



Open studio rehearsal of *World of Wires*.

WORLD OF WIRES

New play adapted and directed by Jay Scheib after the film by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Screenplay by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Based on the novel “Simulacron-3” by Daniel F. Galouye.

World Premiere: January 6-8, 12-14, 19-21, 2012, The Kitchen, NYC *World of Wires* is the final installment of writer and director Jay Scheib’s performance trilogy **Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems**. Part two, *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities*, also premiered at The Kitchen, followed by presentations at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston and at Maison des Arts Créteil in France. Part one, the Obie Award-winning *Untitled Mars (this title may change)*, premiered at Performance Space 122 in New York City, followed by a presentation at the Hungarian National Theater in Budapest. Available for worldwide touring: May 2012.

CONTENTS

Synopsis	p. 2
WoW Team Credits	p. 4
Jay Scheib Background	p. 5
About the Trilogy	p. 6
Praise for the Trilogy	p. 7
WoW Team Bios	p. 8
Jay Scheib Production History	p. 9
Selected Production Images	p. 12
Press Clips	p. 14

Contact Tanya Selvaratnam
tselvar@aol.com +1-917-754-4179

The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true. — Ecclesiastes ¹

SYNOPSIS



Sarita Choudhury in an open rehearsal for *World of Wires* as part of the PRELUDE 2011 Festival in New York City

WORLD OF WIRES

When Professor Fuller, chief technical officer of Rien Incorporated, suddenly goes missing, Fred Stiller, her colleague, begins to investigate. As the investigation spirals into chaos, he discovers that he himself is part of the simulation he thought he had been hired to design, and Professor Fuller had simply been deleted.

World of Wires is a performance about the unveiling of a computer simulation so powerful that it is capable of simulating the world and everything in it.

This new live-cinema performance inspired by the works of Professor Nick Bostrom, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, science-fiction writer Daniel F. Galouye, and an armed robbery at a Duane Reade drugstore that Scheib himself experienced is an all-bets-are-off homage to the startling possibility that you might actually *really* be ones and zeroes in someone else's immaculately programmed world.

1. Fine Print: That *Ecclesiastes* reference above is a total fictional lie - it's Baudrillard's very own simulation of a citation and comes from the first page of his influential essay *The Precession of the Simulacra*, [SemioText\(e\)](#) 1983

In his 2003 paper titled *Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?*, Bostrom, Director of the Future of Humanity Institute and Professor of Philosophy at Oxford University, theorized that **there is a high probability we are currently living in a computer simulation**. Years earlier, in 1973, Fassbinder made an excursion into the world of virtual reality with a science-fiction television series, *Welt am Draht*, which was based on Galouye's seminal 1962 novel, *Simulacron-3*, precursor to films like Larry and Andy Wachowski's *The Matrix*. Picking up where they left off, this production of *World of Wires* is a critique of both the genius and the fallibility of computer simulations—in a world which, as Baudrillard suggested, regularly casts the terms of reality into question.

Development of the work has been sponsored by two residencies. The first was awarded by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and took place on Governors Island in New York City in July 2011. Three weeks of improvisations and compositional studies resulted in a draft of the first forty pages and a 45-minute work-in-progress presentation for an invited audience. Following the Governors Island residency, director Jay Scheib spent three weeks developing a prototype of the production with students at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge MA where Scheib is Professor for Music and Theater Arts. Then, in October, *World of Wires* was presented as an open rehearsal at the PRELUDE 2011 Festival at the Segal Theater Center in New York City.



The stage is concealed by a wall constructed of cardboard. The cardboard serves as a projection surface and after twenty minutes or so it shatters into 180 boxes.

Production travels with 12 artists.

Full Technical Rider, sample production schedule, and estimated touring budget available by request.

CREDITS



Jon Morris, Sarita Choudhury, Mikéah Ernest Jennings, Rosalie Lowe, Ayesha Ngaujah and Tanya Selvaratnam in rehearsal.

WORLD OF WIRES

Adapted and Directed by **Jay Scheib** after the film by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Screenplay by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Based on the novel “Simulacron-3” by Daniel F. Galouye.

With performances by Sarita Choudhury, Mikéah Ernest Jennings, Rosalie Lowe, Jon Morris, Ayesha Ngaujah, Laine Rettmer and Tanya Selvaratnam
Scenic design by **Sara Brown**, Sound by **Anouschka Trocker**, Video by **Jay Scheib** and **Josh Higgason**, Light by **Josh Higgason**, Costumes by **Alba Clemente**, Assistant director **Kasper Sejersen** and **Laine Rettmer**.
World of Wires is produced by **Tanya Selvaratnam**.

The Kitchen's presentation of World of Wires is made possible with public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency. Additional support provided by the Guggenheim Fellowship; Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences; New York State Council on the Arts Individual Artist Theater Commissioning Program, Greenwall Foundation, and MIT Council for the Arts, and the Südtiroler Künstlerförderung. World of Wires has been partially developed through residencies supported by Clemente Soto Vélaz Cultural Center and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council at Building 110: LMCC's Arts Center at Governors Island.

Jay Scheib, Biography

2011 Guggenheim Fellow, Jay Scheib is a director, designer and author of plays, operas and live art events. Internationally known for works of daring physicality, genre-defying performances and deep integration of new technologies, Scheib's upcoming productions include **WORLD OF WIRES**, the final installment of his science vs. fiction trilogy *Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems*, and a collaboration with choreographer Yin Mei and the Hong Kong Dance Company on a new work for contemporary ballet-theater titled *THE SEVEN SAGES*, opening in Hong Kong in March. Following *THE SEVEN SAGES* in Hong Kong, Scheib heads to Oslo, Norway to direct Heiner Müller's rarely performed, unfinished fragment *FATZER* with the acting company of the Norwegian Theater Academy.

Recent productions include part two of *Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems*, *BELLONA*, *DESTROYER OF CITIES*, which premiered at The Kitchen in New York and then played at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston and at Maison des Arts Créteil (MAC) Exit Festival in France. Part one of the trilogy, *UNTITLED MARS (THIS TITLE MAY CHANGE)* premiered at Performance Space 122 in New York and subsequently played the National Theater in Budapest, Hungary. Other recent works include Evan Ziporyn's *A HOUSE IN BALI*, at the BAM Next Wave Festival 2010; a new staging of Beethoven's *FIDELIO* at the Saarländisches Staatstheater in Saarbrücken; Brecht's *PUNTILA UND SEIN KNECHT MATTI* at Theater Augsburg; *THIS PLACE IS A DESERT* (ICA/Boston, Under the Radar Festival/Public Theater NY); and *ADDICTED TO BAD IDEAS*, *PETER LORRE'S TWENTIETH CENTURY* (Spoleto Festival, Urban Festival Helsinki, Luminato Festival Toronto, Peak Performances Montclair, Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and others).

Other international productions include the world premiere of Irene Popovic's opera *MOZART LUSTER LUSTIK* at the Sava Center, Belgrade, Serbia; two plays by Lothar Trolle included *EIN VORMITTAG IN DER FREIHEIT* and *HANSWURSTESZENE 2 FERNSEHEN* at the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin; a new staging of the Novoflot science fiction opera saga *KOMMANDER KOBAYASHI* in Saarbruecken, Germany.



Listed Best New York Theater Director by Time Out New York in 2009, and named by American Theater Magazine as one of the 25 theater artists who will shape the next 25 years of the American theater, Scheib is a recipient of the MIT Edgerton Award, The Richard Sherwood Award, the NEA/TCG Program for Directors, and a New York State Council for the Arts Individual Artist Theater Commission. He is a regular guest professor at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria and is Professor for Music and Theater Arts at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

ABOUT THE SIMULATED CITIES/SIMULATED SYSTEMS TRILOGY



Tanya Selvaratnam in *Bellona Destroyer of Cities* at The Kitchen

1. *Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)*
2. *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities*
3. *World of Wires*

Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems is a trilogy of multidisciplinary performance works developed and produced in residence at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Centered on collaborations with disciplines outside of traditional performing arts idioms, each production re-imagines itself through dialogues with civil engineering and urban planning, computer science and artificial intelligence, aerospace and astronautics. Simulation practices in each of these disciplines are extremely high-pressure operations. In Astronautics and Engineering, simulation has a life or death value to the field. The number of astronauts who have “died,” for example, in simulations far exceeds those who have lost their lives due to accidents in reality. Bridges may collapse in simulation precisely because they may not collapse in reality. In the theater, we simulate every imaginable human situation—and it is entertaining in part because we are curious about what would happen if... This project proposes to set these operations in relief one against the other, using simulation as a means of contrasting reality with theater and theater with fiction.

The first work in the trilogy, *Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)*, simulated Mars on Earth, coupling material from the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah with the science-fiction visions of Philip K. Dick, Stanislaw Lem, and Kurd Lasewitz. The second work, *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities*, simulates a world that has become stuck in a loop of civil upheaval through Samuel R. Delany’s monumental novel *Dhalgren*. The current and final work, *World of Wires*, models one Earth inside of another Earth by borrowing heavily from the fictional backbone of computer science and artificial intelligence.

FROM THE PRESS ON JAY SCHEIB'S SIMULATED CITIES / SIMULATED SYSTEMS TRILOGY

What an engrossing world Mr. Scheib and his fine ensemble have created. It doesn't loosen its grip.
— The New York Times

What a pleasure to encounter an artist like Scheib, with so many ideas and so many means of presenting them... the visual images—in all their plenitude—are arresting, as are the attractive actors.
— The Village Voice

Jay Scheib, one of our most theatrically inventive and truly powerful directors, has adapted Samuel R. Delany's epic sci-fi novel Dhalgren novel, mixing Delany's passages with original material, movement sequences and live video.
— Paper magazine

Scheib (who also went sci-fi with 2008's Untitled Mars) has his own immutable laws to ground us: his customarily elegant use of live video, a grimy aesthetic indebted to Cassavetes, and a sprung-rhythm acting style... a passport to a thoroughly convincing alternate world.
— Time Out New York

Jay Scheib's Bellona, Destroyer of Cities is a sensory overload of a surreal science-fiction mind-fuck, a seriously epic vision of a post-apocalyptic city... Heightening the sense of disorientation is Scheib's use of video. He is one of the few directors who really seems to know how to blend performative and cinematic vocabularies, using video cameras as tools to direct our attention to moments that might be lost, or to heighten our awareness of multiple realities or just to create a fractured sense of reality. The show is a rough beast, indeed, and getting caught up in the maelstrom is well worth the trip.
— CultureBot.org

[Bellona is] the most authentically surreal performance I've seen on stage. It took me some time to put the world back together upon leaving it, but it's an experience I'm glad to have had.
— Blast

Director Jay Scheib doesn't look like a geek. With his art-school specs, tousled hair and stylish attire, this laid-back orchestrator of multimedia installations surrounds himself with strikingly attractive actors and sexy technology. Yet scratch the surface and under the hipster auteur you might find a chubby nerd building a spaceship out of tin foil and cardboard in the garage.
— Time Out New York

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PERFORMERS

Sarita Choudhury (Actor) began acting in film with Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* and *Kama Sutra*. She then joined Cheek by Jowl in the UK and toured with them for a year in *Much Ado About Nothing*. She continued with theater work at the New Group and The Play Company while continuing film work in *Gloria*, *Perfect Murder*, *War Within*, *Lady in the Water* and others and appearing in TV shows including *Kings*, *Law and Order*, *The Philanthropist*, *Damages*, and *Mercy*.

Mikéah Ernest Jennings (Actor) has been seen in *Bellona, Destroyer of Cities* (ICA Boston, EXIT Festival Paris, The Kitchen); *Green Eyes* (Hudson Hotel); *PULLMAN, WA* (Chelsea Ttre, London); *The Shipment* (Sydney Opera House, The Kitchen, Int'l Tour); *S.O.S.* (The Kitchen, REDCAT, Int'l Tour); *The House of No More* (DTW, Int'l Tour); and *A Dream Play* (St. Ann's Warehouse). Film credits include *Failing Better Now*, *Things That Go Bump In The Night* and *The Record Deal*. For more information, go to www.mikeahjennings.com.

Rosalie Lowe (Actor) is a performer and director who moved to New York City from Portland, Oregon where she earned her BA in Literature and Theatre at Reed College. During her time in New York City she worked at La MaMa E.T.C. and interned with The Wooster Group. Most recent projects include The Woodshed Collective's *The Tenant* as an assistant director and performer, and United Broadcasting Theater Company's *Arcane Game* as a sound Foley and video operator. She worked as an assistant director and dramaturge for Portland based theater company Hand2Mouth and studied film acting at La Fémis in Paris with NYFA.

Jon Morris (Actor) has created and performed with *Fuerzabruta*, *Cirque du Soleil*, The MET, *Spymonkey*, *Diavolo Dance Theatre*, the *Evidence Room*, Ken Roht's *Orphean Circus*, *Fabulous Monsters* and *Theatre de la Jeune Lune*. His company, The Windmill Factory, creates original work from living performance installations to international dance theatre collaborations. Recent works were presented at Robert Wilson's Watermill Center, La MaMa ETC, and the Burning Man Arts Festival. For more information, go to www.thewindmillfactory.com.

Ayesha Ngaujah (Actor) was last seen in Tommy Smith's *The Wife*, directed by May Adrales at Access Theatre in NYC. She has also performed in *American Schemes* by Radha Blank for Summerstage, *Eclipsed* at Woolly Mammoth Theater in DC, *Angela's Mixtape* at the Ohio Theater, *Times 365:24:7* at the Bone Orchard Theatre, *Van Gogh Café* at Synchronicity Performance Group (ATL), *Stick Fly* at True Colors Theatre Company (ATL), *GoDogGo!* at Alliance Theater (ATL) and others. Internationally, she has performed in *Diggydotcom 2.0*, *Made in Da Shade* (Amsterdam, Netherlands), and *Spring Awakening*, *Albatheaterhuis* (Den Haag, Netherlands).

Laine Rettmer (Assistant Director/Actor) is an actor, model, and writer. Her modeling included work for designers such as Prada, Chanel, Fendi, and she appeared on the cover of *Elle Japan* at the age of fifteen. Since graduating from NYU's Tisch, she has worked with directors Dan Safer, Julia May Jonas and Jay Scheib. Her TV/film appearances include *Boardwalk Empire*, *Rescue Me*, *Suits*, *Fur*, *Five Minarets* in New York, and the upcoming *Love Magical*. Rettmer co-wrote and produced the short, *1901*, which recently premiered at the Lucerne International Film Festival.

Tanya Selvaratnam (Producer/Actor) is a producer, performer, writer and activist based in New York City and Cambridge, MA. She started her professional acting career as a back-up dancer for John Fleck at an ACT UP Benefit in 1993. Since then, Tanya has performed around the world in shows by The Wooster Group, The Builders Association, and Jay Scheib, among many others; and has appeared in films and video installations by artists including Gabri Christa, Andrea Geyer, Sharon Hayes, John Malpede, David Michalek, Jennifer Reeves, and Carrie Mae Weems. She has been a fellow at Yaddo and Blue Mountain Center, and a guest actor at Voice & Vision Theater, Lincoln Center Directors Lab, New Dramatists, and the Institute on Arts & Civic Dialogue. Also an accomplished film producer, recent projects include Chiara Clemente's *Our City Dreams*, Catherine Gund's *What's On Your Plate?*, *Beginnings* (an original short film series for the Sundance Channel), and *MADE HERE* (a performing arts documentary series for HERE). Since 2008, Tanya has served as the Communications and Special Projects Officer for the Rubell Family Collection. She received her graduate and undergraduate degrees from Harvard University.

JAY SCHEIB, SELECTED PRODUCTION HISTORY

Forthcoming Works

2012 **WORLD OF WIRES** Text and direction by Jay Scheib after the film by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, screenplay by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, based on the novel "Simulacron-3" by Daniel F. Galouye; Commissioned by The Kitchen, with multiple public showings: Work-in-progress presentation, Governors Island, New York, July 2011; PRELUDE Festival, New York City, October 2011; World Premiere at The Kitchen, New York City, January 2012.

2012 **THE SEVEN SAGES** Scenario, co-direction and video design by Jay Scheib and choreographer Yin Mei; World Premiere at the Hong Kong Dance Company, Hong Kong, March 2012.

2012 **UNTITLED PROJECT** Direction and adaptation by Jay Scheib with the acting company of the Norwegian Theater Academy, Oslo, May 2012.

2013 **PERSONA** Libretto and direction by Jay Scheib; new opera based on Ingmar Bergman's film of the same name, composed by Keeril Makan; Premiere 2013 TBA.

Previous Works

2009-2011 **BELLONA, DESTROYER OF CITIES** Text, direction and video design by Jay Scheib; based on Samuel R. Delany's science fiction novel *Dhalgren*; Commissioned by The Kitchen, with multiple public showings: Work-in-progress presentation, The Kitchen, August 2009; PRELUDE Festival, New York City, October 2009; Open rehearsal at The Performing Garage, New York City, February 2010; World Premiere at The Kitchen, New York City, April 2010; Exit Festival, Maison des Arts Cret il, Paris, March 2011; Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, May 2011; Lincoln Center Festival excerpted in David Michalek's *Portraits in Dramatic Time*, (media installation), New York City, July 2011.

2011 **FIDELIO** Opera by Beethoven, direction by Jay Scheib; Staatstheater Saarbr cken, Germany.

2010 **PUNTILA UND SEIN KNECHT MATTI** by Bertolt Brecht, direction by Jay Scheib; Theater Augsburg, Augsburg, Germany.

2009 **A HOUSE IN BALI** a new opera by Evan Ziporyn, direction and video design by Jay Scheib; U.S. Premiere presented by Cal Performances, Berkley California, September 2009; Cutler Majestic Theater, Boston; Next Wave Festival, Brooklyn Academy of Music, October 2010.

2009 **MARGARETHAMLET** and **ALL GOOD EVERYTHING GOOD** Text, direction, choreography and design by Jay Scheib; two choreographic installations for solo performer with guitar adapted from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *All's Well that Ends Well*, Clifford Gallery, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, March 2009, MARGARETHAMLET premiered in 2003 in Berlin, and ALL GOOD EVERYTHING GOOD premiered in 2007 at RAUM/Space Bologna, Italy.

2008 **UNTITLED MARS (THIS TITLE MAY CHANGE)** Text, direction and video by Jay Scheib; world premiere in April at Performance Space 122, New York City; Winner 2008 OBIE AWARD for Scenic Design; Named a Top Ten Production of 2008 by WFMU Radio; Tour: Hungarian National Theater, Budapest, November.

2007 – 2009 **ADDICTED TO BAD IDEAS, PETER LORRE'S 20TH CENTURY DIRECTION** Stage and media design and additional text by Jay Scheib; with The World/Inferno Friendship Society about the life and times of Peter Lorre; Produced by Thomas Kriegsmann / ArkType with multiple public showings: World Premiere, Philadelphia Live Art Festival, September 2007; Noorderzon Performing Arts Festival, Netherlands, August 2008; Kasser Theater/Peak Performances, Montclair, NJ, September 2008; Under the Radar Festival / Public Theater, NYC, January 2009; Spoleto Festival USA, Charleston, S.C., May 2009; Luminato Festival, Toronto, Ontario, June 2009; Helsinki Festival, Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, August 2009.

2005 – 2008 **THIS PLACE IS A DESERT** Adaptation and direction by Jay Scheib; based on the works of Michelangelo Antonioni; Named a Top Ten Production of 2008 by Time Out New York; Production developed over the course of two years with multiple public showings: Prototype presentation at MIT, Cambridge; PRELUDE Festival, New York City; World premiere, March 2007, Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston; NYC Premiere: Under the Radar Festival / Public Theater, New York City.

2007 **KOMMANDER KOBAYASHI** Opera saga by Moritz Eggert, Aleksandra Gryka, Ricardas Kabelis, Juha Koskinen and Helmut Oehring, conducted by Jonathan Kaell, direction by Jay Scheib; Saarländisches Staatstheater, Saarbrücken, Germany.

2007 **AT THE ENTRANCE OF NEW TOWN** by Akio Miyazawa, direction of studio performance by Jay Scheib; produced by the Martin Segal Theater Center, New York City in collaboration with Japan Foundation and Saison Foundation Tokyo for Spotlight Japan 07, a collaboration between leading Japanese playwrights and four American Directors.

2006 **SHELTER** by Saska Rakef, directed by Jay Scheib in a translation by Ruth Margraff; production developed over a year with multiple public showings; M. Segal Theater Center, New York Theater Workshop's 4th street theater, New York City and Glej Teater, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

2006 **WOMEN DREAMT HORSES** by Daniel Veronese, direction by Jay Scheib; translated by Jean Graham-Jones, produced by Buenos Aires in Translation (BAiT) and PS122; Staged reading at the Martin Segal Theater Center; Studio presentation, Prelude Festival; American premiere Performance Space 122, New York City.

2005 **THE POWER OF DARKNESS** after Leo Tolstoy, adaptation and direction by Jay Scheib; produced by Pont Muhely, Budapest, Hungary, at TRAFÖ Contemporary Arts, Budapest, Hungary.

2005 **THE MEDEA** after Euripides, Seneca and Heiner Müller; adaptation and direction by Jay Scheib; co-produced by ITO-NY Actors without Borders and La MaMa E.T.C.; Premiere at La MaMa E.T.C., New York City; International Tour: Sabanci Theater, Istanbul, Turkey; International Sabanci State Theater Festival, Adana, Turkey.

2005 **RETURN TO THE DESERT** by Bernard-Marie Koltès, direction by Jay Scheib; studio project produced by SoHo Repertory Theater, New York City.

2004 **IN THIS IS THE END OF SLEEPING** after Chekhov's Platonov, adaptation and direction by Jay Scheib; commission by the Chekhov Now Festival, Connelly Theater, New York City.

2003 **WEST PIER** by Bernard-Marie Koltès, directed by Jay Scheib; Ohio Theater, New York City.

2002 **EIN VORMITTAG IN DER FREIHEIT** and **HANSWURSTESZENE 2 FERNESEHEN** by Lothar Trolle, direction by Jay Scheib; co-production of Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz and BAT Ernst

Busch, in an evening of works by Lothar Trolle, curated by Adeline Rosenstein, Berlin, Germany.

2002 **ORESTEIA AMERICA AMERICA DREAMLIFE OF THOUSANDAIRE AFFLUENCE** an opera for string quartet in three parts, adaptation and direction by Jay Scheib; Part one, *Agamemnon, King of Pain*, World Premiere, Exiles Festival, Berliner Staatsbank, Berlin, Germany.

2002 **UVEG ES MÁK (GLASS MOHN)** after texts by Tennessee Williams, Walter Benjamin and Paul Celan, adaptation and direction by Jay Scheib; commissioned and produced by Pont Mühely at the MU Szinghaz, Budapest, Hungary.

2001 **GODARD, (DISTANT AND RIGHT)** Written by Jay Scheib, directed by Robert Woodruff; Ohio Theater and the Festival des Jeunes, Theater Nanterre des Amandiers.

2000 **HERAKLES** and **HERAKLES 5** after texts by Euripides, Heiner Müller, Pindar, and Händel, Adaptation and Direction by Jay Scheib; Chashama, New York City.

1990 **THE JET OF BLOOD** after Antonin Artaud, direction and adaptation by Jay Scheib, Pike Gymnasium, Mineapolis, Minnesota (First Production).



Open Rehearsal of *World of Wires* as part of the PRELUDE 2011 Festival in New York City

SELECTED PRODUCTION IMAGES 2005-2011



BELLONA, DESTROYER OF CITIES



BELLONA, DESTROYER OF CITIES



A HOUSE IN BALI



A HOUSE IN BALI



FIDELIO



PUNTILA UND SEIN KNECHT MATTI

SELECTED PRODUCTION IMAGES 2005-2011



UNTITLED MARS



UNTITLED MARS



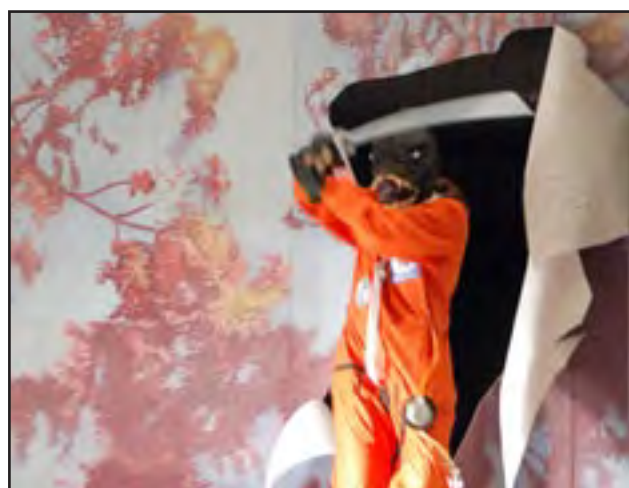
ADDICTED TO BAD IDEAS



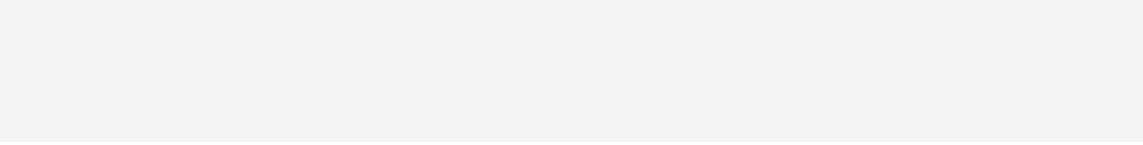
THE POWER OF DARKNESS



THIS PLACE IS A DESERT



KOMMANDER KOBAYASHI



Search

Home | Art | Books | Clubs | Comedy | Dance | Film | Games | Gay | I, New York | Kids | Museums | Music | Opera & Classical
 Own This City | Real Estate | Restaurants & Bars | Sex & Dating | Shopping | Spas & Sport | **Theater** | Travel | TV | Video

Tools

- E-mail
- Print
- Rate & comment
- Report an error
- Share this

Theater

Time Out New York / Mar 25, 2009

New York's best

The best New York theater directors

1. [Jay Scheib](#)
 Mixing multimedia with deadpan-cool (and very sexy) actors, Scheib is forging new ways of seeing drama.
2. [Ken Rus Schmoll](#)
 Schmoll takes on more difficult playwrights, teasing out the ambiguity and menace in their words.
3. [Elizabeth LeCompte](#)
 As chief engineer of the Wooster Group's postmodern tech spectacles, she has influenced a generation of experimenters.
4. [Anne Kauffman](#)
 She helmed two of our favorite shows in years: *The Thugs* and *God's Ear*. Sensitive to thorny language, she makes the murky crystal clear.
5. [Joe Mantello](#)
 Sure, he helmed the blockbuster *Wicked*, but the former actor is most at home working on tough drama on an intimate level.
6. [Richard Foreman](#)
 They don't call him the king of the avant-garde for nothing; Foreman is the auteur's auteur: He writes, designs, directs and even operates the sound.
7. [Robert Woodruff](#)
 It's criminal how little he works in the city, but when he does, we're transfixed by the elegant brutality of his cool tableaux.
8. [Stephen Daldry](#)
 Without this bold British director (of stage and screen), *Billy Elliot* wouldn't have been nearly so magical.
9. [Julie Taymor](#)
 We're waiting for a follow-up as impressive as *The Lion King*, but until then, we'll still get weepy over "Circle of Life."
10. [Bartlett Sher](#)
 This guy can do everything: old-fashioned musicals like *South Pacific* and great drama like *Awake and Sing!* He's a treasure.



Comments | [Leave a comment](#)

No comments yet. [Click here and be the first!](#)

Guides

Student Guide

Practical (and frivolous) advice for the scholarly.

Real Estate Guide

Score a great deal.

Visitors Guide

Everything you need to get the most out of NYC.

Continuing Education

Never stop learning.

Offers

Nightlife +

Get real-time information for bars, clubs and restaurants on your mobile.

Prizes & promotions

Win prizes and get discounts, event invites and more.

Free flix

Get free tickets to hot new movie releases.

The TONY Lounge

Stop by for a drink at our bar in midtown Manhattan.

Subscribe

- ▶ [Subscribe now](#)
- ▶ [Give a gift](#)
- ▶ [Subscriber services](#)

Subscribe now and save 90%!

For just \$19.97 a year, you'll get hundreds of listings and free events each week, plus our special issues and guides, including Cheap Eats, Great Spas, Fall Preview, Holiday Gift Guide and more!

On the blogs

- UPSTAGED
THE WORLD OF THEATER
- OWN THIS CITY
LIFE IN NEW YORK
- THE FEED
EATING AND DRINKING
- THE VOLUME
MUSIC NEWS OF NOTE
- THE FRAME-UP
FILM NEWS AND REVIEWS

- [A one-man remake of First »](#)
- [Puppetry of the Penis: open »](#)
- [Irena's Vow takes liberties with a Holocaust »](#)

Video



This Beautiful City



In the Heights



Chekhov 101

JAY SCHEIB

Riding a Different Circuit

The experimental director is making a name for himself outside the traditional resident theatre network



Scheib

BY AARON MACK SCHLOFF

Important things to know about director Jay Scheib: Born: 1969, Shenandoah, Iowa. Occupation: associate professor in music and theatre arts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Number of productions slated for 2008: five, three of them world premieres, taking place in three countries. (“Last season, I had seven premieres in five different countries,” Scheib says evenly. He says everything evenly.) Number of resident theatre gigs this year and every year heretofore: zero.

How can such a director as Scheib—who, not so incidentally, has also written or adapted scripts for about a dozen of his own productions—earn degrees and awards from impeccably conventional bodies (B.A., University of Minnesota; MFA, Columbia University; NEA/TCG Career Development Program grant) and then go on to fashion his career entirely outside of the institutions they were intended to serve—ostensibly the center of the American theatre? The circuit he is now riding—stretching from New York City’s P.S. 122 to Minnesota’s Walker Art Center to theatres and festivals in Hungary, Austria and Germany—suggests that another center exists and that another kind of theatrical life is possible, even if it’s not quite, or not yet, a living.

“One of my goals is to pay my actors as much as they would make temping,” he says. Still, his regular actors, a group of six to eight that one might call the Jay Scheib Players, moan like addicts when they think of working with him again. “Whenever I get a call from Jay, I just stop the presses,” says New York-based performer Eric Dean Scott. He and

the rest of Team Scheib are gambling big as they develop Scheib’s exuberantly physical, heavily technologized but emotionally open style of theatremaking. Audiences and critics may love it or hate it, but they are rarely indifferent. Scheib himself cites Tadeusz Kantor, Robert Wilson, William Forsythe, Rem Koolhaas and Anne Bogart among his various inspirations

and mentors—famous names that would mean nothing if Scheib couldn’t refine those influences to give every work (whether it be a song cycle or straight play, with his own text or not, high-tech or low) a genuine sense of excitement and risk.

Let’s look at the projects. In January *This Place Is a Desert* appears at Mark Russell’s Under the Radar Festival at New York City’s Public Theater, the equivalent, for Scheib’s circuit,



April Sweeney and Thomas Keating in Scheib’s *This Place Is a Desert* at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston.

HAYDEN TAYLOR

of the resident theatre's Humana Festival of New American Plays. *Desert* is a mashup of relationships inspired by the works of filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni and Three Mile Island transcripts. Disintegrating couples video and re-video each other with multiple live feeds designed by Scheib's frequent collaborator Leah Gelpe.

In March, his as-yet-untitled Mars project premieres at P.S. 122, combining scientific fact and fiction to imagine genuine space colonization. In July, Scheib's staging of the biographical song cycle by the gypsy cabaret punk band World Inferno Friendship Society, titled *Addicted to Bad Ideas: Peter Lorre's Twentieth Century*, has its European premiere at the Salzburg Sommerszene (it played this past September at the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival). This coming September, not far away in Budapest, he will adapt Philip K. Dick's science fiction in a piece called *Time Again and Again*, for Pont Mühely theatre (whose actors also plan to take part in the Mars project, if funding permits). An engagement tentatively scheduled for December will bring him to Minneapolis to direct the premiere of Anthony Gatto's opera



World Inferno Friendship Society in *Addicted to Bad Ideas* at the Philadelphia Live Arts Festival.

of Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* at the Walker Art Center. Scheib is writing the libretto.

And that's the year. Add to that at least one student production, various readings, teaching. "For the past three years, I've been booked a year and half in advance," he says, again, evenly. "This year it's almost two."

Scheib is tall and lanky, with thick brown curly hair going gray and a square, friendly face with a point of a chin. He moves and speaks casually—at a roundtable discussion, he'd rather sprawl than sit. A former high school track-and-fielder, he can live in his body as well as his mind. (The result, perhaps, of his Midwestern farm-boy



INES ALDA

Malaika Ledig in *Kommander Kobayashi* at Germany's Saarländisches Staatstheater.

upbringing. Actor Aimée Phelan-Deconinck remembers, “In Germany, we were outside a rehearsal space. A shirt was in a tree, very high, and he lassoed it.”

This casualness is also deceptive—or no longer the whole story. The sprawling productions of Heiner Müller and of Scheib’s own works (produced by his own theatres, the Arcade Theatre and the American Theatre Institute) that gave him outlaw cred in Minneapolis in the ’90s have been replaced, 10 years later, by shows that display a more focused mind and structured development.

WHAT REMAINS IS HIS BREADTH OF

taste. “He likes high culture, but he also likes trash,” declares German opera director Berthold Schneider of the Saarländisches Staatstheater in Saarbrücken, who imported Scheib to direct episodes of the space opera *Kommander Kobayashi* after seeing his work in Berlin. “This is rare—there are few people who can contain such various visual and other impressions.” When asked why so many of his adapted works have “after” in the credits—“after Tolstoy,” or Euripides—Scheib speaks of searching for ways to make the works as surprising as they were when they were born. With Tolstoy’s play *The Power of Darkness*, which he developed with his MIT students before directing the show for Pont Mühely, he dropped characters, restored censored scenes and rewrote based on actor improvisations. The play’s rural violence resonated for Scheib. “I grew up in Iowa in the ’80s when every third farmer went bankrupt. Rather than doing the play as a museum piece, I did research to see to what extent it paid homage to its time and engaged social

issues—and then I found a way to reassess them.”

I witnessed a sample of Scheib’s approach last year, when he directed Daniel Veronese’s *Women Dreamt Horses* at the Buenos Aires in Translation festival at P.S. 122. I’d seen Veronese’s own production of his play in Argentina—a semi-realistic dinner party in cramped quarters, brimming with suppressed violence. Under Scheib’s direction, the playing space was vast and the violence was drawn to the surface, enacted with boxing, slap fights, compulsive

vomiting and semi-gymnastic stunts. Was this acting or contact improv? It played like both—and, at the first show, also a bit like porn (when they’re talking, you just want the action). But when I returned for the final show of the run, all was knit together: sensible, Argentine at the source, but American in tone and, most important, continuously

interesting. Scheib had gambled and won.

Scheib is perfectly comfortable being textually faithful to other writers’ new plays, but one thing about *Women* was atypical—its low-tech style. At the finish of *Women*, the gun-toting actor just yelled “Bang.” (By comparison, *This Place Is a Desert* has four screens with live video feed. The role of video mediation in live performance has obsessed Scheib for more than a decade.)

Listening to his players talk about how they developed *Women* reveals a lot about Scheib’s method. First of all, like his teacher Anne Bogart, Scheib treats his actors as collaborators rather than instruments. “He’s interested in people—who you are, what you bring to the process and how you and only you can bring that thing,” says another frequent actor-collaborator April Sweeney. When their extensive table work on *Women* finally ended, Scheib brought the cast to its feet with small exercises and wild-card requests—recipes for moments the actors would go off and create. “We composed a list of things to have,” says Scott, “like 30 seconds of a repetition or one moment of the smallest possible violent event.” One actor knew how to box.

They used it. Dance-trained Phelan-Deconinck can stretch her ankle above her head, casually. So they used that too.

Like the late Polish experimentalist Kantor, Scheib gives titles to different periods of his work. The past seven years, ending with *Desert*, were “The Flight out of Naturalism.” A new era, “Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems,” is being born with the Mars project.

Scheib’s research bent is supported by his current berth at MIT, which, he says, forces him to organize his thinking. “MIT is a research institution.

If my research has to do with the integration of media and live performance, or development of tech for use in live performance, or exploring other theatrical idioms, I have to theorize them and describe them in concrete ways.” He can also use student productions to begin explorations—he had his first crack at the Mars project at MIT in October, for instance. “So long as I can continue to main-



This Place Is a Desert at Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art.

HAYDEN TAYLOR

tain a studio environment that I connect to teaching, then I’ll continue to be happy,” he says. “When it becomes routine, it’s time to leave—but as yet it’s never routine.”

The practical challenge for Scheib is turning his theatre life into a living. In the past year, Shoshana Polanco, who produced the Buenos Aires in Translation festival, has joined him as creative producer (a title that

suggests a formal economic relationship that they do not yet have). Her role is flexible, she says, but the management responsibilities are now hers. Financial stability is still a goal. “We fantasize about taking over one of the regional theatres,” she says, even as she admits she has no contact with them.

How long this alternative circuit can sustain them is a hanging question. “I put the work out; I write letters. Most theatres are not interested,” shrugs Scheib. Still, with the Under the Radar showcase, the

array of other projects on tap and Polanco on board—not to mention the continuing loyalty of his players—2008 (or 2009 or 2010, when his schedule opens up) could be the year love meets money. ☑

Playwright and journalist Aaron Mack Schloff writes frequently for this magazine.

March 24-30, 2010

THEATER

TWO MOONS, LOTS A BEER

BY ALEXIS SOLOSKI | JAY SCHEIB ADAPTS SAMUEL R. DELANY'S EPIC SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSIC *DHALGREN*



Group sex plus civic catastrophe: *Bellona's* Scheib

In *Bellona*, a city somewhere in the Midwest, a disaster has occurred. The few citizens remaining negotiate an urban space in which scientific rationalism and civilized conduct no longer apply. A red sun haunts the sky by day; two moons hover

in the night. Buildings burn but are not consumed. The geography of streets alters. Time twists. Disorder reigns. And director Jay Scheib has the privilege of translating all this chaos onto the stage. "It's horrifying," he says. "Really hard to do. It's just so huge."

On April 1 at the Kitchen, Scheib will debut *Bellona: Destroyer of Cities*, described as "part dance, part live cinema, part theater, part urban simulation for disappearing cities." He has derived the piece from *Dhalgren*, Samuel R. Delany's sprawling, cyberpunk

meditation on sexuality, race, and catastrophe. While some sci-fi luminaries (Philip K. Dick and Harlan Ellison among them) have termed the 1975 book unreadable, it has sold more than a million copies and attained the status of a genre classic.

After a day of rehearsal at the Performing Garage, Scheib reflects on what drew him to *Dhalgren*. Though its nearly 900 nonlinear pages do not readily suggest theatrical adaptation, he wanted to make a play of the novel even before he'd read half of it. He found himself attracted to the imagery of a damaged city and the troubling timeliness of Delany's concerns. "We're trying to tackle a piece that looks very unapologetically at race and gender in America in the '70s," says Scheib, "but it reads like it was written this morning. We're grappling with that."

Happily, Delany, who attended an early workshop of *Bellona*, approves of Scheib's adaptation. "It's quite wonderful to have your work interpreted by artists of such energy and vision—not to mention such theatrical intelligence," he wrote the *Voice* in an e-mail. Despite this authorial endorsement, Scheib and his cast (most of whom have read *Dhalgren* at least twice) have plenty to wrestle with. They need to animate an abstruse and disjunctive text, which includes several troubling passages that verge on the pornographic. During rehearsal, they had practiced a sequence involving group sex and scandalous language. Shirts were doffed, belts were loosened, a mattress's springs were strained, and Scheib was moved to answer questions such as, "Do I do that before or after I say, 'Smell my dick?'"

Bellona marks Scheib's second attempt to stage sci-fi. It follows *Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)* in a venture he's named "Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems." Drawing on his fascination with technology and the resources that an associate professorship in directing at MIT permits him, the project weds theater and science. *Untitled Mars* employed research into aerospace and astronautics; *Bellona* will refer to civil engineering and urban planning. Though he has not yet discovered how to integrate those disciplines into this production, Scheib hopes they will provide insight into how *Bellona* functions. "It has been more or less forgotten and abandoned by the world outside it," he explains, "but nonetheless, it is an ongoing system. No one knows where the food comes from, why there's always beer. It's like a strange social experiment."

The showing at the Kitchen may simply mark the first iteration of this "strange, social experiment." Scheib has fantasies of producing the play in a specific site over the course of several days. "The way to do this project is to actually do it in a neighborhood," he muses. "The audience would have to travel around and live more or less by the rules or lack thereof." His desire to achieve a more naturalistic setting for the piece speaks to the competing impulses that animate his work—science fiction on the one hand, theatrical realities on the other. As to how the two will align in this project, Scheib admits, "I'm very, very scared."

'BELLONA: DESTROYER OF CITIES'
APRIL 1-10, THE KITCHEN, 512 WEST
19TH STREET. THEKITCHEN.ORG



JAY SCHEIB in his MIT studio. His multimedia work "BELLONA, DESTROYER OF CITIES," based on the novel "Dhalgren," is part of the Emerging America festival. Photo credit: JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

Taking a sci-fi tale to the stage in 'Bellona'

Laura Collins-Hughes

[The Boston Globe](#)

May 13, 2011 ET

BELLONA, DESTROYER OF CITIES At: Institute of Contemporary Art, through May 15. Tickets: \$25, \$22 students. 617-478-3103, www.icaboston.org

CAMBRIDGE — The first time director Jay Scheib read "Dhalgren," Samuel R. Delany's cult-classic science fiction novel, it took him nearly a year. The dense and looping text sprawls to almost 900 pages in the original edition, but length was not the obstacle. The speed bump he kept hitting was something he had thrown in his own path: the decision, made before he had ever finished the book, that he would adapt it into a theater piece.

"This is maybe a terrible admission, but it's sort of how I read a lot of things — because you read it very differently when what you're planning to do is to engage with the material," Scheib, a boyish 41, said on a recent afternoon in his studio at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he is an associate professor of theater.

Finally, Scheib skipped to the last chapter — "which kind of blew my mind," he said. It also explained to him much that he hadn't grasped about Delany's 1975 novel, set in a post-cataclysmic urban landscape once inhabited by millions, now peopled by only a few thousand stragglers. Bellona is the name of the American city in "Dhalgren"; it is also the name of the Roman goddess of war.

“Bellona, Destroyer of Cities,” the theater piece Scheib made from the book, opens tonight at the Institute of Contemporary Art, part of the weekend-long Emerging America festival. A highly physical, multimedia production, it embraces the issues of race and sexuality that fuel Delany’s labyrinthine narrative. “It’s rated R,” Scheib said.

“Bellona,” which premiered a year ago at the Kitchen in New York, is the second work in a science fiction trilogy Scheib is developing. He has had the cooperation of Delany, the 69-year-old “Dhalgren” author, throughout the creation of “Bellona.”

“The fundamental dramatic structure of ‘Dhalgren’ is to take ordinary society and then remove a large chunk of it and see what is left,” Delany explained by phone from New York. “Money is one of the things that is removed in ‘Dhalgren,’ and a certain kind of social ability to enforce social laws is also removed. What will happen?”

“The quick assumption many people have is that we’ll, you know, devolve into chaos. Well, I think that takes a little bit of time, and I think people bring their expectations of what life should be like even into a situation like that.”

For Delany, who has already seen “Dhalgren” adapted into an opera, allowing Scheib to make theater from it was partly a matter of aesthetic curiosity. Even so, he wants to make sure that the result is recognizable to him, that it jibes with what his 31-year-old self was trying to communicate in the novel that he spent five years writing.

Scheib is scheduled to take part in a post-show conversation tomorrow night with Delany, whom he called a very tough and very good critic. When the novelist gives him notes after a rehearsal, Scheib said, he puts 75 percent of them directly into the show — and yes, he added, that is a high proportion.

At MIT, where he made “Dhalgren” the subject of a course he taught, Scheib inhabits a studio that was once a squash court. Its high wooden walls are covered with photographs and blueprints from theater and opera productions he has made in this country and in Europe.

Video cameras and monitors are scattered throughout the space, the tools of a director whose work borrows from an array of disciplines and typically combines live action with video. Scheib’s “This Place Is a Desert,” seen at the ICA in 2007, was one such excursion.

“I keep threatening, like, oh, ‘The next couple things that I do will have no media whatsoever: no sound, one light cue.’ ” said Scheib, who last month won a Guggenheim Fellowship that is meant to support the completion of his trilogy.

But listen to him talk about people’s diminishing attention spans — he prefers to think of them as faster attention spans — or about the usefulness of video in the context of black-box theater architecture, and the absence of cameras onstage seems like an empty threat for the moment. “For me, a video frame is essentially just another proscenium,” he said. “It’s a way of getting a hold once again of the visual aspect of performance, in a way which makes use of a vocabulary which culturally we know so well.” Using that technology in “Bellona,” Scheib lends a new, 21st-century form to “Dhalgren,” a work that its author described as “very much a novel of the 1970s.” “As many people have said, there’s nothing that dates faster than science fiction,” Delany said. “And the fact that ‘Dhalgren’ has actually managed to intrigue people for this long I think makes me a very, very lucky writer.” That it has not dated, Scheib said, is because the questions it raises about race and sexuality are still with us. “I think this novel should be no longer politically relevant, but it is,” he said. “It could’ve been written this morning.”

Laura Collins-Hughes can be reached at lcollins-hughes@globe.com.

Theater

Time Out New York / Issue 655 : Apr 16–22, 2008

Martian to a different drummer

Multimedia wizard Jay Scheib colonizes the Red Planet for theatrical research.

By Helen Shaw



MISSION CONTROL Scheib probes a strange planet.

Photograph: Naomi White

Deep in the belly of an abandoned vault on Wall Street, a man with a lizard tail talks softly to his foam claws as another stages an aggressive seduction in a boardroom. An almost whisper-soft suggestion—“Could you try that a little more tenderly?”—comes from the lanky director crouching at the lovers’ feet. Even though embraces in Jay Scheib’s shows usually look like wrestling holds, the note persuades actor Caleb Hammond to grip his paramour slightly less viciously—as he half-nelsons her into a revolving chair. The lizard picks up a camera.

Welcome to Mars. Or at least, welcome to a rehearsal of *Untitled Mars: This Title May Change*, a droll, discomfiting trip to the Red Planet as dreamed up by Scheib. An unlikely collision of scientific experiment and Philip K. Dick, the show takes its inspiration from one of the Mars Desert Research Stations, a deadly serious outpost where researchers wear space suits and run around the Utah desert. While the scientists simulate life on Mars, Scheib's company will simulate the scientists—though with a significantly lower budget. Set designer Peter Ksander describes the mash-up of sci-fi and reality as the new alienation effect: "Jay is using Mars in the same way that Brecht used the Thirty Years War." It's not that alien: The 38-year-old director lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and teaches at MIT, where some of his students might actually have a crack at being Mars pioneers.

As with almost all of Scheib's work, the show will be thick with video, much of it shot live in the room. He may not want to become a one-trick pony ("I have an Iphigenia coming up that has no video at all!" he assures us. "Maybe three light cues!"), but Scheib is still known for his multimedia work. Video appears in most of his shows, its function changing to create phantoms (*The Vomit Talk of Ghosts*), a sensation of surveillance (*This Is the End of Sleeping*) or a self-consciously cinematic composition (the Godard-inflected *This Place Is a Desert*). But the director claims there is a constant. "It all stems from trying to work on naturalism," he explains. "I wanted to take up the game that all my incredibly cool teachers—Robert Woodruff and Anne Bogart—had said was dead. It was my rebellion."

The resulting works, exquisitely designed with the lackadaisical rhythms of everyday speech, look totally unlike the rest of the New York avant-garde, though they ring bells with theater buffs in Germany and France. "I am synthesizing techniques that already exist," Scheib readily admits. "It's just that in Europe, the Wooster Group isn't on the fringes—they've been folded into the mainstream."

Not everybody is a fan. Scheib's dedication to observing human behavior forces theatrical time to slow to something like real time, and the pace downshift can leave viewers impatient and disoriented. (Tip: Pretend you're in a gallery watching an installation.) And while theater has been incorporating projection for decades, audiences still rankle at how the video steals focus. Says Scheib: "Desert upset a lot of people. Theater audiences feel bad that they're watching a screen. But for me, video is a delivery system. It's simply a way to bring the performer closer."

Scheib may be the most acclaimed experimental American director whose work you have never seen. The New York premiere of *This Place Is a Desert* during *Under the Radar* in January moved him into the critical spotlight, but this production at P.S. 122 will be his first high-profile run of any length here.

New York economics hobble Scheib's process. His languorous, ensemble-driven works need long rehearsal periods and the kind of technical fine-tuning that can't be done on Off-Off Broadway's panicky schedule. At MIT, he develops work in peace, and then spends roughly four months in Europe making pieces at well-funded spots like the Staatstheater Saarbrücken or Salzburg's Mozarteum. The expense of dealing with Equity and New York real estate drives our most interesting directors into the arms of European state funding.

Another major director who gigs too rarely in New York, Woodruff taught Scheib, but now sees him as a colleague. "It's great that he found a home at MIT," Woodruff says. "He can fly off to Europe, but he still has a place to do his research. If you find another setup like that—please tell me first." The struggle for funding is just another reason to make *Untitled Mars*. "You should go to these space-vision conferences," Scheib says with a chuckle. "That community sounds just like a theater conference—it's always about the lack of funding. It's very rarely about art."

Untitled Mars: This Title May Change is at P.S. 122.

entretien / JAY SCHEIB

UNÉ PARABOLE DE LA VILLE AMÉRICAINE D'AUJOUR-D'HUI

JAY SCHEIB EST AMÉRICAIN. SON SPECTACLE, *BELLONA, EST L'ADAPTATION D'UN ROMAN CULTE DE LA SCIENCE-FICTION OUTRE-ATLANTIQUE, DHALGREN DE SAMUEL R. DELANY. UNE PREMIÈRE EN FRANCE QUI S'ANNONCE EXPLOSIVE.*

De quoi parle *Bellona* ?

J. S. : *Bellona* est basé sur un roman culte de science-fiction : *Dhalgren* de Samuel R. Delany. *Bellona* est une ville située quelque part aux États-Unis, qui a été frappée par un désastre. Les habitants fonctionnent en boucle : ils doivent revivre ou réinventer sans cesse les catastrophes qui ont successivement ravagé la ville. Personne ne se souvient vraiment de ce qui s'est passé. Certains disent qu'un noir a violé une jeune fille blanche et blonde et que des justiciers ont entièrement brûlé la ville. D'autres qu'il y a eu un soulèvement suite à l'assassinat d'un activiste noir (une réminiscence de Martin Luther King). Jusqu'à l'arrivée d'une inconnue. Elle ne se souvient pas de son nom mais elle veut devenir écrivain. Et on ne sait pas si le monde et ses expériences façonnent sa poésie ou si c'est en fait sa poésie qui va déterminer le monde.

Qu'est-ce qui a guidé votre choix ?

J. S. : *Dhalgren* est un ovni dans la littérature américaine. C'est un livre qui traverse les genres et qui est d'une grande profondeur poétique et philosophique. C'est un livre sur l'acte d'écrire de la poésie dans une ville qui tente désespérément de disparaître. Dans sa préface, l'écrivain William

Gibson le voit comme une parabole de la ville américaine d'aujourd'hui. Peu de romans réussissent ainsi à sortir les cadavres des placards.

Était-ce difficile de l'adapter pour la scène ?

J. S. : Au début, je voulais faire une adaptation du roman grandeur nature. Je voulais faire un spectacle qui durerait une semaine et transformerait tout l'environnement du théâtre en une nouvelle *Bellona*. Une vraie *Bellona*, avec ses Teddy's bars, ses immeubles en réflexion qui partent en flammes. Le prix d'un ticket aurait inclus une chambre d'hôtel pour la semaine, mais les spectateurs pouvaient aussi choisir de dormir dans les parcs. Les enfants auraient suivi des cours à la maison, sur l'urbanisme, la poésie, l'ingénierie électrique, comme dans le roman. Pour moi, Detroit aurait été le lieu idéal. Mais on a fini par compresser cette vision XL en un spectacle de 90 mn. Et la concentration de toute cette énergie est littéralement explosive.

Quelles difficultés avez-vous rencontrées ?

J. S. : Faire des choix dans un roman de 800 pages qui ne perd jamais en intérêt. Mais aussi sur des questions technologiques : Delany décrit des gars sauvages qui errent dans les rue habillés en hologrammes de couleur pastel. C'est complé-



© Naomi White

Samuel R. Delany et Jay Scheib

tement psychédélique ! Je n'ai pas encore trouvé la solution, mais j'y travaille avec deux étudiants du département en ingénierie du MIT.

Vous avez la réputation de faire un théâtre mêlant musique, multimédias et un grand engagement physique...

J. S. : L'année prochaine, je vais faire un ballet à Hong Kong avec un chorégraphe chinois à partir d'un documentaire d'Antonioni sur la Révolution Culturelle. Ça devrait être intéressant. Il n'y a rien que j'aime plus que de croiser les disciplines entre elles, c'est vrai. Et je travaille avec une équipe qui reste souvent la même. C'est très important pour moi d'accumuler les expériences dans notre collaboration. Ces acteurs sont tous incroyablement physiques. Sur scène, pour agir instinctivement, il faut des situations d'urgence. Alors on a fait des improvisations avec une liste de contraintes, qui pour

« C'est un livre sur l'acte d'écrire de la poésie dans une ville qui tente désespérément de disparaître. » Jay Scheib

la plupart venaient du roman : perdre une chaussure, marcher sur un bout de verre, boire un litre d'eau cul sec, s'étreindre à six reprises et changer d'habit à toute vitesse tout en disant son monologue ou son dialogue. Pour moi, toute approche d'une œuvre doit être physique. Peu importe la technologie qu'on a sur scène. Les corps restent les technologies les plus complexes.

On dit de vous que vous avez un parcours atypique dans le théâtre américain. Est-ce vrai ?

J. S. : À l'Université, j'étais un étudiant en colère et un professeur – qui m'a aussi fait découvrir Kantor – m'a fait lire le *Jet de sang* d'Artaud. Il m'a dit : « fais quelque chose là-dessus ». Alors, j'ai monté un spectacle avec des artistes locaux et un groupe punk. Avec ce spectacle, j'ai été invité à un festival international en Hongrie et c'est là qu'a débuté ma carrière. Ça m'a ouvert des portes.

Propos recueillis et traduits par Eric Demey

Bellona, destroyer of cities, d'après Samuel R. Delany, mise en scène de Jay Scheib. Du 17 au 19 mars, à la MAC, Créteil. Dans le cadre d'Exit. Réservations : 01 45 13 19 19.

culture

TOTAL LEGAL SUBSTANCE

Mars Bard

Playwright Jay Scheib is on a mission to bring planet Mars into the limelight, with a new stage show.

“I love science fiction,” says playwright and MIT professor Jay Scheib, 38. “But when it comes to Mars, the actual facts are weirder than anyone could make up.”

Example: A group of rogue scientists are planning to inhabit the planet in the next 10 years, but flying there would most likely be a one-way suicide mission. “The fact that there are people willing to give their lives to get to Mars is shocking,” says Jay, who first heard about the mission through a few of his drama

and math university in Cambridge, Mass. For one thing, he teaches in the music and theater arts program, introducing otherwise stage-shy engineers to the basics of acting. He also doesn’t look like a typical academic. Sitting in the downtown performance space P.S. 122, where *Untitled Mars* debuts on Tuesday, Jay appears more British rocker (à la Jarvis Cocker) than tweedy professor. In his lean pinstripe pants, black blazer and dark wool scarf, he is not at all out of place in the experimental East

P.S. 122.) His usual focus is on opera and Greek drama, but this month he has been devoted to the red planet, rehearsing inside an abandoned Wall Street bank vault (“It’s so weird,” he says. “There are still employee memos on the wall from 2001”) and readying the set at P.S. 122. “We are painting the theater completely white,” he says. “I want it to look like a cross between a space station on Mars and a science lab on Earth.”

The play tells the story of a seven-person team that lands on Mars and must adapt to a new planet—and its bitter-cold, jail-cell conditions—or die. Throughout the play, Jay interrupts the onstage action to interview (via live video feed) real aeronautics students and their mentors at the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah. His questions about their research lends the show the aura of a real-world science documentary.

Trekkies, rejoice: *Untitled Mars* is the first in a trilogy of space-age plays, called *Simulated Cities/Simulated Systems*, that Jay plans to complete over the coming years. After this show closes in New York, however, Jay is off to the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis to stage a new opera based on the works of Gertrude Stein. Still, the busy professor is happy to have embraced science in his writing: “I work inside the culture of nerd at MIT,” he explains. “I took the time to listen to what my students were talking about, and I was hooked. Now I really want to bring the science into arts and sciences.”

—Rachel Syme

Untitled Mars (This Title May Change) will run Apr. 8–27 at P.S. 122 (150 First Ave., at Ninth St.).



Footage of aeronautics students at the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah is later woven within Jay's play.

students. “I immediately felt inspired to write something.”

Despite the justifiably nerdy subject of the resulting work, *Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)*, Jay is as far from a geek as one could imagine—especially for a professor at MIT, the famed science

Village theater.

Jay divides his time between Massachusetts and New York, where he keeps an apartment on the Lower East Side, under the Williamsburg Bridge. (Coincidentally, he met his fiancée, a writer and actress, at a November 2006 show at

"When it comes to Mars, the actual facts are weirder than anyone could make up."

15