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DVD
Untitled Mars (This Title May Change), 2008 Performance Space 122, New York City

Untitled Mars (This Title May Change)
7 performers
1 director
1 stage manager / assistant director
1 touring manager / producer
1 sound designer
1 video designer
1 lighting and stage supervisor

Dimensions variable 15m x 8m x 4m
UNTITLED MARS
This Title may Change
Conceived and Directed by Jay Scheib

Premiered April 8, running through April 27, 2008 at PS122, 150 1st Avenue in New York City
http://www.ps122.org

In his latest work for Performance Space 122, director Jay Scheib, crash-lands seven performers into a simulated Martian Environment in UNTITLED MARS: This Title May Change. The first in a trilogy of works for live performance under the banner SimulatedCities / SimulatedSystems, UNTITLED MARS is an international collaboration between celebrated theater ensemble Pont Muhely of Budapest and a team of research scientists phoning in their performance live via satellite from the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah. Sound fake? It's not. UNTITLED MARS is a mind-bending excursion into an interplanetary future defined by Scheib’s signature multi-media aesthetic. This not to be missed performance is a Science vs. Fiction Simulation of Real Simulation as performed by Real Scientist in the very Real Utah desert. Rewriting Fiction with Reality UNTITLED MARS: This title may Change caps a year of collaboration with an international team of Space industry visionaries, artists and research scientists and students from Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Phillip Cunio and Zahra Kahn with MIT’s logistics kit on the back of an ATV, photo courtesy of Guy de Carufel
UNTITLED MARS
This Title may Change

Conceived and Directed by Jay Scheib
Performing April 8 - 27, 2008 at PS122, 150 1st Avenue in New York City
http://www.ps122.org

with performances by Dorka Gryllus, Caleb Hammond, László Keszég, Catherine McCurry, Tanya Selvaratnam, April Sweeney, Natalie Thomas, Balázs Vajna with special on-camera appearances by Waris Ahluwalia, Phillip Cunio, Kofi Hope-Gund, Henrik Hargitai, Zahra Khan, and Dr. Robert Zubrin and others...Scenic Design by Peter Ksander, Costume Design by Oana Botez-Ban, Lighting Design by Miranda Hardy, Sound Design by Catherine McCurry, Video Design by Balázs Vajna and Miklós Buk, Assistant Director Laine Rettmer, Hungarian Producer Anna Lengyel

Directed by Jay Scheib

Untitled Mars (This Title May Change) is made possible by the generous support of the Ensemble Studio Theater/ Sloan Foundation commissioning program; The Trust for Mutual Understanding; The Hungarian Cultural Center; Deutsch-Ungarische Industrie und Handelskammer; Swing Space, a program of Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, generously supported by the September 11th Fund—project space donated by Capstone Equities; with special thanks to the Mars Society, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology School of Humanities Arts and Social Sciences.
About the director

Writer, Director and Designer, Jay Scheib has been developing new works for performance for over ten years in the US and throughout Europe. 2008 productions include Untitled Mars: This Title May Change at Performance Space 122 in New York City and the live-cinema performance work This Place is a Desert, which premiered at Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art last year and had a sold-out run at the Public Theater in NYC as part of the Under the Radar Festival. His collaboration with composer Anthony Gatto on a new opera adaptation of Gertrude Stein's mammoth novel The Making of Americans will have its world premiere at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in December.

Last year, he collaborated with acclaimed punk rock ensemble The World Inferno Friendship Society on the creation of a multi-media music theater performance titled Addicted to Bad Ideas, Peter Lorre’s 20th Century. Addicted to Bad Ideas premiered at Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and will open the 2008 Season of the Kasser Theater, Montclair State University in New Jersey followed by a European Tour. In 2006, he directed the critically acclaimed Women Dreamt Horses, by Argentinean author Daniel Veronese, at Performance Space 122 as part of BAiT – Buenos Aires in Translation. Also in New York, Scheib directed a studio production of Slovenian writer Sakura Rakel’s new play Shelter, first in conjunction with New York Theater Workshop as part of the European Dream Festival and later in Ljubljana as part of the PreGlej Festival of New Plays.

At Raum (Space) Bologna, Scheib took part in the Xing Festival, presenting his Shakespeare adaptation All Good Everything Good as a performance installation with Italian singer Margareth Kammerer. Other International works last season include the world premier of Irene Popovic's opera Mozart Luster Lustik at the Sava Center in Belgrade, Serbia and a new staging of the Novofil science fiction opera saga Kommander Kobayashi at the Saarlandisches Staatstheater in Saarbruecken, Germany.

A recipient of the NEA/TCG program for directors, Jay Scheib is currently Associate Professor for Music and Theater Arts at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a regular guest professor at the Mozarteum Institute für Regie und Schauspiel in Salzburg, Austria and at the Norwegian Theatre Academy in Fredrikstad, Norway. He received his MFA in directing from Columbia University.
Key Collaborators

Oana Botez-Ban (Costume Designer) is a Romanian designer who has worked with major theater and dance companies. Her work is featured in Scenografica, the first Romanian theater design catalogue. She has designed for The National Theater of Bucharest, Richard Foreman, Richard Schechner, Brian Kulick, Karin Coonrod, Jay Scheib, Eduardo Machado, Pavol Liska, and Pig Iron Company among others. MFA in Design from NYU/Tisch School of the Arts. Princess Grace Recipient for 2007.

Phillip Cunio (Research Scientist) is currently completing his second year in the graduate program of the Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics at MIT. He holds bachelor’s degrees in mechanical engineering, aerospace engineering, and German from the University of Florida, from which he graduated in 2006. His research interests include manned space exploration, especially permanent colonization of Mars, and his thesis work focuses on commonality in ISRU (in-situ resource utilization) systems for the Moon and Mars and ECLS (environmental control and life support) systems. Phillip's interest in space exploration dates to his childhood, when he grew up in the city of Titusville, Florida. Phillip's other hobbies include linguistics and foreign languages, as well as science fiction.


László Keszég (Actor) was born in Szabadka, Voyvodina, a Hungarian city in Serbia. He was admitted to the Academy of Drama and Film in Budapest in 1991. Not satisfied with the actor’s role in the theater, he also applied to the directing program and finished his last year of acting while already starting in the directing program led by László Babarczy, the managing and artistic director of the Kaposvár Theater, where he invited Keszég upon his graduation as the youngest director member of the great company. Keszég started his career in Kaposvár with Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus as his diploma work. He soon gained a name as one of the most exciting young talents. Since the new National Theater was built in Budapest, Keszég has been one of its regular directors, staging there and in Kaposvár international classics like Tales from the Vienna Woods by Horváth, Wedding by Gogol through Hungarian classics like Szép’s Bridegroom to commissioned new work from Hungary. Keszég has been awarded grants and scholarships, including the International Residency of the Royal Court in London, and his productions have been invited to festivals and renowned theaters throughout Europe. Mr. Keszég is the founder and artistic director of the cutting edge theater company, Pont Műhely. Collaborations with Jay Scheib began in 1999.

Zahra Khan (Research Scientist) is a graduate student at MIT working on problems of re-entry at Mars. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Aerospace Engineering from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada and her favourite nursery rhyme in kindergarten was Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. A dual citizen of Canada and Pakistan, she hopes to someday be a dual citizen of Earth and Mars.

Peter Ksander (Scenic Design). Sculptor and theater artist based in Brooklyn, NY. Has designed for: The Brothers Size (The Public Theatre), Laude in Urbis (Compania di Colombari), Arms and the Man (Intiman theater), The Blackamoor Angel (Bard Summerscape) Women Dreamt Horses (BAiT Festival) and This Place is a Desert, (ICA Boston, UTR The Public Theatre). He is co-founder of Tiny Elephant, and has continuing artistic relationships with The Ontological-Hysteric Theater, the Theater of a Two-Headed Calf, Banana, Bag, and Bodice, and TENT. Recipient NEA/TCG Career Development Program, 2005.

Dramaturg / Hungarian Producer Anna Lengyel earned her PhD in theatre dramaturgy and literary management at the Academy of Theatre and Film, 2006. An accomplished director with credits throughout Europe and the United states such the Schaubühne in Berlin, Lincoln Center Festival, New York City, The National Theater Budapest, and many others. Ms. Lengyel has worked with directors such as Wulf Twiehaus, Andor Lukáts,
Pál Kurucz, Árpád Schilling, László Keszég, Tamás Ascher, Jay Scheib, Declan Donnellan, and Robert Wilson among others. She has translated and adapted plays by Béla Pintér, Benedek Darvas, Neil LaBute, Anne Washburn, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, and Tennessee Williams. Ms. Lengyel is also a professor at the Academy of Theatre in Budapest.

Catherine McCurry graduated from MIT in 2007 where she studied physics and music. She also trained as a violinist and composer at the New England Conservatory. Recent productions in New York include sound mix and additional design for Jay Scheib’s THIS PLACE IS A DESERT at the Public Theater and sound music and video design for IMMINENCE at La Mama E.T.C., Other recent credits include sound and music for MATERMORPHOSIS and RED, BLACK AND IGNORANT with Serious Play! in Northampton, MA, and DEMOLITION DOWNTOWN/MUNICIPAL ABATTOIR for the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival, in which she also acted.

Tanya Selvaratnam (Actor) has toured around the world with The Wooster Group’s House/Lights and The Builders Association’s Alladeen and Super Vision. She has been a guest actor at New Dramatists, the Lincoln Center Director’s Lab and the Institute on Arts & Civic Dialogue (under the direction of Anna Deavere Smith). In 2007, Tanya was a resident artist at Yaddo, Voice & Vision Theater at Bard College, and the Blue Mountain Center; and appeared in, among others, Rotozaza’s Double Think at PS 122, 9 Scripts from a Nation at War at Documenta, Fiona Templeton’s The Medead at Dixon Place, and her solo show at Issue Project Room. Also a respected film producer, she is currently in post-production on Chiara Clemente’s OUR CITY DREAMS about five decades of women artists and beginning production on Catherine Gund’s documentary about kids and food politics. Tanya received her undergraduate and graduate degrees from Harvard University, where she studied Chinese and the history of law…and also received the Peter Sellars Award for her commitment to the arts at Harvard. She was born in Sri Lanka and grew up in Long Beach, California.

April Sweeney (Actor). With Jay Scheib Women Dreamt Horses (BAIT Festival-Performance Space 122), This Place is a Desert (ICA/Boston), Herakles (Chashama), West Pier (Ohio Theatre), POD (COL). Regional/Off-Broadway: Streetcar Named Desire (National Tour-Montana Rep.), Grapes of Wrath (Arkansas Rep.), The Idiot (Manhattan Ensemble Theatre), Three Sisters, and Uncle Vanya (ChekhovNOW Festival). International: Arcá de Babel (Bolivia, Argentina) Training: MFA-Acting, Columbia University. Ms. Sweeney is Assistant Professor of Theatre at Colgate University.

Natalie Thomas (Actor) has been an associate artist of Moving Theater since 2006, most recently appearing in Mass Particle No. 1, a performance work directed by Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly, created at Robert Wilson’s Watermill Center and performed at Abrons Art Center in New York. Natalie has also been a member of An Films since 2006. For An Films, she performed in Naked Product at The Stella Adler Studio and starred in Heute Nacht, the company’s inaugural short film. Natalie has been a movement coach with the The Wooster Group since 2003; she has worked on Poor Theater and is currently working on their production of Hamlet. Natalie’s theater credits include Lucid at the Cherry Lane Theatre, 52 Pick-Up at the Gene Frankel Theatre and The Wooster Group’s House/Lights at St. Ann’s Warehouse. Natalie’s dance credits include Wooff Phrase at Brooklyn Academy of Music, Minus 16 at Lucent Dansteather, The Hague, and Eidos Telos at Sadler’s Wells, London. Natalie was a company member with Nederlands Dans Theater II, Berlin Komische Oper, and a soloist with William Forsythe’s Ballett Frankfurt.

Balázs Vajna (Actor / Designer) started his professional theater work with one of Hungary’s most prestigious independent company, Mozgó Ház, Moving House, which later regrouped in the HUDI Ensemble. He started out as an actor and assistant director (two roles which he kept), but gradually became the video designer in an oeuvre and performing style where the visual became one of the crucial elements, making Mozgó Ház an outstanding representative of cutting edge Hungarian theater, one of the most often travelling independent companies in this country. Mr. Vajna travelled extensively with the company to festivals and other venues including the Berliner Festspiele, the Bonner Biennale, Hamburg, the Wiener Festwochen, the Caracas International Theater Festival, the London LIFT, Arhus, Basel, Antwerpen, Brussels, Amsterdam, Groningen, Münster, Freiburg, the Philadelphia Fringe Festival (USA), Ljubljana, Prague, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Zürich, Rotterdam, München, the San Antonio Festival (USA), Rakver (Estonia), the Avignon Theater Festival, Polverigi, Cividale (Italy), Burgos, Torino etc.
Robert Zubrin (Research Scientist) is an American aerospace engineer and author, best known for his advocacy of manned Mars exploration. He was the driving force behind Mars Direct—a proposal intended to produce significant reductions in the cost and complexity of such a mission. A modified version of the plan was subsequently adopted by NASA as their “design reference mission.” Disappointed with the lack of interest from government in Mars exploration, and after the success of his book "The Case for Mars" as well as leadership experience at the National Space Society, Zubrin formed the Mars Society in 1998. This is an international organisation advocating a manned Mars mission as a goal, by private funding if possible. Zubrin holds a B.A. in Mathematics from the University of Rochester (1974), and a masters degree in Aeronautics and Astronautics, a masters degree in Nuclear Engineering, and a Ph.D. in Nuclear Engineering — all from the University of Washington[1]. He has developed a number of concepts for space propulsion and exploration, and is the author of over 200 technical and non-technical papers and five books. He was a member of Lockheed Martin’s scenario development team charged with developing strategies for space exploration. He was also "a senior engineer with the Martin Marietta Astronautics company, working as one of its leaders in development of advanced concepts for interplanetary missions" (The Case for Mars 1996). He is also President of both the Mars Society and Pioneer Astronautics, a private company that does research and development on innovative aerospace technologies. Zubrin is the co-inventor on a U.S. design patent and a U.S. utility patent on a hybrid rocket/airplane, and on a U.S. utility patent on an oxygen supply system. He was awarded his first patent at age 20 in 1972 for Three Player Chess. His inventions also include the nuclear salt-water rocket. Zubrin lives in Indian Hills, Colorado, with his wife, Maggie Zubrin, and two daughters.

"The Hab," an 8-meter diameter, two-deck structure mounted on landing struts. Peripheral external structures, some inflatable, may be appended to the Hab as well.

Each station will serve as a field base to teams of four to six crew members: geologists, astrobiologists, engineers, mechanics, physicians and others, who live for weeks to months at a time in relative isolation in a Mars analog environment. Mars analogs can be defined as locations on Earth where some environmental conditions, geologic features, biological attributes or combinations thereof may approximate in some specific way those thought to be encountered on Mars, either at present or earlier in that planet’s history. Studying such sites leads to new insights into the nature and evolution of Mars, the Earth, and life.

However, in addition to providing scientific insight into our neighboring world, such analog environments offer unprecedented opportunities to carry out Mars analog field research in a variety of key scientific and engineering disciplines that will help prepare humans for the exploration of that planet. Such research is vitally necessary. For example, it is one thing to walk around a factory test area in a new spacesuit prototype and show that a wearer can pick up a wrench - it is entirely another to subject that same suit to two months of real field work. Similarly, psychological studies of human factors issues, including isolation and habitat architecture are also only useful if the crew being studied is attempting to do real work.

Furthermore, when considering the effectiveness of a human mission to Mars as a whole, it is clear that there is an operations design problem of considerable complexity to be solved. Such a mission will involve diverse players with different capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. They will include the crew of the Mars habitat, pedestrian astronauts outside, astronauts on unpressurized but highly nimble light vehicles operating at moderate distances from the habitat, astronauts operating a great distances from the habitat using clumsy but long-endurance vehicles such as pressurized rovers, mission control on Earth, the terrestrial scientific community at large, robots, and others. Taking these different assets and making them work in symphony to achieve the maximum possible exploration effect will require developing an art of combined operations for Mars missions. The MARS project will begin the critical task of developing this art.

About the Mars Desert Research Station

Quoted from the Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS) website, http://desert.marssociety.org/
Mars Analog Research Stations are laboratories for learning how to live and work on another planet. Each is a prototype of a habitat that will land humans on Mars and serve as their main base for months of exploration in the harsh Martian environment. Such a habitat represents a key element in current human Mars mission planning. Each Station's centerpiece is a cylindrical habitat,
Untitled Mars: This Title May Change
P.S. 122 Conceived and directed by Jay Scheib. With ensemble cast.
1hr 30mins. No Intermission.

SPACE ODDITY Sweeney, right, encounters an astronaut.
Photograph: Justin Bernhaut

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. Now, Scheib and his dedicated actor-technicians have graduated to fancier materials with Untitled Mars: This Title May Change, a docu-video-performance piece that merges speculative science and avant-garde theatrics.

The elaborate, multizoned playing space created by Peter Ksander (the most ingenious set designer working downtown) is a recreation of the Mars Desert Research Station in Utah—itself a simulation of the Martian landscape, where scientists hope we’ll establish a colony. The plot (related in elliptical fragments) is a crude pasteup of soap-opera seductions and sci-fi pulp, featuring a real-estate villain (Caleb Hammond), a heroic repair woman (Tanya Selvaratnam) and a scientist (April Sweeney) who may have found a link between schizophrenia and clairvoyance. Oh, and there’s a guy in green makeup with a giant lizard tail.

Using live video feeds and editing software to create the illusion of walking on the Martian surface, Scheib masterfully blends high-tech effects with his performers, who wrestle and simulate sex with gusto. (He himself appears, quizzing real scientists about space exploration via Skype linkup.) Even though the message—wherever we humans go, we’ll bring our problems—is old as Ray Bradbury, at least the vehicle is super space age. (See also “Martian to a different drummer,” page 161.)

—David Cote

http://www.timeout.com/newyork/events/off-off-broadway/54302/521200/untitled-mars
Untitled Mars: Lost in Space

Jay Schleib's beguiling, perplexing trip to the red planet

by Alexis Soloski

April 15th, 2008 12:00 AM

"Is there any life on Mars?" David Bowie and various scientists have long inquired. Writer-director-performer Jay Scheib doesn't answer their query, but he does provide a lively look at the attempt to populate the red planet in Untitled Mars (This Title May Change). In collaboration with MIT scientists at the Mars Desert Research Station (MDRS) and members of Budapest's Pont Mühely theater company, Scheib heads a theatrical mission to that far-off sphere.

The script is utterly jumbled—a fusion of Dr. Robert Zubrin's scholarly treatise The Case for Mars, Philip K. Dick's science-fiction Martian Time-Slip, live video conferencing with a tart-tongued aerospace grad student, as well as footage and transcripts from MDRS. The play primarily discusses the potential of a one-way mission to Mars. But it also includes romantic relationships, sinister experiments, and dodgy real-estate deals.

With three video screens, various computer monitors, and three separate stage environments, the plot isn't the only perplexing element. Often, the eye doesn't know where to settle. Yet what a pleasure to encounter an artist like Scheib, with so many ideas and so many means of presenting them. And if the narrative rather baffles, the visual images—in all their plenitude—are arresting, as are the attractive actors. In a video clip, Dr. Zubrin insists: "We have to go to Mars simply because it's there." If Scheib's leading, we just might go along for the ride.

Untitled Mars (This Title May Change) By Jay Scheib, P.S.122, 150 First Avenue, 212-352-3101
http://www.villagevoice.com/theater/0816,sightlines-1,411867,11.html
Goings On About Town

THE THEATRE

April 28, 2008

UNTITLED MARS (THIS TITLE MAY CHANGE)

Jay Scheib’s antic play—half lab-rat experiment and half sex farce—grew out of a collaboration with M.I.T. researchers who are studying the possibility of a manned expedition to Mars. Scheib imagines a tightly controlled Martian colony (or is it a simulation?) that devolves into an orgy of greed, lust, and insanity. Between scenes, he speaks with a scientist via Webcam about the potential challenges—technical and psychological—of a Martian voyage. Throughout, Scheib strikes a tone of semi-academic seriousness laced with deadpan, surrealistic humor. Some of the pulp-inspired elements (time travel, a lesbian affair) are too silly for their own good, but the over-all effect is one of happy disorientation. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through April 27.) - Michael Schulman

Attention sci-fi geeks, multimedia freaks and cutting-edge theater lovers: “Untitled Mars (this title may change),” running through Sunday at PS 122, may be your kind of show. Created by Jay Scheib with help from his M.I.T. colleagues and the Mars Society, it’s set on a space station on the red planet. With video projections, Skype chats with astronomers and text borrowed from Philip K. Dick, it’s meant to bridge “the hard science of how we get to Mars and the science fiction about what happens when we get there.” The singular performer Mike Daisey loved it so much that he agreed to appear tonight as a Mars expert (yep, he’s a nerd).
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,
of the resident theatre’s Humana Festival of New American Plays. *Desert* is a smashup 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 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
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 production 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 to act). 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 maintain 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.
 Martian to a different drummer

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

By Helen Shaw

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.

http://www.timeout.com/newyork/articles/theater/28605/martian-to-a-different-drummer
Welcome to Mars. Or at least, welcome to a rehearsal of Untitled Mars: This Title May Change, a droll, discom-bobulating 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.

http://www.timeout.com/newyork/articles/theater/28605/martian-to-a-different-drummer
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 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 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 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 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.).
“When it comes to Mars, the actual facts are weirder than anyone could make up.”