

**In search of the culture of links :**  
**the use of myth and ritual in the work of Peter Brook**

THESIS

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the use of elements of myth and ritual in the work of Peter Brook, focusing primarily on *The Mahabharata* ( 1986 ).

The argument proposes that Brook uses myth and ritual as an integral part of his search for the culture of links. . This thesis examines the precise functioning of myth and ritual in Brook's theatre, and places his work in relation to the concepts of interculturalism and postmodernism. In so doing, *The Mahabharata* is seen as a valid and important step in Brook's search for the culture of links.

Chapter One formulates broad-based concepts of myth and ritual, and examines their function in society and culture, as well as their role in theatre.

Chapter Two offers a brief discussion of the use of elements of myth and ritual in Brook's productions, beginning with *King Lear* (1962), and ending with *Orghast* (1971). The discussion illustrates the multiple functions which myth and ritual serve in Brook's work.

Chapter Three examines the trend of interculturalism, placing Brook's work within this framework. Attention is given to the moral and political issues implicit in interculturalism. The chapter highlights the need for intercultural theatre to be evaluated in terms of artistic criteria, rather than on anthropological or political grounds. Finally, there is a discussion of the work of other intercultural theatre practitioners.

Chapter Four examines Brook's *Mahabharata*. A detailed discussion of the authenticity and visual presentation of Brook's interpretation shows how Brook mediates between the Indian epic and a Western audience. An examination of the critical response offers insights into the dangers of insensitive cross-cultural contact..

Chapter Five offers a critical summary of the argument. Brook's search for the culture of links has led him to use elements of myths and rituals of non-Western cultures. In so doing, Brook seeks to bring their living quality to his work, and to forge links between the peoples and cultures of the world.

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## Introduction

Peter Brook is one of the key figures in twentieth century theatre. Any analysis of trends in the theatre of this century has to take into account Brook's ground-breaking work *The Empty Space*(1968), as well as the many highly successful productions that he has mounted during his fifty years in the theatre . Brook's reputation is also based on his consistent efforts to stretch the boundaries of theatre, and to find new forms and new ways of communicating with his audience. Brook's sense of curiosity and his increasingly radical questioning of theatrical modes has been the driving force behind his search for a universal theatre that can bring the power of traditional non-Western forms to contemporary Western theatre.

In his search for new forms for the theatre, Brook has worked with a select group of actors from a variety of cultural traditions, and he has relied heavily on elements of the myths and rituals of a number of non-Western cultures to provide the thematic, aural and visual content of his work. Brook seeks to create what he terms "a culture of links" which will unite the world's diverse cultures. He seeks the establishment of a global community, where communication is possible across barriers of language, culture and location, and where cultures can be involved in a process of dialogue, as opposed to one of fusion. Colin Counsell points out that :

“ The theatre of ritual was in part Brook's response to what he sees as the major problem facing the modern world, its descent into a state of spiritual decay. Modern western culture, he argues, is dominated by rationalism, a mode of thought able to grasp only the concrete, material world. As a consequence, all other, immaterial dimensions of life have been neglected. ....  
With no living rituals to maintain the life of the spirit, the West faces social disintegration. ....

It is in this sense that he seeks a ritual theatre, one which, in celebrating the Invisible, offers its audience an experience of *communitas*. He is concerned, then, not only with theatre as a means of representation, but also with its *performative* powers, its ability to establish a sense of communality and so heal the 'sick social body' of the West."

( 1996 : 143 - 145 )

Thus, Brook's use of such source material can be seen to be an intrinsic part of his theatrical agenda. In seeking to 'heal' Western theatre, Brook turns to societies where the role of myth and ritual is still a living one, nourishing the spiritual life of a people. Brook then seeks to find that which is universal in each myth or ritual, so that he can bring some of this living quality to the audiences of the West.

Brook's use of source material has, however, been problematic. The critical response to his efforts has been contradictory. On the one hand he is praised for the clarity of his vision, his intercultural presentation, and his post-modern interpretation of the source material. With reference to *The Mahabharata*, Patrice Pavis remarks that

"Brook takes into account all the potential artistic modelings of Indian civilization, but he integrates them into a vision of rural India once eternal and contemporary. It is not India, but it has all the flavour of India."

( Pavis, 1992:187)

On the other hand , scholars and practitioners of the source traditions have been scathing in their attacks, accusing Brook of neo-colonial cultural piracy :

"Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* exemplifies one of the most blatant ( and accomplished) appropriations of Indian culture in recent years ... he does not merely take our commodities and textiles and transform them into costumes and props. He has taken one of our most significant texts and decontextualised it from its history in order to 'sell' it to audiences in the west."

( Bharucha, 1993: 68)

In the face of such confusingly opposite views, it is difficult to gain an unbiased view of Brook's work. Critics seem to find it impossible to find a balanced reading of a work such as *The Mahabharata*, without resorting to personal judgements about

Brook himself. His motives in using source material are assessed according to personal and moral criteria, as opposed to artistic ones. Because there is no agreement about whether the work can be seen as intercultural, or postmodern, there does not seem to be a strong theoretical framework behind much of the critical discussion regarding Brook's work. It is essential to decide where to place Brook's work in relation to the ideas of interculturalism and postmodernism, in order to assess his work in a more balanced manner. This debate, and the contradictory opinions voiced by many critics were the initial impetus which led me to examine the role of myth and ritual in Brook's theatre. I felt the need to find a more balanced assessment of the artistic result of Brook's use of non-Western source material, as well as examining his motives in using elements of myth and ritual and attempting to discover Brook's relation to the ideas of postmodernism and interculturalism.

In this thesis I have tried to answer three central questions, which I feel go to the heart of the controversy surrounding Brook's work:

- What seem to be Brook's motives in using source material from non-Western cultures ?
- How does his use of myth and ritual fit into the concept of interculturalism?
- Does Brook's work conform to a postmodern paradigm?

In attempting to assess Brook's motives in using elements of myth and ritual, the particular role which they play in Brook's theatrical agenda can be examined. It is also possible to examine the way in which the use of source material informs Brook's search for a culture of links. Myth and ritual play a specific role in Brook's theatre, which allows him to access the universal power of these traditional forms, and use it in order to revitalise and reinstate the spiritual power of Western theatre. However,

critical reception to such work has often been negative. Critics seem to base their objections on anthropological or political criteria, while ignoring the artistic merit of the work itself. It is important to see Brook's work within the broader context of the development of new cultural forms over the past thirty years. In examining how Brook's use of myth and ritual fit into the concept of interculturalism, it is possible to place Brook's work and his search for the culture of links in terms of current cultural trends. Similarly, by attempting to understand whether Brook's work conforms to a postmodern paradigm, the researcher is better able to delineate the area of cultural endeavour in which Brook's work falls. In doing so, it becomes possible to make a more balanced assessment of Brook's work, both by assessing it in terms of its artistic criteria, and by seeing it in relation to other developments in the contemporary cultural arena.

In Chapter One, this thesis seeks to elucidate an open-ended concept of myth and ritual. It is important to decide what is meant by these terms, before their functioning in Brook's work can be examined.

The second chapter offers a brief examination of the development of the use of myth and ritual in Brook's work. Brook's interest in mythic and ritualistic forms first became evident in the 1960s. This enables the researcher to place the discussion of myth and ritual, and *The Mahabharata*, within the broader context of Brook's varied career. This chapter also offers an analysis of the role which myth and ritual play in Brook's theatre. He has very particular reasons for making use of such source material, which are consistent with his theatrical aims.

Chapter Three places Brook's use of myth and ritual within the broader trend



of interculturalism. Here, the thesis attempts to demonstrate that Brook's work needs to be considered as being an important part of this global trend. An examination is made of the philosophy behind the intercultural effort, as well as its defining factors. A clear distinction is made between the concepts of interculturalism and multiculturalism, which are shown to be related terms, rather than synonymous ones. The thesis also examines the many moral and political issues raised by the intercultural agenda. It is the contention of this thesis that the creativity of the artist cannot be made subservient to prevailing ideas about what is politically correct. In addition, an examination of the differences between theatre and anthropology is offered, in order to demonstrate that theatre cannot be created or evaluated according to criteria set up in anthropological analysis. There is a brief examination of intercultural efforts in other genres, such as music and literature. Finally, this chapter presents a brief discussion of four other intercultural theatre practitioners, offering a comparison between their methods and agendas, with those of Brook.

A discussion of Brook's 1986 production, *The Mahabharata*, is offered in the fourth chapter. This particular production was chosen because it demonstrates Brook's most accomplished use of myth and ritual, and because it became the focus of much debate about the exact nature of the intercultural effort. *The Mahabharata* is presented on such a large scale, that it provides much scope for critical discussion. In this chapter, key aspects of Brook's production are examined : namely the authenticity of this adaptation, and the visual and sensory presentation of the piece ; assessing them in terms of artistic merit . The range of critical response to Brook's *Mahabharata* is pertinent, and includes a number of examples of the type of evaluation which depend on anthropological and political criteria. Critical comment also points to the moral

issues raised by Brook's offensive manner while in India. The researcher is able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of this kind of critical endeavour, and to decide to what extent Brook's dealings with Indian artists contribute or detract from his aim of creating a culture of links.

The final chapter offers a critical summary of the argument, and an attempt to formulate answers to the three questions which this thesis has posed. Brook's work is examined in relation to the ideas of interculturalism and postmodernism, and the motives which inform Brook's use of myth and ritual are assessed. In setting up these parameters, it is possible to create a more balanced reading of Brook's work, which recognises that *The Mahabharata* is a valid step forward in Brook's intercultural endeavour and his search for the culture of links.

## Chapter 1

### The World as a Can Opener

*Myth* and *ritual* are words which carry with them a number of meanings or connotations. For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to draw up a **concept** rather than a definition of these terms, since seeking to define myth and ritual would merely serve to narrow the scope of this investigation. Definitions tend to set up rigid parameters which preclude a large number of variables. It is therefore more useful to think in terms of a *concept* of myth, one which is broad-based and open-ended in order to encompass a variety of different ideas. In terms of the creative nature of the theatre, this sense of openness is far more useful both for the critic and the practitioner. It allows for a far greater variety of forms and utilisations. The wide variety of forms of myth and ritual that exist also needs to be considered, in order to discern their common elements.

William Doty reveals that he has collected over fifty different definitions of myth, with little or no overlap of ideas among them (1986 : 9) :

“One of the things that strikes one is the fact that the definition given of the word *myth* is closely linked to the discipline in which the research is done, to the theory proposed by the writer and to the theme which is explored. A plurality of disciplines entails a plurality of contexts and each writer rightfully ascribes qualities to the word *myth* appropriate to his field of study.”

( Degenaar , 1983 : 59 )

This results in a certain amount of confusion. The researcher is forced to chose the set of ideas which best suit his/her purpose. The other major problem which faces the researcher is that many definitions seem too narrow and limited in their scope. There

are those who see myth as being solely concerned with religious beliefs, while others are of the opinion that myth should be seen in the light of folklore or 'old wives' tales'. Many theorists see myths as mere fantasies, that have no grounding in historical fact. All of these parameters tend to confine the notion of myth, limiting its applications.

As a starting point, it is useful to look at the most obvious source of a definition ; The Concise Oxford Dictionary, which defines myth as follows:

“ **myth** *n.* traditional narrative usu. involving super-natural or fancied persons etc. and embodying popular ideas on natural and social phenomena etc. ; ....”

( 1982 : 670)

However, this definition is too vague, with an implication that myth is something fanciful, and therefore not to be taken seriously. Such a definition belies the important role which myth plays in the construction of a specific culture.

It is necessary to clear away the pre-conceived ideas of myth. The notion of a myth carries with it the negative connotation of something that is untrue, or some kind of false belief. Myth is also associated with primitive superstition, and as such is seen to carry no weight in the modern, rational world . It is therefore presumed that myth can have no bearing on our lives in contemporary society. As Doty points out :

“ Myth tends to be lumped together with religion or philosophy or the arts as a superfluous facet of culture that may be considered enjoyable but not particularly functional.”

( 1986 : 7 )

This would belie the important function that myths, religion, philosophy and the arts play in nurturing the spiritual and cultural identity of a people.

Doty identifies five key areas of enquiry in which the concepts of myth and ritual are of vital importance ;

“ \* in the study of religions ...

*\* in analyzing 'mythic elements' or 'legendary plots' in the study of poetry, drama, and fiction*

\* in the anthropological and ethnological analysis of cultures other than one's own ...

\* in political science ...

\* in sociology ....” [ my emphasis ]

( 1986 : 6 )

He goes on to say that in all these areas, there is a general assumption that, “Myth is understood as referring to the basic religious or philosophical beliefs of a culture, expressed through ritual behaviour or through the graphic or literary arts.”( 1986 : 6). This seems to be the broadest possible basis for a concept of myth. Using this approach, it becomes possible to identify a number of key elements in the concept of myth :

A myth is usually a story or narrative, often concerned with the beginnings of a people or culture. In this way, myths serve to define a culture for its own people.

Myths help to order existence. They are the way in which a group of people understand where they come from, who their ancestors are and why they live the way they do.

Myth has an explanatory function, in that it enables a people to explain the world in which they live. Thus, natural phenomena and social interactions are explained through the medium of story.

Myth is often the basis for the art of a people, the foundation upon which they can create a way of saying “This is who we are”. In this sense, myth forms the basis for

group identity.

Myth is often connected to religion or philosophy. Myths are a repository of the spiritual wealth of a people. Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, in conversation on the subject of myth, said the following :

“ **Moyers** : ... Myths are the stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance. We all need to tell our story and to understand our story... We need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are.

**Campbell** : Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life .”  
( Flowers (ed.), 1988 : 5 )

Myth serves as a communal, culturally-specific way of understanding the world. Johan Degenaar points to this function in his essay “Understanding myth as understanding”, saying :

“ It is more appropriate to see myth as one way of understanding experience, an imaginative way in which cognition, emotion and volition are integrated : it gives meaning to experience, it moves the participants and it directs actions.”  
( 1983 : 59)

This thesis is based on a concept of myth that contains all of the above elements.

Another important aspect of the concept of myth is the idea of myth-making or the invention of myths. In many ways, this would seem to be a modern phenomenon, one that belongs to the contemporary world. The advent of mass-communication and the increased power of advertising allow invented myths to become part of the culture in a remarkably short time. The myth of personality is something that operates in politics and the entertainment industry, where personalities are constructed by public relations staff and the press. Despite the displacement of traditional forms of myth in contemporary society, people are still compelled to create myths which help to order

their existence. It is to this latent sense of myth and ritual that Brook's theatre appeals.

Other examples of myth-making can be seen in the passion with which people follow the plots of American television series ; the so-called 'soap operas'. The implicit belief in the truth of events portrayed in these series, the improbable plots, and the sense that each series is a complete world in which all crises can be controlled and all problems explained away, allows us to view these as contemporary myths, created again each day. The plots of soap operas are part of contemporary culture. Similarly, science fiction and fantasy novels and films are also a form of myth making. A particularly good example of this is the popularity of the novels of J.R.R. Tolkien. Another example of contemporary myths are the so-called 'urban legends'. In his book *The Rabbit in the Thorn Tree : Modern Myths and Urban Legends in South Africa*, Arthur Goldstuck discusses these stories (most often found in the urban or suburban landscape), thus :

“ Urban legends have just that edge of credibility that convinces people the story really happened. But,.... they are clearly part of a modern mythology that has emerged from the urban landscape. They are invariably repetitions of stories that supposedly happened to a 'friend of a friend'. ....  
The beautiful thing about urban legends is that you don't have to buy them. People offer them for free, you pick them up in newspapers, you suddenly find one submerged in your dim memories of adolescence. They are stories so amazing, with such a powerful ring of truth, you want to believe them. Yet they are so strange or so bizarre or so unsettling or so funny, that you wonder how you could have believed them in the first place.  
They're easy to believe. They come from such credible sources. Newspapers, friends, mothers.”

( 1990 : 1 - 2 )

The urban legend falls within the category of myths known as cautionary tales. They warn of danger, something that is an overriding concern in contemporary society, and also serve an explanatory function.

The twentieth century has also provided two prime examples of political myth-

making. The first of these was the myth of the Third Reich, promulgated by Adolph Hitler and the Nazi Party during the 1930's. The second was the myth of Apartheid, which sustained the South African National Party through forty years of rule.

Degenaar points out that :

“ In South Africa the history of the Afrikaner is also described by nationalists in terms of the myth of the chosen people. The Afrikaner people are called ‘the Israel of Africa’. The Great Trek is seen as an exodus to the Promised Land . . . D.F. Malan is quoted to have said : ‘The history of the Afrikaner reveals a determination and a definiteness of purpose which make one feel that Afrikanerdom is not the work of man, but a creation of God. We have a divine right to be Afrikaners. Our history is the highest work of art of the Architect of the centuries.’ ”

( 1983 : 62 )

In *Orghast*, Brook made use of both invented myth and found myths from various source traditions. In *The Mahabharata*, Brook makes use of found myth, but re-interprets it to suit his theatrical purposes. This re-interpretation is an important part of the continued evolution of the mythic material.

We can describe myths as the stories which delineate and reinforce the spiritual life of a culture. Their importance in fostering a sense of cultural identity cannot be underrated. They perform a number of different functions, providing each of us with a sense of belonging, and a certain set of sensibilities through which we view the world. Myths are not cast in stone. Like cultures, they evolve and grow. The number of different forms of modern myth attest to their resilience, and their endless capacity for re-invention.

In seeking to find a clear concept of ritual, one is faced with similar concerns as those that operate when one tries to conceptualise myth. Richard Schechner points out that :



“Even to say it in one word, ritual, is asking for trouble. Ritual has been so variously defined - as concept, praxis, process, ideology, yearning, experience, function - that it means very little because it means too much. In common use, ritual is identified with the sacred, another slippery word....

Rituals have been considered : 1) as part of the evolutionary development of animals; 2) as structures with formal qualities and definable relationships; 3) as symbolic systems of meaning; 4) as performative actions or processes; 5) as experiences. These categories overlap.”

( 1993 : 228 )

Thus, ritual can be approached from a number of differing points of view. Once again, the researcher is forced to choose the conceptualisation of ritual that best serves his/her purpose. Another problem that arises is that the difference between myth and ritual is not clear. Many people seem to see the two terms as synonymous or complementary, whereas they are two separate ideas which can be seen to work independently of each other.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines ritual as follows :

“ **ritual** 1 *a.* of, consisting in, involving, religious and other rites.....  
2 *n.* prescribed order for performing religious etc. rites ; book containing this; performance of ritual acts.”

( 1982 : 901 )

However, as with the Oxford definition of myth, this is far too vague and limited to suit the purposes of this thesis. Once again, it is essential to clear away the negative connotations associated with ritual. Psychology has led one to associate the word ritual with repetitive or obsessive behaviour, often coupled with some sort of phobia. This kind of condition is known as obsessive-compulsive disorder. Carole Wade and Carol Tavris point out that:

“ **Compulsions** are repetitive, ritual behaviors that a person carries out in a stereotyped fashion , designed to prevent some disaster. .... Most people do not enjoy these rituals and even realize that the behaviour is senseless. But if they try to break the ritual, they feel mounting anxiety that is relieved only by giving in to the compulsion.”

(1990 : 584 )

In the common mind, ritual is also seen as synonymous with habit, something that leads to routine and boredom. Doty points out that :

“ Used negatively, (ritual) has come to refer to that which is not free, that which constricts human development or forces individuals into submission to group norms and customs that are out of date almost as rapidly as they are formalised.”

( 1986 : 95 )

A review of the related literature does reward the researcher with one important definition, one that is broad enough to allow him/her to build a concept of ritual around it. In his book *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* , Ronald L. Grimes postulates the following definition of ritual :

“ Ritualizing transpires as animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in founded places .”

( 1982 : 55 )<sup>1</sup>

In this statement one finds all the most important elements of a workable concept of ritual :

Ritual is always some kind of **performance** ; it is something which the participants carry out or perform. Barbara Myerhoff points out that :

“ Ritual is a performative genre ; one performs a statement of belief through a gesture. That is all that is socially required and all that is of interest to the society. Personal feelings are irrelevant ; genuflection is all.”

( in : Schechner & Appel (eds.) , 1990 : 247 )

Thus, ritual serves as the physical expression of a spiritual belief. Rituals also always follow a certain pattern of events or action.

Receptivity is implicit in any ritual process. Rituals always have some kind of

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<sup>1</sup> Grimes goes on to break this definition down, and to discuss each phrase in detail. It is unnecessary for me to do the same. I use the ideas in this definition as a springboard from which a more detailed and open-ended *concept* of ritual can be extrapolated.

an audience. In any ritual action, there are those who perform the rite, and those who receive that performance. Thus, the audience for a ritual can be the gods, or the ancestors. The audience, whether they are physically present or not, perform a supportive role, one that is integral to the ritual. Grimes is of the opinion that :

“ The more deeply an enactment is received, the more an audience becomes a congregation and the more a performance becomes ritualized. ‘Sacred’ is the name we give to the deepest forms of receptivity in our experience.... Because receptivity is essential to ritualizing, gestural enactment always has a communicative, as well as cognitive, dimension, even when it is performed in solitude. A ritual enactment must be received by others, perhaps the Wholly Other, perhaps the ancestors, perhaps the powers that be, perhaps a therapist, perhaps only the tourists and anthropologists.”

( 1982 : 63 - 64 )

A ritual functions as a repository of meaning for a people or a culture. For them, each step, gesture, costume has a specific meaning and context. Colin Counsell points out that :

“ .... although in a general sense the patterned dispersal of bodies in space featured in many rituals is symbolic of the material world’s subordination to the immaterial, in different cultures it would infer a *different*, immaterial key into models of the transcendent which are specific to the societies in which those rituals are enacted.

Components of ritual therefore possess no inherent meaning, only the meaning derived from our cultural interpretation of them.”

( 1996 : 160 )

Ritual always takes place in a clearly established ritual space, which separates the performance of the ritual from other actions and interactions :

“ ‘Space’, which is empty, uniform, and abstract, is given shape and life so it may become a ritual ‘place’ such as a burial ground, courtroom, or cathedral. All of these are curiously vacant, even haunting, when the actions of ritual are not occurring in them. Ritual place is a matrix of ritual life.....Not only is space founded to become ritual place, but actors themselves become grounded by acting in it. We hide, display, and boundary-mark ourselves by the way we transform space into place. How we do this determines the extent to which we are an insider or outsider. The ways we cross boundaries of founded places say who we are. ”

( Grimes, 1982 : 66 )

Inside the ritual space, the participant ceases to be him/herself. Instead, s/he becomes a vehicle for the aims of the ritual. Here, s/he retreats from the everyday world, and enters another level of existence.

In any ritual, there is a psychological involvement of the participants ; they believe in the aims of the rite, and they work together to achieve them.

If we consider myths to be the stories that contribute to a culture, then rituals are the actions which express that culture. In performing the actions of the ritual, a people reaffirm their sense of community, while ensuring the continuity of their own cultural identity. Like myths, rituals grow and change, as cultures continue to redefine themselves. Grimes points to the impermanence of rituals :

“ Rituals are events, they have lifespans. Only secondarily do they reside in texts, scenarios, scripts, or rubrics. Thinking of them as unchanging is a half-truth. They are not artifacts. They are not structures in the way that a building is a structure. They are structurings, as a dance is. They surge and subside, ebb and flow. .... Rituals deteriorate. Entropy is the rule; therefore, they must be raised up constantly from the grave of book, body, memory and culture.”  
( 1982 : 57 )

This is of vital importance when we consider the use of ritual by many theatre practitioners, in particular those who attempt to create intercultural theatre. Like Grimes, they believe that a ritual cannot be frozen in time. The re-interpretations and re-imaginings that theatre offers constitute a new incarnation for rituals, raised from the grave and experienced anew.

Theatre itself is a highly ritualised form. The Western idea of theatre developed out of Greek religious ritual, and during the Middle Ages was intimately connected to the ritual of the Christian church.

“Ritual and drama are dance partners. Whether observed historically, in terms

of their origin and development, or phenomenologically, in terms of their structures and dynamics, ritual and drama circle each other in a dialectical two-step characteristic of coinciding opposites. The Western world's post-medieval segregation of church and stage was only a moment in a process; it was not a permanent state of affairs. The recent emergence of ritualized theater belies any such simple oppositions by laying bare the fundamental impulses toward stylization, mimesis, and transformation which are characteristic of ritualistic and dramatic impulses.”

( Grimes, 1982 : 165 )

The close connection between ritual and theatre offers greater opportunities for theatre practitioners to access the latent power of ritual forms, both through the use of elements of ritual and through the re-ordering of the rituals of the theatre.

Like any other type of ritual, theatre has ritual space. There is always a clearly delineated ‘acting area’ in any type of theatrical or dramatic performance. Work in the theatre is also ritualised, with events leading up to a performance following a set pattern, and the preparation for the performance taking place during rehearsals :

“What happens during the rehearsal process may be compared with Victor Turner’s liminal period of the initiation process. Both involve the sequestration of the players or the neophytes from the wider community to a special place where they submit themselves to the authority of a leader or leaders who instruct them and prepare them for returning to that wider community as special persons and with something new.”

( Amankulor, 1996 : 45 )

It has also been my experience that the physical preparation of the performance space or ritual space follows a ritualistic pattern, with a group of people carrying out clearly delineated roles and tasks, in a particular sequence of events, with the common aim of getting the theatre ready for opening night.

Experimental theatre groups try to break down the familiar ritual of Western theatre, by making new rituals. Richard Schechner points out that:

“ ...within the last fifteen years the process of mounting the performance, the workshops that lead up to the performance, the means by which an audience is brought into the space and led from the space and many other

previously automatic procedures, have become the subjects of theatrical manipulations. These procedures have to do with theatre-in-itself and they are, as regards the theatre, efficacious : that is, these procedures are what makes a theatre into a theatre regardless of themes, plot, or the usual 'elements of drama'. The attention paid to the procedures of making theatre are, I think, attempts at ritualizing performance, of finding in the theatre itself authenticating acts."

( 1976 : 207 )

These experimental groups make a concerted effort at breaking down the audience / performer barrier by drawing the audience into the action, and making them an integral part of the performance. This forms part of their efforts to shock their audience out of their usual complacent reactions. Theatre practitioners in the more experimental or avant-garde genres also make use of ritual as a style or ordering principle for a work, as well as a source. A prime example of this is the so-called 'ritual theatre' of the 1960s, such as the Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69*:

" One of the critical moments of the Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69* is the enactment of the birth ritual. The ensemble forms what it refers to as the birth canal. Four naked members of the company sprawl on the ground. Four naked members stand over them. The first four hump their backs to form an arch, the second four face at right angles to them and squat. The one who is to be born crawls and is pulled, thrust, dragged past all the bodies to the front of the canal and is born. ....

The ritual claims its own. We are no longer .... in the domain of the performer offering the gesture primarily for the spectator. The performer now becomes extraordinarily vulnerable to the ritual of his own making."

( Sainer, 1975 :49 - 50 )

In making use of ritual in this way, theatre practitioners attempt to contact and make use of the latent power of ritual forms, which can engender deep-seated responses in the audience.

This chapter's conceptualisation of myth states that myth is a narrative, often concerned with the origins of a people or culture. Thus, myths help to order existence, by helping a group of people to understand where they come from, who their ancestors are and why they live the way they do. In so doing, myth fulfills an

explanatory function. Myth is also often the basis for the art of a people, the foundation upon which they can create a representation of their group identity. In addition, myths often form the basis of the religion or philosophy of a people. Myths are the stories that help to create a communal, culturally-specific way of understanding the world. The concept of ritual serves to reinforce this sense of cultural identity. Ritual is a performance or action, which follows a set pattern of events. Thus, ritual serves as a physical expression of a spiritual belief. Receptivity is implicit in any ritual process. The audience for a ritual can be the gods, or the ancestors, or a physical audience which is present at the rite. The audience perform a supportive role, contributing to the effectiveness of the ritual. Like myths, rituals are a repository of meaning for a people or a culture, with each step, gesture and costume having a specific meaning and context. Ritual always takes place in a clearly established ritual space, which separates the action of the ritual from the actions of everyday life, and creates a clearly defined threshold beyond which the ritual participants enter the realm of the sacred. Within this sacred space, the participants are psychologically involved in the aims of the rite, and they work together to achieve them. In performing the actions of the ritual, a people reaffirm their sense of community, while ensuring the continuity of their own cultural identity. Myth and ritual therefore perform essential functions in the construction of each particular culture. However, they cannot be seen as fixed concepts, but need to be considered as fluid entities which change according to the needs of a particular group of people. Despite the generally-held negative belief that myths and rituals are manifestations of so-called 'primitive' cultures, the evidence of contemporary Western forms of myth and ritual such as soap operas, political myths, and urban legends, as well as the ritual elements present in contemporary theatrical

endeavour, points to their continuing importance in our lives. In making use of elements of myth and ritual, Brook is consciously attempting to harness the power of myth and ritual, in order to create an essential theatre, one that is a fundamental part of the life of Western culture. Brook recognises that the concepts of myth and ritual have become displaced in contemporary Western culture, because of the many negative connotations which they carry. In making use of living myths and rituals from non-Western cultures, Brook seeks to reinstate the importance of myth and ritual in the spiritual life of the West. Having constructed a concept of myth and ritual, this investigation can now determine the exact role which elements of myth and ritual play in Brook's theatrical agenda. The following chapter explores how the role of myth and ritual in the construction of culture informs Brook's theatrical agenda in very particular ways.



## Chapter 2

### Cruelty, Madness and War

Having established the concepts of myth and ritual, it is now possible to assess how they function within a certain set of circumstances. The aim of this thesis is to examine the workings of the concepts of myth and ritual within the theatre of Peter Brook. Myth and ritual perform a vital role in the construction of culture, and it is because of their particular living qualities that Brook sees them as an important part of his efforts to create the culture of links. In order to assess why and how Brook makes use of myth and ritual, this chapter will examine the development of Brook's career since the early 1960s<sup>2</sup>. This analysis, together with the conceptualisation of myth and ritual established in chapter one, facilitates an exploration of the key reasons which inform Brook's use of myth and ritual in order to further the development of the culture of links.

It was during the 1960s that Brook began to introduce ritualistic actions and ideas into his work. This development could be seen in many of his productions during this period, including *King Lear* (1962), the *Theatre of Cruelty* season (1964), *The Marat/Sade* (1964), *US* (1966), *Oedipus* (1968), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1968) and *The Tempest* (1968). Prior to the early 1960s, Brook had pursued a very successful career in commercial theatre. In this capacity, Brook had directed Shakespeare, opera, farce, contemporary dramas, and films. Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves comment that :

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed discussion of Brook's career history would be redundant. I refer the reader to Appendix A, a Chronology of Brook's career.

“ What Brook seemed to be searching for primarily in those early years of exploring the field was variety of experience. He was like a magpie, apparently snapping up anything that came his way. As he flitted between *Measure for Measure*, *The Little Hut*, *Salome* and *Irma la Douce*, between Stratford-upon-Avon, the West End, Paris and Broadway - not to speak of a year as Director of Productions at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, a title he invented for himself - he gives the impression of being driven by an insatiable curiosity. But it is not until the 1960s that he begins to show a more overt curiosity about the nature of what he is doing.”

( 1995 : 2 )

This sense of curiosity about the nature of theatre was the driving force behind Brook's *The Empty Space* ( 1968 ). Eventually, Brook's innate sense of curiosity led him to an increasingly radical questioning, as he sought to find the form of theatre which would best serve the spiritual needs of contemporary Western society.

Brook's interest in ritual and myth extends to all levels of his theatre. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly what it is about his productions which gives them their ritualistic feel, partly because this ritualistic feel is the product of a number of different factors. However, as Colin Counsell points out, it is largely a result of Brook's successful use and ordering of images to express what Brook terms 'the Invisible' :

“ What does Brook mean by the Invisible ? He gives no precise definition but,... he deems it to consist of those 'sacred' realms of experience which lie beyond the concrete world and our rational grasp of it ; magic, myth, the spiritual and so on. .... Brook's Invisible, then, is to appear to the spectator as beauty, an extra-ordinary ordering of the material that figures the immaterial divine.

This is one of the senses in which we may term Brook's a 'ritual theatre'. .... The key quality of ritual .....is its ordering of the profane material plane, for in this ordering is imprinted the pattern of the sacred. Patterning is characteristic of rituals around the world.....

This ritualistic patterning of the concrete world finds its theatrical equivalent in Brook's ordering of the material stage.... Blocking, the arrangement of figures about the stage area, is often highly stylised.....Although such use of space / movement features in many theatres around the world, it is less common on the orthodox western stage, and Brook's consistent use of it lends his theatre a ceremonial colouring.”

( 1996 : 153 - 155 )

It is in Brook's ordering of images, and in his use of stylised patterns of voice and movement, that a sense of ritual and ceremony is conveyed. Clearly, Counsell sees Brook's highly developed aesthetic sensibilities as a key element in the ritual quality of his theatre.

The introduction of elements of myth and ritual into Brook's work can be seen in a number of different ways. It is possible to discern a certain broad pattern to the work which points to this new concern in Brook's mind. There seems to have been a distinct emphasis on innovative use of the voice, with chanting and the elongation of sounds becoming prevalent ( for example, in *The Marat/Sade*, *Oedipus* and *US* ). There is an emphasis on ritualised actions, with an increased importance given to the physical presence of the actor ( for example, in *The Marat/Sade*, *US*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* ). Greater attempts at contact with the audience, with a reordering of the performance space ( *US*, *The Marat/Sade*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* ), are also evident .

The introduction of ritual and mythic elements began in earnest with *King Lear* in 1962. This *Lear* was stark and harsh, played on a virtually bare stage, looking very much like "a series of medieval tableaux" (Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 48). As in *The Mahabharata*, the design reinforced the ceremonial atmosphere of the production. The costumes were heavy and dark, props resembled iron-age implements, and the stage was dominated by three large thunder sheets of corroded metal. The piece had a slow, somnambulant, ritualistic feel to it, with many lines being almost chanted, rather than spoken :

"The pace was slow and full of pauses. It was static for most of the time, so the bursts of action, like Lear and his knights overturning the tables, became

explosive.”

( Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 49 )

As with much of Brook’s theatre, the ritualistic quality of the piece is not immediately obvious. Brook suggests an atmosphere of ceremony and ritual through stylisation.

The audience is given the impression of ritual and primitivism, which opens their awareness to the deeper levels of meaning at work in the text. The production was a revelation for its time. As Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves point out :

“Over thirty years later, it is difficult to remember how directors saw *Lear* before Brook. The production was one of those theatre events that change people’s perceptions of received material.”

( 1995 : 50 )

Somehow, the ritualistic colouring of Brook’s production seemed utterly suited to the harshness of the text. Together, the two elements burn into the spectator’s mind as a vision of despair.

Brook’s exploration of new forms was further expanded in 1964, with the *Theatre of Cruelty* season, and *The Marat / Sade*. The *Theatre of Cruelty* season, directed by Brook and Charles Marowitz<sup>3</sup>, was inspired by the writings of Antonin Artaud. Despite Brook’s many explanations, there was much confusion surrounding the title given to this series of experiments and works-in-progress:

“ The title for the LAMDA season was much misunderstood, although the work itself was presented with a quotation from Artaud [see below] which established absolutely precisely his extraordinary definition of cruelty as being a form of self-discipline, and therefore cruelty meant cruelty to oneself. That notwithstanding, for years and years after that, question after question would be put to one towards an apparently avowed taste for sadistic material, sadistic relationships with an audience, with actors and so on and so forth.”

( Brook, quoted in Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 75 )

Brook and Marowitz took great pains to try to communicate the essence of Artaud’s

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of the *Theatre of Cruelty* season, see Marowitz’s article, ‘Notes on the Theatre of Cruelty’, in Marowitz C. & S. Trussler (eds.), *Theatre at Work - Playwrights and Productions in the Modern British Theatre*. London : Methuen, 1967, pp. 164 - 185.

concept of cruelty :

“ Essentially, cruelty means strictness, diligence and implacable resolution, irreversible and absolute determination.”

( quoted in Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 68 )

This definition finds resonances in Brook’s own determination and implacability, and also in his company’s impressive sense of discipline and dedication. In accordance with Artaud’s ideas, the *Theatre of Cruelty* company were asked to go beyond their technique through constant improvisation and experimentation. The aim was always to transcend the limitations of their rather traditional and conservative training. Charles Marowitz explains :

“Sometimes the work sessions threw up more material than we knew what to do with ... More and more we concentrated on the text ; its coloration; its timbre; ; its weight and feel. ... We found that every moment of naturalism, even the most obvious and unquestionable, benefited by being knocked off balance; by being winged by a metaphor, or studded with a stylization. *Ritualistic* may be a critic’s cliché ...., but it becomes a directorial Rosetta Stone in rehearsal. Even the crudest situation, ..... becomes both more comic and more understandable by being acted ceremoniously, instead of in a loose naturalistic manner.”

( Marowitz & Trussler (eds), 1967 : 181 )

Thus, it is a stylised and ceremonial mode of playing that evokes a sense of ritual in the work, rather than any attempt to perform a particular ritual action. During ten weeks of rehearsal, they worked on several short scenes or scenarios, which were shown to the public in a variety of different ways at the LAMDA theatre. Although not a great success, with audience and critics alike left confused by what they had seen, the experiment had a profound effect on Brook’s thinking, and is indicative of the new direction in which Brook’s work was heading. Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves point out that :

“ ... what had seized Brook about Artaud, on the practical level to which Brook has always returned, was Artaud’s belief in a language of theatre that went beyond words.

In 1922, Artaud had seen a group of Cambodian dancers at a Colonial Exhibition in Marseilles. Nine years later, he saw the Balinese theatre perform at a Colonial Exhibition in Paris. In both cases, Artaud was strongly affected by the fact that communication was by movement and gesture rather than by words..... Brook was looking for a form of theatre that would not depend on anecdote or character, or on verbal messages, but which would communicate *directly* to an audience through a combination of all its elements - sound, gesture, the visual relationship between actors and objects.”

( 1995 : 71 )

This search for a theatre that communicates beyond, or despite language, has become one of the key threads of Brook’s endeavour. It is this that has led him to search for universal theatrical images and stories, ones that will be meaningful to audiences all over the world. Hunt and Reeves reinforce Counsell’s opinion that Brook uses highly stylised staging in order to create a sense of communion with his audience.

Later in the same year, Brook was able to put all that he had learned during the *Theatre of Cruelty* season into practice, when he mounted a production of Peter Weiss’ *The Marat / Sade*<sup>4</sup>. Charles Marowitz is positive in his response to the production :

“That it is a spectacular and breathtaking production - perhaps the boldest we are to see this half-century - seems to me to be unquestionable. It restores something riotous and vital to the theatre ; a kind of stylized mania which is closer to the personality of Antonin Artaud than any other single thing.”<sup>5</sup>

( Marowitz & Trussler (eds.), 1967 : 183)

The production was the culmination of the work of the *Theatre of Cruelty* group, most of whom went on to perform in *The Marat / Sade*:

“ On the first day of work for the *Theatre of Cruelty* season the actors had each been given something to bang with and something to bang on ... They then elaborated rhythms, sometimes using fingers , knuckles, elbows instead of or in combination with their instruments. In the Weiss play, while Sade was lecherously coaching Charlotte Corday in how to stab Marat, orchestrated lunatics were using wooden spoons to beat out Dionysiac rhythms on legs,

<sup>4</sup> The full title of this play is *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*.

<sup>5</sup> This comment could just as easily apply to Brook’s later production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which was characterised by its playful and riotous atmosphere.

knees, ankles. Brook's production went a long way towards translating the principles behind Theatre of Cruelty into theatrical practice, combining Brechtian alienation techniques with semi-ritualised delirium and the Artaudian compulsion to express the inexpressible."

( Hayman, 1979 : 203)

In seeking to portray the inmates of the asylum, Brook encouraged improvisation, and a ritualistic search for the madman within each of them. Christopher Innes points out that :

"As part of their preparation the cast were shown documentary film ( by Jean Rouch ) of a Nigerian native ritual, in which the participants reached extreme states of savage madness - an early indication of Brook's interest in primitivism- and the mental patients of the Charenton asylum were placed in the foreground of the performance. The acting consisted largely of pathological symptoms, graphically displaying the physical state of spastics, catatonics, paranoics, schizophrenics and syphilitics."<sup>6</sup>

( 1993 : 130 )

In asking each actor to explore himself, and find the lunatic each of them carried inside them, Brook was increasingly making use of ritual elements. Ritual became a tool of rehearsal, as well as a mode of performance. Brook used anthropological studies of ritual as a spur for the actors' creativity. The film served as inspiration, encouraging them to explore various modes of madness and possession as well as the orgiastic nature of ritual action. Group exercises were considered a means by which they could access the latent power of ritual. For example ; the group stand in a circle, each holding a stick, and attempt to synchronise their movement of the sticks perfectly, with no one person functioning as a leader or initiator of the action. Rather, a sense of a communal impetus is sought. The sense of communion and group belonging is fostered not only through the attempt to create a communal impulse, but also through the use of the circle, which creates a ritual space within which the group dynamic can function.

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<sup>6</sup> Brook would return to this exploration of insanity much later in his career, with *The Man Who* (*L'Homme Qui*) in 1993.

A further step in the gradual development of Brook's work , towards a more ritual-based form, was *US* in 1966. Inspired by the work of Berthold Brecht, Brook attempted a theatrical response to the war in Vietnam<sup>7</sup>:

“ The birth of *US* was allied to the reaction of a group of us who quite suddenly felt that Vietnam was more powerful, more acute, more insistent a situation than any drama that already existed between covers.....We started *US* from what for us was a great need - to face up to the call, the challenge of this present Vietnamese situation.”

( Brook, 1987 : 61 )

Once again, Brook sought to extend his rehearsal techniques, pushing the actors to explore their own attitudes to Vietnam through improvisation. One of the key images which Brook used to prompt these improvisations was that of a Buddhist monk setting himself alight in protest against the atrocities of the Vietnam conflict ( see Fig. 1 ). This ritual, known as self-immolation<sup>8</sup>, provided a point of departure for the actors to create their own rituals of protest. Brook asked his actors to consider the reasons that would drive a person to kill themselves in such an excruciating way, and in so doing, to make a personal contact with this kind of ritual sacrifice:

“ Brook then asked Mark Jones and Robert Lloyd to re-enact the Buddhist burning himself ..... The other actors were asked to stand around in a square and watch. This was repeated a second time, with everyone pointing out details ..... The third time, the actors were asked to react personally to the event in the most sincere way, and to state their attitude in a sentence, prefaced by their name, details, the place and date.”

( Peter Brook et. al., quoted in Mitter, 1992 : 75 )

In asking the actors to react on a personal level, Brook attempts to bridge the gap between his Western performers, and this Eastern mode of ritual sacrifice. In so doing,

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<sup>7</sup> In making this connection between *US* and the work of Berthold Brecht, I am indebted to Shomit Mitter's excellent book, *Systems of Rehearsal*, which explores the debt Brook owes to Stanislavsky, Brecht and Grotowski .

<sup>8</sup> The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines immolation thus :

“ **immolate** *v.t.* kill (victim) as sacrifice; (fig.) sacrifice ( thing etc. to another)”  
( 1982 : 499 )





( Fig 1.) A Buddhist monk performing the ritual of self-immolation

From : Angela Dodson, *The 1960's Scrapbook*, 1992,  
p. 78.

This photograph provided a key impetus for the creation of *US*, and was used extensively by Brook in an effort to create a personal connection between the actors and this kind of ritual sacrifice.

Brook uses the ritual of self-immolation as a tool to engender a more truthful response to the issue of Vietnam. A great stress was therefore placed on exploring scenes of torture, and of self-immolation, with burning becoming a motif for the production. At the end of each performance, the cast burnt what appeared to be a white butterfly (actually a piece of white paper), in their own private ritual of protest, before sitting down facing the audience, until the audience got up and left. Once again, the cast are using ritual as a mode of playing. They also attempt to create a closer relationship with the audience, through the quiet confrontation of watching them leave.

In their book *Peter Brook*, Albert Hunt and Geoffrey Reeves call their chapter dealing with Brook's 1968 production of *Oedipus*, 'The first attempt at ritual'. However, as I have shown, elements of ritual are discernable in Brook's work after 1962. In *Oedipus*, Brook once again turned to ritual as a rehearsal tool, a prod for the actors' creativity, as well as a mode of playing, especially when it came to the choruses.

"The company listened to a radio series .... called *The Voice of the Gods* which consisted of tribal chants from all over the world, including Shamans from Africa, Tibetan monks and the Indians of the Upper Orinoco ....

This threw up many vocal techniques which were practised, particularly harsh consonants. Also of interest and use was the belief of many of the tribes that God exists in the air and can be conjured up through breathing : the Whirling Dervishes practise this in their dancing and this was to lead Colin Blakely to perform one of his speeches turning and turning at ever increasing speed as though possessed.....

The source for the Bacchus chorus was found in the Maori haka ; as the motive behind the haka is the destruction of the enemy the overall tone is one of aggression. The company contained two New Zealanders who taught it to the rest."

( Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 128 - 129 )

Through the use of chanting and stylized movement, Brook attempts to re-institute the deep connection between the audience and the text, by recreating the sense of ritual

which was part of the first performances of this play. The placement of the chorus, scattered around the auditorium amongst the spectators, was a further step in Brook's exploration of the relationship between audience and performers. Brook chose to end the performance with an alienating device ; a great gold phallus appeared in the centre of the stage, and the cast danced around it in celebration, to the tune of 'Yes, We Have No Bananas'. This was notoriously ineffective, serving only to confuse the audience ;

“Brook wanted the audience to treat *Oedipus* as one possible vehicle to answer the need for a true contact with a sacred invisibility ( God? ) through the theatre; but the production only seemed to underline the impossibility of making such contact now. The kind of awe it generated had more to do with being deeply respectful of actors doing technically very demanding things than getting in touch with something primal. As it never operated on the audience in the way that Sophocles' play did in the ancient Greek festivals, the Dixie band and the glistening phallus at the end seemed merely intellectual ideas.”

( Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 131 )

This is strikingly similar to much of the criticism aimed at *Orghast*. In both cases, Brook's tendency to over-intellectualise his choices leaves his audience confused. This hampers communication, and thus Brook fails to make the desired connection with his audience. However, Martin Esslin believed that Brook had found a suitable ritualistic device in his finale:

“the only sphere of primeval awe and primitive emotion left to twentieth-century mass man is sex and therefore all ritualistic theatre has to veer towards sexual shocks. Brook is no exception here.”

( quoted in Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 133 )

This sense of the orgiastic or celebratory is an important aspect of ritual (especially ritual possession). Brook was to explore this theme more completely in his next production.

In May of 1968, Brook was invited by Jean-Louis Barrault to go to Paris to work with an international group at the Théâtre des Nations. The group worked on

medieval mystery plays, and on various pieces from *The Tempest*. However, politics and the climate of revolt prevalent in the 1960s intruded on the work, and in June student riots in Paris led to the abandoning of the project. The group came together once again in London in July, where they presented *The Tempest* as work-in-progress at the Round House. In this venue, the audience were seated on large scaffolding towers which could be moved about the playing area by the actors, so that the audience became both witnesses to and participants in the action. Brook had begun to explore the rituals of the theatre, influenced no doubt by the many 'happenings' and experimental performances prevalent at the time. The programme requested that the audience help in

“...exploring questions that are concerning the theatre everywhere... What is a theatre ? What is a play ? What is an actor ? What is a spectator ? What is the relationship between them all ? What conditions serve this relationship best ?”  
( quoted in Hayman, 1979 : 211 ).

This reflects Brook's increasingly radical questioning of theatrical modes, which he articulated clearly in *The Empty Space*, also published in 1968. Brook's talent for stripping a play down to its essence was taken to its furthest extreme in this production, which presented an incoherent collage of images and ideas inspired by Shakespeare's text.<sup>9</sup>

“Without attempting to present more than disconnected fragments of Shakespeare's play, the actors would condense lines into keywords, and keywords into isolated syllables or sounds, translating words into physical movements and moods into rhythmic chants.....Some of Shakespeare's lines were chanted, some repeated so many times that they became almost like a litany. The Japanese actor beautifully suggested the wind with a sound derived from the Noh theatre, while the others responded fearfully to the imaginary tempest, huddling together and whimpering - a collective response to an act of theatre projected out of one man's imaginative reaction to an imaginary storm.”  
( Hayman, 1979 : 210 )

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<sup>9</sup> In this, Brook was probably influenced by Charles Marowitz's Collage *Hamlet*, which formed part of the Theatre of Cruelty season in 1964.

Once again, Artaud's influence was at work. Brook attempted to go beyond language and narrative, seeking to communicate through the use of image and suggestion.

Brook used this opportunity to explore the darker side of Shakespeare's text, looking into themes such as "... social exploitation, violence, incest, sexuality and revolution..."

( Innes, 1993 : 135 ). As in *Oedipus*, sex was used to shock and confuse :

"... Caliban led a mass revolution, raping Miranda and then sexually assaulting Prospero, but this 'dark' side of sexuality was balanced against an innocent paradise of pre-civilised responses to nature, in which the final marriage ceremony was performed as a tribal mating ritual."

( Innes, 1993 : 132 )

Brook attempts once again to utilise the orgiastic power of ritual. The use of sexual imagery is unsurprising in the context of the great sexual freedom which characterised the late 1960s.

In 1970, Brook mounted one of the most successful productions of his entire career. Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is still regarded as a watershed in the history of Shakespearean performance. Brook is the only person who has copyright to a production of one of Shakespeare's play's ; if one wanted to present Brook's version of *Dream*, one would have to pay royalty fees. Visually, the production was a revelation ; the set was a giant white box, with trapeze swings for the fairies, and coils of wire hanging from a catwalk, to denote the forest. Once again, Brook sought material from non-Western cultures to provide inspiration for his actors. Brook and designer Sally Jacobs visited the Chinese Circus in Paris, and a whole new style and approach was born :

" Incorporating elements of circus, music hall, conjuring tricks, ballet, songs and ritual at the same time as democratising the poetry, the production tallied with what Brook was later to say about Shakespearean theatre. 'The Shakespearean theatre speaks simultaneously in performance to everyone, it is "all things to all men", not in general, but at the moment when it's being

played, in actual performance. It does so by reconciling a mystery, because it is simultaneously the most esoteric theatre that we know in a living language and the most popular theatre.”

( Hayman, 1979 : 212 )

Brook’s earlier attempts at Bacchanalian revels and increased contact with the audience saw fruition in this production. The sexual aspects of the text were emphasised, and the joyful mood on the stage seems to have spilled out to the audience. At the end of the performance the actors closed the physical divide between themselves and the audience by literally following the line “ Give me your hands, if we be friends”. Ronald Hayman comments that :

“The sensation was of belonging to a circle of people celebrating all the contradictions and compensations of the human condition. At the end, when the actors walked through the auditorium, shaking hands with the nearest spectators, the sense of solidarity was confirmed.”

( 1979 : 212 )

The sense of communion with the actors and other members of the audience is clear. There are many who consider *Dream* to be Brook’s most successful production, perhaps because Brook managed to fulfill his aim of establishing this sense of communion. The radical re-imagining of the text, as well as the innovative design was easily read and understood by the contemporary audience.

The most obvious example of Brook’s increased interest in myth and ritual is *Orghast* ( 1971 )<sup>10</sup>. Here, ritual is used as a style of playing, while myth provides the thematic and narrative material for the production. Ted Hughes built an intricate plot from a number of different sources :

“We started with a fairly complicated narrative, using several myths which we blended together into one cosmology. The Prometheus myth was one and also the mythology and cosmology of Manichean writings.”

( Hughes, quoted in Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 157 )

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of this production, see A.C.H. Smith, *Orghast at Persepolis*. London : Eyre Methuen Ltd. , 1972.

Hughes made use of both found myth and invented myth in building up his intricately layered framework for the production. Here, myth is a tool to play with, rather than an end in itself. The aim of the production was to investigate sound structures, rather than to preserve narrative purity. In one sense, *Orghast* was the culmination of Brook's fascination with the ideas of Artaud. This was the furthest step in Brook's search for a means of communication that was completely independent of language. The entire piece was performed in Hughes' invented language, Orghast, as well as Latin, Ancient Greek, and Avesta<sup>11</sup>. Brook was clear about his aims in this production :

“ What is the relation between verbal and non-verbal theatre ? What happens when gesture and sound turn into word ? What is the exact place of the word in theatrical expression ? As vibration ? Concept ? Music ? Is any evidence buried in the sound structure of certain ancient languages ? ...”

( Brook, 1987 : 110 )

Once again, ritual was a mode of playing, a style or approach used to deal with the material, and an attempt to create a new ceremony of communion between audience and performers :

“ In *Orghast* Brook sought to operate outside what he has termed the ‘normal channels’ of culture and, particularly, rational language. By bypassing these .... he hoped to communicate with his audience on a universal, precultural level. *Orghast* .... had a markedly ritualistic colouring.

Together, the symbolically loaded time and place, arresting images, and formalised soundscape and kinescape evoked a powerful sense of ritual, a combination of the ceremonially disciplined and the ecstatic and ‘primitive’ that pervaded the entire event.”

( Counsell, 1996 : 157 - 158 )

There is no attempt to reproduce any kind of ritual. Rather, as Counsell points out, the piece gives the impression and atmosphere of ritual, in order to access the power of ritual forms. The production was not entirely successful. Instead of Brook's envisioned universal communication, the audience were left confused and dissatisfied. Ronald

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<sup>11</sup> This is a dead language, used in the ceremonies of the Zoroastrian religion during the fourth century.

Hayman points out that :

“ ... the audience could understand neither the relationship between the characters, nor the interrelationship between the moments. Brook had allowed for partial incomprehension. Possibly he had not allowed sufficiently for resentment at being deprived of essential-seeming information.”  
( 1979 : 216 )

Christopher Innes also points to one of the key ironies and contradictions surrounding this production :

“ .... *Orghast* was one-sided in its appeal. And ironically its emphasis on the primitive night-side of nature seems only to have worked with the overeducated, intellectually sophisticated spectators at the Persepolis festival, perhaps because of the highly literary sources for the collage of creation myths. When *Orghast* was performed to a supposedly primitive ( and therefore in theory more susceptible ) audience of villagers ..... they found those dark cries hilariously funny.”  
( 1993 : 140 )

Brook often faces such criticism ; he has a tendency either to over- or under-intellectualise his work. Finding a level that can appeal to everyone and communicate across barriers has proved to be difficult.

In 1972, Brook set off on a personal quest through the deserts of Northern Africa, in search of the roots of the theatrical form<sup>12</sup>. He wanted to test the efficiency of his company's work in the face of what he called “ audiences that are unconcerned

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed and highly entertaining account of this journey, see John Heilpern, *The Conference of the Birds - The Story of Peter Brook in Africa*. Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1979. It is interesting to note that this journey bears a resemblance to the wanderings of the so-called ‘Hippies’ during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Colin Counsell notes that:

“Out of what we might call the neo-romanticism of the 1960's youth movement, the period in which Brook's more radical experiments in theatre began, a militantly ‘alternative’ culture developed, one critical of western materialism and calling for a return to nature and to spiritual values. This took its most vocal form with the ‘hippies’ but actually had a much broader purchase, surfacing as a new interest in natural lifestyles, communal living, health foods, vegetarianism, and holistic medicine..... Most of this finds resonance in Brook's ideas and practices. It is therefore not incidental that an important feature of the period was its fascination with non-western, especially Asian cultures..... Youth culture in the West blossomed in the late 1960's and 1970's with a diversity of Asian cultural artefacts, not only kaftans, incense sticks, ginseng and sitar music, but also more obviously spiritual imports such as Yoga, Taoism, Buddhism, I Ching, gurus and Japanese martial arts.”  
( 1996 : 175 - 176 )



with the 'correct' responses ...” (Brook, quoted in Hunt & Reeves, 1995 : 176). The company improvised a number of so-called 'carpet shows', which were performed in market paces and at crossroads throughout their three month trip from Algiers to Nigeria and back. This journey represents Brook's first attempt at an anthropological approach to theatre<sup>13</sup>. Brook tried to operate his performances on the principle of barter ; we'll give you a show, if you give us a song or a dance<sup>14</sup>. The journey was useful in terms of the company's work, in that it greatly developed their improvisational skills . However, Brook's anthropological methods were deeply flawed. He was never at any pains to discover how the performance had affected his audience, and exactly what could be understood of the performance by the audience. In Ife, Nigeria, Brook and his group encountered criticism for just this reason, from Barbara Ann Teer, the founder of the National Black Theatre in Harlem. John Heilpern recalls a disastrous performance of the *Shoe Show* :

“ ‘What do you feel now ?’ asked Barbara Ann Teer angrily to me. ‘Have you got to know anyone here ? Have you entertained *one* child ? Who have you touched ? *Touch* those people ! ..... What are you *using* them for ? What do you know of Africa ? What do any of you know ?’ Professor Beier, our contact in Yorubaland, ..... looked humiliated. His relationship with Brook would never be the same. ‘I think you’ve insulted the people of this village,’ he told me. ‘Brook’s actors can’t sing, they can’t dance and it doesn’t seem they can act. What does it mean ? Why have you come here ?’ It was little use saying other shows had been different. I felt defeated, along with the others. There was nothing to say. It was as if a finger had been pointed at the Emperor’s imaginary suit of clothes.”  
( 1979 : 266 )

Later in his career, Brook would face similar criticism of his relationship with the people he met while researching his *Mahabharata* in India.

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<sup>13</sup> Brook would make a later foray into anthropology with his 1975 production, *Les Ik*, based on an anthropological study by Colin Turnbull.

<sup>14</sup> This is similar to Eugenio Barba's system of performance barter which forms the basis of his Theatre Anthropology

From a detailed examination of Brook's work and his writings, one is able to deduce a number of different aspects of Brook's approach to the concepts of myth and ritual. His work shows a gradual progression of interest in these two forms, as tools for rehearsal, as inspiration for exercises, as building blocks for narrative or plot development, and as modes of playing. Brook seems to enjoy the utility of myths and rituals, which are open to any number of uses and interpretations. In evoking a sense of myth or ritual, Brook also hopes to make use of the latent power of these forms, in order to deepen the audience's response to his theatre. In his use of myths and rituals, Brook embodies the post-modern concept of *bricolage* :

“ The cultural *bricoleur* constructs his or her works out of the fragments of older works, assembling new artefacts from existing cultural materials. However, these re-used materials bring with them their former meaningful relations with other elements of the system, retain in the interpreter's gaze those structural connections that originally determined their significance. Thus the *bricoleur* effectively builds not just with old materials but also old elements of meaning... As a consequence, new artefacts do not create entirely fresh meanings but redeploy existing semic fragments.”

( Counsell, 1996 : 152 )

Thus, the new work combines the meanings and associations of all its disparate pieces, in order to create layers of meaning. As in much postmodern work, the audience is left to construct the meaning of the work for themselves, as they read the multiple meanings which the work creates.

For Brook, the key appeal of myths and rituals lies in their universal quality. Any brief study of the various mythologies of the world shows that they have many common elements and concerns. Myth can be seen to function as a universal narrative, with similar stories being told by different people. In the same way, rituals share several basic elements which are independent of cultural constraints. Thus, myths and rituals can appeal to a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds.

What Brook is really trying to do is communicate on a precognitive or unconscious level, independent of factors such as culture or language :

“ Brook therefore seeks to escape such cultural tunnel vision by creating a theatre able to depict any and all planes of human reality. His work has been described as a search for a ‘universal language of the theatre’ and for the ‘wellsprings of drama’. Either phrase will serve, for both express Brook’s desire to return to a theatre which is deeper, more essential than the differences of class and nationhood which divide contemporary humanity, one able to reach beneath the Babel of cultures to both speak to all people equally, regardless of their diverse origins, and to communicate those Invisible dimensions of experience that have been lost to the West.”

( Counsell, 1996 : 146 )

This is a result of the influence of Artaud, and has become one of the main thrusts of Brook’s theatrical endeavour.

Brook makes use of the myths and rituals of non-Western traditions because of the displacement of myth and ritual in contemporary Western life. As he points out in *The Empty Space*:

“We have lost all sense of ritual and ceremony - whether it be connected with Christmas, birthdays or funerals - but the words remain with us and old impulses stir in the marrow.”

( 1968 : 51 )

It is to this latent sense of ritual which all human beings possess that Brook’s theatre hopes to appeal. Mythic and ritualistic material from non-Western sources often has an immediacy and a living quality lacking in the jaded material found in the Western Judeo-Christian tradition. Colin Counsell is of the opinion that :

“ .... the practices he takes from the Developing World must be seen as especially significant because, originating in societies that have yet to undergo the West’s rationalisation, they are more suited to depicting those Invisible realms of experience lost to western theatre.”

( 1996 : 148 )

Brook is not interested in using myths and rituals to exploit people, or to support any kind of political agenda. He seeks to make interesting theatre, which can engage the

audience on the deepest possible level.

Brook also seeks to de-intellectualise the audience's response. By presenting them with something unfamiliar, such as the myths or rituals of other cultures, he asks them to think more deeply about what it is that they are witnessing. The shock of the strange or the new knocks them out of their complacency, forcing them to assess the work in a more truthful way. It is clear that this part of Brook's work owes a great deal to the ideas of Brecht and Artaud. By borrowing these ideas, he seeks to make a deeper connection with his audience. Brook is also asking the audience to take a more active role in constructing the meaning of what they are seeing: their complicity is required for the communion that he seeks. In *The Empty Space*, Brook notes that

“Alienation is above all an appeal to the spectator to work for himself, so to become more and more responsible for accepting what he sees only if it is convincing to him in an adult way.”

( 1968 : 81 )

This is a postmodern idea, which lays the burden of creating meaning at the feet of the receptor, rather than the artist. Shomit Mitter, in comparing the work of Brecht with that of Brook, comments that :

“ One of the advantages of having the option to suggest rather than imitate reality is that, assuming there is a limit to the amount of sensory information a spectator can process at any one time, Brechtian theatre can carry a denser truth than appearance-bound naturalism.....

Non-naturalistic theatre does not merely present with greater cohesion truths that are available in naturalism. The more telling advantage of Brechtian flexibility is its capacity to beget a quite different *quality* of experience as a function of its ability to depict both the surface and the structure of reality..... As actors can move between identities, mutually exclusive aspects of content can be presented and access had to truths that cannot be reached through the depiction of lifelike externals, however minutely observed. The result is not just a greater concentration of meaning, but a completely different, and potentially much fuller, order of experience than is available in naturalism. This is what Brook admires .....

( 1992 : 62 )

This sense of suggestion can be seen in *The Mahabharata*, where props and set devices are non-naturalistic and simple, yet they can be used to create any number of different environments. This layering of images, and the multiplicity of roles which the cast play, lends the piece a deeper sense of reality, and also allows the piece to comment on itself in an ironic way.

Brook often reorders the rituals of the theatre, specifically in his use of space. Brook looks out for found spaces that 'speak', rather than playing in the established theatrical spaces. If he does use a theatre, he uses the space in new, more organic ways. His technical director, Jean-Guy Lecat explains Brook's approach to the performance space :

“ .... we don't need theatre - we need a space to be together, you the audience and us. For Peter Brook, and also for me now, the space is one. It's not two spaces - the stage and the audience - its just one space.”

( Performance Papers, 1994 : 16 )<sup>15</sup>

In Brook's productions there is a constant attempt to break down the audience / performer barrier, and engage the audience more fully.

In the ten years between *Lear* (1962) and *Orghast* (1972), Brook's use of elements of myth and ritual became increasingly important in his radical questioning of theatrical modes. Brook's fascination with myth and ritual is a fundamental part of his search for a **culture of links**. Brook truly believes in the possibility in universal communication and the growth of a global community. Another name given to this preoccupation in Brook's life is 'the rainbow theory':

“ According to the gospel of 'The Rainbow Theory', Black or White Man doesn't really exist. To see people as exclusively Black or exclusively White is

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<sup>15</sup> This is very much like the attitude of ritual participants to the ritual space, which becomes sacred ground for the purposes of the ritual.

a unifying limitation on them both..... Man is like a rainbow with the whole range of the prism to be found within him. Man is the microcosm, and Fully Developed Man the world..... For each man carries within him the seeds of all mankind, which is his Africa and his Asia, his America and his Europe.”

( Heilpern, 1979 : 260 )

Brook is also not the only theatre practitioner with such ideas. Many others, such as Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba and Jerzy Grotowski are working towards similar aims. There are different names for the same ideal, for example the Theatre of Sources, Theatre Anthropology, Ritual theatre or Intercultural Theatre.

## Chapter 3

### Making Cultural Salad

Brook's search for the culture of links is a vital part of the intercultural effort in contemporary theatre, and can be placed within the broader context of contemporary cultural trends. The worth of Brook's endeavour becomes increasingly evident when his work is compared with that of other intercultural theatre practitioners.

*Intercultural theatre* is the term currently used to describe the particular genre of theatre which seeks to make use of more than one cultural tradition or background. In a sense, interculturalism is the new buzz word in international theatre, at a time when the global village is shrinking. More and more cultures are either coming into contact with one other, or simply being overwhelmed, as the dominance of American culture in the world's media results in the loss of many traditional forms in favour of the ubiquitous soap-operas and situation comedies. However, theatre is not the only sphere in which interculturalism is used, as Frederick Turner points out :

“ Interculturalism itself comes in a bewildering variety of genres, .....: tourism, international charity, evangelism, colonial administration, anthropology, true trade ( as opposed to mercantile colonialism ), political and military contacts, academic consultation and exchange, artistic collaboration, artistic influence, asylum, statelessness, refugeeism, education abroad, intermarriage, and emigration.”

( PAJ, 35 /36 (Vol. XII, No. 2 / Vol. XII. No. 3), p. 75 )

Thus, intercultural exchange has become a pervasive trend that affects almost every sphere of contemporary life. The idea of interculturalism is often thought of as synonymous with multiculturalism. This is a false conception. Multiculturalism seems to imply a melting together of various cultures to create what I see as 'cultural

porridge', where cultural differences are smoothed out in an effort to join various peoples together. Richard Schechner says :

“...true multiculturalism - where different cultures and peoples take a fair share of economic and political power - is not likely to happen soon. What we are seeing is a kind of ‘false multiculturalism’  
( Spring 1992, p.7 )

Interculturalism is therefore a more useful and realistic project, given contemporary economic realities. The concept of interculturalism is more concerned with cultural collisions and what kinds of issues are thrown up in such encounters, as Richard Schechner points out :

“ The intercultural is different than the multicultural. The intercultural subject is the difficulties brought up by multiculturalism, the misunderstandings, broken languages, and failed transactions occurring when and where cultures collide, overlap, or pull away from each other. These are seen mostly not as obstacles to be overcome but as fertile rifts or eruptions full of creative energy. Interculturalism is neither a settled issue nor a panacea. Think of it rather as the focus of problems, an area of struggle.”  
( Winter 1992, pp.7-8 )

Interculturalism is concerned with what arises from the clash of cultures, rather than with the smoothing out of cultural differences. Patrice Pavis breaks the concept of interculturalism down into smaller sections, showing that there are a number of different thrusts to the intercultural effort. He says:

“ We should make the following distinctions :

the *intracultural* dimension refers to the traditions of a single nation, which are very often almost forgotten or deformed, and have to be reconstructed

the *transcultural* transcends particular cultures and looks for a universal human condition, as in the case of Brook's notion of ‘culture of links’, which supposedly unites all human beings beyond their ethnic differences and which can be directly transmitted to any audience without distinction of race, culture or class

the *ultracultural* could be called the somewhat mystical quest for the origin of theatre, the search for a primal language in the sense of Artaud. In



Brook's *Orghast* (1970), Serban's *Medea* and *The Trojan Women*, Ronconi's *Oresteia* (1972), we had such a quest for a universal language of sounds and emotions, as if all human experience sprang from the same source

the *pre-cultural* which Barba calls the *pre-expressive*, would be the common ground of any tradition in the world, which affects any audience, 'before' (temporally and logically) it is individualized and 'culturalized' in a specific cultural tradition

the *post-cultural* would apply to the postmodern imagination, which tends to view any cultural act as a quotation or restructuring of already known elements

the *meta-cultural* aspects refer to the commentary a given culture can make on other cultural elements, when explaining, comparing and commenting on it."

( 1992 : 20 n. 1 )

Behind the ideas of interculturalism, lies the concept of a developing global community. This is the culture of links which Brook seeks to achieve<sup>16</sup>. This concept of a global human family, united across racial, religious and national boundaries is an idealistic and yet compelling one. Brook is not the only person to believe in and promote this form of unity. Brook is part of a larger movement which is a distinctive feature of the postmodern world. As Richard Schechner puts it :

" With the emergent world information order, a workable kind of relativism is beginning to glimmer and brighten. At some levels - the genetic, the informational, the shared responsibility for the decency of life on the planet ... - all the individuals and all the cultures are at least theoretically equal, even identical. At another level - that of individual, local, regional and cultural expression, there is an abundance of diversity. We have not yet learned how to balance these two levels of social existence. But we are learning - as a world culture, as a world of many cultures - to recognize these levels of existence. Even to the degree of recognizing the rights of other species and their cultures, of the planet as a unified ecosystem and its culture."

( PAJ, 33/34 (Vol. XI, No. 3 / Vol. XI , No. 1),p. 160)

Thus, interculturalists seek to communicate on the levels upon which we are all equal,

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<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed account of this idea, see Brook, 1987 : 236 - 238, as well as the introductory chapter of this thesis.

while still celebrating the diversity of the world's cultures. Schechner's statement characterises the idealism of this kind of project, which can detract from the seriousness with which people like Brook approach the intercultural.

Another aspect of the philosophy behind interculturalism is the fact that it affords opportunities for learning from other cultures. This is not a new development, as Nicola Savarese points out. In his article "Migrations of Actors Between East and West : The Theatre and Cultural Exchange"<sup>17</sup>, he discusses the long history of cultural exchange that took place from Graeco-Roman times. He points out that this type of exchange has only been reliably documented since the mid-eighteenth century, but was surely a part of the trade along the so-called Silk Road between Europe and the East :

"According to Braudel, we can safely assert that with the mobility which accompanies the expansion of great civilizations, the cultural products move constantly in space and time. Yet, although they travel along with men coming from precise places and going along familiar roads, they seldom follow a traceable route and they mostly arrive at their final destination without our knowing their initial starting point and their methods."

( Savarese, 1994 : 48 )

It seems impossible to believe that cultural exchange did not take place along with the exchange of goods. The lack of documentation about this phenomenon cannot be taken as an indication that it did not take place. It is important to note that the history of interculturalism is in many ways a legacy of colonialism and imperialism, and is seen by some as the strongest surviving form of this kind of oppression:

" Theatre ( broadly constructed ) and its modern mechanical offshoots have been instruments of power, whether in the invasion of the 'New World', when Jesuit performances taught language and religion to the 'savages', in the importation of the exotic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ( in world fairs, in museums, in the imitation of 'primitive rituals' and 'oriental' dance forms ), or in the twentieth century spread of capital-intensive mechanical

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<sup>17</sup> *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 1994, Vol. 1,2 pp. 47 - 53

media ( film, television, computer technologies ), which have given the affluent countries a capacity to monopolise the media market, and so to reinforce the cultural hegemonies already in place- to shape the global taste, and hence global consumption of culture.”

( Stone Peters, in Gainor (ed.), 1995 : 201 )

The pervasive influence of the American television and film industries which dominate the world markets is a pertinent example of this kind of cultural hegemony. In many instances, Brook is also seen as possessing this kind of economic or political power, which places him in a position to shape the view which his audience has of other cultures. Stone Peters’ argument is especially pertinent in South Africa at the moment, as we try to shed the legacy of colonialism and apartheid, while still trying to mediate between the philosophies of Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism. There is an attempt to redress the injuries of the past, but as theatre practitioners we have to be try to retain what is useful from both traditions.

The greatest factor influencing the development of interculturalism in the latter half of the twentieth century is the rapid shrinking of our world. Increasingly, disparate communities and cultures are coming into closer contact than ever before. There are a number of different factors which have led to this global shrinking, such as the rapid development of computer technology over the last thirty years, and the growth of tourism. The end of colonial rule in many parts of the world and the rise of postmodernism have led to the coming to the fore of a large number of previously marginalised or oppressed peoples. Postmodern politics, as well as the right to self-determination, have guaranteed such peoples the right to speak for themselves and the ownership of their cultural products. It has also allowed greater interaction with the other cultures of the world. Frederick Turner comments that:

“It is, I believe, safe to assume that a particular constellation of political characteristics in a country will generally bring about greater contacts between

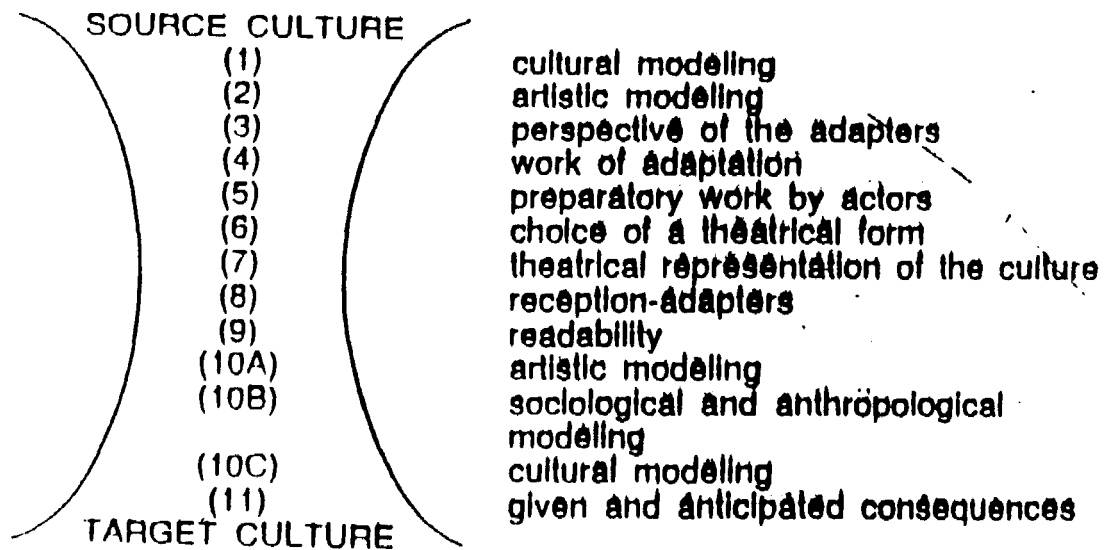
its peoples and those of the outside world : political freedom, to minimise the restrictions on outside contacts usually maintained by tyrannical regimes to protect their flock from dangerous ideas ; democracy, to ensure that freedom; capitalism, to provide both the wealth and the exchange system that makes such contacts possible; and a multi-racial and multi-ethnic home population”  
( PAJ, 35/36 (Vol.XII, No.2 / Vol.XII, No.3), p. 77 )

Evidence of this can be seen in the increased openness of Eastern European countries after the disintegration of the USSR.

The intercultural effort can be seen in a number of genres. It can be found not only in theatre, but in contemporary music, literature and the visual arts. In the sphere of contemporary music, the effects of interculturalism are reflected in the popularity of the so-called ‘world music’. One of the key exponents of this form has been Paul Simon, whose use of traditional Zulu Is’cathamiya vocal technique, as well as the kwela guitar of Ray Phiri, made his 1986 album *Graceland* one of the earliest and most successful attempts at this kind of cultural exchange. However, as Mead Hunter points out, the intercultural can be discerned in the work of a diverse range of artists, from Philip Glass and John Cage to Youssou N’Dour and Peter Gabriel<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, interculturalism can be seen in many works of literature, such as the use of the Haiku form by many Western poets, and in the work of Salman Rushdie, who strives to create a new form able to encompass the contradictions of his Indian heritage and his British education. In the case of theatre, the intercultural effort is concerned mainly with the use of traditional elements from other cultures ; the use of myths and rituals (used by Brook, Mnouchkine, Schechner), visual signs and symbols (used by Robert Wilson, Brook, Mnouchkine) and performance and training techniques (used by Barba, Grotowski, Brook) from non-Western traditions. As already noted, there are a number

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<sup>18</sup> For a fascinating and detailed account, see Mead Hunter, “Interculturalism and American Music”, PAJ, 33/34 (Vol. XI, No.3 / Vol.XII, No.1), pp. 186 - 202



( Fig. 2 ) The Hourglass Model of Intercultural Exchange

From : Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, 1992, p. 4.

of different theatre practitioners engaged in this kind of work, which elevates it to the status of a movement in the contemporary theatre.

Patrice Pavis has formulated a model for intercultural exchange, which he refers to as the 'Hourglass' model (see Fig.2). Pavis explains this process of cultural collision thus :

“ In the upper bowl is the foreign culture, the source culture, which is more or less codified and solidified in diverse anthropological, sociocultural or artistic modelizations. In order to reach us, this culture must pass through a narrow neck. If the grains of culture or their conglomerate are sufficiently fine, they will flow through without any trouble, however slowly, into the lower bowl, that of the target culture, from which point we observe this slow flow. The grains will rearrange themselves in a way which appears random, but which is partly regulated by their passage through some dozen filters put in place by the target culture and the observer.”

( 1992 : 4 )

Each practitioner involved in intercultural exchange serves as a filter, interpreting the traditions of foreign cultures through the sensibilities of his/her own culture.

Pavis's discussion is interesting, because he sees Brook's *Mahabharata* as the most successful attempt to create a truly intercultural theatre<sup>19</sup>. Pavis bases his argument in terms of semiotics, and places the concept of interculturalism firmly within the trend of postmodernism, seeing it as an extension of the model provided by intertextuality. He stresses the importance of the concept of *mise-en-scene*<sup>20</sup>, which he sees as the locus of meaning in contemporary theatrical practice, saying that :

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<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Pavis' response to *The Mahabharata* , see Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>20</sup> Pavis defines *mise-en-scene* as :

“ ...*mise-en-scene*, as we understand it, is the synchronic confrontation of signifying systems, and it is their interaction, not their history, that is offered to the spectator and that produces meaning ... [ It is ] defined as the bringing together or confrontation, in a given space and time, of different signifying systems for an audience. *Mise-en-scene* is taken here to be a structural entity, a theoretical subject or object of knowledge.”

( 1992 : 24 )

“ Western *mise-en-scene* can reveal how the creation of meaning is conceived by our civilization, notably as a relationship of meaning when several sign systems coexist.”

( 1992 : 25 )

This idea of a constructed meaning, one which is made up of a collage of different elements which come from different sign systems, is one of the central concepts of the postmodern.<sup>21</sup> Pavis also points out that :

“ As soon as we are asked to take account of this segmentation of modeling - for example, when trying to convey a foreign culture to our western tradition - it becomes difficult to find a unifying point of view ; the result is a relativism in the concepts of culture and the real..... Relativism is particularly evident in what has been called the postmodern *mise-en-scene* of the classics : the rejection of any centralizing and committed reading, the leveling of codes, the undoing of discursive hierarchies, the rejection of a separation between ‘high’ culture and mass culture are all symptoms of the relativization of points of view.”

( 1992 : 14 )

This is similar to Brook’s view of the classics. He believes that the classics have to be re-interpreted in the light of contemporary modes of thought. Brook also believes in the use of both ‘high’ and ‘popular’ themes together, in order to create more compelling theatre.

This discussion has noted a number of political and moral objections to the concept of interculturalism. There are several particularly moral issues which are implicit in these kinds of cross-cultural transactions, which it would be unwise to ignore. Many consider the intercultural to be merely an extension of the colonial and imperial agenda. As we move closer to the twenty-first century, the issue of cultural ownership becomes increasingly fraught with conflicting ideals. The question which must be posed is ‘ Who has the right to speak for a people?’. Voicelessness is seen as a symptom of oppression, whether it be of women, for example, or of an entire people.

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<sup>21</sup> In an earlier chapter, the idea of Brook as a *bricoleur* was discussed. This ties in with what Pavis is saying here about the nature of *mise-en-scene* and the role of the director in constructing meaning.

Hélène Cixous sums up the dilemma of every practitioner involved in intercultural work when she asks :

“ ... how could I myself, of the species of people of letters, ever give speech to an illiterate peasant woman without taking it back from her, in a stroke of my word, without burying it in one of my fine phrases? So in my texts there can only be people who know how to read and write, how to juggle with signs ? And yet I love this Khmer peasant man, I love this royal mother of a village in Rajasthan who knows so many things and does not know she lives in a country I call India.”

( in Drain (ed.), 1995 : 340 )

But, as Julie Stone Peters points out, it is important to realise that no-one truly owns a particular culture :

“ Who owns a culture? Who inherits it, from the moments of celebration to the documents of barbarism? Nobody, of course. For when one inherits, one inherits a global collective web, a web not concentric or symmetrical, but connected in all its parts ( even if no one is privileged with seeing all parts of it at once ), a web which one is meant, indeed bound, to reweave.....  
... cultural representations, unlike either beads or land, can be borrowed without anyone missing them or attempting to retrieve them at gunpoint ; they have the grace ( like human beings ) to be fruitful and multiply without much training, and they have the good sense ( also like human beings ) to transform themselves in the process.”

( in Gainor (ed.), 1995 : 210 - 211 )

To attempt to own a culture is therefore to deny the fundamental fluidity of culture.

We cannot fix a culture into one form without killing it in the process. It is only through what Stone Peters calls “reweaving” that we keep our culture alive.

Allied to this question is the idea of ‘cultural piracy’, the concept of interculturalism as a form of grand theft of cultural artifacts and traditions. Of course, this kind of theft is not new, and was a popular part of the imperial effort of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A walk around the British Museum in London serves to confirm the acquisitive nature of the British Empire ; the greatest cultural treasures of their former colonies still reside in this huge store-house, away from the



people who made them and for whom they hold the greatest meaning. The recent efforts of cultural activists and traditional leaders in South Africa to ensure the return of human remains of tribal people housed in museums in Britain, are an example of how previously colonised peoples are seeking to reaffirm their ownership of their own cultures. Julie Stone Peters is of the opinion that:

“ ... theatre anthropology and the ostensibly intercultural performances that are its inheritors - from Artaud's hallucinatory ethnography, through 'ritual' theatre like Genet's, through the studies of anthropologists like Victor Turner and theatre theorists and practitioners like Richard Schechner and Eugenio Barba, through performance experimentation in the 1960s on, like that of Jerzy Grotowski, Lee Breuer, or Brook - are part of the pattern of Western imperialist appropriation. Such studies and performances perpetuate the dualisms which have been complicit in post-1950s neo-imperialism : anthropologist / primitive, writing / ritual, subject / object, observer / observed. At the same time, by representing others, intercultural practitioners and anthropologists continue to refuse those 'others' self-representation.”  
( in Gainor (ed.), 1995 : 202 - 203 )

This is an extreme statement, rejecting as it does so much of what has happened in theatre in the last three decades. A position such as this is as unrealistic and idealistic as that of practitioners who truly believe that they can eradicate all differences between the peoples of the world in order to unite humanity on every level. Both beliefs deny the reality in which we live ; there is no way in which to reverse the process of cultural exchange that has been taking place for centuries, and there is also no way to deny that this kind of exchange cannot eradicate the animosities that have built up between people of different races, cultures and religions, over the centuries.

Another critic of the intercultural effort is Rustom Bharucha, whose book *Theatre and the World - Performance and the politics of culture* is a virulent critique of the intercultural agenda, and all who participate in it. He says :

“ The practitioners of many traditional dances and rituals in India no longer perform for the gods ; they perform for tourists, research scholars and 'experts'. In payment for their performance, the actors no longer receive

*prasad* or the blessing of the gods - they get money and, at times, nothing at all. After all, there is no 'copyright' on traditional performances. So many of them have been videotaped without any acknowledgement or payment to the performers involved.

In contrast to this 'cultural piracy' the payment of money ... seems preferable. ... where money is used, the 'cultural exchange' becomes a pretext for an economic exchange. And money, which constitutively suggests power, is very powerful in an impoverished country like India."

( 1993 : 37 )

This goes straight to the crux of the matter ; ultimately, Western tourists or theatre practitioners have greater economic power than the people with whom they wish to exchange cultural currency, and so the bargain can never be made on equal footing. It is idealistic to expect this to be an equal exchange. We must accept that economics plays a vital and inescapable role in establishing power relationships. The only way to circumvent this is to be sensitive in our dealings with other cultures and to beware of exploitative behaviour, while still acknowledging the economic realities of the contemporary world.

The other key issue which arises out of the debate over interculturalism is that of authenticity. There is much complaint from a number of different critics about the corruption of certain traditions through their contact with, and use by, practitioners or tourists from the West. It is these critics' belief that there should only be one definitive form for any myth or ritual. The opposing argument points out that cultures are not set in stone ; they are in a constant state of flux, always involved in a process of change and growth. The increased speed of life in the late twentieth century means that this process of change is accelerated, which makes for feelings of confusion and loss as people become displaced within their world. Julie Stone Peters comments that :

"Those who insist on the radicality of difference feel uncomfortable with the mixing of cultures and forms. But such an insistence on authenticity ( an insistence on orthodoxy ) shows little recognition of the conditions of the theatre, or, for that matter, of cultural pluralism ( indeed culture's only

condition ) as a whole.[ They call ] on theatre to reproduce cultural forms with 'accuracy', rather than recognizing theatre's position as explorer in cultural forms..... To insist that theatre represent things in their 'appropriate context' (as Chin does) is to insist on the purity of cultural property, and is finally another version of the puritanical insistence that cultural identities have their unyielding boundaries....

If orientalism ( representation of the foreign as a fixed and uniform set of cultural features ) means dangerous stereotyping, so does the claim for 'authenticity'. Indeed, that claim is closely akin to the kind of purist cultural self-identity ... that is bound up with nationalist ideologies, with an us-versus-them mentality .....

Those who have not learned, in a world of migration, a world in which there are tens of millions of refugees, a world in which most nations are artificial constructs of the nineteenth century - those who have not learned that cultural identities ( like racial ones ) are fluid composites with multiple genealogies, will perpetuate for us all the sad history of racism and intercultural animosity that has been part of the human inheritance in the twentieth century."

( in Gainor, 1995 : 207 - 210 )

The failure of efforts to insist on the authenticity of culture, such as those of the Nazi Party in pre-war Germany, the Communist Party in the USSR, and the National Party in Apartheid-era South Africa, attest to the futility of such beliefs.

As Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei says, art cannot be concerned with the politically correct. It is her opinion that the role of the artist in society is to be open to influence and inspiration, rather than to support any particular political agenda :

"There are plenty of dangers in cross-fertilization in theater, but it is ultimately the artist's responsibility to allow herself to be influenced by every stimulus she encounters. ....

The current debates in the U.S.A. about Political Correctness, multiculturalism, and criteria for aesthetic judgment have one thing in common ; they forge the basic impulses inherent in the creation of art. The creative artist is not concerned about whether her work fits someone else's concept of what is currently 'politically correct' ; rather, she writes what she feels, what she sees, what she hears, according to internal criteria of beauty, morality, or truth.....

And that is precisely what makes her an artist, and not an advertising executive. Her only guidelines for what works and what is good art reside deep in her soul."

( 1994 : 131 - 132 )<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that Brook's work has always been concerned more with the psychological and spiritual, under Artaud's influence, than the purely political. Although Brook has been influenced by Brecht, and has had brief forays into political statement ( such as *US*), he has steered clear of making overtly political statements in his work.

Thus, creativity cannot be seen as secondary to the politically correct. Art should question, challenge and inspire. It becomes clear that trying to create intercultural work is like walking a tightrope ; on one side is the pitfall of neo-colonial exploitation, and on the other side lies the sterility of politically correct impartiality, with no heart and no magic. Sorgenfrei sums up this dilemma thus :

“ My personal goal is to return theatre to its mythic roots, to find the magic and terror inherent in live performance. I do not believe that photographic realism is the end result of 4000 years of dance and theatre. I want theatre that is full of color, ritual, dance, masks, mime, and metaphysical issues. If I sound like Artaud or Grotowski or Victor Turner or Tadashi Suzuki or Robert Wilson or Ariane Mnouchkine or Peter Brook, it's all right with me. Fusion has been around since the Greeks, since the Egyptians, since the Sanskrit masters. Inspiration by other cultures is the artist's right.”

( 1994 : 135)

Like Brook, Sorgenfrei seeks to make theatre that engenders a deep spiritual connection with the audience. The way to make exciting theatre is to allow ourselves to be inspired, and in turn, to inspire others.

In the last twenty years, it has become increasingly popular for the more experimental, ritual or myth-based theatrical works to be judged according to criteria which are borrowed from anthropology, rather than on purely artistic ones. Examples of this kind of critical assessment can be seen in Grimes' analysis of the work of Grotowski in *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (1982), and in Victor Turner's *From Ritual to Theatre* (1982). This seems to be an erroneous path to follow, because of the fundamental differences that exist between the purpose and methods of theatre and anthropology. While an anthropological approach may be useful in attempting to make new and interesting theatre, that work should then be assessed in terms of its theatrical effectiveness, rather than on its anthropological soundness. It is difficult to find worthwhile critical evaluation or analysis of so-called 'ritual theatre' that is not

anthropology-based. This seems to be the source of much of the controversy surrounding ritual theatre. J. Ndukaku Amankulor comments :

“The negative associations of ritual, though not explicitly emphasized by anthropologists, are nonetheless implied in their writings which for the most part deal with traditional societies in Africa, Asia, and other places where religious ritual and theatre still co-exist. Unable to see the relationship between theatre performances in Europe and America and theatre performances in the largely non-literate cultures of the world, the anthropologists coined the phrase ‘ritual theatre’ or ‘ritual drama’ as a convenient label for distinguishing the ‘otherness’ of non-Western performance traditions. This coinage changed the course of world performance studies as theatre scholars adopted the phrase, somewhat uncritically, specifically to describe or evaluate non-Western theatre and to isolate ritual in performance and theatre criticism.”

( 1996 : 46 )

Thus, the anthropological view of ritual drama serves only to narrow the scope of any critical evaluation.

Anthropologists study myths and rituals as artifacts or unchanging entities.

They regard the myths and rituals of the cultures that they examine to be ‘other’, or foreign; something to be studied and recorded within strict methods and guidelines of scientific research. While anthropology may call for a certain amount of creativity and inventiveness, it is not an art, but a science. Amankulor is of the opinion that :

“ The theatre scholar or practitioner cannot study the phenomenon of ritual in the theatre without losing the creative spirit in the theatre if he depends on any narrow framework dictated by anthropology. This creative spirit, used in the process of bringing theatre into being or evaluating its finished products, ranges freely but purposefully, in an attempt to tap the denotative as well as the connotative applications of ritual.”

( 1996 : 48 )

Thus, ritual and myth can become theatre when they are freed from the constraints of anthropological analysis. Patrice Pavis points out that :

“ Theatre can resolve one of anthropology’s difficulties : translating / visualising abstract elements of a culture, as a system of beliefs and values, by using concrete means : for example, performing instead of explaining a ritual,

showing rather than expounding the social conditions of individuals, using an immediately readable *gestus*.”  
(1992 : 16)

Theatre offers the opportunity to experience the ritual action. Theatre (along with graphic art and literature) makes use of myth and ritual as a kind of tool or building block. Many artists tend to be like magpies ; collecting interesting bits and pieces which are used to make something new. In the same way, myths and rituals function as vehicles or structures in which to explore different ways of expression<sup>23</sup> . Theatre uses myth and ritual to create synergy between cultures or ideas, and seeks to forge new myths and rituals out of old . This process allows for creative learning through experience.

It is vitally important that we recognise the considerable differences between the aims and methodology of theatre and anthropology. Much of the criticism against Brook’s work ( and intercultural theatre in general ) has centered around his flawed anthropological methods. It is the argument of this thesis that Brook’s work cannot be evaluated in this way. The fundamental differences that exist between the two areas of study preclude this. Theatre has to be evaluated primarily on artistic standards.

Theatre practitioners have approached the intercultural in a number of different ways, each using their own particular methods and agendas. In examining the work of a few of the key practitioners of intercultural theatre, it is possible to compare their ideas and methods with those of Brook, and to see how these practitioners have influenced each other over the last thirty years<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> One of the few practitioners who has managed to assimilate the methodology of anthropology into his work is Eugenio Barba, whose system of bartering of performance and skills is very similar to the model provided by anthropology.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed schematic view of Brook’s place within the larger tradition of the avante garde, see Fig. 3.

<i>Established</i>	<i>Alternative</i>	<i>Training</i>	<i>Writing</i>
Barbican	Avignon	Eugenio Barba/Odin Teatret	(Antonin Artaud/Bertolt Brecht/modernism)
Roger Blin	Augusto Boal →		Fernando Arrabal
Dario Fo	Bread and Puppet ←	Peter Brook	Samuel Beckett
<i>Intendantentheater</i>	Peter Brook/Bouffes du Nord →	(Jacques Copeau/Michel Saint-Denis tradition)	Caryl Churchill
National Theatre			Sarah Daniels
Trevor Nunn	Centre Ocean Stream ←	Jerzy Grotowski	Tankred Dorst
Piccolo Teatro	Check by Jowl ←	Jacques Lecoq	Friedrich Dürrenmatt
Roger Planchon/Villeurbanne	Complicité		Dario Fo
RSC/Peter Hall	Edinburgh Festival (alternative/Fringe)		Max Frisch
Peter Stein/Peter Zadek	Dario Fo		Witold Gombrowicz
Giorgio Strehler	Gardzienice		Vaclav Havel
Teatri stabili	Hull Truck ←		Eugène Ionesco
	Keith Johnstone →		Elfriede Jelinek
	Joan Littlewood →		Tadeusz Kantor
	Living Theater		Milan Kundera
	Mediaeval Players ←		Mike Leigh
	Ariane Mnouchkine →		John Osborne
	Mummenschanz		Harold Pinter
	Jérôme Savary		Gerlind Reinshagen
	Zbigniew Stok/Erika Häussler		Richard Schechner
	Teatr Osnia Dnia		Peter Weiss
	Theatre Machine		Arnold Wesker
	Trestle		
	Trickster		
	Jean Vilar/TNP ←		

*Notes:* In film one could also mention Ingmar Bergman, Harold Pinter and Pier Paolo Pasolini  
Arrows indicate movement towards another category

( Fig 3 ) Major Names in European Theatre

From : Ralph Yarrow, *European Theatre 1960 -1990 - Cross Cultural Perspectives*, 1992 , p.4.

This diagram serves to show how the many strands of theatrical endeavour in Europe intersect, and how various practitioners have influenced each other's work over the last thirty years. Brook's work occupies key positions in the sphere of alternative (or avante garde) theatre, and in the sphere of training. However, as Yarrow points out, Brook's work at the Bouffes du Nord is becoming increasingly established as it becomes more influential.

Jerzy Grotowski's influence, through his productions, his para-theatrical work, and his written output ( most notably his 1968 work *Towards a Poor Theatre* ), has had far reaching consequences in shaping the development of theatre over the last thirty years. His thinking revolutionised the way in which we make theatre, and many people working in theatre today have felt and absorbed his influence in some way or another (see Fig. 3) . Like Brook and Barba, Grotowski's *via negativa* depends on rigorous training, and like many others, Grotowski originally turned to the East in search of techniques with which to enhance his methods :

“ Apart from the acting methods of Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Dullin, Delsarte, Marcel Marceau, Grotowski also turned to the training processes of the classical Chinese theatre ( after his visit to China in 1962 ) and the traditional dance-drama of India. *Mudras*, eye movements, and breathing exercises were rehearsed with rigour and precision, For a number of years, Kathakali and Yoga provided the foundations of Grotowski's psycho-physical exercises.”  
( Bharucha, 1993 : 24 - 25 )

Later in his career, Grotowski moved away from these borrowed techniques, preferring to explore the possibilities of self-transcendence through performance. His emphasis on direct communication with the audience led to the gradual shrinking of the number of people to whom he would present his work. By the mid-1970s, he had abandoned all forms of performance for an audience, and moved into what he termed 'para-theatrical' work :

“... Grotowski's subsequent development led to the gradual elimination of any distinction between actor and spectator : ‘ The very word “spectator”.... is theatrical, dead. It excludes meeting, it excludes the relation : man-man.’ But eliminating the audience meant, ultimately, the abandonment of performance itself. This led to a withdrawal from the stage in the mid-1970s. .... In its place, Grotowski gathered together a fluid ‘transcultural group’ to find keys to personal being that preceded cultural, or even individual differentiation, and thus formed the ‘sources’ of human experience. Through physical techniques associated with different, specifically non-Christian and non-western religions, such as Yoga ( India ), dervishes ( Islam ), shamanism ( North American Indian) and the martial arts of Zen Buddhism, he arrived at a ‘Theatre of



Sources` which had nothing to do with stage performance or productions in any sense.”

( Innes, 1993 : 163 )

This ‘Theatre of Sources’ is much like Brook’s culture of links. However, Brook’s emphasis on the importance of the audience, and his determination to have both process and product are contradictory to Grotowski’s aims. I find Grotowski’s more recent work difficult to categorise. His work would seem to constitute an experiment into the nature of performance, but it is difficult to describe it as theatre. He seems to have entered the realm of psychotherapy and spiritualism. In his essay “Goodbye Grotowski”, which is directly addressed to Grotowski in the form of a letter, Rustom Bharucha asks some pertinent questions :

“ My problem lies with your decision to extend [your] process of self-exploration to all people, not just to the actors you had worked with closely over the years, but to strangers from different social and cultural contexts. Let us not forget that hundreds, and at times, thousands of people, have participated in your para-theatrical projects over the years. What was your responsibility to these predominately nameless people, as you moved from one sphere of activity to another ? Working in the theatre raises sufficient problems concerning the ‘personal truth` and ‘self-realization` of actors. But in para-theatrical work, where the human being is all that matters, it seems to me that the responsibility of caring for the individual is even greater.”  
( 1993 : 43 )

Like Bharucha, I am uncomfortable with Grotowski’s para-theatrical work. His agenda is far from clear, and the opportunity exists for him both to exploit and disturb those who participate in his experiments.

Eugenio Barba’s work with the Odin Theatret and ISTA, the International School of Theatre Anthropology, has placed him at the forefront of avante garde and intercultural work for the last three decades. Like Brook and Grotowski, it was during the 1960s that Barba’s intercultural work began. He began his career as Grotowski’s assistant, and in editing Grotowski’s book *Towards a Poor Theatre* ( 1968 ), he was

instrumental in bringing Grotowski's work to the notice of the world. This early influence has coloured Barba's work ever since. Phillip B. Zarrilli points out that :

“ During the 1960s Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba combined the notion of training / transformation with the scientific metaphor of research laboratory as they founded centers where their ensembles of actors could train as well as conceive and workshop productions relatively unencumbered by the constraints of time. For Grotowski and Barba, this quest for transformative exercises, focused at first on developing ‘psychophysical techniques’, that is, techniques which equally engaged the actor's mind ( psycho ) and body ( physical ) in a ‘total’ intensive engagement in the moment. “

( 1995 :74 )

The Odin Theatret was founded in 1964, and since 1966 has been based in Holstebro, Denmark. Like Brook, Barba has worked with a small group of people for the last few decades. The company's work is based on constant training of both the body and the voice. Like Grotowski and Brook, Barba and his actors make use of Eastern techniques in order to enhance their training methods<sup>25</sup>. The company have also travelled widely, practicing their own particular brand of barter whereby they try to exchange performances with the local population . Obviously, there are times when this approach does not work, but it does allow for some interesting exchanges of ideas. Under the guise of the ISTA, Barba has also spent many years studying the relationship between the theatre of the East and the West:

“Specializing in the ‘transcultural analysis of performance’, ISTA applies the techniques and artistic approach of Oriental traditions - Noh, Kyogen, Kabuki, and Kathakali, Balinese and Indian Odissi dance - to developing a western form of physical stylization. In conscious opposition to the standard European focus on psychology in acting ( from the conventional focus on characterization, to Grotowski's psychotherapy ), the work of the school has focused on neurophysiological analysis of the actor's ‘presence’, and vocal studies of the difference between speech in everyday and ‘performance’ situations.....Using the same terminology as Grotowski, in describing ISTA's aims as the development of ‘pre-expressivity’ through focusing on a ‘biological’ level,

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<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that Brook has never emphasised the learning of a body technique. He asks his actors to transcend their technique, to find a common impulse that lies beyond tradition and technique.

Barba defined 'Theatre Anthropology' as 'the study of the behaviour of the human being when it uses its physical and mental presence in an organized performance situation'."

( Innes : 168 )

Clearly, Barba's concept of theatre anthropology, and his use of barter, are similar to Brook's search for the culture of links. Each of them has a similar goal in mind, although Barba is not in search of a basic form of communication, but rather he seeks an equal exchange. He tries to find that which is *precultural*, to use Pavis's terminology. Barba says of his work :

"It is possible to consider the theatre in terms of ethnic, national, group, or even individual traditions. But if in doing so one seeks to comprehend one's own identity, it is also essential to take the opposite and complementary view: to think of one's own theatre in a transcultural dimension, in the flow of a 'tradition of traditions'. .....

Eurasian theatre is necessary today as we move from the 20th into the 21st century. I am not thinking of Oriental stories interpreted with an Occidental's sensibility, nor am I thinking of techniques to be reproduced, nor the invention of new codes. ....

I am thinking of those few spectators capable of following or accompanying the actor in the dance of thought-in-action. ....

For them theatre is a relationship which neither establishes a union nor creates a communion; but ritualizes the reciprocal strangeness and the laceration of the social body hidden beneath the uniform skin of dead myths and values."

( 1988 : 126 - 130 )

Ariane Mnouchkine is another director whose work bears the stamp of intercultural effort. Like Brook, Grotowski and Barba, she works with a small group of people who have worked together for years. She was instrumental in the setting up of the Théâtre du Soleil in 1964, and has worked with them ever since:

"The company, unequivocally associated with Ariane Mnouchkine, its *metteur en scène* and one of its co-founders ....., has moved away from psychological realism towards a militant approach to theatre that has drawn on numerous ritualistic traditions and carnivalesque popular forms. Providing a stylistically eclectic and formally inventive theatre, Mnouchkine's productions have been credited with offering ravishing fusions of Oriental and Occidental cultural scenographies and simultaneously denigrated as naive and offensive recourse to exotic ornamentation."

( Delgado & Heritage (eds.), 1996 : 176 )

Her early travels in the East engendered in her a deep and abiding love for the Oriental. She says, "My love for Asia and Asian theatre has determined much of my work." (quoted in Delgado & Heritage ( eds.), 1996 : 188). In 1987, she also tackled the subject of Indian history, with *The Indiade, or the India of their Dreams*, which prompted comparisons with Brook's work. However, as Christopher Innes points out, there is a definite political agenda in Mnouchkine's work :

" The superficial impression of these Théâtre du Soleil productions may be similar to the primitivism that characterizes so much other avante garde art, and the essential quality of the East is also seen as a corrective to standard western/ capitalist / masculine constructs of power. Yet where the earlier forms of primitivism unconsciously adopted the colonial attitude that was basic to the society they rejected, Mnouchkine makes it the focus of her attack ."

( 1993 : 213 )

The feminist position from which Mnouchkine often works, her political agenda, and her fascination purely with Eastern theatre, serve to limit the parallels between her work and that of Brook.

Rustom Bharucha is critical of the intercultural effort, and proposes instead his own interpretation of this kind of work, which he calls *intracultural theatre*. Here, he attempts to mediate between the various cultures which co-exist within the nation of India :

"Defying the assumed cultural homogeneity of a 'single nation', India embraces a rampantly multicultural, multilingual ensemble of cultures, with sixteen constitutionally recognized languages, hundreds of dialects, and oral traditions of epic narrative which are practised in every state.....  
The cruel paradox is that we live with diverse cultures in India, but more often than not we live in ignorance of their realities, or else with a calculated indifference to their differences. Perhaps this is one way of surviving and constructing our own identities. ....  
The context of intraculturalism in India today is constituted through these multiple Others ( at times, distinct or overlapping in their formulations ), and there is no way that meaningful intervention in theatre can function without working through their contradictions."

( Bharucha, 1996 : 118 - 119 )

This quote could just as easily refer to the situation in South Africa, where we also live with multiple cultures and languages. Attempts within this country to mediate between our many cultural identities, within the larger definition of being South African, can be seen to be intercultural, rather than intracultural. The distinction is a negligible one, and as such is essentially meaningless. What Bharucha describes as intracultural, I regard as being wholly intercultural ; the fact that his work makes use of different cultures which happen to reside within the same national boundaries is not sufficient to warrant his use of a completely separate category for his work. It is also interesting to note that the texts which Bharucha has used in his intracultural efforts are all Western in origin (*Request Concert* by Kroeitz, *Woyzeck* by Buchner and Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*), and have undergone a process of translation and adaptation for the Indian audience. It is difficult to accept that this is not intercultural work ; Bharucha's work constitutes an interesting change in the direction of cultural exchange, working from West to East, as opposed to the other way around, which we see far more often.

Brook's search for the culture of links is part of a broader trend in world theatre. He is part of a group of practitioners, many of whom are considered to be the leading thinkers in contemporary theatre. Together, this disparate group are all working towards a similar aim : the establishment of a global community, and the possibility of communication and communion across racial, cultural and language boundaries. The majority of these practitioners believe that culture cannot be frozen, and that attempts to preserve a culture can only serve to destroy it. They believe that culture is fluid and ever-changing under the constant bombardment of stimuli and influences which characterises our post-modern world. As Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei says, the artist cannot be made subservient to the politically correct. As each artist

interprets and re-interprets the world around him, so cultures change. The critical response to such intercultural work cannot be formulated according to the criteria of the politically or anthropologically correct. Each intercultural attempt needs to be seen in terms of its own artistic merit.

## Chapter 4

### The Great Story of the World

*The Mahabharata*, which engaged Brook's attention for approximately fifteen years, offers Brook's most ambitious and accomplished use of myth and ritual. This production, which toured the world in both a French and an English version, was filmed for television and became a feature film, is one of the high points of Brook's career<sup>26</sup>. It is here that Brook's ongoing fascination with the myths and rituals of non-Western cultures finds its greatest expression. The universal appeal of the plot also provides an example of how Brook tries to create the culture of links by establishing contact between people from different cultural backgrounds through the medium of theatre. The huge scope of the Indian epic allowed Brook to explore many different ideas, and implement his theories on a number of different levels. Gerry O'Connor believes that :

“ *The Mahabharata* is the peak of a life's effort to explore a vision of the theatre as a revitalising force to counter the decaying conventions of Western entertainment, which Brook has called 'The Deadly Theatre'...”  
( 1989 : 27 )

*The Mahabharata* is also interesting because it became the focal point for a great deal of controversy and debate regarding key issues in the making of intercultural theatre.

Julie Stone Peters points out that :

“ Brook and Carrière's *Mahabharata* focussed the discussion of these issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s, generating such controversy because the production was created at a moment in which it could become the axis for a

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<sup>26</sup> Please note that my discussion of *The Mahabharata* depends on a study of the published text, and a critical examination of the 6 hour version which was made for television and broadcast in English. I have no access to the live performance, except through written reports, and so my experience of the production has been mediated through the medium of television.

collection of contested claims, of larger cultural desires and fears: The desire to represent the foreign on the part of regions that had dominated global culture since at least the eighteenth century, and the recognition that any such representation must come to terms with the history of colonialism ; the desire of culturally marginalised regions to represent their own cultural histories and the fear that their histories are, by now, whatever colonialism .... has made them. The discussion surrounding Brook's *Mahabharata* raised one of the crucial questions of the late twentieth century : to whom do 'cultures' - and the products that configure them - belong ? Not ( as at mid-century ) who has the right to possess cultural objects, but : Who has the right to represent them ?"  
( in Gainor (ed.), 1995 :203 - 204 )

As noted in the discussion of interculturalism in chapter three, this issue of ownership is one of the most difficult to resolve, and can lead practitioners into great difficulties in attempting to represent other cultures. *The Mahabharata* became the focus of so much comment not only because of its content or its artistic merit, but also because Brook is so well-known, and because of the particular timing of the production.

*The Mahabharata* is the basis of Hindu thought and philosophy, and forms a large part of the teachings of Hinduism. Vijay Mishra says :

"It is perhaps not too much of an exaggeration to say that *The Mahabharata* is the founding text of Indian culture. The Puranas, dramatic texts (both classical and modern), medieval romance, the Indian bourgeois novel and finally the Indian film all retrieve the rules of their formation from *The Mahabharata*. There is something so dreadfully imperialistic about this text that, in a moment of wild generalisation or enthusiasm, we may indeed claim that all Indian literary, filmic and theatrical texts endlessly rewrite *The Mahabharata*."  
( in Williams (ed.), 1991 : 195 )

Thus, the collection of myths which make up *The Mahabharata* can be seen as the foundation of Indian culture and art. Brook's *Mahabharata* took ten years to develop, after he and Jean-Claude Carrière first encountered the stories in 1974. The length of time needed to develop the piece was warranted by the vast amount of material with which they had to work. The Sanskrit *Mahabharata* is 100 000 stanzas long : fifteen times the length of the Bible. The final production was nine hours long, and was divided into three sections, each approximately three hours in duration : 'The Game of



Dice', 'Exile in the Forest', and 'The War'. The central story line is a simple one : it concerns the drawn-out battle between two warring sets of cousins - the Pandavas (of which there are five brothers), and the Kauravas (of which there are one hundred brothers) - for domination of the kingdom. *The Mahabharata* bears some resemblance to contemporary soap operas in its convoluted plot regarding the machinations of a powerful family. This vast narrative offered Brook ample opportunity to experiment and explore.

In my discussion of *The Mahabharata*, I am not attempting to make a full-fledged analysis of the production, simply because the scale of the production is so large that the task would be unmanageable. I will attempt to discuss three key aspects of the production in order to illustrate my argument. Broadly defined, the three issues I will consider are *authenticity*, *visual/sensory presentation* and *critical response*. The issue of authenticity in *The Mahabharata* offers a chance to make a closer examination of Brook's use of myth. While there has been much negative comment on Brook's interpretation of the mythic material, it is nevertheless possible to see how Brook uses the myth according to his theatrical aims. Similarly, a discussion of the visual or sensory presentation of *The Mahabharata* facilitates an examination of the use of elements of ritual in Brook's production. This research also offers a view of how Brook tries to mediate between the Indian epic and his Western audience, in an attempt to foster the culture of links. A survey of the critical response to Brook's *Mahabharata* provides a number of examples of the type of evaluation which depends on anthropological and political criteria, as well as pointing to the moral issues raised by Brook's conduct while in India. A close examination of the comments of four selected critics allows an assessment of the strengths and

weaknesses of this kind of critical endeavour. The researcher is also able to decide to what extent Brook's dealings with Indian artists contribute or detract from his aim of creating a culture of links.

Much criticism has been levelled at Brook and Carrière for their alleged corruption of the *Mahabharata* myth, and their selective use of the various parts of the story line. However, there is no one definitive version of the *Mahabharata*. The version you see depends a great deal on where you see it and how you see it performed, as there are different versions in different parts of India. The variety of performance traditions in India has led to the development of a number of different interpretations of the basic mythic material. There have also been a number of film and television versions made in India, each of which provided its own slant to the material. Brook's version is simply the latest interpretation of this age-old story. Vijay Mishra points out that :

“ ... *The Mahabharata* is a number of texts. There is, of course, the text as edited, the text which is a result of a labour of scholarship, probably alien to Indian editorial practices. .... But there are at least three other very important texts of *The Mahabharata*. The first one of these comes closest to India's heart because it is passed on from mother to child. Initially told in fragments, over the years, a complete *Mahabharata* text is handed down. Every Hindu child receives it, and knows its genealogy off by heart. Second there is the *Mahabharata* text as it exists through folk, theatrical and filmic representations. Since these forms permeate Indian society at every level, *The Mahabharata*, for the Indian, is mediated through these cultural practices or forms. Finally, there is *The Mahabharata* -in-translation, both in Indian vernaculars and in major world languages. Here, depending on the culture of the receptor language, *The Mahabharata* becomes an extraordinarily varied and unstable text.

I have used this lengthy preamble to introduce what I consider is both a continuation and a radical reinterpretation of the textual and critical traditions of *The Mahabharata* outlined so far. This is Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*, arguably the theatrical spectacle of the century, nine hours of sheer theatre unsurpassed in the known history of *The Mahabharata*. It is a theatrical event

of such epic proportions that it will change the *Mahabharata*-as-world-text forever.”

( in Williams (ed.), 1991 : 200 - 201 )

Brook’s version should be seen as a radical re-imagining of the epic, one that is part of the continuing evolution of the text.

One of the key objections to Brook’s interpretation of the epic is that he has eliminated many of the secondary tales and minor details, to create a linear plot development. Rustom Bharucha disagrees with this practice, saying, “ Nothing could be more foreign to the *Mahabharata* than linearity.” (1993 : 75). Jean- Claude Carrière also invented certain scenes, and truncated others in order to simplify the plot :

“Carrière made it clear that nearly half of the scenes in the play do not appear in the original. He had cut the secondary stories - which are those the characters tell among themselves - but reinforced and filled out the principal events, finding different ways of enriching the sixteen main personages by incorporating in them bits of other abandoned characters. The didactic matter has also been cut .....

( O’Connor, 1989 : 59 )

Thus, we are never told the story of Drona’s rivalry with Draupadi’s father, or the reasons why Dhristhadyumna was born to kill Drona. Other omissions include the seventeen peaceful years of Yudhishtira’s reign after the end of the war, as well as Bhishma’s 300 page discussion of the duties of a king as he lies dying, which Carrière allows Vyasa to summarise, saying :

“ He spoke for a long time to Yudhishtira from his bed of arrows. At the gate of death, he taught him the hard profession of kingship and the secret of the movements of mankind. He told him all that he had to tell. Then, the sun was ready to touch its zenith and Bhishma felt that his end was near.”

( Carrière, 1987 : 225 )

The most criticised omission from Brook’s interpretation was the section of *The Mahabharata* known as the *Bhagavad Gita*. Many critics see this section as the heart of the myth, and found Brook’s handling of this section particularly flawed. Carrière

refers only briefly to this long philosophical discussion between Krishna and Arjuna at the beginning of the war:

“ ARJUNA : Krishna, my legs grow weak, my mouth is dry, my body trembles, my bow slips from my hands, my skin burns. I can no longer stand. What good can come from this battle ? My family will be massacred. If this is the price, who can wish for victory, or pleasure, or even life ? Uncles, cousins, nephews, and Drona, my teacher - they are all there. I can't bring death to my own family. How could I dare to be happy again ? No, I prefer not to defend myself. I will wait here for death.

.....

KRISHNA : What is this mad and shameful weakness ? Stand up.

ARJUNA : How can I aim my arrows at Bhishma, at Drona ? I'd rather be the lowest outcast. I am in anguish, my resolution's gone. I'm shaking. I've no hold on my mind. Teach me.

KRISHNA : Victory and defeat, pleasure and pain are all the same. Act, but don't reflect on the fruits of the act. Forget desire ; seek detachment.

ARJUNA : Yet you urge me to battle, to massacre. Your words are ambiguous. I am confused.

KRISHNA : Renunciation is not enough. You must not withdraw into solitude. You must not stay without action, for we are here to serve the world.

ARJUNA : Yes, I know.

KRISHNA : You must rise up free from hope and throw yourself into the battle.

ARJUNA : I cannot. *Krishna murmurs in his ear.* How can I put into practice what you're demanding of me ? The mind is capricious, unstable ; its evasive, feverish, turbulent, tenacious. It's harder to subdue than taming the wind.

.....

KRISHNA : There is a way to rid oneself of this poison.

ARJUNA : What is this way ?

KRISHNA: *changing his tone* To reply to his question, Krishna led him through the tangled forest of illusion. He began to teach him the ancient yoga of wisdom and the mysterious path of action. He

spoke for a long time, a very long time, between the two armies preparing to destroy themselves.”

( Carrière, 1987 : 158 - 160 )

Thus, Carrière allows us to understand the nature of this discussion, without going into all its details. This is a good choice in terms of the dramatic impact of the piece. Brook's *Mahabharata* is already in danger of being far too wordy. Here, Carrière omits a large section of the text where two characters simply sit and talk in favour of the action of the war itself, which creates a far more interesting spectacle.

This stripping down of the *Mahabharata* is consistent with much of Brook's other work. He seeks always to reduce theatrical images to their essence. He is also attempting to convey the story to a Western audience, unfamiliar with *The Mahabharata*. Including convoluted plot developments and minor characters would only serve to confuse his audience. Brook says :

“Art means celebrating the most refined possibilities of every element, and art means extracting the essence from every detail so that the detail can reveal itself as a meaningful part of an inseparable whole.”

( in Williams (ed.), 1991 : 43 )

Brook is concerned with theatrical effectiveness rather than slavish adherence to the text. He finds his answers through a process of trial and error, and part of this involves the removal of superfluous detail. The model that both Brook and Carrière cite is that of Shakespeare. He too was a great borrower of stories, which he bent to suit his own theatrical needs. Any study of Shakespeare's history plays shows a clear discrepancy between historical fact and the development of his plots. However, within the confines of the theatrical performance, Shakespeare's choices make for better theatre.

Brook states :

“ We know that Shakespeare was a great rewriter, he hardly ever invented a plot. He took old stories and rewrote them and the uniquely Shakespearean touch was to break open anything that seemed schematic, stories that seemed

to have good people and villains, for instance, and humanize them. Humanizing them meant going away from simplified epic figures and filling them out so that every Shakespearean character actually goes beyond judgement.”

( in Williams (ed.), 1991 : 57 )

Brook has long acknowledged a debt to Shakespeare, using the Elizabethan theatre as a model for what he calls “the unreconciled opposition of Rough and Holy”( 1968 : 96). This attempt to form a synthesis between ‘high’ art and ‘popular’ themes can also be seen in a number of comic episodes in *The Mahabharata*.

The key question which one must ask with regard to the issue of authenticity is: Does interpretation equal exploitation ? Rustom Bharucha would seem to think so, calling Brook’s production “one of the most blatant (and accomplished) appropriations of Indian culture in recent years.” (1993 : 68). However, Maria Shevtsova disagrees :

“ *The Mahabharata*’s voyage far and wide over the centuries shows that it has been interpreted through innumerable channels. Can Brook really be an exception, especially as we cannot avoid bringing what we have to what we do not have in order to understand and share it ? The idea that we come with nothing, in some sort of pure, ‘virgin’ state, to art ( conceived equally as ‘virgin’ territory ) as well as to our relations in society may be appealing, but it is sheer myth.”

( in Williams (ed.), 1991 : 218 )

The fundamental point is that Brook’s production is only one interpretation of many. The critic or theorist is forced to decide whether the artist has the right to choose what is most important for him/her and to use that to the best effect . As we saw in the last chapter, this is one of the most contentious issues raised by the intercultural agenda. The director and writer must always be selective and prioritise elements of the story. For Brook, the most interesting parts of the *Mahabharata* myth are those which support his concept of the culture of links. Brook is unlikely to make use of parts of the story that detract from the dramatic impact of the piece. Art cannot be made subservient to the demands of politics, and artists should have the

freedom to choose and shape their material as they see fit. Otherwise the critic is engaged in a kind of cultural Nazi-ism that is far more dangerous than the mistakes made by artists in their attempts to create intercultural theatre.

Brook uses myths because of their living quality, and because he sees them as universal narratives that can appeal to a broad spectrum of people across the world.

*The Mahabharata* offers both these qualities. Maria Shevtsova notes :

“ By ‘universal’ here is meant that *The Mahabharata*’s tremendous scope referred to above allows virtually everybody to take from it what they need in given circumstances. It can be turned to for personal inspiration and edification, spiritual or secular. It can be used for the great public issues of our time. .... In short, whatever may have caused Brook to discover *The Mahabharata* initially, his encounter with it was not fortuitous. Its universality could be nothing but compelling for a director who believes that theatre fulfills its potential only when it brings together and blends all the imaginable contours of human experience - this giving theatre its social character and, at the same time, its artistic justification, beauty and pleasure.”  
( in Williams (ed.), 1991 : 216 - 217 )

Brook reinterprets the mythic material of *The Mahabharata* in order to emphasise this universal quality. In this way he acts as a mediating force between the epic and the Western audience. Without Brook’s intervention this audience would probably find *The Mahabharata* confusing. In filtering the mythic material of Indian culture through his own cultural sensibilities Brook seeks to communicate the living quality of *The Mahabharata* while still allowing his audience to understand and relate to what they are seeing. Thus, Brook succeeds in creating a form of global theatre that brings together the various cultures of the world.

Perhaps the last word regarding the issue of authenticity should go to Mallika Sarabhai, the only Indian member of the cast. Raised in the Hindu faith, Sarabhai grew up knowing the *Mahabharata*. When Brook first met her, she and her mother were performing their own version of the *Mahabharata*, seen from the point of view of the

women in the story. Her portrayal of Draupadi in Brook's production showed sensitivity and strength, and her deep affiliation with the material was very evident. Because she was so close to the *Mahabharata*, Sarabhai brought a very strong interpretation to her role :

“In Hinduism woman occupies a very different role from the one idealised in Christianity. Mallika Sarabhai, who played Draupadi,..... complained that at first this ideal creature whom she had worshipped since childhood had been awfully represented in the Brook-Carrière version. ... She questioned why Draupadi had so little to do, why many of her scenes had been omitted, in favour of the dramatised ‘masculine warrior side’. .... She argued her case passionately.”

( O'Connor, 1989 : 90 - 91 )

Sarabhai's intervention changed Carrière's concept of the character, and so strengthened the interpretation of the epic. In answer to criticism from various sources about her involvement with Brook, she was adamant in her defense of his production, saying :

“I am proud as an Indian to be in the play. Had I not thought it was a proper representation of *The Mahabharata*, the product of a loving and true attitude, I would not have taken part.”

( quoted in O'Connor, 1989 : 92 )

In the visual presentation of *The Mahabharata*, we see an extension of the use of elements of ritual in Brook's work, as well as an attempt at an intercultural imagining of the epic. As in much of Brook's earlier work, the sense of ritual is conveyed through stylised design as well as stylised movement and speech patterns. Gestures become ritualistic, such as the bowed greeting with palms together which is used throughout the performance. Through stylisation, a ceremonial mode of playing emerges which connects the audience to a sense of ritual. As in much of Brook's work, small rituals are created without an attempt to reproduce any kind of traditional ritual. There are many examples of ritualised behaviour such as Ekalavya's worship of



Drona's statue, Draupadi's actions as she curses the Kauravas in the gaming hall, the cleansing ritual which Dhuryodhana performs with water and fire, which enables him to see Arjuna as he goes in search of Pasupata, the blessing of weapons before the war, and the actions which Krishna performs in order to call Gatotkacha to his family's aid<sup>27</sup>. One of the most effective instance of ritualistic behaviour is Kunti's use of her mantra, and the resulting birth of the five Pandavas :

“ PANDU : Don't hesitate. Say your mantra.

KUNTI : Which god should I call down first ?

PANDU : Evoke Dharma. Yes, Dharma. Beyond him all thought must stop. *Kunti says her mantra. Ganesha and Vyasa create an elaborate and ferocious ceremony. The boy is caught up in it, he becomes part of the ritual ; Ganesha puts a sword in his hands. Shadowy figures appear in the background. Pandu says to Kunti : I beseech you, give me another child. Evoke Vayu, god of the wind. Kunti says her mantra a second time. Ganesha puts a club in the boy's hands. ....*

KUNTI : Now I call on Indra, king of gods. *Ganesha puts a bow and arrow in the boy's hands. A flame leaps up. ....*

MADRI : Kunti, lend me your mantra, so that I can have children too.

PANDU : Madri, evoke the Ashwins, the twin gods with golden eyes. *Madri says the mantra. A last flame leaps up. Five men come forward. ...*

KUNTI : This is Yudhishtira, our first born, son of Dharma - irreproachable, flawless, Yudhishtira, born to be king. Here is Bhima, son of the wind, strong as thunder. At his birth, he fell on a rock and split it in two. Here is Arjuna, the perfect warrior, born to conquer.

MADRI : Here are our two sons, Nakula and Sahadeva, as inseparable as patience and wisdom. *Pandu looks with pride at his five children.*”

( Carrière, 1987 : 19 )

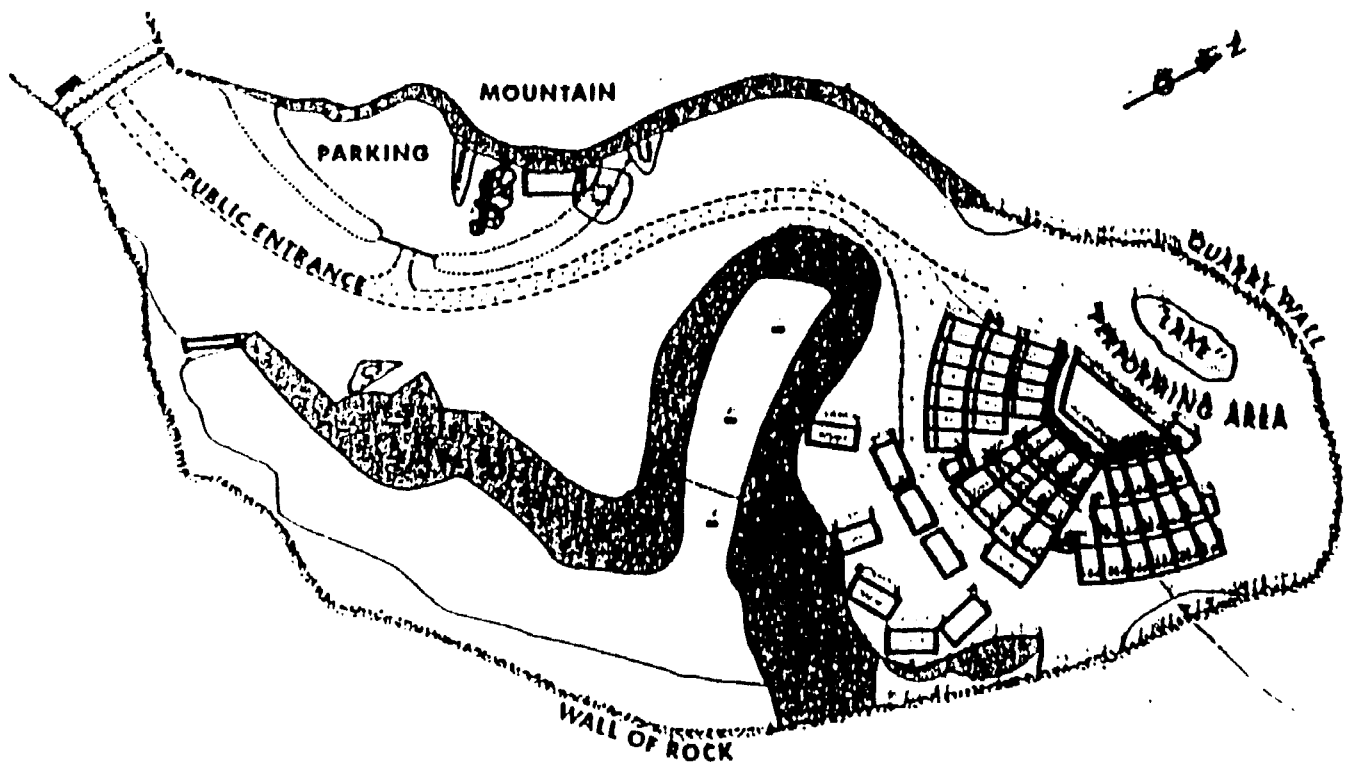
<sup>27</sup> These are just a few examples of ritual actions which one notices in *The Mahabharata*. A close examination of the televised version offers many more instances of ritualistic behaviour.

The stage directions point to the importance of ritual action in this section. The placing of weapons in the boy's hands symbolises each of the Pandavas as they are born. Thus, the audience is given a textual and a visual clue to the nature of each of these five important characters. In the televised version, special effects are used to present this ritual, heralding the birth of the Pandavas. Elements of ritual are evident in the altar before which Kunti kneels to say her mantra and in the precise gestures which Kunti uses, which are reminiscent of the Catholic Mass.

One of the strongest aspects of the production is the design, which creates a pervasive atmosphere of India through allusion and suggestion. Chloe Obolensky, the designer, used India as a starting point for her design. She travelled to India with Brook and Carrière, and returned with a loose group of sensory impressions which served as a springboard for her design. Because of the length of the play, and because of its vast scope, she had to design a non-specific environment that still evoked the right kind of atmosphere for the piece. This is achieved through the use of three key elements : fire, earth and water. The rest of the 'scenery' is made up of small props which can be used in a variety of different ways, such as rugs, lengths of cloth, reeds or canes, oil lamps etcetera. On one level, the versatile use of these elements to create an impression of a palace or a battlefield reflects the way in which Brook approaches mythic material ; as a set of building blocks or puzzle pieces that can be put together in a number of different ways in order to create something new. There is no attempt made to recreate an Indian landscape. The landscape created is neutral and suggestive rather than specific, and in each performance venue the same sense of a versatile space was re-created<sup>28</sup>. In watching the televised version, one becomes aware

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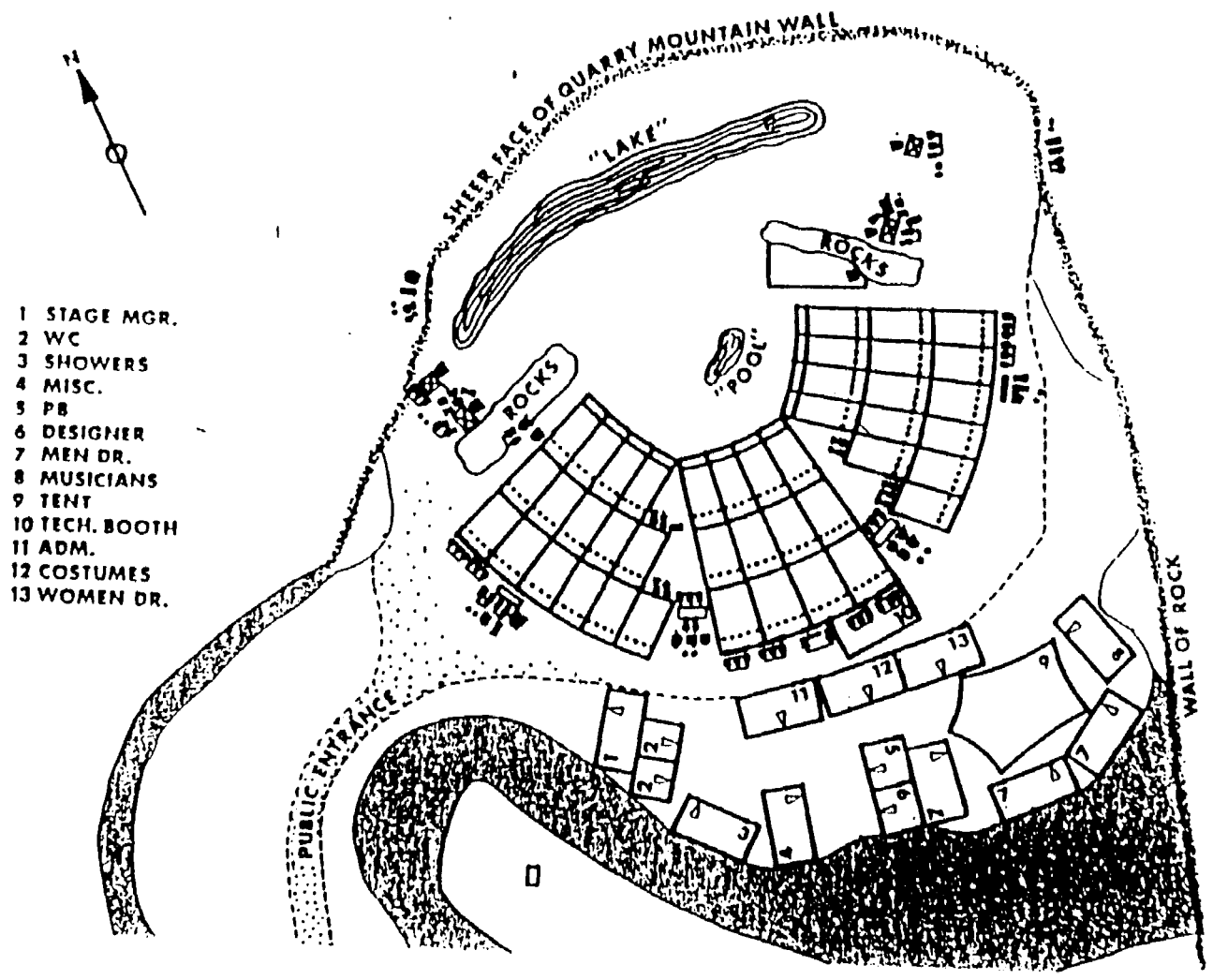
<sup>28</sup> See Fig. 4 & 5



(Fig. 4) Overview plan of entire quarry at Avignon, where *The Mahabharata* was first performed.

From : *The Drama Review*, Vol. 30, Number 1 (T109), Spring 1986, p. 53

It is interesting to note how Obolensky has built her design into the heart of the quarry, and has incorporated key features such as the sheer walls of the quarry, in order to achieve a natural synthesis between the design and the natural environment. The fact that the audience have to walk through the quarry in order to reach the performance site allows them to be drawn into the natural medium of the design.



(Fig. 5) An overview plan of the performance space in the quarry at Avignon.

From : *The Drama Review*, Vol. 30, Number 1 (T109), Spring 1986, p. 60.

This close-up view of the performance space allows us to see the placement of the pool and lake. It is interesting to note that the placement of lighting apparatus and dressing rooms etc. are all very unobtrusive, in keeping with the natural style of the design.

of the same scenic devices being used repeatedly in a variety of different ways : the reeds and the lake or pond are used as Pandu's hunting grounds, the scene of Pandu's death, the venue for Ekalavya's statue of Drona, the site of the Pandavas' camp during their period of exile, the lake of Dharma and King Vitara's palace. However, the careful use of these repeated elements allows the environment to become neutral. The viewer's sense of disbelief disappears as the background becomes less important than the action of the plot. The neutrality of the scenery frees the viewer's imagination, while also serving as a constant reminder that one is viewing a theatrical performance translated onto film. The versatile use of the scenic devices is *theatrical* in the best sense of the word. Colin Counsell sees this neutral and open setting as the ultimate expression of Brook's 'empty space':

“ ...it is perhaps *The Mahabharata*, .... which best illustrates the empty space's *practical* utility. The nine-hour epic journeys from battlefields to palaces, forests, mountaintops and humble peasant huts, moving from the ordinary domestic world of human beings to the mythic realm of legendary heroes, and the divine, Invisible domain of gods and spirits. These would demand very different kinds of set ; a realistic domestic backdrop would hamper any attempt to depict mythic or divine events. Only by eschewing sets entirely was Brook able to depict the range of loci, and thus the range of reality's planes, that this magical tale described.”

( 1996 : 147 )

The 'empty space' created by Obolensky functions as a ritual space, providing an area in which the actors leave their everyday personas, and enter the mythic world of the gods. The beaten earth floor, the stream and pond, and the spectacular use of fire create a sense of timelessness and permanence, which reinforces the seriousness of the *Mahabharata*'s themes. Because they are the only permanent parts of the setting, while everything else is modular and ever-changing, the elements of earth, fire and water serve to anchor the design in the basic reality of the natural world. The first performance took place in a quarry, where Obolensky achieved a synthesis between

her design and the environment of the quarry itself. It is significant that she then went on to try to recreate this feel of the natural world in the Bouffes du Nord, and in the many other indoor venues which the production visited. In each venue, the sense of a ritual performance space is recreated. Even during the filming of the television version, Brook and Obolensky create a ritual space that separates the performers from the crew and other observers. Gerry O'Connor remembers an incident when the importance of this spatial divide was made clear to him :

“ Everyone has removed their shoes to tread over the carpet, which is spread over a large platform of wooden rostrums all bolted together. .... The carpet has been hand-quilted so that it has a special, individual light radiating from it ;

.....  
'*On va répéter.*' They run the scene. I edge forward to listen and look, and arrive at the border of the magic quilt. Shakuni bangs down his dice on the exquisite cross-shaped, dice-table. ....

'Just a moment.' The director goes back to the beginning of the scene. 'I think what would be better ... You all salute the king one by one .... You all salute Shakuni ... Everyone sits.'

.....  
By this time, inadvertently, trying to eavesdrop on the interchange, I have strayed onto the sacred quilt - and have failed to remove my shoes. The director turns to me.

'This is a private rehearsal. Please be discreet,' he says, quite kindly, but with an edge of steel in his voice.

'Take off your shoes !' someone else barks out.  
I withdraw in confusion."

( 1989 : 21 - 24 )

For Brook and his actors, the carpet is a sacred space, one that deserves reverence. Here, they are no longer in the real world, but in the world of the myth, where they will perform its rituals. By intruding into their space and interrupting a private rehearsal, O'Connor disrupts the ritual of the performance and it is for this perceived profanity that he is rebuked.

Another important indicator of Brook's use of elements of ritual is the number of small altars which appear in *The Mahabharata*'s multiple settings. Everywhere

characters make obeisances to the gods at these altars, increasing the sense of ritual and reinforcing the connection between the characters and the gods. Each of these altars has the following elements : fire, in the form of candles or oil lamps ; garlands of flowers in bright colours ; and bowls of coloured spices or powders. Colours such as saffron and red predominate, and provide a hint of India.

The costumes are based on traditional Indian dress, and Obolensky spent several weeks at the Textile Museum of Ahmadabad documenting a number of historical styles. Of her costume designs, Obolensky says :

“The costumes raised real questions. We tried a great number of designs - sewn and unsewn - before getting what we wanted. Once again, the point wasn't to reconstruct archeologically the costumes of ancient India, but to use both what can evoke India and serve our theatrical purpose. It's an extremely delicate process. A beautiful thing about India is the constant use of the costume : the big scarves that you see Indians washing on the river banks or in ponds and with which they cover themselves at night. This is an example of exactly what we were looking for : a great and strong simplicity. ....

Most of the fabrics are Indian. .... As for the designs, we started with authentic ones. The dimensions of the kurtas, cloaks and scarves were all taken from the original. I don't believe in abstract forms of dress. A shape is a result of an evolution, and I've always found an authentic style the most interesting.”

( in Schechner (ed.), 1986, 80 - 81 )

This is in keeping with Brook's agenda ; he never seeks to reproduce India. He suggests aspects of India, and allows the audience's imagination to do the rest.

Obolensky's designs also serve as yet another mediating force between the Indian epic and its Western audience. Despite the authenticity of the designs, the costumes are generally non-specific. The only woman who wears a sari is Draupadi, which seems appropriate on Mallika Sarabhai. Otherwise, the designs seem Eastern, but they could almost be Mongolian or Turkish. Drona wears a Japanese-style kimono garment, that is nevertheless completely neutral, and does not look out of place amongst the more typically Indian designs. The openness of the designs, the fact that they are not too

specifically Indian, reinforces the universality of Brook's production and negates any associations a too specific costume might have for the Western audience.

Within the neutral environment which Brook and Obolensky create, the costumes become increasingly important. In the televised version of *The Mahabharata*, the costumes provide an extremely strong design element, bringing colour and movement to the piece. Despite the openness of the costume designs to interpretation, they nevertheless serve to anchor the visual aspect of the production in India. This can be seen most strongly in the women's costumes (the men's costumes are far more neutral, in more muted colours) ; from the earliest scenes, the costumes of characters such as Satyawati, Amba, Ambika and Ambalika place the epic in India. This Eastern aesthetic is conveyed by the basic shapes of the garments, the use of colours such as red, saffron and orange, and the traditional accessories which the women wear. Throughout the production, costumes function as indicators of character and status. When they are in Dhritarashtra's court, the Pandavas wear beautiful white robes and cloaks, and Draupadi wears a saffron sari. When they are in exile, however, their clothes reflect their status ; the men wear simple tunics and pants made of rough linen, while Draupadi wears a plain beige sari. The women's costumes generally allow them to stand out from all the men. Each of the principle female characters also has a particular colour which is associated with her ; Draupadi wears saffron or orange, Ghandari wears red, and Kunti wears black. Thus, each of these women is clearly differentiated from the others. Similarly. Bhishma wears only white, indicating his purity of mind and spirit, while Drona wears black, which points to his war-like nature. This is a stylised use of costume, which helps to reinforce the sense of ritual which pervades the production. The use of colours such as black, white and red, which all



hold a number of associations for the Western mind (white = pure ; black = power or evil ; red = wealth), is another aspect of how Obolensky's design helps to make *The Mahabharata* more accessible to the Western audience. The symbolic use of colour is very much part of Eastern theatre. Obolensky utilises an Eastern device, but selects colours which have symbolic meaning for a Western audience, which provides another way for the Western audience to access this Eastern story<sup>29</sup>.

Another interesting aspect of the presentation of *The Mahabharata* is the music created specially for the production, which plays a vital role in the sensory impact of the piece. Composed by Japanese musician Toshi Tsuchitori, the music was inspired by India, but grew out of improvisation and experimentation, rather than being based on any particular form of Oriental music. Tsuchitori explains :

“The musical reference is Indian. But I also looked into other kinds of music, notably those I studied myself in the different countries where I travelled. This is why we use material and musical instruments coming from Africa, Japan, Iran, Australia, etc. But, in using these ‘tools’, they lose their cultural connotations. The spectator would never sense the cultural origins of the means used.”

( in Schechner (ed.), 1986 : 78 )

It is clear that this is an intercultural attempt in the creation of music. The instruments are from a variety of different cultures or traditions, as are the musicians. All of the musicians play more than one instrument, which allows for a far greater variety of sounds which can be created. The only instrument which is assiduously avoided is the sitar, because of its association with Indian artists such as Ravi- Shankar. Brook attempts at all times to avoid this kind of direct reference to India, preferring to create an atmosphere of suggestion. However, not every critic found the music satisfactory. Mead Hunter points out that :

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<sup>29</sup> For this insight, I am indebted to Ms. Jane Osborne.

“ According to Brook himself, Toshi Tsuchitori’s score was deliberately ‘suggestive’ as opposed to concrete; Brook feared that strongly Indian music would be a barrier to identification with epic narrative. But this half-measure itself proved to be a barrier - even more, a gross underestimation of the spectators’ capacity for empathetic identification.”

( PAJ, 33/34 (Vol.XI, No.3 / Vol. XII, No.1), p. 192 )

As noted in the discussion of *Orghast*, Brook is often guilty of this kind of miscalculation.

A further focus for criticism regarding the visual presentation in Brook’s production is his use of colour-blind casting, and the accents of his various actors. Critics in America were particularly bothered by this aspect of the production, and accused Brook of trying to form a theatrical UNESCO. Brook is quick to defend his decision, seeing it as the most basic part of his attempt to communicate across cultural boundaries :

“Our aim within the company is to make a model of what could be possible, which is people so different, made not to understand each other, actually reaching understanding because they’re working for a common project, so the audience wants to feel this fundamental harmony. On the other hand, one wants to feel the essence of drama, which is the interplay between very strongly contrasted people. This is what, I think, helps to give an impression of universality, again not universality as a weak liberal intellectual concept, but as a reality of people so different struggling with and against each other through what is life.”

(in Williams (ed.), 1991 : 56 )

This goes to the heart of the intercultural ; this struggle of different cultures with and against one another. This sense of being involved in a dialogue between cultures, is exactly what the intercultural seeks to foster. The use of colour-blind casting is also part of Brook’s effort to make his audience work harder; he asks them to leave their pre-conceived notions and their personal prejudices at the door, as they enter into the willing suspension of disbelief. The use of colour-blind casting serves to enhance the sense that none of these characters are ordinary mortals. The mythic nature of the story

is well suited by a cast of actors of different colours and characteristics. Similarly, the variety of accents is not a problem for me, possibly because I live in a multi-lingual society. Both Maria Shevtsova and Vijay Mishra see the multiple voices of Brook's *Mahabharata* as an enhancement of the text, rather than a drawback. Shevtsova says that :

“ This means that the linguistic cohesiveness, which in monolingual companies involves a monocultural orientation, irrespective of its individual members' linguistic abilities in private circumstances, gives way to a linguistic porosity especially noticeable in accents, tones and timbres and the overall shape of utterances. The profusion of accents in Brook's *Mahabharata* in English has been remarked on negatively - by critics in New York, no less, where every variety of English imaginable fills the streets ! ... Social life, on which the very stuff of language depends, can hardly secrete linguistic purity, least of all in a century of unprecedented migration. Brook's conscious appropriation of impure accents for his production is a way of acknowledging contemporary realities. .... They help project its global view - the 'poetical history of mankind' and the goal of universal theatre here in concert - and link up with the spectators who, the world over, speak with impure tongues.”

( in Williams (ed.), 1991 : 220 )

Thus, the different accents we hear serve to deepen the sense of many cultural layerings at work. Instead of hindering Brook's creation of the culture of links, Shevtsova sees the multiple voices of Brook's *Mahabharata* as an important part of the universal appeal of the production. Because it reflects the linguistic plurality of contemporary Western life, Western audiences can relate to the production, seeing it as a reflection of their own reality.

Brook's use of scenic devices, music and unconventional casting are all part of his effort to mediate between the Indian epic and his Western audience. Brook is not attempting to reproduce an Indian approach to this text, because he knows that this is impossible. No matter how hard we try, we cannot shed our cultural skins. As Patricia Waugh says, “There is no position outside of culture from which to view culture.”

(1992 :5). Rather, Brook is seeking to create a meeting point between the world of *The Mahabharata* and the world of its international audience.

A brief review of the related literature leads the researcher to an enormous amount of critical comment regarding *The Mahabharata*. The production became a focus of a heated discussion about the issue of intercultural theatre. To the researcher, it appears that the critics were ranged on either side of the question, professing either to love the work or hate it, with very little in between. It was this debate which led me to examine Brook's use of myth and ritual. Strangely, many of those who questioned Brook's methods and agenda admitted that they had not actually seen the production, either on the stage or on film, and were basing their comments purely on political issues. In many cases, the criticism is about Brook's offensive manner in India during his research prior to the production, rather than dealing with the artistic merit of the performance. The issue of how Brook has adapted *The Mahabharata* is also one of the main themes under discussion by many critics. Much of the criticism raised against the production is more about Brook himself, and is often personal in nature. Thus, the critical response provides examples of the type of critical evaluation based on either anthropological or politically correct criteria. It is the contention of this thesis that these are flawed agendas in the evaluation of theatrical works, and therefore it is useful to try to assess the advantages and the drawbacks of the critical response to Brook's *Mahabharata*. While I have digested much of the large body of critical comment regarding Brook's production, I feel that there are four critics whose work deserves closer attention.

Rustom Bharucha devotes an entire chapter in his book *Theatre and the World* to Brook's *Mahabharata*. His is a scathing attack, criticising Brook's handling of the

mythic material and his de-contextualisation of the myth, as well as his allegedly tactless and exploitative manner in India. There are three aspects of Brook's behaviour with which Bharucha and other critics have found fault. A perception seems to exist in India that Brook was rude and disrespectful, insulting theatre practitioners by giving them gifts such as pull-overs or pens, in return for their insights into *The Mahabharata*. Brook is accused of disrupting a number of ritual performances, firstly by requesting that they be performed out of their usual season, and secondly by stopping the performance to ask questions or take photographs. The most serious of his transgressions, however, seems to have been his offer of a role in his production to a sixteen year old Chhau dancer. When this offer came to nothing, Brook caused his Indian contacts much embarrassment as well as humiliating the boy in his own village. Allied to this, Bharucha goes on to criticise the intercultural agenda as a whole, seeing it as a new form of colonialism manufactured in the West in order to further the oppression of the East and India in particular:

“Though this colonization of cultures is undeniably complex, insofar as colonial models are not merely imposed but assimilated, it is undeniably different in its orientation from the exposure to cultures that the American avante-garde experienced during the 1960s. .... Whether one views this fascination for predominately non-western cultures as part of a general curiosity for the exotic, or as a perpetuation and consolidation of ‘orientalism’, would depend on one’s political position and place in history. ....

For my own part, I believe that as much as one would like to accept the seeming openness of Euro-American interculturalists to other cultures, the larger economic and political domination of the West has clearly constrained, if not negated the possibilities of a genuine exchange. In the best of all possible worlds, interculturalism could be viewed as a ‘two-way street’, based on a mutual reciprocity of needs. But, in actuality, where it is the West that extends its domination to cultural matters, this ‘two-way street’ could be more accurately described as a ‘dead-end’.”

( Bharucha, 1993 : 2 )

This statement seems flawed because Bharucha's own ‘intracultural theatre’ makes use of classical Western texts. Bharucha seems to feel that the appropriation of cultural

commodities is only acceptable if the exchange goes from East to West, rather than the other way around. His objections to Brook have much to do with the issue of ownership ; he appears to believe that Brook's adaptation would only be acceptable if he had interpreted the epic through an Indian point of view. This is impossible and idealistic. No-one can shed their own culture, not even Bharucha himself. His objections against Brook exist precisely because he resents the use that Brook has made of something which he regards as belonging to the Indian people :

“At one level there is not much one can do about stopping such productions. After all, there is no copyright on the *Mahabharata* (does it belong to India alone ? Or is it an Indian text that belongs to the world ?) I am not for one second suggesting that westerners should be banned from touching our sacred texts. .... All I wish to assert is that the *Mahabharata* must be seen on as many levels as possible within the Indian context, so that its meaning ... can have some bearing on the lives of the Indian people for whom the *Mahabharata* was written, and who continue to derive their strength from it.”

( Bharucha, 1993 : 69 - 70 )

Bharucha's discussion is problematic because of its almost hysterical tone. Bharucha has a tendency to contradict himself, and the discussion seems one sided, because he finds fault with all the interculturalists' motives. His analysis of Brook's *Mahabharata* never grapples with the production itself, preferring to use it as a hook on which to hang his objections to both interculturalism and postmodernism. Bharucha's objections are couched in postmodern terms, being based on the idea of cultural ownership and the rights of oppressed peoples.

A number of Western practitioners working in India were also highly critical of Brook's *Mahabharata*. They were especially concerned with Brook and his group's trips to India, where they observed a number of different performances of the *Mahabharata*. The first negative report appeared in *The Drama Review* in 1986, under the title “The Aftermath : when Peter Brook came to India”. The problem with this

discussion is indicated in the opening paragraph :

“ ZARRILLI : When Peter Brook and his company left India, they returned to Europe filled with ideas, images, music, and experiences of value to them for their version of the *Mahabharata*. *Our concern is not with the creative work of the company, either in the phase of preparation or in performance - indeed, none of us has seen the production*. We are concerned solely with the socio-economic-political-cultural-personal residue left in India by Brook and his company. The key issues raised here, of vital importance to intercultural exchange, are primarily questions of accountability, power and ethics. The same issues face each of us who presume to work across cultures.” (my emphasis)  
( in Schechner (ed.), 1986 : 92 )

Surely, the primary concern of any critic interested in the development of the theatrical form must be the creative work of a company ? Obviously, moral and political issues such as those raised by Brook’s behaviour in India are important, but they should be secondary to the creative or artistic work. A critical discussion that does not engage with the work itself in some form or another ( as text, live performance or film) cannot contribute to our understanding of that work. Like Bharucha, Zarrilli et al. show an unwillingness to grapple with the production of Brook’s *Mahabharata*. While many of the objections raised by Zarrilli, Neff and Guha are valid, their discussion lacks depth because they simply ignore the most important part of Brook’s enterprise: the artistic value of the production itself. I am also extremely sceptical when their discussion begins to emphasise how they might have lost prestige in India through their association with Brook. This applies especially to Guha, who says :

“You see, in that village and with these people, I am something like a god because of my long association with and help for the village. And when I say to them it will help your village if you let him go, they agree because I am saying this.”

( in Schechner (ed.), 1986 : 95 )

The level of self-interest evident here seems inappropriate in a scholarly, critical

discussion. Two years after this discussion was published, *The Drama Review* published another piece, entitled “More Aftermath After Peter Brook”, in which Avanthi Meduri voiced his objections to the Zarrilli / Guha / Neff discussion :

“ ... wouldn't it be more healthy to go along with Rudyard Kipling, Richard Schechner, and Brook and say, ‘East is East and West is West ....’? *This way, when Brook comes to India, the Indians know he comes neither with the bloody sword of Alexander, nor with the olive branch. He comes to take from the culture what he can understand and use, showing his appreciation in the only way he knows - by giving money or material goods.* However Brook behaves, he is still the sahib with the power to commission ritual festivals. What frightens me about the Zarrilli-Neff-Guha article is its rhetoric, the humbler-than-thou prescriptive tone that conceals the essential by postulating an ideal about the way things *must* be done.” (my emphasis)

( Meduri, Zarrilli & Neff, 1988 : 16 )

This is a more realistic reaction to Brook's behaviour, because it acknowledges the fundamental economic discrepancies that exist between India and the West. In facing the reality of the economic implications of intercultural exchange, and admitting that this exchange can never be an equal one because of the economic power of the West, the critic is then free to assess the *product* of intercultural exchange in a more reasonable and realistic light.

In Alf Hildebeitel's 1992 article, “Transmitting *Mahabharatas* : Another look at Peter Brook”, the researcher is once again faced with an account of Brook's insensitive behaviour in India, which has left a residue of bitterness and disappointment among Indian practitioners. Hildebeitel then goes on to compare Brook's “unquestioningly rich imagining” (1992 : 131) of the *Mahabharata* with one of the many different versions performed in India. Hildebeitel's criticism of Brook's work is based on his own anthropological study of the version of the *Mahabharata* connected with the cult of Draupadi. Here again, the issue of authenticity comes under examination, with Hildebeitel making an extremely close analysis of the differences in



plot structure between the two versions. While this is interesting, it cannot really lead us anywhere with reference to Brook's interpretation. Hildebeitel has spent years making a detailed study of one particular form of the *Mahabharata*, and the aims of his endeavour differ so radically from Brook's that the two cannot be compared.

Hildebeitel does offer a slightly more balanced view than that of Zarrilli et. al. as he has at least seen Brook's production and is willing to examine it on its own merits. It is here that Hildebeitel's article becomes more useful, because, despite his criticism of Brook's methods, his response to the production itself is very positive. He says :

"I enjoyed the two stage productions I saw : first in Los Angeles and then in Brooklyn. What I liked most was the open eye and ear it gave to so many varied *Mahabharatas*, whether from texts, other dramas, scholarly insights, or oral traditions ; its character as a work in progress. .... What I liked most about those two viewings was the excitement I felt as I was kept guessing. There was this excitement and uncertainty regarding many levels of the production : the choice and handling of episodes, sequencing, staging, decor, costuming, and props, but above all, language. In viewing the play, one had the feeling that one was viewing something open, unfinished, and very much alive. ... So often Carrière found a brilliant way to both distill an epic speech, phrase, or image, and at the same time make something new out of it."

( Hildebeitel, 1992 : 149 )

Hildebeitel's response to the performance continues in this positive vein. Despite certain reservations, he concludes that Brook seems to have fulfilled his stated aims in mounting the production.

The most recent of the four selected critics is also the most positive. In his book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, Patrice Pavis views Brook's *Mahabharata* as the most "convincing example" (1992 : 212) of the process of intercultural exchange. As we saw in the previous chapter, Pavis examines theatre from a semiotic and postmodern point of view. In analysing *The Mahabharata*, he uses his hourglass model (see Fig. 1), while comparing it to three other productions. Each of

these productions also uses India as a source of inspiration, and all claim to be part of the intercultural effort. Pavis considers Brook's *Mahabharata* to be the most successful production of the four. He points out that :

“ This is an imaginary India, but one that has a tangible connection to the past and present; .... Brook takes into account all the potential artistic modelings of Indian civilization, but he integrates them into a vision of rural India at once eternal and contemporary. It is not India, but it has all the flavor of India ! The set designer and costume designer have no geographical, economic or ethnological pretensions. India is suggested by the beaten earth, the sea-green water, the fires lit to attract the protection of the gods ; it is both the real earth of the Indian subcontinent and the symbolic terrain of humanity as a whole. Brook looks for a balance between rootedness .... and a universalizing imaginary ..... No cultural references are essential to an understanding of the performance, or rather - since cultural references cannot be avoided - the references to the source culture are easily understood by the audience because universal transcultural factors have been considered.”

( 1992 : 187 )

What Pavis points to is the universal nature of Brook's theatre. As far as Pavis is concerned, Brook has succeeded in communicating with his audience, despite the fact that they have been presented with such unfamiliar material. Pavis is entirely concerned with the artistic merit of Brook's production, rather than its political impact.

Pavis's discussion is useful, because he places Brook's work within postmodern and intercultural modes, and then goes on to assess *The Mahabharata* in terms of these concepts. This allows him to gain a more balanced view of Brook's work. It is interesting to note that there seems to be much negative comment from those who have not seen the production, while those who saw it are virtually unanimous in their positive response. This lies at the heart of the matter. Theatre is neither anthropology nor politics. Theatre can and must be seen purely on its own terms, not on those of political or anthropological correctness. The most important criterion for the examination of a work of art is artistic merit. Many critics may have lost sight of this fundamental fact in their handling of Brook's *Mahabharata*, and in so doing they have

done both Brook and the *Mahabharata* a disservice.

Obviously, the fact that some of Brook's conduct in India was both tactless and exploitative cannot be ignored. There are a number of ethical/moral questions involved here. Brook's handling of his material can be problematic in his tendency to decontextualise the myths and rituals he uses, in order to bend them to his aim of creating the culture of links. Brook is so eager to create theatre that is truly universal, that he tends to eliminate the particular entirely. However, Brook's key criterion is always theatrical effectiveness, and in most cases I would have to agree with the choices that he makes. In the case of *The Mahabharata*, the stripping down of the plot and the judicious use of the device of the storyteller (Vyasa and the boy) make it far easier for his Western audience to follow the train of events. The televised version is disappointing on one level, because Brook has chosen to try to make the production more realistic on film. In doing so he loses some of the sense of magic which the stage production seems to have had. The piece has a rather stilted quality on film as the actors attempt to curb their theatrical performances to a more naturalistic mode.

Brook's insensitive manner in India and the moral issues it raises are also problematic. In insulting and embarrassing his Indian hosts, Brook not only opens himself to a great deal of criticism, but he also hampers the creation of the culture of links. The bitterness which Brook's visit to India caused can only be seen as a barrier to universal communication. The issue of cultural ownership is a delicate one, demanding much careful thought. It seems to me that there is no way in which to solve this dilemma. Cultures cannot be said to belong to anybody, simply because each of us is part of the growth pattern of our particular culture, as well as of the growth of human civilisation as a whole. Brook's behaviour in India points to the absolute

importance of how one deals with artists and people of other cultures. The process should be one of mutual exchange. Brook and his company seem to believe that that is what they achieved in India, but their perception is perhaps too idealistic. The reality of the situation is that Brook does seem to have abused his power and his status, in an effort to learn as much as possible in a very short time. He used his economic power and his position as one of the world's leading directors to commission ritual performances, and then failed to respect the sanctity of those rituals. Time constraints, and over-eagerness to get as much information as possible caused Brook to behave inappropriately. The aftermath of Brook's visit to India serves as a lesson to all involved in intercultural exchange. Making intercultural theatre is like walking a tightrope. Brook may fall down often but we have to recognise his bravery. Despite all the criticism aimed at *The Mahabharata*, one cannot deny that Brook is recognised as one of the leading exponents of the intercultural agenda. Perhaps the problem lies in the fact that *The Mahabharata* is, if not the most successful intercultural attempt ever made, then certainly on the grandest scale. For many critics, it is impossible to compare it to anything else, and so its value becomes difficult to see clearly.

My own response to the televised version of *The Mahabharata* is ambivalent. While I found it to be moving and worthwhile, I can only wish that I could have experienced it as Australian critic Brian Hoad did :

“ So it was, on a starry summer's night in a sandy arena crossed by a stream beneath the towering cliffs of the quarry surrounded by the timeless bush and wafted by winds from the Indian Ocean, Brook and his 30 actors and musicians of every race and color opened their hearts in friendship and enveloped their audience in a fabulous spiritual journey : magic fires spurted from the earth, spirits were evoked, voices warned from heaven ; great drums throbbed, conch shells groaned, flutes wailed ; the pomp of kings was summoned up in great swirls of red silk, magicians levitated and fierce battles raged ....”

( quoted in O'Connor, 1989 : 74 )

It is this sense of magic and of being a part of the magic that one experiences in any live theatrical performance, that I find lacking in the televised version. The screen acts as a distancing medium, so that, although I was drawn into the story and was able to assess Brook's re-interpretation of the mythic material, I could not feel that I was a part of the performance as one can with live theatre. Nevertheless, *The Mahabharata* is compelling, engaging the viewer's interest in all the twists and turns of the story. I found myself totally involved with the characters and was never conscious of the extreme length of the piece. I found myself fascinated and enthralled by this tale, one which I would probably never have encountered if I had not met it through Brook's intervention.

*The Mahabharata* offers rich ground for any researcher interested in Brook's use of myth and ritual. Brook's adaptation of the mythic material constitutes a new incarnation of this age old story. This investigation has discussed how myths and rituals evolve as cultures change, and so Brook's use of the myth of *The Mahabharata* serves as an example of how the living quality of a myth can continue to nourish a people as their world changes. In using elements of ritual in the performance, Brook also hopes to access the latent power of ritual, and the vague sense of ritual which all human beings possess. Brook's adaptation of *The Mahabharata* is also in keeping with his theatrical aims. In seeking to heal Western theatre, Brook accesses the power of myth and ritual in order to create a deeper communion with his audience. His desire to create a culture of links is reflected in his efforts to bring this Indian epic to a Western audience. To make the material more accessible to Western audiences, Brook emphasises the universal qualities of *The Mahabharata*. The reinterpretation of the mythic material, the visual impact of the design elements, and the use of an

intercultural music style are all part of Brook's effort to mediate between the Indian epic and the Western audience. It is only by filtering *The Mahabharata* through his own cultural sensibilities that Brook is able to bring this story to a new audience. An examination of the critical response to Brook's *Mahabharata* offers the researcher several examples of the kind of critical evaluation based on politically correct or anthropological criteria. The refusal of many critics to grapple adequately with the performance of Brook's *Mahabharata* is worrying, because they are therefore unable to assess the artistic merit of the piece. The critical discussion surrounding Brook's behaviour in India raises issues concerning the way in which the intercultural agenda needs to be approached. A realistic view of the economic inequalities which exist between East and West allows us to see that any intercultural exchange can never be an equal one. Brook's *Mahabharata* is the culmination of his efforts to create a culture of links by fostering a dialogue between Indian culture and Western audiences.

## Chapter 5

### There are No Secrets

In his 1993 book, *There are no Secrets*, Peter Brook offers us a rare statement about his use of myths and rituals :

“A practical worker in the theatre, wherever he is in the world, has every reason to approach great traditional forms, especially those belonging to the East, with the humility and respect they deserve. They can carry him far beyond himself - way beyond the inadequate capacity for understanding and creativity that the twentieth-century artist must recognise as his true condition. A great ritual, a fundamental myth is a door, a door that is not there to be observed, but to be experienced, and he who can experience the door within himself passes through it most intensely. So the past is not to be arrogantly ignored. But we must not cheat. If we steal its rituals and its symbols and we try to exploit them for our own purposes, we must not be surprised if they lose their virtue and become no more than glittering and empty decorations. We are constantly challenged to discriminate. In some cases, a traditional form is still living ; in another, tradition is the dead hand that strangles the vital experience. The problem is to refuse the ‘accepted way’, without looking for change for the sake of changing.”

( 1993 : 87 - 88 )

In order to bring this living quality back to the theatre, Brook uses myths and rituals. Brook regards them as a way of opening up a greater sense of connection between the people of the world. This is Brook’s culture of links. His search for a theatrical form which can adequately encompass his aim of universal communication and communion has been Brook’s greatest concern for the last thirty years.

At the beginning of this thesis, I asked three key questions which I felt that my examination of the work of Peter Brook should answer :

- What seem to be Brook’s motives in using source material from non-Western cultures ?

- How does Brook's use of myth and ritual fit into the concept of interculturalism ?
- Does Brook's work conform to a postmodern paradigm ?

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, an assessment of Brook's motives in using elements of myth and ritual enables the researcher to examine the particular role which they play in Brook's theatrical agenda. This study had explored how myth and ritual play a specific role in Brook's theatre, which allows him to access the universal power of these traditional forms, and use it in order to revitalise and reinstate this spiritual power in Western theatre.

It is important to see Brook's work within the broader context of the development of new cultural forms over the past thirty years. In examining how Brook's use of myth and ritual fit into the concept of interculturalism, Brook's work and his search for the culture of links can be placed in terms of current cultural trends.

Similarly, by attempting to understand whether Brook's work conforms to a postmodern paradigm, the researcher is better able to delineate the area of cultural endeavour in which Brook's work falls. In so doing, it is possible to make a more balanced assessment of Brook's work, both by examining it in terms of its artistic criteria, and by seeing it in relation to other developments in the contemporary cultural arena.

Any examination of Brook's use of myth and ritual also has to assess why Brook finds these forms useful. It is important to remember here that we cannot read Brook's mind and he gives very little clear information regarding his motives. In addition, if one believes that the criteria for evaluating a work of art or a piece of theatre should be artistic, and not political or anthropological, then the artist's political



motives are unimportant. It is possible to discern several broad trends in Brook's work, and in his use of elements of myth and ritual in particular, which reflect what seem to be some of the motivating factors in his career. Brook is an idealist, and his romantic belief in the world as a place where harmony can be achieved has sustained his work for many years. Colin Counsell comments :

“ Like neo-romanticism in general, Brook's theatre represents a genuine disaffection with and response to a perceived deterioration in the conditions of life under mechanistic western capitalism. The radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s, with its pacifism, libertarianism and lauding of communality, provided a rallying point for those seeking change. Similarly, by offering in microcosm a vision and experience of another mode of existence, theatre such as Brook's reiterates a comparable critique, offering a point of potential resistance to the conditions of contemporary life.”

( 1996 : 177 )

The concepts of myth and ritual serve as an intrinsic part of the spiritual life of a people. The living quality which myths and rituals carry is what keeps a culture alive, and what allows a culture to evolve as the world changes. Brook seeks to use this living quality in order to create a richer theatre that has a more essential role in contemporary Western life. His desire to create essential theatre, theatre from which to create the culture of links, is his overriding concern. To a certain extent Brook seems to see his role as that of teacher as he shows his audience new ways in which to interact with other cultures. Influenced by Artaud, he seeks to communicate with his audience beyond the level of language, in the realm of the precognitive. He seeks a response on a primitive, ritualistic level. To achieve this end, he makes use of the new or the unfamiliar ( such as myths and rituals from other cultures ), in order to cut the audience off from their conditioned response. He attempts to create a more open and all-encompassing exchange between audience and performers. Brook is not concerned with political correctness. He says :

“I don’t believe in authenticity, I believe in conviction.”  
( quoted in O’Connor, 1989 : 40 )

For Brook, the aim is always to inspire his audiences, and he sees the end product as a justification of the means.

The use of myth and ritual in Brook’s work and his desire to create the culture of links place his work within the intercultural endeavour. Thus, Brook’s work can be seen as part of a broader trend in contemporary cultural practice. It is through their myths and rituals that Brook seeks to set up a dialogue with non-Western cultures. Productions such as *Orghast*, *Les Ik*, *The Conference of the Birds* and, most notably, *The Mahabharata* are key examples of intercultural theatre. They provide a meeting or transaction between two or more cultures, as Brook seeks to explore the communicative powers of the theatre. Many Western audiences would never have encountered the *Mahabharata* if it were not for Brook’s production. Thus, Brook’s *Mahabharata* provides an opportunity for audiences to make a connection with something that is out of the scope of their own culture. The fact that the adaptation which they are seeing has been mediated through Brook and Carrière’s cultural sensibilities does not detract from the power of the text. His theatre is a dialogue, and Brook serves as translator. He finds an essence in a myth or a ritual from another culture, and he makes it accessible for audiences all over the world. Brook’s desire to create the culture of links, and his belief in a common heritage of humankind , as well as his attempts to connect with his audience on a deeper level, are all part of the worldwide intercultural endeavour. By placing Brook’s work within the intercultural, it becomes possible to examine the effectiveness of Brook’s theatre in comparison to the work of other intercultural practitioners, in order to assess the success of Brook’s

intercultural project.

Often his handling of such material is considered problematic. Brook's behaviour in India, where he insulted and embarrassed his hosts can only cast a negative light on his work. Brook's tendency to decontextualise his material from its source in an attempt to create a truly universal theatre can also lead to difficulties, particularly in connection with the issue of cultural ownership. However, this thesis argues that theatre cannot be evaluated in terms of anthropological or political methods. A work of art needs to be evaluated on its own terms. The final arbiter should be the effectiveness of the work. If a piece of theatre can communicate with an audience, can move and inspire them, and make them think, then surely we must consider it to be successful. Obviously, it is virtually impossible to assess this kind of effect, which is why the critics' personal responses to a production are of vital importance. Those who deny the validity and the reality of intercultural exchange seem to want to turn back the clock, and put a stop to a natural process which has taken place for centuries. No interaction between human beings is without its own power dynamics. Those who would seek to make politically correct theatre, or to have an absolutely equal exchange of cultural goods, ignore the fundamental economic and technological differences which exist between Western and non-Western countries today. A too stringent insistence on political correctness can also lead to sterile theatre, which has no spark of magic about it. Brook says :

“ The theatre must not be dull. It must not be conventional. It must be unexpected. Theatre leads us to truth through surprise, through excitement, through games, through joy. It makes the past and the future part of the present, it gives us a distance from what normally envelops us and abolishes the distance between us and what is normally far away. .... It is the truth of the present moment that counts, the absolute sense of unity that can only appear when a unity binds performer and audience. This appears when the temporary

forms have served their purpose and have brought us into this single, unrepeatable instant when a door opens and our vision is transformed.”  
( 1993 : 95 )

Brook uses myth and ritual to create this sense of surprise, and as doors to the moment of communion between audience and performer. It is only when we step away from the debate about politics and authenticity, and grapple with Brook’s works on their own terms, that we can fully engage in a deeper interaction with this great artist of the theatre.

Finally, our examination of Brook’s use of myth and ritual brings us to the question of postmodernism, and how Brook’s ideas relate to this particular cultural agenda. John Storey discusses the concept of postmodernism thus:

“ Although the term postmodern has been in cultural circulation since the 1870s, it is only in the 1960s that we see the beginnings of what is now understood as postmodernism. .... a new pluralism following the supposed collapse of the distinction between high and popular culture. It is a sensibility in revolt against the normalizing function of modernism ; its rebellion is an attack on the canonization of modernism’s rebellion, an attack on modernism’s official status as the high culture of the modern capitalist world. What these critics oppose is not so much the project of modernism as its canonization in the museum and academy. Their work contains a lament for the scandalous and bohemian power of modernism, its ability to shock and disgust the middle class. Instead of outraging from the critical margins of bourgeois society, the work of Pablo Picasso, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Berthold Brecht, Igor Stravinsky, etc., has not only lost the ability to shock and disturb, it has become central, classical : in a word, canonized.”  
( 1993 : 155)

This idea is interesting, in that it bears a close relation to the themes of *The Empty Space*, where Brook seeks to make a union between what he terms the ‘Rough’ and the ‘Holy’. Storey’s ideas also point to Brook’s eagerness to shock the audience, to present them with the ‘classics’ in a new form. Brook does not respect the canon. He uses it to suit his own ends, even if that means re-creating it. In doing so, Brook creates what Baudrillard calls a simulacrum, which can be defined as :

“... an identical copy without an original.” (Storey, 1993 : 162). This is a difficult idea to assimilate, but let us consider the example of a slice of toast. No slice of toast can be said to be *the* original slice of toast, yet every slice of toast is a copy of the last one. The term simulacrum applies to an object or text that has been reinterpreted or changed in such a way that it still bears a resemblance to the original, but cannot be considered a copy of that original. It is my belief that many of Brook’s most well-known productions fall into this category. The fact that Brook has been able to copyright his *Midsummer Night’s Dream* indicates that it can be considered as a simulacrum of Shakespeare’s play. I would also consider the Roundhouse *Tempest*, Brook’s stripped down *Carmen*, and *La Cerisaie* to be simulacra. Most importantly in terms of this thesis, I believe that Brook’s *Mahabharata* offers so radical a re-imagining of the myth, that it is in fact a simulacrum of the epic. It is impossible to find the original form of *The Mahabharata*, and so each re-presentation is a copy that has no original. In this sense, Brook’s *Mahabharata* cannot be critically approached in comparison with other versions of the epic. The parameters set up by the idea of the simulacrum negate critical discussion based on issues of authenticity or ownership. Instead, the piece has to be seen in its own terms, and evaluated purely on its own interior fluency and artistic merit.

To take a broader view, it is important to realise that interculturalism falls well within the project of postmodernism. It is a part of the postmodern world, and a result of that world. The birth of postmodernism in the 1960s can be linked to the decolonisation which took place in the early years of that decade in various parts of the world. Frederic Jameson points out that :

“ It does not seem particularly controversial to mark the beginnings of what will come to be called the 60s in the Third World with the great movement of

decolonization in British and French Africa. .... Indeed, politically, a First World 60s owed much to Third -Worldism in terms of politicocultural models, .... and, moreover, found its mission to resistance to wars aimed precisely at stemming the new revolutionary forces in the Third World.”

( in Waugh (ed.), 1992 : 127 )

The liberation of the Third World, and the newly won right to self-determination among previously oppressed peoples in the 1960s opened new channels for cultural exchange, and also increased the interest in this kind of work. It is surely no coincidence that Brook, Grotowski, Schechner and Barba all embarked on intercultural or myth and ritual based work in the mid to late 1960s.

Richard Schechner has complimented Brook on the “cultural layerings” (1986 : 55) of *The Mahabharata*. This idea of using bits of other cultures, and melding them into something new, which creates its own meaning, while retaining the multiple meanings generated by each of these disparate pieces, is a vital part of the postmodern.

John Storey says:

“ According to Baudrillard, postmodernist culture is a culture of the present made from fragments of the past, a toying with historical ruins : ‘All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with pieces - that is postmodernism.’ ”

( 1993 : 165 )

Here again, we see Brook as a *bricoleur* or a magpie, collecting that which is of use to him, and constructing a new theatre out of the myths and rituals of other civilisations.

Having said all this, however, I don't feel that Brook's work truly conforms to a postmodern paradigm. Brook does not have the cynicism and scepticism of the post-modernist. His belief in the culture of links is simply too idealistic. He is also still fascinated by the great stories or meta-narratives of the world, which is contrary to postmodernism. Instead of abandoning linear narrative, Brook has made it increasingly important, especially in *The Mahabharata*. While Brook shows all the

evidence of having been influenced by the postmodern, he is not postmodernist.

In 1968, Brook's *The Empty Space* gave us a vision of Western theatre and Western culture in decay. For Brook, the forms of theatre he was seeing and making were useless, for they had no life. Brook also noted the displacement of myth and ritual in contemporary Western life. In establishing CIRT, and embarking on thirty years of theatrical experimentation, Brook set out to find a cure for the terminal illness which he perceived in Western theatre :

“ A theatre experience which lives in the present must be close to the pulse of the time, just as a great fashion designer is never blindly looking for originality but is mysteriously blending his creativity with the ever-changing surface of life. Theatre art must have an everyday facet - stories, situations, themes must be recognisable, for a human being is, above all, interested in the life he knows. Theatre art must also have a substance and a meaning. This substance is the density of the human experience ; every artist longs to capture this in his work in one way or another, and perhaps he senses that meaning arises through the possibility of contacting the invisible source beyond his normal limitations which gives meaning to meaning. Art is a spinning wheel, rotating around a still centre which we can neither grasp nor define.

So what is our aim ? It is a meeting with the fabric of life, no more and no less. Theatre can reflect every aspect of human existence, so every living form is valid, every form can have a potential place in dramatic expression. Forms are like words ; they only take on meaning when used rightly. .... In the theatre, there are infinitely more languages, beyond words, through which communication is established and maintained with the audience. .... Every element of life is like a word in a universal vocabulary. Images from the past, images from tradition, images from today, rockets to the moon, revolvers, coarse slang, a pile of bricks, a flame, a hand on the heart, a cry from the guts, the infinite musical shades of the voice - these are like nouns and adjectives with which we can make new phrases. Can we use them well ? Are they necessary, are they the means that make what they express more vivid, more poignant, more dynamic, more refined and more true ?

Today, the world offers us new possibilities. This great human vocabulary can be fed by elements that in the past have never come together. Each race, each culture can bring its own word to a phrase which unites mankind. Nothing is more vital to the theatre culture of the world than the working together of artists from different races and backgrounds.”

( Brook, 1993 : 93 - 94 )

Thus, Brook blends elements of the past such as myths and rituals with elements

of the present, in his filtering of material through his own cultural sensibilities, to create theatre that can speak to the human condition, and establish a sense of communion with the audience. In creating intercultural theatre, and in using a multi-national and multi-racial group of actors, Brook attempts to create a model of global unity.

A close examination of Brook's *Mahabharata* allows the researcher to see how Brook's use of myth and ritual in this production constitutes an important step in his search for the culture of links. Through his re-imagining of the mythic material, his use of a ceremonial mode of playing, and the creation of a highly suggestive ritual space, Brook mediates between the Indian epic and his Western audience. Thus, Brook's use of myth and ritual supports his search for a culture of links. In mediating between the elements of non-Western traditions and his largely Western audience, Brook creates a bridge or a link, which brings these two different cultural groups into closer contact. By filtering the myths and rituals of other cultures through his own Western aesthetic, Brook creates theatrical images that are easily read by the Western spectator, while retaining the characteristics of their source. The use of elements of myth and ritual, and the unique dynamic of Brook's company, provide a model of the transcendent power of the theatre when it is used to bring the people of the world closer together. In using myths and rituals, Brook's theatre not only creates links with other people and cultures, but also links us to both the past and the future of the human spirit.



## Appendix A.

### Chronology of Brook's work

1925	Peter Brook born 21 March		London
1942	<i>Dr. Faustus</i> ( amateur production )	Marlowe	Torch Theatre : London
1944	<i>A Sentimental Journey</i> (film)	Laurence Stern	
1945	<i>The Infernal Machine</i>	Cocteau	Chanticleer Theatre Club London
	<i>The Barretts of Wimpole Street</i>	Besier	Q Theatre : London
	<i>Pygmalion</i>	Shaw	ENSA tour : England & Germany
	<i>Man and Superman</i>	Shaw	Birmingham Repertory Theatre
	<i>King John</i>	Shakespeare	Birmingham Repertory Theatre
	<i>The Lady from the Sea</i>	Ibsen	Birmingham Repertory Theatre
1946	<i>Love's Labours Lost</i>	Shakespeare	Shakespeare Memorial Theatre : Stratford-upon- Avon
	<i>The Brothers Karamazov</i>	Guinness / Dostoyevsky	Lyric Theatre : Hammersmith
	<i>Vicious Circle (Huis Clos)</i>	Sartre	Arts Theatre : London

1947	<i>Romeo and Juliet</i>	Shakespeare	Shakespeare Memorial Theatre : Stratford-upon-Avon
	<i>Men Without Shadows &amp; The Respectable Prostitute</i>	Sartre	Lyric Theatre : Hammersmith
	<i>Noh Play (sketch in revue) &amp; Twopence Coloured</i>		Lyric Theatre : Hammersmith
	Brook writes dance criticism in the <i>Observer</i>		
1948	<i>Boris Godunov</i>	Musorgsky	Royal Opera House Covent Garden : London
	<i>La Bohème</i>	Puccini	Royal Opera House Covent Garden : London
1949	<i>The Marriage of Figaro</i>	Mozart	Royal Opera House Covent Garden : London
	<i>The Dark of the Moon</i>	Richardson & Berney	Lyric Theatre : Hammersmith & Ambassador's Theatre : London
	<i>The Olympians</i>	Bliss	Royal Opera House Covent Garden : London
	<i>Salome</i>	Strauss	Royal Opera House Covent Garden : London
1950	<i>Ring Around the Moon</i>	Anouilh / Fry	Globe Theatre : London
	<i>Measure for Measure</i>	Shakespeare	Shakespeare Memorial Theatre : Stratford-upon-Avon & West Germany
	<i>The Little Hut</i>	Roussin / Mitford	Lyric Theatre : Hammersmith

1951	<i>La Mort d'un Commis Voyager</i> ( <i>Death of a Salesman</i> )	Miller	Belgian National Theatre Brussels
	<i>A Penny for a Song</i>	Whiting	Haymarket Theatre : London
	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	Shakespeare	Phoenix Theatre : London & Edinburgh Festival
	<i>Colombe</i>	Anouilh	New Theatre : London
	Brook marries Natasha Parry		
1952	<i>The Beggar's Opera</i> ( film )	John Gay	
1953	<i>Faust</i>	Gounod	Metropolitan Opera : New York
	<i>Venice Presev'd</i>	Otway	Lyric Theatre : Hammersmith
	<i>The Little Hut</i>	Roussin / Mitford	Coronet Theatre : New York
	<i>Box for One</i> ( television play )	Brook	
	<i>King Lear</i> ( television play - New York )	Shakespeare	
1954	<i>The Dark is Light Enough</i>	Fry	Aldwych Theatre : London
	<i>Both Ends Meet</i>	Macrae	Apollo Theatre : London
	<i>The House of Flowers</i>	Capote / Arlen	Alvin Theatre : New York

1955	<i>The Lark</i>	Anouilh / Fry	Lyric Theatre : Hammersmith
	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	Shakespeare	Shakespeare Memorial Theatre : Stratford-upon- Avon & Stoll Theatre : London ( 1956 )
	<i>Hamlet</i>	Shakespeare	Phoenix Theatre : London & Moscow Arts Theatre
	<i>The Birthday Present</i> ( television film )	Brook	
	<i>Report from Moscow</i> ( television film )	Brook	
1956	<i>The Power and the Glory</i>	Greene / Cannan & Bost	Phoenix Theatre : London
	<i>The Family Reunion</i>	Eliot	Phoenix Theatre : London
	<i>A View from the Bridge</i>	Miller	Comedy Theatre : London
	<i>La Chatte sur un toit brûlant</i> ( <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i> )	Williams / Obey	Théâtre Antoine : Paris
1957	<i>The Tempest</i>	Shakespeare	Shakespeare Memorial Theatre : Stratford-upon- Avon & Theatre Royal Drury Lane London
	<i>Eugene Onegin</i>	Tchaikovsky	Metropolitan Opera : New York
	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>	Shakespeare	Théâtre des Nations : Paris & European tour
	<i>Heaven and Earth</i> ( television film )	Brook & Cannan	

1958	<i>Vu du Pont</i> ( <i>A View from the Bridge</i> )	Miller / Aymé	Théâtre Antoine : Paris
	<i>The Visit</i>	Durrenmatt / Valency	English provinces, Lynn Fontanne Theatre : New York & Royalty Theatre : London ( 1960 )
	<i>Irma la Douce</i>	Breffort / More, Heneker & Norman	Lyric Theatre : London & Plymouth Theatre : New York
1959	<i>The Fighting Cock</i>	Anouilh / Hill	ANTA Theatre : New York
1960	<i>Le Balcon</i>	Genet	Théâtre de Gymnase : Paris
	<i>Moderato Cantabile</i> ( film )	Marguerite Duras	
1961	Filming of <i>The Lord of the Flies</i>		
1962	<i>King Lear</i>	Shakespeare	Royal Shakespeare Theatre : Stratford-upon- Avon & Aldwych Theatre : London European tour & New York
1963	<i>The Physicists</i>	Durrenmatt / Kirkup	Aldwych Theatre : London
	<i>The Tempest</i>	Shakespeare	Royal Shakespeare Theatre : Stratford-upon- Avon
	<i>The Perils of Scobie Prilt</i>	More & Norman	New Theatre : Oxford

*La Danse de Sergent Musgrave*      Arden /      Théâtre de l' Athénée :  
( *Serjeant Musgrave 's Dance* )      Pons      Paris

*Le Vicaire*      Hochhuth      Théâtre de l' Athénée :  
( *The Representative* )      Paris

*The Lord of the Flies* shown at Cannes Film Festival,  
and later released in New York.

1964 *Theatre of Cruelty*      LAMDA Theatre :  
London

*The Screens : Part One*      Genet /      Donmar Rehearsal Rooms  
Frechtman      Covent Garden : London

*The Marat / Sade*      Weiss /      RSC, Aldwych Theatre :  
Mitchell      London &  
Martin Beck Theatre :  
New York ( 1966 )

*The Physicists*      Durrenmatt /      Martin Beck Theatre :  
Kirkup      New York

*Lord of the Flies* released in London, followed by general release

1965 *The Investigation*      Weiss      RSC, Aldwych Theatre :  
London

Brook awarded CBE in New Year's Honours List

Brook gives first of university lectures on *The Theatre Today* on 1 Feb. - Later  
revised and published as *The Empty Space*

*Shakespeare Our Contemporary* by Jan Kott published in English, with  
introduction by Brook

1966 *US*      collective      RSC, Aldwych Theatre :  
London

*Marat / Sade* recorded on disc

Filming of *Marat / Sade* at Pinewood Studios , London

Grotowski and Cieslak spend time with the RSC in London ( Aug. 1 - 10 )

1967 Première of *Marat / Sade* film at Odeon, Haymarket

Filming of *Tell me Lies* ( filmed version of *US* )

1968 *Oedipus* Seneca / National Theatre -  
Hughes Old Vic : London

*The Tempest* after Round House, Chalk  
Shakespeare Farm : London

Brook works in Paris with international Théâtre des Nations(May), but forced to leave in June , after student riots

*The Empty Space* published ( Sep. )

*Towards a Poor Theatre* by Jerzy Grotowski published, with a preface by Brook

1969 Filming of *King Lear* in Jutland, Denmark

1970 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare RSC, Royal Shakespeare  
Theatre : Stratford-upon-  
Avon

Centre International du Recherches Théâtrale ( C.I.R.T. ) created in Paris under directorship of Brook and Micheline Rozan

*The Bee Man of Orme* after Mobilier National : Paris  
Stockton

1971 *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare Billy Rose Theatre :  
New York &  
USA / Canada Tour  
Later transfers to  
Aldwych Theatre :  
London &  
European Tour

*Orghast* Hughes Persepolis : Iran  
5th Shiraz International  
Festival of Arts

*King Lear* film released in London

1972 C.I.R.T. gives public demonstration of exercises at Théâtre Récamier, Paris

1972 / Trip to Africa , *Conference of the Birds* - travel to Algeria, Niger,

1973 Dahomey, Mali.

Tour to America, *Conference of the Birds* - meeting with El Teatro Campesino in California, travel to Colorado, Minnesota, New York.  
Public demonstrations at Brooklyn Academy of Music

1973 *Kaspar* Handke Mobilier National & suburbs ; Paris

1974 *Timon d'Athènes* Shakespeare / Bouffes du Nord : Paris Carrière

1975 *Les Ik* Turnbull / Cannan & Higgins Bouffes du Nord : Paris

*The Conference of the Birds* Attar Bouffes du Nord : Paris

*Timon d'Athènes* Shakespeare / Bouffes du Nord : Paris Carrière

Brook participates in International Colloquy on collective creation in the theatre

Brook travels to Poland ( Wroclaw & Warsaw) , for Université des Explorations du Théâtre des Nations

Brook and Grotowski guests at international colloquy on theatre / culture held at UNESCO , Paris

1976 *Les Ik* Turnbull / Cannan & Higgins Round House, Chalk Farm : London & tour of S. America, USA & Europe

1977 *Ubu* Jarry Bouffes du Nord : Paris tour of Europe and Latin America

Filming of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*



1978	<i>Ubu</i>	Jarry	Young Vic : London & Théâtre des Nations : Caracas
	<i>Mesure pour Mesure</i>	Shakespeare / Carrière	Bouffes du Nord : Paris
	<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	Shakespeare	RSC : Stratford-upon- Avon & Aldwych : London
1979	<i>Mesure pour Mesure</i>	Shakespeare	European tour
	<i>Conference of the Birds</i>	Attar	33rd Festival d'Avignon : Avignon & Bouffes du Nord : Paris
	<i>L'Os</i>	Bowens / Carrière	European Tour & Bouffes du Nord : Paris
	<i>Meetings with Remarkable Men</i> ( film ) première in London		
1980	<i>The Ik, L'Os, Ubu, Conference of the Birds</i>		Adelaide Festival : Australia & La Mama Annexe : New York
	<i>L'Os , Conference of the Birds</i>		Bouffes du Nord : Paris
1981	<i>Le Cérisaie ( The Cherry Orchard )</i>	Chekov / Brook, Carrière & Vavrova	Bouffes du Nord : Paris
	<i>La Tragédie de Carmen</i>	Bizet / Mérimée / Meilhac / Halévy / Constant Carrière / Brook	Bouffes du Nord : Paris
1982	<i>La Tragédie de Carmen</i>		New York
	<i>La Tragédie de Carmen</i>		Bouffes du Nord
	Brook gives discussion / lecture at the Donmar Warehouse, London		

1983 *La Cérisaie* Chekov / Bouffes du Nord : Paris  
Lavrova /  
Carrière

*Chin Chin* Billetdoux Théâtre Montparnasse :  
Paris

Three film versions of *La Tragedie de Carmen* released

1984 *Swann in Love* - film by Volker Schlöndorff, screenplay ( after Proust ) by  
Brook, Estienne & Carrière - released

1985 *Le Mahabharata* Carrière / Festival d'Avignon,  
Brook European tour &  
Bouffes du Nord : Paris

1986 *La Tragédie de Carmen* Japan

1987 *The Mahabharata* Zurich, Los Angeles,  
Brooklyn, New York

1988 *The Cherry Orchard* Chekov / Brooklyn, New York  
Lavrova /  
Brook

*The Mahabharata* Glasgow,  
Perth & Adelaide :  
Australia &  
Japan

*The Shifting Point* published in Britain

1989 *Woza Albert* Simon / Bouffes du Nord : Paris  
Ngema /  
Mtwá

*The Mahabharata* film released - also shown on Channel 4 Television, Britain

1990 *La Tempête* Shakespeare / Bouffes du Nord : Paris  
Carrière & Glasgow

1992	<i>Impressions de Pélleas</i>	Debussy / Maeterlink / Constant / Brook	Bouffes du Nord : Paris & European tour ( 1993 )
1993	<i>L'Homme Qui</i>	Brook / Carrière / Sacks	Bouffes du Nord : Paris & European tour

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