

**Intermediality in Yussef El Guindi's
"Language Rooms" (2010)**

**By
Sarah Sayed Ahmed Elgazzar**

Abstract:

In postmodern age, the Arab-American man is torn between two identities. He lives in a world of new modes of representation, in which advent of technologies and new realities in which the line between the original and copy cannot be drawn. The inauguration of technology together with the new American world he faces have led him to live a simulated life far different from his life in his homeland, leading to the fragmentation of his own identity. Yussef El Guindi is one of the prominent playwrights who traces issues of fragmentation, hybridity and assimilation, portraying them capsulated with technological and theatrical tools onstage. He is vocal in insisting to express the division and fragmentation of the self in his plays. This paper traces El Guindi's philosophy of combining the real and the virtual, the self and the other, assimilation and hybridity creating an intermedial stage as expounded in his play "Language Rooms".

Key words: Literature – Intermediality – Yussef El Guindi – Virtual Self – Audience perception – Simulation.

سارة سيد الجزار

الملخص العربي

يعد الألماني إرفين بسكاتور (١٨٩٣-١٩٦٦) من أوائل المسرحيين الذين قاموا باستخدام التكنولوجيا على المسرح منذ ١٩٢٠. فقد قام باستخدام الوسائل الآلية والبصرية والتقنيات الخاصة بالعرض مثل المصابيح الضوئية والمكبرات الصوتية المرتفعة وآليات العرض السينمائي. وقد اشتهر إرفين بسكاتور باستخدامه لتقنيات المسرح الجديد وأهمها آليات العرض السينمائي والتي أسهمت بالكثير في نشأة المسرح التكنولوجي الشامل. وكان تديره لذلك أن المسرح بفضائه الضيق لا يمكن أن يحقق متطلبات المسرح الملحمي الكثيرة والتي استطاع أن يحققها من خلال استخدامه للوسائط التكنولوجية. وقد حذا برتولت بريخت (١٨٩٨-١٩٥٦) حذو زميله بسكاتور في استخدام التكنولوجيا الحديثة في عروضه تحقيقاً لمتطلبات المسرح الملحمي. كما استخدم الكاتب والناقد والمخرج المسرحي الفرنسي، أنطونين أرتو (١٨٩٦-١٩٤٨)،ذبذبات صوتية وأصواتاً متقطعة من أجهزة صوت بغرض التأثير على المشاهدين.

إن تداخل الوسائط الإعلامية تعنى بالتداخل ما بين الميديا. حينما تتداخل وتتناغم وسائل الإعلام القديمة و الحديثة و الرقمية، فيتداخل العالم الافتراضي والحقيقي فتؤثر تقنيات كل منهما في الآخر وحينئذ يصعب على الجمهور التمييز بين العالمين، فينتج عن ذلك حالة اللبنة التي يصبح فيها الجمهور ما بين الواقع والخيال، ما بين الحقيقي والافتراضي أو ما بين التمثيل المسرحي نفسه والحقيقة القائمة وراء هذا العرض المسرحي. ولذلك نجد أن تداخل الوسائط الإعلامية مرتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً باللبنية أو الوسطية.

إن الواقعية الافتراضية وهي عالم اصطناعي يُخلق على المسرح، نتيجة لتداخل العوالم المختلفة، لا يعرف قيمة للزمان أو المكان. وفي هذا العالم يسافر الجمهور عبر حدود الزمان والمكان فلا يستطع تحديد بداية، أو وسط، أو نهاية لما يشاهده. لقد أصبح يعيش في اللامكان واللازمان، أو في زمان ومكان العالم الافتراضي المتخيل، فيتقابل الممثلون و الجمهور في هذا العالم المتخيل ويتعايشون مع التجربة الافتراضية التي لا تحمل أي حقيقة من نوعها، وإنما تكون أحداثها كلها تخيلية افتراضية. وفي هذا العالم التخيلي، تنفصل الذات و تتشتت لأنها لم تعد تنتمي إلى زمان أو مكان محددين. ولذلك يناقش هذا البحث العلاقة الوثيقة بين المسرح ووسائل الإعلام الحديثة وكيفية استخدام التكنولوجيا في مسرح ما بعد الحداثة. ويوضح أيضاً البحث كيف استطاع المسرح في عصر الإعلام الإلكتروني و الرقمي أن يقدم تطوراً في التمثيل المسرحي وفي وسائل إدراك الجمهور للعالم الافتراضي الذي خُلق نتيجة استخدام التقنيات الإعلامية المتطورة. كما يتناول البحث كيفية تطبيق هذه التقنيات على مسرحية "لغة الأماكن" للكاتب المسرحي المصري الأمريكي يوسف الجندي، حيث يتناول البحث تحليلاً لتلك المسرحية والتي تتحدث عن أحمد المحقق المصري الذي يعيش في أمريكا مع صديقه ناصر، ولكنه لا يستطيع أن يتأقلم مع العادات والتقاليد الأمريكية فيظل دائماً متأرجحاً بين آراءه الدينية والمصرية والمعتقدات الأمريكية، مما يُشعر كيفن – رئيسه الأمريكي في العمل – بأنه غير كفاء ولا

يتمتع بالوفاء والولاء الكافي ليعيش بين الأمريكان. وعلى الصعيد الآخر تتحدث المسرحية عن والد أحمد – سمير – الذي يعيش في مصر والذي كان دوماً يطمح للعيش في أمريكا حيث كان يتمنى تحقيق الحلم الأمريكي وأخذ الجنسية الأمريكية والحصول على فرص عمل أفضل هناك ولكنه لسوء الحظ يصطدم بالواقع الحقيقي لأمريكا حينما يتم اعتقاله واستجوابه على يد ابنه أحمد في أمريكا.

ويعرض الجندي أفكاره على المسرح من خلال استخدام التنقل عبر المكان والزمان فيتعرض المشاهد إلى نقلات من زمن إلى آخر ومن مكان إلى آخر حينما يُنقل المشاهد من أمريكا إلى القاهرة ليسرد الجندي أحداثاً تصف حياة سمير وأحمد في زمن ماضٍ، ثم ينقل المشاهد مرة أخرى من القاهرة إلى أمريكا ليعود به إلى الواقع الحقيقي وحياة أحمد الحالية. وتنتهي المسرحية باعتراف كيفن أن أحمد خائن للحياة الأمريكية ولذلك قام كيفن بعزله في بدلة زجاجية لا يستطيع فيها سماع أحد حيث يفقد فيها وعيه تدريجياً حتى يموت ببطء شديد. وقد استخدم الجندي الإضاءة للتعبير عن تلك الأفكار والتنقلات بين الزمان والمكان. وفي تنقله بين مصر وأمريكا، استطاع الجندي أن يعرض عوالم مختلفة للجمهور على المسرح في وقت واحد، فكان تداخل الوسائط التكنولوجية الخاصة باستخدامات الصوت والضوء، و تداخل عنصرى المكان والزمان، و تفكيك الهوية، والخصوصية، والبناء السردى، و الانفتاح على الآخر عبر الحوار و التفاعل، بمثابة عوالم افتراضية جديدة.

Erwin Piscator, Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht have been the leaders in using technology onstage, and the creators of a new theatrical language of gestures; a language of space devoid of dialogue that would appeal to all the senses, through utilizing sound effects of recorded footsteps and rhythmic stamping, stormy winds and waves, eventually creating intermedial performance. Consequently, intermediality appears in the correlation of media in theater in the sense of mutual influences between media, leaving the audience in an in-between state of virtuality, in which time and space are subverted and nothing is certain. Therefore, virtual reality presents open forms that allow the audience simultaneously to be inside and outside the theatrical work. The audience thus becomes scattered in this simulation. The self, in this sense, is torn between the real and the virtual and is distracted and split.

Intermediality refers to the interrelation of modern media of communication, in which various media depend on one another, both explicitly and implicitly. They are interrelated in a communicative way, constituting a wider social environment:

While intermediality might be taken to include any relation whatsoever between media, three different conceptions can be identified in communication research . . . First, the term denotes . . . combinations of different sensory modalities of interaction, for instance music and moving images. Second, intermediality represents the combination of separate material vehicles of representation, as exemplified by the use of print, electronic, and digital platforms in a communication campaign. Third, intermediality addresses the interrelations among the media as institutions in society interrelations that are captured in technological and economic terms such as convergence and concentration. (Jensen 1)

Accordingly, the combination of different modes of representation - exemplified in electronic platforms; such as cameras, projectors, lightings - is associated with the term intermediality. However, intermediality is also about the correlation and interaction between media in a way that the virtual is confronted with the real where there is some sort of a mutual effect. In this respect, media correlation assumes an in-between space as their specific conventions are lost resulting in new relationships and perceptions. Intermediality can be understood as "the attempt to realize in one medium the aesthetic conventions and habits of seeing and hearing in another medium" (Balme, *Theatre Studies* 6). To be intermedial, theatre must utilize slide projections, video or any simulated tool in order to reach an intermedial level between reality, surreality, and virtuality.

This feeling of the unrecognized levels felt by the audience is what creates the in-between state. Hence, Intermediality occupies a position in-between the performer and the audience and in-between the theatre, the performance itself and the reality lying behind the performance.

In this context, intermediality is said to be almost synonymous to in-betweenness. It is actually difficult nowadays to perceive intermediality without referring to in-betweenness. It resembles the meaning of “inter”: “First of all, the term ‘inter’- mediality itself already carries the notion of the in-between, expressed by the prefix inter, along with the notion of the middle or mediation that is intrinsic to mediality” (Rottger). It is defined by what surrounds it. In her article “Key issues in Intermediality in theatre and performance”, Freda Chapple states:

We locate intermediality at a meeting-point in-between the performers, the observers, and the confluence of the media involved in a performance at a particular moment in time. The intermedial inhabits a space in-between the different realities that the performance creates and thus it becomes, at the minimum, a tripartite phenomenon. Intermediality is a powerful and potentially radical force which operates in-between performer and audience; in-between theatre, performance and other media; and in-between realities – with theatre providing a staging space for the performance of intermediality. (12)

Accordingly, intermediality cannot operate without in-betweenness, while theatre itself, on the other hand, provides a stage for intermediality. This space, theatre creates, provides a simulated world for both the audience’s perception and the performers as well, thus creating virtuality on stage.

Virtuality is a simulated space on stage in which time and space are subverted. It takes place in a real location, but at the time of the performance, the audience becomes translocal, as s/he can no longer determine a beginning, middle or an end to the simulated world. The audiences as well as the performers meet in an in-between space where nothing is certain about the performance. It “is made of fragments, segments of information . . . (it) constructs itself through the interaction between the viewer and the work of art which allows the viewer to be present in both the real and the virtual environment” (Giannachi 11). In this virtual realm, the audience and the performer feel that their lives no longer belong to them but to the simulated life created on stage. Virtual reality is, thus, an interactive experience in a simulated world, which creates an intermedial space. Accordingly, intermediality “is one which through virtuality is able not only to include the viewers within the work of art but also to distribute their presence 'globally' in both the real and

the simulated information world" (Giannachi 10). As a result, virtuality becomes the medium that can reinvent itself and reflect upon itself continuously in the performative space.

Yussef El Guindi has been one of the prominent playwrights who tackles these virtual issues in his plays. He has used technological tools in his theater to highlight the fragmentation of the self, the virtuality of time and space, and the hybridity and assimilation of the Arab-American man, especially in his play *Language Rooms*. Consequently, the current paper integrates many approaches, especially the cultural and the psychological approach to crystallize the role of intermedia onstage and to stress the suffering the Arab-Americans have not only from the dilemma of assimilation and hybridity, but also from the virtuality and division of the self affected by the usage of the technological tools in the theatrical scope. All these theoretical approaches are examined in the light of the play *Language Rooms* (2010) where El Guindi creates multifaceted characters that reflect a poststructuralist conception of the subject that deconstruct notions of "identity" and "self".

The play is about family bonds and how an Arab American family tries to fit in the American world. The play shifts between past and present, dream and reality, Egypt and America. It highlights themes of belonging, the American dream and accommodation. The play is about two Muslim Americans Ahmed and Nasser who are interrogators. Ahmed is known to have always insulated himself from his American colleagues and is subsequently questioned about his loyalty to the American society for having compassions with the prisoners he was interrogating. The climax has reached its point when Ahmed's father – Samir – is arrested and Ahmed is asked to catechize him. This questioning leads Ahmed to know that his father has always been cheating on his wife. Ahmed, consequently, shows his aggression against his Arab heritage thereby revealing his perverse position. Kevin, Ahmed's boss, forces Ahmed to be secluded in a suit while Kevin continues the interrogation. In this sense, Samir speaks about the American dream in his monologue when he assumes that America is the land that fulfills others' dreams. However, the contrast lies in the fact that he ends up in prison while his son is isolated in a suit.

The beginning of the play intersects with the end when Samir describes how Ahmed drowns in the sea in Egypt and how Ahmed hates being in the city where he has drowned. Dreaming to travel to America was a new start to a new utopian life with new career and opportunity in

everything. However, in America, Samir ends up arrested and imprisoned while Ahmed ends up drowned and isolated in his suit in America.

In his play, Yussef El-Guindi has incorporated technological tools to emphasize and assert the distracting feelings an Arab American feels as he does. He manifests such themes as Arab-American cross-border, assimilation, and hybridity. Themes like the immigrant experience, cultural and political climates, and current issues facing Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans have also been crystallized in most of his plays. His plays tackle the Arab-American collective despair and accumulative misinterpretations the latter faces. He outcrops theme of belonging to both “us” and “them”; “America” and “Egypt”. Yussef El Guindi himself acknowledges such in-between state an Arab-American feels when he’s asked to define himself:

When asked to define himself as a playwright, El Guindi says that he finds himself on the fringes of both Arab and American cultures. He has been identified as a Middle Eastern American playwright. El Guindi sees this taxonomy as . . . a tension between forgetting where one comes from in order to become an American, and yet constantly being questioned whence one came. (Najjar xvii-xviii)

In that sense, Yussef El Guindi has explored the impulse of the Arab-Americans who want to reinvent themselves, to re-identify their identities and assimilate, without discarding their own heritage. In that sense, *Language Rooms* discloses a significant use of lighting to highlight such concerns. When Ahmed is isolated in this suit, the stage direction clarifies Samir’s feelings when he approaches the face glass of his son’s suit trying to communicate with him: “Samir stares at Ahmed, who appears oblivious to his surroundings. Samir approaches the glass (of the suit)” (72). Ahmed is no more aware of his surroundings, while his father’s trial to get him back to his consciousness is useless.

The scene suddenly shifts to Alexandria, where Samir tries to compare between what’s happening right now to his son and what has happened earlier in Alexandria: “Samir sits, leans against the glass at some point. The lights will also start to dim, ending perhaps with a spot on Samir and Ahmed” (72-73). The lights, as well, symbolize his state of darkness inside and outside, or physically and mentally. The way the lights dim with a spot on Samir and Ahmed, not only serves as a kind of focus on the characters, but also highlights their feelings of total despair and darkness, and how their lives have ended in America this way.

Consequently, the way the play ends with this centering on Samir and Ahmed through lights functions the characterization of the two characters as being assimilated to the American stance in a kind of surveillance. They have nothing to do but to dispense with all their memories, their identities and yield to Kevin and his culture.

Though abundant plays have examined issues of assimilation and hybridity from the perspective of immigrants to the United States, often focusing on the conflict between the parents who have come here and their much-more-assimilated children who grew up here. However, this play focuses on the usage of technology onstage, especially cameras to highlight such thematic aspects of assimilation and hybridity. Despite the coercion and the fear they live in, the Arab American main characters still have faith in the American Dream and intensely categorize themselves with the United States as American citizens. *Language Rooms* surveys the idea of the interrogation out to the extreme, illustrating how the interrogator himself turns into a suspect, and how the U.S. system can exclude trust and confidence. In the play, we actually have two main Arab American characters. Whereas Nasser has succeeded in assimilating into the American CIA society, Ahmed is a socially stranger who has shown his feelings of otherness with his patriotic commitment to his American country. That shocks him when he learns that his faithfulness and devotion have been suspected.

Since the play has started, the usage of cameras is highly stressed, shedding light on the assimilation theme. Yussef El Guindi introduces Nasser and Ahmed as two Arab American guys; one symbolizes assimilation and the other hybridity. From the start, when Ahmed sees the tools used to torture the interrogator Nasser brings, he exclaims to which Nasser gestures with hand, pointing at the cameras; hinting to Ahmed that he can't just oppose the American policy of interrogation:

AHMED and NASSER stand. Nasser holds a clipboard.
Short beat, then:

AHMED

I'm sorry, what?

(Nasser opens his mouth to reply; instead, he gestures and moves towards the corner. He puts the clipboard down on the chair.)

Why? Just tell me.

NASSER

(Starts out in a half whisper)

I will. (Nods towards unseen camera)

AHMED

What about it?

NASSER

(Re: camera)

It's on.

AHMED

I don't care.

NASSER

Well I do. (1)

Yusef El Guindi has incorporated the usage of cameras to assert the combination of mediums in his theater. This intermedial perspective he adheres creates virtual characters on the stage, especially for Nasser who actually has two selves; the virtual self is the one watched and monitored by the cameras. The virtual self is his imaginary American self. While the real self is the one he utilizes when he speaks with Ahmed. The mediated tool used onstage here is a crystallization of the self highlighted. Cameras, thus, become a mirror of the self that is being projected on. However, Ahmed refuses to be assimilated in the Other's culture as Nasser. He wants to keep one self as permanently. Consequently, he refuses to create a virtual self for him even when he is monitored by the camera. In this way, his refusal to pretend to be another one than himself leads him to be perfidious in Kevin's eyes. The eyes of the camera are used as codes or eyes to the American world. For instance, Ahmed's refusal to fit and assimilate in this American society may lead him to be questioned in his loyalty to his job and his boss. Due to this, he moves to the cameras hanged on the wall, and shouted: "Loyalty?", as if he is addressing his American boss – represented in the cameras technique – how can you distrust me! In this way, the mediated and technological tools used are very vital to manifest the theme of assimilation and hybridity.

Even when Ahmed is enslaved in an isolation box, his father asserts to Kevin – the American interrogator - of his own and his son's devotion to the United States: "We are both—proud Americans. We love our new country. (70) Ahmed, though pretends to be fully American – can't acclimate with the American lifestyles. The matter begins treacherously and gets scarier as Ahmed realizes his fidelities are being questioned when his colleague Nasser says, in a futile endeavor to sound patriotic, Ahmed doesn't socialize enough. He didn't come to the Super Bowl party. He doesn't like to shower with the other guys. "I don't know what to do when George wants to hold a conversation without any clothes on," (7) Ahmed protests. Nasser gestures around the room: "You have conversations with naked people all the time!"(7)

To test Ahmed's commitment, Ahmed's boss – Kevin – allocates to Ahmed a task of interrogating his father, Samir. Knowing this, Ahmed is forced to question his loyalties, his patriotism and where his path of life lies. This interrogation is actually an examination of the American and the Arab identity as well. Moving on, the climax rises when Ahmed confronts his father over his recent relationship with a terrorist sheik. However, technological equipment plays a role in the interrogation itself. It soon becomes obvious that the same hidden cameras and observational techniques used in questioning suspects are also trained on the men doing the questioning. The controlling techniques used on the suspects are also part of the police scheme:

SAMIR

I don't understand. This is the opposite of everything. This isn't the people we know. They are better than this.

AHMED

(Half-whisper)

What have you got yourself involved in? (41)

Throughout the whole interrogation between Ahmed and his father, Ahmed is whispering, looking at the camera, giving his back to the camera; in a way to hide his and his father's real feelings about home, and their true identity. This proves the vitality of the symbolism of the cameras used in the play.

Spatio-Temporal effects

Modernism and post- modernism are two terms equated with the collapse of space and time. In recent years, with the advance of the technological aspects on the stage, space and time have been blurred. Since virtuality has taken place on theater, the audience can no longer determine a specific time or space. The theater becomes a panorama of events and scenes, where it is facile to move from one time to another and from certain locale to another; in which spatial categories come to dominate those of time. With the advent of technology in literature, semantic discriminations of spatial and temporal language, the relations between space and time in language, and the interaction between spatial and temporal language came, once again, into the focus of scholarly studies, becoming, to a large degree, one of the milestones of literary researches. However, when it comes to literature, space and time are correlated together:

When it comes to literature, the temporal and spatial parameters of human experience move beyond their familiar dualism and are merged into space time, inherent in every narrative work. The activity of narrating a story correlates with the temporal character of human experience. Thus, time is articulated through a narrative mode, while narrative acquires its full meaning when embedded in temporal existence. (Vukanović 9)

In literature, thus, the temporal and spatial parameters are inseparable. Modernists believed that they lived in the world that was split or broken into pieces. The loss of traditional values and renunciation of customs caused chaos in life. People lost their roots and identities believing that by doing this, they can break free from gloomy memories and painful experience, however, at the same time they lost a part of their own identity. It is not shocking that many post-modernist plays' characters are depicted as rebellious personalities neglecting their family relationships, rejecting the value of the historical heritage, and external culture, resorting to the American dream as a place where they can create new self and new identity. As a result, people felt disillusioned and dissatisfied, as their souls seemed to consist of meaningless bits and pieces that are fragmented. Post-Modernist writers aimed to protest about the irrationality of reality in their works. In this way, post-modernists have introduced a new style of writing, a fragmented style that suits their fragmented souls. They:

Introduced the style of discontinuous narrative in their books. This style is based on moving the narrative back and forth through time paying no attention to logical temporal or spatial boundaries . . . modernists believed that by passing his temporal life man views all things in relation to himself and his life on the earth. Nevertheless, it is rather difficult to lead one's life from birth to death, as man permanently organizes his experience into rather relative formulations of interweaving time and space . . . for example, the present moment is never isolated, because it is filled with very preceding moment, and is constantly in the process of change. (MIČIŪNAITĒ 54)

Yussef El Guindi has used this technique of the fragmentation in time and space in many transitional shifts he inserted in the play *Language Rooms*. In the context when Ahmed and Nasser were talking about issues of assimilation and fitting in, the scene is suddenly shifted from Ahmed's room in America to Samir (Ahmed's father) room in Egypt; in a way to give a back ground history of Ahmed's Egyptian roots:

AHMED

What about the Khaled interrogation?

NASSER

Just think before you mouth off, okay. Really: think.

AHMED

I do; I will. Don't worry. - Thanks for being a friend.

(Nasser picks up the clipboard. Ahmed glances at it.)

Who's being brought in?

NASSER

(Picks up the tool box and bat) Some guy from the States. Connected with that mystery sheikh who's on the run . . .

(With one last look at Ahmed, Nasser exits with the shopping cart. Ahmed looks at the honey. He dips his finger into the pot, then sucks on it. Lights fade on Ahmed. Transitional sounds.)

(Scene 2: Lights up on SAMIR, an Arab man in his 50's. He stands dressed in a gallabiyah and a Muslim skull cap.) (10)

The shift here occurs both in time and space simultaneously; since the transition takes place from America to Egypt, and from our present time back to Samir's old life when he starts to recount his memories with Ahmed when he was a child. In this sense, the Spatio-temporal shifts is connected to this fragmented technique mentioned above, with no cares about the sequence of time or place. Later on, after a long two pages of description of the lives and customs of the Egyptian life, another shift in space takes place once more back again to America, to Kevin's room:

And off we went. Before we even knew we had left we were there. J.F.K. New York. In a land I had visited only once. My God. We were so full of this adventure. The craziness of this chance at something so new. And my son said, "Puppy. We're really here."

SAMIR (cont'd)

(MORE) (A laugh)

And I said, yes...oh yes...we're really here.

(Quick fade to black. Transitional sounds.)

(Scene 3: Kevin's office. Lights up on KEVIN, an African-American man in his 50's-60's. Ahmed is seated. An ironing board and iron have been set up. (10-11)

As the quotation alleges, in the play, time flows as a constant ever-changing stream, having neither beginning nor end. Yussef El Guindi thus portrays reality as timeless and spaceless, because it is impossible to measure and contains all space and all time. Memories carry the characters into the past, while the present moments seem to vanish or melt in the flow of time.

In another context, Yussef El Guindi records another central swing in time and place, when Ahmed and Kevin were talking about Ahmed's disloyalty to the American society, and how he can't fit in, and join his American colleagues their naked parties, Yussef El Guindi signals another shift to Samir's life in Egypt, in which he wears his well-known Egyptian costume (Gallebya). However, the playwright adds here: "sounds. (Scene 4: Lights up on Samir. He is still dressed in a gallabiyah, but this time wears a baseball cap.)" (23). In this scene, the playwright

adds such an addition of the baseball cap to show the extent of the assimilation both the son and his father have at different times and in different spaces. Ahmed's conversation with Kevin has led him to think about forgetting totally about his roots and surrendering to the American culture. Meanwhile, the Spatio-temporal transition from Kevin's room to Samir's room highpoints the same assimilation Samir starts to have when he discovers that his son becomes ashamed of his father's costume (Gallabiyah). Consequently, he wears the baseball cap; a kind of imitation to the American costume – a way to satisfy his son's needs and passions. Due to this, space and time shifts have not only broken the rules of the old traditions of theater, but also highlights the recent doctrines and issues faced by migrated Arabs exemplified in assimilation and hybridity. It also hints to the virtual life the characters lead due to the loss of their identity. The playwright needs the audience to feel the disillusioned life the characters have through the disillusion he creates onstage through the usage of cameras, lighting, and Spatio-temporal shifts.

This virtuality Yussef El Guindi has created in his play has been stressed by the new perspective for the usage of costumes El Guindi has created. The costume's dramatic concept here serve to discern the real self from the virtual one. Hence, clothing discloses many things about a person: social and cultural background, class, status, profession, gender, and believes. It also inaugurates a noticeably differentiated identity of its own. It actually reveals his inner and virtual self. Thus, clothing becomes a technology for dealing with identity. The idea of a dress itself is that clothing is actually a personal act related to one's body and making the body an object of consciousness. In the corporeal world, it is through clothing that the body is made an object in public space. Further, clothes are what create for the body a real event. Calefato stated that: "the clothed body expresses the way in which a subject is in and of the world through his/her aesthetic and physical appearance, his/her relation with other bodies and lived bodily experiences" (2). Accordingly, clothes may isolate the body from the surrounding, creating a virtual atmosphere in which the body is not present or conscious of the surroundings.

In this virtual world, clothing permits for this person another virtual body, parallel to an avatar shape, shaping another identity for the person. In the play in hand, the hero Ahmed is interrogating his father. When Kevin – Ahmed's boss – hears the conversation between Ahmed and his father, he ascertains that both Ahmed and his father are not fully Americans as they pretend to be. On the contrary, they may even agree to condemn the American's police for the sake of their Egyptian heritage

and family bonds. Ahmed, therefore, is suspected to be a sympathizer or spy. Though Kevin may untruly suspects Ahmed, he hurries to segregate Ahmed in a suit – a seemingly scuba suit – where Ahmed has totally lost his consciousness, his body being transferred into apparently a virtual body. Due to this, this suit becomes contextually the clothed body we are talking about. Both Ahmed and the suit become one entity; a new avatar, with a new experience and new altered identity. The new suit accentuates that a virtual self has created far different from the real Ahmed who pretends to be American. In the following quote, Kevin is asking Ahmed to dispense with his claimed American identity and get into the suit:

Kevin: Look: we've figured out what that scuba looking suit is for. Turns out it's an isolation suit. A kind of time out for people to reflect. And that's what I need you to do. Because I still believe there is room for you here. But you've got to get clear on some things. And focus. Can I ask you to do that for me? Get in that suit and reflect? And while you're in there, ask yourself: Do I know what I mean when I say: - "I belong"...When we've all now gathered to be a part of something new. And now that I've arrived, why does that set off such a war, in here? (68)

For this reason, Kevin believes that clothing is one of the means by which bodies are made communal and given meaning and identity. Hence, in insulating Ahmed in this scuba suit, Kevin is just trying to create another virtual identity or virtual body rather than Ahmed's physical pretending to be American body. In this sense, bodily coverings shape the body with the surrounding world, and may sometimes determine one's culture. Accordingly, taking this cloth off may allure to the dispensing of one's mottos, habits or origins: "costume establishes a close relation between the individual and the community to which s/he belongs" (Calefato 9). On the whole, this proves Kevin's intentions when he removes Ahmed's clothes and insulates him in the suit, succeeding to diminish Ahmed's Egyptian's and American's roots at the same time, creating a new virtual identity that belongs to nowhere. Meanwhile, the symbol of the importance of clothing and identity is recurrent in many stances in the play.

Clothing plays a vigorous role in the conversation between Ahmed and his father Samir. Dressing and undressing is a recurrent theme in numerous standpoints between Ahmed and Samir. The first encounter about the dressing code between Ahmed and his father Samir is when

Ahmed caviled about his father wearing Galabia when they go out together:

I did cringe when I walked down the street with you. When you insisted on wearing your gallabiyah, that long dress, like you were oblivious that we were in a country that might find that odd. And cringed when you opened your mouth and out came that thick accent when you could hardly speak English. And when you rolled out your mat and prayed in the *fucking mall*. The *mall*. In a corner off the food court, where my friends could see you. I thought, Jesus Christ, what a fucking Arab. What a goddamn hideous weirdo Muslim is this? (62)

Ahmed feels covered when Samir wears the galabia; which symbolizes his Arab root. Clothing to Ahmed is an integral part of his human organism. It is the costume in which he can conceal his real human face, serving as a mediator him and the American society he lives in:

Clothing bridges the gap between that which a person is and what he or she wants to be. At this level, clothing is a barrier with two-way meaning. At the same time, while protecting the individual from outside influences, clothing is a certain limit to which an individual determines his or her place in relation to society. Clothing is a mask and costume, it is the area where you face the others, the element of recognition or discrimination. (Hošić 183)

Hence, when his father insists on wearing the galabia, in this case the garment, or the galabia becomes an object endowed with the values and morals of the Egyptian Muslims, a principle Ahmed shuns, hence clothing for Ahmed is a way of dreaming an imaginary world; a world of American dreams not Egyptian ones. Due to this, the garment or the clothing becomes a sign, and wearing it foregrounds a specific function to the wearer. Consequently, removing it obliterates this identity. This explicates why Kevin seeks to undress Samir, in a way to humiliate him and towing his identity away, leaving him and his son with virtual identities that are neither Arab nor American. Ahmed in this context is obliged by Kevin to undress his father:

AHMED

Puppy: - he wants me to strip you. - Naked. To humiliate you. To urge you, that way, to tell us what you know. To make you stand on that chair, naked, and, if that doesn't

work, he'll bring in a couple of guards to take over. But you know what: You're right: I am being paid well. If that was the goal, your gamble paid off, look at me. (62)

In this quote, Ahmed reveals to his father Kevin's intentions and start to blame him for wearing galabia, for praying in front of his friends in the mall, for doing all an Egyptian Muslim can do as a custom. Ahmed feels ashamed of his roots and his identity. He feels tormented between his two identities. He hungers for a virtual identity he creates for himself; an avatar that intermingles between the two, taking what suits him from the two identities. However, this turns to be impossible especially when Kevin discovers Ahmed's yearning for his roots. In this sense, Samir couldn't believe that Ahmed is blaming him for getting him to America. As a result, Samir starts undressing his dress American code as a way to show his freedom from the American identity. Samir's undressing scene correspondingly implies his shock towards his son's new ideologies, and new virtual identity. Samir can no longer distinguish his son's identity or partialities:

How could you bring me to a country where I would end up being embarrassed by you? . . .

(The father starts hurriedly removing his clothes.)

What are you doing? ...What are you doing . . .

AHMED

Stop. Stop undressing.

(Ahmed physically tries to stop his father from undressing. But Samir shrugs him off/ moves away and continues shedding clothes)

SAMIR

You want to get back at me? After opening the world to you, and giving you everything we didn't have. You want to hate me for this? You want to beat your own father and treat him like shit. (64-65)

People behave differently toward others depending on the costume or clothing they see them wear. This is actually the reason why persons appear to prefer clothing which transfers images similar to their

characters. For this reason, Samir starts to undress himself as a way of erasing the dress that attributes him to the American culture.

Dressing and undressing issue is a problematic one in both the American and the Egyptian culture. For Kevin and other American staff in the play, undressing parties are numerous, and seem normal. However, to Ahmed, and most Muslim Arabs, it seems awfully impudent to look naked in front of people. Undoubtedly, Kevin and another American police man regard Ahmed as an outsider, since he doesn't share them those undressing nudity parties. Undressing for them embodies uniqueness and team spirit. It implies that everyone belongs to everyone – all are equal. Accordingly, Ahmed's nullifying action indicates that he is a spy; an agent who is not similar to them; a man who does not want to show respect to their culture – in short he is the Other to them. Due to this, Kevin starts to doubt Ahmed's loyalties, and in return Ahmed's friend Nasser pushes Ahmed to dispense with his Arab mottos:

NAASER. And why is it you never - why don't you ever shower with us? You always wait until everyone's done.

AHMED

...

I'm sorry, I'm shy. I'm not comfortable being naked in front of other guys. I don't know what to do when George wants to hold a conversation without any clothes on. Like I'm supposed to ignore that.

NASSER

Why can't you ignore that?

AHMED

Because he's naked . . .

...

NASSER

Look: (Up close to Ahmed) . . . You can't just be yourself here. We have to fit in. Do you understand? (7-9)

Nasser is another Arab American police man in the play. However, unlike Ahmed he is able to assimilate in the American society. Henceforth,

undressing is not an issue for him. He can take off his clothes, feeling at ease. Subsequently, Nasser is regarded by the Americans as their man. He is one of them since unclothing is something desirable for him as he pretends it to be. In view of that, to fit in the American life, and assimilate means to be attributed to all their habits and nude culture. Clothing in that sense becomes attributed to the culture of the place you are living in. Actually, in this context undressing implies the degree of your loyalty and faithfulness. Even Kevin himself tries to hint to Ahmed that clothing and undressing is very essential to show how someone can be friendly, responsive and sociable:

KEVIN

Nothing, it's just one likes to be at ease around people, especially in a closed environment such as ours. For instance, I am about to take my pants off to iron them. I want to feel I can do that without feeling uncomfortable. (19)

Kevin is inveigling Ahmed to admit that he hates the American community, justifying his perspective with Ahmed's problem with the clothing issue. In this way, clothing becomes a symbol for loyalty, assimilation or hybridity, and the identity issue: virtual identity or real one.

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