

# **Žižek and Australian Masculinity: Perceiving Gender Violence in David Williamson's *The Removalists***

**JA Quirk**, Carnegie Mellon University, Pennsylvania, US  
([jquirk@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:jquirk@andrew.cmu.edu))

**Abstract:**

Published in 2008, Slavoj Žižek's *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* provides critical insight into the structures of power that dictate our perception and comprehension of violence in society. In particular, Žižek's distinction between the subjective and objective modes of perceiving violence is illuminating. This paper utilizes his distinction to reframe a classic of Australian theatre, David Williamson's *The Removalists*. This approach puts Žižek's seminal work on violence to task, teases out new meanings from Williamson's text, and explores new methods for understanding the playing out of violence on stage.

*The catch is that subjective and objective violence cannot be perceived from the same standpoint: subjective violence is experienced as such against the background of a non-violent zero level. It is seen as a perturbation of the “normal,” peaceful state of things. However, objective violence is precisely the violence inherent to this “normal” state of things. Objective violence is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent.*

***Violence: Six Sideways Reflections***  
**Slavoj Žižek<sup>1</sup>**

**Introduction**

Published in 2008, Slavoj Žižek’s *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* provides critical insight into the structures of power which dictate our perception and comprehension of violence in society. In particular, Žižek’s conception of the distinction between the subjective and objective modes of perceiving violence is illuminating. This paper utilizes Žižek’s this distinction to recontextualize and reframe a classic of Australian theatre, David Williamson’s *The Removalists*.<sup>2</sup>

The question of violence and how it relates to masculinity was a popular theme for playwrights in the ‘new wave’ of Australian theatre in the 1960s and 70s (Bollen, Parr & Kiernander 2008: 58).<sup>3</sup> *The Removalists*, first performed at the Café La Mama Theatre in 1971, is no exception—it explores violence in Australian society as its central concern (Murrie 1998: 170). It is a story of domestic violence and police brutality which culminates in the chilling death of the wife-beating ocker and low-life, Kenny Carter, at the hands of two policemen. However, as Williamson has stated—and despite criticism levelled at the playwright—*The Removalists* is not simply an ‘anti-police’ play, derived from a critique of authoritarian ideology (Williamson, D. 1998: 28). Rather, it is more properly considered an interrogation of

the ideological aspects of Australian masculinity and manhood that bring about violence. In *The Times* review of the English premiere of *The Removalists* in 1973, Williamson was quoted:

Where's the violence gone? It's been suppressed by the mateship, but it's only just beneath the surface and it simply needs a touch of the trigger to fire it off. *The Removalists* is basically about ritualistic male violence...The Australian male is obsessed with virility and performance; when this is challenged then he can go wild (qtd. in Arnold 1975: 388).

Accordingly, as Peter Fitzpatrick explains, throughout the play “violence is presented as integrally related to the commitment to stereotypes of masculinity by the characters” (Fitzpatrick, P. 1979: 23). An essential component to the construction of Australian masculine identity is the authority they have over women. Gender violence, whether physical or otherwise, is most commonly perpetrated by men in their commitment to stereotypes of hypermasculinity. The women of the play are subordinated and Othered—physically, linguistically, and sexually—by their male counterparts (Murrie 1998: 170). In her reading, Wendy Beckett expresses a similar sentiment: “Most of the violence perpetrated is about asserting masculine power. Domination and masculinity appear to be co-dependent, synonymous” (Beckett 1993: 36). It is my central concern in this essay to analyse Williamson’s portrayal of gender violence as it relates to masculine socio-ideological violence, and the different ways this violence may be perceived.

In contribution to this body of critical commentary on Williamson’s work, this essay adopts an approach that reconceptualizes this important Australian play in light of Žižek’s incisive work.<sup>4</sup> It is important to note, that while Žižek’s study is mainly concerned with the objective violence inherent in the ideology of capitalism, I consider his ideas analogous and ripe for application to the ideologies of Australian masculinity and manhood that motivate the characters in *The Removalists*. Žižek’s and Williamson’s points are essentially the same. Rather than addressing the violence we can subjectively perceive—the physical, obvious types—we would do better to interrogate the structures of our socio-ideological systems by looking from the outside, in; ‘Removing’ ourselves from the passive playing out of ideology that

culminates in that physical violence and calling that ideology into question (Žižek 2008: 206).

The body of my discussion begins with a brief précis of Žižek's work, and more specifically, the two modes of perception which he argues socio-ideological violence may be perceived: subjective and objective. It is these ideas that provide the theoretical framework of this essay and informs my methodology. Turning then to the play, I divide my analysis into three to consider the way masculine socio-ideological, gender violence is presented. First, I analyse the subjective mode in which we may perceive gender violence. This mode is the most 'obvious' manifestation of gender-related violence and occurs specifically in reference to the physical beating of Fiona by her husband Kenny. I use the term 'reference' as the violence occurs prior to events of the play. Second, I turn my attention to the objective mode of perceiving gender-related violence. Here, focus is on the way in which violence towards women is played out as a performative commitment to masculine stereotypes. This violence is perpetrated by no discernible subjective agent and has no physically violent manifestation. Rather, it manifests itself when we consider the action and dialogue of the play from a different ideological standpoint from that of its characters. I suggest that a masculine socio-ideological violence is perceived objectively in Kenny's relationship with Fiona. Third, I argue that an objective violence may also be perceived in the relationship between Fiona and the policemen, Simmonds and Ross.

What this approach to the text hopes to demonstrate is that Žižek's study facilitates new modes of perceiving—and thus understanding—the way *The Removalists* presents gender violence. I believe that while an analysis of violence in Williamson's play is by no means new, reconceptualising it in terms of Žižek's work *is* new. Thus, I argue, what is so effective in the gender violence of *The Removalists* is not so much the depiction of the "subjective" mode, rather what we find so shocking is the fact that the characters do little or nothing to address the invisible violence inherent to the patriarchal ideological system that governs the play.

## Žižek on Violence

In his work, Žižek calls for a reconceptualization in the critical study of violence (2008: 4). He argues for an investigation which moves away from solely focusing on its outward and obvious physical manifestation of violence performed by agents (2008: 2), to consider the socio-ideological vicissitudes that cause its event. Put simply, it is a study that questions the very socio-ideological structures that govern the society in which that violence occurs. Žižek suggests there are two main modes of perceiving violence: subjective and objective. The accessibility of perceiving these modes differs according to the ideological standpoint of the perceiver. Subjective violence is the most readily apparent and perceivable form of violence since it is performed by a readily discernible agent (Žižek 2008: 2). This mode is present in the “obvious signals” of violence; the “acts of crime and terror, civil unrest, [and] international conflict” (Žižek 2008: 1).<sup>5</sup> While it is subjective violence that is most commonly performed on stage (Žižek 2008: 172), Lisa Fitzpatrick notes that in the theatrical context, “the representation of the subjective violence may stand for, or express, other forms of violence as well” (L. Fitzpatrick 15). This will be discussed further below.

By contrast, objective violence occurs without any readily discernible agent and is therefore difficult to ‘perceive’ (Žižek 2008: 2). In other words, “Objective violence,” Žižek states, “is invisible since it sustains the very zero-level standard against which we perceive something as subjectively violent” (Žižek 2008: 2). Žižek further divides the objective mode into two categories: systemic and symbolic. The former is virtually invisible; similar to the ‘dark matter’ of physics, and a counterpart to the “all-too-visible” subjective violence (Žižek 2008: 2). Rather than seen, systemic violence operates invisibly but is “the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (Žižek 2008: 2). Symbolic violence, on the other hand, is present in hate-speech, racism, discrimination and incitement to violence, but also inherent to language and seen in “the imposition of a certain universe of meaning” (Žižek 2008: 2).

Žižek maintains that in order to get to the nub of the phenomenon of violence, we best focus on its socio-ideological foundations. In essence, the work is a sustained attack on the capitalist ideologies which govern our perception of violence. These

ideological foundations govern the structure of our political, economic and social systems (Žižek 2008: 2). By calling into question capitalism's ideological underpinning, Žižek proposes what he calls a "measured, practical approach" to a study of the phenomenon of violence. This is favourable to the extant paradigm of emergency response to violence in Western democratic societies which, Žižek argues, suspiciously detracts from the assessing the true extent and cause of that violence as it occurs (Žižek 2008: 9-10). For my analysis of *The Removalists*, I will use Žižek's notions in relation to the ideologies and structures of Australian masculinity.

### **Subjective Violence: Kenny and Fiona**

Turning to the play, I begin my analysis with the only instance of gender violence depicted in its subjective, physical mode; Kenny's beating of Fiona. Though it occurs before the action of the play commences, it is the *causa sine qua non*, the catalyst which incites the subsequent action (Fitzpatrick, P. 1979: 28). It is therefore necessary to the propulsion of the play's realistic, linear plot that the beating is mentioned. Though we are forced to piece together the facts of this violent event from expository dialogue between the characters, it is nevertheless 'obvious' that the act of violence has in fact occurred, and does not need to be *seen* to be *perceived* (Žižek 2008: 2). As we are told by the stage directions, Fiona is "beaten" by Kenny (R 48). Kenny is therefore perceived as the subjective agent or perpetrator of the physical gender violence.

Kenny's justification for his violence is understood in relation to his commitment to the ocker stereotype (Fitzpatrick, P. 1979: 23). *The Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* defines 'ocker' as a "boorish person; person who is aggressively Australian in speech & behaviour, often for humorous effect" (qtd. in Fitzpatrick, P. 1987: 32). In Kenny's mind, he is the patriarch, 'king of the castle' and absolute ruler of his domestic domain, or, as Williamson calls him, a "chauvinist authoritarian" (Williamson, D. 1998: 29). Kenny rationalizes his actions, stating that since Fiona had not cleaned the kitchen tidy when he had asked her to, he had every right to beat her into submission (R 68-69; 73). Later, in defending these actions to Sergeant Simmonds, he expands upon his ideological beliefs, lamenting the bygone days

where violence as a form of domestic and political gender control was not only accepted, but seen as necessary in the smooth-functioning of the hegemonic structure of domestic life. He tells Simmonds: “In the old days if a man didn’t give his wife a thrashing every week or so she wouldn’t respect him. Nowadays you give ‘em a love pat and they shoot through on you” (*R* 102). Kenny’s violent act is an impulsive ‘eruption’ of physical violence; a *passage a l’acte* which Žižek suggests is the politically passive reaction to the Other: “some disturbing intruder” (213). Here the violence moves down the masculine socio-ideological hegemony, from Kenny to Fiona, as his subordinate.

Yet Kenny is unable to perceive the violence in his actions. He is so indoctrinated with ocker ideologies of masculinity and manhood that he is unable to see his beating of Fiona as an act of violence at all—merely the maintenance of the proper order of things. Here the violence is not really violence at all, but almost a form of affection; it is merely a ‘love-pat’ (Žižek 2008: 36). This is likewise evident in other aspects of Kenny’s female relationships: he refers to sex as a “grapple” (*R* 90); and rather than playing with his daughter, they wrestle (*R* 65).<sup>6</sup> However, when we turn to look from the outside, in—from the perspective of a less ‘hypermasculine’ ideological standpoint than that of the ocker—we can see the violence plain and clear. Kenny’s subjective actions and ideology are repulsive to all but those committed to the same stereotype.<sup>7</sup> Regarding Kenny’s violent outburst, Williamson portrays the subjective mode of gender violence. Consequently, Kenny’s violence is a performative commitment to the hyper-masculine, ocker stereotype. In ascribing the male authoritarian gender violence to the stereotype, Williamson questions and criticizes the inherent violence in Australian socio-ideological masculinity which governs the universe of the Australian beer-swilling populace. The objective mode counterpart to the subjective violence between Kenny and Fiona can be gleaned from the dialogue between the two characters the and to which I will now turn.

### **Objective Violence: Kenny and Fiona**

We have established that the subjective mode of the gender violence inherent to Australian ideologies of masculinity—the beating of Fiona—which is wholly contained within the expository dialogue of the various characters. This subjective

violence is symptomatic of the preservation of hegemonic masculine authoritarianism, and the smooth-functioning of this gendered political system which is inherent to the ideologies of the working-class worker. Yet, the play's assessment and exploration of gender violence are reaching further than the mere physical act of wife-bashing. I return to the comments of Lisa Fitzpatrick who similarly relates Žižek's modes of violence to the context of theatre. Fitzpatrick states, that when a play portrays subjective violence, the subjective representation "may stand for, or express, other forms of violence as well" (Fitzpatrick, L. 2012: 15). In *The Removalists*, it cannot be the actual physical event of the gender violence that we find so abhorrent since this is not played out on stage. Rather it is the way the characters react in response to its occurrence that elicits Williamson's desired response. It is these reactions, in the form of dialogue and stage direction, which provide the counterpart to the subjective violence; the invisible forms of male domination which can be considered the objective mode of violence inherent to the playing out of masculine ideology.

The first example of perceivable objective violence that I will discuss is conveyed through the construction of Kenny's relationship with Fiona. To use Žižek's words, in contrast to the subjective, the objective mode in which violence may be perceived "is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their "evil" intentions, but is purely "objective", systemic, anonymous" (Žižek 2008: 13). Žižek's theory neatly dovetails here with Williamson's own suggestion that his characters are "not horrific, but their conditioning is" (Williamson, D. 1998: 30). Kenny ceases to become an agent of physical, subjective violence, but rather a passively and unconsciously conditioned participant in the unseen objective violence of Australian masculinity. Violence of this kind is impossible to see from his ideological standpoint since it exists, "as the spontaneity of the milieu in which we dwell, of the air we breathe" (Žižek 2008: 36). In this sense, Kenny is a metonymy for what Ian Turner calls the "unthinking social acceptance" of violence against women and the pervasive sexism and misogyny inherent to Australian ideologies of masculinity and manhood (Turner 2000: 10).

From Kenny's ideological standpoint, it appears that Fiona's proper place in the marital home is closer to mere servant than wife; a 1970s Australian version of the Victorian-era 'angel of the house', who submits to her husband, duly performs her domestic duties of motherhood and household maintenance with a selfless devotion



to her matrimonial patriarch. In other words, she exists to service his needs, both domestic and sexual. We first meet Kenny at the beginning of Act 2 when he returns home, unexpected by Fiona, and proceeds to amorously grope her, trying to get her into bed:

FIONA: (*edgy*) I'm not in the mood.

KENNY: (*still feeling her*) You were last night.

FIONA: (*flaring*) Yes, and then you bash me up straight afterwards.

KENNY: It wasn't straight afterwards, and it was about something completely different, and I didn't hit you that hard.

FIONA: Well, it hardly inspires confidence when you're made love to one minute and bashed up the next.

KENNY: (*taking his hands off her*) Look. I'd been warning you about that kitchen tidy for two days.

FIONA: Why didn't you empty it out yourself?

KENNY: (*indignantly*) That's your job. I can't understand how a mother could let the kitchen tidy get in that state when she's got a young daughter whose health might be endangered (*R 67-68*).

In this passage, much is revealed about the objectively violent nature of their relationship and the ideology which governs it. We are told that not only did Kenny beat up his wife, but he did it 'straight after' sex; an appalling fact that suggests the extreme volatility of this stereotypical ocker. Theirs is a relationship in which sex, physical violence, and domesticity are all intermingled in an invisible form of symbolically violent coercion.

Here Kenny allows us to perceive a form of objective violence; a form of objective, social-symbolic violence Žižek describes as inherent to certain language forms and "the imposition of a certain universe of meaning" (Žižek 2008: 2). Kenny, from his ideological standpoint, not only looks and physically acts like a stereotypical ocker, but talks like one. Though he is not physically violent in this passage, here it is his language that contains the violence. Inherent to Kenny's speech is the imposition of

a certain universe of meaning; his belief in the superiority of his masculinity with Fiona absolutely subservient to him. Kenny's language is thus a form of masculine socio-ideological performative violence.

By means of language, Kenny attempts to subjugate Fiona through means other than physical beatings, such as threats and nasty criticisms. The inherent meaning of this operates symbolically as the counterpart of the same ideology that underpinned Kenny's justification for beating his wife. While here it is dormant, it could erupt at any time in physical violence, if Kenny's unwavering belief in his hegemonic masculinity is questioned. An example of this is seen when Fiona refuses to cook for Kenny, leading him to an impulsive acting out, yelling aggressively at her: "Get out into the kitchen, open up the fridge, get out a piece of sliced cow and put it under the griller, you lazy bitch" (R 65). To a similar end, he attempts to justify his physical act of violence by dubiously claiming that their daughter may have been endangered due to Fiona's disobedience of his request. This is another manifestation of social-symbolic violence. We are given little reason to believe Kenny's sincerity, as Beckett argues (1993: 28); rather, Kenny's apparent concern for their daughter appears as violent, and the inherent meaning of his words further asserts an ideologue of masculine patriarchal authority in the domestic domain. Not only is Kenny asserting his own socio-ideological superiority through threatening language, he is attacking Fiona's feminine identity by suggesting she is a bad mother. The implication of this subjugation may be perceived as another form of domestic violence in the form of verbal abuse.

This masculine oppression of Fiona likewise manifests itself in Kenny's view of sex. However, this form of violence is objective in both the symbolic and systemic sense. Sex is a form of political control in which women are perceived by the men as "mere compliant sexual objects" (Fitzpatrick, P. 1987: 49). Sexual proficiency, in the stereotypical Australian view, is arguably one of the greatest indicators of true manhood. Williamson states that, consequently, Kenny not only relates to women merely as sexual objects but "*must* relate to them that way in fact, because...so much of his self-esteem is bound up with his proficiency as a stud" (Williamson, D. 1998: 31).<sup>8</sup> This, Bollen, Kiernander and Parr note, was paradigmatic of Australian plays of the period, where "intimate interactions between men and women oscillated between romantic affection and violent action" (2008: 47). In these plays, the male

characters are depicted as inarticulate and brutish, unable to express their feelings adequately in language and thus, sought to assert their masculinity through the physical acts of sex and violence. Sex and violence can, therefore, are inextricably linked in this ideological conception of Australian masculinity. In demonstrating his proficiency as a stud, to use Williamson's words, Kenny is also demonstrating the extent of his manhood and thus, his ability to exercise authoritarian control over Fiona.

In this sense, the way in which sex is portrayed is perceived as a type of objective violence that, while invisible, serves to further entrench male domination of women as subordinate to men. This is inseparably linked to broader ideas of ideologies of Australian masculinity and manhood. As Ian Turner notes:

[at] the level not so much of approval, but rather of unthinking social acceptance, I believe that the male-female relationship in Australia rests on a frightening sub-stratum of violence...the Australian code of aggressive masculinity...involves the objective isolation of women in their role as sexual objects. This implies an inhuman violence in sexual relationships (2011: 10).

Women in Australian society, are objectified and effectively othered by their male counterparts in the preservation of the *status quo*. The sub-stratum of violence which Turner describes is present not only in physical acts of violence but physical affection also. As mentioned earlier, from Kenny's ideological standpoint, sex is a 'grapple' and even playing with his daughter is a form of "wrestling" (R 65; 90). In other words, ours is a male-dominated system in which sex is yet another means for men to assert control (Beckett 1993: 37). In what is the expression of a similar idea, David Buchbinder writes of the power play of masculinity in pornography: "Ideologically, woman is constructed as penetrable, hence passive and inferior to man, who is penetrator, and thus active and superior" (1998: 114). I believe this power relationship is similarly perceived in relation to *The Removalists* and helps to explain the relationship of Kenny and Fiona; a relationship of hegemonic masculine superiority that is sustained through physical, linguistic and socio-political violence perceived as subjective, symbolic and systemic respectively.

## **Objective Violence: Simmonds, Ross, and Fiona**

Another manifestation of objective violence may be perceived in William's depiction of the relationship between Fiona and the policemen, Simmonds and Ross. The 'invisible' violence of this relationship is most clearly seen in the episode of Act 1 where Fiona and her sister arrive at the police station to report Kenny's beating of Fiona. This violence does not relate to physical beating to assert male authority as it does in Kenny's domination of Fiona; rather, it can be seen as another depiction of the objective 'ordinary state of things' within the masculine socio-ideological logic of the play. From a different ideological standpoint to those of Simmonds and Ross, we can perceive an objective mode of the inherent Australian masculine socio-ideological violence against women. This violence is apparent in the political implications of sexism and misogyny in male attitudes to women which, at least to some extent, remain regrettably prevalent today. In my analysis of this episode below, I look at the implication of Williamson's depiction of the police station scene following Fiona and Kate's arrival and relate how this reveals a socially-symbolic and systemic gender-related violence.

What is so abhorrent in the way we perceive this objective violence is the circumstances in which it is depicted; the reporting of a crime of physical domestic violence at a police station. From the outset, Sergeant Simmonds treats Fiona and her sister with an almost mock-seriousness nearing condescension. Simmonds's dialogue also reveals some appalling home-truths about the protocol of the police on the issue of (physical) domestic violence:

KATE: It was quite a nasty bashing.

SIMMONDS: I'm sure it was but there's a saying in the trade: "Never arrest a wife basher if his missus is still warm". We don't like to stick our necks out on domestic issues for the simple reason that the wife invariably doesn't proceed... (R 49).

In other words, Simmonds states that the usual police protocol is to take no action unless the woman is murdered by her husband. Simmonds uses his cold and questionable discretion to assess the extent of the violence inflicted upon Fiona. Ironically, this itself is a form of violence. As Žižek explains, too cold an analysis of

violent events may paradoxically perpetuate the violence it seeks to prevent (2008: 4). This, he argues, occurs especially in relation to the assessment of narrative accounts of violent trauma such as rape, since there is a disjunct between truth (the events as they happened); and truthfulness (the events as they should be described if the account is to be believed) (Žižek 2008: 4). Žižek argues that due to the nature of an account—such as a report of a raped woman—any factual deficiencies or inconsistencies paradoxically enhance the probative value of the account. These deficiencies rather attest to the trauma inflicted, and thus the ‘truthfulness’ of her account. Relating this back to Simmonds, the policeman does not believe that Fiona’s beating warrants legal intervention, not because he determines that her account does not have the requisite truthfulness, but rather because the only circumstances in which he believes the police should intervene in violent ‘domestic issues’ against women is when the woman is dead. In his opinion, it is not a serious enough abuse and therefore not worth pursuing. Men, in Simmonds’s view, are permitted to inflict violence upon their wives, to a certain extent. His inaction implies that Kenny’s domestic abuse is permissible violence and, consequently, within the limits of the law. Inherent to this logic, there is a cold and unfeeling objective violence which Žižek argues can, “somehow reproduce and participate in [the] horror” of the victims (2008: 4). When Simmonds refuses to act, he participates and perpetuates—symbolically and systematically—in the physical violence inflicted on Fiona.

Simmonds only resolves to act when Kate suggests that he should look at Fiona’s bruises (*R* 54). However, it should be noted that this is a change of heart not caused by sympathy or pity; rather, it is indicative of his perverse sexism and objectification of women. At Kate’s suggestion to examine Fiona’s bruises, the two policemen seize upon the opportunity of perverse voyeuristic delight:

*(FIONA hesitantly rolls up her sweater. SIMMONDS inspects her hips and back very slowly, prodding her flesh slowly and lasciviously. While he is doing this he occasionally looks across at KATE, establishing something of a carnal conspiracy between them. KATE is gaining sensual pleasure from THE SERGEANT’S lechery.)*

SIMMONDS: Tender?

FIONA: (*flinching*) Yes.

SIMMONDS: There?

FIONA: Yes. There.

(*She flinches.*)

SIMMONDS: Yes. I can see the discoloration. One of these braless birds eh?  
(*R 55*).

The scene is a 'carnal conspiracy'; a bizarre and sensual ritualistic orgy of sexual potency and invisible violence. Simmonds acts the seedy ringleader, probing Fiona as though she is a piece of meat; while Ross is the amateur pornographer, awkwardly snapping shots of the action. Even Kate, Fiona's own sister, is so steeped in the playing out of masculine ideologues that she is blind to the violence, looking on with sadistic pleasure. The scene makes visible the masculine ideological violence against women in the form of sexual objectification by the gaze of the police officers. Elvira Sammut suggests the clear perception of what is occurring only becomes apparent in Simmonds's bra comment which is "so obscene that it is shocking, the irony jolts the audience into a serious awareness of something that should not be happening" (2008: 122).

Further support for this reading may also be gleaned in reference to Michel Foucault. In her Foucauldian reading of domestic violence, Andrea Westlund suggests the male gaze has political implications in male/female gender relations. She writes:

Women discipline their bodies through an elaborate system of self-surveillance; rituals of cosmetics, fashion, hair and skin, diet, and exercise furnish innumerable examples of how women internalize panoptic relations of power and regulate themselves before an anonymous male gaze (1999: 1045).

In this Foucauldian paradigm, Ross and Simmonds perpetuate their masculine violence, not through physical action, but by subjecting Fiona to their gaze; a particularly repugnant fact considering their role as police officers.

Here Williamson shows that the objective violence of sexual discrimination and misogyny—a crucial ideological component of Australian masculine identity—is so overarching, so ubiquitous in our society that it even permeates the walls of the police station. In Australia, as in all common law-based liberal democratic nations, the police are charged with an essential function in the administration of the Rule of Law; they are the Repressive State Apparatus that fights crime in the preservation of the ideologically entrenched socio-political *status quo*. This, in turn, is linked with our overarching national myth of Australian egalitarianism and fairness. The police are, in effect, a metonymy for the law and justice. The connection that is drawn between the deeply embedded male sexism and misogyny of Australian society and the policemen has powerful theoretical implications. Williamson here depicts his persuasive attack on Australian masculine socio-ideological violence. The society shown in *The Removalists* is one in which the invisible form of social-symbolic and systemic violence against women is not merely sustained by individual men like Kenny, acting independently under a common umbrella of masculine ideology, but rather, a society in which such violence *is* the very function of the judicial system. In other words, it *is* the *status quo*. *The Removalists* is not an anti-police play *per se* but rather a criticism of the heterogeneous ideologies of masculinity that operate violently in their objectification of the women—perceived even at the level of the law (Williamson, D. 1998: 28).

## **Conclusion**

I have attempted to analyse Williamson's exploration of gender violence in relation to masculinity in Australian society, and the different ways in which we can perceive this. Williamson's depiction of gender-related violence exists as both counterparts of the violence inherent to Australian masculine socio-ideological, gender-related violence: the subjective and objective modes. We can perceive both modes of violence as the performance of masculinity and manhood through ritual. The subjective mode is perceived as the perturbation of 'normal state of things'. When Kenny's masculine authority is questioned, he reacts with an impulsively motivated ritual of physical violence. In contrast, we perceive the objective mode in a ritual violence inherent to language and the smooth functioning of the masculine

dominated socio-ideological system. This, however, remains largely invisible to the male characters of the play and is only perceivable from a different ideological standpoint from their own egocentric hegemonic masculinity.

In Žižek's view, the study of violent acts requires the self-conscious 'removal' from any normative ideological standpoint. In doing so, we are able to perceive more clearly, the invisible permutations of the objective modes of that violence. Seen this way, Žižek touches upon what I believe to be a similar idea to Williamson's central conception of violence in Australian society: that we are all 'removalists' in the sense that we are all removed from reality; blinded by the unquestioned, unconscious and normative acceptance of an ideology.<sup>9</sup> Like the play's titular character, we are all passively and unconsciously participating in and perpetuating the objective, gender-based violence inherent to Australian ideologies of masculinity and manhood of which physical, subjective violence is only counterpart and symptom. By distancing us from the action, and shocking us out of complacency with an intermingling of both subjective and objective violence, Williamson allows us to see what is usually unseen: the dark matter of our objective socio-ideological systems.

And thus Williamson intimates: violence has not gone anywhere; and, if it was any less prevalent in its outward manifestation in the context from which he was writing than at any point previous, he writes against complacency by portraying that violence on stage, bringing it back into the spotlight.



## Bibliography

- Arnold, R. (1975) "Aggressive Vernacular: Williamson, Buzo and the Australian Tradition," *Southerly* 35.4: 385-396.
- Bakhtin, M. (1984) *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Beckett, W. (1993) *David Williamson's The Removalists.*, Sydney: Pascal Press.
- Bollen, J., A. Kiernander, & B. Parr (2008) *Men at Play: Masculinities in Australian Theatre since the 1950s*, New York: Rodopi.
- Brecht, B. (1964). "A Short Organum for the Theatre." in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. J. Willett. London: Methuen.
- Brisbane, K. (1971) "Rev. of *The Removalists* by David Williamson," *The Australian*. 7 August.
- Buchbinder, D. (1998). *Performance Anxieties: Re-Producing Masculinity*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Carnicke, S. M. (2000) "Stanislavsky's System: Pathways for the Actor," *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. A. Hodge. London: Routledge.
- Carroll, D. (1982) "Mateship and Individualism in Modern Australian Drama," *Theatre Journal*, 34.4: 467-480.
- Damousi, J. and M. Lake (1995) *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fitzpatrick, L. (2012) "Representing Systemic Violence: the Example of *Laundry* by Anu Productions," *Warwick Politics and Performance Network Working Papers*, 1.4: 1-15.
- Fitzpatrick, P. (1979) "Chapter 8: David Williamson." *After 'The Doll': Australian Drama since 1955*, Melbourne: Edward Arnold (Australia) Pty Ltd.
- . (1987) *Williamson*. Sydney: Methuen.
- Galbally, F. and K. Milte. (2000) "Introduction." *The Removalists*, Sydney: Currency Press.
- Hatty, S. E. (2000) *Masculinities, Violence, and Culture*, London: Sage Publications.
- Kiernan, B. (1975) "The Games People Play: The Development of David Williamson," *Southerly*, 35.4: 315-329.
- Murrie, L. (1998) "Changing Masculinities: Disruption and anxiety in contemporary Australian writing," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 22.56: 169-179.
- Sammut, E. (2008) "'Sugared Placebos'?" The effects of satire and farce in the plays of David Williamson," Diss. Victoria University.
- Turner, I. (2000) "Reflections on Violence," in Williamson, D. *The Removalists*, Sydney: Currency Press.

- Varney, D. (2011) "Chapter 3: Williamson in the Howard Years," *Radical Visions 1968-2008*, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi.
- West, R. and F. Lay (2000) *Subverting Masculinity: Hegemonic and Alternative Versions of Masculinity in Contemporary Culture*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Westlund, A. (1999) "Pre-modern and modern power: Foucault and the case of domestic violence," *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 24.4: 1045-1066.
- Williamson, D. (1998) "The Removalists: A Conjunction of Limitations," *David Williamson*, ed. Ortrun Zuber Skerritt, Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Williamson, K. (2009) *David Williamson: Behind the Scenes*, Melbourne: Viking.
- Wolf, G. (2008) "Chapter 1: The Moment," *Make it Australian: The Australian Performing Group, the Pram Factory and New Wave Theatre*, Sydney: Currency Press.
- Žižek, S. (2008) *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, New York: Picador.
- Zuber-Skerritt, O. ed. (1988) *David Williamson*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> See Žižek 2008: 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter citations referred to in-text as "R".

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Fitzpatrick, P. 1979: 36.

<sup>4</sup> Much has been written on violence and the Australian context of the play since the publication of the playtext by Currency Press in 1972. To give an indication of the extent of this, the first edition is even prefaced by an Introduction consisting of three articles on the subject. The first, "Reflections on Violence" by Ian Turner, muses on the everyday perception of violence in Australian society. The second and third, "Authority and Punishment" and "Police: Authority and Privilege", written by two prominent legal figures - then federal police officer Kerry Milte and criminal Barrister Frank Galbally and the latter is even mentioned in the play (R 80). The two articles consider interrelationship between violence, law and police authority in Australian society from our convict heritage up until the time of writing. Subsequently, since it first appeared on stage and in print, there has been no shortage of critical commentary on violence as it appears in *The Removalists*. Also see Beckett 1993: 23-47; Fitzpatrick, P. 1987: 32-52; and Sammut 2008: 123-130.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, this 'objective violence' is distinct from the oft-used theatre studies term, 'objective' which refers to the motivation of a play's character; a vital consideration for actors practicing the method acting of 'Stanislavky's system'. For more on Stanislavsky's system see Carnicke 2000: 11-36.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Fitzpatrick, P. 1987: 41

<sup>7</sup> For example, Williamson notes that early audiences of the play were mainly "Australian-hating, European-oriented, sensitive...upper-middle class" (Williamson, D. 1998: 27), in other words, the opposite of Kenny.

<sup>8</sup> Italics in original.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Kiernan 1975: 323.