

# Theater

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*Los Illegals* by Michael John Garcés

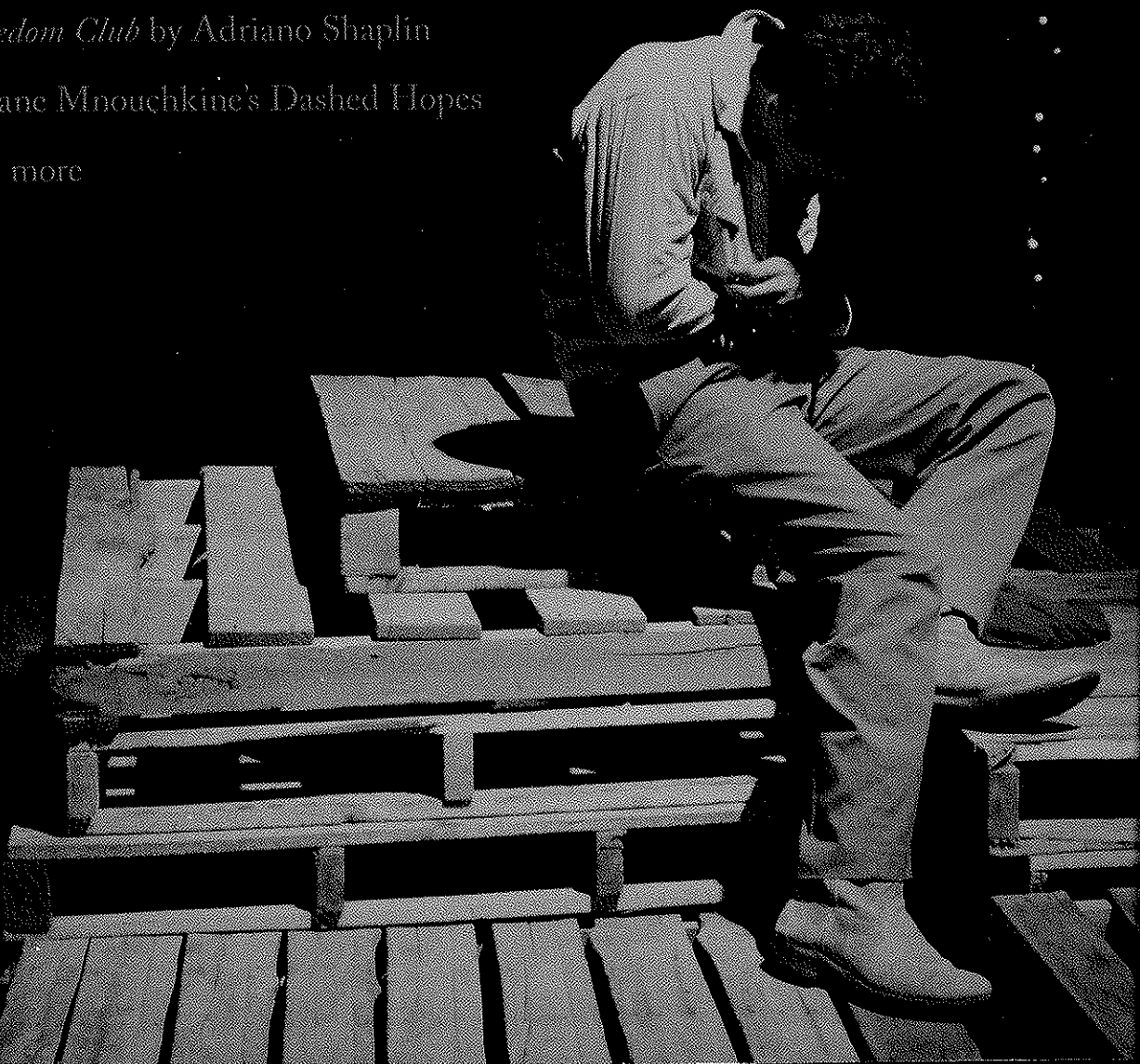
Jonathan Kalb:

What Is Theater's Outer Limit of Great Length?

*Freedom Club* by Adriano Shaplin

Ariane Mnouchkine's Dashed Hopes

and more



## CONTRIBUTORS

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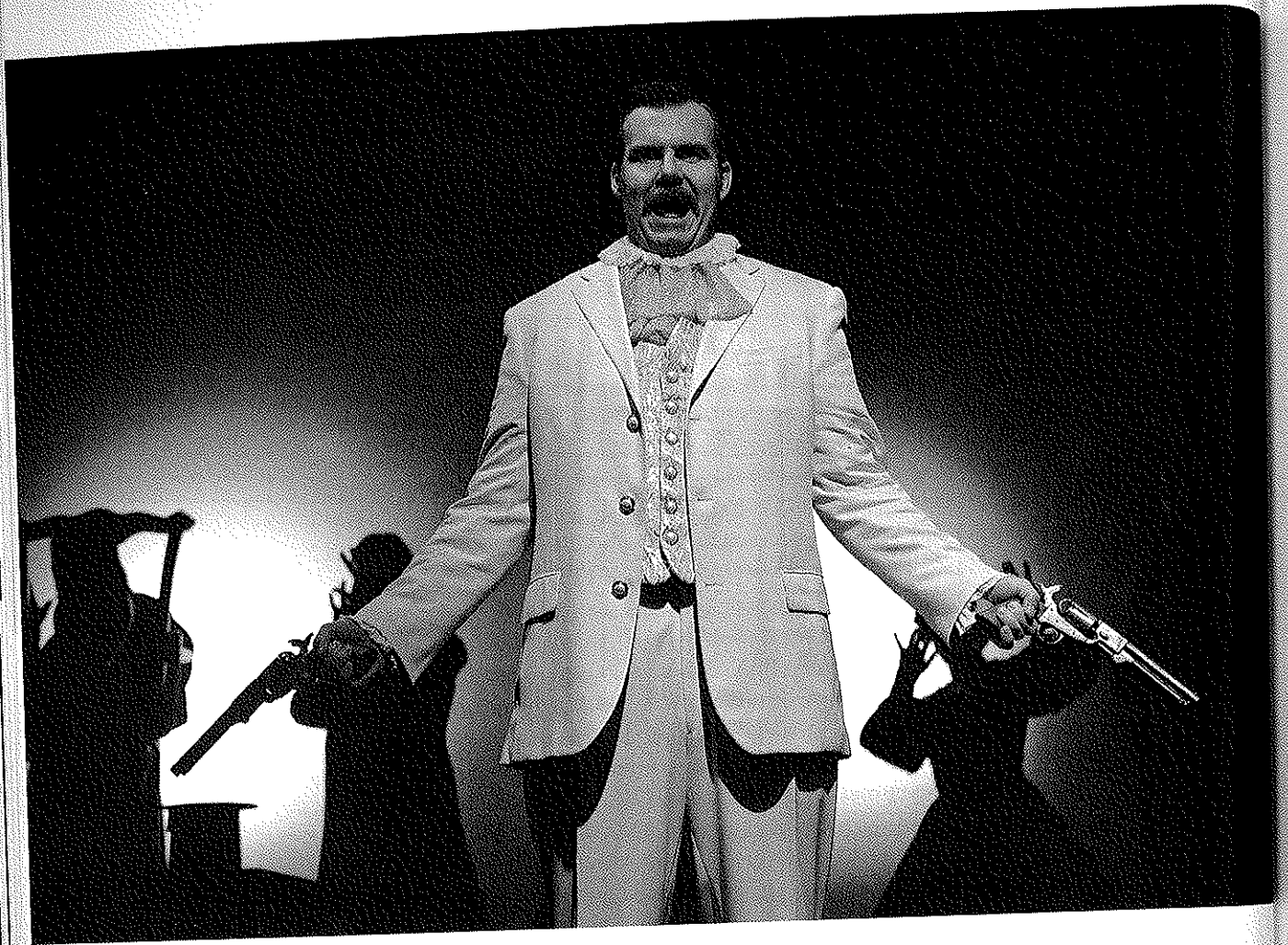
ADRIANO SHAPLIN is a playwright and artistic director of the Riot Group and has written plays for Pig Iron Theater Company, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and New Paradise Laboratories.

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Forced Entertainment's  
*And on the Thousandth*  
*Night...*, Festival  
Ayloul, Beirut, 2000.  
Photo: Hugo Glendinning

Inside Back Cover:  
*Soudain des nuits d'éveil*,  
Cartoucherie  
de Vincennes, Paris,  
1997. Courtesy of  
Théâtre du Soleil



*Freedom Club*,  
directed by Whit  
MacLaughlin, Arts  
Bank, Philadelphia,  
2010. Photo:  
Jacques-Jean Tiziou/  
jjtiziou.net

## THE EUPHORIA OF ANGER

*Adriano Shaplin*

*Interviewed by Tom Sellar*

**TOM SELLAR** *When did you start working on Freedom Club, and why? Did you start with an image, or an idea, or in response to something specific?*

**ADRIANO SHAPLIN** It was a convergence of several things. I had just written a play about the effect of the English Civil War on science for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and it got me thinking about our Civil War in America. At the same time I was talking with Whit MacLaughlin from New Paradise Laboratories about doing a piece on separatists or cults with Riot Group. I was living outside of the country during the last few years of the Bush administration, and I came back to this country right as Obama was taking office. So the American political landscape was looking particularly alien to me when I started writing this play. I saw a poster in Jersey City of Obama's face morphed with Abraham Lincoln's, which really made me want to know if there was any meaningful connection between the two. I wanted to investigate that. And I *was* struck as I was reading about Lincoln and how it seemed like it was about now.

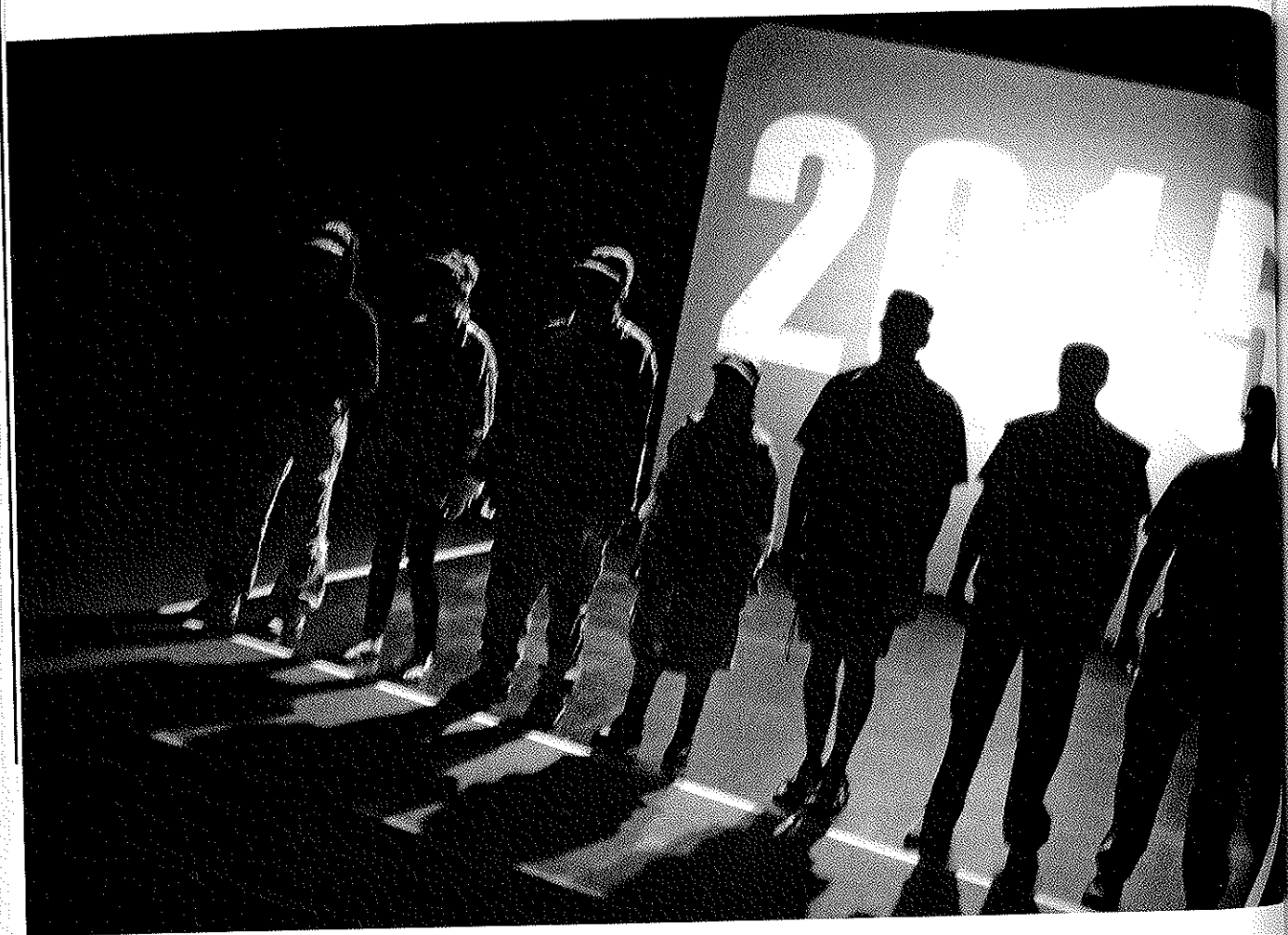
*Supposedly Obama's speechwriters were looking back at Lincoln's rhetoric specifically as inspiration.*

Well, it doesn't surprise me. It's not giving anything away to note that the Tea Party is a carbon copy of the Know-Nothing party, or the

American party as they're officially called, that John Wilkes Booth was a member of. It also interested me that the slanders levied against Lincoln were that he was black, that he was a "half-breed." They called him "King Abraham Africanus the First," essentially the first black president. I mean, that's what they called him in his day: the first black president.

The specter of assassination is on everyone's mind because we know what our country is like. I think that was sort of the unacknowledged connection that people were drawing in between. I can't comment on whether it was founded or not, but there was this specter of assassination because he was black, or because some believed that the demagogues were stoking resentment among the American people.

When you leap 150 years forward, one of the questions we ask ourselves is: "Who are these people that come back?" It's part of a bigger question: "What is America? How does America change?" We felt that John Wilkes Booth has definitely been reincarnated, but we're not sure Lincoln has. And that's odd, you know. Booth killed Lincoln, he thought he was gonna be a hero, and it turned out everyone reviled what he did. He was considered a completely horrible person. And because of the assassination, Lincoln, an extremely unpopular president, was raised to the level of mythic martyr and is on our money now. So in the long run, Lincoln won.



*Freedom Club*, directed  
by Whit MacLaughlin,  
Arts Bank, University  
of the Arts, Philadelphia,  
2010. Photo:  
Jacques-Jean Tziou/  
jtzizou.net

## ADRIANO SHAPLIN

### FREEDOM CLUB

#### CHARACTERS

JOHN WILKES BOOTH, JEREMIAH  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN, ROBERT LINCOLN, ELIOT  
MARY TODD LINCOLN, BELLA  
WILLIAM SEWARD, EDWIN BOOTH, GARY  
BOOTH'S SISTER, LUCY HALE, HAWK, DENISE  
FRANNY SEWARD, LOVER, KEENE, NIKKI  
THURLOW, JUNIUS, GRANT, POWELL, LEROY

I. 1865

LINCOLN *sits upon a throne. BOOTH argues with his sister.*

BOOTH (*aside*) America, you need an actor to save you.  
Shakespeare is making me do things

Lesser men can't dream to do:  
for country.  
Cuz Shax cuts to the core.  
He unlocks my mind from false notions.

ASIA John Wilkes.

BOOTH He is essences, sending me messages,  
across 300 years, telling me what tyranny is,  
what grandeur was, what natural law governs  
Man,  
Is born of Man and binds us,  
And says to us:

ASIA John Wilkes.

BOOTH Kill all kings. Kill every king.

THURLOW Madam First Lady.

MARY He's sick.

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Special thanks to Jacques-Jean Tiziou (jtziziou.net)

