

# **EXPLORATIONS IN DRAMA, THEATRE AND EDUCATION**

**A critique of Theatre Studies in South Africa**

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*EXAMINER'S COPY*

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the potential of theatre studies to develop a pragmatic and relevant pedagogy for South African students and adults. The contention is that the dominant paradigm as conceptualized in the discipline 'Speech and Drama' is outdated. Section One offers a critique of this paradigm and an analysis of the premises that supported its foundation and consolidation in English-language South African Universities. Following this a search is instituted for a methodology of theatre studies which is both appropriate to present circumstances and which could encompass all South Africans. In Section Two, a survey of theories of performance is undertaken because a methodology of theatre studies is, of necessity, linked to performance theory. The pioneering contributions of some South African scholars are explained and evaluated as part of a larger body of theoretical analysis in both the humanities and the social sciences.

In Section Three, the search for a methodology is approached from a different angle. The researcher offers a detailed descriptive analysis of her own work in the Department of Speech and Drama at the University of Zululand both among students and in a nearby rural community. This serves to explore the kinds of learning that occur through practical involvement in drama, theatre and specifically playmaking. These learning processes are related to the distinctive functions in drama and theatre, namely the heuristic, communicative and interpretative functions. The work is connected to progressivist trends in education and participatory research in the field of adult education. One of the intentions behind the work was, indeed, to challenge commonsense perceptions and discover the extent to which individuals are 'victims of their own biography'. This challenge is specifically related to anti-feminist, racist and class perceptions.

The dissertation concludes with recommendations for a learner-centred approach to theatre studies that is rooted in personal experience and consciously mediated through refined and extended conceptual categories. The tension between the development of students' analytical powers and communicative skills is explored and a semiotic approach to analysis is posited. The importance of extending university work into the wider community is discussed and related to a rural development project involving playmaking, undertaken to research the potential of learning through drama for adults.

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## PREFACE

As I write this preface, I think of the appalling circumstances under which my students are expected to live and work. I know of students in detention, students terrified at the thought of being arrested and students who have been expelled from the University of Zululand without being given a reason for their expulsion.<sup>1</sup> I think of students gathering in 'Freedom Square' to protest the injustice of their situation under an apartheid regime and I recall the teargas, the police dogs, the whippings and the arrests.<sup>2</sup> One of my students has a scar across the back of his head – a permanent sign of violence of another order – unleashed on the 29 October 1983. Others have been party to a near necklacing which was stopped by a fortuitous lack of petrol and a sane voice. I think of the constant problem of trying to find money to pay the fees. Many students 'live by faith' to get the education they crave. They have no idea how they will pay the fees to complete the course they have enrolled for but they enroll anyway and live in the hope of finding a bursary or a sponsor, they are usually the 'Arabs'. The 'Romans' wear expensive clothes and are there for the women and the certificate. I am mindful of a time when a student who was usually courteous and controlled, as most are, baldly cried out to me in a moment of anguish, "We hate all whites. It doesn't matter what you say or do!" As I mull over these thoughts, I return to a recurring question, "What am I doing teaching Speech and Drama at the University of Zululand?" This dissertation is an attempt at answering this question.

For me one of the effects of working in a crisis ridden environment was that my common sense assumptions were disrupted and undermined. I realised that common sense is not what the mind cleared of nice speculations of philosophy, spontaneously apprehends but what the mind filled with presuppositions concludes. For example, a common sense perception in South Africa is: whites and blacks are different as are men and women, and these 'differences are biological, therefore whites are innately superior to blacks as are men to women. These conclusions are part of our experience not just a matter of perceptions. However, I came to understand that experiences are never facts they are already interpretations. In other words, the common sense that seems to spring spontaneously from experience is a cultural system. We are coded to the core and if this is so then common sense assumptions can be challenged and transformed with a consequent transformation of cognitive structures and practical reality. The intention behind much of my work is to discover to what extent we are 'victims of our own biography'.

Common sense can only be recognised as a set of created propositions by adopting a theoretical stance that seeks causal connections which cannot be understood through 'experience' alone. A theoretical position is of necessity abstract involving deductive thinking rather than only empirical observation. Causal connections cannot be understood by experience because neither the underlying structures nor the connections between them and the empirical world are themselves experienced. In order to attempt to make these connections and gain a sense of causality for myself and my students I examine social theories in this dissertation taking an especial interest in understanding the ways in which culture and education may act as a means of social reproduction of class, ethnic, racial and gender structures and therefore as a means of social control. I also consider ways of resisting attempts to win the consent of the exploited to the order of their exploitation, in a capitalist social formation such as South Africa. In the field of theatre studies we have inherited a tradition of eschewing social theory as outside the bounds of our discipline and have focused instead on drama as Art. I contend that the refusal to develop a sociology of theatre studies has thrown the

discipline into a state of crisis in which much of the work is outdated and irrelevant to the changing needs of the society and serves simply to reinforce positions of superiority and inferiority rather than generating free and critical enquiry.

The purpose of this dissertation is then to contribute towards the development of a new methodology for theatre studies in South Africa taking into account the pioneering work that is already underway in this field. Rather than considering the curricula and the curriculum changes that are occurring in some South African drama departments I have chosen to examine the underlying premises that support the existing dominant paradigm in the field of theatre studies and the paradigm shifts that are taking place. A methodology appropriate to theatre studies is of necessity underpinned by theories of performance and Section 2 of this dissertation deals with emerging theories of performance. Section 1 is a critique of the dominant paradigm in the shape of the discipline 'Speech and Drama' and Section 3 contains some suggestions for a new approach to the discipline and ways of connecting theory and practice.

In order to clarify my sense of the situation in South African theatre studies I outline the changes and developments in my own position in an introduction. What is offered is not only an outline but a critique and an argument in an attempt to locate my own position as a researcher in this field. In the Introduction and throughout the dissertation I have broken with the conventional style of research reports and deliberately chosen to be openly subjective. For example, I have not avoided pronouns in the first person hoping, as I suggest often happens, to give an impression of 'scientific' objectivity. Here, I am aware of some risk in two areas. Not only is rationality traditionally seen to be the province of objectivity, it is also considered a male prerogative whereas feelings are thought to be the province of subjectivity and of women. I challenge this commonsense assumption and posit instead that it is impossible for the researcher to position him or herself outside the work in a field involving human communication. The researcher cannot be a neutral observer and critic of objective reality and to claim objectivity is to conceal a sense of omniscience for which there is no justification. By declaring myself from within my class and gender position in this particular society I hope to contribute to a process by which meaning is produced, negotiated or contested and demonstrate that taking a position inside this process does not mean a loss of rationality.

The approach that I have adopted in writing this thesis is analogous to my recommendations for an appropriate methodology in the field of theatre studies. The progressivist movement in education has drawn attention to the importance of individual experience. It is argued that as knowledge is socially constructed students should be taught to value their own experience as a source of knowledge. In line with this position I have drawn on my own experience as a source of knowledge recognising that in constituting myself as subject I am the bearer of ready-formed conceptual categories rather than an 'expressor' of unique conceptions. As noted, experience must be mediated through conceptual categories and in the dissertation I attempt to move from recording and reporting personal experience to critical analysis,

generalisations and theorizing. Likewise students must be shown how to mediate their personal experience and develop an analytical approach to problems. Or to put this the other way round, systematic propositional knowledge that is the province of higher education needs to be rooted in the practical experiences that it reflects upon.

The Introduction cites my own experience of learning through drama. When I emerged as a graduate from the Departments of English and Speech and Drama at the University of Natal (Durban) I was an ardent disciple of Speech and Drama converted to the 'civilizing potential' of the study of drama as Art. When I began teaching drama at the University of Zululand I ran into a host of difficulties and some of the major problems that I encountered are mentioned in the second section of the Introduction. After undertaking an M.A. Dissertation which involved four years in the field of rural Zululand, I felt more familiar with the Zulu way. The introduction of more African dramatic literature into the Speech and Drama course led me into thinking that the course was becoming more appropriate for our students. However, I was falling into the trap of ethnocentrism. I began to explore theories of culture and the work of Raymond Williams, in particular, had a profound impact on my thinking and provided me with conceptual categories to mediate the experience of teaching at the University.

I began to review established approaches to the discipline and in Chapter 1 the premises on which Speech and Drama was founded are outlined. The influence of the work of Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis on the work of Elizabeth Sneddon is traced indicating the importance in this work of the evaluative use of culture. Sneddon claims that to be educated is to be the possessor of superior values and a refined sensibility, both of which are manifested through a positive engagement with the works of 'distinguished playwrights'. The definition of drama as Art, the rise of aesthetics and the concept of universality are discussed and related to the stress placed in a liberal arts education on the development of the individual as a way of achieving a free and democratic society. In the second chapter in this section I indicate that as Speech and Drama consolidated as a discipline in the 1960s and 1970s the underlying premises established by its founders were not debated. With the rise of vocationalism in this era the demand for a professional training for actors increased and a central debate opened up about whether or not university drama departments should be training actors. In this chapter I suggest the importance of developing a theory that is informed by the practical work and in turn influences the nature of the practical work undertaken. The paucity of theoretical work emanating from departments of Speech and Drama is detrimental to their development as

university disciplines and the practical work has tended to become a reduced version of an actor's training course for western theatre. I conclude this chapter by mentioning the impact that university drama departments have on drama teaching in schools.

Chapter 3 is a discussion of some developments in performance theory which encompass a broader approach than the largely Eurocentric and essentially Aristotelian approach adopted by South African Speech and Drama departments. I note the difficulties of establishing a framework for the discussion of African theatre and drama as complex phenomena of social and cultural change and the impact of Richard Schechner and others on the development of performance theory. Some of these theories have been applied to the South African situation and the work of Peter Larlham and Temple Hauptfleisch is critiqued. The topic of the final section of this chapter is the development of a semiotic approach to theatre studies. The contributions of Saussure, Peirce, Barthes and Pavis are mentioned as is Raymond Williams's assertion that semiotics must be developed beyond formalism into socio-semiotics. The chapter concludes with Williams's definition of drama as a special kind of use of quite general processes of presentation, representation and signification.

Chapter 4 outlines the central tenets of historical materialism that relate to theatre studies, specifically 'culture' and 'hegemony'. The South African version of culture is critiqued in relation to the work of the Regional Councils of Cultural Affairs and problems of definition notably 'black', 'popular', 'alternative', and 'committed' are tackled. In Chapter 5 the major difficulty in a materialist approach of relating text to context is examined with reference to the work of Kavanagh, Tomaselli, Sitas, Steadman and others. This work is analysed and related to the contributions of major European theorists such as Brecht in the search for an appropriate theory of performance for the South African condition. In this connection suggestions for the recording and interpretation of performance are also mooted.

In Section 1 of this dissertation the focus is on a critique of the dominant paradigm in theatre studies and in Section 2 it is on theoretical shifts in this paradigm. In these sections the emphasis is on enquiry, reflection and criticism which are the traditional pursuits of higher education. The proponents of theatre studies have argued that a study of theatre is best undertaken through direct engagement in the activities of the theatre. The difference between learning about the theatre and learning through the activities of the theatre is explored in Section 3. Here my concern is with practical work in drama teaching and with discovering ways in which theory and practice may be related so that one kind of knowledge is not privileged at the expense of the other. I relate this approach to progressivist trends in education and begin this section by outlining the influence of the progressivist movement on drama teaching and the consequent development of D.I.E. (Drama-in-education) and T.I.E. (Theatre-in-education). These important movements in educational drama focus on learner-centred activities rather than the artistic achievements of others. D.I.E. has its roots in child psychology and theories of play and T.I.E. is part of a much larger movement in the 20th Century that concerns itself with the educative potential of the theatre.

In Chapters 7 and 8 I describe the circumstances under which I work at the University of Zululand and the process of playmaking as a way of learning through drama. The kinds of learning processes that occur through practical involvement in drama, theatre and specifically playmaking activities are connected to the heuristic, communicative and interpretative functions in drama and theatre. I explore the educative potential of these functions in a search for an appropriate methodology for South African theatre studies. I suggest that a major goal of university education is the development of a critical consciousness and the focus of the work is to this end. This is not to deny the importance of developing skills in communication but to suggest that a university is not the environment where a training for the execution of a conventionalized and established art form should take place. I suggest instead that it is the work of universities to experiment with new and emerging forms while maintaining a balance between an understanding of tradition and a search for new directions. These chapters are separated under the

headings 'the process' and 'the product' although this is something of a false dichotomy. This is to signal a focus that is at first on the heuristic function in playmaking and then on the development of a score and performance. In order to describe the performance of a play on feminist issues that we made and called Lolo Bambo Lolo (That Extra Rib) I adopt a semiotic approach. (The foundation for this approach is laid in Chapter 6). This approach also offers a means of analysis and reflection on the work. The educative potential of watching plays is also discussed in Chapter 8 in relation to audience responses to Lolo Bambo Lolo.

In chapter 9 I describe and analyze a pilot project which was set up to explore the potential of playmaking in the wider community. I contend that the University of Zululand is ideally situated for executing 'development projects' and inspired by the work of Ross Kidd on popular performance and adult education I undertook a similar project among some rural women. I was assisted in this work by a research assistant Mrs. Vicki Doësebs and together with the Insika Candle Maker's Club we made a play that is called Ukhiphukwazi. This title, which literally translated means 'bringing out knowing', and which was suggested by the participants, sums up the project which aimed at developing a participatory approach to adult education in line with progressivist trends in formal education. I took the students from the University of Zululand to watch this play and I report on the shared experience between the university community and the local community.

In Chapter 10 I evaluate the work I have described and note some of the contradictions inherent in attempting a progressivist learner-centred approach. I suggest that an appropriate methodology for theatre studies moves beyond the concept of 'civilisation' which is the imposition of the ideas and values of the hegemonic block in the guise of serving the best interests of everyone, through 'self-realisation' which is a search for meaning and understanding rooted in personal experience that can however tend towards extreme subjectivity and solipsism, towards 'conscientization' which is the search for critical and reflexive modes of thought and an understanding of causality. In this regard I assess the importance of the development of heuristic,

communicative and interpretative skills, of group work and of the refinement and extension of conceptual frameworks as key aspects of the methodology of theatre studies. I pay special attention to the use of improvisation as a distinctive feature in drama teaching and suggest that it is through the use of improvisation as a feature of playmaking that theatre studies has an important contribution to make to education as a whole. This work has the potential to bring theory and practice together in order to discover praxis. However, there are limits to what can be achieved in one specialised field and if the work is to contribute to the development of a free and democratic South Africa it must be linked to wider organisations that also have this end in mind. I conclude this chapter with some general observations in this regard.

Ultimately this dissertation makes manifest a personal struggle for a new consciousness. In this struggle I have taken comfort from a passage I came across in Raymond Williams's Marxism and Literature:

Creative practice is thus of many kinds. It is already and actively, our practical consciousness. When it becomes struggle - the active struggle for a new consciousness through new relationships that is the eradicable emphasis of the Marxist sense of self-creation - it can take many forms. It can be the long and difficult remaking of an inherited (determined) practical consciousness: a process often described as development but in practice a struggle at the roots of the mind - not casting off an ideology, or learning phrases about it, but confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships.<sup>3</sup>

This dissertation enacts the process of my own struggle which is an ongoing process of confronting a "hegemony in the fibres of the self". It is "a long and difficult remaking" because of the power of thinking habits that we fall back on at moments of intellectual low tension. In these moments habits of mind take the place of consciously critical thought because of the difficulty of remaking our practical consciousness. There will no doubt be many examples of habitual and contradictory thinking in this dissertation but I nevertheless hope that this attempt at a relational mode of thought will be useful to others

involved in the same struggle. Paulo Freire has a useful comment to make on education for liberation:

Its not a situation where one knows and others do not; it is rather a search by all, at the same time to discover something by the act of knowing which cannot exhaust all the possibilities in relation between subject and object. In other words, education for liberation tries to make history - not just receiving or reading history.<sup>4</sup>

This work is my own original work and I have acknowledged all sources that I have used or quoted by means of complete references.



## PREFACE NOTES

- 1 I mention here that the concept of 'student' is an abstraction that it is difficult to do without but, clearly, actual students do not form a unit. To begin with, they come in two genders and thus with strikingly different perceptions of relations between men and women. It is possible, however, to discern a view that is representative rather than a personal idiosyncrasy, from the reactions of the rest of the group.
- 2 In this dissertation I make use of 'single quotations marks to distance myself from certain words, to highlight that the meanings of some words are contested and to suggest that a word is not being used literally in addition to the conventional usages of these punctuation marks. Double quotation marks are reserved for direct quotations.
- 3 Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 212.
- 4 Paulo Freire, 'A few notions about the word conscientization', Roger Dale, Geoff Esland, Madeleine MacDonald (eds.), Schooling and Capitalism, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976, p. 225.

## AN INTRODUCTION

### BY WAY OF A PREAMBLE

My interest in drama as a process of representation and signification, began in early childhood with dressing up games and 'plays' that I organised in the playground at school and was later able to present in the school hall for fellow pupils and parents. As children we were taken to pantomimes and musicals as yearly treats and my totally Eurocentric idea of the theatre was shaped by productions of Cinderella, Peter Pan and Wendy, The Wizard of Oz and so on. To me, the theatre was a magical place where a story in the form of dialogue between characters, song, dance and gorgeous costumes and scenery, depicted an enchanted world. These productions were sentimental, extravagant, entertaining and escapist. A musical play that I wrote, choreographed and directed in my final year at school, naively attempted to capture all these elements in the way that only a precocious schoolgirl would. The play was called Cockles and Mussels from the Irish folksong, was set in Ireland, a place about which I knew nothing, and included ballet sequences, a medley of European folk songs, a cabaret-type skeleton dance and comedy turns, all held together by a tenuous and sentimental storyline. My parents decided that this production was sure evidence that I had 'dramatic talent' and so I was packed off to the University of Natal in Durban to study English and Speech and Drama under the wing of Elizabeth Sneddon.

Before I entered the University, at the age of sixteen, my parents took me on a tour of Europe, which included, along with the museums and the palaces, a range of theatrical entertainments from strip shows in seedy night clubs to a spectacular at the Moulin Rouge, musicals including Salad Days, a visit to Covent Garden and a presentation of Romeo and Juliet at the Young Vic. The young, impressionable girl arrived at the University to discover that 'drama' (not the kind with which I was familiar) is "a storehouse of values" and that its aim is "to develop our insight in regard to the truth about human character and human choices so that our compassion our tolerance and our understanding

are exercised". These and similar dictums, taught with great zeal by Elizabeth Sneddon and reinforced by the English literature course which claimed to develop trained and discriminating readers who were able to discover central and universal human values, had a profound influence on my thinking. As a young woman from a militantly bourgeois family whose main concerns were achieving wealth and status in the elitist and parochial circles of English-speaking Durbanites, I was thoroughly colonial. Although I took part in a protest march against the separation of the universities on a racial basis, I had very little understanding of the implications of institutionalized apartheid and had never mixed with black South Africans other than in a master-servant relationship. But, influenced by the University courses I was taking, I became increasingly aware of the materialistic values of the community in which I lived and I began to challenge my parents' way of life with insufferable priggishness. They accepted my criticisms with amused tolerance, regarding my attitude as a phase that was part of the process of becoming educated. I wrote a long essay, as an assignment in the Department of English, for which I received 85%, which attempted to demonstrate the inferior reading habits (and, by implication, inferior minds) of my parents and friends who preferred popular novels, sentimental verse and even magazines and the Reader's Digest to the literary canon, the study of which we had been taught, as part of the hidden curriculum of the course, would develop our critical judgement not only of 'literature', but also of 'the meaning of life'. English Literature graduates thought of themselves as a virtuous minority who were able to recognise the debasing effects of commercialism, 'popular taste' and the sinister potentialities of film and television. Accurate speech, we were taught in the Department of Speech and Drama, was nothing less than the foundation of freedom, justice and civilisation.

THE DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH AND DRAMA – UNIVERSITY OF NATAL 1957 –1960

The Department of Speech and Drama at the University of Natal was founded by Elizabeth Sneddon in 1949 amid many doubts and prejudices. This was the first South African University to accept Speech and Drama as an academic discipline for degree purposes.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Sneddon pioneered the

Department with indomitable faith in a discipline she defined as “the tool of thought, invented by man for the purpose of achieving a civilised way of life.”<sup>2</sup>

The Speech and Drama Department at the University of Natal was founded before the general establishment of departments of Speech and Drama in the United Kingdom. Nearly all these departments were founded during a period of university expansion in the United Kingdom (1962 – 1967 quinquennium) as a result of some initiative within the arts faculty, usually from English Departments.<sup>3</sup> In America, the situation was different and drama as a respectable academic discipline, and as a practical art, had found its place in the curriculum of American universities before the First World War. As was to happen later in the United Kingdom, Sneddon motivated for the establishment of a Department of Speech and Drama from within a Department of English. She stressed the importance of the spoken word and described ‘drama’ as the “art form of the craft of speech”.<sup>4</sup> She said, “Drama is speech used to the utmost limit of man’s ability to convey his vision of what constitutes a civilised world”.<sup>5</sup> She did not hesitate to claim that Speech and Drama is the central human study, a claim that had already been made by ‘English Literature’:

As a discipline, Speech and Drama is both rigorous and strenuous in physical, intellectual and emotional terms, for it involves the whole being of the individual. As a challenge, the development of skill in communication has no rivals for its goal and the individual’s realisation of the many directions in which the quest for truth can lead him. It is the source from which all other academic disciplines derive.<sup>6</sup>

The course she devised was firmly rooted in the prevailing ideology of liberal humanism that was embraced by Departments of English. The influence of F.R. Leavis on the development of the discourse ‘English Literature’ has been clearly traced by Terry Eagleton in two important polemical essays.<sup>7</sup> This influence still permeates Departments of English in South African universities because, under the influence of colonial habits of mind, most English Literature courses in this country are imitative of those offered in the United

Kingdom. Eagleton describes the fashioning of English into a serious discipline:

In the early 1920s it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worth wasting your time on anything else. English was not only a subject worth studying, but the supremely civilising pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation. Far from constituting some amateur or impressionistic enterprise, English was an arena in which the most fundamental questions of human existence - what it meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationship with others, to live from the vital centre of the most essential values were thrown into vivid relief and made the object of the most intense scrutiny.<sup>8</sup>

The proponents of Speech and Drama claimed autonomy from Departments of English, arguing that the acquisition of skills in communication, the performance of plays before an audience and the study of plays across linguistic boundaries were the basic dynamic of the study. However, the discipline did not shed the underlying premises of Departments of English when it gained autonomy. These premises had been re-fashioned and reproduced by Leavis who, as editor of Scrutiny (1932 – 1938), disseminated the ideology of liberal humanism. The key elements of liberal humanism as expounded by the Leavisites, namely, the development of the unique individual, the imperishable truths of the human condition and the civilizing influence of the study of the humanities underpin Speech and Drama.

The plays set for reading in the Department of Speech and Drama indicate that the study of Drama, like the study of Literature, means the interpretation of a canon of 'great works'. Certain periods in history - the 'Golden Ages of the Theatre' – have become reified, and selected plays from these Ages form this canon of the works of 'distinguished playwrights'.<sup>9</sup> Books such as Theatre through the Ages, A Concise History of the Theatre and Golden Ages of the Theatre abound, giving legitimacy to Western cultural imperialism. This kind of thinking offers us a chance to study the life and times of a species called Drama: born out of ritual in Ancient Greece, fell with the Roman Empire, was

born again in the Middle Ages in Europe, flowered in Elizabethan England, popped up in Italy, Spain and France, suffered a setback, but was restored only to decline in the melodrama so obtusely enjoyed by the Victorians. When injected with new life from Russia, Scandinavia and Italy, Drama grew into a bewildering amorphous shape in the 20th century, sprouting in all directions under the influence of the 'isms' – naturalism, realism, expressionism, modernism, post-modernism, structuralism, Marxism, populism and so on. Passing references are occasionally made to related species in the East, but the slightly disreputable sub-species in Africa, South America, and the colonies are simply ignored.

Referring to early developments of English studies, Raymond Williams points to the reasons for this particular selection for theatre studies. He notes that the English ruling class had long traced its real ancestry to the classical world. In 1907, Tragedy from Aeschylus to Ibsen was taught at Leeds and made sense as a subject at Cambridge because it could move from Greek and Roman Drama to Shakespeare. What was being traced was a genuine ancestry of thought and form, but what was excluded was early British culture and history.<sup>10</sup>

The cultural history of the English ruling class is the heritage of English speaking South Africans and, in a clear case of colonial dependency, we have clung to this heritage with great tenacity and imposed it on the indigenous population. Supported by notions of 'universalism' we have been able to genuinely believe in the importance of the nurturance and transmission of this cultural heritage. In the same way as the English ruling class was able to simply 'jump' over early English literary history when defining 'literate culture', we have jumped over and greatly prejudiced the culture and history of our own land and people in our definitions of cultural history.

Sneddon claimed that "interpretation, in active terms, of the works of distinguished playwrights is a key feature of education and essential for the spiritual well-being and refreshment of the individual".<sup>11</sup> From this perspective, to be educated is to be cultured and to be the possessor of

superior values and a refined sensibility, both of which are manifested through a fulfilling engagement with 'good', literature, art, music, and so on. She clearly stated that one of the aims of taking a course in Speech and Drama is "the development of an artistic sensibility which means the realisation of form and content and the power to interpret it in terms of prose, poetry and drama, all of which are forms of Public Speaking".<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the 'civilizing influence' of engagement with 'great art', a training in Speech and Drama involves the development of the individual's skill in communication. According to its proponents, the course embraces both the theoretical and practical aspects of organic communication and is orientated primarily towards extending the imaginative insight and creative awareness of each individual.<sup>13</sup> This involves three fundamental areas of study in addition to a study of the theory and practice of Drama. These areas are Speech, Movement and Theatre Arts, and the emphasis is on the development of communication skills, awareness and control of the quality of the movement response and an understanding of all the visual elements which reinforce the artistic concept. It is claimed that Speech and Drama, whether as drama or public speaking, is a training for the whole personality so that the highest potential in audible and visible movement capacities may be achieved. The training involves the speaking of poetry, prose and drama and the practice of Rudolph Laban's analysis of human movement and its application to drama and dance.

Elizabeth Sneddon pioneered drama in education in South Africa and developed an awareness of the importance of theatre studies for her community. As a counter to the unrestrained individualistic materialism of colonial white South Africans, this is an important contribution. But, exposure to the Drama depends on a privileged existence and is therefore class-bound, partial and alienating from many of the cultural forces at work in our society. Claims about the value of this exposure, either to discover our essential humanity, or to learn to act with integrity seem unfounded.

I graduated from the University of Natal, having majored in Speech and Drama, an ardent disciple for the cause, Convinced that the introduction of the course in all schools and universities would be a panacea for the ills of society – only to become increasingly disillusioned by a growing awareness of the problems of my relation, as a university graduate, to a crisis-ridden society. If I assumed that students who had been exposed to the kind of influence that Drama provides had developed communication skills, integrity, insight and an ability to discern right values, there was no evidence that we applied what we had learned by attempting to halt the implementation and replication of apartheid with all its appalling implications. We protested, but remained aloof and inactive after emerging from an educational system that defines itself in terms of disinterested disciplines and legitimates its autonomy from politics through a commitment to academic freedom. We claimed that we supported the freedom to think, to enquire and to communicate, but also, it seems, we are free ‘to pass by on the other side’.

## **DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH AND DRAMA - UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND**

### **The Syllabus**

I started working at the University of Zululand in 1976, in the Department of English, and began motivating for the establishment of a Department of Speech and Drama. The course I proposed was closely related to the courses offered at other Universities in Natal and was founded on the principles of liberal humanism. The Department was established in 1979 and the syllabus that I proposed was adopted with a few minor changes and is still in use. It is divided into the usual four sections, History and principles Of Drama, Theatre Art's, Speech and Phonetics, and Movement. There is a large practical component to the course involving practical drama and improvisation classes and tutorials for teaching skills in interpretative speaking. The study of the theatre is Eurocentric and set in semesterised components to comply with University policy. It appears in the syllabus as a brief general survey of 1) Greek and Roman Theatre, 2) Medieval Theatre, 3) Elizabethan Theatre, 4)



Ibsen, Chekov and the Theatre of Ideas, 5) African Theatre, and 6) Modern Theatre. In the motivation I stressed the importance of movement, improvisation and interpretative speaking for the development of the personality through gains in poise, self-confidence, general sensitivity and perception, the stimulation of the creative imagination and the ability to concentrate. I indicated that the aim of movement and speech classes is to teach basic communication skills, and emphasized the importance and value of practice in speaking English for second language speakers. A small creative writing component and a mention of acting for radio and television, at third year level, are included in the course. The central thrust of the motivation was the importance of communication and particularly communication in English in South Africa today. The course was ahistorical (in the sense that history was conceived as background to the expression of universal values), Eurocentric and largely motivated by notions of the importance of individualism. Not surprisingly, we soon ran into serious difficulties with many of its aspects.

This failure to grapple with substantive problems and develop a pedagogy and analysis that is pragmatic and relevant is evident in a range of courses in the humanities, arts and social sciences in South African universities. Referring to these courses, Manganyi notes that critical issues are often blunted or even avoided and cites as examples, that in Economics, income and wealth distribution and labour unions are avoided and that in Psychology no deep study of race or racism is offered by any South African university.<sup>14</sup> Studies in the humanities and the arts tend to confine themselves to a selected Eurocentric tradition which may include the works of a few African writers. This approach succeeds in reinforcing notions of the superiority of western culture and the inferiority of the students. Furthermore, as Manganyi points out, the disciplines are generalised and presented as if they each have their own independent history. This makes the history of western thought virtually incomprehensible to students who are never presented with a totality, but always with 'autonomous' disciplines called History, Philosophy, Sociology or Speech and Drama. Each discipline is 'reified' and seen as if it were self-evolving and internally developed.

In this context, the teaching of the History and Principles of Drama, as it is presented in the syllabus, is problematic. A study of Ancient Greek theatre, for example, cannot be satisfactorily undertaken in the time allowed because the students have no knowledge of Ancient Greek culture or history. Sketchy lectures on Greek religion, history and philosophy in order to provide 'background' to the plays is a hopeless solution and, in the end, plays are invariably taught for their narrative interest and then, no doubt, dismissed by the students as 'an interesting story'. The major connections between forms of social relations and specific dramatic forms are virtually impossible to demonstrate in five or six, thirty-five minute lectures. The lecture system itself is suspect and a 'close reading' of the text, or other techniques of literary criticism presented as a demonstration of the lecturer's skill, which the students must then attempt to imitate and apply to other texts, is a singularly unsuccessful teaching method.

1.

2. **Universalism as an Approach<sup>15</sup>**

Most of the serious work undertaken at the University is based on the notion that we can ignore the social conditions inherent in any practical individuality. Knowledge is thought of as somehow detached from human subjectivity. Such a view implicitly presents men and women as passive receivers because it refuses to take into account the social creation of the individual. A specious universality of commonness in the core of all human cognition is assumed which suggests, in drama teaching, that after you have provided a 'bit of background information' Shakespeare, for example, is just as accessible to first year students at Ongoye as he was to young Elizabethans. His plays are, after all, about Life. Most of our work depends on this assumption and then failure is ascribed to either students or teachers – usually students. We believe that our students will 'develop' or that we can help them to 'develop' through hard work, extensive reading, discussion and improvisation with no understanding of ourselves as social beings. There is generally a lack of recognition of the radical 'otherness' of learners enmeshed in a system inscribed with our own limitations and a lack of recognition that social being determines social consciousness. There is instead a perception that we are all autonomous individuals.

Raymond Williams makes a pertinent comment on the effects of this approach on those who are subjected to it.

Any version of individual autonomy which fails to recognise or which radically displaces, the social conditions inherent in any practical individuality, but which has then, at another level, to reintroduce these social conditions as the decisive 'practical business' of the everyday world, can lead, at best, to self contradiction, at worst to hypocrisy or despair. It can become complicit with a process which rejects, deforms or actually destroys individuals in the very name of individualism.<sup>16</sup>

Our students' response to the work we were trying to do began to make far more sense to me. Many of them are cynically concerned only with certification – the easier it is to obtain a certificate the better and they will hunt around for 'easy' subjects to pass. Others resist the sense of personal volition by refusing to allow the work to really impinge on their consciousness and they simply memorise a few key phrases on which the lecturer seems keen, regurgitate these for examinations and forget them as soon as possible. Still others experience a sense of "hypocrisy or despair" and a sense of deficiency which serves to reinforce notions of inferiority, as they struggle for the perceived ideal of individual autonomy. The result of this approach is a fragmented consciousness which denies us all access to each other in a collaborative search for a picture of the total situation and hopes for transformations.

### **The 'Language Problem'**

The most striking, didactic problem at the University of Zululand is commonly referred to as 'the language problem'. The medium of instruction is English, and for all the students and most of the members of staff, English is a second language.<sup>17</sup> A superficial analysis of the language problem immediately indicates that students arrive at the University with an inadequate grasp of English vocabulary, pronunciation and syntax for the courses for which they have enrolled. This idea is rooted in the view that language is a "tool or instrument or a medium that can be taken up by individuals when they have something to communicate, as distinct from the faculty which made them from the beginning, not only to be able to relate and communicate but, in real

terms, to be practically conscious and so to possess the active practice of language".<sup>18</sup> This instrumental view of language overlooks the way in which humans come to understand their world and act within it through the mediation of language. Language is not 'the tool of thought', but thought itself. Nor is it a fixed system with correct and proper meanings, a standard to be attained, flanked on either side by dialects or errors. The difficulties experienced by students who must approach complex concepts in a second language, raises the questions 'Why English?' and 'Which English?', in a way that cannot be lightly dismissed.

The answer to 'Why English?' is suggested by Manganyi,

In the beginning was the word. The word was written and spoken and it was, as blacks know so well, about God and whiteness and the devil and blackness. This apart from the violent wars of conquest, is the fundamental statement about the interface between blacks and whites in the eighteenth century and beyond. It was the power of the word, the power of language, the tyranny of the symbolic which introduced psychological dominance of blacks by whites. It was culture developing negatively.<sup>19</sup>

Black South Africans understand the power of becoming totally conversant in an international language. Unlike Afrikaners, with their intense sense of ethno-linguistic nationalism, black South Africans do not seem to feel the need to preserve their language in a 'pure' form at all costs, to translate books and dub films and build a 'literature' expressive of an ethnic identity. African writers choose English for their work, political leaders speak in English and one of the most insistent pleas from those concerned with education is for an improvement in the teaching of English. So, there is recognition that the ability to speak English, the language of the colonizers, offers opportunities not only to improve prospects of employment in the labour market, but also to define reality linguistically to counter the fragmentation of the working class and the resuscitation of 'tribal' languages through the Government's insistence on a policy of mother-tongue instruction.

The key to deconstructing “the tyranny of the symbolic which introduced psychological dominance of the blacks by whites”, is surely the language itself. But, the power to define reality linguistically has largely denied our students because of a mechanical and static approach to language studies. All too often, the emphasis in language teaching is on proficiency in its vocabulary, pronunciation and syntax, without consideration of the way fundamental social relationships between speakers and hearers are an essential prerequisite for any imputation of meaning. Although words are basic to any sort of communication, they have no intrinsic meaning, but are rather given meaning and content by their structured location within a particular ideology.

Quite extraordinary demands of language competence are made on students at the University of Zululand. Those who do not speak Zulu when they arrive, invariably learn the language, in order to communicate with their fellow students, in addition to a version of English which, for want of a more satisfactory term could be called ‘black English’. In the classroom, the students are expected to listen to lectures delivered in a range of different English accents and, in their written work, they are expected to achieve a ‘standard’ or ‘formal’ style of writing which differs in each department depending on the attitude of lecturers concerned. In the Department of Speech and Drama, attempts to resolve the question ‘Which English?’ are made by referring to Received Pronunciation as a guide to pronunciation, while asking for ‘clear, intelligible speech’, a subjective idea once again dependent on the lecturers concerned. The notion that there is a version of ‘good English’ that must be acquired reinforces the sense of inferiority experienced by most students. Gaining a command of language can be an important instrument of liberation and yet language teaching quite often becomes an instrument of oppression.

### **Culture and Identity**

The legacy of colonial education has meant a crisis of identity for South Africans. The common-sense knowledge of an indigenous people was negated by colonizers, thus reinforcing a self-image of ignorance and

incompetence. Those who received a formal education were encouraged to despise their own culture and traditions and western Christian education became a focal point of hope for social status and integration into white colonial society. A petit bourgeoisie was formed that was tempted to see European culture as its own, but which was destined never to be satisfied or accepted by its white counterpart – a group, in Fanon's words, with black skins and white masks. The colonizers, in their turn, received a Eurocentric education which reinforced their sense of belonging to a different and superior culture. The result of this legacy is the ambivalent and contradictory attitude of South Africans to culture. White South Africans determinedly attempt to preserve European culture in order to cling to their 'civilized identity'. The state's policy of 'separate development' aims at the discouragement and retardation of African unity and urbanisation in emphasizing both cultural differences among ethnic groups and the static 'natural' character of African traditional culture. At the same time, it is argued that

the aim of Bantu education is the development of a modern progressive culture while also considering the language of pupils, their home conditions their social and mental environment, their cultural traits and their future work and surroundings.<sup>20</sup>

This kind of statement reveals the interest of the proponents of Bantu education in developing a proletariat while simultaneously preserving a sense of tribal identity among black South Africans. The loss of this culture and identity is posited as a process of disintegration that must be resisted. But, the emergence of the urban performing arts is an indication not of the disintegration of culture, but of the making of culture, as part of a search for autonomy in an environment in which black people have very little control over anything except a culturally guided sense of collective humanity and the individual self.<sup>21</sup> These cultural expressions speak of resistance and achievement, but as they do not satisfy established notions of Art they are not included in the syllabus of Speech and Drama departments. There are serious implications for education when an emerging and vibrant culture is denied and the context of education becomes largely irrelevant. It is then difficult, if not

impossible for students to develop an authentic voice of their own or articulate their own particular sense of themselves. They become passive imitators and consumers of the dominant culture.

In the Department of Speech and Drama, I attempted to come to grips with some of these problems, mostly unsuccessfully. Still influenced by notions of the value of Art, I began with 'African' versions of Macbeth and Peer Gynt hoping to make these plays more accessible to the students by focusing on their 'universal themes' while attempting to create a more localized setting. I adapted the plays by selecting key scenes and linking them with narration and used costumes, sets and dance sequences inspired by African designs, motifs and rhythms. The plays foundered on their artificial settings and the 'language problem' because Shakespeare and Ibsen's poetry does not transplant into Africa and, short of re-writing the entire script, the exercise was rather futile. In addition to the unsatisfactory setting of the plays, the structured language presented students with problems of observing rhythmic and intonation patterns which they found totally unfamiliar. This difficulty resulted in either rather wooden or completely inaudible performances. But it began to seem increasingly inappropriate to focus on the 'great tradition' just for the sake of it. I then turned to plays by South African playwrights and departmental productions of plays by Zakes Mda, Athol Fugard and Matsomela Manaka were far more successful as conventional theatrical performances.

### **The Influence of Brecht**

However, I was becoming increasingly concerned about the purpose of theatre studies at the University of Zululand and this led to an intensified enquiry into the work of Bertolt Brecht. Brecht devised the *Lehrstück* or learning play – a kind of didactic cantata with solos, choruses and dramatised sections – on the underlying principle that moral and political lessons could best be taught by participation in an actual performance. These theatrical experiments were meant not so much for the spectators as for those engaged in the performance. The learning play is essentially dynamic; its task is to

show the world as it changes (and also how it may be changed).<sup>22</sup> It seemed that involvement in the process of performance could develop a critical and questioning attitude among the participants. The *Lehrstücke* were Brecht's response to the political and economic crisis which developed in Germany during the second half of 1929, making revolutionary change seem not only desirable, but imminent.<sup>23</sup> Our students enjoyed the clear and straightforwardly didactic style of the learning plays. The Exception and the Rule, a play about what happens to humanity when exploitation becomes a way of life, was performed to appreciative audiences on campus and at the Grahamstown Festival of Student Drama. Encouraged by Brecht's belief that epic theatre could change the attitudes, not only of the cast, but also of an audience, the students took the play to Grahamstown to make the statement to white South Africans that South African society must change. The play ends with a direct command to the audience:

You have heard and you have seen.  
And where you have recognised abuse  
Do something about it.<sup>24</sup>

I encouraged the student director of the play to approach the text through a series of improvisations in order to make connections between the cast's experience and the text. Through improvisation the students developed working class South African characters and interpreted the text as a play-within-a-play. They were able to explore the characterization and situation in the play in a meaningful way because connections were made between the symbolic forms, devised by Brecht and his collaborators, and their own understanding of these ideas in the South African situation. The clear and simple prose (even in translation) of the learning plays lends itself to adaptation and, as the play was set in South Africa, the students were able to speak confidently in their own accents and interpret the songs using rhythms with which they were familiar.



## ***IN SEARCH OF NEW DIRECTIONS***

### ***Performance Theory***

Many scholars of African theatre are in search of new definitions, but there is a strong predisposition in some of their work to look for an accomplished art form. This is a response to western cultural domination and, in order to claim a rich dramatic heritage rooted in the pre-colonial era, a wide range of activities including masquerades, festivals, ritual performances, story telling and praise poetry are defined as drama. For example, in her dissertation on Xhosa drama, awarded *cum laude* from the University of Zululand, Dorcas Jafta includes initiation rituals, work songs, praise poems and story telling as examples of traditional Xhosa drama.<sup>25</sup> She adopts an Aristotelian mode to analyse these events, drawing on the concepts of conflict, plot, character, dialogue and theme, and revealing the extent to which some African scholars are saturated with western culture. But, in her discussion of ritual as drama she associates herself with Wole Soyinka's view that ritual is synonymous with drama. He argues that the question of the "supposed dividing line between ritual and theatre need not concern us much in Africa, the line being largely one that was drawn by European analysts".<sup>26</sup> This view suggested a connection and interaction between ritual and drama and a much wider definition of drama than the one usually espoused in Departments of Speech and Drama at South African universities.

I embarked on a study of African performance for a master's thesis in an attempt to widen my conception of theatre and develop a more appropriate approach to South African theatre studies.<sup>27</sup> Until the 1980s, most students of drama confined their research to text and playwright and consequently there was an inadequate body of research available to those who wished to open up the field. I was fortunate in being able to undertake fieldwork with Peter Larlham who was working on his doctoral thesis.<sup>28</sup> But, we adopted what was essentially a functionalist approach to performance, rooted in the assumption that each part of a community shares common values and that there is consensus or agreement between the parts. My sense of a community was rooted in cultural relativism and in my examination of the interaction between

ritual and drama with special reference to Zulu ceremonies, I remained an outsider viewing the performances of another 'culture'. This untheorised approach meant that we were unable to work from our observations and contribute to the development of a theory of South African performance.

I attempted to explain the way the various phenomena that I observed contributed to the preservation of what the group perceived to be 'the Zulu way' among a group of peasant farmers and migrant labourers and to discover the impact of these traditional performances on emerging forms of popular performance. Despite the dominant influence of western drama on popular performance in South Africa, some aspects of these emerging genres relate directly to traditional ritual performance. Music, dance and costume are integral to the action and social roles of African ritual and supported by western-style musicals, these signifying practices have become an integral part of the 'township musical' developed by Gibson Kente.

The area where western theatrical convention has had the least impact is the audience. African audiences observe a set of conventions that are more closely linked to the conventions observed at ritual performances than to western-style performances in proscenium theatres. The degree of audience participation has often been commented on and is probably typical of popular audiences world-wide. But, in ritual, audience participation involves far more than backchat, noisy laughter and singing along with the cast. In ritual, all those present form a congregation. Though some are more directly involved than others, everyone believes that their presence makes some impact on the efficacy of the ritual. The audience, or congregation, has a stake in seeing that the performance succeeds and is often made up of relatives or members of the same community. Attendance at a ritual performance means partaking of a celebration, witnessing an event and demonstrating that one is part of a community. My experience of audiences attending plays by Kente, and at the University of Zululand, suggests that these attitudes are still prevalent and are more important than the distanced critical aesthetic judgement of a play that is the response of white, middle class audiences.

The enthusiasm of the student body at the University of Zululand for the theatre means that there is a valuable opportunity for engaging in research into audience responses and of utilizing the theatre to address the needs and problems of this community. There is an opportunity to test out ideas in performance and hammer out objectives in education while encouraging a depth and complexity of response among the students. This is an important aspect of educational drama and the continual presence of a vibrant audience is conducive to the development of theories of performance.

### **Popular Culture**

The recovery of South African cultural history is fraught with difficulty, not only because of the damaging connotations of mine workers dancing for tourists on Sundays, the exploitation of cultural forms in productions such as Ipi Tombi (1974) and Lula Wena (1976) by Bertha Egnos and Gail Lakier, Meropa - The Drums of Africa: A Musical Legend (1974) by Clarence Wilson, and the highly romanticized versions of the history of Shaka presented from a European perspective, but also the idealized and vague presentation of the past by Black Consciousness literature.<sup>29</sup> There have been some important attempts to assess South African culture and history in the light of contemporary developments in dramatic forms in plays such as uNosilimela (1973) by Credo Mutwa and The Sacrifice of Kreli (1976) by Fatima Dike and, more recently, The Marabi Dance (1982) and Sophiatown (1986) by the Junction Avenue Theatre Company. There is also a growing interest in recording popular forms and a corresponding development of a theory to explain the dynamics of performance. Ian Steadman, Robert Kavanagh and David Coplan have made an important contribution by recording South African popular theatre history from a clearly defined theoretical position and introducing a number of fresh issues into the arena of theatre studies.<sup>30</sup>

One of the results of Bantu education is that students are not only ignorant of their own cultural history, but also of the works of contemporary novelists, poets and playwrights. When I first began working at the University of Zululand in the early 1970s many students considered the study of

Shakespeare far more worthwhile than a study of, for example, the poetry of Pascal Gwala or Oswald Mtshali. The Black Consciousness movement has, however, made considerable gains in stressing the value of an anti-elitist stance and of relevance and direct communication in literature and performance.<sup>31</sup> The South African Students Organisation (SASO) set up a cultural committee with the aim of “awakening and heightening cultural awareness and involving black people in their struggle for identity, self-respect and liberation”.<sup>32</sup> One of the functions of literature and art that is consistently drawn on by this movement, is that of changing perceptions and raising the level of political awareness of black people. The Black Consciousness perception of the function of performance is that it should be politically relevant and contribute to the liberation struggle. The theatre of Gibson Kente and Sam Mhangwane, popular among lower class audiences, was often attacked during the 1970s for being commercial, escapist, and not showing the oppressive nature of township life truthfully.<sup>33</sup> Some of the work of Black Consciousness playwrights was presented on campus and was important in opening up new perceptions and possibilities for theatre studies.

However, the greatest potential for the discovery of new directions was in the practical work. Sneddon’s major contribution lies in the opening up of possibilities for experiential learning through a large practical component in the course. This practical work provides opportunities for a participational situation in which both lecturer and student are engaged together in the learning process. Improvisation, or acting-out, is a core activity in practical drama classes and the students’ response to this technique encouraged me to become involved in playmaking. Two basic processes are involved in the use of improvisation towards playmaking – the objectifying and codifying of reality into symbolic forms and the analysis of this process. Drawing on the work of Ross Kidd, we became involved in a process of ‘writing the world’ and this set up opportunities for the students to demythologise and decode their own experiences.<sup>34</sup> For the first time since I began work at the University of Zululand I was able to engage with students in critical, stimulating and motivating discussion on topics where I was on unfamiliar ground and the students became the source of knowledge. The requirement of spontaneity in

improvisation sets up possibilities for expressions of latent resistance and opportunities for making inchoate connections explicit. The students' response to improvisation convinced me that this was an avenue worth exploring. The third part of this dissertation is a description of some of this work.

What is it like to be a white teacher at a black university? There are obviously serious contradictions that have to be faced if meaningful work is to be undertaken. As a member of the petit bourgeoisie, in which whites are dominant, I am faced with my biological 'whiteness' and all that this means in terms of privilege and opportunity. While the syllabus remains determinedly Eurocentric, I am an expert in my field. Few black students would dispute my knowledge of my own cultural history which, they assume is part of my experience because I am of European origin. Furthermore, I speak English and this place me in a position of authority, as all the work is conducted in English – a language that students need for their education, but in which they lack competence because of the system of primary and secondary education. What are the opportunities for developing a sense of democracy and a progressive relationship between teacher and student? When the emphasis is taken away from the inherent value of all things western and placed on things African then the authoritarian position of the white teacher is eroded. She must learn from her students and this immediately changes the dynamic in the student/teacher relationship. The role of intellectuals in a changing society has been debated, many taking heart from Gramsci's position and others arguing that this position is simply a way of justifying privilege and power.<sup>35</sup> Is it possible to be a member of the dominant classes and, at the same time, part of the struggle for a free and open society? Is the cultural struggle of any real importance? Is education at a tribal college, of necessity, indoctrination into an established system? Is any part of education apolitical? These are difficult questions for me and I constantly return to them as I attempt to work with my students through the processes of educational drama.

As I sought to establish a theoretical base for educational drama, I began to question the philosophical premises that underpin the discipline 'Speech and

Drama'. The next section is an examination of the foundations of the discipline in South Africa and some changes and developments that took place as the discipline established itself.

## INTRODUCTION NOTES

- 1 A Diploma course had been established at the University of Cape Town since 1936. The beginnings of the Drama Department at the University of Cape Town are to be found in the S.A. College of Music as early as 1914 when Miss Mina Freund first taught elocution in that institution. When the S.A. College of Music was amalgamated with the University of Cape Town in 1923 this work continued. From 1925 - 1930, the Speech Training course was offered, in the Faculty of, Education. In 1931 the course was once more offered by the S.A. College of Music. In 1936 a three-year Diploma in Speech Training and Elocution was offered for the first time by the Music Faculty. From 1940 the Diploma course included Drama, and from 1942 a Teacher s Diploma in Speech Training, which included Drama, was offered. In 1949 the Department of Speech Training and Dramatic Art was established as a department in its own right in the Faculty of Arts and Science. Ruth Peffers was head of Department until 1946 when Rosalie van der Gucht took over. In 1980 the name was changed to Drama Department. The Drama Department offers a Speech and Drama Performer's Diploma' course for' students intending to make a career in the theatre and related media. In addition to this, a course entitled 'Drama', which focuses on history and theory of drama, theatre and communication is offered as a discipline within the Faculty of Arts. Information supplied by University Libraries, UCT.
- 2 Elizabeth Sneddon, 'The Power of the Spoken Word', Natal Education Department Bulletin 28, 1981, p. 12.
- 3 Michael Richards 'U.K. University Drama; Facts, Figures and Facilities', Theatre Quarterly, Vol. IV, No. 15, Aug - Oct 1974, p. 55.
- 4 Elizabeth Sneddon, 'The Correlation between Drama, Education and Community', L.B. Odendaal (ed.), Drama Training in the Seventies, Butterworth en Kie (SA) (EDMS) Beperk, Durban, 1978, p. 16.
- 5 Sneddon, 'The Power of the Spoken Word', op. cit., p. 15.
- 6 Ibid., p. 9.

- 7 Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 1983, and The Function of Criticism, London, Verso Editions, 1984.
- 8 Eagleton, Literary Theory, op. cit., p. 31.
- 9 The 1986 reading lists of Departments of Speech and Drama indicate that this canon has remained a dominant concept in the discipline.
- 10 Raymond Williams, Writing in Society, London, Verso Editions, n.d., p. 15.
- 11 Sneddon, 'The, Power of the Spoken Word', op. cit., p. 15.
- 12 Sneddon, 'The Correlation between Drama, Education and Community. op. cit., p. 16.
- 13 Pieter Scholtz, Foreword, Sightlines, Vol. 6, 1964.
- 14 N.C. Manganyi, 'Identity, Culture and Curriculum', John A. Marcum, (ed.), Education, Race and Social Change in South Africa, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982, p. 97.
- 15 Michael Vaughan has pointed out, in his critique of the dominant ideas in Departments of English in the English- speaking Universities of South Africa, that an absolutely central and dominating concept at work in these departments is the concept of a 'universal aesthetic principle'. It is this principle that has allowed for the development of a canon of literary texts, the works of 'great writers' and, in the case of Speech and Drama, 'distinguished playwrights' which form the backbone of these syllabi. He points out that this aesthetic order of literature is universal-timeless, not because its historical terms of existence are altogether negated, but because aesthetic evaluation places it beyond historical contingency. In this way certain literary texts become **timeless**. The texts which belong in this order are recognised in terms of certain concepts or values - the values of liberal humanism and the method of interpreting or recognising these values is practical criticism.

See Michael Vaughan, 'A Critique of the Dominant Ideas in Departments of English in the English-speaking Universities of South Africa', Critical Arts, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1984, Durban, pp. 35 - 51.

- 16 Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 194. This passage is also quoted by Richard Aitken,



'Masks as Cultural Defence: Reflections on 'English' as a Discipline in a Black Context', English Academy Review 4, 1987, p. 222, subsequent to the collaborative work we undertook at the University in this regard.

- 17 For example, in 1987 16% of the heads of departments speak English, 20% speak an African language and 64% speak Afrikaans as a first language.
- 18 Williams, Marxism and Literature, op. cit., 1977, p. 32.
- 19 N.C. Manganyi, Looking Through the Keyhole, Braamfontein, Ravan Press (Pty) Ltd., 1981, p. 91.
- 20 J.J. Ross, 'Bantu Education in Historical Perspective', P.A. Dummy, (ed.), Trends and Challenges in the Education of the South African Bantu, Pretoria, J.L. Van Schaik Ltd., 1967, p. 8.
- 21 David B. Coplan, In Township Tonight!, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985, p. 3.
- 22 John Willet, (ed. and trs.), Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, London, Eyre Methuen, 1974
- 23 Ibid., p. 33.
- 24 Bertolt Brecht, The Exception and the Rule, Ralph Manheim (trs.) London, Eyre Methuen, 1977, p. 60.

Although the adaptation of plays is a possibility for South African drama students, it is a limited solution to deep-seated problems and I felt that a far more radical response was required if we are to come to grips with our circumstances.

- 25 Dorcas Jafta, "A Survey of Xhosa Drama", Unpublished MA. Dissertation, University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa, 1978.
- 26 Wole Soyinka, Literature and the African World, London, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 7.
- 27 Lynn I. Dalrymple, "Ritual Performance and Theatre with Special Reference to Zulu Ceremonial", Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Natal, Durban, 1983.

- 28 Peter F. Larlham, "Black Performance in South Africa. A Survey and Documentation", Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of New York, New York, 1981.
- 29 See Kelwyn Sole, 'Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance', South African Theatre Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, May, 1987, pp. 45-113.
- 30 Ian Steadman, "Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984", Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1985; Robert Kavanagh, Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa, London, Zed Books Ltd. 1985; and David Coplan, In Township Tonight!, op. cit.
- 31 This does not necessarily mean that European culture should be excluded from the syllabus - most educationalists who wish to Africanize the syllabus are aware of the dangers of parochialism. The search is for a balance and a comparative study.
- 32 Black Review, Durban, 1973.
- 33 Sole, op. cit., p. 53.
- 34 Ross Kidd is well known for his role in promoting the popular performing' arts in non-formal education for social change in the Third World. He uses performance as a mode of participatory research and as a tool in conscientization programmes. He notes that the theatre form is effective because it is easily adopted by most people, it is entertaining and it encourages co-operative rather than individual thinking because it is a communal activity.  
See Chapter 6, pp.' 211-217 below for a discussion of his work
- 35 Gramsci's position is clarified in Chapter 4, pp. 137-138 of this thesis.



## **SECTION 1 – SPEECH AND DRAMA**

### **A CRITIQUE OF THE DOMINANT PARADIGM IN THEATRE STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

There has never been a document of culture which was not at one and the same time a document of barbarism.

Walter Benjamin  
Theses on the Philosophy of History, VII

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF SPEECH AND DRAMA

### 3. THE CIVILISING INFLUENCE OF SPEECH AND DRAMA

Elizabeth Sneddon was able to launch Speech and Drama as a discipline in the Faculty of Arts in the 1940s because it met the requirements of an established philosophy of education. The dominant liberal tradition and the prestige of the liberal arts in British education had been effectively transferred to South African English-language universities prior to World War II. These universities were unashamedly promoting the survival, transmission and progressive enlargement of western culture in Southern Africa and, in so doing, were reflecting the intellectual climate of the times. Smuts took South Africa into World War II out of a declared concern for the future of the human race and, in particular, for that of Europe, “this glorious mother continent of Western civilisation – the proudest achievement of the human spirit to date”, which seemed to be in danger of destruction, in the short term, by Hitler, or, in the longer term, by Stalin.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the war, the South African Government was an active and publicly honoured participant in the British imperial alliance and, with the return of ex-servicemen, the English-language universities flourished. After 1948, when the Nationalist Government came into power, these universities attempted to reinforce their position as the bastions of liberal humanism by opposing Afrikaner apartheid ideology. Liberal traditions are fostered through a system of education that focuses on personal growth and development, the nurturing of independent thought, the ability to make decisions, the cultivation of heightened sensitivity and awareness and successful interpersonal communication. Ideally, these traditions are manifested in a society that supports civil liberties for all its members, the rule of law, a free press and equal economic opportunities. Although these non-exclusive, non-dogmatic values run counter to apartheid policies and, in this respect, the white enfranchised groups in South Africa claim to be ideologically opposed, these groups are economically aligned. And by the 1980s, in the face of Afrikaner nationalism and the entrenchment of monopoly capitalism, the western liberal tradition in South Africa seems to have degenerated into little more than the “ritualistic repetition of phrases

and pieties” and has become quite specifically a ratification of the interests of a particular social group.<sup>2</sup>

In the decades between the world wars, the belief in the beneficence of the ‘white civilizing mission’ and the dissemination of western culture that supported the Eurocentric orientation of South African universities was challenged by anthropologists who stressed the functional stability of African social institutions.<sup>3</sup> A new rationale was required to resolve the contradiction between a Eurocentric orientation espousing liberal values and the oppressive exploitation of the indigenous population. This was provided by cultural relativism. Alfred Hoernlé interpreted cultural relativism in the South African situation in the influential Phelps-Stokes lectures of 1939. His plea for the protection of the cultural homogeneity of African societies through total separation was idealist as economic historians in the 1930s had shown that the degree of integration at the economic level was so far advanced that racial separation was no longer a serious possibility.<sup>4</sup> Hoernlé recognised this and, as he could see no possibility of successful assimilation, he was forced to reflect on the ‘heartbreak house’ of South African society and concede that there was no ultimate hope for the liberal spirit.<sup>5</sup> But, the pleas for respect for social groups “other than one’s own” and a definition of culture in the group-orientated sense was influential in the development and acceptance of apartheid ideology in South Africa. The concept of ‘cultural differences’ could still mean ‘racial differences’ and could be used to underpin ‘scientific’ arguments for the ‘preservation’ of the different ‘population groups’ in South Africa. There was a fundamental consensus between the promoters of apartheid and liberals who opposed its implementation on the importance of the development of African reserves and their guidance towards the essential precepts of western civilisation.<sup>6</sup> This consensus allowed English-language universities which professed liberal values to promote the ‘excellence of their own culture’ and establish ‘Departments of African Studies’ as specific disciplines rather than attempt to become African universities on African soil. Hoernlé articulates a concept of culture in which ‘excellence’ is relative to each social group and argues that the liberal spirit shows itself in respect for other groups, but also in a willingness “to share one’s own”

... individuals live their lives as members of social groups and the excellence of their lives is relative, therefore to the culture (in the widest sense) of their group; the culture, to the pattern of which lives are moulded, the culture from which they draw their materials, as it were for a life worth living. The liberal spirit in this aspect, shows itself as a respect for social groups other than one's own, for cultures other than one's own, for sentiments and traditions other than one's own, though always coupled with a willingness to share one's own.<sup>7</sup>

The development of cultural relativism was a reaction against ethnocentrism. Theories of 'culture contact' tended to emphasize the continuity and functional stability of indigenous social institutions and the continuing links, even in the urban context, of first generation city dwellers with their pastoral and rural backgrounds.<sup>8</sup> The stress on the homogeneity of African societies and the value of territorial segregation served to reinforce colonial stereotypes of African societies as pastoralized and rural entities that merged back into the African landscape.<sup>9</sup> The 'development' of these societies was simplistically thought to be a matter of allowing market forces to take their course so that as industry developed, so too would job opportunities and wages, which would feed back into rural areas via the migrant labour system. The notion of a dual economy justified separate development and it was deemed logical for each 'population group' to have its own system of education appropriate for its needs. While the liberal universities promoted western culture there was a willingness to "share one's own", and all South Africans were admitted to these universities (under various different conditions) until the enforced segregation of universities in 1959. However, admission to university is controlled by the concept of 'intellectual ability' which is tested in the matriculation examination and, as very few black students were adequately prepared for this examination, very few were admitted to University.

When Sneddon introduced Speech and Drama at the University of Natal, her approach was in keeping with the ethos of the university. The course would preserve and transmit the western cultural heritage in the field of theatre studies. As the discipline developed and was established at other universities, it retained its Eurocentric bias. This bias is supported by a notion of culture that stems from the work of Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis in particular.<sup>10</sup> Despite close affinities in their views, they cannot be lumped together without qualification but, in a broad sense, they define culture as a commitment to a set of values. It is this approach that provides the central

distinction between 'culture' as the achievement of excellence, as defined by literary intellectuals, and culture as defined by anthropologists where the stress is on relativity and the discussion is about 'cultures' rather than 'the cultural heritage'. As Bauman points out, when 'culture' is used in the evaluative sense it can hardly be used in the plural:

The term 'cultures' if understood hierarchically, can hardly be used in the plural. The concept makes sense only if denoted straightforwardly as 'the culture'; there is an ideal nature of the human being, and 'the culture' means the conscious, strenuous and prolonged effort to attain this ideal, to bring the actual life-process into line with this highest potential of the human vocation.<sup>11</sup>

As has been noted, Hoernlé attempts a synthesis of these notions of culture by arguing that the achievement of 'excellence' is relative to the 'cultures' of different societies. It is Matthew Arnold who most forcefully developed the concept of 'culture' as the pursuit and study of perfection. Drawing on a concept of culture which in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century described a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, he develops the concept as a basis of his social critique and educational theory.<sup>12</sup> He defines culture as "a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world...".<sup>13</sup> Although he refers to a particular body of knowledge and various art forms as the "best that has been thought and said", he does not clarify his ideal of human perfection beyond generalised statements about "sweetness and light":

Culture seeks the determination of this question (what perfection is) through all the voices of human experience which have been heard upon it, of art, science, poetry, philosophy, history as well as of religion...<sup>14</sup>

...culture may with advantage continue to uphold steadily its ideal of human perfection; that this is an inward spiritual activity, having for its characters increased sweetness, increased light, increased life, increased sympathy.<sup>15</sup>

Arnold goes on to argue that perfection is the development of all aspects of human nature and that we should study the best that has been thought and said so that we might critically examine our thoughts and ideas, particularly those "stock notions and



habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically”.<sup>16</sup> Arnold’s concern was to find a force that would unify society and stem the tide of cultural anarchy or mass vulgarity. He hoped that through ‘culture’ the gross materialism and utilitarian values of the age would be countered and that the “best self” of the nation would assert itself. He sought to achieve this through an education that centred on a rich and fertile heritage. His claim for education is that its true end is to produce a disciplined and informed mind, rather than to impart special knowledge leading to a vocation. He has been accused of arguing for education, under the guise of its humanizing and civilizing influence, in order to ensure the incorporation and control of the working class.<sup>17</sup> However, Arnold’s writing suggests his genuine hopes for progress towards a new society although his assumptions about “natural goodness and rightness” and the possibility of a nation striving for ideal perfection are questionable.<sup>18</sup>

Leavis confined Arnold’s idea of culture to the arts and literature. While Arnold espoused the idea that culture should be attainable to all, Leavis asserted the elitist basis of culture.<sup>19</sup> He maintained that in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century it could only be sustained by the co-operative efforts of then elite of society, the cultured few.<sup>20</sup> His focus of attention was literary criticism and he claims that this is of paramount importance because:

It trains in a way no other discipline can, intelligence and sensibility together, cultivating a sensitiveness and precision of response and a delicate integrity of intelligence that integrates as well as analyses and must have pertinacity and staying power as well as delicacy.<sup>21</sup>

His particular concern was the question of lowering of standards in mass society, a process which he referred to as “levelling down”. In harking back to an ‘organic society’, he claimed to be pointing out that the dehumanization and materialism of a modern, consumer oriented society. However, his hopes for changing society were pinned on the actions of the conscious minority rather than on any plans for re-organizing society. For Leavis, ‘culture’ as the “picked experience of the race” was the collective wisdom about fundamental problems of human existence. Education is a vitally important way of asserting humane values in a mass society and literature

that represents the best in the western cultural tradition was considered by Leavis to be central in any system of education.

He argued that universities should play a key role in “energizing consciously and systematically for the continuity of cultural consciousness”.<sup>22</sup> In his struggle against a blind and mechanical age, he asserted the importance of “humane values” that are essentially universal. Leavis’s position has been summarized as follows:

the impulse to artistic creation reaches satisfying artistic results only when it is the correlative of a deep ethical preoccupation: the imagination in great writers, is moral, the form of a great work is a moulding of deeply felt ethical concerns into a pattern.<sup>23</sup>

However, in order to experience this “deeply felt ethical concern”, Leavis worked from the assumption that a shared and stable system of beliefs and values existed in the past and could exist again. This assumption reveals the central paradox of Leavis’s position because clearly a shared system of beliefs and values does not exist in modern societies and it is questionable that this was even the case in ‘organic’, pre-industrial societies. As Eagleton points out, Leavis’s empirical arguments do not combat ideology, as Leavis claims that they do, because the ‘experience’ that Leavis calls on is not separate from ideology.<sup>24</sup> Leavis’s faith in ‘personal judgement’ involves a problem of circularity because until ‘judgement’ is developed through education it presumably does not exist but, in order to establish a system of education to nurture judgement, a set of values must be espoused. For Leavis, these are inherent in “great works of literature” and are recognised because “it is so”.<sup>25</sup> Leavis ascribes a universal character to literature, but the values that he upholds are not those of some past common culture or empirically found, but his own. For Leavis, these had been nurtured within a particular tradition of thought or the discourse of liberal humanism and he sought to foster and promote this tradition by claiming that it expresses the ‘human condition’ and ‘universal values’. He argued, in a short report of a meeting held at Cambridge in May 1933 that appeared in the second volume of Scrutiny, that without cultural consciousness, “practical and political action is likely to be worse than useless”:

...at a time when the process of civilisation tends more and more to become mechanical and blind, it becomes vitally necessary to energize consciously and systematically for the continuity of cultural consciousness; to assert the humane values; to insist that an adequate realisation of human ends is not easily achieved, and that unrelated to it, practical and political action is likely to be worse than useless.<sup>26</sup>

Leavis stressed the apolitical nature of his concept of culture, contending that its essential elements must be extended into an “autonomous culture, a culture independent of any economic, technical or social system, as none has before”<sup>27</sup>. From this standpoint, any work that is consciously political or biased cannot be defined as Art. He declared that Scrutiny could not be identified with any social, political or economic creed or platform but, despite these claims for impartiality, Leavis was explicitly anti-Marxist even though his critique of Marxism in Scrutiny indicates that he had not seriously addressed himself to Marxist thought.<sup>28</sup> It was through Leavis’ influence that the commonly held assumption that Art should not be political gained ascendancy.

Speech and Drama was established within the paradigm of liberal humanism but, although the central tenets of the discourse were adopted by the English-language universities, they were adjusted to meet the complex requirements of colonialism. A primary concern of colonial powers is the survival of civilization and this concept features predominantly in Sneddon’s motivations for the inclusion and expansion of Speech and Drama in the educational system. The ‘mixed good’ of civilisation identified by Coleridge and taken up in the work of Arnold and Leavis is not a focal point in a ruling class that perceives that the central struggle is the survival of their perception of civilisation itself. Coleridge draws a distinction between ‘civilisation’ or ‘culture’ or ‘cultivation’:

the permanency of the nation... and its progressiveness and personal freedom... depend on a continuing and progressive civilisation. But civilisation is itself but a mixed good if not far more a corrupting influence, the hectic of disease, not the bloom of health, and a nation so distinguished more fitly to be called a varnished than a polished people, where the civilisation is not grounded in cultivation, in the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity.<sup>29</sup>

In this definition, 'civilisation' comes to stand for the whole modern social process. It is contrasted with 'cultivation' and Coleridge makes the point that without 'cultivation', 'civilisation' can be a veneer. Arnold and, in his wake, Leavis defined the difference between 'culture' and 'civilisation' as the difference between a process with a mechanical material character (civilisation) and an inward condition of the mind and spirit (culture) . The implication in this line of thought is that western society, as a totality, is civilised in contrast to 'barbaric' or 'savage' societies, but the promotion of 'culture' is critical for the preservation of the heart of civilisation or its central moral values. An education in the arts plays a key role in this process of preservation, replacing religion, which was no longer fulfilling this important function of upliftment beyond material concerns. Sneddon's preference for 'civilisation' over 'culture', despite her Arnoldian interpretation of the educative power of art, indicates a colonial pre-occupation with the preservation of 'civilization'. But, it does not indicate a lack of concern for the "inward condition of the mind and spirit". She expresses concern not only for the quality of life, but the "quality of being which manifests itself in the range of perceptivity, awareness and response of every individual"<sup>30</sup>. Her definition of 'civilised' is focused exclusively on the development of the 'individual'.

The civilised human being is one in whom the power to think and to feel is completely integrated. A training in developing one's skill in speech involves the development of one's awareness not only of the feeling or feelings that are implicit in every idea, but also the emotional response of the listener. Truth of meaning is dependent on fully realising the emotional implications implicit in the idea that we are communicating and the power to evoke an appropriate emotional response.<sup>31</sup>

The paradigms of the discipline are established as the nurturing of western civilisation through the education of the intelligence and sensibility of the individual. Sneddon does not address herself to the complexity of the interaction of individual and society and so, freedom becomes a matter of individual choice:

The basic law of the individual's responsibility to life is to foster and to cherish its many emanations, if one is ever to know the true meaning of freedom. Freedom is not a commodity that can be conferred on any individual by priests and politicians. Rather, each of us must, through the development of our knowledge and skills, achieve the integration of all aspects of our being, physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual, which is the hall-mark of the civilised man in every age and clime. Only for such is democracy possible. It is a state that owes no man privileges and which involves him in the responsibility of being a person fit to live among his fellow men.<sup>32</sup>

There is an implication in this way of thinking that it is possible to be 'civilised' in an 'uncivilised society'. 'Freedom' is set up as an inner state of mind rather than a material condition or even a metaphysical one. The separation of the individual from the constraints of collective life is an extreme form of individualism. From this perspective, failures become individual failures and never the failure of the system. Individuals learn to accept this perspective and internalize any failures to function effectively in the social formation. But, as the state has to resort to an increasingly high level of violence to repress the majority of South Africans, the Arnoldian disinterestedness of the statement that "freedom cannot be conferred on any individual by priests and politicians" becomes untenable.

As she rejoiced at the opening of the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, Sneddon remarked that she had "felt doomed to play the role of a modern Moses who was never to reach the promised land of Canaan" to which she had led a turbulent and recalcitrant people. She saw the building of a physical theatre at the University as a victory in that it is a tangible sign of the "intangible things of the spirit". Sneddon's victory was over the Philistines in her own class and her vision for a study of the theatre that would be appropriate for the majority of South Africans was that everyone should accept 'civilized values'.<sup>33</sup> She is a subject of a segregated society and a member of an elite class that was able to comfortably ignore the exploitation and suppression of fellow South Africans while engaged in training the individual's finer feelings. Sneddon's work did, most certainly, include the founding of the Department of Speech and Drama at the University of Durban-Westville and the production of Umabatha, but these ventures worked within apartheid structures rather than questioned a view of culture that divides a nation on the basis of racial differences.<sup>34</sup> This is not to say that

these achievements are not laudable, but rather to point to the complexity of finding the right approach to education when there is no possibility of assuming a common set of values and beliefs. Quite clearly the assumption that one's own cultural beliefs and moral outlook is **the** humane approach is open to question when, in the face of this approach, a fascist state develops.

#### 4. DRAMA AS ART

Sneddon's claims for the educative power of drama to nurture and develop civilisation through realizing the potential of the individual, rest on the underlying premise that drama is Art. She drew on aesthetic theory to argue her point about the civilizing influence of drama and also claimed that because speech is a fundamental human activity, a training in 'organic communication' is a fundamental discipline. She argued that whatever is not understood is neglected or exploited and that the blame for the prevailing low level of individual skills in communication, and the corrupt and degraded misuse of Drama and Theatre in our time, must be laid squarely at the door of the universities.<sup>35</sup> An enlightened view of drama is that it is a "flowering in creative forms" of the "craft of Speech".<sup>36</sup> The cornerstones of the discipline are therefore knowledge and experience of drama as Art in order to achieve a desirable state of mind defined as "imaginative insight" and "creative awareness" and the development of the individual's skill in communication which involves the "whole man" physically, intellectually and emotionally.<sup>37</sup> In order to sustain the argument about the power of Art to provide a valid vision of life and develop a civilisation, it must be understood as an abstract capitalized category with its own internal, but general, principles.

The abstraction of Art from similar social processes is achieved mainly through the development of aesthetic theory in which principles are defined, and attempts made, to separate 'art' from non-art', 'literature' from 'popular literature' and 'culture' from 'mass culture'.<sup>38</sup> Williams argues that the concept 'Art' developed as distinctions were drawn between various kinds of human skills and notes that this is related to changes in the practical division of labour. He shows that these changes can be primarily related to changes in capitalist commodity production with its specialization

and reduction of values to exchange values. There was a consequent defensive specialization of certain skills and purposes to the arts, where forms of general use and intention which were not determined by immediate exchange could at least be conceptually abstracted.<sup>39</sup> This process of abstraction meant that activities such as writing a poem or staging a play were extricated from the historical context in which they were produced and isolated as Art. As Eagleton notes, it is not that questions about the nature of poetry, drama and music had not been considered, but that the concept of the aesthetic experience as an isolatable experience and of an unchanging object known as 'Art' assumed a new significance.<sup>40</sup> Art was extricated from the material practices, social relations and ideological meanings in which it is always caught up and raised to the status of a solitary fetish.<sup>41</sup> This was a reaction against the dominant ideology of the rising middle classes in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century which reduced human relations to exchange values and tended to dismiss art as unprofitable ornamentation.<sup>42</sup>

Aesthetics, or the philosophy of art, developed as a specific discipline in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but it rooted itself in classical ideals. The complexity of modern aesthetics cannot be analyzed here but, for my purposes, it is sufficient to note that the classical ideal of a search for perfection, which is revealed and inculcated through art, is taken up in Arnold's concept of culture which articulates a belief in the superior reality of Art. The search for reality beyond our material existence is related to Art by Aristotle who wrote that the "aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance – this, not the external mannerism and detail is true reality".<sup>43</sup> The romantic tradition made a significant contribution to aesthetic theory with the notion of the imagination that is capable of gaining access to higher truths and thus "creative or imaginative forms of expression" could become a force for the betterment of society. Arnold argued for the special function of the artistic imagination in society and Leavis interpreted art as a moral force and repudiated mass culture which he believed has the power to destroy a 'traditional culture' that he prized and assumed as a heritage. The efficacy of art and the role of art in society are key issues in aesthetic theory.

On the one hand, the argument of "art for art's sake" is an attempt to define art purely in terms of aesthetic principles and intrinsic merit, and on the other hand, the

employment of art for social purposes denies the validity of such an exclusive view and posits instead, “Art for Life’s sake”. T.S. Eliot’s definition of the function of Art is a succinct expression of a key concept in aesthetic theory; that of offering a perception of order in life, by imposing order upon it. The effect of this experience is cathartic and improving and, according to Eliot, only available to a cultured elite;

For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order on reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of order in reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation; and then leave us as Virgil left Dante, to proceed towards a region where the guide can avail us no farther.<sup>44</sup>

The expression of order is achieved through an interplay of the elements of art conceived of as unity, emphasis, rhythm, balance, proportion, harmony, and grace. The work of art consists of substance, form and technique through which the artist conveys his intention or develops his themes. Drama is often defined as a synthesis of the arts when it is conceived of as Art:

... even a casual analysis of the elements that compose the seven fine arts will point up the fundamental truth that the theatre is perhaps the one place where all the elements of the arts meet on common ground – the **bodily movement** and **gesture** of the dance, the **rhythm, melody** and **harmony** of music, the **meter** and **words** of literature and the **line, mass** and **colour** of the space arts - sculpture, painting and drawing, and architecture. Surely, then, the theatre is a synthesis of the arts. With today’s emphasis on the total dramatic production and the unification of all its elements, the theatre, whether a separate art or a synthesis of the arts, is subject to the tests of unity, emphasis, rhythm, balance, proportion, harmony, and grace, which we recognise as the pillars of the fine arts.<sup>45</sup>

#### PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT – TRAINING THE EMOTIONS, IMAGINATIVE INSIGHT AND CREATIVE AWARENESS

As the Department of Speech and Drama at the University of Natal took shape in the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of Speech and Drama was also becoming more firmly established in Great Britain as a university discipline.<sup>46</sup> However, as the discipline separated from literary criticism, on the grounds that drama is an art form that ought



to be performed and not simply studied as a text, aesthetic theory and the notion of theatrical masterpieces remained as key premises underpinning the new discipline. Drama in education, at all levels, flourished in Great Britain and aesthetic theory was refined and used to support arguments about the value of art in education.<sup>47</sup> The relevance of these underpinning assumptions is clear in the Department of Education and Science Report on drama in education published in 1968.

If we admit that the activities we have described as drama have any emotional significance can we deny that they are also the beginning of the process that ends with Aeschylus, Shakespeare and Ibsen? And are we to deny that the works of the great masters in art and science are any less valid for children than for their parents? The universality of a master's work lies not only in its international status; it has significance throughout time as well as space, a significance for young as well as old.

Yet the ultimate relevance of the classics seems to lie, for children and young people, not simply in their own splendour, but in the combination of aesthetic experience with a quality of self-knowing. If science is an embodiment of the physical world, the arts are an embodiment of the spiritual. The two are interrelated. That is our heritage.

D.E.S. Report, Education Survey No.2;  
Drama in Education (H.M.S.O., 1968)<sup>48</sup>

Sneddon's claims for the value of Speech and Drama for personal development were nurtured by such proponents of the value of art in education. If the goal of education is the total holistic cultivation of human potential then a case can be made for drama as an art form involving the training of the emotions, imagination and creative abilities. However, the dominant view of art as 'Art' and the insistence on a distinction between 'high' or 'literate Art' that "expresses, entertains, exalts and enlightens", and popular or mass art that "simply exploits the emotions", means that popular art is ignored, if not despised, by apologists for the promotion of the Arnoldian sense of culture in education.

One such apologist is G.H. Bantock who drew a significant distinction between 'popular art' and 'folk art'. In his attempt to promote a cultural revival that would appeal to the democratic temper of the mid-twentieth century in Britain, he sought to

promote cultural activities that would be generally appealing, but he denied the popular culture of the times as cheap and tawdry, encouraging a shallow, emotionally deficient response. It appeals to thwarted desires raised to a high pitch of expectation. It is not a culture of the people, he declared, but a culture manufactured by “clever men who thus feed rather than check the dreams of unreality”. In contrast to the debilitating effect of popular culture and its falsification and exploitation of human emotions, the experience of culture (from Bantock’s perspective) educates our emotions. (Bantock’s definition of ‘popular culture’ is significantly different from other definitions that I shall explore later in this thesis).

The articulations of the great artist (‘folk’ and ‘high’) present us with feelings which we recognise, as we develop to be true to our own deepest experience; and it is a presentation, not a telling about which they offer. Our acceptance, that is not simply cognitive; it is itself emotional, so that the artist seems to express what remains inchoate in our less precise consciousness. For it must be insisted again “precision is one of the ingredients of genius.” Human development proceeds in part at least, out of an ability to make finer and finer discriminations. Even to primitive man, presumably, not all dreads were the same dread, nor all hopes the same hope; but he perhaps lacked the artistic sophistication necessary to define the distinctions possible among similarly named emotional states; through this latter, more sophisticated sort of definition an emotion becomes a more precise emotion, distinguishable among the many sorts of precise feelings one could experience under the same generic term.

In this way, our emotions can be educated in two ways. We can become aware of the feelings we have and we may also be able to develop new sorts of feeling.<sup>49</sup>

In Bantock’s argument there is an underlying sense of development, not only in the sense of educating the sensibilities of the young, but in the sense of human development. Social Darwinism underpins the suggestion that “primitive man lacks sophistication”, or finer feelings, and that there is a sense of progression from primitive states, where feelings are not precisely defined, to the manifestation of precise emotions in the work of ‘great artists’. The movement from primitive to a literate/folk duality is supported by underlying assumptions about the movement from ‘barbaric’ to ‘civilised’. Presumably in his primitive state, when man was incapable of making “finer and finer emotional distinctions”, he was also incapable of producing

‘folk culture’. Bantock is not at all clear about the meaning of ‘folk culture’. Into which category, for example, would San Rock Art fall? He offers no clear explanation of when a primitive culture becomes a folk culture capable of making fine emotional distinctions, or why the folk culture of the past is edifying and that of the present stultifying and exploitative, unless one accepts the idea of a bygone mythical organic society.

It was the Romantic artists who stressed the autonomy of the imagination and the special creative powers of the original minds of the age. These ‘powers’ of the mind were the key to a depth of comprehension of human nature and were considered to be part of the sensibility. The education of the feelings and the “cultivation of the beautiful” are considered to be as important in a liberal education as an intellectual and moral education, but these are tied to a particular cultural heritage defined by the concept of aesthetic excellence, the training of the emotions and imagination is bound to the development of the sensibility and a disciplined understanding of the works of art that define this heritage. In other words the training is not a training for general personal development, but the training of an appropriate response to a selected cultural heritage. There have been arguments, such as those propounded by Eliot, Lawrence and Bantock, that there can be no general development of this sensibility among all classes and so only a small section of the population should receive an intellectual education. This elite group would be responsible for maintaining the standards and quality of high culture. Eliot argued that the culture of other classes is also valuable and should be promoted but, in his work ‘high culture’ emerges as being superior. As he argues, what he means by culture and what he means by those “excellent works that mark a civilisation” appear as one and the same thing. There is a sense in which Eliot’s views are a reflection of what actually does happen in schooling systems but, in an age that is becoming increasingly egalitarian, to claim that a return to a feudal system is desirable is untenable. The dominant tendency is to argue, as is done in the D.E.S. report, that the universal appeal of great works of art makes them accessible to everyone.<sup>50</sup> The concept of universality is related to the rise of individualism and, as these are key concepts in Speech and Drama teaching, the origins of these ideas bear some investigation.

## 5. INDIVIDUALISM AND UNIVERSALITY

The concept of an aesthetic order was developed into a reference system based on the principle of universality. This universal (and hence timeless) aesthetic order is empirically defined and consists of artworks, literary texts, musical compositions and plays, rather than of theoretical concepts about art. (How to arrive at criteria for aesthetic excellence has remained a perplexing philosophical question).<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the works that belong within this order are recognised as belonging in terms of certain concepts or values.<sup>52</sup> One of the criteria of ‘great art’ is that it transcends “social use and social valuation” and expresses a concern with “humanity as a whole”. In other words, it expresses values that are of universal significance. The concept of universality interacts with a sense of the primacy of the individual. The consolidation of these concepts took place in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The Enlightenment had called into question the whole structure of society as traditionally conceived in hierarchical terms and supported by a theological view of nature. The central tenets of the Enlightenment itself were that human nature was fundamentally the same in all times and all places, that there were universal human goals and that a logically constructed set of laws and generalisations could replace superstition, prejudice and dogma.<sup>53</sup> The concentration on an ‘essence’ redolent of the ‘true self’ of humankind could lead to a collective society or an atomised one. Philosophically the two strands relate in broad terms to the two great lines of thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The true self emerged through the participation in some complex, some ‘whole’ or as an individualistic atomic unit with the emphasis on self-expression. For example, in a discussion of Shakespeare’s plays, Coleridge describes the development of drama and defines its ‘universal element’ which he connects with a sense of individualism which is related to a sense of nationality. His theory of the imagination focuses on the creativity **of** and **in** the mind in contrast to later theories where consciousness is grasped as both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the mind.<sup>54</sup>

The first form of poetry is the epic, the essence of which may be stated as the successive in events and characters... The next form into which poetry passed was the dramatic. Both forms are founded on the relation of providence to the human will; and this relation is the universal element, expressed under different points of view according to the difference of

religion, and the moral and intellectual cultivation of different nations....

In order that drama may be properly historical, it is necessary that it should be the history of the people to whom it is addressed... It must likewise be poetical: - that only I mean, must be taken which is the permanent in our nature, which is common and therefore deeply interesting to all ages.

By its nationality must every nation retain its independence; I mean a nationality *quoad* the nation. Better thus: - nationality in each individual, *quoad* his country, is equal to the sense of individuality *quoad* himself; but himself as sub-sensuous, and central.<sup>55</sup>

The concept of universality is a legacy of the Enlightenment. As Professor Solomon puts it: the new ideology carves out a new dimension of existence, the primacy of the human mind and expands this into a universal principle. A universal is a concept which postulates an indefinitely large class and ascribes some essential property to it.<sup>56</sup> Thus, 'humanity' is a universal concept which implies unique and essential properties which all individual human beings must share.

Raymond Williams points out that the concept 'humanity', meaning a set of human characteristics or attributes, is only common after the eighteenth century. In classical thinking a contrast is made between 'humanity' and that which is less than human, whether **animal** or (significantly) **barbaric**. The medieval use is in distinction from **divinity** and also appears synonymous with courtesy and politeness. In the sixteenth century this sense is extended to include kindness and generosity.<sup>57</sup> From the 16<sup>th</sup> Century on there is both controversy and complexity in the term, over a range from cultivated achievement to natural limitation.<sup>58</sup> In different ways the concept encompasses both the 'collectivist' and the 'liberal' views of man. In the liberal view 'humanity' is comprised of individuals, each with a unique centre of consciousness, the locus of freedom and choice. The emergence of the idea of individuality can be related to the break up of medieval society. In the move against feudalism there was a new stress on personal existence. The influence of Protestantism which allows for each human being to have an individual relationship with God, as opposed to a relationship mediated by the church, lent further impetus to the development of the primacy of individual states and interests.<sup>59</sup> Coleridge defines the universal element as

the “relation of providence to the human will”, thus emphasizing the importance of individual action and assuming an equal potential for autonomy. In this form of thought “the human will”, standing for the ‘individual’, is a fundamental order of being – in other words, the concept becomes an abstract category which stands in opposition to another category, ‘providence’, ‘the nation’, or ‘society’. There is something ‘permanent’ and ‘common’ in our human nature, according to Coleridge, but our sense of individuality must be “subsensuous and **central**”. ‘Subsensuous’ suggests lying beneath an awareness that is generated by the five senses and is therefore subconscious and an integral part of human nature. Marx attacked the opposition of the abstract categories ‘individual’ and ‘society’ and argued that the individual is a social being, born into relationships and determined by them.<sup>60</sup> He posits a dialectical relationship between the individual and society suggesting that human life is a manifestation of social life:

It is above all necessary to avoid postulating ‘society’ once more as an abstraction confronting the individual. The individual is a social being. The manifestation of his life even when it does not appear directly in the form of social manifestation, accomplished in association with other men – is therefore a manifestation of social life... Though man is a unique individual – and it is just his particularity which make a him an individual, a really **individual** social being – he is equally the whole, the ideal whole, the subjective existence to a society as thought and experienced.<sup>61</sup>

The emphasis on the individual in contemporary western thought is made at the expense of the ‘individual **social** being’. There is a sense that each individual remains separate, inviolate and related to, but not shaped by, his or her fellow beings and circumstances. Individualism presents the individual contained, rather than the consciousness flowing and forming in a dialectical relationship with others. Human beings are presented as having certain common characteristics regardless of specific historical conditions, as though it is possible to ‘be oneself’ apart from history. This essence can be observed by the artist and presented, clothed by circumstance, for others to observe and recognise as a truth. The difficulty is not in the definition of men and women as unique individuals or in their identification in terms of certain general features but, in the development abstract categories that are isolated from social conditions such as ‘humanity’, ‘the human condition’ and ‘human nature’. The exposition of what constitutes these categories often hides a prescriptive intent – there are always judgements about what it means to be ‘human’ or ‘inhuman’ and these are not made by one human essence recognising another, but from within the framework of a particular ideology. The abstraction of the individual was paralleled in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the

abstraction of art, as noted. The romantic poets emphasized and isolated subjective sense activity as the basis of art and beauty, as distinct from social and cultural interpretations. Raymond Williams notes that the use of 'aesthetic' is an element in the divided modern consciousness of art and society and that it is a reference beyond social use and social valuation with the intention of expressing a human dimension.<sup>62</sup> However, by separating the human from the social, the end product of aesthetics can be dehumanizing, as was noted in Nazi Germany when 'lovers of art' turned out to be mass murderers.

When Sneddon, in laying foundations for the discipline of Speech and Drama, argued that the aim of drama "is not to enable us to sit in judgement on other men but rather to develop our insight in regard to the truth about human character and human choices", she was arguing from an assumption of an absolute and constant world full of universal truths. So, she is able to say that, as we watch Antigone, or King Lear or Hamlet, we are able, through "shared experience" and "because we are on the side of life" to approve those choices "which foster and cherish life".<sup>63</sup> In other words, we are able to relate to that which is 'permanent' and common in human nature and choose from these permanent and common attributes those which we admire and those that we reject. In this way, drama "links our minds to right values, our heads and hearts approve the act of integrity and the spirit of man is strengthened in confronting reality".<sup>64</sup> The fact that behaviour is the result of specific historical conflicts is weakened in this approach and the 'universal value' which is not an objective fact, but an ideological construct, is given the appearance of absolute truth. The implication is that the study of drama is highly effective in promoting awareness of human commonality and that this should promote human relations and human interaction. One of the aims of a Department of Speech and Drama is "to develop an understanding of each individual's experience of life in action, in relation to his fellow men".<sup>65</sup>

The concept of transcendental values that are universal also appears in the work of writers such as George Bernard Shaw, who rejected the ideas of the "beautiful or lovable work" and submitted work that is consciously didactic and propagandistic.<sup>66</sup> Shaw claims to represent the vulgarity of life in his work:

...the author (Shaw himself) is not giving expression in pleasant fancies to the underlying beauty and romance of happy life, but dragging up to the smooth surface of

‘respectability’ a handful of the slime and foulness of its polluted bed, and playing off your laughter at the scandal of the exposure against your shudder at its blackness.<sup>67</sup>

For Shaw, every social question arising, as it must, from a conflict between human feeling and circumstances affords material for drama. But, the great dramatist is an interpreter of life.<sup>68</sup> In a discussion about “the problem play” he suggests that the difference between the great dramatist and the ordinary is that the great dramatist rises above social questions to write about humanity as a whole:

Shakespeare and Goethe do not belong to the order ‘which takes no interest in politics’. Such minds devour everything with a keen appetite... but their theme finally was not this social question or that social question, this reform or that reform, but humanity as a whole. To this day your great dramatic poet is never a socialist, nor an individualist, nor a positivist, nor a materialist... Social questions are too sectional, too topical, too temporal to move a man to the mighty effort which is needed to produce great poetry.<sup>69</sup>

Here, Shaw suggests that ‘great’ playwrights transcend the contingencies of history to write about “humanity as a whole”. An interest in the social, the sectional, the topical and the temporal is insufficient to produce ‘great poetry’. These interests must be transcended so that the plays become universal; i.e. they have the potential to appeal to all human beings. According to Shaw, the great dramatist “has something better to do than to amuse either himself or his audience. He must interpret life.”<sup>70</sup> Life, as it occurs, is senseless and the writer must pick out the significant incidents from the chaos of daily happenings and arrange them so that their relation to one another becomes significant.<sup>71</sup> The observers of ‘great drama’ are changed from “bewildered spectators of a monstrous confusion to men intelligently conscious of the world and its destinies”.<sup>72</sup> Here Shaw points to the didactic function of drama and, indeed, says that the writing of ‘great drama’ is the “highest function that man can perform – the greatest work he can set his hand to”.<sup>73</sup>

The key linkage in these views is that human nature is continuous. Even when it is conceded that the conditions of such a nature change from society to society, this dominant view is not dislodged; and so a twentieth century African student can read the experience of a Theban King by more, rather than the less, they have in common. The experience of drama is about the human condition or, as Sneddon claims, about Life. As with all universalized categories, what is actually meant by Life is ambiguous and obscure.



In outlining the foundations of Speech and Drama as a university discipline, I have focused on the basic premise adopted by Sneddon that drama is Art and that the function of Art is to preserve and promote civilized values. These values are described as humane, or ultimate, or universal values. She established the view that the aim of an education in drama is to realize the full human potential of each individual through the experience of Art which develops the intellect, sensibility and imagination. As these faculties mature, the individual learns to make choices with integrity or gains moral judgement and becomes fit to live in, and capable of making a contribution to, civilized society. A second, and equally important, aim articulated by Sneddon is the development of skills in 'organic communication'. These aims are interrelated because communication skills are predominantly taught through the oral interpretation of the art forms of poetry, prose and masterpieces of the drama. The skills that are taught are in fact performance skills and there is a basic assumption that a training in these skills results in an improvement in interpersonal communication. This is not to say that general communication theory is not an aspect of the course, but that the emphasis is on the interpretation of Art. In effect this means that the students receive a training that amounts to a truncated actor's training course for the western, establishment theatre, even though Departments of Speech and Drama insist that they do not offer a training for actors, but in communication. In the 1970s this central paradox opened out into a debate in university drama teaching about the extent to which the scope of a general liberal education was being undermined by a vocational training for the theatre.

## 6. CHAPTER ONE NOTES

1 T.R.H. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History. Johannesburg, Macmillan South Africa (Publishers) (Pty) Ltd., 1978,p.32.

2 Paul B. Rich, White Power and the Liberal Conscience, Braamfontein, Ravan Press (Pty) Ltd. 1984. p. 69.

The 'Indaba' initiative in Natal is perhaps evidence of some revival of an attempt by liberals to initiate effective action against apartheid.

In a series of recent lectures, Charles Simkins makes an eloquent plea for a pursuit of liberal principles, particularly the principles of justice and equal basic liberties for all. See Charles Simkins, Reconstructing South African Liberalism, and Liberalism and the Problem of Power (Alfred and Winifred Hoernlè Memorial Lecture), South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) , Johannesburg, 1986. A symposium drawing on the Simkins' papers was held in March 1986 and a collection of the papers presented at this symposium has been published including the Presidential Address by Stuart Saunders, Liberalism and the Middle Ground, SAIRR, Johannesburg, 1986.

3 Among notable works by South African anthropologists produced in this period are Eileen Krige. The Social System of the Zulus, Pietermaritzburg, Shuter and Shooter, 1950; Monica Hunter, Reaction to Conquest, London, Oxford University Press, 1936; and Hilda Beemer, 'The Swazi Rain Ceremony', Bantu Studies, Vol. 9, 1935, pp. 273 - 281. The focus of attention in these works is on African societies in their 'tribal state' and questions of power relations and economic interaction tend to be overlooked. Assad has pointed out that, unlike 19th Century anthropology, the objectification of functional anthropology occurred within the context of routine colonialism of an imperial structure of power already established, rather than one in process of vigorous expansion in which political force and contradiction are only too obvious. In Rich, op. cit. p. 150.

4 Davenport, op. cit., p. 371.

5 Rich, op. cit., p. 69.

6 Ibid., p. 129.

7 Ibid., p. 68.

8 Ibid., p. 55.

9 Ibid., p. 68.

10 I have focussed attention on Matthew Arnold and F.R. Leavis as spokespersons and dominant figures in the development of a particular educational approach that I shall argue had an important influence on the

approach developed by Sneddon. I am working from the assumption that these cultural analysts articulated and gave direction to the dominant ideology of their respective epochs. They were influenced by the structures of thought and feeling of their periods and the ideas that they articulated were supported and debated by other prominent figures who concerned themselves with cultural theory. However, a discussion of this debate is beyond the limits of this thesis and I have had to content myself with extrapolating ideas that I think have had a bearing on the development of the discipline 'Speech and Drama'. In selecting these ideas I have brought my own personal bias to bear and have simplified complex ideologies in a process that is corn— parable to processes that occur all the time as part of the making of hegemony. Complex ideas are extrapolated and simplified until they become part of a lived culture and are perceived as common sense. The value that some South Africans place on 'Art' and the support that it is given by business organisations, such as the Standard Bank and Barclays Bank, is an indication of this process. 'Art' is valuable, it is thought, but most people are hard put to explain why 'opera or 'ballet' is more valuable to South African society than Gibson Kente's musicals or *isibhaca* and *Isishayameni*. (Two Zulu dance styles that are performed competitively and widely admired. Described by Peter Larlham, Black Theater. Dance and Ritual in South Africa, Michigan, UMI Research Press, 1984).

- 11 Zygmunt Bauman, Culture as Praxis, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 9. In Lesley Johnson, The Cultural Critics, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1979, p. 2.
- 12 Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, Hammondsworth, Penguin, 1968; and Keywords - A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, London, Fontana Paperbacks, 1983.
- 13 Matthew Arnold. Culture and Anarchy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966 (This edition) , p. 6.
- 14 Ibid., p. 68.
- 15 Ibid., p. 64.
- 16 Ibid., p. 6.
- 17 Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory - An Introduction, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited. 1983

- 18 What Arnold was advocating was that all of society should share his culture and, in a rare moment of self-reflection, he was forced to question his faith in the power of 'culture' and to acknowledge that the regeneration that he hoped for was not taking place:

-to think that he. (that is Arnold himself) has for more than twenty years' got by his living by inspecting schools for the people, has gone in and out among them, has seen that the power of the letters never reaches them at all and that the whole study of letters is thereby discredited and its power called in question, and yet has attempted nothing to remedy this state of things, cannot but be vexing and disquieting. He may truly say like the prophet of Israel; "We have not wrought any deliverance in the earth."

P. Horan, Matthew Arnold. a Life, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981, p. 254. In G.E. Bantock, Studies in the History of Educational Theory, Vol. II, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1984. p. 215.

- 19 See Lesley Johnson, *op. cit.*, pp. 93 - 115, for a discussion.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Leavis, Education and the University, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1948 (2nd edition), p. 34.
- 22 *Ibid.* p. 16.
- 23 Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 94. See Chapter 4, p.135 below for a discussion of ideology and common sense or experience.
- 25 Leavis claimed that his literary criticism was expressed in interrogative form, as the question "This 'is so, is it not?'" See Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

- 27 Leavis, 'Under which King, Bezonian', Scrutiny, Vol. 1, 1932, pp. 100 - 107.  
In Johnson, op. cit., p. 100.
- 28 Kenneth Trodd, 'Report from the Younger Generation', Essays in Criticism, Vol. XIV, 1964, p. 30. In Johnson, op. cit., p. 101.
- 29 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'On the Constitution of Church and State'. In Williams, Keywords, op. cit., p. 59.
- 30 Elizabeth Sneddon, 'The Correlation between drama in education and the community', Prof. LB. Odendaal, (ed.) Drama Training in the Seventies, Durban, Butterworth, 1978, p. 10.
- 31 Elizabeth Sneddon, in the Foreword to the syllabus for the Speech and Drama Festival 1987 - 1989, p. 3.
- 32 Elizabeth Sneddon, Sightlines Vol. 3, 1984, p. 25 - 26.
- 33 In a recent interview with Philippa Riley, Elizabeth Sneddon spoke of her understanding of the theatre and civilization. Her vision is for everyone to adopt the values and standards of western civilization:

You have to look at every civilization. It's always the work of a small group. The city states of Greece - they were all walled. It's easy for us to sit now and, looking at them, say "Well, they invited their disaster, they kept the barbarians out", but the barbarians were overwhelming in numbers *and* they couldn't see it...they wouldn't have gone anyway if they'd let them in, you see? Impossible For those people, in the situation they were, with the kind of weapons they had. It would have been impossible for them to be other than engulfed. But, as long as you keep them out (you survive], and this is the kind of dilemma, I think there is in the world. That's why I pin my 'hopes on this civilisation. It will change enormously if it's going to survive. But, if it's going to survive, it's got to be global and I don't see that happening by tomorrow, do you? No. I think what we, in a small way, encountered in this country in *building* a theatre is an absolute archetype of how civilization works. Because among the whites, drama was not accepted. For a long, long time it was regarded, and still is in many quarters, as the work of the devil, because it's the' work of the devil to get your

mind working. And dangerous. They think. They can't see beyond the danger. And one must forgive them - because when one looks at students' behaviour, you can see that the immature and the ignorant are frightfully dangerous. And that's your own people! So you can't blame people for being in a situation of being, in terms of evolution, too young and inexperienced, or, in terms of the barbarous world, hemmed in by it.

Implicit in her thinking is the notion of the superiority of western civilization which must eventually incorporate the "barbarous world" and become a global civilization.

34 As I have pointed out, the founding of the Department of Speech and Drama at the University of Zululand was also a direct result of Sneddon's influence.

35 Elizabeth Sneddon, *Motivation for Fietermaritzburg Campus Speech and Drama Department*, 1965.

36 Sneddon, 'The Correlation between Drama, Education and the Community', *op. cit.*, p. 10.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

39 Williams, *Keywords*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

40 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory, An Introduction*, *op. cit.*, p.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

43 Quoted in Edward A. Wright, *Understanding Today's Theatre*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1972, p. 26.

- 44 T.S. Eliot, 'On Poetry and Poets', in Barrett. H. Clark, European Theories of the Drama, New York, Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965 (3rd edition), p. 46g.
- 45 Edward A. Wright, op. cit., p. 29.
- 46 See David Clegg 'The Dilemma of Drama in Education', in Theatre Quarterly Vol. 3, No. 9, Jan - March 1973, p. 31 and Letters to the Editors? 'The Crucial Question of Drama in Education', Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 3, No. 10, 1973, April - June 1973, pp. 61 - 65.
- 47 For an example of the refinement of aesthetic theory, see the work of Susanne Langer, Feeling and Form, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.
- 48 Quoted by David Clegg in 'The Dilemma of Drama in Education', op. cit., p. 32.
- 49 G.H. Bantock, Culture. Industrialisation and Education, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1966, p. 77.
- 50 See Chapter 1, p.49 above
- 51 R.G. Woods and R.St C. Barrow discuss this problem in An Introduction to Philosophy of Education, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1975.
- 52 See Michael Vaughan, 'A Critique of the Dominant Ideas in Departments of English in the English-speaking Universities of South Africa', Critical Arts, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1984, p. 31.
- 53 G.M. Bantock, op. cit., p. 346.
- 54 See Chapter 6, p.223 below.
- 55 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Shakespeare's English Historical Plays', 1836, in Clark, op. cit., pp. 418 - 419.

- 56 R.C. Solomon, History and Human Nature Brighton, Harvester Press, 1980, p. xiv, in Bantock, G.H., op. cit., p. 15.
- 57 Williams, Keywords, op. cit., p. 149.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Ibid., p. 163.
- 60 Ibid., p. 164.
- 61 Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, p. 105. In Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, op. cit., p. 194.
- 62 Williams, Keywords, op. cit., p. 32.
- 63 Sneddon, 'The Power of the Spoken Word', op. cit., pp. 15 - 17.
- 64 Ibid., p. 16.
- 65 Study Guide, Department of Speech and Drama, University of Natal, 1987.
- 66 George Bernard Shaw, 'The Problem Play', 1895, in Bernard F. Dukore, Dramatic Theory and Criticism, New York, Molt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974, p. 630.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid., p. 637.
- 69 Ibid., p. 633.



70 George Bernard Shaw, 'Preface to Three Plays by Brieux', 1909, In Dukore,  
op. cit., p. 637.

71 Ibid., p. 638.

72 Ibid.

73 Ibid.

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## **THE CONSOLIDATION OF SPEECH AND DRAMA**

During the 1960s and 1970s, Departments of Speech and Drama, or *Spraak en Drama*, were established at most of the universities catering for 'white' South Africans.<sup>1</sup> Departments of drama vary in South African universities in their aims, content and length of course. The concept of Speech and Drama as a discipline within the B.A. structure has had a pervasive influence, and Departments based on the course established at the University of Natal in Durban were established at Rhodes, in 1966; the Pietermaritzburg campus in 1967; at Durban-Westville in 1973; and at Zululand in 1979.<sup>2</sup> In 1974 a four year Bachelor of Dramatic Art was introduced at the University

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of the Witwatersrand under the joint administration of Dr (now Prof.) Van Zyl and Dr de Villiers, both of whom are still with the department. These two established a syllabus and, in 1976, Professor David Homer, who was heading the Speech and Drama Department at the University of Durban-Westville, became the first administrator of the department and the Performing Arts Centre.<sup>3</sup> David Horner had trained under Elizabeth Sneddon and, until 1985 when extensive revisions to the syllabus were begun, the course was based on the premises which she had established.<sup>4</sup> These premises were unquestioningly adopted by Sneddon's successor at the University of Natal (Durban), Prof. Pieter Scholtz and by her former students, who took on the roles of heads of most of these departments.<sup>5</sup> In his inaugural address Scholtz argues that the playwright, the director and actor each have a claim to be the transmitters of life through the medium of their art.<sup>6</sup> Roger Orton suggests that through a study of Drama we should be able to deepen and broaden our own experience of life, develop an awareness of others and "begin to overcome the enslavements of prejudice, and clear paths between man and man, between race and race through which finally we can free ourselves from the islands of fear and violence".<sup>7</sup> David Horner claims that the Greeks produced a golden age of Drama where actors could express emotions and universal truths through the clarity of their texts.<sup>8</sup> Roy Sargeant addresses the question of how to make theatrical masterpieces available to modern audiences or, in his words, "take away the empty masterpieces, and, hopefully, bring on the fulfilled masterpieces as Peter Brook did".<sup>9</sup>

However, it is interesting to note that although the fundamental principles of a liberal education were unquestioningly adopted by these heads of departments, there was a distinct trend away from the importance of an education in the liberal arts, espoused by Sneddon, towards an interest in theatre, and acting as a profession. In his inaugural address, Scholtz concerns himself with the roles of playwright, director and actor, as artists in the theatre, and then makes a tenuous link between drama as art, and personal development:

Drama, as an integral part of education, is concerned, like the other arts, both with the workings of the imagination and with the discipline of craftsmanship – a part of every individual's life, not the privilege of the gifted few picked for a special

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occasion. It is concerned with opportunities for the development, of the imagination, for the understanding of human situations and behaviour through movement and speech, in a way that adds to personal experience, of much that has merely been imparted information.

Speech is the civilised man's tool of communication. But it is a tool which has become blunt and uncared for. It is time that we put our workshops in order, - in the schools, in the universities and in the theatre.<sup>10</sup>

In their respective inaugural addresses, Horner concerns himself with establishing some respect for his profession as an actor, and Sargeant with trends in contemporary theatre.<sup>11</sup> Only Orton concerns himself directly with the 'civilizing influence' of drama and the importance of communication skills for every profession and for future leaders.<sup>12</sup>

The belief that the true aim of university education is the disinterested pursuit of truth for its own sake, was being eroded by the need for job training that became an increasingly important consideration in the 1960s in South Africa. The inherent ambiguity in any educational programme is how to gain skills or technical proficiency and, at the same time, some longer-range understanding of the fundamental theoretical propositions underlying the discipline. Departments of Speech and Drama are particularly vulnerable to becoming trapped in this contradiction because there is no clarity about what kind of technical proficiency they are aiming for. From the 1960s the trend seemed more and more toward a training for mainstream western theatre and also for television, when it was introduced in 1976. This is not suggested by any basic changes to the syllabus, but by the increasing number-and the kind of productions presented by the departments.

## 1. THE RISE OF VOCATIONALISM

As the boom conditions of the 1960s in South Africa highlighted the shortages of skilled labour power, the state began to place a major stress on vocational and technical training for whites, as well as white immigration.<sup>13</sup> In Britain and America, movements towards career education, based on the argument that education must meet the needs of the economy, gained impetus and supported the shift towards

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increasing vocationalism in South Africa. Economists working within the liberal tradition expressed confidence in the power of a 'free' market economy to break apartheid, and these views gave ideological support to any movements that seemed to favour economic growth.<sup>14</sup> The interaction between state, private sector and university is obviously complex, but the trend towards vocationalism is fuelled by the needs of the capitalist society that the university serves. According to the Thorn report of 1965, universities are moving along the line of development that favours the establishment of a variety of fields of study and training, often with a very strong professional and career bias that cannot really be distinguished from training. The motivation for this development is said to be the university's desire to meet the needs of the community it serves.<sup>15</sup> The effect of career orientated education is to undermine the liberal idea of the university as an institution of higher learning that has, as a fundamental mission, the nurturance and transmission of a cultural heritage through the disinterested pursuit and dissemination of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Although universities recognise the legitimacy of demands for occupational competence, the certificate of academic proficiency and professional preparation is traditionally rewarded as subsidiary to the higher goals of a general and liberal education. In this connection, the Van Wyk de Vries commission made the following statement:

- (a) It is the function of the university to advance learning by bringing to light the knowledge amassed through the ages, by systematising it, by incorporating every facet into the various disciplines as a component of the whole structure of knowledge, and by new discoveries through investigation and research. The primary concern is basic knowledge and research, and when this has been transmitted to society to be employed there, applied and directed science and research follow. Broadly speaking, therefore, the humanities, the natural sciences and the applied sciences are involved.
- (b) It is the function of the university to prepare students to practice a profession for which society considers a university education to be necessary and even prescribes it. This is to be distinguished, however, from purely practical professional training which is not the function of the university.<sup>17</sup>

The generality of undergraduate studies, in particular, is defended on the grounds that excessive specialization is limiting, denies personal freedom to develop and therefore

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ultimately undermines progress towards a democratic society by producing unthinking automatons. But, the push for specialized competence and professionalism, supported by arguments that the hard social reality is that practically everyone must seek a job, cannot be ignored, and universities have had to respond to the challenge of vocationalism. The SAPSE formula claims to support and uphold the mission of the university in its disinterested pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, but details of the formula favour particular pursuits at the expense of others.<sup>18</sup>

As I have noted, the proponents of theatre studies have responded to the debate, over the merits of a liberal education as against a professional training, in different ways. The University of Cape Town developed a Performer's Diploma that can be obtained with a B.A. degree after three years. The Universities of the Witwatersrand and Stellenbosch have four-year career orientated degrees while other universities offer Speech and Drama, or *Spraak en Drama*, as a course within the B.A. degree. Students may major in Speech and Drama and another subject. In the latter case, the argument is that a false dichotomy is set up between liberal education and professional training, and that it is possible to achieve a synthesis of the two, especially when students include an honours course which provides an opportunity to acquire a professional training. But, these universities are increasingly caught up in the contradiction between claiming that they are not training actors, and students' requirements for a career education. A classical actor's training for western theatre requires years of intensive physical training and so, the honours course is not an altogether satisfactory answer to the problem of offering a professional training.

The introduction of television in South Africa in 1976 and the growth of the Performing Arts Councils meant that there were increasing job opportunities for actors and this put further pressure on Departments of Speech and Drama to focus on this aspect of the training.<sup>19</sup> A published record of a Drama Conference held at the University of Pretoria in 1975 indicates that a central concern was the professional training of actors. Professor Odendaal, who organised the function, specifically invited theatre, film and television practitioners to express their views on preparing students for these professions. The value of Speech and Drama for personal growth and the ability to communicate came under attack from theatre professionals and



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some academics. In his capacity as Artistieke Leier, TRUK Toneel, Francois Swart commented on the lack of basic training in speech and movement in Speech and Drama Departments. He noted that his Alma Mater did not claim to train actors, but dismissed this argument saying that he was “talking out of the needs of the theatre”.

The credo of my Alma Mater was to produce articulate human beings... not necessarily actors. To achieve this goal, drama was used as a medium to attempt an understanding of life and its values, and the tools of speech and movement utilised to express the measure of one's success in this pursuit.

After graduating I proceeded to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, to learn the craft of acting... I found that I could move exquisitely, speak beautifully, and had sterling values but proved to be an abysmal actor.<sup>20</sup>

In a comment he continued:

I am talking from out of the needs of the theatre; of getting practical people into the theatre. Not only actors, as I said. I am saying it with gratitude: a great number of trained people come from the departments, but they haven't got sufficient training for the practical theatre, for the practical needs of the theatre; and I understand this very well. I understand the great concentration on theory in the departments. I am pleading for fewer departments, better staffed and then the flowering (of the endeavour) will be much greater.<sup>21</sup>

#### **He pleads for a particular kind of actor's training - a 'classical training**

I am also pleading for a return to a classical training. Every student of music must master the Masters, every singer plod through Aria Antica, every dancer Corps de Ballet his way through the classics. Its all too easy for even a moderately talented student of Speech and Drama to impress in the modern mumble-and-shuffle behaviourist plays. Easy results for the student, easy for the lecturer/director; unfair to the student; hell for the *praktyk* when your products, no matter how talented, cannot phrase a speech, cannot sustain a role, lack rhythm and have no inkling of style.

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There are many departments dabbling in communication. If Speech and Drama denotes training centres for the *praktyk* ... there are but few.<sup>22</sup>

His implied criticism of the emphasis on 'theory' rather than a practical drama training and his dismissal of the general educational value of the discipline as "dabbling in communication" is indicative of the growing trend towards vocationalism. His views about theory were endorsed by Prof. Robert Mohr, then head of the Department of Drama at the University of Cape Town. In his opening remarks he disclaimed the chairperson's reference to himself as a scholar, saying that his address would be lacking in "erudition, wit or theorizing"<sup>23</sup> Later when, in discussion, he was rebuked by Roy Sargeant for the dismissal of himself as a scholar he claimed that it was simply that he had not chosen that identity for himself for this particular address.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, his remarks underline a sense of unease about 'theory' and confidence in getting on with the practice of theatre that began to prevail in university drama departments in the 1970s. In his address outlining the training of directors in the theatre, Mohr falls back on empirical arguments, similar to those favoured by Leavis, about the need for students to engage with the text and not interpretation of the text; "to treat the script with all the resources they can bring to it of intelligence and understanding and then to reveal that understanding."<sup>25</sup>

The implication is that the students bring their ideologically pure selves to engage with the essence of Shakespeare, in order, not to interpret him, but understand him, and, in the simplest way, convey that understanding to the audience. According to Mohr, although a training in skills is important (he achieves this in six months), of more importance is "the exploration of our individual and group cultural identity". In an endorsement of the approach articulated by Sneddon, he exclaims:

My plea is for a training in literature, in reading, in the whole cultural history of the theatre. We have to explore the nature of the medium, its history, not starting with Artaud but starting in ancient Egypt 6r before; not even starting with Aristotle...

This is the way I think we can acquire and teach our students something, at any rate of the true humility of the artist. Give him his tools by all means, but let him understand where he himself is situated is situated in the history and in the potential future. After all, all of the history of Western culture flows through us. We are the summary, each one of us sitting here, of the whole Western civilisation.<sup>26</sup>

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His argument is that, given this training and the opportunity to practice directing and make mistakes, young directors will produce work that is meaningful “in the core”.<sup>27</sup> When it was suggested that The Space and The Company receive subsidies, he said that although he had great respect for the work done, that these companies, “had not yet achieved a status where they can prove their contribution to the larger stream of ‘our culture’”.<sup>28</sup> This strikingly Eurocentric and evaluative interpretation of ‘culture’ typically underpins the work undertaken by Speech and Drama Departments in the country.<sup>29</sup> But, unlike the aim of Speech and Drama Departments, which is “to train articulate human beings”, the diploma course at the University of Cape Town unequivocally trains students for the professional theatre. The logical conclusion to the demand for a classical training is that central Academics or Schools of Performing Arts should be established to prevent spreading the few expert teachers too thinly throughout the country and producing large numbers of students who are inadequately trained for a vocation in mainstream western theatre.

## **THEORY AND PRACTICE IN DRAMA TEACHING**

The courses offered by the various Departments of Speech and Drama all include a substantial practical component in addition to language and theatre studies. Some of the initial resistance to the introduction of Speech and Drama as a discipline centred around the practical component of the course. The question still hovers, “Is the course sufficiently ‘academic’ to be regarded as a university discipline?”. This question is based on an assumption that some pursuits are appropriately taught at a university while others are taught in other institutions for tertiary education such as technikons. University education is perceived, to be academic and theoretical and orientated towards research, while technikon education focusses on the acquisition of skills through practical application. The dichotomy is in many respects a false one because the acquisition of knowledge and skills is interrelated and, ideally, practical and theoretical work should not be divorced from each other. The focus of attention on theory at universities at the expense of practical application is expressed in the derogatory sense of ‘academic’ as being of no practical consequence. Universities do, of course, undertake practical work, but this is constrained by the traditional teaching technique that is dominant at universities - the lecture. The lecturer offers ‘academic’

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courses, is a purveyor of information and is able to address large numbers of students simultaneously. Practical work requires an improved staff/student ratio, more time and more facilities and is therefore more expensive to operate than the lecture system that has now been entrenched by the SAPSE formula. Technicians traditionally operate from a given position and are, in this sense, tools or agents of theories that have been developed at universities. They simply 'get on with the work' without too much questioning of the basic assumptions that underpin the skills that are being taught.<sup>30</sup> To return to why Speech and Drama Departments are threatened as University disciplines because of the large practical component in the course, is to consider what is undertaken as 'practical work'? It is here that the Departments are caught up in an anomaly - are they offering a 'classical training' for the professional theatre, are they offering a training in 'organic' communication or are they researching and - 'reflecting on the nature and function of theatre studies'?

The viability of offering a 'classical training' for professional actors in a university drama department is discussed in depth in an informative article written by Clive Barker about his teaching experience in the Drama Department at the University of Birmingham. In South Africa, no specific tradition of training actors for our circumstances has been developed and so, a professional training for the theatre implies a 'classical training' as offered in the western tradition.<sup>31</sup> For this reason Clive Barker's experience in a 'British university is relevant to the situation in South African universities. Any performer training, whether it be in classical western ballet, Indian Kathakali dance, Japanese Noh Theatre, or for Euro-American theatre requires a total commitment to the work. The training is basically physical, a matter of actually learning a technique through imitation and repetition, through practice under the guidance of skilled practitioners of the technique. It cannot be learned or even practiced without such guidance and so students and teachers must spend long hours together.

As Clive Barker points out the problems of even demonstrating what the demands are in learning a specific technique, let alone embarking on a fully fledged course for professional actors, runs foul of the university set-up at every single point.<sup>32</sup> The main constraint is time - the time allocated to embark on a broad and comprehensive

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introduction to as many aspects of drama and theatre training as possible, in other words an academic study, and also undertake a practical training is insufficient. Students become trapped between the need to study and the need to practice and the working out of these contradictions for each individual is very complex and, according to Barker, often destructive.<sup>33</sup> He is referring to a four year professional degree course when he complains that one hour a day spent on movement, which is “under the bare minimum if any progress is -to be made”, is inadequate. Quite clearly, South African Speech and Drama Departments that offer one or two hours of movement training a week cannot claim to be even approximating a classical training for actors. But, the proclaimed intention of these Departments has never been to train professional actors, as Roy Sargeant pointed out in response to Francois Swart at the 1975 Association of Drama Departments in Southern Africa Conference held in Pretoria:

At Rhodes anyway we are not training actors and we don't pretend to be training actors. It is not our job to prepare actors; it is simply that anybody who wants to become a fully qualified, efficient actor can do a university degree which is a plausible arts degree which will stand him in good stead for his life as a whole. Perhaps then he should be encouraged to proceed overseas for specific training where they certainly seem to have the staff to do this specific training.<sup>34</sup>

Here Sargeant comes out with the familiar argument that a ‘plausible arts degree’ is an education for ‘life as a whole’. It is almost as though a student may become an actor by default through taking the Speech and Drama course. The ambiguity of this statement is not merely a lapse that occurred in open debate, but an indication of the deep contradiction that exists in Speech and Drama Departments that teach practical courses that simulate an actor’s training course, that focus on the production of plays and so offer their students acting experience and yet claim that they are not training actors. If the course to be offered is a developed professional course for an established repertory, then under the South African system, it is better offered at a technikon or academy, than at a university, where the focus of attention is on a vocational training and not on a broad and comprehensive study of the theatre. What about the training of the individual’s skills in communication, imaginative insight, creative awareness and understanding of our fellow men? How is this achieved through the practical work? A

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glance at various study guides indicates that the practical work involves a training in what are essentially acting techniques, movement, voice and breathing, acting and directing, in a truncated and summarized version of a professional western actor's training course. The question is, "What is being taught?". The ability to communicate, imaginative insight, creative awareness and empathy are extremely valuable attributes, but I cannot agree that they are generally developed by any activity requiring them. In pursuing a study of the theatre, one becomes more imaginative and proficient in this particular field, but not necessarily a more imaginative architect or parent, and certainly not necessarily a 'better' human being.

Therefore, I cannot agree with Scholtz that the learning of a specific skill or craft - acting, for example, for western theatre - will develop a general ability to communicate and that, because movement and speech are human activities, by focussing our attention on some very specific ways of moving and speaking we gain a general understanding of human situations. However, I do agree with the importance of experiential learning and I think that Speech and Drama Departments have made a very valuable contribution to education by introducing an approach that includes ways of thinking, other than through reading, writing and listening to lectures. It is through building on this approach that an opportunity exists for radical educational innovation. But, is it possible to gain a general understanding of the structure and functioning of society? I think not if we police off the parameters of our discipline and remain shackled by specific knowledge and unaware of general theoretical developments in the human sciences.

## **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'THEORY'?**

What do we mean by 'theory'? There is a sense, in which it is the awareness of why we do what we do. It is the making explicit of this implicit awareness. Theory in this important sense is always in active relation to practice; an interaction between things done, things observed and systematic explanation of these.<sup>35</sup> In theatre studies this sense of theory manifests itself in courses such as the history and principles of drama, theory of spoken language, movement theory and scenographic theory. These courses introduce students to ways of describing and analyzing plays, visual communication, language usage, movement and so on. They provide the theoretical base that gives the discipline academic status. However, the familiar argument is that theory divorced from practice is useless and drama departments justify their autonomy by arguing that

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preparing a play for acting is the best way of studying a play academically and that, if students are to explore the nature of drama, they must have some experience of acting. In South African drama departments, practical and theoretical courses are therefore interrelated in 'order to provide a comprehensive study of theatre, dramatic literature and related arts. In common usage it is theory that is taught in the lecture situation and tested in written examinations, while it is practice that is undertaken in tutorials and practicals and examined through a system of oral assessments. There is also a sense in which there is a contrast between the theory/practical relation, the theoretical being that which is proposed and the practical that which is usually done.<sup>36</sup> When theory bears no relation to practice, a false dichotomy -is set up and the necessary distinction between the two learning processes becomes an opposition. Theory may, be reduced to a set of conventional ideas or speculations rattled off in a lecture or a 'thing' that can be learned from books. Practice that is not consciously informed by theory, becomes conventional or habitual. It may then become entrenched, supported by common sense assumptions that this is the 'obvious' and 'natural' way of doing things. As Steadman pointed out at the 1984 Stellenbosch conference, when practice exists in isolation from theory it is merely routine imposed by habit.<sup>37</sup> Practice that has become conventional or habitual can always be traced to a base in theory. It is vital for universities to be aware of which theories inform the practices they have adopted because in this way these practices may be questioned and challenged, and to be constantly in the forefront of theoretical advances. The key problem is to discover an active relation between theory and practice or praxis. The division of teaching time into lectures, practicals and tutorials under the SAPSE formula is a particularly pernicious way of holding theory and practice in a false opposition.

There is another range of meanings attached to theory which reach beyond description and analysis to **explanation**. In this sense, theory refers to an explanatory scheme of ideas, a position that is, of necessity, hypothetical and that involves deductive thinking rather than empirical observation. From the perspective that what is **real** can be identified with what is experienced, theory as explanation, becomes superfluous. The reliance on observation and the indifference to theory has, of course, been challenged by arguments that the 'empirical world is causally connected to 'deeper' levels, the structures and processes of the real. These causal connections cannot be understood by experience, because neither the underlying structures, nor the connections between these structures and the empirical world, are themselves experienced.<sup>38</sup> We cannot rely on observation or common sense to make these connections and therefore must make use of deductive thinking or theory. The construction of highly abstract ideas, such as 'mode of production' and 'relations of production', then becomes an essential task. We have inherited a tradition of eschewing this kind of theory as outside the bounds of our 'discipline and dubbed it as simply a way of perplexing ourselves and our students with nice speculations of philosophy, of promoting jargon and even of leading to a loss -of spontaneity and creative power. This approach to theory has been challenged and the need for an overriding theory of cultural practice that relates to the South African social formation has been articulated by Kavanagh, Coplan, Steadman and others.<sup>39</sup> Hauptfleisch has pointed out the need to embrace a much wider field than that traditionally regarded as the terrain of theatre, studies and define the interaction between theatre and society.<sup>40</sup> The refusal to develop a sociology of theatre studies has thrown the discipline into a state of crisis in which much of the work has become outdated and irrelevant to the changing needs of the society and serves simply to reinforce positions of- superiority and inferiority rather than generating free and critical enquiry.

It is important to note here that 'theory' as a general concept, may give a misleading impression of unity where there is, in fact, enormous diversity. Obviously there is not one theory, but the various structuralisms, Marxism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, post-structuralism, and others that have all contributed to a significant dismantling of barriers supported by assumptions that are regarded as common sense. Geertz has shown that common sense itself is a cultural system that bears investigation which can

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only be achieved through theory.<sup>41</sup> A significant new approach is the interdisciplinary approach which means that theories developed in specific fields are drawn on to 'counter the- policing of conceptual boundaries between what is pertinent to one discipline and what to another. One development of recent years, that South African scholars are finding particularly useful in generating a theoretical approach to literature and art, is historical materialism. Materialist criticism refuses to privilege 'literature and the arts' as the proponents of high culture have done. As Raymond Williams argues in an important essay, "we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws".<sup>42</sup> The arts may have quite specific features as practices, but they cannot be separated from general social processes. This attention to social process has far reaching consequences. To begin with, it leads us beyond idealist preoccupations with supposedly universal truths which find their counterpart in man's essential nature, into the recovery of the historical and political dimensions of cultural practice. One particularly important consideration is the unmasking of cultural connections between signification and legitimation: the way that beliefs, practices and institutions legitimate the dominant social order or status quo - the existing relations of domination and subordination. Such legitimation is found, for example, in the representation of sectional interests as universal ones. Those who rule may be serving their own interests and those of their class, but they, together with the institutions and practices through which they exercise and maintain power, are understood as working in the interests of the community as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

The purpose of theory is, therefore, to draw attention to problems and make them even more problematic in order to demonstrate that there are different possibilities, different responses and that established ways of doing things should not be taken for granted. One of the key functions of theories of education is to provide a rationale for selection of what will be studied. It is enlightening to examine the difficulties of passage from complexities of knowledge and method to the simplicities imposed on ideas when they are translated into a syllabus, set works and examination questions, especially at primary and secondary level. The rationale for making particular selections needs to be constantly reconsidered so that a 'safe choice' does not become entrenched and 'the way it has always been, done', a force of absolute authority. In



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this dissertation I have drawn on theory to question the central tenets espoused by the proponents of Speech and Drama: the training of intelligence and sensibility, the development of moral judgement or the ability to make the right choice, through the experience of Art, the fostering of a selected tradition of works of art that it is claimed express the collective wisdom of humanity about fundamental problems and the maintenance of 'standards' in the face of the mass market. My critical description of the work of others undertaken in this field is not undertaken simply for the sake of theorising, but is a response to the questions; what is being taught in the field of theatre studies' and why?

It is instructive to note the influence of the work of university departments on developments in primary and secondary education. Speech and Drama is not a well established school subject in this country and its proponents fought a long and difficult battle to get the subject accepted by the Department of Education and Culture as a subject suitable for matriculation on the higher grade.

## **SPEECH AND DRAMA IN EDUCATION**

Speech and Drama has been introduced into some schooling systems in South Africa. The Natal Education Department has accepted the subject for the Natal Senior Certificate and provision has been made in the school time-table to teach at both the standard and higher grades. It has also been accepted in Indian schools. However, it has not been introduced as a matriculation subject in schools for black South Africans. The Speech and Drama course that is advocated specifically for education, closely resembles the course that is offered at university level. The components of the course are Principles of Drama and Theatre History, Principles of Speech and Practical Work (including Improvisation and Movement). The premises that underpin the study of drama are the same as for the university course and in the following section I shall focus on some of the more problematic aspects of speech training.

When Speech and Drama was established, its proponents challenged a common perception, still prevalent in South Africa today, that drama in an educational setting

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means the school play, and speech, the acquisition of the 'right' accent. The school play was, well established as an extramural activity in schools, in Britain and in South Africa, concerned with providing a well-rounded' education for their pupils. The value of the school play, from this perspective, is clearly articulated by a British board of education in 1919:

The pupils who take part in the performance of plays learn to speak well and express emotion becomingly: to be expressive yet restrained; to subordinate the individual to the whole; to play the game; to be resourceful and self possessed and mitigate personal disabilities.<sup>44</sup>

According to Speech and Drama specialists, when the school play is attempted by untrained teachers the result is often simply an outlet for gifted or exhibitionist pupils, or a showcase for the school. The argument is that Speech and Drama should be a central feature of the school curriculum and that drama should not be relegated to an annual recreational activity. They also took issue with the notion of 'elocution' or speech training that involved the mechanical imitation of correct forms of speech for the sake of discriminating a privileged elite. The concern is with self-expression and creativity and, as has been noted, with the development of the individual through an engagement with great works of drama, poetry, prose and rhetoric.<sup>45</sup>

### **Speech Training**

However, 'good speech' remains a central concern of many drama specialists because the preservation of a standard of spoken English is perceived to be one of the priorities of Speech and Drama education. An interview with the late Professor Rosalie van der Gucht published in Talk Out, a newsletter produced by the South African Guild of Speech and Drama Teachers, succinctly captures the dilemma of attempting to preserve 'standards1 in a changing world.

The standard of English in South Africa is deteriorating and it's an awful pity. If something isn't done to stop that, whether its done by the drama teachers or the, English teachers or the parents, the beauty of the language will be lost to the next generation. English is dynamic, changing. A lot of South Africanisms are being adopted, and that is enriching, but we don't want it just to be the white tribe's dialect in the endless dialects of Africa which has an English origin, but that's all

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one can say. It is still after all, an international language and it would be nice to think that all South Africans could at least speak English which is understood wherever they go. It doesn't make a child popular in the school situation to speak well. If they do speak well, they are not acceptable to their peers and this has always been so –it's nothing new. What one always hoped was that they learned certain things from the Speech and Drama teacher so that when the incentive was there, they could use it, and that about the best one hoped for. The very, very strong dialects that the schools use nowadays are often barely understandable if you're not in that group, and it would be a pity if standard of English was entirely lost. Of course there are so few standards in anything today. It's all very difficult. It would seem the standard of English usage and spoken English on television and even on radio has declined dreadfully. It's for us Speech and Drama teachers not to sit by and allow this to happen without at least trying to do something about it. Through official means, certainly, to stand up and be counted, but it is also for us to try and instill into the school children a love, for example, of excellent verse well spoken and certainly a pride in their language.

It is all a question of balance.<sup>46</sup>

This is a fascinating attempt at transcending the irreconcilable contradiction between recognising the inevitable development of dialects and accents of English and preserving a perceived superior standard. South African English is one of the white tribe's dialects and it is one of the endless English dialects of Africa. The problem is, as van der Gucht points out, to foster a dialect that can be internationally understood. This does not necessarily mean preserving the 'beauty' of the dialect of the Southern British upper middle classes but it does mean working towards some kind of conformity lest the various speakers of English dialects do become incomprehensible to each other. Speech patterns and a sense of identity are intimately connected and when some dialects are pronounced 'standard' with the implication that they are more valuable than others and worth preserving, cultural domination is imposed at a very personal level. Very often the condemnation of a non-standard dialect has to do with perceptions of the 'beauty' of the language rather than with what is or is not comprehensible. However, the problem is by no means simple because it is possible for dialects to become so broad that their speakers lose the advantage of speaking an international language. I agree that it is up to Speech and Drama teachers to address themselves to the task. But the task as I perceive it is to find a balance between

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fostering versions of English that remain essentially English and imposing standards for the sake of preserving a cultural heritage that is meaningless to most South Africans. This is sometimes difficult because a belief in the importance of preserving the Southern British dialect as a standard version of the language is the heritage of most Speech and Drama teachers.

**In a booklet for the South African Guild of Speech and Drama Teachers, on the first speech teachers of Southern Africa, Norah Taylor notes that these teachers insisted on a standard of pronunciation that would be acceptable on the stage in England.<sup>47</sup> She claims that in Natal, the wish to preserve the standard of spoken English, “less touched in this province than in others by the influence of other languages”, encouraged the work of speech teachers, and paved the way for a Speech and Drama Department at the University of Natal. The impulse to train students to speak in a way that is “pleasing to the ear” is still a factor in Speech and Drama courses. In the Natal Education Department syllabus for Speech and Drama for the Natal Senior Certificate the following recommendation is made on accents:**

#### 4.2.5.1 Accents

Good speech should be pleasant to listen to, easy to understand and free from strain. Accents are acceptable provided they do not distort speech or interfere with the clarity and expressiveness of the communication.<sup>48</sup>

While the main thrust of this recommendation is that the aim of speech training is to help students to find ways of speaking that are appropriate to whatever challenges they might encounter, there is an implication that there is a standard of speech against which achievement can be measured. We all speak English with an accent, but the implication here is that some speakers have an accent and presumably others do not. The difficulty with this notion is that when it comes to assessing the standard of speech, judgements against ‘incorrect pronunciations and ‘distorted speech’ are often a reflection of bias against accents with a low status.

The vexed question of dialects, accents and standards of speech haunts Departments of Speech and Drama. Most South Africans do not use the dialect of educated native

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speakers in south-east England and yet, Received Pronunciation which is based on this dialect, is often posited as a model for 'correct speech. The argument for achieving an acceptable standard of speech is usually that no attempt is made to change speech patterns so long as articulation is crisp, the vowel sounds comprehensible so that there are no substitutions to change the meanings of words and the speech rhythms of the English language observed. This kind of argument rests on an assumption that accent can be separated from the physical activity of speech and that speech patterns can be separated from speech rhythms. In other words, it is possible to speak clearly and intelligibly 'with an accent'. This view overlooks the importance of the listener in communication who makes judgements about, the standard of speech depending on how well the speaker is comprehended. When the listener's speech environment differs from the speakers then it is particularly difficult to make judgements about whether there are problems with pronunciation or with the physical activity of speech. It is difficult to know whether or not articulation is crisp and the vowel sounds and speech rhythms are not simply those of another dialect of English. When aesthetic judgements are made along the lines of "pleasant to listen to" and some accents are found less pleasing than others this is usually because of a complex of factors that have to do with social, political and regional biases and prejudices rather than with anything aesthetic. It is important for teachers to tolerate a range of accents rather than to attempt to impose a standard accent under the guise of teaching 'clear and intelligible speech'

An approach to dialect that is gaining ground in Departments of Speech and Drama is that all varieties are worthy of attention. Differences between non-standard dialects and standard versions of English are pointed out and students are encouraged to gain competence in other accents in addition to their own. However, this remains onerous for students who do not 'naturally' speak a standard dialect and who are obliged to become bi- dialectical in order to pass the-course. This usually applies to black students whereas their white counterparts reach the required standard without having to acquire the use of a range of accents although credit is always given for the appropriate use of accent to portray character. The claim for Speech and Drama in education is that it provides opportunities for enhanced language ability and develops speech that is free from strain. This enables students to communicate their thoughts

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with more clarity, precision and fluency. However, studies in language learning have indicated that if this training involves attempting to change a dialect or accent then the result is that speech becomes more hesitant and faltering and for some personality types there is apparently the danger that in addition to becoming inarticulate the speaker may develop problems of personal and cultural identity.<sup>49</sup> Progressive approaches to educational drama stress the drawing out of the student's potential rather than dwelling on the correction of speech problems and specific training in communication skills. These trends in educational drama are discussed in Chapter 6.

The influence of Speech and Drama on the way drama is taught in schools is limited, except where Speech and Drama is taught as a matriculation subject. In a survey of drama teaching in South African schools, presented at the Association of Drama Departments of Southern Africa (ADDSA) Conference in Johannesburg, 1987, Paddy Terry found that more than 70% of the drama groups that exist in schools have the stated aim of using their time to rehearse plays or allied performance events that are then presented to an audience.<sup>50</sup> The proponents of Speech and Drama prefer Speech and Drama Festivals where the emphasis is on speaking poetry, prose and drama extracts, to the production of plays. This is so that children can engage with suitable 'high-quality' material at an early age. (Full length productions of great works are rightly considered too difficult). However, Terry's survey indicates that the majority of the time spent on 'drama' is spent neither on festival-type work, nor on school plays, but on concerts, operettas and musicals. As Terry notes, this indicates a concern with discovering talent and offering entertainment rather than with drama as a serious educational pursuit. There are connections between this attitude and the drive towards vocational training, including a preparation for commercial theatre, that is emerging in some university drama departments, it would appear that the civilising potential of drama posited by Sneddon has not made deep inroads into school curricula and drama remains, in Terry's metaphor, 'Cinderella Trying to Get to the Ball'.

This is not to suggest that other approaches to educational drama, in the form of D.I.E. and T.I.E., are unknown in this country. In Chapter 6, I outline the work that has been under-taken in this connection. I contend that this important work is the basis for developing an appropriate methodology for South African theatre studies. There has also been a serious attempt to provide children's plays of educational value from Pieter Scholtz at the University of Natal. These plays are an important contribution to the development of children's theatre within the confines of a conservative view of drama as Art.

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In this chapter, I indicated how the dominant paradigm established by Sneddon has consolidated and been further adjusted in terms of vocational imperatives by the generation of professors that followed her. I suggested that the primary reason for the entrenchment of the discipline and the paucity of published work is that, the importance of theory is overlooked. Without constant recourse to theory, received methodologies are taken for granted and the discipline starts to stultify. In the next section of the dissertation I explore the first shifts in the paradigm and the changes in underlying premises that are generating a break with established methodology.

I also commented on the impact of the university discipline on educational drama and pointed out that although Speech and Drama specialists have achieved an acceptance of Speech and Drama as a school subject in some Departments of Education, a good deal of work remains to be done. The question of imposing a standard of spoken English as a form of cultural dominance was addressed and the implications of this for the development of a methodology are taken up again in Chapters 8 and 10.

## **CHAPTER TWO NOTES**

- 1 In 1959 the extension of the University Education Act was passed which effectively segregated the universities, ending the enrolment of 'Non-whites' at the Universities of the Witwatersrand and Cape Town which had been open.
- 2 The course structure, content and underlying philosophies of the Drama Departments established in Afrikaans-language universities are beyond the scope of this dissertation.
- 3 1977 was the first graduate year for the School of Dramatic Art. In 1983, Paul Regenaar took over the administration of the Performing Arts Centre. In 1986, Ian Steadman became the first full Professor and Head of the School of Dramatic Art.

At the University of Durban-Westville, Devi Bughwan took over from David Homer as Professor and Head of Department.

- 4 According to Fred Hagemann, who joined the School of Dramatic Art in 1975 as a movement specialist under David Homer, the course structure was eclectic and incorporated the different contributions of its staff members. John van Zyl's field of interest is film and television and Aart de Villier's interest is in the field of educational drama and Afrikaans theatre in translation. Some theatre courses were offered within the paradigm of the liberal humanism approach established by Sneddon.
- 5 Pieter Scholtz, Roger Orton, Devi Bughwan, David Homer, Ian Steadman and myself were all awarded our Bachelor of Arts degrees at the University of Natal (Durban)

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- 6 Pieter Scholtz, Transmitters of Life, Inaugural Address delivered at the University of Natal, Durban on 23rd May, 1973.
  - 7 Roger D. Orton, No Man is an Island, Inaugural Address delivered at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg on 7th May 1975.
  - 8 David Homer, All the World's a Stage - So Pity the Poor Player, Inaugural Address delivered at the University of Durban-Westville on 6th October, 1976.
  - 9 Roy Sargeant, No More Masterpieces! or The Word Made Invisible!, Inaugural Address delivered at Rhodes University on 23rd May 1979.
  - 10 Scholtz, Inaugural address, op. cit., p. 11.
  - 11 Homer mentions, in his inaugural address that he is both actor and teacher, but does not develop the concept of university drama teaching.
  - 12 Orton, Inaugural address, op. cit. The paucity of theoretical work emanating from Departments of Speech and Drama means that  
  
I have had to rely on inaugural addresses to establish the premises of the leading exponents in this field.
  - 13 H. Sharp and N. Hartwig, 'The State and Reproduction of Labour Power in South African, in Peter Kallaway, (ed.), Apartheid and Education, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, p. 391.  
  
By 'vocationalism' I mean the thrust towards a specific training for a career. Distinctions have been made between career education and vocationalism. For a full discussion, see Christopher 3. Lucas, Foundations of Education, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall., Inc., 1984.
  - 14 See, for example, Michael O'Dowd, 'South Africa in the light of the stages of economic growth', in A. Leftwich (ed.) Economic Growth and Social Change,



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London, 1974, pp. 29 - 43; and R. Harris, (ed.) Political Economy of South Africa, Boston, 1975.

15. South African Post—Secondary Education (SAPSE) Report, SAPSE 115, University Affairs Branch, Department of National Education, Pretoria, May 1982, pp. 7-9.

16 Lucas, op. cit., p. 132.

17 Commission of Inquiry into the Universities. (Chairman: 3. van Wyk de Vries) Main Report, Pretoria: Government Printer, (HP 25/1974], p. 12.

18 In the case of Theatre Studies, only one category (Theatre Studies 03 04 02) is allocated as contextually basic subject matter, whereas Music, for example, has two categories as basic subject matter Historical Musicology 03 03 02 and Systematic Musicology 03 03 03) and one category as contextually basic subject matter (Musical Composition 03 03 082). This means that more courses within the same discipline are recognised as basic courses requiring staff and facilities.

19 The performing arts councils were established in 1963.

20 L. B. Odendaal (ed.) Drama Training in the Seventies, Butterworth en! Kie (SA) Edms Beperk, Durban, 1978, p. 37.

21 Ibid., p. 41.

22 Ibid., p. 39.

23 Ibid., p. 67.

24 Ibid., pp. 73 and 74.

25 Ibid., p. 70.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

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- 28 This suggestion was made by Sneddon in question time, Drama Training in the Seventies, op. cit., p. 73, and the reply p.74.
- 29 For a detailed analysis of concepts of 'culture', see Chapter 4, p. 4 -14.
- 30 The value of separating universities and technikons for maintaining the status quo is obvious. Large numbers of people are 'trained' to perform a range of skills without questioning basic social structures. The function of technikons is to provide immediately employable graduates.
- 31 Gibson Kente has developed a training specific for his needs for projection in large dimly lit halls. Mavis Taylor, Benjy Francis, Matsemela Manaka and others are working in this field, but as yet have not theorized their work in order to make it generally available.
- 32 Clive Barker, 'The Dilemma of the Professional in University Drama', Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 4, No. 16, 1974/75, p. 56.
- 33 Ibid., p. 57.
- 34 Roy Sargeant, in question time, Drama Training in the Seventies op. cit., p. 48.
- 35 Williams, Keywords, op. cit., p. 317.
- 36 Ibid., 357.
- 37 Louis Pasteur, in Ian Steadman, Teaterforum 5, No. 1, May 1984, p. 80.
- 38 Madan Sarup, Marxism / Structuralism / Education, New York, Falmer Press, 1984, p. 146.
- 39 Works by these authors have been previously quoted in this thesis.

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- 40 Temple Hauptfleisch, South Africa: A Laboratory for Theatre Research. Research Address No. 1, HSRC, Pretoria, 1984.
- 41 Clifford Geertz, Local Knowledge, New York, Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1983, pp.74 - 93.
- 42 Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, pp.45 - 54.
- 43 Jonathon Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (eds.), Political Shakespeare, New York, Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 6- 7
- 44 Board of Education, Report on the Teaching of English, HMSO, 1919, in Ken Robinson, (ed.) Exploring Theatre and Education, London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd. 1980, p. 142.
- 45 See Mabel E.L. McNeil, "A Didactical - Pedagogical Analysis of the 1985 Syllabus for Speech and Drama in the Province of Natal", Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Natal, Durban, February 1986.
- 46 Rosalie van der Gucht, 'A Question of Balance', taped interview in Talk Out, The South African Guild of Speech and Drama Teachers Newsletter, Vol. 16, 1987, pp. 5 - 6.
- 47 Norah Taylor "The First Speech Teachers of Southern Africa", Unpublished booklet.
- 48 See Natal Education Department Syllabus for Speech and Drama, Standards 8, 9 and 10, Standard Grade and Higher Grade, issued September 1985, implemented January 1986.
- 49 Peter Trudgill, Accent. Dialect and the School, London, Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd. 1975, p. 79.
- 50 See note 9 in Chapter 6 below for more details of this survey, p. 228. Of those groups whose stated principal aim was to do productions for an audience, the following kinds of performance were most popular:

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In primary schools:

Variety concert (75%)

Operetta/musical (59%)

Plays, one-act plays, theme programmes (10 -30%)

In secondary schools:

Variety concert (76%)

One-act plays (69%)

Operetta/musicals (68%)

Plays, theme programmes and Shakespeare (20 -45%)

## **SECTION 2**

### **PARADIGM SHIFTS IN SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE STUDIES**

#### **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PARADIGMATIC BREAK IN THEATRE STUDIES.**

I have touched on several matters and not had time to discuss them fully. And it might seem that some of what I've said is too theoretical to be a guide to practical performance - but this is something I do not apologize for. We cannot know how to write, direct design or act till we know why we have a stage. As a species we need an

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image of ourselves. Other animals are guided by instincts and protected by limited needs. We make decisions, and to do this wisely we need an image of ourselves, a human image. Our biology prepares us for this and if we do not create such an image we cannot use the opportunities of our technology without destroying or corrupting ourselves. Culture is created by the rational, self-manipulating self-consciousness. One of the means of creating this is art. All societies have used art. It is a biological requirement of the orderly functioning of human beings. But other societies have used art not in the way tired business—men want to use our theatre, to escape from labour which denies them self—respect and self—knowledge, but in order to learn how to live and work so that we may be happy and our moral concern for one another is not wasted.

Edward Bond  
1978

## **EMERGING THEORIES OF PERFORMANCE**

The growing interest among South African theatre scholars in indigenous performance forms during the 1970s was not an adventitious one.<sup>1</sup> It was part of a much wider shift in the basis of cultural concerns. The positivistic methods of science of the 20th Century began to pervade all realms of intellectual endeavour, challenging established methodologies in a range of fields including the study of literature and drama, Progressive ideas in education gained ground and the value of engaging with the 'great works was questioned from this quarter also. Finally, anthropological views of culture that were suited to an increasingly egalitarian age became more prevalent than the Arnoldian/Leavisite concept.<sup>2</sup> These shifts opened up the field of performance studies. Knowledge of the theatre other than knowledge of 'golden ages was sought in performance forms that had previously been neglected. A sense of the ossification of western theatre under the weight of a body of great dramatic texts provided the impetus for an exploration of the origins of performance in other cultures, in ritual performance and in popular performance forms. In South Africa, this interest led to research into the cultural history of black South Africans. This sometimes meant a rejection of western aesthetic principles; a rejection related to the legitimation of the movement towards national liberation which intensified in the 1970s.<sup>3</sup>

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The head of the Centre for South African Theatre Research ICESAT), Dr Temple Hauptfleisch, comments on the changing trends in the art studies paradigm in his research address.<sup>4</sup> He claims that the primary impetus for this shift has been a redefinition of the concept of the text and the realisation that any text can only grow from, and exist in, an 'extratextual' context.<sup>5</sup> He notes the influence of the theories and discoveries of a wide range of, disciplines, including anthropology, linguistics and communications on the development of new approaches to the arts. Of particular interest in the theoretical field, is the study of semiotics initiated by the Prague school and, in the Anglo— American world, developed by Keir Elam's The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama. Noting the paucity of research in areas other than textual analysis and biography emerging from South African universities, he comments on the need to produce a theory of performance particularly suited to South African traditions.

In South Africa, as in other colonized countries, a broad and comprehensive theory of performance is essential in order to provide a theoretical base for the analysis of traditional performances, developments under colonialism and emergent forms. The result of dependency on a dominant paradigm imported from the west is that certain kinds of theatre are privileged at the expense of indigenous theatre. This tendency is exacerbated by the divided nature of South African society, apartheid and cultural relativism. Faith in the superiority of western culture has meant that an important body of work has been ignored by Departments of Speech and Drama. This is being rectified to some extent in the 1960s and efforts to record analyse and explain indigenous performance forms are the focus of attention in this section of the dissertation. These efforts signal attempts to redefine the nature of performance which ultimately has a bearing on the methodology adopted in drama departments.

## **THE CONVERGENCE OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND THEATRE STUDIES**

Anthropology has had an important impact on theatre studies. Some anthropological views of culture stress the totality of a people's way of life and emphasize the functional importance of culture as an adaptive mechanism.<sup>6</sup> In this 'totalist' view, culture is a generic term for the sum total of the ways in which a society organizes its relations to its environment and the way it is internally organized.<sup>7</sup> Anthropologists

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working within the 'mentalist' paradigm in the 20th Century, such as Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, Mary Douglas and Gilbert Lewis, have paid attention to social activities such as rituals and ceremonies as symbolic forms and have emphasized the importance of symbolisation. Their description and analysis of ritual performance has been a source of inspiration to drama practitioners and theorists, for example, in the case of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, who have worked collaboratively.

The comparison between ritual processes and performance is established in conventional dramatic criticism as an evolutionary process. The thesis is that dramatic art, as a more advanced form of symbolisation, grows out of ritual and the example of Ancient Greek tragedy and comedy developing out of rituals in honour of Dionysis is cited. But, working between anthropology and theatre, Schechner has developed a theory of performance in which ritual and theatre form a continuum.<sup>8</sup> He argues that the basic opposition is between efficacy and entertainment and not between ritual and theatre. His contention is that all performances contain elements of both forms in varying intensities and that the swing from ritual to theatre is a shift in emphasis. He draws a distinction between drama (the smallest, most intense area of activity), script (all that can be transmitted), theatre (the event enacted), and performance (the whole constellation of events). Performance is a broad definition that includes any presentation before an audience, be it a traditional rite of passage or a modern play. Theatre occurs at a special time and in a special place and, according to Schechner, theatres are maps of the cultures where they exist.<sup>9</sup> This is in both the analogical sense and in terms of their architecture. -The script, or text, has been the central feature of western theories of drama and Schechner has sought to draw attention to the overlapping, but conceptually distinct realities of drama, script, theatre and performance.

In a wide ranging descriptive analysis of modern European and American theatre, Eurasian and African theatre, happenings, environmental theatre and shamanism, he emphasizes the complex inter-relationships between performance forms while providing insights into the multi-channel realities of the modern world, Although Schechner has considerably expanded concepts of the meaning of drama and theatre, his approach is ahistorical and the performances he describes are not analysed in

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relation to the structures of the society in which they are embedded. Schechner provides a vivid description of the processes of performance and intricate analyses of the conventions and internal structures of the events he describes, but he avoids interpretation of performance in relation to its social context. His study is silent on generalized meaning, possibly because of his awareness that meaning is so culture-bound that its manifestation in cultural forms is received intuitively within a particular context and is therefore not accessible to an outsider, no matter how integrated he is in the community. Schechner is concerned with the experience of theatre, with the psyche of performer and audience and active involvement in the process of making an event and the event itself rather than in analyzing the meaning of the event. A key question is “What is the meaning of performance beyond the experiential meaning?” He records that he met with the audience before a performance of Macbeth, in New York in 1969, and suggested that they move around during the show. His suggestions for responding to what was happening indicate his concern with the experience of performance in contrast to, for example, Brecht’s concern with showing causality:

If you are noisy or block the performer’s movements you can bust this thing up. If you take off your shoes so that you are absolutely silent and move from carpeted area to carpeted area, *you* can intensify your own and our experience. Try to understand the action and go with it. Think of yourselves as witnesses or people in the street. Something happens – you go to see what. But you can’t interfere or change what’s happening.<sup>10</sup>

In his cross-cultural analysis there is an underlying assumption of a common human nature that expresses itself in the need to perform. The influence of the anthropologist, Levi-Strauss, is significant in his work in that in the study of cultural symbolism, Levi-Strauss aims to understand a mode of thinking shared by all humans through the study of symbolic systems. In his study of the theatre, Schechner searches for our common humanity.

## **A DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH TO RECORDING PERFORMANCE**

Peter Larlham was one of the first South African academics, within the discipline of Speech and Drama, to undertake research in the field of performance. He worked



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under Schechner at the University of New York and his approach bears marked similarities to that of his mentor. In his doctoral dissertation, “Black Performance in South Africa. A Survey and Documentation”, he surveys and documents a wide range of performance forms, including traditional Zulu rites and ceremonies, Zionist rituals, festivals of the Nazareth Baptist Church, contemporary folk dance and plays.<sup>11</sup> In the chapter on traditional Zulu rites he includes the observations of 19th Century and early 20th Century travellers, historians and anthropologists, such as Henry Francis Wynn, A.T. Bryant, A.F. Gardiner and Eileen Krige, as an introduction to his own observation of ritual performance as it exists today. These observations are simply juxtaposed and Larlham does not draw comparisons between the social meanings of early recorded performances and modern versions that have developed under the influence of colonialism, In his recording of Zionist rituals and Shembe festivals he concentrates on observed behavioural data in order to discuss performance mainly in terms of its internal structure and function. He writes:

My concentration is on the performance aspects of these churches, the function of space, costume and dance at the regular Sunday services. I use here the broadest definition of the term ‘performance to include these Christian rituals.<sup>12</sup>

His focus of attention is on the final product rather than on either the process or the means of production of the performance and on simply recording through description and photographic material the events he has observed.

The contemporary folk dances and the dance competitions held in Dalton Road in Durban have not been documented, to date, in any detail and this section of the thesis is rich in original material and Observation, but silent on style as an index of meaning in a broader social context. The two chapters on popular and committed theatre are a record of plays that have been performed, with brief descriptions of some of the conditions of performance and audience responses. Here again Larlham’s approach is that of an outside recorder simply noting theatrical events for posterity without any attempt at an analysis of the function of theatre in society or desire to determine whose interests these performances serve. Larlham’s approach seems to be a reaction to the ephemeral and experiential nature of performance and to a sense of the

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inadequacy of a descriptive approach to capture these qualities. All that it is possible to do is to note that these events occurred for the record, so to speak.

As in the case of Schechner's work, in this study, performances are described and analysed purely on their own terms and the moral and social values reinforced by the performance forms are considered irrelevant to the discussion of these phenomena. In this way, performance is unproblematically analysed as contributing to the organisation of the society in which it functions, with the implication that it is serving the best interests of all the members of the, society. It is an approach that tends to focus on the celebratory nature of performance rather than on its potential for strengthening or challenging social structures. In this view, performance generates its own energy and Schechner, in particular, writes of performance as a vision of electrifying ecstasy, of trance-like states and modes of being that exist apart from the mundane experience of everyday life.

Larlham's careful observations in his dissertation lack this visionary quality and sense of other worldly celebration. He presents himself instead as an objective observer. However, attempts at describing performance objectively are doomed from the start because the very acts of recording and documenting are acts of interpretation. By refusing to offer overt interpretation, perhaps because with the realisation that meaning is culture-bound comes a sense of the impossibility of giving a 'true' interpretation, the 'objective' observer conceals the assumptions inherent in his or her approach. For example, Larlham works from the Coleridgean notion of organic forms. In making sense out of the internal dynamics of Zulu ritual and the Zionist and Shembe festivals, he seeks a formal unity to which all the elements contribute. The Shembe rituals are explained as a form, of corporate worship that satisfies a common aim and a common need. But, in refusing to distinguish between his observation of the subjective experience of the worshippers and the objective social conditions of their existence, Larlham neglects the possibility that there might not be a common aim and common need amongst those who dance at the festival. Indeed, the dictum he quotes, "Not to dance is like breaking the law", suggests the possibility of subtle coercion to participate in a physically demanding, trance-like dance that channels

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energy that could be expended in a way that might be harmful to the established social order that the dance sustains.<sup>13</sup>

In the final chapters of the dissertation, Larlham records and, in some cases, briefly describes the performance of a number of South African plays. Although he makes no attempt at analysing or evaluating these plays, in terms of their aesthetic, political or social function, he does draw a distinction between popular and committed theatre and uses these terms as headings for the chapters. The categories are not defined beyond a brief statement that “committed theatre embraces those playwrights and theatre practitioners concerned with social and political change”.<sup>14</sup> The chapter, ‘Popular Theatre, contains a section on ‘township musical dramas and one on ‘commercial musicals’. At the beginning of the chapter on committed theatre, Larlham discusses the Black Consciousness movement. Some of the writers and companies he mentions in this chapter were involved in this movement and others were not. In Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa, Robert Kavanagh makes clear distinctions between the ideology of Black Consciousness espoused by groups such as People’s Experimental Theatre (PET) and Theatre Council of Natal (TECON) and the ideology of Workshop 71 which was not a commitment to Black Consciousness, but to developing a perception of the class struggle in South Africa. By presenting a series of works under the heading ‘committed theatre’ in an unproblematised manner, Larlham assumes or implies that these Writers and companies have adopted similar ideologies in their commitment to social and political comment. To avoid his readers coming to these conclusions, Larlham needs to tell us why the work produced by PET, TECON, Workshop 71, The Space, The Company, Junction Avenue Theatre Company, Athol Fugard, Ronnie Govender, Nuthal Naidoo, Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya and others is ‘committed’, and that of Gibson Kente and Sam Nhangwane is ‘popular’. What kind of social and political change is the work committed to and why, under the overall heading ‘Black Theatre’, is so much collaborative work involving white South Africans included? Larlham notes that some of the work he records is collaborative, but he makes the following statement at the end of his introduction:

It is because of racial classification and its accompanying discrimination – devised by whites for the protection of white interests – that the growing concept of “Black Consciousness” has emerged in

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South Africa. This, together with the enforced separation of all racial groups, makes it possible to speak exclusively of “Black performance” and “Black theatre”.<sup>15</sup>

Although he mentions that collaborative work is undertaken, the reader is not informed about the depth or extent of this work, or its importance in this country in the face of racial discrimination. Gibson Kente is one of the few influential black theatre practitioners who has not worked collaboratively with whites and this is not clarified in Larlham’s work. In South Africa, the terms ‘black’ and ‘white’ are mutually exclusive and Larlham’s use of ‘black’ in a very broad sense to include whites, is not the usual use of the term. By refraining from defining his terms in any depth, the implication is either that the work described in Chapter VI was achieved, in the main, without white intervention or contribution or that these contributions are being overlooked, or even suppressed. Clearly this is not Larlham’s intention, which is simply to record events as they are but I am attempting to demonstrate that this is impossible. We cannot work without interpretation and explanation, and it seems more useful for the method of interpretation to be defined openly than concealed in a stance that purports to be neutral and objective.<sup>16</sup>

The contribution of functionalists, particularly in the field of anthropology, is the recognition that meaning is culture-bound. This insight has the important effect of ‘decentering’ the individual subject who is no longer regarded as the source and end of meaning. The limit of this synchronic approach, rooted in assumptions of an essentially conflict-free society, is that it cannot account for historical change, thus precluding any explanations of causality. The belief that cultures are all equally valid and valuable also supports a desire to ‘preserve’ cultures, a desire that has contradictory implications under the impact of colonialism. In South Africa functionalism has tended to preclude the development of explanations of the contradictory role of ethnicity which is at once a means of maintaining domination and gaining autonomy. African performances are rendered exotic, perceived as frozen in time and the hierarchical values that usually work to the detriment of women are not exposed, nor the way these are entrenched and reinforced by performances.

An interest in ritual and popular performance informs the dramatic practice and theory of much of the work of contemporary theatre practitioners, notably Artaud, Peter Brook, Jean Genet and Jerzy Grotowski. Performance theory has not only broadened the scope of theatre studies, but contributed to further defining the interaction between the objective meaning of the playtext and the subjective experience of it in performance. Through The Drama Review, the School of the Arts, New York University, plays a major role in the dissemination of theories of performance that

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emphasize performance as a functional whole. The generation, the experience, the reception and the function of performance, within a given society, are all considered. This is an important break with the concept of theatre as the expression of the genius of 'distinguished playwrights'. The concept of symbolisation in this work differs from the Coleridgean notion of the fusion of content and form or mind and world and focuses instead on symbols as part of the processes of signification in an act of communication between performers and audience.

The concern with performance as communication has resulted in the development of theories of performance that are rooted in communication theory with further developments into 'semiotics. In the South African context, Hauptfleisch has made a contribution in this area which will be considered in the next section.

## **PERFORMANCE AS COMMUNICATION**

Since 1917, Departments of Speech have been established in the United States, 'speech' being an all-inclusive word large enough to, cover all theoretical and practical activities connected with verbal communication. Communication studies have proliferated and after 1950, behaviourism and positivism had a strong influence on the development of communication science or communicology. The focus of attention in much of the early research was on effects rather than causes or relationships, particularly the effects of advertising on consumers. A linear model derived from radio transmission of the process of communication, developed by Shannon and Weaver is the foundation of communication science.<sup>17</sup> Until recently, this model has been taken for granted and become a common sense perception of communication. For example, in the South African context, Van Schoor claims that communication is a traffic of messages and typical of the process is the presence of a "timeless and durable structure which characterizes any communication event".<sup>18</sup> The structure consists of a communicator, a medium in which the message is embedded and a recipient (C-M-R model).<sup>19</sup> The communicator intentionally directs and expresses the message, the medium indicates all possible channels and vehicles through which the message travels and the response, recipient or destination stands for those who receive the message. The model takes no cognisance of the content of

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messages and assumes that they are the unproblematic reflection of social norms and values.

The first major shift in this approach was the advent of content analysis which broke with the determinism of the C-M-R model.<sup>20</sup> Content analysis examined messages as structured mediation of wider social norms and values.<sup>21</sup> Then, according to Tomaselli, it was- contemporary cultural studies which reconceptualised the content of media in terms of dynamic sets of internal systems of signs interacting with, and responding 'to conditions in society.'<sup>22</sup> Interpretation of these signs was now argued to depend on class position, class ideologies, and the nature of the encounter between individual viewers/readers/listeners and the medium.<sup>23</sup> This later approach broke with the pervasive linear model of the transmission model of communication which cannot account, for either domination or resistance in the communication process and is unsuited to the South African situation where societal tensions remain unresolved.

Sless has pointed to some major flaws inherent in the C-M-R model. He cogently argues that the idea of transmission implicit in this model cannot be successfully applied to human communication research because it ignores the fact that the researcher into human communication cannot be a detached observer.<sup>24</sup> He suggests that transmission as a concept of communication is firmly rooted in the ideology of imperialism because the control of meaning by both the researcher and the transmitter is assumed.<sup>25</sup> In the transmission approach when meanings are contested and it becomes clear that oppositional readings cannot, always be prevented these are described as 'deviant'.<sup>26</sup> Sless suggests that the other defining characteristic-of communication, which is sharing, is not necessarily inevitable. However, a belief in sharing is essential, so too is the projection of authors or readers by their absent counterparts.<sup>27</sup> This insight has an important bearing on the application of communication models to performance theory.

The concept of performance as communication informs the contribution- of Hauptfleisch to the development of specific methodological approaches to theatre research in South Africa.<sup>28</sup> In Towards a Methodology for Theatre Research: A South African Perspective, he aims at providing a methodology for the study of

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
performance.<sup>29</sup> In addition to a discussion of the range of fields that theatre studies could embrace, he provides a series of models from communication theory to illustrate this field. Starting with a basic C-M-R type model, he demonstrates how it may be used to develop models that account for some of the complexities of theatrical communication. One of the difficulties of attempting to, equate communication theory with theatrical processes in diagrams is that there is no straightforward correlation between the perceived participants in a theatrical event and the categories ‘communicator, medium, receiver’, interpreted as ‘source, channel and receiver’. The source may be identified as the playwright; but the roles of producer and director must be accounted for. The actors may be identified as an element in the ‘channel’, but in some cases they may also be the source, if the play was developed collaboratively. The complex interaction between text when one exists in the written form and performance and the possibility of the play being received by a reading public as well as a viewing public must also be taken into, account. Hauptfleisch points out these difficulties, but figures 3.4 and 3.5 convey theatrical communication as a single transactional communication between a dramatist and an audience in a theatre.<sup>30</sup> The source is identified as the dramatist, the channel as the total message in the language of the theatre and the receiver as the audience. The whole process is one in which the dramatist’s ‘concept’ is received through the medium of the theatre as ‘meaning’ by an audience. The total message is influenced by “society, country and age, theatrical tradition and other circumstances”.<sup>31</sup> In Figure 3.5 Hauptfleisch makes use of the concept ‘noise’ from communication theory where it is used to refer to any element that may interfere with the generation of intended meaning. In this model ‘noise’ seems to mean limitations which prevent an ‘ideal’ process of theatrical communication from taking place. These limitations may be the dramatist or the actor’s lack of ability resulting in weaknesses in the text or in performance, inadequate facilities or an inappropriate response from the audience.<sup>32</sup> Hauptfleisch says that the aim of these models is to provide a full range of theatrical vocabulary and that they do not really allow for the multiple transactions that the theatre involves.<sup>33</sup> Figure 3,10 is more sophisticated and provides useful insights into the complexity of the processes involved in making and receiving a performance.<sup>34</sup> The open-endedness of a ‘text’ is demonstrated and the diagram indicates the range of possible influences or ‘inputs’ that may modify its development, including the

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response of a 'reading public' and a 'media public'.<sup>35</sup> Hauptfleisch suggests that versions of the model may be used to analyse a wide range of performance forms from a Zulu wedding to a production of Hamlet by a performing arts council.<sup>36</sup> He does not provide an analysis of a performance based on his models.

Hauptfleisch's approach is useful in that it indicates that theatre is a social phenomenon, created by means of integrated, but identifiable, processes of communication within specific communities. This opens up possibilities for theatre studies in which the text and playwright are not always privileged over other possible areas of study. However, the central questions of how to describe and evaluate an actual theatrical event and how to relate text to context are not satisfactorily addressed.

In Figure 3.10, the actual theatrical event or performance receives no special focus. The event is split in the model and shown as two rectangles (participatory response and direct response to total text) and two circles (text 3: performance and text 4: combined total images). The rectangles indicate a process and the circles an artefact. Hauptfleisch suggests in the publication and in the models, that a researcher is free to select an area of focus for research, which is of course possible, but the nature of performance is that the event, or actual occurrence, is a focal point. The performance event is central and is the motive for all other events and any research must surely reflect this. By showing the text and the response to the text separately in the model, the performance itself seems to disappear. As Michael Green notes in a review of the publication, there seems to be a lack at the very heart of the scheme, that is at the, actual point of application to performance.<sup>37</sup> Also, it is a moot point whether the performance can be viewed as an artefact and the audience's response as a process, while the researcher remains an outside observer. According to Sless, this is an untenable argument. I take up this point to explore the relationship between performances, audience and researcher in later chapters.

In Figure 3.5, Hauptfleisch utilises the concept  to indicate that there might be interference in the process of theatrical communication. While 'noise' may be useful in telecommunication theory, its application to theatrical communication is



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problematic. It involves the researcher in making a series of judgements about the competence of the playwright (terms provided are; ability, character, desires) the text (obscurity, ambiguity, weaknesses, relevance, actability) the actors the audience and the suitability of the physical theatre. No criteria are provided for making these judgements and it is difficult to see how the researcher would decide whether or not 'noise' has interfered with the process of communication, except in an entirely subjective way. There is a strong likelihood that aesthetic criteria would be drawn on 'unconsciously', defeating any claims for a 'scientific' recording of the performance. In Figure 3.10 the concept 'noise' no longer appears but, in its place, judgements have to be made about 'modifying input' and the influence of the cultural situation, the socio-political situation, societal conventions and so on, on the genesis, form and production of the particular performance. These situations and conventions are presented as general influences and as background. Despite Hauptfleisch's arguments for a contextual approach, here the performance is abstracted from its context which becomes background rather than being woven into its context in order to develop a contextual analysis.

The question of evaluation is crucial and should not be evaded on the basis that empirical evidence is being supplied. This implies that the researcher is neutral or blank when viewing the performance or, in other words, has come to the performance classless, sexless and without a consciousness that has been loaded by previous theatrical experiences. Furthermore, the evidence of the senses does not enjoy a necessary or primary authenticity. The process of interpretation involves both observation and deduction and the researcher must identify his or her frame of reference. As Sless points out, performance cannot be reduced to a concept being transmitted like a message to an audience. There is also the lived experience of the performance, (that Schechner captures so vividly), that is not a cognitive message, to be considered. Music and dance function in a different way to narrative structures and arouse different responses that are analogues of feeling, but not of 'meaning'. The recording of this key aspect of performance is not adequately suggested by concepts such as 'input' and 'participatory response'

The recording of a performance remains problematic and is, perhaps, best achieved by descriptive writing combined with analysis and explanation.<sup>38</sup> If a descriptive approach is adopted, then working to Hauptfleisch's models could be

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rather like painting by numbers and would result in a schematized interpretation that might leave out more than it is able to include.

In his research address, delivered in 1984, South Africa: A Laboratory for Theatre Research, Hauptfleisch suggests an interdisciplinary approach to theatre studies that would include studies of a cross-cultural response to theatre, the description of evolving theatrical forms, theatre in education, theatre as propaganda, the role of the performing artist in society and the socio-economic basis for theatre in South Africa.<sup>39</sup> He argues that South Africa is a multi-cultural society and that the range of traditions, forms and performances create valuable opportunities for comparative analysis and experimentation in a laboratory type situation. He indicates that his interest lies in measuring, recording and preserving theatrical forms and events for analysis and in generating the creation of a “uniquely South African theatre, a totally South African theatre, by everyone, for everyone”.<sup>40</sup> Here again, the concept of a researcher as a scientific observer, implicit in the choice of a laboratory as a metaphor and explicit in Hauptfleisch’s interest in measuring, recording and preserving theatrical forms, is problematic. One of the assumptions that underpins this concept is of objectifiable universal reality- “the country itself, its peoples, customs and structures” are the laboratory in which the detached observer views the object of study (the performance).<sup>41</sup> The connotation of this metaphor is of a fixed and unchanging society that provides a background against which theatre takes place. It does not suggest the fluid interaction between theatre and society and performance and researcher, both determined by and determining each other, that informs a contextual approach and is surely the most valid rationale for interdisciplinary study. When the subjective nature of interpretation is overlooked then the researcher’s control over meaning is obscured and the audiences are assigned the roles of passive consumers. In the guise of being ‘scientific’ this kind of empiricism is inherently authoritarian.

The tendency to form categories and allow each category a measure of autonomy is a feature of conservative western thought. A view of cultures as autonomous and self-contained, implicit in the notion ‘multi-cultural’, obfuscates processes of domination and resistance and offers no opportunities for explaining the dynamics of performance. It is a methodology that can only measure levels of appearance. In the introduction to South African Theatre, edited by Hauptfleisch and Steadman, this

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tendency to categorise, and the resultant difficulties, is evident in the analysis of South African theatre as 'Afrikaans', 'English', 'Black' and 'Alternative'.<sup>42</sup> Although the editors suggest that there is interaction between these categories, by setting them up it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to discover the nature of the interactions and the causes of the different movements in the theatre. Each category becomes autonomous and the legacy of aesthetics begins to dominate the work. A striking example of succumbing to this legacy is the tendency to develop a new canon of 'great works' of South African writers apparent in the editors' reference to the golden age of Afrikaans playwrights.<sup>43</sup>

Developments in communication theory correlate to some extent with developments in critical theory and theories of meaning. The early emphasis on transmission postulates a communicator that is superior to the receiver, and equal to his intention to communicate a particular message. It is the burden of the receiver to recover that intention. This authoritarian approach is in line with a notion of language as a channel, through which ideas are transmitted, and critical theory that privileges the author's intention. This authoritarian concept is challenged by reception theory which privileges the reader/receiver/audience. In communication theory this is conceptualized as sharing but, as noted, sharing does not necessarily take place. With the focus on the receiver, meaning can no longer be grasped as the reception of a transmitted message. It becomes relative and, dependent on the conditions of reception or, in the case of performance, on the audience's horizons of expectations. The difficulty in reception theory is to discover the nature of the constraints on meaning and the nature of sharing.

With the advent of content analysis, the message became privileged in communication theory in line with the privileging of the text in New Criticism that held sway in America from the 1930s until the past decade. But, while New Criticism sought to discover meaning within the text isolated from context, content analysis went one step further and drew attention to abstractions beyond the immediate appearance of the text.<sup>44</sup> Later work in communication theory, such as that of Sless, has attempted to reconceptualise the basic C-M-R model and grasp communication as the interaction between author and text, on the one hand, and reader and text on the other. A specific

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concern with the processes of signification and communication or the means whereby meanings are generated and exchanged, informs semiotics, a field of study that is dependent on communication theory. The focus, in semiotics, is on the different sign-systems at work in society and in art. Early work in the field tended to be bound by the 'transmission' theory. As work in communication studies and semiotics advanced far more complex theories of the nature of semiosis have been proposed such as Sless's theory. The field of semiotics is important in theatre studies for its potential in establishing alternatives to Aristotelian-type analysis.

## SEMIOTICS

The semiotic approach to theatre studies first arose in countries where Leavisism was absent (France, Italy and Russia). It also arose in America as a challenge to New Criticism. The adoption of the paradigm in South African drama departments was a major breakthrough in the late 1970s, spearheaded by the work of John van Zyl, Tomaselli and Steadman.<sup>45</sup> In 1979/80, Patrice Pavis toured South African drama departments which helped to establish semiotics as a legitimate field of study.<sup>46</sup> The paradigm has been adopted in the School of Performing Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand and in the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit at the University of Natal (Durban), but not in other drama departments in the English-language universities.<sup>47</sup> By providing a forum for semiotic and materialist criticism, Critical Arts has also assisted in establishing the potential of semiotic investigation.

There is a somewhat confusing use of either 'semiology' or 'semiotics' to define the study of the production of meaning in society. 'Semiotics' arises from the work of C.S. Peirce and 'semiology' from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure.<sup>48</sup> Saussure restricts the sign to the relationship between a 'signified' and a 'signifier', whereas Peirce adds to these terms the notion of the referent', that is to say, the reality denoted by the sign.<sup>49</sup> He also proposes the concept of the 'interpretant'. By 'interpretant' he means a disposition in the mind of the interpreter of the sign to respond to it in a certain way. A discussion of the referent and interpretant is obviously crucial in

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theatre studies because, in order to describe what is seen on stage, the connections between sign referents and interpretants must be made. For this reason, Pavis prefers the use of 'semiology', but the tendency to conflate these terms, especially in the work of Elam, means that 'semiotics' is more generally used and I shall follow this usage.

Saussure's pioneering work on language includes the central perception that language signifies reality by bestowing a particular, linguistically structured form of conceptual organisation upon it. The signifiers of language are the sound structures of speech and the notations by which these are represented in writing. These signs do not signify actual things or actual relationships, but concepts or ideas. This is not to deny the existence of objective reality, but to suggest that our knowledge of reality is always mediated through, and influenced by, the organizing structure we call language. In other words, the linguistic sign is not analogous (the word 'ox' does not resemble an actual ox). The sign is the result of a collective agreement made between a particular group of people to ascribe similar meanings to similar signs and follow similar rules in using those signs to convey meaning. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is then a matter of convention. This conventional system is referred to as *langue* and the rendering of *langue*, or speech, as *parole*. However, Saussure's dyadic approach has similar problems to the C-M-R model. His proposal that a sign consists of a signifier (a sound-image) that transmits a signified (a concept.) has proved to be too fix and mentalistic. The essential idea in early linguistic studies, and the structuralist currents of thought that derive from it, is the separation of the diachronic aspect of language from the synchronic. The danger of this was recognised by later scholars in the field and I shall return to this point when discussing socio-semiotics. For Peirce, a sign is something that stands for something else to somebody in some respect or capacity. The Peircean sign has an object to which it refers, an interpretant which it generates in the mind of its interpreter, and a ground upon which the interpretation is based. Different grounds allowed Peirce to distinguish between three basic kinds of signs. There is the 'iconic', where the sign resembles what it stands for; the 'indexical', in which the sign is associated with what it is a sign of; and the 'symbolic'.<sup>50</sup> The choice and function of sign-systems often reveals the underlying intentions of theatre practitioners.<sup>51</sup>

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The theatre is noted as an activity where the sign appears with abundance, variety and density. However, the complexity of the signifying systems of the stage means that attempts to discover a method of analysis too closely related to linguistic models have been fraught with difficulties.<sup>52</sup> Barthes unproblematically defines theatre as a sort of 'cybernetic machine, and indicates the density of its sign system:

What is theatre? a sort of cybernetic machine. When not working, this machine is hidden behind a curtain; but as soon as it is revealed it begins to transmit a certain number of messages in your direction. These messages are distinctive in that they are simultaneous and yet have different rhythms. At every point in the performance you are receiving (at the same second) six or seven items of information (from the scenery, the costuming, the lighting, the position of the actors, their gestures, their mode of playing, their language) but some of these items remain fixed (this is true of the scenery) while others change (speech, gestures.)<sup>53</sup>

Semioticians have attempted to find units in performance in order to undertake a formal study, but Pavis has pointed out that if performance is broken down into numerous isolated signs, it becomes impossible to understand the totality of the communication processes in the theatre. He says that it is better to isolate an ensemble of signs forming a 'gestalt' pattern, with overall significance instead of simply adding signs together.<sup>54</sup> This ensemble of signs is referred to as a signifying unit by Steen Jansen.<sup>55</sup> The process of rehearsal is a process of identifying these units or moments or beats and establishing them in relation to each other. These units cannot necessarily be established from the written text alone and may not correspond to a literary breakdown. Indeed, Pavis claims that theatre semiotics is a reaction against the 'imperialism of the text' and that the system has restored the text to its place as one system among the many systems of the whole performance. Pavis refers to a meaningful ensemble of signs as a framework. As each frame is built up, it is associated with other frames so that meaning arises as, and at, the interaction of these frames. In this way, the *mise en scene* (staging in the sense of organising the meaning system) becomes a complex of frames which are relatively autonomous and composed of hierarchized sub-groups.<sup>56</sup> The process of identifying signifying units is a process of reconstituting some of the basic patterns of theatre symbolism as realized in the staging.<sup>57</sup> In other words, it provides insight into the development of a design - design as form and design as intention.<sup>58</sup>

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Barthes's definition of theatre as a 'cybernetic machine' is an example of a semiotics of the theatre founded on what Sless refers to as the 'transmission' approach. Barthes's structuralism, as with Levi-Strauss (in particular), locates the observer outside the system being studied. This privileges prior assumptions that what the scholar or semiologist discerns in a performance is what the audience will, or should, discern. This is not to say that there is no recognition of an interaction between performers and audience. According to Elam in a reference to the audience's response to performance:

The spectator will interpret this complex of messages - speech, gesture, the scenic continuum, etc - as an integrated text, according to the theatrical, dramatic and cultural codes at his disposal, and will **in turn** assume the role of transmitter of signals to the performers (laughter, applause, boos etc) along visual and acoustic channels, which both the performers and members of the audience themselves will interpret in terms of approval, hostility, and so on. This feedback process and the **inter-communication** between spectators is one of the major features of live theatre, which can in this sense be seen as a 'cybernetic machine'.<sup>59</sup>

Here, Elam points to the difference between the immediate reaction that is part of interpersonal and live theatrical communication and the more detached response to written texts, films and so on. In orthodox communicology, both types of response are referred to as feedback' which is **transmitted** back to the communicator. In this approach, meaning is still controlled by the communicator of the message and insufficient cognisance is taken of the two kinds of semiosis that occur in an act of communication. The first is the performer/play relation and the second is the play/audience relation. Following Sless, we can see these as complex mixes of the sign/user/referent relation of semiosis.<sup>60</sup> We cannot assume, however, an omniscient vantage point as researchers from which both these relations are evident.

The formalist and structuralist emphasis in the work of Elam and Pavis posits performance as produced by a system of signs. The performance is grasped as largely self-referential rather than in a dialectic relation with its context. This approach is quite compatible with the functionalism of Schechner and indeed Schechner's work incorporates semiotic analysis. The value of structuralist approaches is the recognition that meanings are construed not by their apparent content, but by their relations within a general system of signification. In other words, meanings do not simply disclose themselves, but are constructed by understanding in a system that is never itself disclosed.<sup>61</sup> In his later work, Barthes's contribution to a school of critics, now called 'deconstructivists', is significant in that by postulating the imperfection, or inadequacy, of a 'script' the audience are free from passivity.<sup>62</sup> This neutralizes the hermeneutic insistence on the intention of the playwright by assuming that this intention will be imperfectly realised. In performance theory the audience are now in a position to construct meaning rather than passively absorb it and transmit their

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response. The notion of an audience, actively engaged in making meaning, is clearly incompatible with the transmission approach and in line with Brecht's insistence on the active participation of the audience. However, the difficulty with formalism is that it is a closed system which focuses on the production of meaning and lacks any anchorage in the social and historical circumstances of this production.

## **SOCIO-SEMIOTICS**

Raymond Williams emphasizes the importance of recognising that the systems that bring about production and interpretation are themselves produced.<sup>63</sup> He suggests that the diachronic principle must take precedence over the synchronic principle. In other words, the historical development of productive systems cannot be overlooked and there is always a struggle between a sense of the fixed character of the sign and productive systems that are constantly constituted and reconstituted. While agreeing that the production of meaning is not within scripts, but between scripts and audience, he emphasizes that the audience have a history and their act of interpretation is conditioned in part by the script, but also by the whole ensemble of ideological relationships that conditions their way of seeing.

A sign system, in its actual and concrete use, is always socially formed. Each unit of meaning is related to a historical process. The relationship between the signifier and the signified in language may be arbitrary or conventional, but the conventions are the result of a real process of social development, in the actual activities of speech and in the continuing development of a language.<sup>64</sup> Drama is a special kind of use of quite general processes of presentation, representation and signification.<sup>65</sup> From this perspective, a performance does not reflect reality, but works on, and transforms, other forms of representation and signification which give rise to distinctive 'effects' whose social impact can be subjected to a political calculation.<sup>66</sup> The process of making meaning through dramatization is a process .in which the sign systems of everyday life are patterned and organized deliberately in order to examine, or comment on, a particular view of reality. Williams suggests that any system of signs can become incorporated in performance, including known rhythms and movements of an existing system and the difficult rhythms and movements of an emergent



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representation, rearrangement and new identification.<sup>67</sup> He says that drama is neither ritual nor myth, but a specific practice which is complex, active and questioning:

Drama is a precise separation of certain common modes for new and specific ends. It is neither ritual, which discloses the God, nor myth, which requires and sustains repetition. It is specific, active, interactive composition; and action, not an act; an open practice that has been deliberately abstracted from temporary practical or magical ends; a complex opening of ritual to public and variable action; a moving beyond myth to dramatic versions of myth and history. It was this active variable, experimental drama - not the closed world of known signs and meanings - that came through in its own right and in its own power; significantly through periods of crises and change, when an order was known and still formally present but when experience was pressing, it, testing it, conceiving breaks and alternatives; the dramatic possibility of what might be done within what was known to be done, and each could be present and mutually, contradictorily potent, in specific acted forms. We need to see this especially now, when myth and ritual, in their ordinary senses, have been broken up by historical development, when they are little more in fact, than the nostalgia or the rhetoric of one kind of scholar and thinker, and yet when the basic process of presentation, signification and representation have never been more important. Drama broke from fixed signs, established its permanent distance from myth and ritual and from the hierarchical figures and processions of state; broke for precise historical and cultural reasons into a more complex, more active and more questioning world.<sup>68</sup>

Here, Williams indicates the way in which drama as a concept is a response to the historical and material conditions of the age. It has emerged through periods of crisis as a process of signification in a society that cannot assume a common culture, unlike the earlier societies in which myth and ritual flourished as a way of making manifest the belief-systems of a culture and explaining reality. 'Myths' and 'ritual', in the anthropological sense, in which Williams is using the terms, are meaning systems that attempt to resolve the contradictions between reality and its perception within a particular society. In the closed world of signs and meanings of secure and settled societies, they contain experience and moral teachings with an implicit interpretation. Drama broke through as a system of signification in a more complex and questioning world in which myths and rituals exist not as the belief system of the entire society, but a system through which dominant historical processes are made to appear 'natural', 'inevitable' and even 'God-given'.<sup>69</sup> Drama is now a version of myth and

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ritual and a practice in which ideology can both exist and be questioned. Signs and meanings are no longer fixed, but contested in and through processes of presentation, signification and representation.

Williams sees always the, close correlations between the deep structures and conventions of society and the structures and conventions of drama and the way they interact. Drama is specified as a particular activity, but not reified, because Williams does not lose sight of drama as a process embedded within a particular historical and social context and this is what sets him apart from other theorists mentioned in this chapter. Critics working within the, paradigm of historical 'materialism seek to incorporate history, social process and context into their theories of art. The difficulties inherent in this approach are dealt with in Chapter 5.

In this chapter I have examined some important breaks with conventional dramatic analysis in this country. The entrenchment of the Arnold/Leavis tradition was first unsettled by the concept 'performance' which does not privilege the great works of the western tradition, but seeks instead to discover the dynamics of theatre in a wide range of activities. The need to discover a theory of performance has led researchers into the fields of comunicology, structuralism and semiotics and the results of these pioneering efforts have been outlined. A noticeable flaw in this work is the tendency to place the researcher outside the act of human communication and assume an omniscience that is untenable. The synchronic nature of structuralism has influenced work that is rooted in this movement and, in the field of semiotics, the focus is often on showing where all the parts, or components, have come from and how they work to make a coherent whole at the expense of explanation or a search for causality. Williams has suggested a more radical semiotics that looks at systems as modes of formation which can be put into question as they become visible.<sup>70</sup> He suggests that while it is important to be aware of social determinants, it is also important not to lose sight of the relative autonomy of works of art. In his work he seeks a dynamic connection between text and context unlike the formalist approaches of Hauptfleisch, Pavis and Elan who tend to foreground performance and relegate context to a stable background against which the performance is played.

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In defining the dominant paradigm in South African theatre studies, I am not suggesting that the work of modern theatre practitioners such as Artaud, Grotowski, Brook, Brecht and others is excluded from the syllabi of our university drama departments. On the contrary, modern dramatists that have broken free of the norms of the western aesthetic tradition, feature prominently. But, what happens is that the tradition closes around them, incorporating certain innovations and continuing as if no challenge had occurred and so, a radically new theory of performance does not emerge in response to radical, work.<sup>71</sup> As Craig points out, “alternative artists have to set a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of incorporation into the mainstream and cultural ghettoization”.<sup>72</sup> It is Berger, in Ways of Seeing, who draws attention to the fact that the selected tradition of ‘high’ or literate culture is made up of works of art which have broken with the tradition of which they are now considered a part, as well as those created firmly within the tradition.<sup>73</sup> This process of incorporation has most strikingly occurred with the work of Brecht, who features on the syllabus as one playwright in the canon whose social theory should be ignored because his plays are actually about the human condition.

It is not only works that are easily contained within a dominant paradigm. Some approaches, such as formalism, that seek value within the text are compatible with, for example, practical criticism. The notion of a ‘cybernetic machine’ is not at such odds with ‘organic unity’ that it cannot be contained. However, not all approaches are easily absorbed. While some are little more than realignments of familiar positions, others offer a significant alternative, to traditional practice. The approaches considered so far in this section are founded on a view of culture that stresses the importance of cohesion and stability and lend themselves to containment. The approaches that I shall consider in the next section of this work insist on relating performance to historical processes in which fundamental **conflicts** have occurred and are still occurring.<sup>74</sup> They also insist that culture cannot transcend the material forces and relations of production and that connections must be made between culture and economic and political systems. Before discussing the way in which these issues have been tackled in the South African context, I shall outline the key difference between a consensus and a conflict approach to culture and some problems of definition in order to provide a theoretical basis for the work that follows.

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## CHAPTER THREE: NOTES

- 1 This interest was expressed in three doctoral dissertations on indigenous South African Performance: D. Coplan, "The Urbanization of African Performing Arts in South Africa", Indiana University, 1980; P. Larlham, "Black Performance in South Africa. A Survey and Documentation", New York University, 1981; and R. McLaren, "Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa", Leeds University, 1980. These dissertations have now been published as: D. Coplan, In Township Tonight!, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985; P. Larlham, Black Theater. Dance and Ritual in South Africa, Michigan, UMI Research Press, 1985; and R. Kavanagh, Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa, London, Zed Books Ltd., 1985.

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- 2 See Chapter 4 below for a discussion of 'culture', pp. 127-142
  - 3 Ian Steadman, Popular Culture and Performance in South Africa, CCSU Seminar Paper No. 7. University of Natal, Durban, April 1986, p. 2.
  - 4 Temple Hauptfleisch, South Africa: a laboratory for theatre research, Research Address No. 1, Pretoria, Human Sciences Research Council, 1984, Also in Communicato, Vol. II, No. 2, 1985.
  - 5 Ibid., p. 6.
  - 6 Frank Robert Vivelo, Cultural Anthropology Handbook. - A Basic Introduction New York, McGraw Hill, 1978, p. 17.
  - 7 The 'mentalist' view is an alternative view that is less comprehensive. From this perspective, the stress is on the design or mental code for proper behaviour or on the idea of the artefact and not the artefact itself. Briefly, by the totalist definition, culture is observable and, by the mentalist definition, it is inferred.
  - 8 Richard Schechner, Essays on performance Theory 1970 - 1976, New York, Drama Book Specialists (Publishers). 1977, p. 75.
  - 9 Ibid., p. 114.
  - 10 Schechner, op. cit., p. 29.
  - 11 The dissertation has been published under the title, Black Theater, Drama and Ritual in South Africa, op. cit. The title of the dissertation is more appropriate than the title of the book. The work is a survey and documentation and not a detailed discussion, as the title of the book implies.
  - 12 Ibid.1 p. 16.

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13 Ibid.1 p. 43.

14 Larlham, “Black Performance in South Africa. A Survey and Documentation”, op. cit., p. 6. This statement is excluded in the book.

15 Larlham, Black Theater. Drama and Ritual in South Africa, op. cit., p. xix.

Difficulties inherent in defining performance in the South African context are taken up in the next chapters.

16 Steadman makes this point in his doctoral dissertation, “Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984”, Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985, p. 8.

17 C.E. Shannon and W. Weaver, The Mathematical Theory of Communication, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1949.

18 M. van Schoor, What is Communication?, Pretoria, Van Schaik, 1981, p. 10.

19 There are a range of interpretations of this model, but the basic idea remains the same.

20 Keyan Tomaselli, A Contested Terrain - Struggle through Culture, Inaugural Lecture, delivered at the University of Natal, Durban, 24 September 1986, p. 8.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid,1 p. 9.

23 Tomaselli, Inaugural Lecture, op. cit., p. 9.

24 D. Sless, In Search of Semiotics, London, Croom Helm, 1986, p. 23.

25 Ibid.

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- 26 Tomaselli, Inaugural Lecture, op. cit., p. 8.
- 27 Sless, op. cit., p. 39.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Hauptfleisch, Towards a Methodology for Theatre Research: A South African Perspective, CESAT publication No. 6, Pretoria, XSRC, 1984.
- 30 See Appendix 1, p. i.
- 31 Ibid., p. 25.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., p. 13.
- 34 See Appendix 1, p.ii.
- 35 Ibid., p. 28.
- 36 Hauptfleisch, Towards a Methodology for Theatre Research: A South African Perspective, op. cit., p. 16.
- 37 Michael Green, Review, Critical Arts Vol. 3, No. 4. 1985, pp. 68-71.
- 38 This approach is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, pp. 182-186 below.
- 39 Hauptfleisch, South Africa: A Laboratory for Theatre Research, op. cit., pp. 12-13.
- 40 Ibid., p. 13.

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41 Ibid., p. 1.

42 Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman (eds.), South African Theatre. Four Plays and an Introduction Pretoria, HAUM Educational Publishers, 1984.

43 Ibid., p. 11.

44 See Chapter 8, p. 318, note 20 below for a discussion of the concept text'

45 Letter from Keyan Tomaselli to Lynn Dalrymple, 15 August, 1967. See J.A.F. Van Zyl, 'Socio-Semiology of Performance' in J.A.F. Van Zyl and Tomaselli (eds.), Media and Change, Johannesburg, McGraw Hill, 1977.

46 See Patrice Pavis, Preface, Critical Arts, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1980, pp. i - iii, for an allegorical description of his tour of South African drama departments.

47 Semiotics is the preferred approach to analysis at the University of Zululand.

Allan Munro, from the Drama Department at the Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education, has taken an interest in semiotics. See 'Semiotics: A Methodology of Drama and Theatre Analysis, or, the Whole World is a Semiotic Stage', Teaterforum, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1984 and a paper presented at the Association of Drama Departments of Southern Africa (ADDSA), "Structure, Meaning, Relevance: The Dilemma of Value". These articles tend towards summaries of semiotic terminology, the 'transmission' approach to communication is unquestioningly accepted and the researcher places himself firmly outside the systems he studies.

48 Patrice Pavis, Languages of the Stage, New York, Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982, p. 14.

49 Ibid.



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- 50 Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory - An Introduction, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983, p. 101.
- 51 See Chapter 6 below for notes towards a semiotic analysis of performance and Chapter 8 for a semiotic analysis of Lolo Bambo Lolo.
- 52 See Pavis, Languages of the Stage, op. cit., for a discussion of problems.
- 53 Roland Barthes, 'Theatre and Signification', Peter W. Mathers (trs.), Theatre Quarterly Vol. 9, No. 33, 1979, p. 29.
- 54 Pavis, op. cit., p. 15.
- 55 Susan Bassnett-McGuire, 'An Introduction to Theatre Semiotics', Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 10, No. 38, 1980, p. 50.
- 56 Pavis, op. cit., p. 128.
- 57 Ibid., p. 18.
- 58 Ibid., p. 129.
- 59 Keir Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1980, p. 38.
- 60 Sless, op. cit., p. 38.
- 61 Raymond Williams, Writing in Society, London, Verso Editions, n.d., p. 208.
- 62 Roland Barthes wrote provocatively about theatrical semiosis, but did not follow up this line of work. His recent work focuses on fashion and other areas of contemporary life.

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I am using 'script' in this instance, following Schechner, as discussed on p.95 above. See also Chapter 8, note 20, p.318 below.

- 63 Williams, Writing in Society, op. cit., p. 209.
- 64 Williams, Marxism and Literature, op. cit., p. 37.
- 65 Williams, Writing in Society, op. cit., p. 15.
- 66 Tony Bennet, Formalism and Marxism, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1979.
- 67 Williams, Writing in Society, op. cit., pp. 15 - 16.
- 68 Ibid., pp. 15 - 16.
- 69 Keyan Tomaselli, Alan Williams, Lynette Steenveld, Ruth Tomaselli, Myth, Race and Power, Bellville, Anthropos Publishers, 1986, p. 3.
- 70 Williams, Writing in Society, op. cit. p. 209.
- 71 See Nick Visser, 'The Critical Situation and the Situation of Criticism', Critical Arts, Vol. 3, No. 2, op. cit., p. 4, for a discussion of this phenomena in English studies.
- 72 Sandy Craig, led.), Dreams and Deconstructions - Alternative Theatre in Britain, Derbyshire, Amber Lane Press Ltd. 1980 p.
- 73 John Berger, Ways of Seeing, London, EBC and Penguin Books, 1972.
- 74 I am indebted to Raymond Williams' essay 'Crisis in English Studies', Writing in Society op. cit., pp. 192-211 for the insight into the way processes of containment occur within academic disciplines.

## **TOWARDS A CRITICAL THEORY**

### 2. INTRODUCTION

The 1970s and 1980s in particular, have been periods of great social and political upheaval in South Africa. As détente policies have failed and South Africa has become increasingly isolated, the economy has declined. There has been a massive rise of inflation, bankruptcy and unemployment and a corresponding fall of fixed

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investments, domestic savings and profits. A fluctuating gold price, periodically rises and stifles the symptoms of an ailing economy, but even if the high price stabilized, it could not provide a cure for a society facing a series of antagonistic social divides. The historical development of racial capitalism has created divisions between possessors and dispossessed, between employers and workers and between black and white South Africans.<sup>1</sup> These divisions became so acute in the mid-1960s that the state declared the country to be in a state of emergency and was forced to resort to coercion and not consensus in order to maintain the appearance of law and order.

**The wildcat strikes of 1973 marked the end of the quiescence of the 1960s and the beginnings of a period of resistance from a black working class to the conditions of their exploitation. Political opposition moved rapidly through several phases. Reinvigoration and mobilisation under Black Consciousness was followed by the Soweto uprisings of 1976. This in turn was succeeded by a phase in which a decentralised, localised, radicalised community based politics took root.<sup>2</sup> In mid-1983, the formation of the National Forum and the United Democratic Front provided national umbrella structures for the new community politics.<sup>3</sup> Political struggle continues to be extended and radicalised in a number of ways despite harsh repressive measures taken by the, state. The state s response to the situation of ‘unrest’ has been to introduce a series of reforms - including the legitimisation of labour unions, the abolition of the Mixed Marriages Act and the recognition of the permanency of the urban proletariat within the boundaries of ‘white South Africa’. However, these areas of reform are not regarded as critical to the maintenance of the apartheid policy and there is little evidence to indicate that the government intends to advance either fast or far towards the development of a genuinely democratic society. At bottom, the central debate in South Africa is over the possibility and nature of change. The profound problems generated by a system of capital accumulation and class rule have also intensified a rupture at the ideological level.<sup>4</sup> The state and the ruling classes in South Africa face a ‘crisis of legitimacy’ which has penetrated educational institutions.<sup>5</sup>**

Within the English-language universities, liberal humanism has been challenged as elitist, idealist, depoliticizing and socially marginal. The disciplines that embrace its

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central tenets, such as English and Speech and Drama, are having to face this challenge, or risk becoming increasingly marginalised and irrelevant in a crisis ridden society. The claim of a liberal education is that each individual achieves a free, enriched, self-reflective, autonomous identity, but in a repressive political context the products of this education seem to be passive and powerless. For some, this sense of passivity and powerlessness has been a spur to attempt the development of a more democratic<sup>1</sup> participatory and learner-centred approach to education, resulting in a demand for socially relevant studies. The ‘crisis of legitimacy’ has also generated an increase in theoretical activity. As Eagleton points out, “theory does not emerge at just any historical moment; it comes into being when it is both possible and necessary, when the traditional rationales for a social and intellectual practice have been broken down and new forms of legitimization for it are needed”.<sup>6</sup> Some theoretical tendencies are compatible with the existing dominant paradigms and may be co-opted as a form of legitimization, but others become a challenge that force a paradigm shift. The response to the challenge to dominant ideas in English and Speech and Drama departments is strikingly different.<sup>7</sup>

Both English studies and theatre studies are in a state of crisis. The difference between the disciplines is that English as a discipline, is being propelled into finding new directions through heated debate in journals and at conferences while, until recently, the central concern of Speech and Drama departments has not been an examination of fundamental premises but raising the number and standard of their productions.<sup>8</sup> More fundamental concerns have largely been ignored. However, there is a revisionist movement afoot in the discipline but, as Ian Steadman notes, it was not initiated from within Departments of Speech and Drama, but by scholars in adjacent disciplines.<sup>9</sup> This movement is founded on the basic tenets of historical or cultural materialism and, before examining some of the pioneering contributions in this field, I shall outline some of the differences between a materialist approach to the understanding of ‘culture and more orthodox approaches. I focus on the concept ‘culture’ because it is one of the key philosophical premises underpinning theatre studies as a discipline. A shift in the conception of ‘culture’ has generated re-definitions of the dominant paradigm and a search for new approaches.

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## KEY CONCEPTS IN A MATERIALIST ANALYSIS

### **Culture**

The arts and the humanities are defined by a definition of culture that describes a general process of intellectual and aesthetic development. In an applied form, this sense is used to describe the works and practices of intellectual and, especially, artistic development. Culture is perceived to be the result of a process of enlightenment and refinement of taste acquired through an intellectual, moral and aesthetic training. From this perspective it is crucial to preserve the traditions and artefacts of a cultural heritage because they are considered to be expressive of highest forms of consciousness and creative ability that have been achieved. As has been noted, the preservation and fostering of the heritage through education is thought to be the key to the preservation of an achieved state of refinement and order or civilization!. The human and social sciences are defined by a much broader concept of culture. In this usage culture' designates the whole system of signification by which a society or a section of it understands itself and its relations with the world. This broader concept of culture has opened up possibilities for an analysis of the interplay of cultural forces and the way they express themselves in art and literature. There are tensions and interactions between culture as a theory of the arts in their relation to society and culture as a theory of social process which creates specific and different ways of life. Each of these senses stresses the human capacity not only to understand, but to build a human social order which is decisively different from earlier views in western thought which focussed on religions or metaphysical motive forces.<sup>10</sup>

In his discussion of the concept 'culture', Raymond Williams notes two decisive interventions of Marxism into the development of the concept. This first is the analysis of 'civil society' and the recognition of 'civilisation' as a specific historical form; bourgeois society as created by the capitalist mode of production.<sup>11</sup> The second is the rejection of what Marx called 'idealist historiography'. History was not primarily the overcoming of ignorance and superstition by knowledge and reason. What that account and perspective excluded was material history, the history of labour, industry as 'the open book of the human faculties'.<sup>12</sup> The Enlightenment notion of 'man making his own history' was given a new radical content by the

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emphasis on 'man making himself' through producing his own means of life.<sup>13</sup> The Marxist view is that human labour is central, necessary and thus genuinely originating in the development of culture. The implication of this major contribution to modern thought is that culture cannot be understood separately from economics and all aspects of material history. The real relations between culture and society have to be seen in terms of the particular mode of production and social order within which the relations practically occur. From this perspective, the central problem for theatre studies and cultural studies in general, is how to relate a specific performance or work of art, to the economic base within the social formation that has produced it. This problem relates to what has become known as the problem of the superstructure. Is it strictly determined by the economy or does it possess a certain amount of autonomy, and if so, how much autonomy? Before considering how some South African theatre practitioners have attempted to resolve the problem of economic determinism I shall briefly examine the central differences between a Marxist analysis of culture and other dominant views that are prevalent In South Africa.

An essential difference between the Marxist view of culture and various anthropological views is a difference between **cooperation** or consensus and conflict perspectives. The dominant tendency anthropological views of culture, whether they are defined as codes of behaviour or a whole way of life, is to identify the functional requisites of social harmony. A central assumption is that "given the necessity of order and reality of consensus, all members of a society are expected to conform, adapt or adjust to legitimate social requirements".<sup>14</sup> In conflict approaches, such as the Marxist approach to an understanding of culture, the opposed interests of different groups or classes are stressed. In an analysis made from this perspective, importance is given to distinguishing the conditions and concerns of particular groups and the way these relate to the class struggle. The reality of constraint, the legitimacy of social order is in question. Conformity, adaptation and adjustment become problematic.<sup>15</sup> Resistance is understood to be a principle of historical change, and culture is not a pre-determined model offered by the past, it is not a state of being, but a state of becoming.<sup>16</sup> Marx's theory of class struggle draws on evolutionary theory and inverts the dialectical idealism of Hegel into a dialectical materialism. His general theory of history is that new systems evolve in social formations as a result of internal struggle

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between competing forces and that material causes and economic conditions are the determining factors.<sup>17</sup> The connections between class and ideology or the way men and women interpret their world, is problematic and a source of debate within the Marxist, tradition itself.

According to Marxist thought, a capitalist mode of production gives rise to classes that must always be apprehended relationally. The classes are two necessary poles of a common specific mode of exploitation and oppression. The nature of the relationship between the classes is one of antagonism and unity. The capitalist mode of production then is contradictory in the sense that it is, at the same time, both a specific unity of opposing classes, of immediate producers of surplus labour and a conflict and struggle of these opposing classes. To define class in this way is to sharply differentiate the Marxist model of class from conventional definitions in which society is divided into strata, subgroups, subcultures, professional elites and so on. In an orthodox sociological approach, these groups can be isolated from one another and their values and world views defined independently as a reflection of their particular location in a given society. Jameson describes the dynamics of ideology in its constituted form as a function of social class.<sup>18</sup> He argues that the very content of a class ideology is relational, in the sense that its 'values are always actively in situation with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter: normally a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the legitimation of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant 'value system'.<sup>19</sup> Kelwyn Sole has pointed out that this does not mean that 'ideology' is the consciousness belonging to the dominant classes and 'culture' the consciousness belonging to the subordinate classes, or community.<sup>20</sup> He notes that dominant and dominated groups both participate in the ideological network of meanings imminent in social life and both use cultural forms to maintain and change their identities. He argues that ideology is the overreaching term; while culture is an important facet of ideological studies.<sup>21</sup>

The apartheid structures in which South Africans live favour the development of a racial consciousness rather than a class-consciousness. The understanding of culture



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as predominantly a matter of race, language and codes of behaviour is divisive because it prevents the unification of the working class. The working class is important because it is one of the two major contending classes in capitalist society with access to the means of production, and the only one structurally in a position to alter the relations of production. This does not mean that other group identities are denied because, as Sole says, the same person may, at different times say: “I am a human being”, “I am an African”, “I am black”, “I am a South African”, “I am Zulu”, “I am a Zionist”, “I am a Sowetan”, “I am working-class” and so on.<sup>22</sup> Implicit in each of these statements is a sense of identity for a group differentiated by historical, class, ethnic/racial, geographical, organisational or other factors.<sup>23</sup> David Coplan points out that in South Africa, symbols of ethnic identification are often more available than symbols of class. In countries as different as Nigeria- and South Africa, a major problem for African nationalists has been not simply how to neutralize ethnicity, but how to mobilize the power of ethnic loyalties for the advancement of broader political goals.<sup>24</sup>

The working definition of culture used in the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit in Durban is:

the ensemble, or ‘bundle’, of meaningful practices through which self-defined groups within or across social classes express themselves in a unique way, or locate themselves within an identifiable web of significations. It is the process which informs the way meanings and definitions are socially constructed and historically transformed by people themselves. Cultures are distinguished in terms of differing responses to the same social, economic and environmental conditions. Culture is not a static or even a necessarily coherent phenomenon: it is subject to change, fragmentation, reformulation. It is both adaptive, offering ways of coping and making sense, and strategic, capable of being mobilised for political, economic and social ends.<sup>25</sup>

Here, the emphasis is on culture as a symbolic system and on the differing responses of one body politic to the same social, economic and environmental conditions. Culture is both a collaborative and a divisive activity giving rise to signifying systems and labels of identification through which social order and group distinctiveness are

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communicated, reproduced experienced, explored and changed.<sup>26</sup> Tomaselli points out that the interpretation of culture is 'contested terrain' and is of particular significance in the critique of modern industrial society.<sup>27</sup> The nurturing of proletarian culture is significant because the mass media make the previously class isolated bourgeois culture accessible to mass society where it is absorbed and where it undermines the independence of the working classes. This process destroys the essential dialectic necessary to critical development.

In the South African situation it is particularly necessary to recognise the complex and contrasting ways in which culture is interpreted, analysed and utilized because of the way the concept underpins the society's perception of itself. In its *volkekunde* guise, culture has been corrupted into a pseudo-scientific justification for apartheid and racial prejudice in general.<sup>28</sup> But, even South Africans who claim not to be racist, struggle to find a sense of identity that is not related to one of the racial categories enforced by the state. This is because, in its focus on the preservation of a valuable heritage, 'culture' in the sense of a valued way of life of a group, is set up as a kind of court of appeal over the levelling down process of mass society and the consequent loss of identity. The preservation of a sense of identity is justification for the maintenance of a particular lifestyle whether it be a 'braaivleis and boerewors' way of life or a traditional Zulu way. The task of education is to contest a view of culture that develops inward looking groups, intent on their own purposes and oblivious of others.

However, there is danger in treating nationalism or racial identities (for example) as merely functional to political ends or an evolving 'class consciousness' - they can speed up the process of 'liberation' - thus denying them their own durability and effectivity.<sup>29</sup> There is also the danger of assuming an unrigorous assimilation of the consciousness of the individual to the dynamics of the group. The logic of collective dynamics is highly problematic and to suggest that there is a pure 'class consciousness' or 'racial consciousness' raises more problems than it solves. Classes constitute themselves on political, ideological as well as economic levels: individuals and groups can be interpellated into a variety of overlapping (but not necessarily complementary) ideological frameworks which are potentially available for political mobilisation.<sup>30</sup>

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Cutting across these interpretations of 'culture' is another debate centred around the question whether or not culture reflects and controls our lives which are therefore determined or whether it is a dynamic process in which human beings are determining their, lives. The emphasis is either towards structures or towards human agency. In the structuralist approach, individuals are largely seen to be determined by the social structures within which they live and work. Tomaselli argues that structuralism holds that individuals can only live and experience conditions through categories, classifications and frameworks of culture.<sup>31</sup> The emphasis in this approach is on the human being as a social being, on social behaviour and on education as a reflection of the wider society and, therefore, determined by it. In contrast, the human agency approach of orthodox sociology conceptualizes the social system as the result of social action and interaction, a social world produced by its members, who are seen to be active, 'purposeful, self and socially created beings. Education is determining and, because of its powerful socializing influences on the young, it can bring about changes in the wider society. Dawe points out that debates about these issues are central and perennial in sociological discourse and, at root, they are all different versions of the fundamental debate about the abiding conflict between the domination of the system and the exertion of human agency.<sup>32</sup> Among Marxist theorists the debate has developed into two approaches referred to as the structuralist and humanist or culturalist approaches. Where structuralists argue that people make history, but under conditions that are not of their own making, culturalists aver that people are active agents in the making of their own history. In the South African context, these different approaches are demonstrated by Keyan Tomaselli and Ari Sitas in their work in the field of theatre studies and will be further discussed in connection with this work.

I am aware of the inherent danger in this summing up of the fundamental structure/human agency and co-operation/conflict debate, of falling into the trap of setting up simplistic dichotomies. This tendency to reify analytical divisions is a form of false consciousness that is specifically criticized by Marx. It allows for such separations as those of 'theory from 'practice', the 'individual' from 'society' and 'determined' from 'determining'. The acceptance of these categories amounts to the acceptance of an ideology in the sense that they present an appearance as reality. A

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dialectical or relational approach involves seeking out the contradictions between abstract concepts and concrete social reality. This method has been described as a “circular movement from the concrete or real to the abstract or ideal and from the latter back to the former”.<sup>33</sup> A relational approach would involve seeking the conditions in which such abstract opposites as ‘determined’ or ‘determining’ could be transcended. Marx’s oft-quoted statement that “it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” is an example of such dialectical thinking.<sup>34</sup> Here Marx is expressing the view that ‘man’ is formed by social circumstances, but simultaneously she/he is capable of transcending these circumstances in order to change them. It is perhaps more useful to regard historical materialism as a methodology than as a kind of religion that provides timeless concepts and ultimate truths<sup>35</sup>. The concepts have always to be tested against the development of concrete examples to assess whether extant social forms correspond with previously established abstractions. The aim of a Marxist approach is to combat orthodox approaches that set up a court of appeal against which ‘standards’ or ‘civilised values’ or ‘the human condition’ can be tested. This cannot be achieved if the Marxist approach is perceived as having a true interpretation of the process of contextual history in advance and is able to judge the meaning of signifying practices against an absolute view. As I understand it, a dialectical approach means the eschewing of absolute truths in favour of grasping internally unified, and yet, contradictory relative truths. The importance of contradictions is that they provide space for resistance and dissent within, a dominant social order. It is therefore through the recognition and utilization of contradictions that developmental change occurs and I return to this point in later chapters.

### **Hegemony**

Before turning to the impact of a materialist approach on theatre studies, I wish to refer to some aspects of the work of Antonio Gramsci that have become central in the field of contemporary cultural studies. Tomaselli notes that Gramsci addressed himself to two pitfalls that are common in socialist writing. The first is economic reductionism which reduces all social activity to movements in the economic base and the second is class reductionism which collapses all social conflict to the capital versus labour contradiction.<sup>36</sup> In order to explain the acquiescence of the masses to

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their subordination, Gramsci employs three key terms of cultural/ideological analysis; 'common sense' which refers, concretely, to the lived culture of a particular class or social group; 'philosophy' (or sometimes 'ideology') which refers to an organised set of conceptions with a more or less transformative relation to lived culture; and hegemony which describes the state of play, as it were, between the whole complex of 'educative' institutions and ideologies on the one hand, and lived culture on the other: the extent to which common sense is made to conform both to 'the necessities of production' and to the construction of consent and a political order.<sup>37</sup> According to Gramsci this common sense must be challenged and must become 'good sense'. Critical intellectual activity must not be confined to elite groups but extended through to the subaltern classes in order to develop counter-hegemonic movements. From this perspective 'cultures' and 'ideologies' are not identical and the recognition of the interplay between these forces is crucial to an understanding of ideological domination. When established ideologies are obviously inconsistent with social existence, then common sense also becomes problematic and open ideological reconstruction. In any class society, the ideologies of materially powerful social groups tend to be promulgated as universal or natural truths.

Whenever possible, a hegemonic class will contain, transform and control any forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and systems of ideological thought that exist in a social formation. Even the most dominant ideological world-views are able to tolerate and accommodate alternative opinions and attitudes and ideas from prior eras and other cultures. Williams draws a distinction between 'residual' and 'emergent' forms of both alternative and oppositional ideologies.<sup>38</sup> By 'residual' he means ideas and practices that remain within a culture from - previous social formations.<sup>39</sup> These practices and ideas are harnessed and made to work for the maintenance of the dominant culture or hegemony. In South Africa, because of colonization, this aspect of hegemony is particularly important. The incorporation of selected aspects of African traditional ways of life into the system, such as 'Bantu Law' and rule by chiefs, is important in the maintenance of white domination. The residual culture may also provide a point of departure for radical emergent forms, which aim at bringing about social revolution such as the Black Consciousness movement. By 'emergent' he means new ideas, meanings and values and new

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practices that are continually being created.<sup>40</sup> He stresses how alert the dominant culture is to anything that can be seen as emergent and how quickly these emergent ideas will be incorporated, if possible. It seems that if emergent ideas are to become truly oppositional then a new discourse and original modes of thought must be established to escape the mindset of the dominant culture.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony recognises the wholeness of the processes of domination and subordination within an actual social formation by refusing to equate consciousness with the articulate formal system which can be abstracted as 'ideology'. It includes the relatively incomplete and inarticulate aspects of the structures of an actual society, referred to as common sense. Relations of domination and subordination are seen as part of a way of life, a lived system of meanings, in which forms of domination are often not recognised as exploitation. The anti-feminism in many societies is, for instance, not thought of by either the men or the women as an attitude that relegates women to, a-subordinate position, but as a 'natural' way for the sexes to relate to each other. A lived hegemony is a process and not a fixed system or structure and it does not passively exist as a form of dominance. It has to be constantly renewed because for a class to rule it has to be seen as having the right to rule. A combination of force and consensus is evident in the maintenance of power of the ruling classes and success involves a minimum use of force. In South Africa the interplay between consent and coercion that is a feature of hegemony is increasingly out of balance, as the state has to step up its use of coercion in order to maintain the status quo.

Gramsci particularly stresses the important role of intellectuals. He argues that intellectuals should be classified according to their social functions. There are 'traditional intellectuals' whose position has a certain inter-class aura but it derives from past and present class relations and conceals an attachment to various historical class formations. However traditional intellectuals do not necessarily support the ruling classes. 'Organic intellectuals are the thinkers and organisers of any fundamental social class. They may not have the role of an intellectual, but they direct the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they belong. For example, the organic intellectuals among the white petit bourgeoisie may organise ways of reinforcing

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apartheid and those among the black petit bourgeoisie ways of opposing the system. Gramsci asserts that the working classes must develop their own organic intellectuals in order to engage in the struggle for a democratic society and develop a critical self-consciousness among the masses. The function of organic working class intellectuals is to challenge bourgeois ideologies and foster 'peoples' education'. The whole question of the role of intellectuals is fraught with difficulty because of questions of whether it is possible for intellectuals of the dominant classes (traditional intellectuals) to switch allegiance and work in the interests of the oppressed. According to Gramsci,

...one of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and conquer ideologically' the traditional intellectuals.<sup>41</sup>

Education plays a crucial role in the willing acceptance of the rulers by the ruled because it is through the control of education for the whole society that a class is able to maintain itself without resorting to an unacceptable use of force. According to Gramsci, "Every relationship of hegemony is necessarily a pedagogic relationship".<sup>42</sup> Through 'educative' processes in the larger sense, including schooling, the media and political parties, a class is able to saturate a society with its ideology. For example, South African educational systems reinforce the traditional western view of co-operation and shared responsibilities within a culture, rather than the notion of struggle against domination. The names of government departments in South Africa, for example the Department of Co-operation and Development, are indicative of attempts of this sort.

Williams reminds us that 'education' is a process of selection and organisation from all available social knowledge at a particular time. He calls it the selective tradition:

...That which in the terms of the effective dominant culture is always passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past.' But always selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of the past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded. Even more crucially some of the meanings are reinterpreted, diluted or put into other

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forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture. The processes of education; the processes of much wider social training within institutions like the family; the practical definitions and organisation of work; the selective tradition at an intellectual and theoretical level; all these forces are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture.<sup>43</sup>

Education and the culture by which it is determined and which it produces and transmits are not politically neutral. Education is a crucial hegemonic instrument and through its institutions it attempts to establish a consensus of social taste, or common tradition and prepare people for the workplace. Through education, existing ideologies are transmitted and sectional interests are presented as universal truths. In South Africa, 'education' is presented as a discipline in its own right with its own development and logic. This allows assumptions that educational policies are formulated for general 'advancement' to be made.

When education is understood as a crucial hegemonic instrument, the role of teachers becomes highly problematic. The question of the amount of autonomy that teachers are allowed becomes important as, does their class location which may be contradictory. Conflicting ideas about the role of universities as institutions with 'academic freedom' have provided a space for the development of oppositional ideas, but it seems that a range of pressures from state and capital are increasingly threatening this position. The state threatens to withdraw funds from universities that do not 'control' subversive activities of staff and students and there is relentless pressure from capital to provide students with adequate skills to take up positions in the professional, managerial classes rather than gain an in-depth understanding of causality.

#### **'CULTURAL AFFAIRS' IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The function of the concept 'culture' in South African government rhetoric bears some investigation because of the influence it has on educational strategy that is not always apparent in public rationales for education. The state makes use of the term in



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both its received senses of artistic practice and as a noun defining a way of life. One of the principles in the National Policy for General Education Affairs Act, No. 76 of 1984, is that “recognition shall be granted both to that which is common and to that which is diverse in the religious and cultural way of life of the inhabitants of the Republic, and to their languages”. Here ‘culture’ is combined with ‘religion’ and ‘language’ to identify the different ‘population groups’ that will each receive a separate education. It is understood as an achieved condition that must be preserved in order to preserve the identity of the various ‘minorities’ that make up the South African social formation. However, in addition to drawing on this concept of culture to maintain a separate system of education for South Africans the state actively intervenes -in “fostering and promoting culture” in South Africa through the Regional Councils of Cultural Affairs. According to the Cultural Promotion Act of 1983, ‘culture’ is to be promoted in South Africa by three different government departments each controlling different ‘population groups’ The preamble -to the Culture Promotion Act reads as follows:

To provide for the preservation, development, fostering and extension of culture in the Republic by planning, organisation, co-ordination and providing facilities for the utilization of leisure and for non-formal education; for the fostering of educational and cultural relations with other countries; and for the establishment of regional councils for cultural affairs; to confer certain powers upon Ministers in order to achieve these objects; and to provide for matters connected therewith.<sup>44</sup>

The act claims to provide for the “preservation, development, fostering and extension of culture in the Republic”, but this is to be achieved through the “utilization of leisure and non formal education.” In this usage the concept of culture is limited and defined out of formal education and work and relegated to leisure and non-formal education.<sup>45</sup>

Cultural activities are defined in the act as follows:

- (a) the visual arts, music and the literary arts;
- (b) the acquisition, in popular fashion, of knowledge of the applied, natural and human sciences.

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(c) the utilization of leisure, including physical recreative activities which are of such a nature as not to be courses in training with a view to participating in competitions.<sup>46</sup>

By this definition, 'culture' is seen to be separate from the serious intellectual pursuits undertaken by formal education, but to include 'the arts'. This attitude has an important bearing on the role of the arts in education and it is interesting to note that the performing arts are not even specifically mentioned. As is noted later in the discussion of educational drama, the most striking point to be made about drama in primary and secondary education is its neglect as a discipline and as a teaching method, particularly in black schools.<sup>47</sup> It would seem that when the arts are related to leisure and to neither serious educational pursuits nor to work, that they are in grave danger of being marginalised as the society becomes increasingly oriented towards consumerism. There is a concept of the 'arts, as a kind of optional extra in the fabric of life of modern industrial societies, which is in direct contradiction to the amount of time the members of the society spend watching drama through the medium of television. The constant viewing of television means that modern societies are, without doubt, the most highly dramatised societies that have ever existed, and yet in our systems of education we are raising children who are illiterate when it comes to reading signifying practices by which the society understands itself. Theatre studies have a particularly important role 'to play in redressing this situation and developing methods of critiquing the forms of public thinking that prevail in the society, such as its rituals and theatre, including those presented through film and television.

In a directive written for members of the Regional Councils of Cultural Affairs it is evident that the promotion of 'culture' is also an attempt made by the state to keep control of 'trends in cultural creation'. This sinister watchdog role is clearly formulated in the following policy statement;

The State as an organisation of power and authority does, however, have the right and duty to ensure that-

- (i) no action harmful to the State derives from the transfer, advancement and strengthening of culture;

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(ii) the citizens, adults as well as children, receive adequate cultural care;

(iii) the services that are deemed necessary are provided and effectively used;

(iv) it is possible to act effectively against those who unlawfully impede the preservation, development, advancement and extension of the various cultures within the borders of the State.

The State has a growing responsibility to provide services as part of a well-organised and effective programme to promote culture. The State must at all times keep informed of the educational-cultural situation of all strata of the population and of all population groups. This serves as a basis for initiator action, advice and assistance. The State should be aware of trends in cultural recreation and expression in order to be able to do the essential long-term planning so as to provide assistance and facilities. This long-term planning, can however, never be prescriptively enforced on the various cultural groups.<sup>48</sup>

It seems that attempts to marginalise 'culture', reduce it to leisure activity and only promote the high culture of a particular class, are the result of a deep seated fear of the possibility of utilizing 'culture as an agent for change. This has indeed been the intention of a great deal of cultural mobilisation and I shall examine some of these developments with special reference to alternative theatre movements.

### **PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION AND TERMINOLOGY: 'BLACK', POPULAR', 'ALTERNATIVE', 'WORKING CLASS' AND 'COMMITTED' THEATRE**

In a paper entitled 'Black South African Theatre: Text and Context', published in English in Africa and presented at the AUETSA Conference in 1980, Tomaselli comments on the way many university English and Drama Departments have ignored the offerings of their own country's popular culture.<sup>49</sup> While this paper makes the important points that South African theatre has largely been ignored, the analysis of theatre must not be limited to textual analysis (when texts exist, which is often not the case in popular theatre), that theatre plays an ideological role in society and that it must be examined in the context in which meaning is attributed to it, it also raises a number of questions. What is meant by terms such as 'black South African Theatre',

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which is often related to ‘working class theatre’, ‘popular theatre’ and ‘committed theatre’? Tomaselli addresses these problems himself in a series of subsequent papers.<sup>50</sup>

### **‘Black’ Theatre**

In ‘The Semiotics of Alternative Theatre in South Africa’, he discusses the difficulties inherent in adopting the label ‘black theatre’ to categorize performances in which most of the participants happen to be black.<sup>51</sup> This kind of over-generalization obscures the different factions within the black community and conceals the processes in an apartheid society that brought about the label in the first place.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore it perpetuates the idea of dualisms that is symptomatic of this society; ‘black’, ‘white’, ‘Afrikaans’, ‘English’, the notion, of a dual, economy and hence the structural oppositions of tribalism versus modernity, ‘culture’ versus naturalism, civilisation versus savagery, ‘Christianity versus paganism and politics versus art.’<sup>53</sup> He goes on to point out that performances that purport to deal with the ‘black experience’ may be generated by different social classes including white petit bourgeois intellectuals (in Gramsci’s sense) with different intentions and different results. The term ‘black theatre’ obscures the complexity of these inter actions and of the genesis, development and consequences of the cultural practices. For these reasons Tomaselli rejects the concept ‘black theatre’ in favour of ‘committed theatre’ to describe theatrical activities that function to expose and reveal, in human terms, the consequences of ideology determined by a particular politico-economic and social conjecture.<sup>54</sup>

In a later paper he takes up Steadman’s argument in more detail and discusses the use of ‘black drama’ within the Black Consciousness movement to generate a sense of dignity, self-reliance and critical assessment among Africans.<sup>55</sup> He notes that Maishe Maponya has suggested that ‘black theatre’ is a theatre imposed by whites and that ‘African theatre’ deals with ‘resistance and ‘freedom’, but that this argument contradicts the Black Consciousness use of ‘black theatre’.<sup>56</sup> His conclusion is that ‘black theatre’ is a catch-all label that obscures more than it elucidates and that what is required is a process-oriented definition. In a discussion of ‘working class’ and ‘popular’ as terms used to describe the cultural activities of the populace, he points

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out that there are similar difficulties' with these terms because they tend to suggest that the work springs spontaneously from within these classes and obscure the intervention of intellectuals in the work. Finally, in 'The Semiotics of Alternative Theatre in South Africa', the work is conceptualised as 'alternative' in order to encompass a group that is resistant to the penetration and subsequent control of capitalist interests.

It is interesting to note that although Tomaselli cogently argues for the rejection of the use of 'black theatre' he uses the term himself, albeit in quotation marks, in the title of his paper, 'Class Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre', Presumably the term is used in order to clarify the content of the article, although Tomaselli and Muller distance themselves from its use. They are quoting a common perception; both 'black' and 'white' South Africans know what 'black theatre' means. These writers wish to challenge this perception and introduce the concept of class as a basic cause of conflict 'in the South African social formation. The difficulty is that the concepts 'black' and 'white' are built up and relate to actual physical differences of skin colour that are now related to the distribution of power.<sup>57</sup> These differences in colour are a perception a heightened, shaped, modified and sharpened perception that relates to the way the society has developed. The physical difference in skin colour between South Africans has been called or named 'white' and 'black', although this usage of these terms bears very little relation to the usual usage of 'black' and 'white' to mean colours. Skins that are called 'white' are in fact much closer to pink, orange or red ('rooineck' is more accurate than white) and skins called 'black' are cream or brown and only rarely 'black' as such. The whitest skins that I have seen in South Africa are those of some Indo-Africans and so although they are 'white', they are labelled 'black'. The point is that 'white' and 'black' have been developed into concepts relating to privilege and power and so they have a double signification in the same way that the 'other sex' does. Feminists have called for a distinction between sex and gender and the same distinction is needed between 'white' and 'White' and 'black' and 'Black'. If this distinction is not made then the double signification of these terms (they operate as the signifier within one system and as the signified in another), means that the informal 'logic' of racism works in a syllogism of confirmation,

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I am white;  
Re is black  
therefore; I must be 'White'.<sup>58</sup>

One kind of difference operates to confirm and justify another kind of difference. The second difference, in power relations, that has been developed in every possible respect in South Africa under apartheid, is an imposition that is reinforced by language. The only way of refusing to be 'White' is to actually say, "I am white in skin colour only". Jomo Kenyatta, in the days of the Mau-Mau, made this distinction in the remarkable comment, "The British press have tried to paint me as black as possible".<sup>59</sup> The difficulty in South Africa is that the common perception is both racist and sexist. People do not 'see' the differences between 'white' and 'White', 'black' and 'Black' and sex and gender.<sup>60</sup>

The function of committed theatre (in Tomaselli's sense) is surely to develop an understanding of the way these perceptions have been socially constructed within the culture. But, meaning and identity have to be fought for and concepts cleaned up, as Brecht notes.<sup>61</sup> I concur with Tomaselli that 'black' and 'white' serve no useful function as concepts at all, except to reinforce divisive, racist perceptions and that the struggle should be to abandon these terms altogether, but to dismantle the language of political racism, or, for that matter, anti-feminism, is not achieved without considerable effort because those involved in the struggle are up against a deeply entrenched 'common sense perception that is reinforced by what seems to be a logical conclusion. The Black Consciousness movement has worked to reinforce the use of divisive, racial terminology by developing the concept 'Black', in order to build up resistance to 'White' domination. The result is a refusal, in some quarters, to entertain the idea of white Africans.<sup>62</sup> Hopefully this Black Consciousness perspective, in its building of confidence, is a first stage in the dismantling of racism in South Africa. Chabani Manganyi expresses a humanism that will hopefully propel us all into a happier future.

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I think blacks understand intuitively that black consciousness will have remained a dismal failure if it has failed to develop beyond its erstwhile preoccupation with race. The prospects as I see them are for a humanism that would come into being and thrive as a new cultural belief system which Dreyer Kruger and I have described as **Africanisation**. Despite the banning of the organs of the black consciousness movement, I believe that a natural pattern of socio-cultural evolution has come into being and the emergence of Africanisation as a humanism for this country is assured. It certainly is not naive or idealistic to believe, as I do, that we blacks have a historical advantage that propels us towards this humanism, a challenge which the exponents of Afrikaner *volknasionalisme* have failed to grasp.<sup>63</sup>

### **'Popular' Theatre**

Another term that is problematic, but that is increasingly used to define an important area of theatre studies, is 'popular'. A dominant idea in the discipline is that drama undergoes an evolutionary process from the 'lower' forms of ritual and popular theatre to the 'higher' Art forms. Judgements are made about whether or not individual plays or art on the basis of whether or not they timelessly transcend their historical conditions. It is claimed that these judgements are based on standards or values that are independent of particular times or places.<sup>64</sup> In this way, a distinction is made between theatre that is Art and theatre that is variously described as 'ritual', 'folk', 'popular' or 'commercial' and, more recently, 'alternative'. In the conventional approach to theatre studies these 'other' kinds of drama are dealt with only in so far as they have aided the development of Drama or been incorporated into the established canon.

The historical materialist approach to 'popular' is altogether different. Here the premise is that as the class struggle is the nexus of a capitalist society and this means that there are at least two cultures that are basically in opposition to each other. There is the dominant culture that justifies and ratifies the position of the dominant classes and what may be referred to as a 'second' culture that is necessarily oppositional because it is a means of self-assertion and self-formation for the working classes under conditions of oppression and exploitation. Both cultures may embody residual and emergent practices and meanings and both may include a whole range of cultural formations. The dominant culture will constantly seek to reach out and incorporate

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emergent meanings and practices and transform them, as is very evident in the theatre in South Africa when groups move from the 'townships' to the Market Theatre and from there to an overseas tour, often only to become engulfed by capitalism. This second culture is referred to as 'popular culture', after Brecht, and it differs from mass culture in that it is a genuine expression of the concerns of the exploited classes.<sup>65</sup> Mass culture in South Africa is soccer, popular music, soap operas on television and radio, beauty contests and so on. It is imposed on the society from the 'top down' and its aim is to promote consumerism and apathy. It seems that all classes are susceptible to the influence of mass culture. 'Popular theatre' is an important component of 'popular culture' because it does not require extensive funding or technology to work successfully, but, as in the case of 'culture', the meaning of the term 'popular' is contested.

Raymond Williams notes in Keywords that 'popular' was originally a legal and political term from 'popularis' - belonging to the people. The transition to the predominant modern meaning of 'widely favoured or 'well-liked' is interesting, according to Williams, in that it contains a strong element of setting out to gain favour, with a sense of calculation that has not disappeared.<sup>66</sup> 'Popular culture' was not identified by the people, but by others; and is used in consumer societies for the activities of the working class or the common people by those who consider themselves 'uncommon people'. In this sense, it carries connotations of inferior kinds of work (popular literature, popular press) and work deliberately setting out to win favour (popular entertainment) as well as the predominant definition of well-liked by many people. The struggle is for a shift in perspective. It is for 'popular' to be perceived from the point of view of the people rather than from those seeking favour or power from them.<sup>67</sup> According to Williams, the sense of popular culture as the culture actually made by the people for themselves, relates to Herder's sense of '*Kultur des volkes*' which came through in English as folk culture. Williams discusses the complexity of the interaction between 'folk culture' and 'popular culture', noting that in English, -folk culture tends to be offered as a contrast to modern popular culture, either of a radical and working class, or of a commercial kind. This characteristic emphasis has been challenged.<sup>68</sup>



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In an essay, 'The Popular and the Realistic', Bertolt Brecht challenges the use of the word 'popular' (*volkslumich*), meaning 'folk' in the quaint sense, and 'cleans up' the concept to mean intelligible to the broad masses, adapting and enriching their forms of expression, assuming their standpoint, confirming and correcting it and representing the most progressive section of the people so that it can assume leadership.<sup>69</sup> He adds, "we have in mind a fighting people and a fighting conception of popularity". In other words, Brecht argued that 'popular', carrying its sense of broad general appeal, should describe a people's movement that is in opposition to dominant forms of expression that are not intelligible to the broad masses, do not enrich their forms of expression or serve their interests. Brecht's definition of 'popular' is openly political in that his aim is to alert the working classes to capitalist exploitation and stir them into reformist or revolutionary political action. Brecht was initiating a process, a struggle for a new commonsense perception of 'popular' that would stand in opposition to dominant perceptions - a sense in which 'popular' would strengthen class consciousness.

In an article given as the keynote address at the fourth Australian Drama Studies Association on 'Popular Theatre', Michael Booth demonstrates the ongoing struggle for the concept 'popular' as it refers to the theatre. He attempts to define popular theatre as discernible phenomena with particular characteristics or conventions. One of these characteristics is the breaking of the conventions upheld by the theatre of the elite. He argues that in popular theatre the treatment of character is, distinctive in that it is always stereotypical, the function of language is peculiar in that popular theatre is primarily visual and the content is readily understandable.<sup>70</sup> According to Booth, popular theatre and the aesthetic theatre exist side by side. The one form does not evolve out of the other although the forms relate to each other and influence each other. He discerns four kinds of popular theatre; that of the professional entertainer, historical forms such as the mystery plays and the *commedia dell'arte*, political theatre and a middle class synthesis of elements of popular forms for middle class audiences. This essay is an interesting example of the process of containment. By defining 'political theatre' as one category of popular theatre, he implies that the other categories are not political, but neutral. By treating popular theatre a-historically as an object of study rather than a process he is able to discover its components and bracket

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one of these off as 'political'. In this way an oppositional movement in the theatre becomes incorporated into the dominant paradigm.

Tomaselli and Muller suggest that when popular theatre is used to define oppositional trends it is underpinned by four key elements: first the need for analysis with regard to the political economy and social formation; second, the strength and coherence of the created fictions, which using irony and contradiction lead to a detailed and comprehensible understanding of the problems; third, the need for a continuing organisation; and fourth, the unification and exchange of experiences between groups engaged in popular theatre.<sup>71</sup> Like Brecht, Tomaselli is defining popular theatre as it should be rather than as it exists at present in South Africa.

In 'Dialectics of Tradition in Southern African Black Popular Theatre', Coplan explains his preferred use of 'popular' to define a whole movement:<sup>72</sup>

The term 'popular theatre' has great support among working-class theatre movements elsewhere, and would seem promising but for its suggestion of a theatre merely by and not necessarily **for** the people. Thus we could identify 'people's theatre' as distinct from 'popular' theatre. 'People's theatre' arises and manifests itself spontaneously through the mobilizing of folk resources, but may be appropriated by commercial interests of the state, which use it to serve their own interests. 'Popular theatre' provides not only an autonomous form of expression and a source of identity and popular understanding, it also represents the people's interests, overcomes their negative self-images, asserts their grievances and aspirations, and mobilizes support for a 'total' liberation process.<sup>73</sup>

He stresses the importance of mobilizing the performance resources of South Africa's historical culture, and, in the article, demonstrates the connections between the indigenous tradition in South Africa and the emergence of black popular theatre. In this connection, Coplan also makes a valuable point about the terms 'alternative' and 'committed' in connection with theatre.

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### **'Alternative' and 'Committed' Theatre**

In order to pinpoint areas of debate around the use of 'alternative and 'committed' theatre, I quote Coplan at some length because of the neatness of this argument:

“Alternative” has an attractively critical, antiestablishment sound, but in the end suggests a sort of permanent marginality and a negative or diminishing definition-by-what-its-not; as if the fault with this theatre is not in its stars, but in itself that it is an underling. ‘Committed is to be praised for laying its political cards on the table, and for including everyone actively engaged in using theatre to promote popular interests and radical change. But this term also fails in focusing on the message at the expense of the medium. Steadman’s assertion that “there is no homogeneity between Africans and their ‘culture’ - in the conglomerate social structure of South Africa what is important is socio-economic reality” is true on the face of it. But it is not the whole truth, for it conceives of culture as merely a pool of creative resources, a bag of expressive tricks; selected, reinterpreted, and recombined as social forces dictate. The notion of social reality must include the historical cultures and constitutive process that give black South African theatre its vitality and special character. To assert that a truly South African theatre is emerging from a crucial conjunction of cultures is not to reify ‘the Bantu’ or sub- ordinate social realities and consciousness to the ingrained traditions of an idealized past. It is rather to acknowledge the structuring capacity of historical experience, and to grant black people a positive, autonomous self-definition based upon historically rooted values and relationships, and represented by the symbols of cultural continuity. As Steadman observes, political, nationalism is everywhere in Africa congruent with cultural nationalism. In South Africa, ‘committed’ theatre draws much of its impetus from the Black Consciousness Movement, whose program includes heightening the awareness of historical culture as a means of promoting black self-esteem, solidarity, and principled political action.<sup>74</sup>

As was suggested in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, the distortion of indigenous traditions by the process of colonization, and then by the state in order to reinforce its apartheid policy, has made this a contentious area of study and so the links between the popular forms of the past and the present African tradition are only recently being made. It seems therefore, that, despite some of the difficulties mentioned, popular’ is a more satisfactory definition of oppositional cultural

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formations than either 'alternative' or 'committed' because it allows for an acknowledgement of the history of these formations.

**Popular' is used by Ross Kidd to describe cultural educational activities in which the popular classes present and critique their own understanding of the world in relation to the broader aim of structural transformation.<sup>75</sup> This educational activity is described in more detail in chapter 9, in connection with an experimental venture that I undertook, inspired by the work of Ross Kidd.**

#### **'Working Class' Theatre**

In an article entitled 'The Study of South African Working-class Culture', Sole sketches out some of the issues pertaining to the types of mainly black, mainly lower class culture which has evolved and developed in the Witwatersrand area.<sup>76</sup> These activities are loosely referred to as working-class culture'. Sole cautions against an approach that either refers to everything that the working class does as 'working class culture' on the one hand, and, on the other, a selection of certain privileged institutions and activities to fit into already existing preconceptions about the meaning of culture.<sup>77</sup> He suggests that working class culture can only be fully understood if one is aware of attempts at ideological domination on the part of the state, business and commercial interests, as well as resistance to domination by subordinate groups.<sup>78</sup> Michael Vaughan points out that the difficulty with the term is that it suggests that "the only authentic working class art must derive solely from agents of the working class, which, in turn, would seem to suggest a strategy based on working class spontaneism".<sup>79</sup> What happens is that the possible involvement of agents from other classes in some of the activities is either denied or obscured. For example, Ilanpa, The Dunlop Play, The Frame Play, Zivajika/Turning Point and the Spar Play involved collaborative work between trade unions, members of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company and white academics and, therefore, did not spring spontaneously from working class experience, but were initiated by cultural activists from other classes.<sup>80</sup> Also, 'the people' and 'the majority' are not entirely coterminous with the working class, as some analysts suggest, nor is it possible to claim that members of the working class necessarily have a working class consciousness. So, some working class culture may not necessarily be socialist in orientation. As is the case with other

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definitions, 'working class' may obscure some of the tensions and contradictions implicit in the notion of oppositional culture.

The challenge to consensus views of society that occurred in the English-language universities in the 1970s and began gathering momentum in the 1980s was evident at first in the social sciences and in English departments. There was little evidence of a challenge to traditional approaches in departments of drama until the 1980s when Steadman, Tomaselli, John van Zyl and academics from other disciplines posed important questions and suggested new paradigms for the study of theatre in South Africa. As has been noted, drama departments have tended to adopt a Stanislavskian attitude to their work and have focussed on commitment to the 'right' playing of the text and have neglected to reflect on whether or not we have been teaching and directing the 'wrong kind of work for a South African context.

The next chapter is an assessment of some of the contributions to the paradigmatic break that is a feature of theatre studies in the 1980s. I discuss current pioneering theories of a South African performance in some detail because theory underpins the adoption of any methodology. In order to bring about a change in dominant approaches to theatre studies, as a university discipline, the nature of drama and theatre themselves must be investigated.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR NOTES**

1 I am indebted to an article by Colin Bundy for this brief summary of the South African condition between 1970 and 1967. Colin Bundy, 'Street Sociology, In Journal of Southern Africa Studies, Vol. 13, No. 3, Oxford University Press, April 1987.

2Ibid., p. 313.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

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5. D. Posel, 'State Ideology and Legitimation', Conference Paper, New York, September 1982; and S. Greenberg, 'Legitimizing the Illegitimate', both in Colin Bundy, *op. cit.*, p. 314.

6 Terry Eagleton, The Function of Criticism, -London, Verso Editions, 1984, p. 90.

7 I am using 'paradigm' to mean a perceived field of knowledge based on certain fundamental hypotheses. Raymond Williams in 'Crisis in English Studies', Writing in Society, London, Verso Editions, n.d., p. 192 explains the impetus for a paradigm shift -as follows:

Included in the definition of a field of knowledge or object of knowledge are the appropriate methods of discovering and establishing such knowledge. When attempts are made to shift and replace the fundamental hypothesis, its definitions and its established standards and teaching methods, the discipline is thrown into a state of crisis.

8 Nick Visser comments on this debate in the Introduction to 'English Studies in Transition', Critical Arts Vol. 3, No. 2 1984.

The only publication produced by Departments of Speech and Drama at English—language universities is Sightlines, produced by the University of Natal, Durban Department. This publication focusses entirely on productions. Teaterforum, produced by the Departement Spraak en Drama, Potchefstroom, University for Higher Christian Education, includes some articles in English, but there is little evidence of theoretical debate in this publication. Critical Arts has played an important role in opening up this debate during the 1980s, but there has been little response from more orthodox perspectives. The South African Theatre Journal, first published in 1987, promises to generate some discussion about underlying premises.

9 Ian Steadman, Popular Culture and Performance in South Africa, Seminar Paper No. 7. Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, University of Natal, Durban, 1986, p. 2.

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10 Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p.13.

**11 Ibid., p. 18.**

**12 Ibid.**

13 Ibid., p. 19.

14 C. Reasons, and W. Perdue, Ideology of Social Problems, Sherman Oaks, Alfred Publishing, 1981, p. 6. In David W. Livingstone, Class Ideologies and Educational Futures, Sussex, Falmer Press, 1983, p. 15.

**15 Ibid., p. 16.**

16 Keyan Tomaselli, A Contested Terrain - Struggle through Culture, Inaugural Address, University of Natal, Durban, 1987, p. .9.

**17 Frederic Jameson provides a neat summary of the evolutionary sequence of modes of production in classical Marxist thought:**

The modes; or stages of human society', have traditionally included the following: primitive communism or-tribal society (the horde), the *gens* or hierarchical kinship societies (neolithic society), the Asiatic mode of production (so- called Oriental despotism), the *polis* or an oligarchical slaveholding society (the ancient mode of production), feudalism, capitalism, and communism (with a good deal of debate as to whether the 'transitional' stage between these last - sometimes called 'socialism - is a genuine mode of production in its own right or not) . What is more significant in the present context is that even this schematic or mechanical conception of historical 'stages' (what the Althusserians have systematically criticized under the term 'historicism') includes the notion of a cultural dominant or form of ideological coding specific to each mode-of production. Following the same order these have generally been conceived as magic and mythic narrative, kinship, religion or the sacred, 'politics' according to the narrower category of citizenship in the ancient city state, relations of personal domination, commodity reification, and (presumably) original and as yet nowhere fully developed forms of collective or communal association.

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Frederic Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1981, pp. 89-90.

18 Ibid., p. 83.

**19 Ibid., p. 84.**

20 Kelwyn Sole, 'The Study -of South African Working Class Culture', Perspectives in Education, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1983, p. 65.

21 Ibid., p. 78.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 David Coplan, 'Popular Culture and Performance in Africa', International Arts, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1983.

25 Tomaselli, Inaugural Address, op. cit., p. 3.

26 Kelwyn Sole, 'Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance: A Preliminary Investigation' in South African Theatre Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1987, p. 83.

27 Tomaselli, Inaugural Address, op. cit., p. 2.

28 Ibid.

29 Sole, 'Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance', op. cit., p. 86.

30 Ibid., p. 85.



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31. Tomaselli, Inaugural Address, op. cit.

32 A. Dawe, 'Theories of Social Action', I. Bottomore and R. Nisbett (eds.), A History of Sociological Analysis, London 1979, Heinemann, p. 366.

33 Della Volpe's view of this method has been most succinctly summarized as followed:

Thus the correct method can be represented as a circular movement from the concrete or real to the abstract or ideal and from the latter back to the former. This means precisely a continuous, unavoidable historical verification of economic abstractions or categories. These verified categories and abstractions will be specific, determinate concepts. Scientific dialectic, therefore, is but the experimental method itself, always starting from a real, concrete problem, proceeding to a rational (and in this sense 'abstract') hypothesis, and finally coming back to concreteness for the verification.

From N. Monano, 'The "Scientific Dialectics" of Galvano Della Volpe', in D. Howard and K. Klare (eds.) The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism Since Lenin, New York, Basic Books, p. 345. In Livingstone, op. cit., p. 40, note 61.

34 K. Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, Moxam Progress Publishers, 1920, p. 21.

Critics of Marxist thought tend to deride all the materialist view, arguing that the utopian society that is posited as a truth is untenable.

**35 Some positivist critics of Marxist thought tend to deride the materialist view as a whole, arguing that the evolution 157 towards a utopian society that is posited as a 'truth' is untenable and therefore the whole theory is untenable.**

36 Tomaselli, Inaugural Address, op. cit., p. 12.

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37 Richard Johnson, 'Three Problematics: Elements of a Theory of Working Class Culture', 3. Clarke, C. Critcher, and IL Johnson (eds.), Working Class Culture, London, Hutchinson, 1979, p. 232. In David Livingstone, *op. cit.*; pp. 90 —91.

**38 Raymond Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory'. Roger Dale; Geoff Esland, and Madeleine Mac Donald (eds.), Schooling and Capitalism, London, Open University Press, 1976, p. 206.**

**39 Ibid.**

40 Ibid.

41 Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds.), London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 10.

42 Antonio Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, *op. cit.* in Madan Sarup, Marxism / Structuralism/Education, New York, Falmer Press, 1984, p. 140.

**43 Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', *op. cit.*, p. 206.**

44 Cultural Promotions Act of 1983, p. 7.

45 The powers of the Regional Councils for Cultural Affairs are set out fully in section 3 (5) of the Culture Promotion Act, 1983 (Act 35 of 1983) (Annexure A), and in the regulations made by the Minister of National Education in terms of section 6 (1) of the Act, (Annexure C) read with Proclamation R. 44 of 1984 of the State President, as published in Government Gazette 9135, dated 23 March 1984, (Annexure 8)

The Regional Councils for Cultural Affairs only 'promote' culture for the 'white population group' I made extensive enquiries and could get little satisfaction from the Department of Education and Training, but as far as I can ascertain there are no equivalent organisations for black South Africans.

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46 Regional Councils for Cultural Affairs, Booklet issued by Department of Education and Culture, no date or author stated), p. 5. See Chapter 6, p.206 below for some of the consequences of this stance.

47 See Chapter 6, p.205 below.

48 Regional Councils for Cultural Affairs, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

49, Tomaselli, 'Black South African Theatre: Text and Context', English in Africa, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1981, p. 52.

**50 See Keyan Tomaselli, *The Semiotics of Alternative Theatre in South Africa*, Critical Arts, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1981; Keyan Tomaselli, 'From the Laser to the Candle. Ilanga Le So Phonela AbaseBenzi: An Example of the Devolution of Theatre', South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 6, 1981; and Keyan Tomaselli and Zohan Muller, 'Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre', Critical Arts Vol. 4, No. 3, 1987. -**

**51 Tomaselli, op. cit.**

**52 Ibid., p. 15.**

**53 Ibid.**

**54 Ibid., p. 17.**

55 Tomaselli, 'Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre', op. cit., p. 44,

**56 Ibid.**

57 The use of 'Black' and 'White' have long histories which cannot be explored here. 'Non-white' was initially set against 'white' by 'Whites' and then 'black' was

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developed by 'Blacks' to counter this negative definition and build a positive image for black South Africans.

58 Bernard Sharratt, Reading Relations - Structures of Literary Production. A Dialectical Text/Book, Sussex, The Harvester Press Ltd., 1982, p. 155.

59 Ibid. , p. 156.

60 The conflation of 'sex' and 'gender' differences arises from biological determinism. The feminists' response to biological determinism is to acknowledge the basic importance of biological differences, but to distinguish these differences sharply from the legitimation of the social arrangements which are supposedly based upon them. Biological differences cannot explain many social relations, including the oppression of women, and it is useful, to distinguish between gender differences, which are socially constructed, and sexual differences, which are biologically determined. The fact of biological reproduction, for example, does not necessarily require the social arrangement of 'motherhood'. Peter Leonard, Personality and Ideology London, Macmillan Press td, 1984, p. 68.

61 Brecht's contribution to problems of definition is discussed with reference to 'popular' theatre below.

62 This seems to be indicated by the following passage from Maponya:

I don't believe there s such a thing as a white African,-- I won't entertain -the idea of whites calling themselves African... In the end-- it s a question of heritage.

Luther and Maponya, 'Problems and Possibilities: A Discussion on the Making of Alternative Theatre in South Africa', The English Academy Review No; 2, 1984, p. 28, in Tomaselli, Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre', op. cit., p. 56, note 29.

63 N. Chabani Manganyi, Looking Through the Keyhole - Dissenting Essays on the Black Experience, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 19t31.

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64 Allardyce Nicoll writes an illuminating preface, that demonstrates this attitude, to his volume World Drama: From Aeschylus to the Present Day, London, George C. Harrap and Company Ltd., 1949:

This book attempts to provide a general conspectus of the drama's development from its earliest days in Ancient Greece down to latest times. Confessedly it is prejudiced since without prejudice no essay of this kind can be other than a mere record of facts, and the endeavour here is to present something beyond a collection of statistical information.

Judgements on individual plays and on the works of various playwrights are, therefore coloured by the light in which the entire progress of the theatre is viewed. Still further it must be emphasized that these judgements are based on standards or values independent of particular times and places. If we take Sophocles and Shakespeare, Aristophanes and Shaw, as our standards, many lesser authors, although perhaps important for their own time and country must of necessity be ignored.

In the present volume a definite orientation has been adopted. It begins with Aeschylus and ends with Anouilh. This means that it is concerned chiefly with the Western drama and that other kinds of drama are dealt with largely in so far as they have aided in the evolution of Western forms.

This preface succinctly captures an approach to theatre studies prevalent in South African Universities in 1987, although our prejudice is not confessed. Instead of the definite orientation towards particular standards and a specific history being acknowledged, as Nicoll does, these standards and this history are presented as universal standards to which all South Africans should aspire and this history becomes the history of the theatre. Popular forms that do not match the standard (and the judgements are claimed to be independent of particular times and places) are ignored, studied only -in relation to the evolution of 'great art' or condemned as being escapist and sentimental.

65 Brecht's influence on the development of African drama is noted- b-y Michael Etherton, Development of African Drama, London, Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1982, pp. 324 - 325.

66 Williams, Keywords - A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, London, Fontana Paperbacks, 1983 (2nd edition) , p. 236.

67 Ibid., p. 237.

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68 Ibid.

69 John Willet, (ed. & trs.), Brecht on Theatre: The development of an Aesthetic, London, Lyre Methuen, 1974, p.107 in Michael Booth, 'What is popular theatre?', Australian Drama Studies Vol. 1, No. 1, 1983, p. 7.

70 Ibid.

71. Tomaselli, 'Class, Race, Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

72 David Coplan, 'Dialectics of Tradition in Southern African Black Popular Theatre', Critical Arts Vol. 4, No. 3, 1987.

73 Ibid. pp. 6 - 7. See also Etherton, *op. cit.*, for a detailed discussion of 'popular theatre', pp. 321- 325.

74 Ibid.

75 Tomaselli, 'Class, Race, Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre, *op. cit.*

76 Sole, 'The Study of South African Working-class Culture, *op. cit.*

77 Ibid. p. 90.

78 Ibid.

79 Tomaselli, 'Class, Race, Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

**80 Ibid.**

**HISTORICAL MATERIALISM AND THEATRE**

**STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

This chapter is an exploration of approaches adopted by some pioneers in the field of South African performance theory.<sup>1</sup> All the contributors that I shall examine in this section have *adopted* historical materialism as a basic approach.<sup>2</sup> Different conceptual strands can be identified in their work, but it is rooted in the premise that although the

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theatre may have quite specific features as a practice, it cannot be understood separately from general social process.<sup>3</sup> Their approach involves a radical contextualisation of performance which eliminates the old divisions between performance and its 'background' or between text and context. The attention that is paid to social process, to history and to a materialism that insists that culture cannot ultimately transcend the material forces and relations of production, is a challenge to the dominant paradigm of Speech and Drama with its established standards and methods. To begin with, the new approach leads theatre analysts beyond a pre-occupation with a narrowly defined canon with its own history and principles which supposedly yields universal truths that find their counterpart in 'man's' essential nature. Under the impact of this revisionist movement there is a growing tendency to take more interest in our own South African theatre in relation to the social, economic and political system in which it is produced and in which it functions.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis in this movement is on the conjunctions between social production, ideology and form; between organiser, artist and audience; and between history, social structure and performance.<sup>5</sup> The studies try to identify the, dialectical relations which lead from self-awareness towards awareness of social forces and the collective consciousness and organisations needed to forge social change.<sup>6</sup> However, the complex relations between consciousness, ideology, culture and the economic structure of a social formation and the role of the theatre in this relation is highly problematic and a source of debate within the historical materialist approach.

## A REFLECTIONIST APPROACH

Robert Kavanagh has made an impact on South African theatre studies with his book Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa. He works from the assumption that art and theatre are produced by a social formation and that, in the broadest sense, these practices reflect the fundamental conflicts within the social order. In the opening chapters of the book he outlines the development of racial capitalism in South Africa and the basic conflict that he discerns between the dominant classes and the oppressed classes. His primary concern is the function of the theatre in society and, in this context, he means whether or not the plays he analyzes function in the interests of bringing about revolutionary change in South Africa.<sup>7</sup> He argues that form, content, intention and aesthetic criteria ultimately give way to the fundamental consideration of function.<sup>8</sup> As a cultural activist he is concerned with producing works of an



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agitational or polemical nature and as an analyst his concern is to distinguish between progressive and reactionary types of work. He sets out to make judgements on the four plays he selects for detailed analysis by tracing a series of connections between the economic base that gives rise to classes and class ideologies, the author's ideology and class position, linguistic and literary conventions that have been influential, and the text as a final product. He does not consider the plays in performance or attempt to develop a theory of performance, but confines himself to textual and contextual analysis.

In order to develop a connection between the economic base and theatre as a part of the superstructure, in the particular circumstances of the South African social formation, Kavanagh argues that although apartheid appears to be primarily a racial structure, its function is to ensure cheap labour for the capitalist classes.<sup>9</sup> Apartheid also ensures the continued domination of an alliance of the two minority national groups over the majority of black Africans.<sup>10</sup> He argues that the urban black proletariat developed rapidly, especially during the 60s, and this gave rise to a class consciousness despite the state's stress on ethnic divisions, tribalism and vernacular languages.<sup>11</sup> He suggests that this means that it becomes increasingly possible to note ideological differences between the black intermediate classes and the proletariat, and between the older generation of black intellectual and the new.<sup>12</sup> Thus, he is able to draw connections between the economic structure of the society which gives rise to classes and argue that these can be associated with specific ideological forms of consciousness.

The next connection made by Kavanagh is between the playwright and performers and their membership of a particular class. He claims that because of their class position or their mediated relationship to a class they also bear an ideological form of consciousness. The exact nature of this consciousness is explored by means of biographical evidence, for example, in the case of those involved in producing No - Good Friday, Kavanagh writes a detailed biography which he sums up as follows:

Fugard affiliated to the liberal, avant-garde tradition of European philosophy and art - what the critic Georg Lukacs termed 'modernism'. Nkosi and Modisane at that time were

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black intellectuals who aspired to enter this world. In Modisane's case, at least, this aspiration sprang from a somewhat intense feeling of rejection of the traditional culture of his group. Though Nkosi and Modisane adopted a more ambivalent stance towards black urban culture, they nevertheless both had their noses pressed to the glass of the cultural world Fugard inhabited and ascribed to.<sup>13</sup>

After an analysis of the play text as an object that is made up of a number of components which are either reactionary or progressive, he connects the content of the play with the ideology of the playwright and his collaborators. He then suggests that it is the playwrights that have modified 'authentic' material and substituted political cynicism for political awareness.

Thus, to sum up, the image of the culture of Sophiatown expressed in the play, though it contains a basic content which is authentic, is modified by certain emphases given it by its main author, Athol Fugard, partially endorsed by its subsidiary authors, the black intellectuals of the cast. This modification embodied an ideology which appeared 'progressive' in comparison with that of the Afrikaner nationalists and, despite certain tensions, in the main acceptable to the black intellectuals who participated. It was, however, an ideology which reinforced the domination of the white groups in the society over blacks and especially that of the English-speaking white group. This becomes especially clear when one examines the play's substitution of political cynicism for political awareness and especially when one examines the political interpretation of crime in Sophiatown and the image of the politician that the play projects.<sup>14</sup>

It is as though Kavanagh set out to discover the ways in which the broad ideological and cultural perspectives of the playwrights and those involved in the project would shape the texts they produce, only to find in each case that the ideology of the class represented by the playmakers is indeed reflected in the text, which is then flawed.

Although he does pay attention to the influence of various conventions on the structure of the plays and particularly to the use of language, his primary objective is to brand the plays 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' depending on the overall position or class view that they reflect. While he allows for a kind of evolutionary progression from the input of white liberals through 'multi-racial' projects, the 'township' plays of Rents and the contribution of the Black Consciousness Movement towards 'the

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theatre of the majority', all these plays (except those of Workshop 71) are reflections of the 'false consciousness' of their makers:

This study has raised a number of examples of false consciousness operating in social, cultural, political, economic, linguistic and aesthetic spheres. The entire system of social stratification in black urban culture, and what we have referred to as ideological geography and hierarchical ethnic attitudes, are based on false-consciousness. In terms of language, we have observed the way in which English is associated with education and intelligence and with opposition to the government, and is considered the language of culture and sophistication; the way in which the majority languages are associated with ignorance, inarticulate expression, lack of sophistication, comedy, etc. We have touched on the distorted and inhuman morality of *clevergeid* and *moegoegaid*. And then overarching the entire system is the colossal ideological structure of racialism, racial categories and all the elements of false consciousness it embraces, in the shadow of which virtually all theatre in South Africa is produced and all thought and culture conducted.

Though itself trapped in this structure, the BCM began the process of identifying and eradicating certain areas of false consciousness. This process needs to be continued and pushed further than the racial ideology of black consciousness can take it. It needs to be pushed forward towards class (i.e. majority consciousness) and thus ultimately full human consciousness.<sup>15</sup>

Kavanagh's thesis offers many interesting insights into the way theatre may function in society and is particularly valuable in its discussion of the use of language in relation to cultural dominance, but his approach raises numerous problems.

A major area of difficulty is the nature of the connection between the ideology of the playwright, which is assumed from biographical evidence, and ideological forms of consciousness which are generally assumed to be typical of a particular class. Kavanagh suggests that this relationship is one of 'representativeness' that the makers of the plays express the ideology of the class they represent. To give another example, Kente is 'classed' as a member of the commercial, intermediate, black bourgeoisie which, Kavanagh claims, ascribes to European-type Christianity and, because of this, is opposed to violent revolution. He finds that this view is reflected in his plays. He

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presents these general truths as coming first and then as being demonstrated or evident in the plays:

Now, it has historically been the educated intermediate classes in the black group who have ascribed to and propagated the ideology of Christianity, in its established, i.e. its European, forms. Christian teachings have traditionally played an important part in the ideological struggle of the ruling groups and classes in South Africa to maintain their dominance, especially by 'legitimizing' a non-violent morality. As we shall see in the chapter on Shanti, the Christian taboo against the use of violence for revolutionary purposes as one of the important ideological barriers the play attempted to break through. Kente's play affirms it.<sup>16</sup>

This formulation implies that all members of a particular class are representatives of the class and have an identifiable class-consciousness. In the case of the ruling classes, this is a false consciousness and so their work is not, and cannot be, a "genuine theatre for the majority". One of the difficulties with this kind of analysis is that it does not explain why the 'majority' that gives support to Kente's plays, respond to the deeply Christian message if they are also not typically Christian as a class. And, if Christianity is an 'ideological barrier' to revolution, how does one account for the deeply Christian content of Aluta Continua - a play that is openly revolutionary in its appeal for opposition to an oppressive regime.<sup>17</sup> It seems unsound to assume too direct and close an a priori correspondence between modes of thought that can be identified historically as happening within a social order and actual theatrical productions made by individuals. In his search for a genuine theatre of the majority, Kavanagh seeks direct and obvious connections between what he assumes is typical of the 'false consciousness of the ruling classes and certain selected texts. This leads him into class reductionism. He argues that the criterion that he employs for judging whether or not the plays that he analyzes are 'genuine' and 'authentic' is the way they function and that he does not judge the work by its author's class membership.<sup>18</sup> But, in order to analyze the plays, he relies on the biographical details of the playwrights. As Sole points out, "literature and performance are not directly based on class interest - this would be a grotesque assumption that would, for instance, disqualify love poetry from its concerns, or the category of feminist

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literature and others".<sup>19</sup> Williams mentions that this kind of Marxist interpretation is widely known (and often all that is known) and that it does not stand up well against the much closer kinds of analysis such as those introduced by Leavis.<sup>20</sup> However, he also notes that the general proposition of social determinism, no matter how crudely or sophisticatedly developed, cannot be wholly abandoned without abandoning the Marxist position.<sup>21</sup>

There are more complex ways of relating text and context and of defining valuable work that do not involve labelling works as progressive or reactionary. There is, for example, a tendency to judge works of art by the fidelity to, or illumination of, otherwise observable reality. As Marx observed of Balzac (a man at the opposite political extreme from himself), precisely because Balzac represents the realities of French society he is important.<sup>22</sup> He would have been a much inferior writer if he had attempted to turn this realistic representation towards what both Marx and Engels continuously attacked as 'tendency literature', in which, instead of reflecting reality, the writer tries to turn it in the direction of some political presupposition of his/her own. It was thus crucial in this tendency that the work reflected reality - reality as it was, however unwelcome.<sup>23</sup> The difficulty with this argument is that Marxists claim that they have special insights into the nature of reality. For example, on the back cover of Kavanagh's book the claim is that "the author explores the real, as opposed to the apparent functions of South African theatre by examining four very different theatrical ventures."

Williams suggests that the concept of hegemony offers a whole different way of seeing cultural activity, both as tradition and practice.<sup>24</sup> These activities are not now seen in any ordinary sense as superstructure, they are among the basic processes of the social formation itself and related to a much wider area of reality than the abstractions of 'social' and 'economic' experience. He argues that these cultural activities can be seen as they are, without reduction to other categories of content and without the characteristic straining to fit them (directly as reflection or indirectly as mediation) to another and determining manifest economic and political relationships.<sup>25</sup> Yet, they can still be seen as elements of hegemony; an inclusive social and cultural formation which, to be effective, has to extend to and include the

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whole area of cultural experience.<sup>26</sup> Kavanagh draws on the concept of hegemony to make an historical *analysis* of the South African social formation and, although he acknowledges an indebtedness to Williams, he uses the term in the sense of cultural and ideological domination through articulated and latent meaning and common sense that hegemony includes. Nor does he allow the autonomy that Williams suggests for theatrical practices, but attempts to make **direct** connections between text and context. However, Williams' conflation of base and superstructure does pose problems for maintaining a Marxist position, and what is at stake is the very notion of 'class' as a group composed of members who have class-consciousness.

In order to discover a method through which particular works of art can be understood and described, there must be a break with isolating the work as an object and then discovering its components.<sup>27</sup> Instead, the reality of the practice of art as it is executed must be discovered. Art is always both social composition and social composition and both its irreducible individuality and its collectivity should be attended to. Williams says that "As we discover the nature of a particular practice, and the nature of the relation between an individual project and a collective mode, we find that we are analysing as two forms of the same process, both its active composition and its conditions of composition."<sup>28</sup> In his analyses of the composition of drama, he pays attention to historically based conventions in art as social formations of a particular kind which may in turn be seen as structures of feeling.<sup>29</sup> His notion of 'structures of feeling' refers to social experiences that are still in process or practical consciousness. These structures of feeling do not only articulate conscious systems of ideas and beliefs or ideology, but also latent and undefined modes of thought - the tension between ideology and practical experience. In his analysis of King Lear for example, he demonstrates an emerging break with conventional religious belief evident in the structure of the dramatic writing:

When Lear cries out in the convention of madness in Act Four, Scene Six the form is also consciously based on formal address from the seat of power:

3. I will preach to thee: Mark!

...When we are born, we cry that we are come  
To this great stage of fools.

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The world-view of this is a loss of state and a religious critique of power and vanity, written in the powerful and protected form of a personal disorder that is both apparent and real. The communicative level of this kind of drama is a creative composition beyond the dialogue of fixed and reliable relationships. When neither the preacher's assigned homily nor the addressable presence of God is available, the modes of necessary speech beyond the forms of social exchange belong neither to the self, as in private soliloquy, nor to the exchange of selves, as in ordinary dialogue, but to a generic form drawing on and moving beyond both:

Let me have surgeons;  
I am cut to th'brains.

It is an appeal or a prayer, but though Gloucester can answer, conventionally, "*You* shall have anything", neither appeal nor prayer will be answered, though both, in a common voice will be heard.<sup>30</sup>

Here the discovery of new modes of thought is matched with new dramatic modes or, in other words, Shakespeare articulates the structures of feeling of his society. Williams connects text to context by connecting the signifying systems of the drama with a shared signifying system of a specific culture and then reaches beyond the established forms into the discovery of new forms of structures of feeling.

In his search for a methodology of art, Williams characteristically stresses the primacy of practice and tends to discount the causal priority of the economic system. The value of creative activity and the importance of lived experience are dominant ideas in his writing. He is described as a humanist and his early work, in particular, has been attacked because it conflates a Marxist analysis into a concept of culture in which he tends to emphasize social cohesion rather than the deep-rooted social conflict within society.<sup>31</sup> He is also accused of rejecting theoretical abstractions and therefore of denying the importance of theory. But, in his recent work, Williams develops an explicit theoretical position which he describes as 'cultural materialism'. In this approach, history, sociology and English converge in cultural studies in order to undertake an analysis of all forms of signification within the actual means and conditions of their production. This approach is one of the counters to the kind of reductionism that is evident in Kavanagh's work. The development of structuralism

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under the influence of Althusser is another counter to economic and class reductionism and these - opposing positions have generated some debate among South African theatre practitioners.

What are the implications of tending towards a reflectionist theory of art for theatre studies? Kavanagh's work is representative of the view that culture is not merely a background against which political struggles are waged but itself a site of struggle. The implication of this for theatre studies is that we cannot contentedly sit back and indulge in academia for its own sake. While the focus in university work is on the practice and theory of a selected field of study this must constantly be related to the wider society. The work must be contextualised theoretically and also linked to relevant social and political movements. However, there is a danger in adopting the reductionist view that performances can be judged from the 'outside' as either reactionary or genuinely revolutionary because of the insights provided by a social theory. This is the other side of the coin of judging whether performances are 'Art' or not because of the insights provided by aesthetic theory. Theory does provide insights but it does not provide an omniscient view. It is itself an aspect of social process and lest we fall into the trap of fetishizing theory it is important to develop an approach in which theory and practice are kept in a dialectical relationship with each other.

Ari Sitas has made an important contribution to the extension of theatre studies into the wider community by working in the trade unions and his approach is considered in the next section of this chapter.

#### **A 'UNIQUE' SOUTH AFRICAN PERFORMANCE THEORY**

The debate about the relative importance of lived experience and theory, a debate that often occurs between the practising artist and the contemplative academic critic has emerged within the paradigm of historical materialism in South African cultural studies as attempts are made to forge a theory of popular performance. The debate has centred around a group of plays now usually referred to as worker plays.<sup>32</sup> Ari Sitas, a founder member of the Junction Avenue Theatre company and a major force in the generation of worker plays, argues for a specific analysis of these cultural-events



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rather than a general application of models and theories that are derived in other circumstances. He claims that the imposition of these theories results in the most acute insensitivity to local artefacts.<sup>33</sup> He cautions against the cavalier assumptions made by some intellectuals about the specific dynamics of the worker plays and suggests that the first task is to explain the mechanism of these unique events as a 'participant observer.'<sup>34</sup> A central idea in Sitas's argument is the recognition of the importance of the participant observer, a role played by Sitas himself. It seems that it is the lack of careful first hand observation of what is actually taking place, in the work of some theorists, that Sitas finds frustrating. He argues that any theory of performance must derive from within the cultural formation where it occurs, that it must not be imposed from without and that it is always a post-mortem examination.<sup>35</sup>

**Sitas makes a valuable contribution to the development of performance theory in two distinct ways. In his paper, 'Culture and Production: The Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in South Africa, he deals in some detail with the specific dynamics of the playmaking processes in which he is involved.<sup>36</sup> In 'The Flight of the Gwala-Gwala Bird: Ethnicity, Populism and Worker Culture in Natal's Labour Movement', he addresses himself to the specific dynamics of the cultural movement in Natal and to what is new and unique in this labour movement. His aims in this work are to explain to the broader community what is unique to Natal, to share his experience with others in the hope that projects of this nature would proliferate and to caution against some of the serious pitfalls. He also wants to create some awareness within the labour movement of the internal dynamics of such projects.<sup>37</sup>**

In his discussion of the genesis of worker plays, Sitas suggests that a clash of moral order takes place between the workers'- attempts to express their *khalo* in the world of production, their strength in organisation, their lives in -the townships and existing popular culture.<sup>38</sup> The struggle for self expression is conducted within and through the aesthetic hegemony of current dominant cultural forms and is manifested in some of the central contradictions on which Sitas comments.<sup>39</sup> His focus of interest is the need and desire of workers to express their experience of the work processes and of their exploitation. This need and desire is, to some extent, captured in the word *khalo*, which means pain, but also grievance, which is lamentation, but also complaint,

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which is 'tears', but also a 'wrong'.<sup>40</sup> The concern is with self-expression, the impulse to disclose, reveal or make manifest - which is an aspect of the impulse to perform. Sitas points out that the theatre as an institution is not deeply - rooted in working class life in South Africa, but that a-broad range of performances and spectacles influence working class expectations of *umdlalo*<sup>41</sup>. These include some indigenous forms of expression that are mimetic (containing re-enactment qualities) mass events like soccer games and music concerts and to some extent the work of Gibson Kente.<sup>42</sup> These are, the- dominant cultural forms that are both incorporated and contested by emerging popular forms.

Sitas locates the forces that interact in the process of making a play to express the worker's *khalo*. His analysis of contradictions between the need to express the experience of exploitation in the workplace and the 'idea of the theatre' that is part of the group's experience is extremely useful to cultural workers in similar fields. Sitas demonstrates his sensitivity towards facilitating the restoration of experience in a form and style that is, not imposed, but initiated-by the workers themselves. He mentions that a central concern in the play making process is to find ways of portraying the experience of the alienation of work' in a modern factory without allowing the presentation- to become entertainment, 'a circus of tyres'.<sup>43</sup> He discusses the group's attempts to portray the horror of a machine age convincingly and concludes that this was most successfully achieved through direct address to the audience. The relations of - production were successfully demonstrated in several plays - through characterization of the roles of the 'middle men' such as supervisors and *Indunas*. However, the tendency to elevate these roles to that of 'mischievous villains', capable of taking action, compared to the facelessness of the workers, tended to, negate the workers' desire to develop their own position and - ability to take action. Furthermore, the tendency of both indigenous forms of dramatic presentation and western forms tend to develop individual heroes and mitigates against the need to express the importance of collective action. Sitas also mentions the vibrancy associated with immoral characters who have resorted to individual escapism in the forms of drunkenness and violence. These types, such as the *tsotsi* and other off-beat characters, have been mythologised by Kente and the workers were confronted with the difficulty of developing serious class conscious characters with

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whom the audience could identify.<sup>44</sup> Some of the other contradictions noted by Sitas, are the different attitudes to time, implicit in modern performances where there are constraints on time, and indigenous performances where taking time is equated with dignity. Different attitudes towards the way the audience pays attention affect the time-span allocated for performance. Some performances call for intense focussed attention for a comparatively short time and others allow for selective inattention or offering possibilities of paying attention, relaxing and even moving away and then returning, and may last for days. Constraints such as the need to catch buses and get home or get to work- have a bearing on attitudes to time in performance.

A crucial contradiction experienced by Sitas is related to the function of theatre. Sitas defines this tension in terms of the cognitive moments which involve the lessons of the play, or the points around which the audience is invited to think, and the cathartic moments.<sup>45</sup> He relates this contradiction to the way the play is connected with reality and suggests that the audience must be made aware of these connections and that the function- of the play is to assist them to grasp the nature of social reality.<sup>46</sup> Cathartic moments can be used to assist the development of understanding, but they should not become a substitute for the definitive statement of the play.<sup>47</sup> There should be no confusion between the emotional release achieved by defeating management in the play and the actual stirring of emotional energy towards praxis. A key question is to what extent cultural events provide an, escape valve for frustration and to what extent they clarify the issues in order to generate feasible collective action? Sitas also points out that the white characters in the play often gain, mythological status which obscures the emergence of realist conflict and this sets up a contradiction between a realistic portrayal of struggle and a mythological, and therefore escapist, portrayal. A final contradiction experienced in workshops is between the traditional function of performance forms such as songs and dances and their new function within the play. He points out that the use of songs must be strategic and functional and that the audience's willingness to participate because of traditional participatory experiences must not be exploited.

Sitas not only provides valuable insights into the nature of workshopping a production, he also provides an important - analytical tool by demonstrating how an

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awareness of tensions or contradictions can be exploited to generate creative output. This is very different from the condemnatory tone adopted by Kavanagh who also identifies contradictions in the work of theatre practitioners, but ends up by making judgements that seem reductionist. Sitas describes the complexity of a process which is becoming a powerful regional cultural movement. He says that what is unique about this movement is that it attempts to utilize cultural forms for propaganda or education purposes as well as providing an outlet for cultural energies or recognising the value of performance for its own sake. He says further that the cultural activists of the labour movement have achieved this and more - they have made cultural work a site of struggle in its own right and have fully put their energies into cultural transformation. In his paper "The Flight of the Gwala-Gwala bird", Sitas stresses the multi-faceted nature of the Natal cultural movement. He defines the parameters of the cultural debate about populism and once again argues that the specificity of the situation in Natal must be attended to. He defines a range of different ways in which people understand themselves as Zulus in order to demonstrate the complexity of the struggle to develop active cultural formations. He compares the cultural movement to the Gwala-Gwala bird,<sup>48</sup> which is brightly coloured because the cultural movement is made up of- a patchwork of bright politico- cultural colours, and not of a uni-dimensional tradition; whether this- tradition is imagined to be one of 'Zulu-ness', -of tribalism, of a national oppression and so on. It is rather a multi-coloured chequerwork of influences and performance rituals.<sup>49</sup> In short, he says, there is no one appropriation of 'Zulu-ness, nor is there, to swing the argument around, one culture of resistance: there are many.<sup>50</sup>

Sitas's insistence on the importance of lived experience and his concern over the danger of general and abstract theoretical positions is in line with the humanist Marxist position. He stresses the primacy of practice and the importance of distinguishing between what people actually do and what they say they do.<sup>51</sup> In other words, he does not accept the Althusserian argument that ideology has a material existence in the social formation and does not only exist as a set of ideas. Althusser's argument is a challenge to humanism because it reflects the ideas of the constitutive subject and proposes, instead, the constitution of the subject by ideology. Sitas argues that ways of life do not necessarily correspond with belief systems or ideology. He

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points out that Zulu migrants living in hostels may practise their lives in all kinds of ways which may contradict with their belief systems. He finds it scientifically unrigorous to conflate ideology and culture. Ideology should mean systems of belief, statements of value, texts, justifications and arguments about ways of life and should not be confused with lived experience. He defines class determinism as the result of the economic constraints on our lives. Classes develop, but this does not automatically translate into a development of -class consciousness or class culture. In other words, according to Sitas, there is no unified way of life that can easily be called 'working class'. There is always variety. Sitas prefers to speak of cultural formations when he is referring to the various activities that offer working people ways of identifying with each other such as church groups and homeboy clubs. These are a defensive response to the pressures of the capitalist system. These cultural formations are not only imposed from above, not only adaptations to domination but, in their collective nature, in their rejection of individual values, many have elements of resistance, and, many, elements which can be used as pillars-on which new kinds of resistance can be built.<sup>52</sup> Sitas suggests that for a shift in perception to take place the power base of an organisation must be changed. If cultural formations can be organised democratically then existing autocracies will be undermined, discourses will change and justifications will change. If a choir, for example, is accountable to a community organisation, then people start asking questions, "Why did you sing that?", "Why did you praise chiefs?", and this starts a shift. The challenge is to establish grassroots democratic organisations so that a transformation of existing cultural formations can take place. The creation of a new hegemony does not mean trying to make a clean sweep of existing practices and beliefs and replacing them with new already formulated ideas, but of transforming existing practices.

## **CULTURALISM VERSUS STRUCTURALISM:**

### **PARTICULAR HISTORY VERSUS ABSTRACT THEORY**

Keyan Tomaselli and Johan Muller take issue with the culturalism that is implicit in Ari Sitas's position.<sup>53</sup> While recognising the importance of his contribution, they query his claim that theories of form or aesthetics are always post hoc and his rejection of semiotics as a method of analysis which considers culture in terms of its

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significatory content and constitutive relationships. They point out that by positioning his work outside the semiotics of performance, he is denying crucial elements of working class theatre; that of its communicational potentialities, as well as its necessary moments of critical/ theoretical self-reflection.<sup>54</sup> In a seminar held in the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, Tomaselli distinguished between the theoretical-work of ‘outsiders’, that is more abstract, and the particularities of description and analysis that is offered by those who are directly involved in cultural events, Me argued that both kinds of work are necessary and important.<sup>55</sup> Sitas agreed that both positions are important, but suggested that there are very few people able to straddle both perspectives and that there is usually a gap between a critical university community’s perceptions and the perceptions of the artists and practitioners themselves. When I suggested that surely it would be valuable for these different kinds of cultural workers to form a team in order to both describe the work and explain it, he agreed that this would be a solution, but not if the dynamic of the object of study is not understood clearly.<sup>56</sup>

Elsewhere, Johan Muller and Mary Crewe lucidly explain the difference between visible and intelligible, commonsense categories and theoretical categories.<sup>57</sup> They suggest that it is poor analytical practice to collapse the two. With reference to the ‘subject’, as used by Althusser, they point out that this is a theoretical category. The subject is not a causal notion; nor is Althusser’s definition of ideology. They are theoretical organising notions enabling us to rank in importance the elements operating in a given situation.<sup>58</sup> They further note that all post-empiricist positions postulate a concept to mediate between the visible and the intelligible, the two most popular being language and theory itself, both pre-eminently discursive notions.<sup>59</sup> They argue that neither experience nor ideology is in a relation of correspondence with reality. The concept of the ‘imaginary’, devised by Althusser, is simply the historically specific way in which historically real persons live their conditions of existence, **as if they could experience reality cold**. An attempt to read the ‘imaginary’ (by Althusser’s definition in commonsense terms is analogous to reading Newton’s gravity concept of attraction in romantic terms.<sup>60</sup> Clearly, what is required is recognition of different levels or horizons of -discourse and this point is developed by Frederick Jameson in The Political Unconscious. Before outlining this idea, it is

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important to discuss the contributions of those academics who locate performance within a discernible dramatic/semiotic theoretical framework designed to link culture to art.<sup>61</sup> As is the case with the work discussed so far in this chapter, the point of departure for these analysts is historical materialism.

#### **ART AS PRACTICE: FROM REFLECTION TO MEDIATION**

The reflectionist theory of art was attacked as western Marxists struggled to account for the failure of the proletariat to defeat the bourgeoisie in Western Europe. A different definition of literary production and its social relations centred not on reflection, but on the different concept of mediation developed in the Marxist tradition. In theatre studies this tradition was particularly developed by Bertolt Brecht who recognised that the task of the theatre is not to 'reflect' a fixed reality, but to demonstrate how character and action are historically produced, and so, how they could have been, and still can be, different.<sup>62</sup> The play itself, therefore, becomes a model of that process of production; it is less a reflection of, than a reflection on social reality.<sup>63</sup> The actors 'show' their characters, rather than 'become' them; the Brechtian actor quotes his part in order to communicate a critical reflection on it in the act of performance. Brecht is well known for developing 'alienation' effects which show up familiar experience in an unfamiliar light, forcing the audience to question attitudes and behaviour which it takes as 'natural'. It is the reverse of the bourgeois theatre which 'naturalizes' the most unfamiliar events processing them for the audience's undisturbed consumption.<sup>64</sup> Brecht's epic theatre is an indication of his concern with the transformations of the form and not only the content of artistic production. The understanding of art as 'work', as 'practice' and as a particular transformation of reality, informs the contribution made by Ian Steadman to performance theory.

Steadman is the first theatre practitioner, operating within the discipline, to offer a sustained challenge to established paradigms.<sup>65</sup> A survey of his articles, his book and his doctoral dissertation which have appeared over a period of some six years (1980 - 1986) reveals an interesting progression of thought from the rejection of purely textual analysis to the development of a fairly sophisticated theatrical discourse.<sup>66</sup> He

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begins with a polemical argument against an exclusively textual analysis and stresses that an appropriate critical methodology for the study of South African theatre should be 'descriptive' rather than 'prescriptive'.<sup>67</sup> He takes issue with critical pre-conceptions - that demand the separation of theatre and politics, prescribe western forms and that elevate text over performance. While - noting that the artistic and academic paradigms established by the dominant group and its institutional scaffolding are inadequate for evaluating the cultural expressions of other groups, Steadman considers it provincial to- think that critics working from within western frameworks have nothing to offer in an analysis of African performance. Citing Armah's dismissal, implicit in his argument, to his own neutrality or lack of prejudice,<sup>68</sup> he points out that all critics work from a particular perspective and asks, "Surely no-one can suggest that the criticism of indigenous theatre is the prerogative of 'indigenous' critics?". What is required then is a new approach to theatre studies and, in this paper, Steadman calls for a descriptive attitude that will start in the context- of the production.<sup>69</sup>

In his doctoral dissertation Steadman takes up the theme of the impossibility of remaining neutral as a critic and stresses the importance of declaring a critical framework from the outset.<sup>70</sup> He points out that to select a theoretical framework is to hypothesize: to make a stand. This is the most difficult part of scholarship because it is paradoxically, an acknowledgement- of prejudice and a setting of limitations.<sup>71</sup> Criticism is always an act of interpretation on the part of the critic who should be conscious of his or her own critical position. Criticism cannot be made from the position of common sense or- personal response, because these are simply undeclared ideological positions. Steadman's early paper gives some indications of his own struggle to move from established paradigms towards a new methodology. Although he calls for a new approach in his paper, his approach remains prescriptive; he argues that the role of the critic is to lead the consensus of popular appreciation nearer towards the consensus of qualified appreciation.<sup>72</sup> He writes of defective theatre' although he does not define this idea beyond condemning 'petty proselytism'.<sup>73</sup> Although he recognises that we must understand theatre as 'informing and being informed by an ideological view', he does not establish how an analysis of 'defective



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theatre' would be accomplished or the criteria for developing 'qualified appreciation'.

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In his editorial, 'Culture and Context: Notes on Performance in South Africa', to Critical Arts 1981, he abandons prescriptive assumptions of this sort and develops a more analytical approach.<sup>75</sup> Here he argues that the goal of scholarship is not to attempt to place new cultural forms within an existing framework, but to explain the genesis of these works as 'unique and individual creations within specific socio-historical co-ordinates, each with a certain relation to the cultural formations which gave them birth'.<sup>76</sup> Critical attitudes should focus on the relationship between social determinants and the practitioners of a public art, rather than on attempting to define the intrinsic merit of cultural artefacts. An established cultural tradition is dependent on the selective valuations of dominant groups and, - according to Steadman, the focus of our studies must shift from a narrow emphasis on 'principles of drama -and 'masterpieces' to the relevance of performance to social structures. He claims that although art can never be reduced to ideology or to sociological manifestation it always relates to, and is bound by, specific social co-ordinates. Playwrights such as Matsemela Nanaka and Maishe Maonya are concerned with the situation of the black worker in contemporary social structures and their work reflects a social consciousness and a desire to awaken audiences to the disorders and the malfunctions of a specific social community.<sup>77</sup>

In his doctoral dissertation, he avoids the reductionism that occurs when direct connections are made between 'social determinant', 'practitioners of a public art' and the performance itself. After tracing the influence of Northrop Frye on the development of a contextual approach to literary studies, he - argues for a sociological perspective to the study of literature and theatre. He draws extensively on the work of Lucien Goldman. Goldman is concerned to examine the structure of a literary text for the degree to which it embodies the structure of thought (or world vision) of the social class or group to which the writer belongs. The more closely the text approximates to a complete, coherent articulation of the social classes 'world vision', the greater is its validity as a work of art.<sup>78</sup> What Goldman seeks is a set of structural relations between literary text, world vision and history itself. He wants to show how the historical

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situation of a class is transposed, by the mediation of its world vision, into the structure of a literary work. To do this it is not enough to begin with the text and work outwards to history, or vice versa; what is required is a dialectical method of criticism which moves constantly between text, world vision and history, adjusting each to the others.<sup>79</sup> Goldman terms his critical method 'genetic structuralism' and, according to Steadman, he radically transformed the traditional methods of the sociological study of literature.<sup>80</sup> This was because in order to understand the text in relation to its context, the major concern had been with the content of the work and this meant that most of the attention was given to work in the realistic mode. Once it became possible to see a relationship between the structure of consciousness in a society and the structure of consciousness reproduced in the work, it became possible to see structural homologies between a social group and the most imaginative artistic works of fiction.<sup>81</sup> The sociology of literature could now deal with both realist-and non-realist works of art. According to Steadman, 'genetic structuralism' begins with a search for the internal coherence of a work and its aesthetic dimension and then proceeds to explain it. In this way interpretation and explanation are mutually reinforcing and there is no need to set up a false dichotomy between aesthetics and sociology.<sup>82</sup>

While acknowledging an indebtedness to structuralist thought, Steadman stresses the importance of refinements in contemporary critical theory in the notions of ideology and hegemony. These relate the signifying practices of cultural expression to the concept of social consciousness.<sup>83</sup> Common to this work is the recognition that all readers and audiences are bound by the contingent facts of their history and culture, and that they are co- producers of meaning. Ideology is therefore seen as part of the structure of relations which determine meaning.<sup>84</sup> When he turns to theatrical discourse he stresses that theatrical action is symbolic representation structured for dynamic effect.<sup>85</sup> By 'discourse' he means language grasped as utterance, as involving speaking and writing subjects and therefore also, at least potentially, readers or listeners.<sup>86</sup> It is necessary to view performance as a dynamic act in time and not merely as an object in space.<sup>87</sup> He also comments on the value of semiotics as a method of analysis especially to dispense with the text-performance dichotomy and to study the systems of theatre.<sup>88</sup> Steadman demonstrates his approach in a detailed study of twelve subjects in his doctoral dissertation. By analysing works created in

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opposition to established forms, themes and techniques he documents the growth and development of a concept of black theatre' which posits conscious cultural challenges to white hegemony. However, for the sake of brevity, I shall consider his approach to an analysis of Pula by Matsemela Manaka, presented as a seminar paper in the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit in Durban in 1985.<sup>89</sup>

In this paper he does not confine himself to a textual analysis of the play in terms of plot, characterisation and dramatic technique, but concerns himself with the play as performance and describes the processes of its conception, construction and enactment. After locating the work of Nanaka and the Soyikwa Theatre Group as popular performance, he discusses the themes of the play under the heading 'Pula: The Product'. A focal idea is the search for black unity. He then narrates the events of the play and comments on the connection between these events and contemporary. Socio-political circumstances. For example:

At this performance in an all-purpose community hall, the action described above was kept virtually intact. It ended with the four actors in the rural farmlands, stricken by drought, calling for rain. By this stage in the play's creation, it's major theme was apparent: rain must come to quench the thirst of black people for unity and solidarity, for purpose and direction. For Manaka, Africa has been demoralised. One of the actors says:

We need a -drumbeat to pump life into the dampened spirits of our people... Today we can still feel the drought from the *west*... there is -no more rain to wet our souls.

The drought 'from the west' has obvious implications, but Manaka does not over-emphasise these strategies. His concern is to sow such ideas while developing the play into other directions. Thus, for the first time in the play, an actor assumes a specific identity. Izwe, a young man who wishes to leave the devastated rural areas and seek his fortunes in the urban areas, bids farewell to his family, and a new sequence in the action begins. This also affords Manaka the opportunity to change the form of the play. After the deliberately romanticised view of tribal life, followed by a picture of colonisation and exploitation, he now transposes the action to the rural areas.<sup>90</sup>

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Clearly Steadman is reconstructing his experience of Pula and this is a creative, interpretative exercise rather than a record that mirrors an event.

Under the heading 'Pula: the Process', he describes the playmaking process and the play in rehearsal. He then turns to the description of the visual impact of the song, mime and dance sequences that depict a pro-colonial harvest festival, the coming of the white man and the defeat of the people. Out of this experience a 'new song' emerges - hard labour in the mines. In his description, he notes ways in which costume, spacial arrangements, vocal and other sound effects and the use of lights produce meaning. The action of the play begins in a narrative mode with the symbolic evocation of the past, shifts into 'a more discursive mode for the shebeen scene and then returns to symbolic enactment to show the lives of black workers. In the shebeen scene the audience are addressed directly and there is a moment when a *tsotsi* attack on the shebeen is presented in such a way that it 'fools' the audience into thinking this may be a real attack. This momentary disjunction between a staged event and an actual 'dramatic' situation has the effect of arousing the audience's awareness of the reality of the play's message and their own part in the fragmentation of black unity. In this section of the analysis, Steadman seeks the internal coherence of the work and its aesthetic dimension.

In the section 'Popular Theatre and Populism', Steadman explains some of the connections between performance and the context in which it was made and presented. He argues that Manaka's theatre is a mediation of black experience - but more importantly, it is a mediation through actors who become, in performance, both signifiers and signified.<sup>91</sup> Although Manaka himself cannot be categorised as working class, his four actors, who are co-creators of the play, are black, working class actors and their roles as creators are interchangeable with their status as characters in the play.<sup>92</sup> This means that Manaka reveals ideology from the inside and is able to straddle idealised class perspectives. Steadman warns against simplistic equations between class, ideology and the production of cultural forms. He also notes that the audience cannot be easily defined in terms of a particular class, but that a cohesive collective consciousness develops in an audience as a particular theatrical phenomenon.<sup>93</sup> He suggests that to develop monolithic categories, that are not related

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to particular circumstances, is obfuscatory rather than revealing because the specifics of theatrical phenomenon may be overlooked. Steadman's shift from critical description to sociological explanation in the documentation of Pula is a demonstration of his theory that interpretation and explanation can be mutually reinforcing. As he has witnessed the playmaking and forcing. As he has the process some performances, he is- able to write about the specificity of this particular cultural process and product from the 'inside'. He is then able to distance himself in order to- make more -general observations about the text in relation to the circumstances in which-it was generated. He makes use of narrative, descriptive and explanatory styles of writing in order to convey the dynamics of performance into its context. If we are to abandon an Aristotelian approach to dramatic criticism, then a new approach that is clearly formulated has to be developed. Steadman has indicated one direction that this could take.

However, his paper also demonstrates the difficulty of capturing a performance in the written form and of verbalising aesthetic experience. This is partly because of a neglect of some of the vital aspects of the performance, such as the audience's response, as is noted by -Rob Amato.<sup>94</sup> It is also because of a lack of texture in the writing, but this is not surprising because descriptive writing is not usually recognised as an appropriate style for academic discourse, possibly because it is deemed too subjective. Clearly, descriptive writing is far more than 'putting down an intuitive response. It involves processes of perception and of uttering and a mastery of conventions of writing. It does, however, offer one of the best possibilities of capturing performance for posterity - consider, for example, the descriptions in Nicholas Nickleby of Victorian melodrama. Another possibility is to develop a semiotic approach. This involves the pointing out of theatrical signs, a demonstration of their evolution and their syntagmatic arrangement, of describing the rhythm of the *mis-en-scène* and the flow of the movement from one sequence to the next. Although Steadman mentions semiotics and refers to the signifier and the signified, he does not develop a full semiotic analysis. Perhaps it is possible to find a middle ground between concrete description and abstract, Semiotic theory. When, it comes to explanation or theoretical analysis, Steadman seems to lack a framework in which to generalize without falling into the trap of mechanistic thinking. He is conscious of this

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danger and cautions against the use of ill fitting hypothesis, but he does not really resolve this extremely difficult problem.

Jameson tackles the problem of analysis by proposing a method that includes three 'horizons' - a textual analysis, a level of social discourse analysis and an epochal level of historical reading. - In order to move to the second level he explains that the individual text must be refocussed as a *parole*, or individual utterance of that vaster system of *langue* or class discourse.<sup>95</sup> The individual text retains its formal structure as a symbolic act; yet the value and character of such symbolic action are now significantly modified and enlarged.<sup>96</sup> He points out that in order to grasp the individual text or utterance as a symbolic mode -in an essentially polemic and strategic confrontation between the classes, and describe it in these terms, a whole set of instruments is required.<sup>97</sup> In the second phase the object of study is no longer the individual text, but the text in relation to the collective and class discourses in which it is constituted. He refers to these discourses as 'ideologemes' - they are the smallest intelligible units of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes. He argues that these are always in narrative form and that narrative is not just a literary form or mode, but an essential 'epistemological category'; reality presents itself to the human mind in the form of stories. In other words, an ideologue is a narrative paradigm or a master code. The religious master code in which the ethical binary opposition is of good and evil, was 'unmasked-' in the 19th century by an ideologue which he refers to as *ressentiment*<sup>98</sup>. In order to reach the third horizon the text and its ideologemes know a final transformation, and must be read as the ideology of form, that is the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production.<sup>99</sup> The brilliance of this model lies in its shift in focus from a narrow look at the text as a symbolic act, through a sociological analysis into a final connection with a mode of production.

#### **A SOCIO-SEMIOTIC APPROACH**

The importance of shifts in focus is implicit in the suggestion made by Tomaselli for a socio-semiotic approach to theatre studies. In a series of articles, Tomaselli pays

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particular attention to the-relationship between performers and audience.<sup>100</sup> With reference to Ilanga Le So Phumela Abasebenzi, he distinguishes between the digital, metaphorical, textual mode of conventional western theatre and the part-whole metonymic mode of working-class plays.<sup>101</sup> He compares the style of expression of these plays to the oral tradition, pointing out that they are free of the constraints of elaborate staging-devices and of the restricting conventions of a recorded script.<sup>102</sup> In Ilanga, the characters and actors are one and the same, and, by re-enacting a lived experience, the performers are constructing the experience in a symbolic mode. Tomaselli argues that this mode is not the comparative and more distancing mode of metaphor or mimesis, but a metonymical mode where the symbols embody the lived experience for the participants and the observers. This deepens the perceptions of those involved:

This deeper perception has implications for both actor and audience for it helps both 'to see', 'to feel' and 'to perceive' a deeper structure of reality.<sup>103</sup>

However, this ability to perceive the metonymic component of the play is ideological and, according to Tomaselli, the average white spectator is class bound and will interpret the play according to an ideology that separates art from life and entrenches the distinction between performer and audience; the play- stands in dyadic relation to something else and is thus metaphorically interpreted.<sup>104</sup> Tomaselli draws a further distinction between directors who impose theatrical conventions and those who allow performance to develop organically:

For the director who imposes theatrical convention, performance is moved into the theatrical realm. For the director who allows it to develop organically, the play may be metonymic for both black and white audiences because they relate to the play as direct participants. That is to say it is metonymic for those white viewers who are forced to live the dominant ideology but who may - reject it intellectually.<sup>105</sup>

Tomaselli goes on to explain that the bourgeoisie and the working class can never truly share their experiences, but they act and react in response to the other's actions and reactions. Both are part of the performance, for both live, and are aware of, the economic imperatives which have brought about these conditions of existence.<sup>106</sup> The

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greater the understanding, the greater the degree of perceived metonymy which permeates deeper levels- beneath the- surface for the performance. According to Tomaselli the extent to which metonymy is perceived, is dependent on the class position, the ideology and the politico-economic determinations of the spectator.<sup>107</sup>

For Tomaselli, metonymy is a mode of perception that is most likely to occur in a performance when the actors and characters are one and the same, when the situation that is being acted out has been actually experienced, when the staged representation is realistic and when the audience has a working class consciousness. This set of circumstances allows for a deeper penetration of ideology because through the experience of the play, the audience perceives the dynamics of social power.<sup>108</sup> The same event could be perceived metaphorically by a different audience that did not identify with the actor/characters, the represented events and who are not politically conscious. But, Tomaselli's argument rests on a number of uneasy premises. Firstly, as Sitas has suggested, we cannot assume that a working class audience has a working class consciousness in South Africa. The development of the proletariat is uneven and many working class people are deeply conservative. Secondly, as Tomaselli himself points out, the 'reading' of sign systems is culture bound. As soon as the 'giant mechanisms' are removed from their usual physical environment they become icons.<sup>109</sup> Even though they are literal properties, it does not mean that they will necessarily induce a metonymic response from an audience that has preconceived ideas about performance which may not include realistic representation. When they are out of context, the 'giant mechanisms' may simply look strange and the audience may wonder why they are on the stage and not in the factory - particularly an audience used to storytelling modes in which realism plays no part. Or is Tomaselli suggesting that the play should be performed in the actual factory? The way an audience has learned to perceive performance as part of a tradition and a life style must surely influence their response. It may be true that white middle class audiences are socialized into viewing art in an aesthetically distanced way and therefore metaphorically, but if distinctions are to be made between black and white audiences, then attention needs to be paid to the way black audiences have been socialized through oral traditions, the influence of playwrights such as Kente and so on, before it



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can be claimed that the black working class will 'see' a deeper connection between reality – out - there and representations of reality on stage.

However, the concepts of metonymy and metaphor seem valuable for a discussion of the vitally important area of audience response to performance. From my own experience at the University of Zululand, I would agree that the audience reaction to performance varies from a metonymic or committed reaction, to a metaphoric or distanced reaction. However, I do not think that this is related to actual representation - either in the sense of actors playing themselves or the use of literal properties. Sometimes a committed reaction is to do with immediately recognisable experience, but it could also be a response to symbols that are well known and clearly understood, It is not always necessary to spell things out for an audience, as Kente knows well. A Brechtian style play induces a high level of metonymy in an audience that is open to its challenge and not shut off because of the convention of adopting a distanced, aesthetic and judgmental attitude. When the audience is addressed as a community it is possible for something consequential to happen that may lead to a change of consciousness for the participants. It is difficult to know what is needed to- 'open an audience' to a challenge and it is possibly working class audiences that are the most susceptible to a response that does not allow for a separation of art from life and is able to penetrate the ideology of their world.

The established view is that when watching theatre we are always finally aware that it is a game, a play, that beneath the surface of costume, makeup, voice and manner there lives another being who is not the person whose *life we are* following. Most western theatre depends on separating the actor from the actant. It is this separation that allows a distinction to be made between drama and ritual. Without it we are participating in a ceremony, not observing a drama. There is irony in this double vision that dramatists make good use of, and it is a convention that has to be -learned. There has, however, been a thrust in modern theatre towards what Schechner has called 'actuals'. As Coplan notes, this is the idea of art as an event, the play has a quality of having-been-lived while the performance has the quality of- living now.<sup>110</sup> It is this kind of theatre that challenges its audiences into knowing that it is not a

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game, or a play that can be enjoyed and then dismissed, but a transforming experience of life itself.

### **BEYOND SPEECH AND DRAMA**

In this chapter I have considered a number of challenges to the traditional concerns of departments of Speech and Drama. A materialist analysis undercuts the Arnoldian belief, that art embodies permanent values that transcend any particular situation, and insists on relating the actual variety of art to historical processes in which fundamental conflicts have necessarily occurred and are still occurring. This means that certain works are no longer privileged and that the feeling that popular forms might possess more vigour and relevance can now be justified theoretically. The claim that it is self evident that some work is more valuable than others, is challenged by a belief that what appears to be self evident or common sense is, in fact, what is acceptable to the dominant culture. The approach that has been adopted by scholars who are looking beyond Speech and Drama towards a study of the theatre that will be meaningful to all South Africans includes all forms of dramatic signification within the actual means and conditions of their production. This approach is not without its problems and debates. A central difficulty is to discover the ways in which performance relates not only to observable reality, but to deep forms and shaping forces that have been identified in the fields of linguistics, anthropology and psychology. The idea that drama can be interpreted as a reflection of reality was explored and in the work of Kavanagh it is evident that there is some danger in making direct and a priori connections between ideology, playwright and text. Other scholars argue for a more autonomous existence for art and consider it misleading to look at the drama as a mirror of life. Steadman stresses that art is produced and that by its construction as drama or performance reality is mediated rather than reflected. He is concerned about reductive approaches and about the denial of the importance of racial categories in South Africa in the work of some Marxist writers. Steadman develops a performance theory which combines description with analysis and explanation and I will take up this idea. Tomaselli suggests a mode of analysis for the relations between performers and observers and a type of play that elicits a metonymic response from an audience.

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The need for new forms of analysis is evident, but there is a debate about where our attention should be focussed. Sitas is convinced that it is most important to work in the field and pay particular attention to the specific circumstances of cultural activity. He provides a valuable critical approach for understanding the playmaking process and I draw on his analysis of contradictions in this dissertation. Tomaselli points out that it is important to move beyond the specific to a more general analysis and he suggests a socio—semiotic approach. It seems that a combination of description and semiotic analysis as a first level is an appropriate direction to develop, followed by attention to performance in its wider social context. The work of Williams and Brecht has been mentioned because of its central importance in taking us beyond Speech and Drama.

### **Implications for the Syllabus**

The theories of performance discussed in this chapter have a profound bearing on the rationale behind a theatre studies syllabus. In terms of a methodology, once the definition of theatre as ‘Art’ and the need to preserve a valued heritage fall away, the parameters of the dominant paradigm begin to dissolve. It is no longer easy to define the course in terms of its content and argue that such and such a play must be included because of its ‘greatness’.<sup>111</sup> The field of study is opened up to include theatre and performance in all its forms. In the South African context if we are to provide relevant courses in which connections can be made between theatre and society the focus must be -first and foremost on South African theatre. To begin with South African theatre is not only practical but important for the development of our students’ sense of identity. As will be discussed in the chapters that follow an alienated system of education tends to reproduce social constructions- that are legitimated by those in positions of power and control rather than to stimulate a confident and inquiring mind. A relevant syllabus would, therefore, include opportunities for studying cultural manifestations of the past, the dominant culture of the day and popular culture.

The second important consideration in developing a methodology is the role of theory. In the work outlined in this chapter, theory is posited as the foundation of theatre studies. Even Sitas, who debates the kinds of theories that are applied in the

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South African context and the connections between theory and practice, does not dispute the need to grasp social theory and the context in which theatrical events occur. The implication is that it is the work of theatre scholars to contextualize their work and constantly seeks ways of making connections between theatre and the social, economic and political systems in which it is produced. As mentioned, theories themselves are historically produced and the search in theatre studies is to discover ways of working inside the meaning making processes of culture while simultaneously linking theory with practice so that theory itself does not become reified.

If we are to seriously adopt a contextual approach then the connections between the macro context of the society and micro educational practices must be considered. University work cannot remain confined within the university community but must extend into the wider community. In order to make suggestions about meeting this requirement, in Chapter 9 I explore some of the implications of working on a community theatre project in a rural community. Finally, implicit and explicit in the work discussed in this chapter is the dialectical relationship between culture and political action. Education, as an aspect of culture, and politics are integrated and the political implications of any methodology that is adopted have to be faced.

In Section 3, I consider these points from a different angle. The strength of drama teaching has always been, and- remains, its holistic approach to education. The practical component of the work concerns itself with the physical, affective and cognitive development of students in an integrated way that is unusual in modern educational practice. The following section is an exploration of the practical aspects of theatre studies. After surveying the rise of drama and theatre for educational purposes in Chapter 6, I offer a detailed analysis of my own approach to the work in Chapters 7 and 8. I do this in the full realisation that there are as many approaches to practical drama teaching as there are drama teachers. However, my own experience of reading about theatre workshops and various methodologies is that I am often frustrated by a lack of detail about how the work is undertaken. I offer detailed descriptions in an attempt to remedy this although the suggestions remain tentative and exploratory. My hope is that by reflecting on this work in order to discover some

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of its inherent contradictions that a contribution will be made towards the reconstruction of an appropriate methodology for South African theatre studies.

#### CHAPTER FIVE NOTES

1. I have identified a number of conceptual strands within a historical materialist approach and selected the work of one analyst in each area in order to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each conception. The work of other major contributors such as David Coplan is noted, but not fully- discussed.
2. See David .Coplan, In Township Tonight, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985; Robert Kavanagh, Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South- Africa, London, Zed Books Ltd., 1985; An Sitas, 'Culture arid Production: The Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in South Africa, Africa Perspective, New Series 1 and 2, 1986; Ari Sitas, The Flight of the Gwala-Gwala Bird: Ethnicity, Populism and Worker Culture in Natal's Labour Movement", Unpublished paper; Kelwyn Sole, 'Black Literature and Performance: Some Notes on Class and Populism', South African Labour Bulletin Vol. 9, No. 8; Kelwyn Sole, 'The Study of South African Working Class Culture', Perspective in Education, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1983; Kelwyn Sole, 'Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance: A Preliminary-Investigation', South African Theatre Journal, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1987; Ian Steadman, "Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984", Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985; Ian Steadman, 'Popular Culture and Performance in South Africa1', CCSU Seminar paper No. 7, November, 1966, ; Ian Steadman, "Culture and Context: Notes on Performance in South Africa", Critical Arts Vol. 2, No. 1, 1981; Ian Steadman, 'Critical Responses to Contemporary South African Theatre', Critical Arts Vol. 1, No. 3, October 1980; Ian Steadman 'Theatre, Criticism and Cultural Studies: New Directions for the 1980s' 'Teaterforum, Vol. 5., No. 1, 1984; (Keyan Tomaselli,

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'From the Laser to the Candle. *Ilanga Le So Phonela Abasebenzi*: An Example in the Devolution of Theatre, South African Labour Bulletin, Vol. 6, No. 6, 1981; Keyan Tomaselli, 'The Semiotics of Alternative Theatre in South Africa', Critical Arts, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1981; Keyan Tomaselli, 'Black South African Theatre: Text and Context, English in Africa Vol. 8, No. 1, 1981; Keyan Tomaselli, 'A Contested Terrain — Struggle through Culture', Inaugural Lecture, University of Natal, Durban, 1986; Keyan Tomaselli, 'Class and Ideology: Reflections in South African Cinema Critical Arts, Vol. 2., No. 1, 1980; Keyan Tomaselli and Johan Muller, 'Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre', Critical Arts Vol.4, No. 3, 1967; Keyan Tomaselli, Johan Muller and Ruth Tomaselli, 'The Lineage of Contemporary Cultural Studies: A Brief Historical Examination', CCSU Seminar Paper No. 4, University of Natal, Durban, 1986.

3. Tomaselli and Muller distinguish between a culturalist approach and performance theory analysis in 'Class-, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South-African Theatre', op. cit.
4. At the Association of Drama Departments of Southern Africa (IADDSA) Conference in 1986, two papers called for the introduction of more South African Theatre onto the syllabus. See Lynn Dalrymple, "Some Thoughts on Identity, Culture and the Curriculum and the Future of South African Theatre", Unpublished paper, 1986; and David Haynes, "Curriculum Development of Drama in Higher Education in South Africa: Problems and Prospects", unpublished paper, 1986.
5. Coplan, In Township Tonight., op. cit., in Tomaselli and Muller, 'Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in "Black" South African Theatre', op. cit. p. 40.
6. Ibid.
7. Robert Kavanagh, Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa, op. cit., p. xv.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 9, Kavanagh adopts Wolpe's analysis of South African capitalism. See Harold Wolpe: 'Class, Race and the Occupational -Structure', Institute of Commonwealth Studies 12: Southern Africa 2, London, 1970, pp. 98 - 119; 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', Economy and Society 1, 1972, pp. 425 -456; and 'Apartheid's Deepening Crisis', Marxism Today Vol. 26, No. 1, 1983, pp. 7- 11.

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10. Ibid.
  11. Ibid., p. 32.
  12. Ibid., pp. 32 - 33.
  13. Ibid., pp. 64 - 65.
  14. Ibid., pp. 74 - 75.
  15. Ibid., p. 205.
  16. Ibid., p. 127.
  17. Aluta Continua - The Struggle Continues was devised by the Cape Flat Players, 1967.
  18. Kavanagh, op. cit., p.. 201.
  19. Sole, 'Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Theatre and Performance: A Preliminary Investigation' op. cit., p. 94.
  20. Williams, Crisis in English Studies', Writing in Society, London, Verso Editions, n.d., p. 197.
  21. Ibid.
  22. Ibid., p. 196;
  23. Ibid.
  24. Raymond Williams, Marxism and literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. iii.

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25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', Roger Dale, Geoff Esland, and Madeleine Mac Donald (eds.), Schooling and Capitalism, London, Open University Press, 1976, p. 209.
28. Ibid.
29. Williams, Marxism and Literature, op. cit., pp. 128 - 135.
30. Williams, 'On Dramatic Dialogue and Monologue', Writing in Society, op. cit., pp. 3 - 64.
31. See for, example, Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, London, New Left Books, 1976.
32. The worker plays have been extensively discussed. See Sitas, 'Culture and Production: The Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in- South Africa', op. cit.; Tomaselli, From the Laser to the Candle: *Ilanga Le So Phonela Abasebenzi: An Example of the Devolution of Theatre*', op. cit.; Keyan Tomaselli, 'The Semiotics of Alternative Theatre in South Africa, op. cit.
33. Sitas, 'Culture and- Production: The Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in South Africa', op. cit., p. 86.
34. Ari Sitas, "The Flight of the Gwala-Gwala Bird: Ethnicity, Populism and Worker Culture in Natal's Labour Movement", op. cit., p. 7.
35. Sitas, 'Culture and Production: The Contradictions of Working Class theatre in South Africa', op. cit., p. 104.
36. Ibid.



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37. Sitas, "The Flight of the Gwala-Gwala Bird: Ethnicity, Populism and Worker Culture in Natal's Labour Movement", op. cit., p. 3.
38. Sitas, 'Culture and Production: The Contradictions of Working Class Theatre in South Africa', op. cit., p. 93.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., p. 88.
41. Ibid., p. 90.
42. Ibid., pp. 90 - 91.
43. Ibid., p. 95.
44. Ibid., p. 98.
45. Ibid., 102.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. 'Gwala-Gwala' is the Zulu name given to the purple-crested lourie.
49. Sitas, "The Flight of the Gwala-Gwala Bird: Ethnicity, Populism and Worker Culture in Natal's Labour Movement", op. cit., p. 35.
50. Ibid.
51. Seminar presented in Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, University of Natal, Durban, 6 June, 1967. Sitas's ideas recorded in this paragraph were expressed by him during this seminar.

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52. Sitas, ‘The Flight of the Gwala-Gwala Bird: Ethnicity, Populism and Worker Culture in Natal’s Labour Movement’, op. cit., p. 36.
53. Tomaselli and Muller, ‘Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in ‘Black’ South African Theatre’, op. cit.
54. Ibid., p. 42.
55. Seminar held in the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, 26 May, 1987.
56. Seminar held in the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, 3 June, 1987.
57. Johan Muller and Mary Crewe, ‘Shadow Boxing’, *Perspectives in Education* Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 5, July 1983.
58. Ibid., p. 4.
59. Ibid., p. 4.
60. Ibid.
61. Tomaselli and Muller, op. cit., p. 40.
62. Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1976, p. 65.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., p. 66.
65. Keyan Tomaselli began a critique of the discipline from within the School of Dramatic Art at the University of- the Witwatersrand, but he subsequently moved into journalism and then Contemporary Cultural Studies.

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66. Ian Steadman, "Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984", Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985; Ian Steadman, Popular Culture and Performance in South Africa, CCSU Seminar paper No. 7, CCSU, University of Natal, Durban, April 1986; Ian Steadman, 'Culture and context: Notes on Performance in South Africa', Critical Arts Vol. 2, No. 1, 1981; Ian Steadman, 'Critical Responses to Contemporary South African Theatre', Critical Arts Vol. 1, No. 3, 1980.
67. Ian Steadman, 'Critical Responses to Contemporary South African Theatre', op. cit.
68. Ibid., p. 43.
69. Ibid., p. 45
70. Steadman, "Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984", op. cit.
71. Ibid., p. 8.
72. Steadman, Critical Responses to Contemporary South African Theatre, op. cit., p. 45.
73. Ibid., p. 41.
74. Ibid.
75. Steadman, 'Culture and Context: Notes on Performance in South Africa', op. cit.
76. Ibid., p. 3.
77. Ibid., p. 9.
78. Terry Eagleton, Marxism and Literary Criticism, op. cit., p. 32.

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79. Ibid., p. 33.

80. Steadman, 'Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984', op. cit., p. 21.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid., p. 26.

83. Ibid.1 p. 41.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid., p. 42, He draws on Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory -An Introduction, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983, p. 115, for this definition.

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid., p. 43.

89. Steadman, Popular Culture and Performance in South Africa, op. cit.

90. Ibid., p. 11.

91. Ibid., p. 17.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid., p. 20.

94. Rob Amato also notes the lack of texture in Steadman's descriptive writing. Rob Amato, 'Response to 'Popular Culture and Performance' in Steadman's Popular Culture and Performance in South Africa, op. cit. p 20.

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95. Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act,  
London, Methuen and Co. Ltd. 1981, p. 85.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid., p. 88.

99. Ibid., p. 76.

100. Tomaselli, 'From the Laser to the Candle', op. cit.; 'The Semiotics of  
Alternative Theatre' op. cit; and Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and  
Metonymy, op. cit.

101. Tomaselli, 'The Semiotics of Alternative Theatre in South Africa', op. cit., p.  
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102. Ibid.

103. Ibid., pp. 19 - 20.

104. Ibid., 20.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. Tomaselli, 'The Semiotics of Alternative Theatre in South Africa', op. cit., p.  
20.

108. Tomaselli uses 'ideology' in the Althusserian sense of lived experience.

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109. In his discussion of the making of the Dunlop Flay, Sitas mentions the difficulty of representing the 'nightmare of the modern factory system'. The workers suggested the use of 'giant mechanisms', but this idea was rejected because it was felt that actual machinery would dominate the realism of the action on stage. Sitas argues that the use of machinery is symbolic but, according to Tomaselli this is a culture bound concept and the use of literal properties is primarily metonymic. He argues that stage design is metaphoric and, in this, the white co-director (Sitas) worked against the very earthy strengths of worker theatre'. Tomaselli, 'Class, Race and Oppression: Metaphor and Metonymy in 'Black' South African Theatre', op. cit., p. 48.
110. Coplan, 'Dialectics of Tradition in South African Black Popular theatre', op. cit., p. 22.
111. I am indebted to Anton van der Haven, "Some Observations on the-Future of English Studies in South Africa", Unpublished paper delivered at the Association of University English Teachers of Southern Africa (AUETSA) conference, Durban, 1986, for clarifying some of the implications of a paradigm shift for the syllabus in a related discipline.

## **SECTION 3**

### **A METHODOLOGY FOR SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE STUDIES**

#### **POTENTIAL OF PLAYMAKING AND SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS AS FEATURES**

#### **OF PROGRESSIVE DRAMA TEACHING IN SOUTH AFRICA**

I am unconditionally opposed to all forms of oppression. For me oppression is the greatest calamity of humanity. It diverts and pollutes the best energies of humanity -of

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oppressed and *oppressor* alike. For if colonisation destroys the colonised it also rots the coloniser.

Albert Memme,  
1974

Open this door softly  
In you go  
In the shadow is sitting  
A woman a mother a bride a widow  
Sobbing  
What are you doing, you fool?  
Don't go away  
Out of the shadow  
Her voice will rise  
Anon

Mweya Tol 'Ande  
(a Zairean poet)

Signs are not merely elements in a communication system, in a mind set, in an intentionality. They connect to the world, they refer to history, to class struggles, to justices, injustices,

Marshall Blonsky, 1985

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### LEARNING THROUGH DRAMA AND THEATRE

#### THE PROGRESSIVIST MOVEMENT IN DRAMA EDUCATION

The pioneers of what is generally referred to as the progressivist movement in drama education were Peter Slade and Brian Way, in Great Britain, and Winifred Ward, in the United States of America. In Britain, the founding of the Educational Drama Association in 1943, with Slade as chairman in 1947, was a milestone in the history of

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educational drama. Slade published his views in Child Drama and was influential in establishing the idea that drama begins in the world of the child's imagination<sup>1</sup>. The cornerstone of this approach to drama is that self realisation should start with inner experience and move through personal expression to full communication<sup>2</sup>. Slade argued that child drama is an art that is rooted in play, and to be fostered by adults who should not impose their ideas, but simply act as catalysts for personal and group relationships. This movement set the teaching of drama on a new course away from the school play, drama as Art and speech training.

This approach to drama teaching is part of a wider trend in education which, since the Enlightenment, periodically comes to the fore in the west, as a reaction to traditional pedagogy. The progressive-education trend is characteristically diverse in its aims, but central tenets are active learner participation, a supportive climate of encouragement for learning and relevant curricula. The movement loses ground when for some reason traditional arguments for high standards and academic rigour are re- iterated. For example, in America, the progressivist movement of the 1950s and 60s was smothered after Sputnik 1 was launched and the Americans believed they were losing their traditional scientific prominence in the world. The progressivist movement is usually traced to Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Frobel and Montessori and, in the early twentieth century it was championed by the American educationalist, John Dewey, who abandoned the traditional model of education which implied pupil-accumulated knowledge for one in which knowledge was regarded as a tool, or something for use in action. He posited that knowledge was for power, not for contemplation or intrinsic or aesthetic satisfaction. For Dewey, Art was co-extensive with experience arose out of the everyday: it did not constitute a separate realm of the aesthetic, but constituted a "clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience"<sup>3</sup>. Dewey argued that education is not something to be imposed from without. It should be conceived of, instead, as part of a process of growth, originating in large measure with the felt needs and interests of the learner, and organized around learning activities that are meaningful and relevant to the child involved:



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The child is the starting point, the center, and the end. His development, his growth, is the ideal. It alone furnishes the standard. To the growth of the child all studies are subservient: they are instruments valued as they serve the needs of growth. Personality, character, is more than subject matter. Not knowledge, or information, but self realisation is the goal... Subject matter never can be got into the child from without. Learning is active. It involves reaching out of the mind. It involves organic assimilation starting from within, Literally, we must take our stand with the child and our departure from him. It is he and not the subject-matter which determines both quality and quantity of learning<sup>4</sup>.

With these sentiments Dewey captured a prevailing mood and influenced educational trends in America and Europe. Drama provided a perfect medium for putting these ideas into action and, supported by the developing field of child psychology which gave value to learning by experience, educational drama flourished abroad during the 1950s and 1960s. As Ken Robinson has pointed out, one of the reasons why drama took such a grip at this time was because of a change in the educational climate as a whole. Progressivist movements gained ascendancy in education as a counter to the trend towards vocationalism and the pre-occupation with technological advance<sup>5</sup>. The affluence of the 1960s, in the west, allowed space for educational innovation and, as teachers concentrated on finding new and stimulating ways of dealing with traditional curricula, they also began questioning the nature of learning itself. The new approach, taken up in teaching drama, was that no education is adequate or effective if it fails to take into account the child's psychological nature and characteristics. Another concern was with the social nature of education, and drama offered opportunities for children to engage with each other in playing out roles and testing experience in a protected environment in a process analogous to that of the less structured world of the playground.

#### **D.I.E. (DRAMA-IN-EDUCATION) AND T.I.E. (THEATRE-IN-EDUCATION)**

From these beginnings, drama practitioners, such as Gavin Bolton and Dorothy Heathcote, developed educational drama into an important teaching technique. However, there is very little consensus over the use of terms describing the various relations between drama and education. A convenient distinction is between drama-

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in-education (D.I.E.) as the work of teachers with children or students using dramatic techniques; and theatre-in-education (T.I.E.) as the work of permanent theatre companies and touring troupes in presenting plays and dramatic activities for an educational institution. The essential activity of drama in the classroom is often referred to as 'acting out', rather than acting, to imply the difference between the activity of children or adults in the classroom or workshop and the activity of the actor on stage. 'Acting-out' is the process through which 'drama' is produced. Drama in the classroom or workshop is mostly improvised, and has no separate audience. Drama refers to an encounter between those who are taking part, the events and the tension which threads through them<sup>6</sup>. 'Theatre' also means an encounter, one centred on a performance and with a separate audience. The audience does not watch theatre; they watch a drama. They participate in theatre because it is partly their presence and their activity which identifies what is going on in theatre<sup>7</sup>. However, the distinctions between D.I.E. and T.I.E. are difficult to sustain because a D.I.E. programme may include dramatic activities that culminate in a performance for an audience and T.I.E. programmes may utilise dramatic techniques to invite participation from the audience in the planning, preparation and presentation of the performance. 'Educational drama' is useful for describing the whole range of relations between drama and education, including D.I.E., T.I.E., and children's theatre productions.

These new trends in educational drama stress the drawing out of the child's potential rather than dwelling on information and formal skills. The stress is on the individual's mind that is already engaged and already active and which needs to be respected. Improvisation was developed by its proponents as a technique for objectifying experience with the aim of helping children to investigate their own ideas and feelings, beliefs and attitudes towards the social world of which they are part. But, the danger in this kind of teaching is that 'spontaneity' and 'creativity' become so valued that some kinds of drama teaching degenerate into simply provoking uncontrolled expressive behaviour as a reaction to a stimulus. The tension lies in having respect for each individual's way of thinking, feeling and questioning and the teacher's more developed traditions of thought and meaning. The difficulty is - how much knowledge and expertise should the teacher impose?

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There is a reversal in priorities in this approach to drama teaching from the approach inherent in the discipline Speech and Drama with its focus on realised art. In the D.I.E. approach, children are not taught to interpret poetry, prose or selections from plays, but to engage in acting-out in order to construct their own representations of the world. The premise is that active involvement in symbolization develops a basic process of understanding which is the capacity to see the world through symbols. The proponents of Speech and Drama argue that language, the most important of the processes of symbolization, is the 'tool of thought' but recent studies in the acquisition of language indicate that we do not use words just to express our view of the world, but to shape this view. According to Vygotsky, "Thought is not merely expressed in words, it comes into existence through them... words play a central part not only in the development of thought but in the historical growth of consciousness as a whole"<sup>8</sup>.

The emphasis in D.I.E. on acting-out, or role play, for its own sake has led to a split between drama and theatre in education. The proponents of D.I.E. are suspicious of involving children in theatrical activities because this implies learning 'skills' such as voice projection, that might stifle spontaneity. Also the teaching of realised art is easily seen as a kind of cultural imposition which, in fact, is one of the arguments against the 'great works' approach of Speech and Drama. The question is, to what extent and at what stage should children and students be introduced to developed traditions in the theatre in addition to exploring themselves and their own environment through the processes of acting-out.

#### 4. EDUCATIONAL DRAMA IN SOUTH AFRICA

The most striking feature of educational drama and theatre in South Africa is that it is, for the most part, marginalised and neglected by education authorities<sup>9</sup>. The proponents of Christian National Education and Bantu Education, not surprisingly, have no truck with the progressivist movements in education although the idea of learner-centred education is called on to support mother-tongue instruction and 'separate education for separate cultures'<sup>10</sup>. As noted, Speech and Drama has recently

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been accepted as a matriculation subject in some schools, but the course is conservative and Eurocentric<sup>11</sup>.

However, some universities have responded to the progressivist movement in spite of the scarcity of opportunities for drama teachers trained in D.I.E. and T.I.E. In her report on theatre in education at the South African Association for Drama and Youth Theatre (SAADYT), Esther van Ryswyk notes that the University of Cape Town started work in the field of educational drama in 1974 and that many of the young actors in the Performing Arts Council's companies received their training from this university<sup>12</sup>. Rhodes University is also offering training in educational drama, as are the Universities of Durban-Westville and Zululand. However, according to Van Ryswyk, T.I.E. faces severe problems, some of which she outlines as follows:

- 1. The present educational and social system appears to demand that the body of knowledge fed to pupils is strictly controlled. Independent thinking and questioning, the consideration of alternatives, the acceptance of responsibility for 'own' (sic) learning, would appear to undermine the voice of authority.**
- 2. Theatre is still regarded by education departments as a form of entertainment or at best a form of 'culture' that should be part of the education of children<sup>13</sup>.**

In the conclusion to her paper, she deduces that the movement, which was initiated in the early 1970s, developed by the University of Cape Town, PACT Playwork and, later, CAE'AB, reached its peak during the period 1979 - 1984 and that it is now dying in South Africa. She does, however, comment on the encouragement of T.I.E. programmes in some 'black' schools in the Transvaal and of the work in some 'coloured' schools and expresses the hope that the movement will continue to develop in this area.

The theatre-in-education movement is not an isolated phenomenon, but a particular and unique extension of trends discernible in the theatre since the 1920s and even earlier. The impetus for this movement, and a range of other related movements, is theatre's educative potential and in the next section I shall examine this trend.

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## 5. THEATRE'S EDUCATIVE POTENTIAL

The twentieth century has seen the emergence of a range of experiments in educative theatre<sup>14</sup>. Shaw and Ibsen's concern with social problems were early indications of an interest that was to develop in the theatre medium as a way of serving society. A sense of the educative potential of theatre is represented most clearly in the work, between the two world wars, of Piscator and his theatre for the people', the small 'agit-prop' ('agitation and propaganda') groups of the 1920s and 1930s, the didactic theatre of Brecht (particularly the early *Lehrstücke*, or teaching plays) and the living newspapers produced by the Federal Theatre Project in America in the late 1930s. Since the Second World War, the theatre's search for an effective social role has found expression in diverse ways; from Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop which emerged from a small, but thriving, workers' theatre group in Manchester in the 1970s through to the current wide range of political theatre companies, 'alternative' companies, community theatre and children's theatre<sup>15</sup>. In South Africa, in the 1970s, the Black Consciousness Movement paid particular attention to the importance of theatre for developing resistance to cultural dominance. The aims of PET and TECON have been taken up by contemporary playwrights, notably Matsemela Manaka and Maishe Maponya, who stress the social function of theatre. Workshop '71, the early work of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company and the worker theatre movement have all exploited the educative potential of theatre. It was Brecht, above all, who first developed a theory for a theatre that could teach, that offered a forum for the examination and debate of ideas and that would be at once unashamedly didactic and entertaining; a theatre with a social function<sup>16</sup>.

In the west, the impulse to discover the educational potential of the theatre was the raising of the consciousness of dominated groups. For Piscator, Brecht and the 'alternative' theatre movements, all art was subordinate to the conscious cultivation of the class struggle, or feminist, 'gay' and other movements. In South Africa, the aim of the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970s was to assist black South Africans to re-assert their pride, human dignity and group identity through encouraging creativity in the arts. Unlike the 'alternative' movements described so far, the Black Consciousness Movement is defined specifically in terms of race and not class.

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However, Workshop '71, the Junction. Avenue Theatre Company and the worker theatre movement were specifically geared towards developing an awareness of basic conflicts in a capitalist society between working classes and the hegemonic bloc. Referring to his work in Workshop '71, Malcolm Purkey discusses the tensions inherent in these different intentions:

Workshop '71 made two crucial decisions: firstly, it was to be a radically democratic organisation, a vital move if it was to transcend the tendency of similar non-racial organisations to break down into great distrust under stress. Secondly, the theatre group confronted the crucial question of language spoken in South African Theatre head-on.

...it insisted that at all drama workshops and in all meetings and discussions, members should feel free to express themselves in any of the main South' African languages. Workshop '71 was clearly engaged in a political struggle, and the problem of language was just one aspect of its ongoing ever-changing ideological position

[It] nevertheless suffered a great deal of criticism from the Black Consciousness movement. If the Company had embraced a non-racial, democratic and socialist ideal wholeheartedly during their five years of operation, in line with their actual practice, then they would perhaps have escaped this criticism, or at least had an adequate rejoinder. But they were operating in an intensely militant time when alternative ideologies to Black Consciousness seemed temporarily incoherent<sup>17</sup>.

Although there are important differences in the kinds of educative theatre, I have mentioned there is also a line of continuity in this movement. There is the search to redefine the relationship between theatre and society in plays that are openly critical of social contradictions. The aim is the raising of awareness of oppressed groups in order to accelerate the transformation of society. The plays work at deconstructing prevailing mythologies and the focus of attention is usually on engaging the audience in shared creativity.

It is Brecht who has clearly articulated the ways in which theatre may perform an educative function. He made a number of suggestions, but perhaps the most innovative are the variety of techniques that present a view of the world in which the audience is confronted with an idea and made to study it (the well known *verfremdungseffekte*, or alienation effects). The development of a Brechtian play

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occurs by leaps and not by a sliding of the scenes into one, another. The fragmentation of the story reproduces the contradictions of social process<sup>18</sup>. The story does not mask the illogical nature of the linking of scenes, but draws attention to' this in order to educate the audience out of accepting evolutionary inevitability and into a recognition of the possibilities of change. Finally, in 'A. Short Organum for the Theatre, Brecht stresses the importance of the connection between learning and pleasure or entertainment:

Let us therefore cause general dismay by revoking our decision to emigrate from the realm of the merely enjoyable, and even more general dismay by announcing our decision to take up lodging there. Let us treat the theatre as a place of entertainment, as is proper in an aesthetic discussion, and try to discover which type of entertainment suits us best....

From the first it has been the theatre's business to entertain people, as it also has of all the other arts. It is this business which always gives it its particular dignity; it needs no other passport 'than fun, but this it has got to have. We should not by any means be giving it a higher status if we were to turn it e.g. into a purveyor of morality; it would on the contrary run the risk of being debased, and this would occur at once if it failed to make its moral lesson enjoyable, and enjoyable to the senses at that: a principle, admittedly, by which morality can only gain<sup>19</sup>.

There is, however, a tension in Brecht's formulation of the connections between pleasure and instruction implicit in the idea of 'which entertainment suits us best'. The implication is that only certain kinds of pleasure are acceptable and these are the active pleasures of critical engagement rather than the contemplative pleasures of more distanced observation. In other words, the pleasure is of a particular kind, dictated by Brecht. In his theatre, the entertainment functions purposefully to encourage critical thinking and is not for its own sake.

The emphasis in Brecht's work is on the conscious critical speculation of both actors and audience. The actors play the characters and then 'stand aside' in order to comment on the action they have just played. This encourages the audience to reflect critically on both the mode of representation and the actions represented. For Brecht, the key learning process is the dialectic between 'being' and 'knowing'. His work

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stands in contrast to other uses of performance for learning. Many performance techniques involve a transformation of consciousness into trancelike states. This is particularly noted in some of the ritual performances ably recorded by Schechner<sup>20</sup>. In these performances the actors and audience are transported by the intensity of the experience. These activities include some of the Christian ritual's of contemporary 'society and the performance forms of non-literate societies, all of which play a key role in developing the consciousness of their participants. In other words, the educative potential of ritual is recognised and utilised.

Learning through performance modes that has been rediscovered' in the west was a feature of education in non-literate societies. The educative value of rites of passage and other types of ritual has been well documented by anthropologists<sup>21</sup>. One brief example from the Tswana:

During their initiation ceremony 'songs of law' which stress Tswana points of morality and correct conduct were chanted to the initiates. Such songs exhort the boys to protect the cattle while the men are away, to give the bones of the killed cattle to the men, to kill the hawk that feeds on the doves, to respect the father's younger brothers, to learn the hereditary refuges and so on<sup>22</sup>.

The significance of this type of ritual is that it binds the initiates to their community and anchors them to a social identity. This kind of learning tends to emphasize conformity, empathy, adjustment and a respect for the cherished beliefs of the group rather than critical or creative thinking. The paradoxical way in which the use of ritual has become significant as part of the processes of improvisation in some contemporary drama schools is discussed in the next chapter.

The impulse to renew or rediscover the theatre's role in society as an educative force has resulted in a growing interest 'in theatre in Third World social transformation programmes. This development will be examined in the next section for its potential in offering new directions for drama departments wishing to move' beyond bringing life to the classics.



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## 6. THE POPULAR PERFORMING ARTS AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

In a bibliography and review essay, Ross Kidd indicates the extent of the conscious use of the performing 'arts to bring about, or reinforce, a process of social change; changes in self-concept, attitude," awareness, skill or behaviour<sup>23</sup>. He points out that the' overriding focus of this effort has been to prepare people: a) to understand and change their existing situation or: b) to understand and deal with changes in their lives brought about by external influences<sup>24</sup>. Kidd identifies eight different ways in which the performing arts are utilized world-wide in non- formal education. At the one end of the scale there are the mobile information campaigns initiated by central government whose function is to transmit information on a range of issues, such as family planning or agricultural development, while at the other end there are *campesino* theatre projects, whose function is to contribute to a process of organisation and struggle initiated by *campesino* members of a popular movement. The type of plays that are presented differ according to the function of the programme. The plays presented as part of an information campaign tend to be polished, finished plays based on centrally produced scripts<sup>1</sup> while in programmes that are organised within the community, the theatre is both a process and a product which focusses on specific issues of oppression around which the popular movement is organizing. In between the use of theatre to transmit information and for conscientization there are a range of uses that include teaching modernisation practices, facilitating processes of community problem-solving, or facilitating a process of critical analysis which may be initiated by extension workers, theatre animateurs or *campesino* theatre groups<sup>25</sup>. In some cases, the plays are collectively produced and deal with issues that arise out of dialogue or participatory research while, in others, the themes of the plays are determined by field workers and the involvement of the community is only a token involvement.

Ross Kidd has been involved in a number of popular theatre programmes in which the emphasis is on participatory research. One of the best known of these programmes in Africa is Laedza Batanani, held in Botswana. Kidd and Martin Byram, who initiated this project, stress the importance of the participation of the peasants or workers in the project. In a discussion of the work they comment:

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The emphasis is on people becoming more aware of their exploited situation, and seeking more control over power and economic resources. Until the poor are able to exercise a fair degree of control development will be for rather than with the masses. Until popular participation is realised, the tendency will be for development to be a 'top-down' process which does not take into account the needs and goals of the poor people in the society. Popular participation, involvement of the people, will help to provide a more authentic development process; more appropriate and realistic solutions to social and economic problems will be found if the poor are actively involved in determining and carrying out the solutions<sup>26</sup>.

They claim that popular theatre may be successfully utilized as a method of undertaking genuine participatory research and as an effective tool in development programmes, if the people are involved in all the aspects of the programme<sup>27</sup>. The theatre form is effective because it is easily adopted and performances are based on issues that have been worked out by the community through improvisations and discussions<sup>28</sup>. This codification of reality can be used by the participants in analyzing their situation<sup>29</sup>. Other advantages of using performance as a mode of participatory research are that it is entertaining, it can involve illiterate people and it encourages co-operative rather than individual thinking because it is a communal activity<sup>30</sup>.

Laedza Batanani became an ongoing community theatre project and an annual festival was held each year. The mode of production was for community members to first identify problems at workshops that were held for this purpose. Problems that could be solved locally, with available resources, were selected for dramatisation. This limiting of the work to small scale improvements' is a distinctive, feature of many community theatre projects, depending on the political situation in the country. It means that the work can go on, but that there are limits to what can be offered in the way of a liberating education and the work does not address, itself .to the one change that would be central<sup>31</sup>. At a second workshop, community members and cultural workers became involved in a play-making process, using improvisations to create the dialogue and songs, dances and puppetry to re-inforce the message. All performances encouraged audience participation. Once the play was ready, it toured to five major villages where it was usually greeted enthusiastically by the community who were

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involved in the preparations for the presentation and then as an audience in the presentation itself. The performance attempted to reflect the “issues from the perspective of the participants and does not present pre-packaged answers”<sup>32</sup>. Follow up is regarded as important and a special programme was organized by extension officers to support the action decisions taken in the community discussions<sup>33</sup>. Kidd and Byram drew the following conclusions from their participation in this project:

Experience in Botswana has shown that popular theatre can play an important role in social transformation programmes, expanding participation and self-confidence and providing a mirror for critical analysis and a stimulus for discussion and action.... As ‘rough or simple’ theatre it is a manageable technique and therefore capable of lying and being kept within the control of local people. It is as yet under-utilized, but it has an amazing potential as a conscientizing and mobilizing force contributing to progressive social change<sup>34</sup>.

In a later paper, Ross Kidd comments on this work, pointing out that although theatre projects of this kind are enthusiastically supported by the community, they tend to put across narrowly circumscribed messages that do not stimulate a process of critical thinking or create sufficient momentum for an organised and’ collective response to the problem<sup>35</sup>. He cites the work done by the Benue State Workshop, situated in Nigeria, as a genuine breakthrough in the use of community theatre. In the Botswana situation the play was made away from the village, or the community, after some initial discussions. This resulted in a superficial analysis that could not be developed because of lack of further information that was required from the community and an exclusion of the community from the play-making process. The Benue State Workshop showed that by going to the community and staying there the analysis could be deepened, the villagers drawn in and a clearer idea of implications of various strategies for change could be achieved. This workshop demonstrated in a powerful way that participation in the process is not only the community’s right; it is critical to the success of the exercise<sup>36</sup>.

This raises an important issue in community theatre work of whether the emphasis should be on the process of making the play or on the final product. Kidd points out that when the emphasis is on the process, rather than the product, the true objective of

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facilitating a process of critical analysis with a view to making actual changes is achieved. This is because discussion becomes a continuing part of the improvisation and there is participation in all stages of the production. The final product is a combination of performances by the cultural workers and the villagers. This way of working generates natural analysis of the issues at all stages of the play-making process. The procedure that was used by the Benue State Workshop, of information giving, followed by analysis of the information, improvisation and further discussions and analysis, is more effective for conscientization than when the play is made by ‘outsiders’<sup>37</sup>.

The role of the cultural worker or actor/teacher in popular theatre programmes is one of active involvement. As Byram points out, “there are clear ideological implications involved”<sup>38</sup>. Participatory research depends on the commitment of the cultural workers involved and the emphasis on learning as a dynamic, two-way transaction rather than as a one-way banking operation. The cultural worker, who is working with powerless groups of people, is not ‘objective’ or working in a way that is ‘scientifically pure’, but a ‘committed’ participant and learner in the process of research in order to bring about a radical transformation in the lives of the people involved<sup>39</sup>. Kidd describes how development agents working for the Benue State Workshop changed their attitudes towards farmers after working in close collaboration with them in a play-making process and abandoned their stereotyped thinking that farmers are ‘lazy and ignorant in favour of, a more realistic understanding of farmers’ genuine problems’<sup>40</sup>. Cassirer defines the interventionist role of actor/researcher as one of mediators:

His role is not that of a missionary or politician, or expert or teacher. He is above all a mediator who seeks to get at the real problems and tries to resolve them by stimulating a fruitful dialogue between the base and the authorities among all the people of the country<sup>41</sup>.

There are a number of contradictory impulses evident in the use of the popular performing arts in adult education and development programmes. The first of these contradictions involves the use of popular’, to describe a range of activities that includes both cultural imposition, or co-option, and efforts towards conscientization.

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A recognition of this difficulty led a group of Latin American theatre activists to distinguish between ‘people’s theatre’ and ‘popular theatre’. ‘People’s theatre’ is used to describe theatre that exists as part of the heritage of the people, but has been absorbed by the ruling culture and ‘popular theatre’ is that which strengthens ethnic and class consciousness<sup>42</sup>. In South Africa, the usual terminology for ‘people’s theatre’ is ‘indigenous theatre’ and, as noted, the use of the word ‘popular’ is contested<sup>43</sup>. Kidd’s unproblematised use of ‘popular’, that includes a range of activities on a continuum does not clarify the difference between activities that support the dominant culture and those which are truly oppositional. Kidd does, however, point out the difficulties in engaging in subversive activities in many Third World countries. Overt political statements, like those of agit-prop, would not be tolerated and the work would be banned or be counter-productive if the peasants involved in subversive political activity were harassed, arrested or, in some way, punished, without anything being achieved. For this reason, many adult education programmes deliberately limit themselves to the problems that it might be possible to solve, in the belief that at least some forms of consciousness, raising are worthwhile.

There is also an inherent difficulty in the concept ‘development’. Kidd notes that conflicting strategies for social change reflect distinct political and economic views and contradictory material interests:

For some development is handing over technology to the unskilled so that they can become more productive: for others it is awakening the intellectual and decision-making potential of rural people so that they themselves can change the very structure of society<sup>44</sup>.

He refers to the two models of development labelled ‘deprivation-development’ and ‘dependency-liberation’ by La Belle<sup>45</sup>. The deprivation-development notion is based on the view that poverty or disadvantage is self-inflicted and the result of certain deficiencies or inadequacies (‘deprivation’). The solution (‘development’) is to overcome ‘backward’ ideas with new ways of thinking and behaving. The kind of education that is provided within this framework tends to ‘domesticate’ rather than ‘liberate’ by converting the anger of the poor into self-blame and adjustment to the system. The ‘dependency-liberation’ theory views disadvantage as a consequence of

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structural inequalities that keep oppressed groups in a state of dependency on the economic and political decisions made by the dominant groups<sup>46</sup>. The corresponding educational strategy is to awaken the consciousness of the oppressed about their rights and collective power so that they can challenge and transform the relationship of dependency. Educational theatre programmes based on this intention, encourage an active response, the questioning and analysis of issues and the development of active resistance to oppression<sup>47</sup>. The difficulty lies in working out a strategy when the issues are not clear cut. A naive belief in overnight transformations does not usually produce results and some of the most successful work seems to be that which is carefully geared to the needs of a specific community rather than to 'imported revolutionary ideas'<sup>48</sup>.

As already noted, the most difficult contradiction is in the role of the cultural worker, or facilitator, who must initiate democratic procedures, ensure the participation of everyone in the project and keep the project moving along without becoming authoritarian. This is a similar difficulty to that experienced by teachers in progressivist styles of education and I shall take up this point again in the discussion of my own experience as a teacher and cultural worker.

The importance of working within communities is not disregarded by individual members of staff in drama departments in South Africa. Mavis Taylor, in Cape Town, and Malcolm Purkey and Fred Hagemann in Johannesburg are noted for the work that they have undertaken in their respective communities. They have, however, confined their efforts to the practical aspects of the work and, to date, have not recorded their experiences or findings<sup>49</sup>. As far as I can ascertain, this work is not directly connected to the work of the drama departments and so, although it is a challenge to the practical work undertaken within the dominant paradigm, thus far, it has not involved a radical change in departmental policy. However, in the case of the School of Dramatic Art at the University of the Witwatersrand, the 1987 syllabus is evidence of a break with an orthodox approach and the impulse to change the syllabus is likely to be the result of both the practical and theoretical work undertaken by members of this school.

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## 7. TOWARDS A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

The educative function of drama lies in its capacity for initiating processes of self-realisation and conscientization. The codification of reality or 'writing the world' is used by the participants to analyze their own situations and so the process is learner-centred in the progressivist tradition. The development of a critical consciousness is related to the comprehension of our capacity to see the world through symbols. This is a learned capacity that provides a meaningful framework for understanding ourselves, our culture and the world. Clifford Geertz defines culture as

... a system of symbols by which man confers significance upon his own experience. Symbol systems, man-created, shared, conventional; ordered and indeed learned, provide human beings with a meaningful framework for orienting themselves to one another, to the world around them and to themselves. At once a product and a determinant of social action, they are to the processes of social life as a computer's program is to its operations ... -so the symbol system is the information source that, to some measurable extent, gives shape, direction, particularity, and point to an ongoing flow of activity<sup>50</sup>.

Here, Geertz stresses that culture is a symbol system that is man-created and learned. The dialectical relationship between the development of symbol systems and the dynamics of social process is a central concern in contemporary cultural studies including the study of the performing arts<sup>51</sup>. Drama is a special kind of process of representation and signification. Learning through drama is a way of learning about symbol-systems as both 'a product and a determinant of social action' and how these systems or patterns of meaning' are organised in order to comment on the world. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, radical semiotics looks at symbol systems as modes of formation which can be open to question as they become visible. A semiotic approach to the analysis of drama and theatre is an important new direction for theatre studies that opens up possibilities of discovering more about the problems of meaning. And, as Pavis points out, to analyze the codes and signifying systems of a performance is not to rediscover what the author and director had previously established, secretly, once and for all<sup>52</sup>. It is to organise the performance and the text

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as a possible circuit of meaning whose productivity and coherence are more or less great, according to the theatre event in question, but also according to the analyst<sup>53</sup>.

A consciousness of signs or semiotics seems barely to have impinged on the intellectual pursuits of South African academics in contrast to the excitement about semiotics that is reported to have swept Europe and America in the 1970s<sup>54</sup>. In these notes I make some introductory remarks about the semiotics of drama and theatre. In Chapter 8, I offer a brief analysis of some of the work I have undertaken. I have not tried to construct too elaborate a theory for this analysis that then disappears into a haze of fine distinctions and incomprehensible terminology in the hope of demonstrating a confidence that I do not have. Instead, I have used some of the most accessible concepts, as outlined below, in order to suggest the educative potential of a semiotic approach.

## 8. Theatrical, Dramatic and Cultural codes

Semioticians hold that all intelligibility depends upon codes. Whenever we 'make sense' of an event it is because we possess a system of thought, a code, that enables us to do so<sup>55</sup>. Human languages are the most developed instances of coding, but codes exist to interpret movement (kinesic), meanings of space (proxemic), meanings of dress (vestimentary) and so on. Interpretation of the complexity of performance involves the appropriate use of a number of codes simultaneously.

One of the first difficulties encountered by theatre semioticians was the attempt to break performance down into units in order to study its sign systems. This quest has not been fruitful and Elam has suggested that the first endeavour should be instead to make explicit the complex of dramatic theatrical and cultural codes which permit a range of diverse messages to be brought together to the united end of producing a performance text<sup>56</sup>. In other words, the building of the play through the development of a series of 'moments', which incorporate the range of sign-vehicles that are being utilized, cannot be understood by establishing what the, basic units are. What can be established are the theatrical codes that permit a performance to be understood on its own terms and the dramatic codes that relate to the drama and its composition. Elam



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refers to these codes as theatrical and dramatic sub-codes because, while they are peculiar to theatre and drama, they are founded on the cultural codes of a given society<sup>57</sup>. Specific theatrical sub-codes are the general conventions of performance: the fiction of the character embodied by the actor, the stage which signifies the world, the 'fourth wall' of dramatic theatre, two-dimensional space and time (in the fiction and in the theatre event) and the variety of conventions linked to the genres of specific historical periods. Specific dramatic and theatrical sub-codes are conventions for the interpretation of gesture, spatial arrangements, costume, set, linguistic and paralinguistic constraints and so on. The nonspecific codes on which the sub-codes are founded are those used in everyday life or in other arts: linguistic codes, ideological codes, cultural code and codes of perception<sup>58</sup>. Every performance of interest involves a complex dialectic of code observing, code-making and code-breaking<sup>59</sup>. Codes are systems of signs. They may be simple or complex and they consist of different types of signs and rules for their use.

## 9. Types of Signs

For Saussure, a sign is a double entity, consisting of a signifier (a sound-image) and a signified (a concept). For Peirce a sign is something that stands for something else to somebody in some respect or capacity<sup>60</sup>. The Peircean sign has an object to which it refers, an interpretant which it generates in the mind of its interpreter and a ground upon which the interpretation is based<sup>61</sup>. Different grounds lead to three types of signs: icon, index and symbol. Any given sign is iconic to the extent that it signifies by virtue of its resemblance or similitude between the sign and what it stands for. Elam comments on the importance of icons to theatrical semiosis: the sign-vehicle denoting a rich silk costume may well be a rich silk costume, the language of the actor is iconized by being spoken by the actor and so on<sup>62</sup>. He points out that in naturalistic performances especially, the audience is encouraged to take both the linguistic signs and all other representational elements as being directly analogous to the denoted objects<sup>63</sup>. In Peirce's theory of signs, a sign is indexical to the extent that there is a phenomenal or existential connection between the sign-vehicle and what it signifies. As with icons, indices are not so much distinct entities as functions<sup>64</sup>. The rich silk costume, for example, may denote iconically the mode of dress worn by the dramatic

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figure, but at the same time, stand indexically for social status. In Peirce terminology the use of 'symbol' has a precise meaning. It refers to a type of sign which signifies by virtue of an arbitrary, conventional habit of usage<sup>65</sup>. The rich silk costume becomes symbolic of wealth, power and a life of luxury. Elam says that theatrical performance as a whole is symbolic, since it is only through convention that the spectator takes stage events as standing for something other than themselves. On the stage, the symbolic, iconic and indexical sign-functions are co-present; all icons and indices in the theatre necessarily have a conventional basis<sup>66</sup>.

It is important to note that the classification of the icon, index and symbol are seldom mutually exclusive. Rather they represent different levels of meaning. Beyond its basic denotative meaning the theatrical sign invariably acquires second order or connotative meanings for the audience. Every aspect of the performance is governed by the denotation-connotation dialectic: the set, the actor's body, his movements and speech determine and are determined by a constantly shifting network of primary and secondary meanings<sup>67</sup>. In practical social affairs the participants may not be aware of the meanings they attach to the phenomena but theatrical communication allows these meanings sway over practical functions; things serve only to the extent that they mean<sup>68</sup>. A study of the signs of the theatre can develop a heightened awareness of the levels of meaning of the 'immense message' of the world's condition.

### **Socio-Semiotics**

This brings us to the question of socio-semiotics. A semiotics that only analyses signs for their meaning and connotation is not enough. We must also grasp meaning in relation to intention, for otherwise semioticians will simply produce meanings that are authorized by dominant ways of seeing. To understand intention does not mean understanding essentially private 'mental acts', but the effects that signifying systems bring about. This involves grasping intention in relation to a context and interpreting the way intention is oriented to achieve certain effects. The art of communication is not in the sign systems, but in the sharing of meaning and therefore in the case of the theatre, between the performers and audience. As argued in Chapter 2, this sharing is complex and involves two processes of semiosis between initiator/animators and theatrical score and between audience and score. An analysis of the use of theatrical

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signs should therefore include an analysis of the intentions of the playmakers in relation to the constraints of the coding system they are using. These intentions can only be grasped in the context of the theatrical frame governing the participant's expectations and their understanding of the kinds of reality involved in the performance. They must also be grasped in relation to the dramatic frame, or world of the play in which the signs are modified, transformed and imbued with meaning. A grasp of intention lies in perceiving what holds the elements, contradictions and dislocations in the staging of the play together. Intention is manifest in the form or design of a production rather than in the overt statements which may be contradictory. An analysis concerned with intention also exposes the connections between the, choice of sign systems and the dynamics of social process. In other 'words for a contextual analysis attention must be paid to the intention behind the actual production of signs by studying their effect as well as their function within a particular system.

#### 10. Cultural Codes, Politics and Consciousness

One of the aims of a semiotic analysis is to develop a perception of the underlying construction of a performance. However, the aim of adopting a semiotic approach to performance analysis goes beyond grasping the system of codes and conventions by which a performance is interpreted and seeks to understand sign systems as the fabric of consciousness. The work of Bakhtin is important in this respect because in the field of linguistics he shifted attention from the abstract system of *langue* to the concrete utterances of individuals in particular social contexts<sup>69</sup>. He respected what might be called the 'relative autonomy' of language, the fact that it could not be reduced to a mere reflex of social interests; but he insisted that there was no language that could not be caught up in definite social relationships, and that these social relationships were, in turn, part of broader political, ideological and economic meanings<sup>70</sup>. Similarly, the languages of the stage are synthesized into a production that has 'relative autonomy', but they remain in a dialectical relationship with broader cultural codes. This means that a study of theatrical and dramatic sub-codes cannot be divorced from a study of the cultural codes on which they are founded. Moreover, Bakhtin's theory of language, in which signs are understood as material, laid the foundations for a materialist theory of consciousness itself<sup>71</sup>. Eagleton argues that with

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this insight came the recognition that human consciousness was ‘the subject’s active, material, semiotic intercourse with others, not some sealed interior realm divorced from these relations; consciousness, like language, was both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the subject simultaneously<sup>72</sup>. Further, languages and other sign systems are not to be seen as either ‘expression’, ‘reflection’ or abstract systems, but rather as a material means of production, whereby the material body of the sign is transformed through a process of social conflict and dialogue into meaning<sup>73</sup>. This semiotic intercourse forms our perceptions of the world and our intentions towards it and is, in its turn, shaped by these perceptions<sup>74</sup>. Cultural codes are the products of a particular history, a particular way of seeing. In order to demystify proven relations it is the task of educationalists to clarify the ways in which codes function to reinforce the power of a dominant culture. If students are to be empowered with knowledge, connections must be made between cultural codes, politics and consciousness. A socio-semiotic approach to analysis opens up the possibility of making these connections by identifying the complex of codes that are a cohesive (Or disruptive) force within a social formation.

In his preface to On Signs, Marshall Blonsky comments that the semiotic ‘head’ or eye sees the world as an immense message, replete with signs that can and do deceive us and lie about the world’s condition<sup>75</sup>. Following Saussure, he argues that this is because signs are entirely independent of the objective natural properties of the entities to which they point<sup>76</sup>. He claims that the arbitrary is a fundamental concept of semiotics and so if the sign is not the thing, we can use the sign to lie<sup>77</sup>. The Saussurian sign, in which the signifier and signified are connected by convention only, in an arbitrary or ‘unmotivated’ manner is equivalent to the Peircean symbol. It is important to note that these two founders of semiotic study agree on this crucial matter. While Peirce goes on to name two sign-functions that are not entirely arbitrary or conventional, Elam notes that the theatrical performance as a whole is always symbolic. It is clear that at the symbolic level, meaning is man-created, conventional and learned” (we decide and learn that snakes are evil, or a visitation from the ancestors, or vertebrates in the class reptilia). However, when the iconic function of signs is dominant we are more easily deceived. Common sense suggests that naturalistic drama and particularly film and photograph ‘show it as it is’. It is presumed that the camera cannot lie. But the camera can lie because presence

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conceals questions of choice or selection -we do not think about what has not been shown. The category of the present, conceals thoughts of other categories of absence, form and the rules that make possible this instance<sup>78</sup>. This is why Brecht demanded a constant shift in modes of presentation so that we are not deceived by presence, but encouraged to also become reflexive. His theatre brings rules and absences out into the open. The proper study of the semiotics of the theatre is then not only of the sign as such, but also of the rules whereby one set of codes is coupled to another set - producing various effects. Blonsky suggests that the sign is always a deceit and when this is fully assumed on both sides, by sender and receiver, then more attention can be paid to playfulness and pleasure, rather than to blind manipulation<sup>79</sup>.

### **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

In this chapter, several different, but related, aspects of the educative potential of drama have been considered, In line with progressivist trends in education, the proponents of D.I.E. emphasize the central importance of subjectivity in learning. They claim that as the process of dramatisation exploits the - impulse to make sense of, express and communicate from the inner world of subjective experience, it is an ideal learning medium. However, the tendency to emphasize self-realisation and the fear of stifling spontaneity has set up a false dichotomy between learning through drama and an engagement with realised art. The most recent developments in educational drama seek connections between all the functions in drama and theatre. Robinson has identified these as the heuristic, the communicative and the interpretative and appreciative functions all of which relate to processes of symbolisation<sup>80</sup>. In the chapters that follow, I explore the educational value of these functions in relation to my own teaching experience.

The educative potential of theatre has been harnessed throughout the twentieth century with a range of different intentions. The development of T.I.E is an aspect of this trend and the central feature of T.I.E is that it includes audience participation. One of the most powerful impulses to develop the didactic quality of theatre is to raise the political and social consciousness of oppressed groups. In this connection, Brecht's major contribution in developing a theory that posits the educational task of the theatre and a new form (epic theatre) that demonstrates how this may be achieved

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was noted. Drama for development in the Third World utilizes many of these concepts and in a whole spectrum of approaches the potential of drama for 'domestication or conscientization' was outlined. In this connection I paid particular attention to the work of Ross Kidd as this work inspired me to undertake a community theatre project which I describe in a later chapter.

It was noted that in the South African context there is a long tradition of working through performance forms to develop a sense of identity and an awareness of group values that begins in pre-literate societies. The intention is to induce conformity and acceptance of these values among the society's younger members. However, in formal education the value of D.I.E. and T.I.E. is generally ignored, especially in 'black' schools. The Black Consciousness Movement made use of theatre to encourage black South Africans to re-assert their pride and dignity, specifically in terms of race rather than class, but other theatre movements have concerned themselves with the class struggle.

Finally in this chapter, I examined the educative potential of semiotics as an approach to theatre studies. In some brief working notes, I defined some of the key concepts utilised by semioticians to prepare the ground for a semiotic analysis of some plays in Chapter 8. I contended that culture is a system of symbols and that -a grasp of the processes of symbolisation opens up possibilities for creative reconstruction of our personal and - by extension - the public world. This means that no-one need be forever a victim of their own biography'<sup>81</sup>.

In the next chapters I explore some of the difficulties and possibilities for the development of an appropriate methodology for theatre studies, citing my teaching experience. My focus is particularly on the playmaking process and a consideration of how improvisation and discussion may be utilised to unearth, examine and communicate ideas, attitudes and perceptions. I suggest that it is not only making plays, but watching them and understanding them as a specific use of general processes of 'presentation, representation and signification' that is important in education.

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There is no implication that playmaking is not already an aspect of most drama courses. I do, however, contend that it is considered of less educative value than the Production of Scripts of 'distinguished playwrights'. The research outlined is learner-centred and attempts to bridge the gap between being and knowing, theory and practice and the 'world inside' and the 'world outside'. As suggested by Raymond Williams, "beyond what many people can see as the theatricality of our image conscious world, there is a more serious, more effective, more deeply rooted drama: the dramatization of consciousness itself"<sup>82</sup>. This has serious implications for our sense of identity in a post-modern age. What kind of consciousness determines and is determined by our media and our systems of education? The educative potential of semiotics is that it indicates ways of exploring how meaning may be both manipulated and negotiated and this relates to the development of consciousness itself.

## 11. CHAPTER SIX NOTES

- 1 Peter glade, Child Drama, London, University of London Press Ltd., 1967.

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- 2 G.H. Bantock in Studies in the History of Educational Theory, Vol. II, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1984, pp. 13 and 23, defines self-realisation as a universal principle relevant to all. He notes that self-realisation is a post-Enlightenment concept which posited the pursuit of positive freedom through the imposed or accepted recognition of one's 'true' nature as a human being. It has behind it the notion of converting some aspect of the unregenerate self into something else - 'a second nature'. Practically all educational theorists propound doctrines of self-realisation. He points out that what matters and what needs to be made explicit are the terms in which the realisation can take place. The two great lines of thought that emerged in the 19th Century favour a collective society on the one hand and a liberal atomised one on the other. In the former case, self-realisation implies the emergence of a true self as a result of participation in some complex 'whole' with its consequent restrictions and positive opportunities; the later tended more towards self-expression as an individualistic atomic unit inhibited at most by the need not to interfere with others.
  - 3 John Dewey, Art as Experience, New York, Putnams, 1958, p. 46, in G.H. Bantock, Studies in the History of Educational Theory, op. cit., p. 316.
  - 4 See Christopher S. Lucas, Foundations of Education, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984, p. 306.
  - 5 Robinson, (ed.), Exploring Theatre & Education, London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1960, p. 143.
  - 6 Robinson, op. cit., p. 149.
  - 7 Ibid.
  - 8 L.S. Vygotsky, Thought and Language, MIT Press, 1962, in McGregor et al, op. cit., p. 15.
  - 9 Data gathered by Paddy Terry and presented in an address to- the Association of Drama Departments in Southern Africa (ADDSAI Conference held in Johannesburg in July 1987 revealed that 23% of the white schools, 13% of the coloured schools, 15% of the Indian schools and 52% of the private schools in Southern Africa that responded to the questionnaire have some form of drama activity either during or- after school hours. 88% of white schools, 71% of the Indian schools, 50% of the private schools and 55% of the coloured schools returned the pilot questionnaire sent out in 1985)
  - 10 For example, W.M. Kgware, 'The Present Revolution in Bantu Education and its implications for the Future', P.A. Dummy (ed.), Trends and Challenges in the Education of the South African Bantu, Pretoria, J.L. Van Schaik Ltd., and Fort Rare University Press, 1967.
  - 11 See Lynn Dalrymple, "Some Thoughts on Identity, Culture and the Curriculum and the Future of South African Theatre" Southern African Theatre Journal, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1987, pp. 20-40.



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- 12 Esther van Ryswyk, 'Theatre in Education in South Africa' Brendan Butler (ed.), SAADYT, Vol. 8, issue 1, Maidstone, R.S.A, SAADYT, 1987, p. 6.
- 13 Ibid.) p. 21.
- 14 Tony Jackson, 'Can Theatre Teach? Fifty Years of an Alternative Theatre', Critical Quarterly, Vol. 22, No. 4, 1982, pp. 29 - 41. In this paper, Jackson identifies T.I.E. as part of a wider movement in the theatre that is concerned with the educative power of theatre.
- 15 Ibid.1 p. 33.
- 16 Ibid.1 p. 34.
- 17 Malcolm Purkey, 'Experimental Theatre and Resistance in South Africa: 1948 - 1984', Actes Vol. II, sessions 1,2, 3. , Barcelona, Institut del Teatre, 1986, p. 300.
- 18 Patrice Pavis, Languages of the Stage, New York, Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1962, p. 43.
- 19 John Willet (ed. and trs), Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic, London, Eyre Methuen, 1974 (2nd edition), p. 180.
- 20 Richard Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985 and Essays on Performance Theory 1970 - 1976, New York, Drama Book Specialists, 1977.
- 21 For example some African studies are O. Raum, Chaga Childhood, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1940, N. Read, Children of their Fathers, London, 1959 and E.J. Krige, 'Individual Development', Schapera, (ed.) , The Bantu Speaking Tribes of South Africa, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1937.
- 22 W. Willoughby, Race Problems of the New Africa, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1923 in P.A. Dummy, African Pupils and Teaching Them, Pretoria, J.L. Van Schaik Limited, 1973, p. 38.
- 23 Ross Kidd, The Popular Performing Arts. Non-formal Education and Social Change in the Third World: a Bibliography and Review Essay, The Hague, Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (CESO), 1982, p. 2. He cites 1 720 articles and journals on the topic.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 'Conscientization' refers to a gradual learning process in which people look critically at their social situation in order to gain a deeper Understanding of the root causes of their problems. The process of conscientization is based on the premise that with an increase a critical understanding of their social

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environment, people can increase their control over their own lives, and thus their ability to effect positive change.

- 26 Martin Byram, 'People's Participation Demands Change', Media Development, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1981, p. 12.
- 27 Ross Kidd and Martin Byram, 'Popular Theatre: A Technique for Participatory Research', Working Paper No, 5, Participatory Research Project. Toronto, 1978.
- 28 The word 'community' is vague and has different meanings in different contexts, Mere, the reference is to what may be called a 'traditional community' or a medium sized rural village with a close-knit group of inhabitants. Such a community would live in the same place, have broadly common values and be bound by economic, religious and kinship ties. The use of this term is further discussed in the following chapter, pp. 243-245.
- 29 Ibid., p. 3.
- 30 Ibid.. pp.3-4.
- 31 Byram, 'People's participation demands change', op. cit., p. 16.
- 32 Kidd and Byram, 'Popular Theatre: A Technique f or Participatory Research', op. cit., p. 28.
- 33 Ibid., p. 29.
- 34 Ibid., p. 30.
- 35 Ross Kidd, 'From Outside In to Inside Out: The Benue Workshop on Theatre for Development', Theaterwork, Vol. 2, No.- 4, 1982, p. 44.
- 36 According to the Brazilian theatre director, Augusto Boal, rehearsals are the most important contribution to the inhabitants' process of conscientization. Again and again, passersby are questioned whether what they see on stage also applies to their own situation: are there any elements that should be omitted or added? By choosing this approach, the actors hope to avoid the reaction: "Oh, here comes another bunch that insists on developing us. Let's go and hear what they have to say this time". That is why the plays are realistic and funny offer a multiple choice of alternatives for action.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Byram, 'People's participation demands change', op. cit., p.16.
- 39 Ibid., p. 12.

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- 40 Kidd, 'From Outside In to Inside Out: The Benue Workshop on Theatre for Development', op. cit.
- 41 H.R. Cassirer, 'Radio in an African Context: A Description of Senegal's Pilot Project', Radio for Education and Development: Case Studies, Vol. II, World Bank staff working paper No. 266, 1977. Ibid., p. 16.
- 42 Michael Etherton, The Development of African Drama, London, Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1982, p. 321.
- 43 See Chapter 4 pp. 211-217 above.
- 44 Kidd, The Popular. Performing Arts. Non-Formal Education and Social Change in the Third World: a Bibliography and Review Essay, op. cit., p. 20.
- 45 Ibid., p. 20.
- 46 Keith Watson (ed.) Education in the Third World, Kent, Croom Helm Ltd., 1982, p. 181 - 182.

Closely associated with dependency theory is that of centre-periphery relationships, whereby economic developments at the periphery help sustain and build up the economies at the centre. This occurs at several levels, both national and international. In individual countries the development of regional capitals or cities depends upon the economic growth and exploitation of the regional hinterland... the bigger the city grows the more it absorbs economic investment and the more economic investment that is put into the city the larger it grows, with the result that the rest of the country, the periphery, is usually underdeveloped economically and neglected politically.

In international terms, economic developments at the periphery of the global economy, that is in the poor countries of the Third and Fourth Worlds, help to sustain the economies of the rich industrial North. This view is widely accepted and the evidence to support it is overwhelming. (Mende 1973; and Brandt 1980). However, it also applies - in educational and intellectual terms. Not only is the most economic and industrial power and wealth concentrated in the North - Europe, North America, Japan, the Soviet Union and Australia - but the majority of intellectual and educational power is also concentrated there. The majority of the world's leading universities, research institutions, academics, academic journals, publishing houses, library and research facilities are also concentrated in the developed countries so that developing countries seeking to develop any of these particular areas must look to the developed countries for leadership and assistance. As such they become more subservient than ever during the colonial period, especially when it is considered that the speed of developments in research and publishing activities increasingly places the North ahead of the South. The countries on the periphery, the South, are thus disadvantaged, but because the relations between the metropolitan powers and the developing countries

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tend to be on a government to government basis, i.e. from elites in one centre to elites in, another centre, those people on the periphery of the poorest countries are even more acutely disadvantaged in economic and educational terms.

See W. Brandt, North-South: A programme for survival, London, Pan Books, 1980; and T. Mende, From Aid to Recolonisation: Lesson's of a Failure, London, Harrap, 1973.

47 Ibid.

48 Worker theatre is a good example of theatre that deals with the specific needs of a particular community and has been successful in South Africa, in that it has generated criticism and response from the working class communities and organisations. Popular Theatre Programmes for adult education are not well established in South Africa. The only recorded efforts of this kind that I have come across are Hilary Blecher, 'Goal Oriented Theatre in the Winterveld', Critical Arts Vol. 3, No. 1, 1980; G.S. Fehrsen, W. Shasha and B. Simon, 'The Use of Traditional Means of Communication in an African Community' International Journal of Health Education, Vol. 22 No. 2, 1979, pp. 122 - 124; Barney Simon, 'Education Through Respect: Drama in Health Education in the Transkei', Lecture to the Extension Staff of the Nutrition Advisory Services, Johannesburg, 1974.

49 Malcolm Purkey presented a paper at the International Theatre Conference, held in Barcelona in 1985. Malcolm Purkey, 'Experimental Theatre and Resistance in South Africa: 1948 - 1984', op. cit., p. 293.

50 Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Vultures, New York, Basic Books, Inc., 1973, p. 250.

51 The word 'symbol' is widely used with varying meanings. Most people refer to all signs as symbols and here following Geertz I am using 'symbol system' in a general and comprehensive sense. In Pierce's terminology 'symbol' has a precise meaning referring to a type of sign which signifies by virtue of an arbitrary, conventional habit of usage.

52 Pavis, op. cit., p. 195.

53 Ibid.

54 In his preface to On Signs. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985, Marshall Blonsky (ed.) writes as follows about this response to the presentation of key lectures, seminars and conferences by leaders of the field in semiotics: -

Probably it will be difficult for the reader to form a concept of those heady days in Paris, Milan or in the European countryside, or at Yale, Berkeley and Oxford, when (I am not mythifying it) adults acted like eager children, listening to the Word from scholars and authors who were in love with felt discovery, whose discourse and minds were young and generous.

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- 55 Robert Scholes, Semiotics and Interpretation, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1982,. p. 143
- 56 Keir Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1980, p. 49.
- 57 Ibid., p. 53.
- 58 Pavis, op. cit., pp. 33 — 34.
- 59 Elam, op. cit., p. 54.
- 60 See Chapter 3 above, p. 111.
- 60 Ibid.
- 62 Elam, p. 22.
- 63 Ibid., p. 23.
- 64 Scholes, op. - cit., p. 144.
- 65 Ibid., p. 148,.
- 66 Elam, op. cit., p. 27.
- 67 Ibid., p. 11.
- 67 Ibid., p. 12.
- 69 Ibid. p. 12
- 70 Terry Eagleton, Literacy Theory - An Introduction, Oxford, Basil Blackwell Publisher Limited, 1983, p. 117.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid., pp. 117 - 118.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 I am aware that Artaud and others have challenged a logo-centric view of the development of consciousness, but I tend to this view and to the acceptance of the premise that we see the, world primarily through a framework of language to which other coding systems are related.
- 76 Blonksy, op. cit., p. -vii.

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- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid., p. 443.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ken Robinson has suggested three ways of focussing on the process of dramatisation as a whole. The three functions of drama are identified as heuristic, communicative and receptive. When the emphasis is on the initiation of ideas, the construction of drama through processes of improvisation and the exploration of issues, themes and events, then the general function of these activities is heuristic: they are to do with exploration of self and of meaning. When the emphasis is on the broad process of staging or the *mise en scène*, then the focus shifts from the initiation of ideas to their communication. Robinson refers to the intermediary between the original creative act and the audience as the animator. The director, the actors and the theatre technicians are all animators because they realize a drama for an audience: they make it be. The third process in dramatization is the - receptive activity of the audience. According to Robinson, this is both interpretative and appreciative. The schematic symbolism of performance demands a complex effort at understanding and responding to its signifying systems.  
Robinson, Exploring Theatre in Education, op. cit., pp. 167 -175.
- 81 Robinson, op. cit., p. 162.
- 82 Raymond Williams, Writing in Society, London, Verso Editions, n.d., pp. 17 - 18.

**PLAY-MAKING IN A UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY -  
THE PROCESS**

**INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH  
AFRICAN CONTEXT**

**Theatre studies are a comparatively recent innovation in formal education in South Africa and its practitioners are under constant pressure to strengthen arguments for its inclusion on school and university curricula. In this section, my intention is to contribute to**

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**this effort by exploring some aspects of theatre as education. However, since I contend that the entire system of education in South Africa is in a state of crisis, I will focus on an educational policy that is an alternative to the present apartheid system. The questions are: how do we educate towards a state of greater openness and for general social progress? Is it possible for a state-controlled institution to become a serious arena in the struggle for social transformation? Or is the inevitable function of an institution, such as the University of Zululand, ideological control of its graduates. These questions cannot be addressed unless the dynamic relations between educational institutions, state and society are constantly borne in mind and consideration is given to whose interests are being best served by an educational institution.**

**South Africa's apartheid system of education has been condemned by critical educational theorists of all persuasions, and the students' revolt of 1976 signified the beginning of a sustained battle on the part of black youth against the system. Calls for an adjustment of the existing system to meet the needs of the economy, a dismantling of racial divisions and a redress of glaring inequalities of access and facilities are condemned by revisionist critics as inadequate to solve fundamental problems. To seek the roots of the apartheid educational system in racial ideology rather than in class relations is to obscure the basic dynamics of power<sup>1</sup>. Reformist initiatives by the state that have included the introduction of compulsory schooling in selected areas, the appointment of the de Lange Commission of Inquiry into education in 1980, increased expenditure on black education and the introduction of a Department of National Education in 1985 to formulate policy for all departments of education, have done little to either redress grievances or reduce tensions<sup>2</sup>. There are strong criticisms of what amounts to a technicist solution to the problems and to the state's determination to maintain a system of education that is basically racist<sup>3</sup>. At the heart of the controversy about education are conflicts over some of the assumptions concerning its nature. Is the knowledge that is offered at schools arid universities neutral', 'objective' and 'unbiased' -is it above and outside politics? Or is there some sense in the seemingly senseless cry from black students, 'Liberation now and education later'?**

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**These questions draw attention to important contradictions between the state's attempts to develop an appropriate educational institutions for its own ends, the needs of a capitalist mode of production and the demands of the black majority for literacy, occupational mobility, financial security, personal growth and social respect. The dilemma for the state and the ruling classes is to construct and manage institutions that will simultaneously enhance the labour power of black South Africans and reproduce a submissive attitude to the conditions of their exploitation. The dilemma for the exploited classes is how best to utilize these contradictions and gain skills and knowledge while simultaneously expressing resistance by engaging in political protest. Education is a site of struggle with both limits and possibilities. The relationship between state and capital is not unproblematic, because conflicting demands are made on the state from various sectors of capital - the labour needs of white farmers are not the same as those of secondary industries. While state educational policies, in general, may be calculated to reproduce cheap labour power, the specific functions of educational institutions and the possibilities that are opened up, because of contradictions in the policy, cannot be overlooked.**

### **The University of Zululand**

**The University of Zululand did not develop at Ongoye out of any existing tradition of learning established either by the indigenous population or the missionaries who, until 1953, provided the only formal education available for black South Africans<sup>4</sup>. In 1960, a university college academically affiliated to the University of South Africa was built at KwaDlangezwa by the state, with the express purpose of implementing its policy of apartheid education that includes ethnic universities. The connections between state educational policies and the development of a labour force in South Africa have been established<sup>5</sup>. Apartheid policies deepened the distinctions between rural and urban sections of the labour force and created a pecking order in terms of access to urban employment. Education has played an important role in separating out unskilled, semi-skilled, technical and clerical workers into different segments of the working class. The homeland policy necessitated the establishment of a black elite and a supporting middle class, hence the establishment of a high proportion of South Africa's 'black'**



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secondary, and all its 'black' tertiary education in the homelands by the mid-60s.

According to the homeland policy, each 'Bantu nation' would become an independent national state. These 'states', known as Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Transkei, Venda, Gazankulu, KwaNgwane, KwaNdebele, KwaZulu, Lebowa and QwaQwa would be provided with a university which would meet the demands, the needs and the challenges of each specific community<sup>6</sup>. It was argued that the "aim of university education for the Bantu is to recognize the cultural heritage and needs of the community, as well as the demands of the modern scientific and technological era"<sup>7</sup>.

The proponents of Bantu education are critical of the education offered by missionaries, claiming that its sole aim was to Christianize and westernize the black man who thus lost his identity by becoming a black Englishman or Frenchman<sup>8</sup>. Bantu education, on the contrary, it is claimed, is specifically geared to meet the yearnings of Africans for an African education<sup>9</sup>. The aim is to conserve a sense of ethnicity while at the same time developing "a modern progressive culture"<sup>10</sup>. However, there is a false coherence of thought in this argument which rests on a notion of 'difference. The stress on the retention of a sense of identity in the face of the acquisition of scientific knowledge suggests that knowledge and identity can be separated. The implication is that the identity is established and then, like a vessel, the empty mind is filled with knowledge which does not transform the identity. This is because, ultimately, it is a racial identity that is perceived.

This concept of an identity that is fixed in the formative years is further clarified when linked to a concept of culture that is also fixed, natural, absolute and thus sacred. In his inaugural address in 1970, the Professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of Zululand, Professor Beyers Nel, refers to each person's 'cultural home'.

Every person has a cultural home and every personality a cultural role and potentially an appropriate setting. Every child grows up and attains adulthood in such a particular setting. Re is born into a given situation of

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**cultural- historical origin, and becomes a personality shaped by and for his particular sociocultural context.**

**The fact remains that the personality is hewed from culture; so that the image of man which serves as the ultimate educational aim, is not super-human intercultural or universal abstraction but an identification with a particular cultural- historical and language community; for in practice education is concerned with the unfolding of the personality in real-life situations<sup>11</sup>.**

**In a revealing image, ‘culture’ is conceived of as so fixed and solid that the personality is ‘hewed’ from it. In this static view of culture, people become endlessly locked into ethnicity. They are born into a ‘cultural home’ which is primarily defined by language, in which they must live, playing a role that is, by implication, pre-ordained; for each personality there is “potentially an appropriate setting”.**

**Education is the shaping of the personality by and for this socio-cultural context and, as this is conceived of as fixed, the purpose of education is to mould the individual’s personality in order that he might fit into this appropriate setting. Culture is presented as a closed system into which people are born, in which they must live and from which’ it seems only death can separate them, and education is a preparation for the individual to play his appropriate ‘cultural role’ in his ‘cultural home’.**

**The University was founded specifically to concern itself with the education of the Zulu and Swazi ethnic groups. According to Beyers Nel:**

The University of Zululand would be highly irresponsible if it did not concern itself with the theoretical and philosophical problems of Zulu education, i.e. with the radical and systematic analysis and reconsideration of the education of the Zulu child on his way to adulthood<sup>12</sup>.

It was founded on the premise that it is in the best interests of the individual to be educated within an ethnic context. It was accepted on the premise that education is unambiguously a good thing and a sign of progress. At the official opening ceremony held in March 1961, Paramount Chief Cyprian Bhekuzulu was requested by the Minister of Bantu education to accept the college on behalf of the Zulu and Swazi people. Although he tentatively expressed some

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reservations about the newly established college in his acceptance speech, lie expressed faith in the potential of education:

It is a great thing we do here today. Some say this college is not good for us, but I say it is the best offer we have had...

**However, the deep contradictions between the cultural relativism that underpins segregationist policies and militant Afrikaner paternalism are evident in the discrepancies between the rhetoric and reality of educational practise at the University of Zululand.**

**Arguments that the education for the future citizens of Africa must be a modern African education and that, as students are exposed to the scientific and cultural aspects of the outside world they need to be thoroughly grounded in a firm knowledge of their own cultural heritage, have not yet borne fruit<sup>13</sup>. The fields of study remain Eurocentric and the philosophy of education adopted from the University of South Africa, tends to entrench apartheid education because of its focus on education as an independent discipline and its refusal to relate education to state and society.**

**In 1970, the College was granted autonomous status and ceased to be affiliated to the University of South Africa and, in 1979, black students from any ethnic group in South Africa were accepted. In the 1987 University Calendar there is a statement that the University is a fully autonomous educational institution and, therefore, free to make its own decisions about educational policy. There is also a conscience clause which reads:**

It is the University's avowed policy not to discriminate on the grounds of race, religion, colour, creed or sex.

**It appears, on the surface, that in years the University has made remarkable progress from a tribal college to a fully autonomous university. The question is, to what extent is this institution still involved in the replication of apartheid, despite its autonomy and conscience clause?**

**The University thrives in the quantitative sense on the overwhelming assumption that education is a 'great thing'. In the face of the pervasive sense of crisis, student enrolment has increased, a seven storey library capable of catering for over 6000 students and with space for 400 000 volumes was opened in 1987 and new courses are constantly introduced. A tradition of academic excellence and**

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equality of opportunity has been posited by the University Council to redress the ill effects of Bantu education and the University has embarked on programmes to improve the quality of its teaching and research. Student resistance to apartheid, that resulted in massive countrywide boycotts in 1984 and the closure of the University, has been crushed through a system of expulsion of students. Those who are identified as 'troublemakers' are simply not 'invited to return for the following academic year. In this way the student body is ruthlessly controlled, but the University continues to function. This measure has to be weighed against the need to counter a situation of anarchy where responsibility for the education and socialization of the young members of the society would be up for grabs'. In my view, the abdication of responsibility by those members of the society who have been privileged enough to enjoy a

worthwhile education is not a solution to the problem. Ways must be found to break through paternalism (or maternalism) and a 'baaskap' mentality which usually underpins educational situations in South Africa.

One way through this impasse is an attempt at understanding the historical situation of our own society in its social, political and economic dimensions. The traditional compartmentalization of academic disciplines results in a lack of analysis of the relationship between culture and its material base. This means that separations are made between the forces of economic and social production and cultural forces. Education is then conceived of as objective, apolitical and internally governed. Academic freedom, teacher autonomy and the denial of bias are called in to support a perspective in which the free flow of ideas is claimed to be beyond ideological control. This standpoint has been challenged by post-Althusserian structuralists who stress that any educational apparatus is a crucial ideological instrument. What ideology does, is support existing forms of domination by representing sectional interests as universal and, in this way, existing relations of power are justified<sup>14</sup>. From this perspective, it becomes difficult to see how use can be made of educational apparatus without succumbing to the dominant ideology which is not merely a set of ideas, but a complex set of practices.

However, in response to this, humanist Marxists argue for recognition of an interplay between education and ideological control and stress the importance of resistance and the dialectic between human agency and experience. In a colonial context, state education

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is an intervention and the political problem is not how to use it or even resist it but how to wrest it away<sup>15</sup>.

**As a result of a refusal to think contextually, the dominant argument emanating from the administration at the University of Zululand is that education must not be confused with politics and that it involves both students and staff to focus on achieving academic excellence, rather than on political activity. This approach embodies an assumption that it is possible for a university to maintain a position of political neutrality. It ignores the fact that silence on crucial issues is inevitably taking a stand and maintaining a position that is conservative and biased towards maintaining the status quo. Furthermore, silence may be a refusal to bring that which is the rationale of a university, namely rationality, to bear on crucial issues.**

**What of our students? In his inaugural address as Professor of the Bureau for Tertiary Education, Angus MacLarty described the connections between staff, students and educational practices as follows:**

**In our semi-third-world conditions our universities receive students from under-provisioned schools, set in socially unstable and economically impoverished environments, under teachers who feel safest when they are transmitting information in a very authoritarian fashion. We have to take note of comments like:**

**“(after twenty years) although the campuses (of black universities set up by the Nationalists government) were physically splendid, the academic programs at the ethnic universities lagged far behind their white counterparts in South Africa, as well as elsewhere in Africa.”**

**(Mokubung. O. Nkomo, writing in the United States in 1984)**

Nor can we forget the socio-political environment which constrains the students once they get on campus. Students are heavily involved in learning from university life; their official instruction is quite a small part in their education, and this is not a matter of beer and rag queens, but coming to terms with political roles expected by the community. Nkomo also concluded, from his evidence from five expatriots, that a “substantial portion of the student body” were in a “culture of

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resistance whose trust and direction are contrary to the expectations of the apartheid education system<sup>16</sup>.

A colleague has even more graphically described the social reality of a black university:

**I suggest here only in very simplistic form reasons why the social reality of my black university is so fraught. Again and again one has the experience of chance encounters, incidental conversations, accidental autobiographical anecdotes revealing, beneath the seemingly even tenor of quotidian business, a harrowing world of social duress: accidents, arrests, killings, police shootings, township criminality, teargas, roadblocks, petrol bombings, street committees, rape, grinding poverty, joblessness (let us remember the Stellenbosch report that shows that four fifths of all South Africans between the ages of eighteen, and twenty six have never worked) - this and much else in a catalogue of unfolding disaster<sup>17</sup>.**

**Aitken notes a strategy that students adopt to survive the pressures towards political commitment, on the one hand, and the ‘neutrality’ required by the university administration on the other. He suggests that for many this creates a sense of a mask - a mask of overt quiescence - which is an instrumental compromise<sup>18</sup>. He says the mask promotes an unnerving mood because it never becomes acquiescence.**

### **The University Community**

In the title of this chapter, I refer to the ‘university *Community*’ and use the term ‘community’ in its broadest sense to convey direct common concern. In Keywords, Raymond Williams describes the connotations of the word as ‘warmly persuasive’ and notes that unlike other terms of social organisation it seems never to be used unfavourably<sup>19</sup>. Commenting on this insight, Belinda Bozzoli suggests that it is these connotations of ‘*socially* good, constructive and to be supported and sustained’ that render the term useful to the government as well as its opposition<sup>20</sup>. She suggests that “community is both sufficiently general and sufficiently vague to cover all categories

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in which massive economically defined classes seem inappropriate.”<sup>21</sup> The University functions as a community in the sense that a group of people live and work together ostensibly with a common interest in education<sup>22</sup>. However, as in the case of most social organisations in the divided South African social formation, there are horizontal stratifications along the lines of class, status and power and ‘vertical pillars’ such as religion, ethnic identity and race in the university community<sup>23</sup>.

**It is difficult to identify the class position of students. As far as I know, there is no empirical data on the class position of their parents, but the need to support their children through school and university suggests that most parents belong to the petit bourgeoisie or, at least the aristocracy<sup>24</sup>. There are bursaries available for enterprising students who emerge from the lower classes determined to gain an education for upward mobility, but these are available to comparatively few of those seeking further education. It seems that many parents are first generation petit bourgeoisie but, some members of the same family are likely to be migrant workers or unemployed members of the proletariat, so it is difficult to argue for a distinct class position or a class consciousness among the student body. With some caution, I suggest that the reason for acquiring an education is usually for upward social mobility but this does not mean that students are automatically adopting the values of the petit bourgeoisie. There is a huge gap between opportunities and privileges for the white and black middle classes and so, although many black students may appear to be aspiring towards the rising bourgeoisie, and expensive clothes and hairstyles seem to suggest this, living conditions at home and access to job opportunities are very different from those usually associated with the bourgeoisie. A high percentage of students have their own children and many have already worked and have returned to university under very straitened circumstances to upgrade their qualifications<sup>25</sup>. This suggests that the impulse, to acquire a higher education is to improve basic living conditions which does not necessarily imply aspirations toward upward social mobility. The reasons for pursuing higher education at an institution, such as the University of Zululand, are therefore complex and varied. There is no uniformity of purpose and this manifests itself in severe internal conflicts and conflicts between the university community and the wider community.**

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There are a range of groups on campus seeking status and power as in any community. Some of these groups are specifically student groups and others reflect the interaction between the student body and the wider community. For example, the students refer to the group who openly seek the company of the opposite sex and wear expensive clothes as the 'Romans' and this is a specific student group. The 'Arabs' do not pay attention to the opposite sex, the *pantsulas*' (a more generally used term) do not wear fancy modern clothes, but are conservative in their dress and the *amadubuka*' (literally meaning 'having no shoes') are friends who 'do not attend' or are not registered students<sup>26</sup>. Among the political groupings there are the comrades who belong to revisionist movements and the 'dissenters' who refuse political involvement. There is fierce competition for the control of the student body and so, although there may be a common concern with education, there are powerful divisive factors which periodically erupt, resulting in boycotts of classes. There was a notable instance of violent confrontation on October 29 1983 in what is referred to in some quarters as the 'Ongoye Massacre' that involved not only students but 'outsiders'<sup>27</sup>. There is a strong Christian revivalist movement on campus and 'born-again' Christians are referred to as the '*abasindsiwe*', in addition to more traditional Christian organisations that are also active. On average, 70% of the students are Zulus and the rest come from all parts of South Africa and neighbouring independent states<sup>28</sup>. This has a bearing on the way the students either work together to seek a common, more cosmopolitan culture or focus on language and other 'ethnic' differences. There is a constant tension between these tendencies which is reflected in the plays made by the students.

**In these introductory comments, I have sketched the context in which I have attempted to develop a technique of learning through drama and theatre that creates opportunities for the analysis and debate of problems and for a genuine participatory relationship between myself and my students. My aims are to discover ways of recognising and developing the students own particular sense of themselves while at the same time developing a critical and sceptical attitude and instilling an understanding of causality without becoming manipulative. I concur with Freire that part of the process of developing the ability to think critically includes regular, critical**



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reflection on one's own actions and the next section of the work is an attempt in this direction.

## THE EDUCATIVE FUNCTIONS IN DRAMA

In previous chapters, I have argued against some of the limitations of 'Speech and Drama', examined recent challenges to the hegemony of dominant cultural forms and made suggestions for the recording and interpretation of performance. These arguments have been presented from the point of view of an observer of performance. In the next section of this chapter, I focus on improvisation as a key technique in the play-making process as a way of attending to the educative functions in the dramatic process. This is not with the intention of suggesting that the playmaking process is the most valuable teaching method in theatre studies, but of suggesting a progressive teaching technique that has potential. The playmaking process is a way of understanding performance from the position of initiator and animator which supplements the position of participant observer and analyst. The obvious weakness in this method of teaching drama is that the finished product may lack the 'density of experience of a finely constructed play'<sup>29</sup>. But, the learning experience, that is part of playmaking, more than makes up for deficiencies in the final product.

Within the general concept of learning through drama, there are a range of possible approaches<sup>30</sup>. The focus may be on movement, mime or improvisation with or without dialogue. As noted, the proponents of D.I.E. have set up a dichotomy between theatre and drama in an attempt to redress the balance between personal expressive work and the appreciation of realized art. This is something of a false dichotomy and I suggest an approach that concerns itself with drama both in the sense of 'acting-out' and acting for an audience and with theatre as both process and product.

In drama teaching there is usually a tendency to favour one of its educative functions over the others, depending on the prevailing dominant idea of the theatre and of philosophies of education. In 'Speech and Drama' the communicative function is favoured because of the intention to develop communication skills within the limits of an established area of the theatre. The heuristic function is underdeveloped in this paradigm, because of the emphasis on

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engaging with the valued heritage of masterpieces. A study of the receptive function in the dramatic process is also limited in 'Speech and Drama' by a prescriptive understanding of the nature of Art, as Steadman notes<sup>31</sup>. In contrast to this approach the proponents of D.I.E. lay all the emphasis on the heuristic function because of their concern with self-realisation. But, as Robinson points out, this kind of drama teaching can all too easily degenerate into chaos if self-realisation is advanced as an idea with no deliberate point<sup>32</sup>. It would seem that a balance must be sought between the various educative functions in drama.

The Heuristic Function (Improvisation as a progressive teaching technique)

Improvisation utilizes two elements from everyday life; firstly the spontaneous response to an unexpected situation and secondly, employing this in controlled conditions to gain insight into problems presented<sup>33</sup>. The requirement of spontaneity offers opportunities for making inchoate expressions explicit and for expressions of latent resistance. This is a valuable counter to the passivity of the usual learning situation. It is a way of problem posing that requires students to examine, to know and to suggest ways of transforming their world. It requires genuine participation and genuine communication and when properly utilized can help to resolve the teacher-student contradiction. In the normal teaching situation, the teacher prepares, learns, makes notes and masters her topic and then regurgitates this information to students who are only too eager to devour her words. In an improvisation the students are challenged to actively respond to a situation, demonstrate their knowledge, make choices and communicate their choices.

Improvisation allows students to value their own experience as a source of knowledge and puts teachers in a position to learn from their students. It also allows work to be based on the background and experience of the students and, in this way, is an important rejoinder to cultural domination. Improvisation utilizes the general impulse and capacity for projecting a range of identities or role playing in social situations. Richard Schechner suggests that human beings are unique among animals because they carry and express multiple and ambivalent identities simultaneously<sup>34</sup>. The agreement to play imaginary roles is related to the far less conscious acceptance of social roles. In the worker theatre described in the previous section, the actors play themselves and there is no clear-cut distinction between social role and symbolic role as in the orthodox forms of western theatre. In an improvisation this kind of role playing of self

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**is common and students exploit the opportunity to communicate what they actually feel about a situation, relying on the ‘protection’ afforded by the convention of a hypothetical situation.**

In the Speech and Drama Department at the University of Zululand we have worked on a range of topics including the cleavage between men and women, parents and children, workers and the rising bourgeoisie. I have observed many improvisations that are a critique of university life and especially of the drama department itself. A recent play made in the department called Reconstructions dealt with a political meeting on campus, the treatment of a sell-out and personal relationships. This kind of critique seldom emerges in conversation because of the extremely powerful traditions of respect among our students that prevent criticism of elders and teachers. I have always found our students exceptionally polite and unwilling to openly ‘voice out’ (a student expression) their complaints to figures of authority. The improvisations we have worked on and the subsequent discussions have been a valuable learning experience for me and have given me some insight into the complexity of the students’ lives<sup>35</sup>.

**There is another capacity to take on roles which is common in everyday conversation. This is the ability to slip into a role to make a point, depict an event or describe someone we know. We take on the personalities of others to bring them to life for the listener and to add our own commentary on them through the way we represent them<sup>36</sup>.**

**This basic capacity is utilized in role playing to create characters other than our own, or represent the action of someone else in the depicted world of the improvisation. Role playing means exploring different ways of interacting with others. Dorothy Heathcote has pioneered an important technique of the teacher assuming a role in order to overcome the authoritarian role she is usually obliged to assume. In her work, she assumes a role of an enquirer after information - a journalist, archeologist or visitor - and sets up a situation in which the children have the information and the ideas which they pass on to the teacher. This technique makes it possible for teachers to collaborate with their students in order to learn with them.**

**While improvisation certainly makes it easier to develop an educational strategy that is more democratic than orthodox methods**

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it is a technique that can be utilized with different intentions. The mere fact that the class is involved in improvisation does not mean that a progressive learning situation has been established. Unless the teacher intends to set up a democratic situation and refrains from using subtle forms of coercion and manipulation, the experience can be a form of domination that is merely a more opaque and deceptive method of control than traditional banking education. Here, the teacher is telling her students how to feel and respond rather than genuinely allowing them to explore and communicate their own experience. This does not mean that the teacher can abdicate all moral responsibility and validate every aspect of the experiences of individuals.

Through skilful questioning and through discussion, an attempt must be made to provide students with information they may require and an analytical approach to problems. I think it is important for the teacher to clearly establish her own position so that the students understand the perspective that is being presented and there is no hidden agenda. I have found a technique, suggested by Michael Etherton, very useful:

Subsequently, Brian Crow and I tackled the problem of dramatic form and its relation to ideology in popular drama in a paper which we presented at conference in Benin city and in Zaria, Nigeria. In it we argue that the form of 'plays' of the popular theatre (which we try to define carefully) is 'incompleteness'. By developing thought through the dramatic processes, activists and their audiences can discover the key contradictions. Laying bare one contradiction through modes of drama raises others, either in rehearsals or in an actual performance, which then have to be brought out through discussion among the activists and between the activists and the audience. This is followed by a restructuring of the play. The process continues. Thus, a 'play' is never complete. (This notion, in terms of aesthetics, is much more complex than this outline suggests.)

Peeling off the layers of contradiction becomes the shared activity of the theatre activists and their audiences; and therein lies the process of acquiring true consciousness, no matter what level of formal education

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**one has reached. Thus, the process of making drama, outlined in this way, becomes a valid alternative to the imposition of an ideology through the ‘ready-made’, ‘complete’ play<sup>37</sup>.**

**This process of working through contradictions by activists and audience that Etherton describes is analogous to the process of working through contradictions by the performers as they prepare for the performance. The recognition of contradictions facilitates the breaking down of habitual movement and voice patterns and preconceived ideas which is an important feature of some training and rehearsal schedules. The term ‘workshop’ is commonly used to refer to this phase of the preparations.**

### **Workshops**

**The concept of a theatre workshop was initiated by avant-garde and experimental theatre groups in the 1960s and 1970s to get away from dogmatic acting classes, explore new ideas and make productions that would reflect the personal values of the group involved rather than the standard theatrical values of commercial theatre<sup>38</sup>.**

**Improvisation and discussion are among the most important techniques used to achieve these aims. However, according to Schechner, the workshop is only one phase in the seven phases of all performances which he identifies as training, workshop, rehearsal, warm-ups, the performance itself, cool-down and aftermath<sup>39</sup>. He argues that training is where known skills are transmitted and workshopping is a deconstruction process where the readymades of culture (accepted ways of using the body, accepted texts, accepted feelings) are broken down<sup>40</sup>. Rehearsals are the opposite of workshops. In rehearsals the performance is built up and the conclusion of the workshop-rehearsal process as the public performance.**

Schechner makes connections between the preparations for performance and initiation rites:

**Looking at the whole seven-phase performance sequence, I find a pattern analogous to initiation rites. A performance involves a separation, a transition, and an incorporation. Each of these phases is ‘carefully marked. In initiations people are transformed permanently, whereas in most performances the transformations are**

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**temporary (transportations). Like initiations, performances make' one person into another. Unlike initiations, performances usually see to it that the performer gets his own self back. To use Van Gennep's categories, training, workshop, rehearsal and warm-ups are preliminary rites of separation. The performance itself is liminal, analagous to rites of transition. Cool-down and aftermath are postliminal, rites of incorporation<sup>41</sup>.**

What is of interest to educationalists is what is learned in the different phases of the performance sequence. What is the nature of the transformation that takes place? When the performer gets his own self back' what changes may or may not have occurred? As observed in the previous chapter, the participation in performances was a key aspect in the education of young people in non-literate societies. Taking part in the various phases of performance had a profound impact in that valued attitudes were instilled through the repetition of songs, dances and stories after preparing the candidate through various ordeals and 'breaking down' processes. In ritual the aim is usually to develop acceptance and submission to an established way of life in contrast to drama in which the aim is to develop attitudes that are more questioning. But ritual and drama cannot be easily isolated into separate categories. Schechner notes that traditional ritual performances are not ultimately fixed, but fluid and contingent. However, it is the masters of the dance or drama who are free to improvise and develop new ideas and not the neophytes<sup>42</sup>. This means that the forms themselves are preserved and new ways of thinking can only be developed within these parameters. In the case of drama the tendency to crystallize and formalise behaviour patterns is very powerful and so dramas become rituals in the sense that their forms become fixed by convention and there is always a struggle to discover new forms. Paradoxically, in some experimental theatre movements the term 'ritual' is used to describe the processes of self-discovery. In this context the intention is to uncover habitual ways of moving, thinking and speaking and examine these for what they mean. Unlike in the next phase of orthodox rituals the intention is not to instill an unquestioning acceptance of established concepts and values, but a sceptical and questioning mind.

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**In the playmaking process, workshopping is the key phase because it is during this phase that there is the most potential to develop critical thinking. It is in this phase that common sense perceptions can be deconstructed. As accepted ways of using the body, accepted attitudes and relationships are shown spontaneously through improvisation, they can be 'frozen', as it were, and discussed. For example, our students have observed the respectful attitude shown by women to men in a rural context and will spontaneously act out the lowered eyes, bent body, kneeling and softened voice that women adopt when speaking to men or serving them food. The meaning of these movements can be discussed as they manifest themselves in the workshop. This involves behaving, thinking and making connections in a very dynamic way as the habitual use of the body and mind to express attitudes is explored. The combination of different modes of thought -actual physical experience immediately followed by conceptualization - is a potent learning technique.**

**Clearly, the role of teacher or facilitator in this work is of crucial importance. Drama teachers adopt a range of techniques when conducting workshops from totally controlling and commanding the work to appearing to abandon the participants completely. An essential requirement for the work to progress is for a sense of trust to exist between the teacher and the group and among the group itself. To this end, most drama teachers spend initial time on trust exercises and gaining rapport with their group. I have found working with senior students as assistant helpful in preparing the ground for improvisation. Some drama teachers join the improvisation themselves by taking a role while others set up ideas and observe what happens. The improvisation is followed by comments and discussion which leads into the next improvisation. The teacher usually initiates the idea in some way and may plan to work around a particular theme. In some of my work I have attempted to allow the group to discover a theme themselves through improvising around a broad general idea and then focussing on whatever emerges.**

**However, the teacher's influence cannot be avoided and my own interest in feminist concerns is reflected in my work. On the other hand there is a corresponding interests in the relations between men and women among the students which emerges spontaneously in improvisation. Other interests I have that do not correspond with students' interest have not emerged as central themes and, I have no doubt, ideas that other facilitators would have honed in on have been ignored. There is a constant tension between attempting genuine**

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**learner- centred work and taking charge and imposing one's own ideas. I have found that my students prefer to work some of the improvisations entirely on their own without my intervention until the ideas crystallize into a 'moment' that can be shown for discussion. The disadvantage of this is that certain students begin to dominate the group and good ideas by quieter students are often suppressed. I might have been able to bring out these ideas, but I think it preferable for the students to work on their own than for me to dominate the work entirely. For me the advantage in this work is that most of the time I; am on very unfamiliar ground as far as direct experience of student's lives is concerned and this forces me into a tentative and enquiring position. Some students find this reversal of the usual roles very disconcerting. One first year student wrote as follows in a diary that all students are asked to keep in order to record their experience in the various stages of the work:**

What we did today worried me. I thought when we are preparing to present a performance the lecturers would come with everything - material, and parts which one would perform. But I find that the students come with ideas, improvise them and try to improve them.

What follows is an account of some of the preparations for making a play called Lolo Bambo Lob. This play depicts the conditions of life and the role of African women in three different social formations – pre-colonial Zululand, South Africa in the 1950s and the present day. The pre-colonial episode of the play is an interpretation of the problems created by polygamy for the African woman. The myth of harmony and unity between co-wives and the impartiality of husbands is examined<sup>43</sup>. A narrative sequence, which is presented from the view point of two missionaries, depicts a state of suspicion and jealousy between co-wives that results in accusations of witchcraft. There is a hint in the narrative of the coming disruption that missionaries will cause pre-industrial societies. In the second episode, sufferings brought about by the migrant labour system, city loneliness that drives women to prostitution, the work situation and the deterioration of relationships between men and women are depicted in a series of short episodes. The final episode is set in a staff room in a modern school and involves a debate about the value of sex education in schools. The contradiction between tradition and modernity is explored when the headmaster discovers that his own daughter is pregnant while still at school. A feminist and a singer comment on the action and provide opportunities for reflexive thought.



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This account deals mainly with the making of the first section of the play, but similar techniques were used to construct all three episodes.

## **MAKING LOLO BAMBO LOLO**

### **Preparing to improvise**

**There are numerous techniques for ‘warming-up’ a group and preparing them to participate in an improvisation<sup>44</sup>. Most drama teachers begin with relaxation and breathing exercises and continue with ‘trust exercises’ of various types to try and gain the group’s confidence. Exercises are, of course, important in their own right for developing the movement and voice skills required for performance but, in this work, the focus is on developing cohesion in the group and confidence to improvise<sup>45</sup>. I have found theatre games useful for encouraging a group to work together and games that re-inforce the need for concentration and co-operation are important. The games may relate to one of the ideas that will be explored through improvisation. Verbal dynamics and storytelling are also useful techniques for preparing a group to improvise. Games and exercises are important when the group is new and unfamiliar with improvisation as a technique for exploring a given situation. Once the group has become involved in the play-making process the warm-up period may be reduced considerably to allow more time for the exploration and representation of meaning that occurs during acting-out and discussion. I have found that a short routine warm-up, that meets the group’s specific needs and has been devised by them as the work goes along, is a useful way of beginning each improvisation session to establish rapport within the group and focus attention on the work.**

I have a collection of children’s rhymes in Zulu that I have used with groups that are unfamiliar with improvisation:

*Ngihlala ngiwezwa’amavial* I often hear about lazy people

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<i>Kodwa hay' uNomtobhoyl</i>	But not like Nomtobhoyi
<i>Kuyalineywaywa</i>	When people work in the
<i>Ngiyafa, ngiyafa</i>	I am dying, I am dying
<i>Kuyavunwa</i>	It is being reaped
<i>Ngiyafa, ngiyafa</i>	I am dying, I am dying
<i>Kuyaphekwa</i>	It is being cooked
<i>Ngiyafa, ngiyafa</i>	I am dying, I am dying
<i>Kuyaphakwa</i>	It is being served
<i>Ngiyafa, ngiyafa</i>	I am dying, I am dying
<i>Kuyadliwa</i>	It is being eaten
<i>Uyangua</i> (repeated)	There she comes

**Students told me that this rhyme stressed the important role that women play in rural communities as providers of food and that the work is organised as a group activity. The function of the rhyme is to discourage laziness by disparaging those who wanted to eat, without having done the work. I thought it significant that it was one of the women, rather than a man, who was being criticised and, in response to my comment, a student from a rural area earnestly explained that the women do all the work:**

They do everything. Everything. They work in the fields, planting and hoeing and reaping the vegetables or whatever they have planted. They fetch water everyday and sometimes it is very far to walk and they also fetch firewood. There are a lot of children to look after and if the men are at home everything must be nice for them. They sweep around the homestead and some make baskets and do beadwork so that they can get a little bit of extra money. (This was uncritically offered as the way things are')

**Some students did not question these 'natural' and 'traditional' occupations of women. We discussed the energy and time the tasks of cooking, cleaning and attending to the basic needs of the family, for water and warmth, consume and the resultant exploitation of women when these tasks are their sole responsibility. The men pointed out that in a rural situation where a group of women live in one homestead, women often share the preparation of food and their presence would be unwelcome, if not laughable, if they attempted to involve themselves in women s work'. We noted that the transition**

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**from a communal family life to a single family unit sometimes results in a worse situation for women because their domestic labour is now isolated from their community life. I suggested that the idea of the exploitation of women is related to the changing consciousness of women that occurs as the mode of production changes and classes are formed. Rural women are not necessarily conscious of their exploitation. The women in the group accepted this, but reiterated that they felt exploited.**

### **Improvisation and Discussion**

Following on these initial ideas, I asked the students to improvise around the idea of women's work (as described by the student) and, after a lengthy discussion, I left the room and asked them to prepare an improvisation. They came up with an improvisation in which the women were working in the fields and then went to fetch water when a group of men abducted one of the girls. They wrapped her in an overcoat and dragged her off in order to force her to marry against her will. I was rather surprised by this improvisation, because I did not think that forced marriage was a source of concern, until I discovered that one of the students had recently read Nokulunga's Wedding by Gcina Mhlope, and that the improvisation was an enactment of the first part of the story. I realized that the majority of the students were not on particularly familiar ground when it came to rural practices and that enacting a published story, that one of them had read, gave them confidence that what they were doing was 'right'. I suggested that we read the story together at the next class and research rural attitudes to women through reading anthropological accounts in the library and discussion, if possible, with parents and relatives.

**In the next class I asked the students to make some connections between the story they had used as a basis for improvisation and the situation on campus, regarding the relations between the men and women. They acted out the following sequence of events after preparations on their own.**

Everyone was watching a film in the student centre. The men and women were not sitting together, but in two groups. The women were sitting very close to each other and there was a sense of intimacy and friendliness about the way they held onto each other. After the film, everyone left and one of the men grabbed one of the girls and pulled her aside. The girl cried out in anguish, most convincingly, and

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everyone, except for one couple who were deeply engaged in conversation, went to her aid. There was a quarrel between the men and the women. The women accused the men of being brutal and violent and of only wanting sex from them and the men retaliated by telling the women that they were too proud and only interested in money. The scene ended with angry jeering between the two groups while the courting couple remained engrossed in each other.

**Subsequent discussion centred around the sense of inferiority experienced by black women. Male domination was related to men's physical strength and many of the students (both men and women) said that they believed that men are inherently superior to women.**

**Some women rejected this view saying that women are not necessarily even physically weaker than men and they cited an example of a group of women on another campus banding together and physically attacking a man who had been bullying them! Some members of the group felt that men resort to physical violence far too easily and the men retorted that they were driven to using force because the women did not respond to anything else. I was told that in 1979, a group of men had gone down to Umzana (meaning 'the females' place'), one of the women's residences, had pulled the women out of their rooms and beaten them with their belts. A number of women ran away and stayed at Esikawini for about a week until order was restored: The men claim that the women talk about them in a disparaging way, refuse even friendly contact and prefer men from the neighbouring townships who have money, as companions. Their attitude is contradictory in that they long for a more harmonious social situation, but insist on their innate superiority. I suggested that the improvisation be developed into campus theatre and presented to the student body in order to promote discussion among the students on the matter.**

**There are a number of interesting points about the genesis of this improvisation and the connections made between the story by Gcina Mhlope and later improvisations. The story connects to Xhosa experience rather than Zulu experience because marriage by abduction or capture is a traditional Xhosa rather than Zulu custom. The students' readiness to make use of this story indicates that in this case a tribal sense of identity gave way to a sense of common experience among black South Africans. Moreover, the writer of the story and the students perceived the abduction and rape entirely from a modern perspective. It is not presented by the writer nor was it viewed by the students as a legitimate custom leading towards**

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marriage but as a violent and criminal act. The students then connected this act which relates to customary marriage practices to issues of sex rather than marriage. The acceptance of responsibility for the consequences of the abduction and rape puts the first act into a different category from sexual exploitation and rape as a criminal act. Once the fabric of a society begins to disintegrate the important context in which events occur is often overlooked. This is the danger of thinking in terms of 'universals'; 'love', 'sex' and even 'rape' have different meanings in different contexts depending on the way they are perceived by the members of a given society.

### Lolo Bambo Lolo as Campus Theatre

In order to prepare a campus theatre piece on the relations between men and women, I asked the group to consider why the women felt oppressed or inferior. Some of the women responded that they did not feel oppressed and that -they accepted their 'weakness' because women are dependent on men for their protection, especially during childbirth and when nursing a child. This group argued that women are born 'weaker' than men and should accept their inferior status because of the compensation of bearing children. Other women in the group said that in their experience, women received very little protection from men either during childbirth or when caring for young children. Most of the support came from other women or they were able to care for themselves. The men submitted that they provided a secure environment in a broader sense for the women to bear children, but were unable to support their argument except in a tribal situation where there was a likelihood of attack from other tribes. We agreed that colonisation and the migrant labour system had destroyed the role that men might have played in physically protecting women from intruders. Those women who did not see men as 'protectors' claimed that they did feel oppressed because they were often treated as though they were inferior while they did not feel inferior.

As a group, we tried to trace the origins of the idea that women are 'weak', noting that under the migrant labour system they have shown a remarkable strength in their ability to care for themselves and their children. Fundamentalist Christian doctrine seemed to be a factor in propagating the idea of the inherent inferiority of women. The story of Adam and Eve was interpreted to suggest that Eve was susceptible to evil influences and - therefore 'spiritually weak'. She

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**was also created specifically to be a suitable companion for Adam. Adam was created first, hence the superiority of males, and Eve was created from the substance of Adam and is, therefore, subordinate to him. One of the men in the group claimed that Genesis 2, Verses 21 - 23, is irrefutable evidence that it is God's will that men are innately superior to women:**

Then the Lord God made the man fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him. Then the man said, 'At last, here is one of my own kind - Bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh. Woman is her name because she was taken out of man<sup>46</sup>.

A sardonic response from a more sceptical student that Adam must have had an extra rib resulted in a title for the piece - Lolo Bambo Lolo, meaning 'that extra rib'. The Bantu education system encourages simplistic interpretations of Christianity and I discovered that a surprising number of students were prepared to accept the story of Adam and Eve as historical fact and were totally unaware of the theory of evolution<sup>47</sup>. As a group, we were beginning to realise some of the tensions on which the work was touching, A central tension was expressed in the 'After the film improvisation' between the couple who sought friendship from each other and the expression of male dominance through the use of physical force. This opened up questions about the way in which men and women should ideally relate to each other and the way in which they actually do relate. 'Women should know their place' was contrasted with 'men should accept us as equals and not inferiors'. A question that was raised was, 'Do all women respond to physical violence by becoming submissive?' Geina Mhlope's story of the rape of Nokulunga and her subsequent acceptance of the situation seems to suggest that enormous social and legal pressure is brought to bear on certain groups of women to reduce them to submission:

**(After Xolani has abducted and raped Nokulunga, she - marries him) Nokulunga now accepted that Xolani was her lifetime partner and there was nothing she could do about it. Once, she saw Vuyo in town and they had kissed. It had been clear to them that since she was already pregnant, she was Xolani's wife, and Vuyo knew**

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he would have to pay a lot of cattle if he took Nokulunga with the unborn baby. There was nothing to be done<sup>48</sup>.

Other students cited examples of women who have resisted the myth of female inferiority and established themselves independently of men. A student; who came from a family that was run entirely by women, declared that she would never marry and that men were drones in the society. This open antagonism seemed to indicate the struggle these women were experiencing to establish their independence and their right to education, equal opportunities for employment and, especially, for reproduction rights. These issues were touched on in the dialogue of the improvisations that we did to find an appropriate form for the campus theatre piece, but they were not explored in depth.

As the group worked together, a central contradiction, that was never resolved by this group, began to emerge. The women could not find roles for themselves for which they were not always depicted in a subordinate position or in a stereotyped way such as a 'mother' or a 'prostitute'. It seemed to me that the women are engaged in a struggle for recognition of their equality in social roles and yet, in the play making process, they were unable to define these roles. The drama activity itself put pressure on the women to relinquish a submissive position and do something about their plea for equality.

They were required to initiate ideas and make a contribution towards finding symbols for these ideas. They found it very difficult to take the initiative, work with men, persuade them to accept their ideas and act on them. As a result, they either became antagonistic or simply fell back into submissive roles in their relation to the men.

This indicated to me that quick, overnight transformations, in an entrenched sense of identity, are unlikely and that years of serious and committed work are required to develop a critical consciousness. Also, there is a gap between 'knowledge' and experience that is not easily bridged. It also indicated a need for a careful and thoughtful assessment of what learning through drama and theatre can achieve and how far it can go.

We presented Lolo Bambo Lolo, in this early form, to a campus audience. Campus theatre has been a successful way of creating a forum for discussion among the students and it was well supported by the student body. This piece was presented at lunchtime under the trees and most of -the student body turned up to watch. In the

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piece, some of -the events leading up to the men invading Umzana and dragging the women out to beat them with their belts were shown. The end of the play depicted a protest march organised by the women with banners calling for their emancipation and acceptance of their rights. This very slight piece did not really touch on any root causes of oppression or offer solutions to the problem. We agreed that it was worth pursuing the idea further and the group decided that they would work on the project for the Grahamstown Festival of Student Drama, which they had been invited to attend, We intended- to tackle the contradiction that was being exposed of a play about feminism with no positive roles for women.

**The student body found the campus theatre piece entertaining, but the lack of debate after the play indicated that it was not particularly thought provoking. However, some of the students who took part were distressed because, in certain quarters, they were criticized for exaggerating an incident that showed the men up in a bad light and indicated some of the tensions within the student body. Needless to say, the criticism came from some senior male students who said they felt that drama should be more ‘positive. The failure to explore root causes of the cleavage between men and women in this play had the effect of simply antagonising some of the men rather than persuading them to reconsider entrenched positions of superiority. I also began to -realize the practical consequences of ideology in that in the drama group the men were for the most part (there are always exceptional women) more innovative, more ready to share and contribute ideas and more prepared to take responsibility than the women. We had to face the central contradiction that the men actually are in a sense superior -because they have been socialized into believing themselves to be so.**

**In order to explore the connections, between reproduction and gender distinctions, I organised a project in which we would dramatise attitudes to birth control, motherhood and sex education for young people. I hoped this would illuminate some deep seated perceptions of gender.**

The Family Planning Controversy - A drama-in-education project

At the University of Zululand, women are expelled from the residences if they are unmarried and they fall *pregnant*. Similar action is not taken against a student who



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fathers a child. There is a clinic on campus, but its staff does not supply contraceptives or provide the students with advice about birth control. I know of students who have fallen pregnant and who suffered from the very stressful situation of trying to hide their pregnancy towards the end of the second semester. Expulsion means that they lose a year in their study programme and, in the case of a third year student, an opportunity to graduate. Are women free from oppression if pregnancy is their penalty for engaging in the same kind of sexual activity that men take for granted? Should women have the right to practice birth control and, if desired, -abortion? Should men deny their responsibility for the children they have fathered? These were topics for discussion that led to a community theatre project on family planning. In order to research the topic, I invited one of the lecturers in the Department of Nursing Science to give a talk on family planning to the students. Her talk was so lively and well presented that we decided to incorporate it into community theatre piece that we planned to present for a conference at the Natal Medical School. To prepare for this, we set up a dramatised lecture. She played the role of community health organiser and the students took roles as members of a rural community that objected to the practice of birth control. Some of the dominant attitudes expressed by students in-role, were a deep suspicion that family planning was a ploy by whites to limit the number of blacks -in order -to maintain their hegemony and the idea that birth control practices are dangerous to a woman's health. It became clear that these attitudes are supported by religious beliefs because the ancestors are thought to be present at the moment of conception and are 'displeased' if this is interfered with. This was a successful drama- in-education project, on a purely informative level, because it allowed the group to ask a range of different questions in their roles as rural people. In this way, they were able to mask some of their genuine ignorance about birth control practices and they gained some excellent information from the lecturer from the Department of Nursing Science.

**The most interesting contradiction that arose out of the improvisation was that the students were genuinely interested in methods of contraception, but they were in role as rural people who were basically antagonistic to the idea. This was amusingly symbolized by a small group who walked out in disgust when the nurse began discussing 'personal matters', but then when things**

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**became interesting and they wanted to take part in the -question session, they came back into the improvisation ‘because the chief had ordered them to at least listen to what the nurse had to say’. The role play broke down as the afternoon wore on and the students demanded more information about contraception. As the original intention in setting up the role play was to impart information, we simply allowed the improvisation to dissolve into a discussion.**

To further our research into women’s rights to control reproduction, we invited Geoffrey Ngubane, from the Department of Health in Durban, to lecture to the group on family planning. He stressed that the motivation for family planning is that reproduction should be well regulated or planned. He also referred to the importance of men taking responsibility for their offspring. Family planning does not simply mean sex education, but an education in all aspects of family life. He pointed out that in traditional societies the children were prepared for their role in society through initiation and other rituals and that as these were falling away, the children of today were not being properly socialized. The transition from a traditional family system to a ‘modern western’ system was a source of great difficulty for black South Africans and, according to Ngubane, education could play an important role in helping to overcome these difficulties. Some of these ideas were included in Lolo Bambo Lolo in the final episode which was an attempt at depicting the situation in which modern women find themselves in their struggle for emancipation.

## **SOME RESPONSES TO THE HEURISTIC FUNCTION IN DRAMA**

**I asked a post-graduate assistant in the Department of Speech and Drama to interview students who had taken part in the playmaking process in order to discover more about their response to the work. Most of the responses emphasized the pleasure and the difficulty of group work. One of the men commented as follows:**

**Working together to put on a play like the campus theatre play creates an atmosphere of belonging to one family or one team. It creates an environment where we think like one, move like one, feel like one and even cry like one. But at the same time working together creates resentment and bitterness in the team. For instance some**

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**people feel bitter when their suggestions are not taken or tried out. Other people do not lend a hand and there is a lack of discipline.**

**Working together to make a play involves the exposure of attitudes and opinions in the spontaneous response to acting out. In effect this means taking risks - offering and building on each other's contributions as a way of developing understanding, both of each other and the issue at hand. This means that tensions that exist between members of the group in everyday relationships are often revealed in group work. The women were unable to find roles for themselves which were not stereotyped, but this may have been because the men in the group literally would not 'allow' this, even at the stage of 'trying out' an idea. My observation is that the women found it very difficult to suggest ideas with the confidence and courage that is required to persuade the men to try them out. They would certainly make suggestions, but these would often be overridden until we were back in a place where everyone felt 'comfortable'. The ability to speak out and articulate a point of view is a fundamental pre-requisite for progress to be made and it is just this attribute that many of the women lack. Even articulate women have difficulty in being persuasive and holding on to their point of view when it is opposed. I felt that to really make progress we would need a deep sense of commitment from the men to listen to the women and work toward discovering new kinds of relationships, but I could not really see how this could be achieved until the women could be persuaded to take more risks. We were in effect trapped in a double bind.**

**I realized how little progress we had really made in changing commonsense perceptions about the relationships between men and women when I read this observation contributed by one of the women; (she is a mature woman with a family of her own and teaching experience):**

**Through taking part in improvisations I was somehow forced to get out of my cocoon and mix with other students. This is very important. No man is an island. For a student to be successful he should relate somehow to his fellow mates. I find the girls have a problem relating to the boys. They lack respect. That is basically caused by the background. Some have no brothers, some have been to girl's boarding schools and some are from**

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**broken families where the mother is dominant and the father is looked down on and despised. Funnily enough I find the boys behave very well, they behave like any other men.**

Here she argues for the traditional value of 'respect' for men as a solution to the problems experienced by the group. What the women were really seeking it seemed to me was respect from the men for their ideas and the contribution they could make. In this group they did not win it partly because they were unable to articulate their ideas in a persuasive way and often fell back on quarrelling at a personal level and partly because they were generally very unhelpful as far as the practical aspects of the work were concerned. They did not offer to paint scenery, carry equipment (apart from costumes which are regarded as 'women's work') or take any kind of responsibility. Throughout the whole production of Lolo Bambo Lolo all the responsible work was undertaken by the men who definitely remained in leadership positions.

As a group improvises, the individuals assume roles and enter into dialogue or action with each other. Each new idea depicted through the dialogue or action affects and modifies the behaviour of the other members in a group. For example, the following - improvisation formed the basis for the second episode of Lolo Bambo Lolo

A woman anxiously waits for a letter from her husband containing money for herself and her - children. She speaks of her anxiety to a group of people at the post office in a rural area. There is no letter and so she decides to go and find him in Johannesburg. The group all warns her against going but she insists. Suddenly one member of the group announces that the train has arrived. Impulsively the woman jumps on the 'train' - now all the group become passengers and the train arrives in Johannesburg. The woman finds her husband and he tells her to go back home. She resists and he beats her - (the improvisation dissolves).

**In this improvisation, as the situation was being established the fictional world of the play was being defined. The way each member of the group responded determined the actions and potential involvement of the others. The woman was helped on her way to Johannesburg by those members of the group who suddenly decided to announce the arrival of a train and she was able to move out of one**

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encounter into a new situation. As the fictional world was developed through processes of interaction, so the underlying meaning was explored. The woman was initially confined by a preconceived role - she was able to break out of it and find a new role, but was punished for her action. At this point-the improvisation broke down because nobody knew what to do next, but a process of negotiation was going on. Robinson et al refer to this process as the negotiation of- meaning and point out that it takes place at two bevels: the 'real' and the 'symbolic'<sup>49</sup>. They say that, although in acting-out the participants are negotiating at the symbolic level, the real social network in the group underlies and informs the nature and quality of their involvement<sup>50</sup>. The symbolic situation may become the vehicle through which the underlying relationships in the group are expressed and in their turn modified and developed<sup>51</sup>.

In the improvisation described above the woman was clearly attempting to break through conventional patterns of behaviour and she was working on both levels. At the symbolic level she was playing a rural woman confined by social, economic and political constraints and at the bevel of 'actual' or 'real' negotiation she was making a role for herself within the dynamics of a group of seven men and seven women. There was strong resistance to her break within the group at both levels and the improvisation would probably have broken down if the 'moment of the train' had not been discovered by some other members of the group. She took her opportunity and the whole group were persuaded to move into the train scene. Once she was helped through her first moments of dissent she could not break through a second time because the group would not allow it. This could either have been because an appropriate symbol did not come to mind or because there was no impulse to encourage further dissent.

In the discussion after the improvisation I was told that it would have been unrealistic for her husband to have greeted her with enthusiasm. I pointed out that beneath the surface structures of the represented situation there are deep personal motivations and impulses at work. When the 'husband' was questioned about why he beat his 'wife' he shrugged and replied "That is how it is". As the facilitator of the work, my difficulty was to differentiate between the fine and realistic acting-out of the situation and the extent to which actual impulses and motivations were being revealed. Sometimes students are startled by what they have done and are not prepared to

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**discuss their feelings but, it seems to me, that a sense of personal awareness is at best initiated. It is important to add that if a student enacts beating his wife in an improvisation he must remain protected by the fictional-world of the play. It would be tactless and quite incorrect to assume that he is a wifebeater himself and, if this was even suggested, all the levels of trust that had been built up which allow spontaneous improvisations would be destroyed. He is drawing on cultural codes to portray symbolic action and it is the nature of the codes and his reasons for their choice that are significant.**

For many students the group work is difficult and sometimes painful and their response to the workshops is silence, lateness or absence,

### **Silence, Lateness and Absence**

**One of the most severe problems experienced by the Department of Speech and Drama is that, as we offer one course within the B.A structure, there is insufficient time allocated on the timetable for the workshops and rehearsals that are required for productions. This means that students must attend additional classes on the evenings and over weekends and there is resistance to this, although most students recognise that working with their tutors and class mates is a valuable 1-earning experience. This resistance to what is perceived to be extra work is demonstrated by arriving late for rehearsals, even though everyone else is kept waiting, by staying away altogether and by refusing to cooperate in the group work<sup>52</sup>. This is not to say that there are not perfectly ordinary reasons for coming late or staying away, but the level of absence suggested to me that there was resistance to the work from some students although it was never-openly expressed. This is a difficult problem and, as the raft of the group are always intensely loyal, found it impossible, for example, to expell one member of the group for consistent absence without disrupting all the work. My suspicions about lateness and absence were confirmed by some comments made by a student with reference to preparations for a student production under the control of a student director:**

**We would come late for rehearsals just to spite him. We made a game out of the 'warm-ups'. We would enjoy failing to do what we were supposed to do and would imitate Mrs. Dalrymple instead and mock her seriousness about warming up in order to improvise.**

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**The following comments of the student director about the group's attitude to workshops are indicative of the difficulties inherent in attempting to establish democratic procedures and give students control of the work:**

**The group jacked self-discipline. To some extent I think there was an attempt to undermine the director but this is not an excuse. As director I should have been able to know what type of treatment that person deserved.**

**I think that the Department is to blame for the lack of self-discipline. There should be no special treatment for any student. As soon as someone has been assigned a task it should be seen that it is done and that no-one enjoys the privileges of those who have done their part.**

**Somehow those who inconvenience others must- be punished. It is either a person is kicked out of the group, pays a fine or gets parts that won't make him do too much. In fact a set of rules should be formulated and duties delegated. All the rules must be adhered to.**

**Anyone who fails to keep them must be kicked out. We shouldn't rely on talented students and give them the best parts but only on the willing hardworking student.**

**When I suggested to this student director that he had my full authority to 'kick out' any unco-operative member of the cast he did not choose to exercise this option. It was his contention that the department was slack and that students should 'somehow' be forced to be co-operative. This kind of authoritarian approach runs completely counter to the aim of encouraging students to develop self-discipline. It is not only student directors who experience difficulties with attendance at rehearsals and workshops, but all the members of staff who have worked and still work in the Department. One can only hope that as the tradition of silent resistance is broken down, students will begin to express their difficulties Openly and make negotiations for working time easier.**

## **EVALUATION**

**Learning through drama is usually associated with developing powers of self-expression, self-confidence, imagination,**

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concentration, observation and sensitivity<sup>53</sup>. In the D.I.E. approach and in theatre workshops this is thought to be achieved through group interaction rather than isolated personal endeavour, In other words, self-realization occurs through participation in a communal activity with its consequent restrictions and positive opportunities. In modern educational practice there are very few opportunities for group work and drama is valuable for this reason. A student's comments on making a play pinpoint some of the strengths and weaknesses of communal activities:

He develops from within himself the potential to make a play. This makes him aware of his ability and he realizes that when something has to be done it is not only the few deemed clever who do the work. Everyone has potential which needs to be actualized. When we were making the play everyone was equally important. Those who wanted to remain passive in class were encouraged to voice their views and present their findings avoiding plagiarism. But some people rest on their laurels and let others do all the work. They gain nothing from that approach.

When a learner-centred approach is adopted and active problem-solving substituted for traditional receptiveness, the emphasis is on the learning process rather than on gaining knowledge of 'things'. The learning process is relevant to the student's experience- of life and becomes an integral part of his or her being and not an alienating and distancing experience that reinforces a sense of inferiority. This is because the experiences of the individual are considered valuable and valid. However, there is a danger in students becoming 'experience-bound' and unable to see issues in a broader perspective. The experience of students must be taken seriously as one dimension of the learning process, but experience must be mediated through conceptual categories<sup>54</sup>. Gramsci specifically attacked the progressivist educational movement that was initiated in Italy under Mussolini as inadequate for developing a critical consciousness. He argued for a systematic acquisition of knowledge and stressed that the oppositional criticism of both the highest cultural manifestations of the past and the dominant culture of the day are the fundamental intellectual task<sup>55</sup>. This is an important insight for both the development of a theatre studies curriculum and for developing the playmaking process itself.



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**When this insight is applied to playmaking it is clear that the teacher cannot abdicate responsibility for the work claiming that her students are learning to express themselves and gaining self-confidence. The process of making the play must include opportunities for critical self-exploration and an exploration of the ‘dominant culture of the day’. These moments of reflexivity should ideally become part of the form of the play itself. My contribution to the workshopping process is usually in this area. The influence of film, radio and television is pervasive and students inevitably choose modern realism as the ‘natural’ way of portraying their ideas. The work of Brecht is an important antidote to this perception and I constantly ask students to consider other ways of exploring their ideas in addition to the realistic use of narrative, dialogue and setting. I also encourage research in order to gain a broader perspective of the work. A conscious effort must be made to move beyond surface and superficial portrayals of events and relationships and the next chapter is an account of my efforts to discover ways in which experience may be mediated through conceptual categories. This connects with performance theory because whatever theory of performance is adopted by the facilitator will inevitably have a profound impact on the work. When we set about making a play it was my intention to persuade the students to find a form analogous to Brecht’s epic theatre that would be both didactic and entertaining.**

## **CHAPTER SEVEN NOTES**

- 1 See Peter Kallaway (ed.), Apartheid and Education Cape Town, Ravan Press, 1984, for a collection of essays that accept the central relevance of class factors and provide an explanatory framework in the field of educational thinking.
- 2 Debate about the stated reformist initiatives in education and the contributions of liberal and revisionist approaches is a central feature of the journal, Perspectives in Education,
- 3 See ‘Wart Four: The Current Crisis’ in Kallaway, op. cit.
- 4 The University is often referred to as Ongoye which is the name of the district.
- 5 Martin Legassick points out that while the earlier policy of segregation was an attempt to secure a migratory labour force for mining and farming, apartheid is the application of a cheap forced labour policy to secondary industry which came into its own after the Second World War. By the 1940s and early 50s,

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agriculture in the reserves was rapidly collapsing. This was threatening the social order because an urban proletariat is difficult to control and a permanently urbanized labour force could not be as cheaply reproduced as a migrant one. The political programme of the Nationalist government after 1948 is thus understood as attempting, through influx controls and the elaboration of the bantustan system, to maintain the migrant labour system in a situation where its original basis was breaking down. A weakness in the cheap labour power thesis is that it tends to present the apartheid social order as reproducing a single type of labour power: that of the temporary migrant worker. But, in the restructuring of influx control in the 1950s, the position of the existing black proletariat was considerably strengthened. In short, a differentiation of labour power was taking place, especially between urban and rural workers. Education for black South Africans, from the 1960s, has not only been aimed at producing unskilled migrant labour, but also an urban working class. Martin Legassick, 'Legislation, Ideology and Economy in post 1948 South Africa', Journal of South African Studies Vol. 1, No. 1974, pp. 5 - 34. See also Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', Economy and Society 31, 1972; and Jonathan Hysslop, "State Education and the Social Reproduction of the Urban Working Class", Unpublished paper presented at the Association of Sociologists of Southern Africa (ASSA) Conference in July 1986 in Durban.

- 6 Separate universities are also provided for the other 'population groups', i.e. for Indians and Coloureds and for English and Afrikaans speaking whites.
- 7 F.A. Dummy, Trends and Challenges in the Education of the South African Bantu, Pretoria, OWL. Van Schaik Ltd., and Fort Hare University Press, 1967, p. 11.
- 8 Ibid., p. 65.
- 9 Ibid., p. 66.
- 10 Ibid., p. 12.
- 11 C.F.Beyers Mel, Some Aspects of Adulthood As Seen In Philosophical Pedagogical Perspective With Reference to the Zulu's New Image of Man, Inaugural Address delivered at the University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa, 16 June, 1970.
- 12 Ibid., p. 15.
- 13 See Dummy, op. cit., p. 20.
- 14 Madan Sarup, Marxism /structuralism/Education, New York, Falmer Press, 1984, p. 146.
- 15 This is a policy of people's education' in South Africa.
- 16 A.H. MacLarty, Theory and Praxis. The Case of Tertiary Didactics, Inaugural Address delivered, University of Zululand, KwaDlangezwa, October 1987, pp. 7 - 8.
- 17 Richard Aitken, 'Masks as Cultural Defence: Reflections on 'English' as a discipline in a Black Context', The English Academy Review 4. 1987, p. 216.

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- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Raymond Williams, Keywords, London, Fontana Paperbacks, 1976, p. 76.
- 20 Belinda Bozzoli, (ed.) Class, Community and Conflict – South African Perspectives, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1987, p. 5.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 The University of Zululand is a microcosm of the South African social formation in many interesting ways. The staff members live separately in their ‘own’ areas and work together. Black members of staff live on and around the campus and white members of staff in Empangeni and Mtunzini. White members of staff dominate the higher echelons of the administrative and academic systems although we have a black rector and vice- rector. Most of the senior white staff are Afrikaans speaking men. At present, in a senate of seventy members, only two of these are white women and three are black women. There are ten English speaking members and seventeen black members. A detailed analysis of the class and ideology of the university community as a whole is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
- 23 See Mark Bray, Peter B. Clarke, David Shephens, Education and Society in Africa. London, Edward Arnold, 1986, for a detailed discussion of education and social stratification in Africa.
- 24 Access to the University is controlled by the admission requirements which are a matriculation certificate of exemption from the matriculation examination, issued by the Joint Matriculation Board, and a fee of R3 045 (e.g. for a B.A student in 1987) which includes board and lodging.
- 25 In 1987, 70% of senior Speech and Drama students had their own children.
- 26 See Mary de Haas, “Culture, Class and Consciousness in Contemporary Natal”, Unpublished paper presented at the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, 1987, for a discussion of these groupings in the wider community.
- 27 For a description of this tragic event see Graham Leach, Easy Peace .1. South Africa, Bergvlei, Century Hutchinson S.A., 1986, pp. 119- 120.
- 28 See Facts 1986/87, University of Zululand pamphlet produced by Bureau of Public Relations.
- 29 Peter Brook, in his introduction to *Marat Sade*, describes the central problem for theatre as a search for density of experience.

“What’s the difference,” he asks, “between a poor play and a good one? I think there is a very simple way of comparing them. A play in

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performance is a series of impressions; little dabs, one after another, fragments of information of reeling in a sequence which stir the audiences ~ perceptions. A good play sends many such messages, often several at a time, often crowding, jostling, overlapping one another. The intelligence, the feelings, the memory, the imaginations are all stirred. In a poor play, the impressions are well spaced out, they lope along in single file, and in the gaps the heart can sleep while the mind wanders to the day's annoyances and thoughts of dinner. The whole problem of the theatre today is just this: how can we make plays dense in experience?"

- 30 See Gavin. Bolton, Towards a Theory of Drama in Education, Essex, Longman Group Ltd., 1979, for a discussion of some of the different approaches.
- 31 See Ian Steadman, 'Critical Responses to Contemporary South African Theatre', Critical Arts, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1980, pp. 40-46.
- 32 Ibid., p. 154.
- 33 John Hodgson and Ernest Richards, Improvisation, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966, p. 3.
- 34 Richard Schechner, Between Theater & Anthropology, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 36.
- 35 To communicate at a personal level students have, for example, improvised a situation in the drama departments where they are required to attend so many rehearsals that they feel over extended. In the discussion after the improvisation we were able to explain our different attitudes to the importance of rehearsals and make some adjustments to meet each other needs. (This opened out into a broader discussion of difficulties of leaving children at home while students improve their qualifications and the consequent shortage of study time). It seems that it was easier for the group to share this difficulty through improvisation than through direct confrontation with me. All the points of view were aired and the whole group were involved, so nobody had to take the responsibility of becoming a spokesperson.
- 36 Robinson (ed.), Exploring Theatre & Education, op. cit., p.151.

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- 37 Michael Etherton, The Development of African Drama, London, Hutchinson University Library for Africa, 1982, p. 350.
- 38 Ron Argelander 'Performance Workshops: Three Types' The Drama Review, Vol. 22, No. 4, December 1978, p. 4.
- 39 Richard Schechner, Between Theatre and Anthropology, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985, p. 19.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Ibid., p. 20.
- 42 Ibid., pp. 140 - 141.
- 43 See Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Women of Africa - Roots of Oppression, London, Zed Press, 1983, for an extensive deconstruction of these myths.
- 44 The average size of the groups with which I have worked, is about 15, with an equal number of men and women. However, I have made a play with a group of 45 with the help of senior students, The group was split into four groups for the improvisations.
- 45 It should be noted that the intention in this work is different from the intention in the trust groups developed by psycho-therapy. The aim is to improvise and the fictional world that is depicted 'protects' the participant's from revealing raw experience. The sense of group cohesion is for the moment - to get the task done - and does not necessarily hang over into everyday life. However, many drama students have commented, Particularly in letters that reflect on the work after they have left university, on the feeling of belonging that they experienced in the drama department.
- 46 Good News Bible, Glasgow, William Collins Sons & Co. Lt., 1976, p. 5.
- 47 The theory of evolution is not generally taught in 'Black' schools because it is not considered appropriate knowledge for 'Bantu' children.

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- 48 Gcina Mhlope, 'Nokulunga's Wedding', in Susan Brown, Isabel Hofmeyr and Susan Rosenberg (eds.), Lip from South African Women, Johannesburg, Ravan Press (Pty) Ltd., 1983.
- 49 Lynn McGregor, Maggie Tate, Ken Robinson, Learning Through Drama. London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977, p. 17.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid., p. 18.
- 52 I have explained that group work is as valuable as reading in the library or writing an essay as a learning experience, but many students lack the commitment to work in the evenings or over weekends. Also it cannot be denied that improvisations and rehearsals are energy consuming. It is also true that students with a major role to play are required to attend more than the others. Although most students enjoy the opportunity to take a leading role some find the work too demanding on their time and energy and so they simply stay away from rehearsals and present the director with the problem of whether to start again with an understudy (who may be equally unreliable) or persevere with attempts to instill a sense of commitment to achieving a high standard of work.
- 53 In the paper presented by Paddy Terry at the ADDSA Conference held in Johannesburg in July 1987 we were informed that a survey of drama events in schools indicated that 63% of drama teachers regarded these as the aims of drama teaching.
- 54 Sarup, op. cit., p. 125.
- 55 Ibid. , p. 137

**PLAYMAKING IN A UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY**

**THE PRODUCT**

In the previous chapter the focus was on a learner-centred approach to theatre studies. In line with progressivist trends in education, I examined a methodology in which enquiry, rather than knowledge, became a focal point and suggested that the educative value of the experience of improvisation lay partly in the participants themselves finding value and interest in the work. In other words, there was a meaningful connection between the students' personal experience and the learning experience. This kind of learning relates to solving problems which occur at the level of the negotiations within the group as they work together and in the selecting and arranging of symbolic forms in order to develop a scenario. The work is a valuable antidote to

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the type of curriculum that takes no cognisance of the students' interests, questions or modes of thinking and simply prescribes a selected and usually alien field of knowledge. However, there are limitations to this approach which can become too personalized and subjective and the educative value of introducing a theoretical basis for understanding cannot be overlooked. A process of consciousness-raising that sets out to question and demystify all aspects of an individual's existential and historical situation can amount to an extreme form of individualism.

In a paper by C.A. Bowers, 'Culture Against Itself: Nihilism as an Element in Recent Educational Thought', he refers to the limitations of setting the individual against culture and tradition<sup>1</sup>. He argues that instead of allowing the educational experience to turn inwards towards subjectivity, on the assumption that 'speaking a true word' represents a progressive transformation of the world, the project of consciousness-raising can lead to a more thoughtful awareness of how the present pattern of thinking evolved in the past<sup>2</sup>. Bowers' argument is similar to the argument Gramsci uses for school education to be an initiation into the history of philosophical thought<sup>3</sup>. These arguments articulate a personal conviction which I had that the work should move beyond subjective experience and I sought ways of introducing meaningful conceptual categories and outside experiences to the group.

One of my primary objectives in playmaking is to move away from a view of education in which the teacher as 'narrator encourages a one-way dependence of the student on her knowledge<sup>4</sup>. For this project I attempted to develop a situation in which I was able to collaborate with students in a joint exercise that stimulated group discussion and decision making. However, in order to extend the work beyond the students' immediate experience it was necessary to introduce new concepts and set up situations where these could be explored. One way to achieve this is to pay attention to the practical experience of students in which certain understandings and ways of seeing things have within them the potential for developing a deeper and more extensive perception. I noticed that the students are interested in notions of witchcraft and ancestor veneration. A closed cyclic mythological perception of reality that proposes metaphysical sources of human suffering was a dominant pattern of perception in non-colonial societies. In order to strengthen a historical and material



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consciousness I persuaded the group to explore areas where historical and mythical explanations can be compared and contrasted. I imposed the strategy of investigating traditional Zulu thought- patterns on the work. There was nothing democratic about my decision, but it was not difficult to introduce the idea because it coincided with the students' own areas of interest. I was assisted in this respect by a colleague and I shall return to his contribution.

By this time, a group of seven men and seven women had committed themselves to a play-making project. The intention was to make a play about the relations between men and women that would be presented on campus and at the Grahamstown Festival of Student Drama. We discussed my proposal that we start the play in a non-colonial era and the students agreed to undertake research into Zulu history and the traditional Zulu way of life in order to construct the first scenes of the play. Some students were anxious about focussing on one particular ethnic group and appearing to promote a sense of ethnicity and we agreed that later scenes in the play would depict a struggle to dissolve ethnic divisions as the South African proletariat was formed<sup>5</sup>. We planned several areas of research, the most important being an investigation through oral history (students would ask their own families about Zulu history and traditions) a study of some anthropological work, notably the introduction to the play, A Witch in my Heart, by well-known anthropologist, Hilda Kuper, Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism by Axel Ivar Berglund, and a historical material analysis of the consciousness of black women in fictional form contributed by Richard Aitken. We began with a visit to a rural family to observe their way of life first hand for those unfamiliar with a rural life-style.

## **RESEARCHING THE PLAYMAKING PROJECT**

### **A Visit to the Shozi**

I suggested to the students that it might be interesting to visit the rural family with which I had become friendly while I was undertaking research for my MA. thesis. This family lives their version of the Zulu way and have very clear ideas about their lifestyle. A group of eight gathered for this visit and we decided to split up into three smaller groups and each visit different members of the family group in their own

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homesteads. We decided to focus on the social arrangements that were indicative of the position of the women in the family in the discussion. Our strategy to initiate discussion was simply that we felt ignorant of the Zulu way and wanted to learn more about it. We all noticed that the seating arrangements were an immediate indication of the subordinate status of the women. The men commanded the conversation and the women sat together on a mat at the side of the room and had very little to say. However, in the group that I visited one of the women is a '*sangoma*' and she spoke up with authority and obviously commanded the respect of the men.

It became clear to us that the description of the Zulu way, presented by the men, was a picture of an ideal community life. The men were not prepared to admit to difficulties or discuss controversial points with us. We thought that this was probably because we were strangers and that loyalty to each other would preclude the discussion of personal difficulties. The ideal, presented to us, included very definite attitudes to women - one of the older men even went so far as to say that women need to be cared for and protected like cattle. A student pointed out that Zulu men are devoted to their cattle and that this would not have been a disparaging comment, but that it did indicate that the men thought of their wives as possessions. The men were all totally opposed to any form of family planning and the women were, in fact, forbidden to visit the clinic. When I hesitantly suggested that maybe there would be a shortage of land for future generations, one of the men pointed to a distant hill and said that he would like to see the whole area, from where we sat to the hill, peopled with Shozi.

One of the students reported a far more ambivalent attitude among some of the younger women who had drawn her aside and engaged in a private conversation that the men did not overhear. She said that some of the women secretly went to the clinic without the men's permission to get birth control pills.

The women were far more concerned, than the men, about feeding and educating large numbers of children, but they found it difficult to persuade the men to change their rigid attitudes. The attitudes of the older women who had a great deal of authority over the young women were also very conservative and one old woman insisted that 'the pill' was poisonous. Then I informed her that I had taken the pill for

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many years, she said that it is poisonous for black women, but not for white women. However, the need to reproduce many children is also related to the perception that some of the children are likely to die of malnutrition or childhood disease and so the production of numerous children is an insurance against this kind of misfortune. The men and older women bear the responsibility for preserving the family and so they encourage the young women to bear children. Among the Shozi, at least one child had died in each nuclear family.

The Shozi men are migrant workers but, because of their comparatively close proximity to their work places, they are able to return home at least once and often twice a month. They appeared to be responsible in their attitude to their families and the women said that they did not feel neglected. It seemed to us that the men were attempting to preserve a sanctuary against the hardships of the migrant labour system by clinging to a traditional lifestyle and that the women were caught up in providing this sense of security. The men have adopted European style clothes for everyday wear, but the married women still wear a version of the leather skirt made of cloth, keep their shoulders and heads covered and sit in a traditional way. The Shozi do not encourage education for their women above Standard 2 and most of the younger women work as farm labourers on the neighbouring farms until they marry.

The first hand observation of this way of life proved to be invaluable when the students made decisions about the dramatic codes, such as set, costumes and kinesic codes for the first episode of the play. We made no attempt to create period costumes for the play, but the students' observations of the way the Shozi had adapted tribal costume for their own purposes and the connections between dress and gesture were a point of departure for their adaptation of costumes for the production. It was also quite evident that an afternoon's conversation with a family could provide only the most superficial glimpse into their way of life and that it would be an intrusion to expect people to divulge their problems to a group of strangers. I noted that a community theatre project would be a far more satisfactory way of attempting to communicate, because it might possibly bring some problems to light, but that it would have to be undertaken with some constructive purpose in mind, otherwise what

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passed as 'research' could amount to nothing more than a condescending and inquisitive invasion of other people's privacy.

It should be noted that the Shozi were extremely hospitable and willing to share in conversation with us on their terms. The men spoke with authority in a lively and commanding way and enjoyed the use of language and engaging in conversation. To make a point, some of the men would enact parts of the anecdote they were recounting for the elucidation and amusement of all who were listening. One of the female students engaged in a debate with one of the men about education for women. He treated her with amused tolerance and demolished her arguments with aplomb. She retreated from the argument when he told her that she wasn't a proper woman if she did not have children, as she looked quite old enough!

## 12. A Witch in my Heart

This play, and especially the introduction, by Hilda Kuper, had an important influence on the choice of signifiers made by the group. It was our intention to attempt to examine some of the contradictions in the social relationships between men and women in a non-colonial situation. Kuper discusses the complexity of the many-faceted relationships of male and female among the Swazi<sup>6</sup>. She mentions the number of roles imposed on a single person simultaneously that sometimes support and sometimes contradict one another, creating the dilemma of choice of alignment, a dilemma particularly acute for a woman. She goes on to suggest that the roles of mother and son are key symbols in Swazi culture:

Mother and son are key symbols in Swazi culture. Like all symbols, they stand for many and often opposed values and ideas at different levels. 'Mother is woman, reproduction, earth, soft rain; but 'woman' is also dangerous, polluting and disruptive. The son is masculinity (the bull, strength, responsibility, 'the pole of the hut') as a man he is also lightning and war. A wife as woman has the power to create but she also has the power to withhold creation, Sterility is always blamed on the woman. If there are no children a homestead dies as surely as, and more fearfully than, if destroyed in open battle<sup>7</sup>.

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We discussed the exaltation of maternity which was a familiar idea to all the members of the group. In fact it seemed a normal' attitude and it was only when we discussed the position of a barren woman that the concept of motherhood was seen to be problematic in any way. Among the Swazi, the barren woman is seen to be withholding her power and the already marginalised position of a young wife who is a 'stranger' in her husband's family is further exaggerated. Kuper explains:

To have no child is the greatest pain. Barrenness is both a misfortune and a danger. The barren woman is unfortunate because she may have been bewitched; she is a danger because in her envy she may bewitch a fertile wife and her children<sup>8</sup>.

We chose a barren woman as a central symbol for the first episode of the play. She represented the marginal position of women in a patrilineal society such as traditional Swazi and Zulu societies. Research indicated that these societies demand exogamy and it is the women who are exchanged in order to ensure it. They are exploited for their role in reproduction and as 'exchange objects' acquire their socially constructed roles<sup>9</sup>. In this case, the socially constructed role includes motherhood as a prerequisite for acceptance into the adult community. I suggested to the students that it may be useful to distinguish between gender differences which are socially determined and sexual differences which are biologically determined. For example, the fact of biological reproduction does not necessarily require the particular social arrangements of motherhood that are typical of the Swazi and the Zulu - the woman who 'refuses' motherhood becomes a misfit and an outsider. In order to become a socially accepted mother, in these societies, a woman must become a wife and this involves submission to male dominance. The submissive role of women is ensured by elaborate '*hlonipha*' customs and regulations. Rebellion against the socially constructed role of motherhood, no matter how unwitting, cannot be tolerated in a patrilineal and polygamous society. According to Kuper,

In a polygamous homestead, a barren woman may become the focus of the deepest tensions and fears and antagonisms. The children of other wives are proof of the man's virility and fertility. The childless woman is incomplete, abnormal - a thing to pity, scorn or fear. When all is well (with all but the

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unfortunate) the co-wives may treat her kindly, encouraging their own children to give her help when necessary, to smear the floors of her hut, bring her water and wood, and sometimes grind grain for her daily meal or cook for her. But as soon as there is misfortune, more especially if a child of a co-wife falls ill or dies, she is vulnerable to subtle ostracism, suspicion, and even open hatred and aggression. Her danger is intensified if the shared husband shows her particular attention<sup>10</sup>.

The danger is in accusation of witchcraft. In a patrilineal society, the power of witchcraft is believed to be generally transmitted through the woman, the outsider, and not through the father to his children<sup>11</sup>. Kuper points out that a woman whose children die for no apparent reason, or who is barren, may, in some cases, be pitied as a victim of witchcraft and in others be feared as a witch<sup>12</sup>. Accusations of witchcraft bring to the surface the undercurrents of tensions and suspicions that may be caused by jealousy of a favourite wife or other insecurities. In Roots of Oppression, Maria Cutrufelli notes that myths about the unity and harmony of polygamous unions belong to Utopia rather than reality<sup>13</sup>.

We referred to Berglund's discussion of witchcraft among the Zulu to gain some insight into the concept '*ubuthakathi*'. The students are all familiar with the concept and were interested in Berglund's discussion of traditional Zulu thought-patterns and witchcraft. He makes the point that in traditional thinking there is a lively and very real fear of witches and witchcraft and that witchcraft is often associated with women<sup>14</sup>. One of his informants explained that women are not sterile for no reason, 'she is not dry because of nothing' and that sterility may be an indication that the woman is a witch. Tensions especially 'immoral anger, caused by pride, jealousy and hatred result in the practice of witchcraft. Jealousy between co-wives is cited as a reason for one or both women to resort to witchcraft by one of Berglund's informants<sup>15</sup>. These informants reveal the deep-seated nature of male chauvinism in this society. It seems linked to the reproductive power of women and the fear that this power to procreate may be used for the one single goal for which '*ubuthakathi*' strives – annihilation<sup>16</sup>.

It was neither the purpose, nor within the scope of this work, to attempt an in-depth analysis or interpretation of witchcraft. We considered both ancestral veneration and

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Christianity as ways of reinforcing a particular social order and the process of ‘demonising’ subversive forces. We noted the seriousness of accusations of witchcraft in different societies ranging from Medieval Europe to indigenous African societies and how they work to induce conformity. Those who challenge the principles on which authority is based may be labelled ‘evil’ or as ‘witches’. It was also said that a belief in witchcraft indicates tensions in a social system, but may have a cathartic quality since it allows people to express feelings of hate which, albeit wrong as a rule, have suddenly become permissible to someone who believes they are suffering from somebody else’s unjustified hostility<sup>17</sup>. The importance of confession is evident in Berglund’s work and he indicates the way women, in particular, internalize their anger and allow themselves to be persuaded to ‘confess’ to evil thoughts. We discussed a graphic description of a confession and improvised around this account to build up one of the sequences in Episode 1<sup>18</sup>.

In our discussion about witchcraft, many of the students offered first hand information about their experiences and, although there was a sense of unease in believing in witchcraft, it was certainly not discounted:

1. Look, I don’t really believe in everything about witchcraft, but I know of cases where people have been bewitched. My brother was involved in a fight and his arm was wounded. He had some medicine rubbed on the arm and the person who attacked him lost the use of his arm and his leg. I know that happened so I suppose I believe in witchcraft about 25 %.
2. **As far as a barren woman is concerned, I would say something has been done to her on her wedding day. She may have not done everything properly or somebody may have bewitched her. I know of women who went to the inyangas and after treatment, they had children.**
3. **It’s very common in our society for a woman to be accused of practising witchcraft in a polygamous marriage - if she is barren and one of the other women s children die - she will be accused of practising witchcraft. I do not believe in polygamy**

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**myself - one woman is difficult enough without  
having two - but I've heard of what Hilda Kuper  
writes about - it's definitely known among our  
people.**

Some students had also visited '*sangomas*' and we were able to construct a scene about such a visit from personal knowledge after considerable debate about ways of representing the detail of the scene.

The student group was able to identify with these ideas and we began improvisations around the themes of jealousy, the anguish of a barren woman and the relations of men and women in a pre-colonial situation. We were attempting to theatrically reconstruct a specific system of rules or behaviour patterns using personal knowledge, literary interpretations and anthropological accounts of Zulu culture. The aim was to understand and represent the codes used by a community during a specific historical period. As attempts were made to improvise the interaction between men and women in a different community, the students debated around what would have been considered appropriate behaviour. They attempted to make use of cultural codes in the enactment of a sequence of events to demonstrate the interaction of the members of non-colonial Zulu society. While acting out this carefully selected sequence, we became aware of the contradictions between likely actual behaviour and appropriate behaviour. This raised questions of who deemed certain behaviour patterns appropriate and for what reasons. As improvisation relies on spontaneity and we could not assume that the group could, in any deep way, approximate their thought patterns to the thought patterns of the tribal Zulu, the improvisations were, of necessity, modern interpretations of the social interaction of another community. What we hoped to achieve was the discovery of some latent impulses behind the manifest meanings of social interaction. Was the protective role assumed by men an expression of their desire to dominate and control women and children? The use of improvisation to discover latent impulses in the life of a different community meant that we were working from certain assumptions about the universality of human nature and human experience. I was aware that this perception of 'human nature' is ideological and that the perception evolves out of the need to achieve group solidarity, but could not reject the Eurocentric idea that there are some permanent features of



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human experience. In any case, in this particular instance, the students were not all entirely remote from the community they were depicting. Some of the group were Zulus and they were working on their own history remembering the collective 'wisdom' of their grandparents and the origins of some rituals and customs still in practice in their family life. These students became the authorities for this section of the work. They cast themselves in leading roles and taught the others what they considered to be the appropriate movement patterns, song and dance sequences and use of language. By doing this, they solved the problem of the choice of appropriate behaviour, but they set up a new problem of obfuscating power relations, to which I shall return.

Finally, in order to focus on the way present patterns of thinking evolved from the past, Richard Aitken, who was collaborating in the generation of ideas for the play, wrote a 'generational recitation' that narrates the changing consciousness of South African black women <sup>19</sup>. This offered valuable insights into the changing nature of practical consciousness.

### **A Historical Materialist Perspective**

In the generational recitation, Aitken adduces shifts in political consciousness that relate to the changing situation of women in post-colonial South Africa. The changing conditions of work, the migration to the towns, domestic labour and the suffering and exploitation of women are recorded by a narrator who, on the surface, appears impartial but, at a deeper reading, is angry and bewildered. (In *Lolo Bambo Lolo*, we made use of two narrators - a singer and a feminist - in an attempt to mediate between the female and the male perspectives.) The women described in Section B of the recitation are the first generation of politically conscious women. They were conscious of their oppression as they moved off ancestral lands and began to work on white farms. For the previous generation, the tales of mines and factories were information that did not deeply affect the tenor of their lives but, for the generations that followed, the factories and the mines would become the focal points of their oppression. The women of today are presented as compromised by the drudgery of labour and strategies of survival, but complex in their response to injustice.

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The recitation draws attention to the material aspects of constitutive power relations in contrast to dominant tendencies to obscure these aspects. It demonstrates how character and action are historically produced. This is in contrast to the view that in non-colonial social formations, everything works together to maintain social cohesion.

Although we discussed the geneological recitation in some detail and the importance of materialist approach to reality, we were unable to transcend actual experience'. At this point, the play- making process was on the verge of collapse and the 'authorities' on Zulu culture took over and brought their lived experience to bear on the work. This included all the customs of respect between men and women and we were unable to decode these signifying practices. Their 'rightness' seemed indisputable and far from revealing the hegemonic interrelationships between men and women that is the intention of realist critical scrutiny, the first episode of the play reinforced these relations. At the point of collapse, we were unable to break through into the discovery of new structures of feeling, but fell back on known and common sense ways of perceiving history. The gap between diegesis (the geneological recitation) and mimesis (the improvised work) could not be bridged by this group and so although we had suggestions from Aitken for making a breakthrough, we were unable to fully utilize them. Constraints of time and energy were also factors that did not allow for a deep examination through a new series of improvisations and all of us lacked confidence in our ability to make this play. However, after the first episode when the 'glory' of non-colonial Zulu culture was behind us, we were able to penetrate contemporary events more successfully' in the second episode. The work of facilitators and mediators in the playmaking process is exacting and complex. Although the geneological recitation seemed to provide the conceptual categories that would deepen the work; it was inaccessible to the group and we reached the point where, as facilitators, we had to sit back and let things take their course.

### **Producing the Score of Lolo Bambo Lolo**

Through a series of improvisations and discussions, we were beginning to discover some of the ideas, values and aspirations of the group. These were expressed in relation to the specific topic of anti-feminism as the play took

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shape. I encouraged practical and theoretical research in order to stretch the work beyond our immediate perspectives. The role of the facilitator in this process is fraught with difficulties because if intervention is too explicit then the spontaneous quality of improvisation is lost, but there is a danger of the work becoming too personalized and subjective if new ideas are not introduced. The work we had done provided us with raw material from which to produce a score<sup>20</sup>. The students began to pay attention to the narrative line of the play. We discussed the difference between diegesis and mimesis as we worked on the organisation of the narrative itself. At this point, the students began writing down the dialogue that was developed in improvisation, in order to prepare a script. After each rehearsal, new scenes were recorded and then polished until a final script was settled. The actors then stopped improvising, apart from odd lines that suddenly came to mind and were usually quite 'brilliant' in their wit, humour or perception and spoke the lines that had been decided on. This group was very disciplined about not rambling on and continuing to improvise for each performance. There were, however, subtle changes and shifts in the ideas as the group responded to different audiences which unfortunately have not been recorded.

## THE COMMUNICATIVE FUNCTION IN PLAYMAKING

The first step in playmaking is the exploration and articulation of ideas and experiences through discussion, improvisation and research. When the intention is to make a play or communicate the drama to an audience then there is a change of focus from the heuristic to the communicative function in playmaking. There came a point, when the group involved in making Lolo Bambo Lolo switched their attention from the initiation of ideas to their realization and thus changed their capacities from initiators to animators. Schechner's distinction between workshops and rehearsals was helpful in bringing about this change of focus, but there is no clear cut division between these activities and the differences in practice are purely of emphasis. In the case of this production, the impetus to shape the work into a play was that the students had entered the Grahamstown Festival of Student Drama. The requirements of the festival were that the play should be directed and performed by students and, once the initiatory process of the work was complete, I withdrew from active involvement. The students assumed the capacities of director, actors, designers and technicians in order to pay attention to the creation of a *mise en scène*. The following remarks on the staging of this play are therefore made from the point of view of an observer of the performances.

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The communicative function in playmaking involves the development of a range of skills and abilities. These are the ability to portray character, project ideas to the audience, respond to the audience's reaction and work together as a team. In the case of Lolo Bambo Lolo, a sense of character was developed during the improvisations and, as the lines were in most cases the students' own contribution, there was no difficulty in creating a sense of the characters speaking the lines spontaneously rather than reciting them. Where the difficulty lay was in the projection because in improvisations that were part of the workshopping process, very little attention was paid to projection. At this stage of the work, spontaneity is crucial. I was worried that if attempts were made to simultaneously achieve projection with this inexperienced group that these attempts would inhibit the spontaneous response that is required. Once the lines were set, the group began to work on foregrounding and projection. This was often difficult because the original impulses that gave life to the improvisation had to be recalled and repeated. The work went flat for a while and the inexperienced actors found this difficult to contend with after the initial elation of discovering exciting moments. A great deal of work had to go into recovering and holding onto the ideas and feelings that were spontaneously expressed through improvisation.

The educative value, of taking part in performance lies in developing powers of recall (remembering and repeating sequences of action) projection and various voice and body skills. Performances are special occasions and the excitement of being involved and taking risks' before an audience builds self confidence and a sense of personal worth. Unsuccessful performances can, of course, be counter-productive and undermine self-confidence and reinforce a sense of inferiority. There is always this risk involved in encouraging students to show their own work. There are also all the technical aspects to the performance and working together to incorporate lighting designs, costume changes, set changes and the use of stage properties calls for concentration, timing, dedicated team-work and general commitment to the project.

As I pointed out in Chapter 5, the description is fraught with difficulties. In an attempt to of the performance of Lolo Bambo Lolo, I begin by describing audience reactions to some of the performances and then offer a socio-semiotic interpretation of the play.

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## THE PERFORMANCE

The pattern that holds Lolo Bambo Lolo together is three parallel stories that represent a woman's suffering. The oppression and suffering is shown to be the result of gender determination and the women attempt to escape their ordained roles and discover a new role for themselves. In the first episode, a woman is persecuted because she is barren, in the second episode a mother and her child are abandoned and in the third episode a young woman falls pregnant under socially unacceptable circumstances. In each episode, the way of life of a particular society and the situation in which the subordination of women has been established and experienced is shown through gestural, proxemic, linguistic and other codes. A pattern emerges in the 'play that foregrounds women's robes and lives in different, but historically connected societies. In each episode, a particular woman's problem is isolated and explored. This focus is most effectively achieved in the second episode which revolves around a woman's search for her husband in the city, his rejection of her and her discovery of the support of other women as she finds work and makes a new life for herself. The third episode is not as successful because it focusses on the visit from the Family Planning Clinic to a school rather than on the misfortunes of the pregnant school girl. The episodes are linked by a narrator and singer who comment on the action and debate the role of women between themselves. In the performance, the same actress plays the role of the suffering woman in each episode which helps to make connections for the audience about the way in which one set of circumstances and ideas has a bearing on another related, but new, set of circumstances. In the first and second episodes the role of the suffering woman is foregrounded further in that in each role she has a song to depict her anguish in the first episode when she is accused of witchcraft and in the second episode when her child dies. The third episode is weakened because this pattern is not followed through<sup>21</sup>.

Lolo Bambo Lolo was played to a wide range of audiences, At the Grahamstown Festival of Student Drama it was judged one of the three best plays at the festival. The audience at this festival is made up of sophisticated theatre goers and drama students and is, therefore, highly elitist. The question of whether the University should support the Grahamstown Festival is controversial. It is argued, on the one hand, that the

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Festival is controlled by whites whose sole purpose is to promote the dominant culture and commemorate the arrival of the 1820 settlers in South Africa. On the other hand, many 'alternative' theatre groups attend the festival and, in terms of gaining a wider perspective about the state of South African theatre, it is a useful experience for our students. There is, however, a patronizing attitude among many whites about 'happy blacks' who are 'good at singing and dancing' and when Lolo Bambo Lolo was well received by the festival audience there were comments along the lines of "Oh well, of course, they are good at that sort of thing". There is quite a marked difference between the audience in Grahamstown and the campus audience. In an interview I had with one of the students after the festival he commented as follows:

The Grahamstown audience go to the theatre with a purpose - that is to listen to the play. They pay to get into the theatre and they want their money's worth. They have a critical eye for everything. Here on campus, the audience comes to the theatre for fun. Even if something is not funny, they make it funny. Our audience on campus is not inhibited. They comment throughout and if they like the play they like it and if they don't they don't. There is a here and now reaction - not after the show - not tomorrow, but during the show you know how they feel. I value both audiences, but I believe that the Grahamstown audience that is prepared to listen is better than ours here <sup>22</sup>.

In Grahamstown, the audience is often enigmatic in that it tends to sit politely through a play and then demolish it afterwards. Student audiences are usually sympathetic to actors' difficulties with, for example, timing and projection, but if the ideas that are presented do not meet with general approval they do not hesitate to respond. This is done by walking out, jeering and, in the case of songs, singing along and drowning out the cast. When the ideas do meet with approval this is signalled by spontaneous applause throughout the production.

In Grahamstown the response of the audience is interpreted by newspaper critics and, in the case of Lolo Bambo Lolo, the students involved were reassured by good reviews, such as this one 'that appeared in The Natal Witness:

A focus on women's struggles, created in workshop by the director and cast, Lolo Bambo Lolo, draws on the experience of Black women in

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rural and urban situations to make a point about the continuing struggle of women for their liberation.

The students have created a "*Lehrstuck*", a teaching play, borrowing from the ideas of Brecht. "His ideas help us to create a 'poor theatre'," says actor Bongani Simelane. The teaching play with its bare set and the minimum of props is ideal for their purposes.

"The play was really a combined effort of the cast," says director Mthandeni Namba. "We started with an idea, improvised and scripted it."

"It is a new play, and we were not sure that it would work," says Bongani. "Our one worry was that the use of two languages (as in the scene where an interpreter acts as go-between for a European missionary and a group of rural Zulus) was delaying the action, killing the natural suspense.

"Also people who do not understand Zulu would miss out on things like the singing of the praises of the ancestors, which is actually very moving."

The reaction of their audience during their opening performance must have dispelled those fears. The appreciative applause which greeted their imaginative production was the most enthusiastic for any student production so far.

"The festival is our only chance to meet other drama students," says Bongani. "We gain a lot from other students' performances."<sup>23</sup>

**In October 1984, the University of Zululand closed before the second semester was complete and students were unable to continue with their studies or write examinations. The closure was brought about because the student body boycotted classes and damaged University property. It seems that the boycotts began as political protest and were orchestrated by student activists, but the situation was exacerbated by general grievances experienced on campus. The play was presented on campus just prior to the closure of the University and was a resounding success, It was the only cultural activity supported by the student body which was boycotting concerts and film shows and, at the last performance which took place the night before the University closed, 200 people had to be turned away as the theatre was already filled far beyond its seating capacity and a large section of the acting area was taken up by the audience. This audience is also elitist as it consists of highly educated young black students who were especially responsive to the nuances of the play which was in both English and Zulu. The search for identity was**

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**especially appreciated by the women, as were the issues surrounding birth control. The play was left open ended in order to pose relevant questions without providing ready made answers.**

The campus audience is unique in the overwhelming interest that is taken in live theatre. Productions presented by the Department of Speech and Drama invariably play to full houses especially on opening nights<sup>24</sup>. In attending the productions, the students are making an active choice which signals their interest in the theatre, This is a lively and vibrant audience and there are, therefore, a range of signals that are an indication of the response to the production. It is important to note that communication between members of an audience is a key feature of live theatre. Elam has identified three main effects of this kind of communication; stimulation (laughter provokes more laughter) confirmation (the audience find their own responses reinforced by others) and integration (the individual audience member is encouraged, in consequence to surrender to the larger unit of which he or she is part)<sup>25</sup>. Laughter is a dominant signal from the audience in Block B Theatre at the University. The opening scene of Lolo Bambo Lolo is a group of Zulu tribesmen who are confronted with the arrival of whites. This scene was greeted with gales of laughter on each occasion that it was played before the student audience, When the same scene was played at the Grahamstown Festival of Student Drama it was met with quiet and polite interest. Discussions with students about the reasons for laughter led us into identifying a range of possibilities. In the first place, the students insist that laughter is a sign of appreciation and enjoyment. The audience attend the performance with the express purpose of discovering things to laugh at and one of the difficulties encountered is, in fact, to develop serious moments that will not be greeted with laughter. Another important reason for laughter is that students recognise their colleagues taking roles in costume and are amused by their endeavours. The audience most certainly laughs at unconvincing acting and is very sensitive to histrionics. Finally, as in the case with any audience, the student audience laughs at amusing dialogue and comic action and the students who make the plays become expert at knowing what will amuse their colleagues.

There is a high degree of audience involvement in theatre on campus signalled by comments that are called out in response to the action. The most common are



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expressions of sympathy after moments of pathos and, in epic theatre, the intention is to break these moments and immediately comment on the causes of suffering. In Lolo Bambo Lolo, this was achieved by the singer, who acted as a chorus. To indicate enjoyment, members of the audience shout out 're-wind' and, for inaudibility, they call out 'sound' - two metaphors that are obviously derived from the use of tape recorders and videos. Whistling, which is very common, often indicates disapproval of an idea and, in Lolo Bambo Lolo, the feminist was greeted with whistles and jeers from the men. This set up a response from the women in the audience which sometimes ended in a brief shouting match between the two groups. The audience is very sensitive, however, to disruption from amongst themselves and after each round of laughter there are calls for silence so that the show can go on. This poses great problems for inexperienced actors who have to learn how to time their lines and, in many instances, the lines are lost because the actors find it difficult to hold the characters and wait for the audience to quieten down.

Clapping is not conventionalized, as in western theatre, and the audience does not respond politely by clapping at the end of the play. It does, however, applaud ideas that meet with approval and moments in the play (either funny or tender) which it finds particularly moving or convincing. From these brief comments, it is clear that there is a striking difference between the behaviour of the audience on campus and in conventional western theatres. I comment on the semiotics of audience response at the end of this chapter.

The closure of the University meant that the students were in a desperate situation having lost their fees for the semester and being unable to continue with their studies. Encouraged by the success of the play in Grahamstown and on campus, they formed a theatre company with the aim of taking the play on tour as a commercial venture. The intention was to reach the general public and particularly the black working classes in the 'townships'. It was decided, as a first venture, to arrange a tour of the Empangeni area and performances were held in schools, hospital and mission halls as, apart from the Civic Centre in the 'white section' of Empangeni, there are no theatres in the area. The text of the play remained provisional and, during this period, it was continually re-worked on the basis of the audience's reaction. Attention was paid to language and,

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in the end, there were three versions of the play - an English version, a version that contained a mixture of languages and a Zulu version. The tour was not a financial success as theatre is not well established as a mode of communication in this area and a great deal of work needs to be done to overcome practical difficulties such as transport problems for the audience and finding suitable venues. However, the play was appreciated by the audiences that did attend and it seems that there is great potential for theatre groups to exploit drama as a means of introducing audiences to the possibility of differing perceptions of reality.

In order to describe and analyze the performance of Lolo Bambo Lolo in more depth and discuss its value as an educational project, I shall adopt a semiotic approach although I was not using this approach with the students at the time of making the play. I think it would have been helpful if we had adopted a system of analysis that pointed up the contradictions and weak moments more clearly than working from intuition, as we did. There is possibly a danger of an approach that is too critically analytical stalling creativity, but there must be a dialectic between creative thinking and critical thinking that can be discovered.

## **THE INTERPRETATIVE FUNCTION: A SEMIOTIC APPROACH**

By now it is no doubt apparent that my concern lies with the educative potential of theatre studies rather than the acquisition of objective knowledge about the theatre. My interest in a semiotic approach is not in the interpretation of plays and performance as a kind of intellectual exercise for its own sake. My interest lies in stimulating an enquiring mind and the ability to interpret the signs and codes that make up the fabric of our understanding of ourselves and our world. Signs are not transparent, but pregnant with meaning and it is the work of semiotics to force away this sense of transparency. Meaning lies between the teller and the listener of the tale and not in the essence of things. As Blonsky asks, “Why do we let signs ape the absolute presence of reality when we know that all language is figurative”<sup>26</sup>. He suggests two reasons for this:

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Some theoreticians believe in a referential longing or urge signs that want to make things be, Others look to culture, believe that a fundamental use of power is to make us believe that signs are transparent, true, natural, free of any determination save those of the object they designate<sup>27</sup>.

Signs are not “transparent, true, natural and free”, but man- created and learned. Students need to acquire a conscious command of the interpretive codes of their culture and learning about theatrical codes is a way of recognising that codes are codes. They formulate our sense of the world inside and the world outside and they can be used to deceive and manipulate our perceptions. What is also significant is how codes come to be meaningful and it is the task of semioticians to examine the history of the codes themselves. As I suggested in Chapter 6, cultural codes are the products of a particular history, a particular way of seeing and it is the task of educationalists who wish to demystify power relations to clarify the ways in which they function to reinforce the power of a dominant culture. If students are to be empowered with knowledge, semiotics must not be studied for its own sake, but in order to make connections between cultural codes, politics and consciousness.

### **The Communicative Process**

The activity of an audience watching a play is both interpretative and appreciative. The meaning of the play is not transmitted through the sign - systems - it is reconstructed by the audience in a complimentary process of semiosis. There are two processes of semiosis involved - one in making the sign-systems and the other in receiving the sign systems<sup>28</sup>. If I choose to comment on either of these processes of semiosis a third process comes into being as I, as critic or researcher, make meaning. Sless points out that meaning is the end product of processes of semiosis and when we try to study meaning we are studying what we ourselves produce. In art, the interpretative aspect of the semiosis is more prominent than in language<sup>29</sup>. This is because systematic symbolism is a feature of language and schematic symbolism a feature of art. In the systematic symbolism of language conventionalized meanings and rules of structure are established and can be learned, whereas, in art, the use of symbols is not fixed in the same way. A script is not a drama and a score is not music<sup>30</sup>. They are cues and the work itself has power over its component parts. In

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watching a drama the audience is not faced with something it can systematically interpret by reading off the symbolism<sup>31</sup>. It is faced with an act of creative semiosis.

My position in this analysis is of participant observer of rehearsals and member of the audience during performances. Therefore, what follows is a secondary text which evaluates and interprets the primary text which was the performance.

The Structuring of the Fictional World of the Play Dramatic fiction is structured around the trilogy of space, time and action. The drama sets up its fictional domain by the direct representation of events from 'within' the dramatic world, or mimesis<sup>32</sup>. This means that narrative information will usually be provided to the audience through the interactions of the characters. The dramatic world defines itself as it goes along. In some genres of performance, language is excluded or dominated by non-verbal codes, but in Lolo Bambo Lolo, the dialogue is the essential meaning creating system<sup>33</sup>. Supported by other representational elements, the dialogue conveys expository content, circumstance and action and defines the world of the play. As participants in speech events, the characters are assigned specific roles as speaker or listener entailing a set of projected qualities and capacities. Their dialogue conveys 'background' knowledge of their social status, linguistic and conversational competence, physical location and unstated intentions and purpose in addition to expository content<sup>34</sup>. This background knowledge is conveyed through the nonverbal signs that accompany the actual speech. These signs function in a variety of complex ways. They may punctuate the current of speech and emphasize key words (parasyntactic function), modify or amplify the meaning of words (parasemantic function), or influence the meaning as a whole (parapragmatic function). The connections between verbal and nonverbal discourse are not arbitrary, but culturally encoded. For example, the way the eyebrows are used to point meaning, or the hand to reinforce an idea, or the expression of the face to suggest a mood are communicative systems that are developed by convention and are therefore likely to differ in different cultural contexts and across different periods of time.

Lolo Bambo Lolo was performed in English, but with the intention of signifying that the characters speak an African language to each other in everyday life. The problem

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faced by the company was to create a language (a version of English) that would signify another language (Zulu) and, as has been noted, this involves divorcing the verbal and nonverbal elements of the communication process. When the group first began improvising they worked in English to develop the dialogue, because the predominant feeling was that the play should be in English in order to communicate to a wide range of South Africans<sup>35</sup>. The improvisations of contemporary and comparatively recent events were successfully conducted in English, but the use of English in scenes that attempted to depict a non-colonial era was particularly difficult. It was very problematic for the group to discover Zulu thought patterns and behaviour through improvisation using English dialogue. The group decided to work in Zulu with the intention of translating the dialogue into English once it was established. I suggested that they consult the work of Chinua Achebe, Alan Paton, Dikobe and others for ideas in this regard. However, a satisfactory English register was not discovered and the idea of a missionary and interpreter solved the language difficulty in this particular instance. The scene was played in Zulu and the key ideas were translated for the missionary (and English speaking audiences) The use of translation was an effective device particularly for multi-lingual audiences that were able to appreciate all the nuances of inexact translation at which the interpreter became very adept<sup>36</sup>. It meant that the actors were able to draw on their own experience of conventional Zulu behaviour among older members of their families in order to show the characters of a previous era through both verbal and nonverbal sign-vehicles. But, the use of translation also limited the scope of the scene. It allowed for very little exploration of relationships between the Zulu characters because there was no logical reason to translate these exchanges and so the reaction to colonizing forces was not explored in any depth. The overt reaction of the tribesmen was to gently mock the missionary from a position of security, particularly in connection with the claim about the inferiority of women:

The man of God speaks wisely when he speaks of the weakness of women and I understand the snake coming through a woman (appropriate gesture) - that is clear to me - but the fashioning of a woman from a rib - as you can see some of them are nicely rounded - that is difficult to believe<sup>37</sup>.

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But, there was no opportunity to counter this with a sense of foreboding that might have been expressed in private. There was also very little opportunity in the scene to express opposition to the colonial presence in Zululand.

In the later episodes of Lolo Bambo Lolo, an English interspersed with exclamations in indigenous languages signalled that the characters were speaking an African language. Just as language itself is flexible and constantly borrowing from other languages and adapting to changing circumstances, nonverbal codes are also flexible and constantly adapted. In order to show a society in a rapid state of transition the group was able to draw on a mixture of linguistic, gestural and spatial codes. The rural woman was contrasted with the city women by her respectful attitude compared to their westernized manner and she was also shown adapting and changing under new circumstances including learning to speak English. An ability to speak English is associated with education and in the final episode in the staffroom the way English is used signals that the dialogue is now actually in English. The use of nonverbal signifiers supports and communicates this change of languages.

When a semiotic analysis is applied to the struggle over the choice of language in the play the wider implications of the choice of language in the South African context are also revealed. When a language is used as a sign system to denote a people, a place and a period, there will also be second order meanings attached to this choice. For a black South African audience the focus on Zulu and the exclusion of other indigenous languages may connote a concern with promoting a sense of ethnicity. In later scenes the actors had to work hard to mitigate against this reading. The choice of English signals power and prestige for the characters in the play that speak English. It also carries connotations of status for the actors who appear so fluent and at ease in a language that is connected with power and privilege. Simultaneously, English carries with it a history of colonial and racial domination and so its use is contradictory. On the one hand, there is the implication of becoming absorbed into the dominant culture and gaining status and, on the other, there are the possibilities of using the language of dominance as a weapon for resistance (You taught me language and my profit is that now I know how to curse you) Likewise the use of Zulu may mean either resistance to the dominant culture or acceptance of the concept of ethnic chauvinism. These

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complexities are intuitively sensed by the students, but a semiotic analysis helps to clarify the way the codes are working.

### **The Meanings of Space**

The conception of the way theatre mediates reality relates directly to the use of space in the structuring of the fictional world of the drama. As has been discussed, Brecht succeeded in altering the functional relations between stage and audience<sup>38</sup>. The student, group was familiar with his concept of epic theatre and the play they constructed did not attempt to set up an illusion of reality by adopting the theatrical frame of an audience watching through a 'fourth wall', but instead invited the audience to actively observe the recording and analysis of the unfolding events. This approach was evident in the spatial arrangements of Lolo Bambo Lolo. The play opened with the Feminist addressing the audience directly, drawing on the lecture and meeting conventions of everyday life to establish a frame of reference for the audience. This frame is interrupted by the Singer who takes over the lecture in order to sing his songs and introduce the dramatised sequences of the action while at the same time commenting on the action.

I sing the song of the city women  
And their country sisters  
These beings of passage  
The toing and froing between town and country  
The white man's work  
The days in trains and buses  
A world of partings and returnings -  
Leaving children - those links  
With life  
The cruel gap between rich and poor  
The rich man's child in expensive schools  
Black children left on poorer and poorer soils  
The daughters of the city make do, make do  
Do not cry for us our mothers (refrain)<sup>39</sup>

The function of these characters is to stimulate critical observation and direct the audience in the interpretation of the meaning of the depicted events. An effort was made not to simplify the complexity of the interpretation of events. The Singer's comments are made in character and are often juxtaposed against the Feminist's viewpoint. These linking scenes were an attempt at dramatising not only the storyline,

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but the analysis of the depicted events. These sequences were interchanged with the episodes which explored the nature of a cause and effect through the dramatisation of experiences and events.

The mobile and open action of the play moved through a variety of places and historical periods foregrounding the interaction between men and women under changing historical circumstances. The action was created in these different places by its own logic and momentum - the crowd in the Post Office dissolved into a crowd on a train - and was not fixed by a specific set. Changes of place and time were indicated by changing a two-dimensional backdrop that expressed 'historical ambience' rather than 'immediate surroundings'. In contrast to the theatre of illusion that depends on verisimilitude or recreating the textures and appearances of things as exactly as possible, epic theatre constantly presents itself as theatrical - as an event in the theatre. The backdrop was supported by poles and it was changed in front of the audience as part of the action. 'This technique compels the audience to recall the theatrical frame with the intention of stating the players relation to the play. They were in the capacity of storytellers showing events rather than actors mirroring events. The spatial arrangements indicated a sense of constructing reality or reflecting on reality rather than attempting a reflection of reality.

### **The Function of Theatrical Signs and Codes**

A dominant idea conveyed in Lolo Bambo Lolo is the situation of women under changing circumstances. Their situation is explored in a non-colonial era and then during the development of the proletariat under a capitalist social formation. The network of signs used to convey these changing circumstances combined iconic, indexical and symbolic functions. In the first episode, hides were hung across some poles and the horns of cattle attached to one of the poles formed a focal point. The horns denoted iconically a Zulu homestead (horns are literally placed on the roofs of Zulu huts), but at the same time, stood indexically as did the hides for a particular society. There is an interplay of semiotic literalness between the use of the hides and the horns to signify a situation and a way of life. The horns had an iconic identity-they denoted horns-but the hides, (which are not usually hung on the exterior of Zulu homesteads) functioned predominantly indexically rather than only iconically to suggest a historical ambience<sup>40</sup>. The horns are also symbolic (in the Peircean sense)



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of the ancestors in Zulu thought and, for an audience familiar with this interpretant, they would have carried this third order meaning with all the implications of ancestor veneration.

The costumes used were not full period costumes. In the first episode headresses and shoulder cloths signified the marital status of women. For the men, skins and sticks were an index of Zulu tribal dress worn with modern boxer shorts and vests bearing an African design. In the second episode, the poles which signified a Zulu homestead in the first episode, now signified telephone poles - suggesting the woman's journey to the city in search of her husband. Costumes were changed and the range of styles of dress, from traditional Zulu to modern overalls, were an index of a society in transition. In a later scene, workers appeared in uniform indicative of attempts to regiment the proletariat. The formal western dress of the teachers in the final episode signalled the rising black petit bourgeoisie. The backdrop for the staffroom scene was a blank canvas that made a dreary impression after the hides in the first episode.

The combination of the iconic and indexical functioning of the sign systems in this production was not altogether satisfactory. An indexical order of signification was encoded throughout 'for the set and this assisted the epic structure of the play by refusing the development of an illusion of reality. In the first episode the costume functioned indexically - period costume was not fully established - but in later episodes full costume was used and changed each time a different character was portrayed. At an iconic level, the suit worn by the actor portraying a headmaster was, at the same time, an index of a male in formal attire and a symbol of his status as headmaster. A sense of the importance of semiotic literalness is deepseated and a predominant feeling in the group was that full period dress was the most appropriate way to show the characters. They assumed that the reason why an authentic use of costume was not adopted for the first episode was the difficulty of getting hold of the period dress and that the indexical use' of costume was a compromise and not a deliberate choice. As soon as modern costume was required and was readily available, the 'predominantly indexical use of costume was abandoned in favour of iconic representation which seemed correct. The result of this concern for verisimilitude was that changes of costume became very complicated and difficult, particularly when the

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group went on tour. Also, the Brechtian notion of showing characters rather than becoming characters was adversely affected by this choice of costuming. In the final analysis, the choice of sign-vehicles for the production suggested a lack of coherent intention among the group as they struggled to escape from the dominant idea of realism in the theatre or direct similitude between sign-vehicle and signified. There was also a lack of a coherent pattern formed by the sign-vehicles. The very effective use of horns in the first episode which was rich in connotative meaning was not followed through once the horns were replaced by telephone connections. This meant that in later episodes the set lost its connotative power with a subsequent loss of density. In retrospect, it is clear that a sign-vehicle for Bantu Education was required for the final episode.

## **Proxemic and Kinesic Codes**

Appropriate kinesic and proxemic codes were observed or broken to indicate at the one level the literal situation and at another level the interaction of the characters. For example, the head of the family sat on a small stool (*isigqiki*) surrounded by other senior men, while the women sat apart observing traditional rules of decorum in the way they sat. The young man who was 'overfond' of one of his wives signalled this by breaking the cultural code and sitting too near to the women rather than paying attention to the proceedings, thus earning a rebuke from his father about lack of decorum. The meanings of the kinesic and proxemic codes in this episode were contrasted with the final episode, where in a modern staffroom all the teachers, both male and female, sat on chairs with no gender differentiation of roles. Traditional respect patterns were still evident in the gestural relations between the headmaster and the pupils but the reaction to the use of these codes became contradictory. The headmaster criticized the boy bringing a message telling him to look up and speak up in a direct revocation of traditional patterns, of decorum where children did not look directly at their elders. The boy was left not knowing how to signal respect for the headmaster.

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In Lolo Bambo Lolo, the intention was to explore, the ways in which cultural codes instill and reinforce a sense of subordination in women and show this to the audience. In the first episode of the play the deference codes used' by women in traditional Zulu behaviour patterns were used by the performers. They demonstrated, the customary ways in which women bend the body, avoid eye contact and generally show respect by making themselves literally physically lower than the people to whom they are deferring - in this case, any of the senior men. The women sat apart from the men and observed ways of sitting that indicated politeness and self-respect, but also subservience in that they (except those past child-bearing) did not question the men's authority or engage in public debate with them. All these, and many other cultural codes, were observed and functioned in the performance to demonstrate the interaction between men and women in a non-literate Zulu society. When the scene shifted to 50 years later it was interesting to note what happened to these proxemic and kinesic codes. They were still observed by the rural woman which made her appear markedly different from the city women who abandoned the use of these codes and adopted westernized patterns of behaviour. In the scene showing a white couple, the white woman lent on the arm of her husband, signalling her dependence on him and similar gestures were adopted by the prostitutes who went off with the men who were living in a compound in Johannesburg. What was indicated was that the women had exchanged one set of deference codes for another and were still trapped in subordinate roles. The examples' of this interaction between cultural codes and theatrical subcodes are too numerous to mention in detail here, but I shall briefly focus on eye contact because it is one of the most telling of the gestural signs and causes great difficulty at every level.

As was mentioned, by tradition women and young people do not meet the eyes of their superiors and the eyes are downcast as a sign of respect. This affects the whole demeanour and sense of self because one is never allowed to boldly challenge a superior with the eyes and women are taught that older men and their husbands are their superiors. This respect pattern is still prevalent among black people today and many young women have difficulty looking directly at someone they believe should be respected. These women are, in turn, praised and supported for their sense of politeness within a community that values a sense of hierarchy and so the behaviour

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pattern is constantly reinforced. This means that physically and to the core, women are constantly reminded of their place or status. They literally, physically position themselves - outwardly in terms of placing the body and inwardly in terms of placing the eyes - in a more lowly position than the men. This becomes a habitual demeanour which is hard to change because it affects the sense of self as a respected and integrated member of a community where these codes are valued. Theatrical subcodes call for downcast gestures with the eyes to be overridden in favour of a gesture that makes the eyes visible to the audience, This is to facilitate communication between performers and audience. It is difficult, if not virtually impossible to develop a performance if the performer constantly looks at the floor and yet, this is what happens in the case of inexperienced performers who habitually look down to indicate deference. Many young black women find it hard to use the eyes boldly in a confrontation with others in the theatre and in their general relationships - there are a range of fine distinctions to a bold look with different connotations including a sexual advance, polite interest from an equal and a direct challenge. All these fine points of gesture are learned within a cultural context and are meaningful with this context. When the context changes new gestural codes have to be learned which is not always easy. The examination of some of the ways in which women were historically, and still are, dominated through the use of proxemic and kinesic codes opens up the possibilities for a change from domination and subordination to one of equal status in gender relationships.

### **Ideology and Form**

Epic structure does not have an organic unity, but is left open ended to suggest the possibility of alternative outcomes rather than the inevitable outcome suggested by a carefully structured plot. Lolo Bambo Lolo posed questions rather than offering solutions and in this way invited the audience not to be passive victims or witnesses, but interpreters of experience and agents of the future. The intention of the play was to communicate that we are not necessarily victims of our own biography. This applied especially to women. In naturalistic performances the audience is encouraged to interpret the signs as being directly related to the denoted objects. This way of telling the story may not contain an implicit interpretation of the events, but nevertheless, the received interpretation is influenced and subverted by the hegemony

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of the dominant culture. If signs are grasped as the material medium of ideology then a mere recording of what is observed will not provide an opportunity for analysis, but will tend to reinforce dominant ways of seeing. In modern societies the story cannot speak for itself either, as in non-colonial, more homogenous societies where the interpretation of mythologies was not in question. This means that the audience must be guided in their interpretation which must be built into the play. In Lolo Bambo Lolo, this problem was not adequately solved although it was attempted, particularly in the roles of the Feminist and the Singer. This was because the group were unable to sufficiently distance themselves from the notion of recording events and the play tended to slip into straightforward storytelling with all the concomitant difficulties of interpretation. This confidence in recording events is rooted in the premise that events speak for themselves and that the audience is then 'free' to draw its own conclusions. It does not take into account the functioning of sign and coding systems both in the making of the play and the response to it. These prohibit, control and exclude ways both of showing meaning and ways of seeing. It identifies the real with what is experienced. Epic theatre attempts to discover the causal connections that exist at deeper levels than observable reality and develop a synthesis between observation and deduction. This is a difficult task and habitual ways of seeing constantly intrude and, in this case, eventually dominated the production. Although the women characters were portrayed as courageous and intelligent, and the codes that subordinate women were explored, they were eventually depicted as losers and so the play did not make a positive statement about women.

In On the Road, a play which was made the following year by a group that included the nucleus of the students involved in Lolo Bambo Lolo, the students tackled this problem and the structuring of the, fictional world relied more on scenic event than on plot. In this play there was an attempt to come to grips, with the relation between ideology and form. The road itself provided a central symbol of a society in search of new meanings. Here the reliance on verisimilitude was abandoned and a level of symbolism was reached which allowed for an expansion of meaning connotative of the sign-vehicles on a number of different levels. On the surface, the play dealt with the lives of taxi drivers and their families, but the road was transformed into a road on which the players sought the way to the kingdom of heaven. The metaphysical

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journey was presented in the form of a parable based on Matthew 13<sup>41</sup>. The parable in its re-written version showed the promise of the kingdom to be a cruel moral and metaphysical deception. It spoke of the sheer unreliability of the connection between mankind's moral state and metaphysical reality. The sense of security that informs a plot which works towards an ending that is a solution or resolution was absent in this play. Instead, the play relied on flashbacks, changes in sequence and a visionary sequence to convey a great sense of insecurity as the social fabric disintegrates. Although the correspondence of the real world of the taxi drivers and the visionary world of the suffering people was not altogether successfully developed in the *mise en scene*, the road remained a focal point of meaning.

### **Metaphor and Metonymy: The Collective Response**

The complex question of the audience's response to performance has been debated by Ian Steadman and Keyan Tomaselli. Tomaselli holds that for black viewers of plays like *Egoli*, and the worker plays, there exists a 'metonymical contiguity' which erodes the boundaries between art and life because the plays are externalisations of their 'actual' conditions of existence<sup>42</sup>. White viewers, according to Tomaselli, tend to "isolate out the play" from life because, in terms of their conditions of existence, the experience enacted does not exist<sup>43</sup>. He argues further that whether the image is interpreted as metaphor or metonymy depends on the class position of the audience. Steadman points out that these plays are so obviously located within a specific context that no spectator is likely to "isolate out" the play from life<sup>44</sup>. The audience sees the black actors as black workers, not as merely the representation of black workers, whatever their social group, and the plays as a fictional world which is continually set off against the realities of the South African social formation<sup>45</sup>. The audience is persuaded that these conditions of existence are a reality, and that is Manaka's intention. It seems to me that there is a sense in which an audience that is, not trained in the convention of aesthetic appreciation receives a play metonymically. There is a tendency, among student audiences, to react very directly to the action as though it is life and not a representation of, life. This means that the representation of ideas is not as easily dismissed and is likely to make a deeper impact than when plays are viewed as objects of art. Tomaselli links this type of perception to the working classes, but it is my contention that it is not confined to these classes. As observed, the student body

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is not easily classified as a working class audience or as having a working class consciousness and yet their response is engaged rather than distanced.

The response of young children who have not been socialized into distanced viewing is 'also far closer to a metonymic response than metaphorical response. Tomaselli particularly mentions that it is white viewers who are prone to isolating out the play from life and this is probably true and because of a particular kind of education. This kind of education is sometimes imitated by well-meaning teachers in 'black' schools. I was dismayed when I visited a school in KwaZulu, with a T.I.E. programme, to hear the headmaster instruct the children beforehand on how to view the play 'politely'. He warned them not to laugh too loudly, or make remarks, or move in their seats until I begged him to stop and allow the children their spontaneous reactions. He was, in fact, teaching a more distanced way of viewing the play and instilling a sense of the separation of art from life - the experience is out there to be watched and not actively engaged in.

One of the tensions inherent in this debate is the extent to which the collective response may influence individual perceptions. If the majority of the audience are responding in a certain way, can they sway the point of view of those who initially respond differently? I contend that the collective experience has a potent influence on individual perceptions. For a white member of the audience, the experience of viewing the same play in Zululand and in Grahamstown is very different. On campus, if parts of the play seem obscure and yet the audience roars with laughter, or murmurs in anger, then the tendency is to ask oneself, 'Why didn't I appreciate that'. In Grahamstown the audience is often remote from some of the experiences that are being depicted but when the action seems obscure, the thought is 'Why can't these players communicate effectively?' This means that in Zululand, outsiders' would have far less confidence in their critical judgement of the aesthetic experience in the face of a huge and responsive audience totally engaged by the play. This reinforces my point that meaning lies in the context and not only in the texts of art. The impact of the collective experience is lessened when the audience is restrained and it is not clear what the response is, but when there clearly is a collective response it makes an impact on the individual. When the audience shows its approval or disapproval of a sentiment or attitude this is a profound form of public thinking and a learning

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experience for all involved. The challenge for the playwrights is to win over such an audience to new ideas and new ways of perceiving themselves and their circumstances.

In this somewhat lengthy chapter I have attempted to demonstrate the educative potential of making a play and then presenting it to an audience. To begin with, I discussed the importance of research in addition to the subjective experience of improvisation for the preparation of the script. I used the example of making Lolo Bambo Lolo to indicate the kind of research I have in mind and discussed the difficulty of introducing concepts that are inaccessible to the group. A balance has to be discovered between the group's own experience and ideas that are being imposed from the outside to strengthen and deepen the work. These ideas can eventually become counterproductive, no matter how apt, and destroy the group's confidence in their own creative abilities. Once the play was made, the focus of attention switched to developing a *mise en scene* and a new range of skills and abilities were exercised. These were the ability to use the body and voice to convey meaning and the ability to work together as a team to stage the play. The rehearsal process is onerous and demands a high level of commitment, energy and dedication to the task on hand. Preparing the score or the *mise en scene* involved numerous choices of theatrical and dramatic subcodes in order to stimulate appropriate interpretations in the minds of the audience. This involved making connections between the fictional world of the play and personal and researched experience. The educative potential of this exercise is that it develops a realisation that codes are not transparent vehicles of meaning, but are loaded with meanings that are culture-bound. Part of the critical enterprise of this project is a continual process of defamiliarization; the exposing of conventions and the discovery of codes that have become so ingrained that they are considered natural ways of behaving. Particular attention was paid to a common perception that realism is the appropriate convention for communication in the theatre. In the making of Lolo Bambo Lolo the introduction of a Brechtian approach was subtly resisted and a semiotic analysis revealed how the attempt to use the theatre as a way of reflecting on reality rather than as a reflection of reality was subverted by common sense perceptions about the use of costume in particular. The way language is also a coding system that carries second order meanings was discussed and related to the use of



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language in the wider society. Kinesic and proxemic codes that reinforce the subjugation of women and young people were examined and it was posited that the way we know ourselves is thoroughly permeated with signs; we are culturally coded to the core. I concluded that an understanding of the codes of the theatre generates an interest in the way culture generally functions as a symbol system and that a semiotic analysis opens up ways of understanding ourselves and our circumstances with more clarity. Finally in this chapter I discussed the possibility of learning as a member of the audience and suggested that being part of an active and responsive audience is a potent learning experience.

## CHAPTER EIGHT NOTES

- 1 C.A. Bowers, 'Culture Against Itself: Nihilism As an Element in Recent Educational Thought', American Journal of Education, Spring 1984, in Shirley Walters, "People's Education: A Conceptual Framework for Analysis", Unpublished paper presented at the Association of Sociologists of Southern Africa (ASSA) Conference, University of Natal, Durban, July 1986, p. 7.
- 2 **Ibid.**
- 3 **Walters, op. cit., p. 7.**
- 4 The teacher as a 'narrator' is a concept denounced by Freire who argues for a dialogic exchange between teachers and students.
- 5 In the second and third episodes of the play, the students made a point of signalling that the characters were not all Zulu speaking, by using Xhosa, Sotho and Tswana interjections and exclamations. The way to depict the importance of struggling against ethnic chauvinism is an ongoing concern.
- 6 Hilda Kuper, Introduction to A Witch in my Heart, London, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. xiv.
- 7 **Ibid.**
- 8 **Ibid. p. xxi.**
- 9 **Ibid., p. xxii.**
- 10 **Ibid., p. xxiii.**
- 11 **Ibid., p. xxiv.**
- 12 **Ibid.**
- 13 Maria Rosa Cutrufelli, Women of Africa - Roots of Oppression, London, Zed Press, 1983, p. 53.
- 14 Axel-Ivar Berglund, Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism, Uppsala, Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 1976, p. 260.  
Harriet Ngubane points out that the worst type of witches in Zulu society are the male lineage sorcerers. Harriet Ngubane, Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine, London, Academic Press, 1977.
- 15 **Ibid., p. 271.**
- 16 Berglund reports the comments of an informant:

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'The sterility may arouse her husband's suspicions of moral misconduct and if he thinks that his wife may be practising witchcraft, he may put pressure on her towards confession. The aspect of pressure towards confession is important because, as one person put it: "Even if she (the wife) is not *umthakathi*, she should not entertain another man. It brings about hatred. Then his hatred becomes the cause of *ubuthakathi*. "On my asking him to explain further, he said: "A woman's desire must be like a river, flowing in one direction only. If it divides, then it causes trouble. Her desire cannot go to her husband and the next time to the other one. Why did she accept the other one? Perhaps because he said something nice. So she desires him. Then the desire just grows in her. Eventually she will desire him and not her husband. Then she hates her husband when he comes, wanting her. She hates him with great hatred and decides to kill him. She speaks one night with the lover. They decide to kill the husband. So they do it, becoming *abathakathi*. That is what I mean, when I said that he must beat her until she confesses. She is not dry because of nothing (i.e. sterile without cause). There is a reason that the shades have seen.

**Ibid., p. 260**

- 17 Cutrufelli notes this phenomena, op. cit., p. 162.
- 18 Berglund, op. cit., pp. 314 - 325.
- 19 See Appendix 2 for this text.
- 20 The words 'text', 'script', 'score' and 'work' are a source of confusion. The same set of words can be regarded as a text, a script, a score, or a work. New Criticism tended to privilege a set of words as a work; a complete self sufficient object, constructed of words on a page, that could yield its meaning to anyone trained in practical criticism. The boundedness of works is their distinguishing characteristic. They are seen to be as free of authorial intention, free of historical necessity and free from the readers' projections of meaning and value. Meaning is folded into the words on the page and must be drawn out by a skilled unfold of meanings. The performance of plays was always a problem for new critics and so, a dichotomy was set up between the work or script and the performance. Is a Shakespeare play a script or a work? 'Script' is usually used to mean the text of a play or the set of words that instruct the players as to what to say and do, but Schechner has developed the concept of the script to mean "all that can be transmitted from time to time and place to place; the basic code of the event". He uses the word 'score' to mean the set of words on a page. (Richard Schechner, Essays on Performance Theory 1970 - 1976, New York, Drama Book Specialists, 1977). In the meantime, in opposition to the concept of the 'work', - the 'text' has gathered connotations of being

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“open, incomplete and a piece of writing that must be understood as the product of a person. or persona at a given point in history in a given form of discourse, taking its meanings from the interpretative gestures of individual readers using the grammatical, semantic, and cultural codes available to them (Robert Scholes, Semiotics and Interpretation, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1982, pp. 16 - 17)

I am using the word ‘script’ to mean the set of instructions to the actors and ‘score’ to mean the basic code of the event that includes the linguistic, kinesic, proxemic and other codes. The *mise en scene* is a term used by semioticians to mean the realization and interpretation of a text into a performance or the process of staging the play. I am using ‘text’ as defined by Scholes above.

- 21 See Appendix 3 for a copy of the script of Lolo Bambo Lolo. As noted, the script changed and developed as the performances continued and, unfortunately, these changes were not recorded. This is an early version of the script that was produced during the rehearsal period.
- 22 Interview with Boetie Mota, October 1985.
- 23 Brigid Keeley,. ‘Students who deliver’, Natal Witness, July 16, 1984.
- 24 Block B Theatre, where the productions are presented, seats 300. Average number of students staying on campus is 3 000. Usual run is 4 - 5 performances. Entrance is free, or a nominal amount that is collected by other students for a worthy cause, such as Flood Relief.
- 25 Keir Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, London, Methuen & Co. Ltd., pp. 96-97.
- 26 Marshall Blonsky led.), On Signs - A Semiotic Reader, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1985, p. xxvii.
- 27 Ibid., pp. xxvii - xxviii.
- 28 See Elam, op. cit., pp. 49 — 50, for the difference between a system and a code. Briefly, a system is put together for a purpose and a code is an ensemble of correlational rules.
- 29 David Sless, In Search of Semiotics, London, Croom Helm, 1986, p. 91.
- 30 Ken Robinson led.), Exploring Theatre & Education, London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1980, p. 170.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Keir Elam, Shakespeare’s Universe of Discourse, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 72.

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- 33 The forms of western drama draw on both literary and oral types of communication. The different impulses give rise to a range of types of dramatic dialogue from the kinds characterized by a predominance of linguistic features that are common in written language to kinds that denote spoken language. Some kinds of dramatic dialogue (usually poetry) state the fictional world directly and others simulate conversation and rely on developing a subtext. In the latter type of realistic drama kinesic and proxemic codes are important for conveying a meaning that might be at odds with the actual words spoken.
- 34 Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, op. cit., pp. 136 - 137.
- 35 The intention to perform the play in Grahamstown was an important factor in the choice of language, but all the plays presented on the campus at the University of Zululand are presented predominantly in English. This is because the medium of instruction is English, the students recognise the importance of mastering English to improve their status and job opportunities and there is an awareness of signifying a parochial consciousness if one African language is favoured over others. There is a strong resistance to appearing to favour Zulu and ignore other African languages although a high percentage of students are Zulu speaking.
- 36 Unfortunately these versions are not in the text in Appendix 3, p
- 37 Lolo Bambo Lolo, Appendix 3, p. xviii.
- 38 See Chapter 6, p. 208-210 above.**
- 39 Lolo Bambo Lolo, Appendix 3, p. xl.
- 40 According to Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, op. cit., p. 8. it is important to recognise that the semiotization of phenomena in the theatre relates them to their signified classes rather than immediately to the dramatic world, since it is this which allows non-literal signifiers to perform the same function as literal ones, The only requirement is that the sign vehicle successfully stands for its intended signified.
- 41 Richard Aitken wrote the parable that appears in the text of On the Road. A copy of the text is available.
- 42 Keyan Tomaselli, 'Black South African Theatre: Text and Context', English in Africa Vol. 8., No, 1, pp. 51-58.
- 43 Ibid., p. 53.**
- 44 Ian Steadman, "Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1984", Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985, p. 372.

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**PLAYMAKING IN A RURAL COMMUNITY**

**POPULAR PERFORMANCE AND ADULT EDUCATION**

As I made plays with students and discovered the educative potential of the playmaking process, I became interested in extending the work into a wider field. As discussed with reference to the work of Ross Kidd and others, popular theatre is a powerful tool for education and is utilised in adult education programmes world-wide for community development and for conscientization<sup>1</sup>. There are a range of approaches to the work in the field of educational drama, some of which are broadly analogous to my approach with the students at the University of Zululand as outlined in the previous chapters. While some popular theatre projects involve professionals

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presenting informative and entertaining plays that encourage audience participation in a similar vein to T.I.E. programmes, others adopt a more learner-centred approach in that the community is encouraged to make its own plays. I was interested in the latter approach because although it would have been easier to devise a production and take it 'on tour, in rural communities as we did to some extent with Lolo Bambo Lolo, I thought a playmaking project that emerged out of the community itself would ultimately have more educational potential. I noted Kidd's comments in this connection and decided to attempt a participatory approach.<sup>2</sup>

The term 'Participatory research' is fashionable in certain quarters but as Shirley Walters notes there are differences among those involved, in participatory research depending on their different ideological frameworks.<sup>3</sup> All are working towards some form of social change; for some this means dialogue and adjustment leading to social reform.<sup>4</sup> One group stresses the importance of the subjective experience of the work involved, while the historical materialists emphasize that through the research process the mental-manual division of labour must be consciously broken down<sup>5</sup>. This means direct involvement and consultation with the participants at all stages of the research programme. A participatory approach is in line with progressivist trends in formal education in that the participants are encouraged to value their own experience as a source of knowledge. Here again the facilitator has to decide on how much knowledge to introduce from the 'outside' resulting in a dialectical interplay between central imposition and local determination of the form and content of the play<sup>6</sup>. Popular theatre programmes are usually designed for marginalised or oppressed groups with the intention of developing or conscientizing the participants. As previously mentioned, 'development' is a difficult concept and it may involve an education for adjustment to a particular social order or developing a critical class-consciousness<sup>7</sup>. In his discussion of Laedza Batanani Kidd points out that in this project the concept of social change was confined by a priority-setting exercise in which only problems which required a local response rather than a government solution were tackled in the plays. The aim was to encourage the community through dramatisation and discussion to develop a deeper awareness of these problems and to initiate a commitment to take both individual and collective action<sup>8</sup>. In contrast to this, *campesino* and *barrio* theatre is strategically linked to a process of education, politicisation, movement -

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building and struggle undertaken by a *barrio* organisation<sup>9</sup>. It gears its activities to the needs of the *barrio* organisation rather than operating independently.

The use of popular theatre as a vehicle for education in local-level community development seems an especially appropriate project for the University of Zululand to undertake, situated as it is in the centre of a rural area. I motivated for the establishment of a theatre company attached to the Department of Speech and Drama that would operate in the fields of both adult education and formal education in schools<sup>10</sup>. I suggested that the company undertake a range of different kinds of work within the framework of educational drama. I was provided with funds to undertake a pilot project and research the potential of educational drama in schools and in the local community. The following is an account of the research I undertook in a local community.

## **BEHIND THE FIRST STEP**

The intention behind the pilot project I had in mind was to focus on investigating the potential of playmaking among adults in a rural community for identifying problems, discussing and analysing information and deciding on how the information would be best utilized. In short, the intention was to discover whether co-operative enquiry through playmaking is possible. In the preface to their book Improvisation, John Hodgson and Ernest Richards claim that “improvising is as natural as talking or moving” and I wanted to find out if this were true of an adult community that had no previous experience of acting-out as a deliberate exercise to generate discussion<sup>11</sup>. I employed a former student of mine, to undertake this research with me. As we had to start from scratch and find a group to work with, I thought it important to have someone work on the project full-time and this was impossible for me because of my teaching commitment at the University. Also I have a very limited command of Zulu, especially of speaking myself, and for this project it was essential for at least one researcher to be fluent in Zulu. Finally, I wanted to set up a situation where the facilitator of the playmaking process would not be viewed as a teacher or figure of authority. Mrs. Vicki Doësebs, who undertook the research was quickly able to

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establish a relationship of trust with a local group that it would have been difficult if not impossible for me as a white 'outsider' to achieve. While Vicki was attempting to find a group to work with I consulted with her on a weekly basis and once the project was underway I visited the community frequently to observe the playmaking process, interview the participants and make myself known in the community.

Mrs. Vicki Doësebs, neé Kapueja, grew up at KwaDlangezwa and was educated at the Inanda Seminary. She is a graduate from the University of Zululand with a Bachelor of Arts degree with Speech and Drama and English as her majors. She completed her degree the year before we embarked on making Lolo Bambo Lolo but had actively taken part in a similar playmaking project. She met her husband, who is from Namibia, at the University of Zululand where he is studying law. Vicki's father is also originally from Namibia and he met her mother who is of Zulu origin and from Camperdown at the Dorothea Faith Mission in Pretoria where both studied for four years to become missionaries. They settled in KwaDlangezwa in Zululand in 1954 where they have remained as independent missionaries. They run a number of community projects including a pre-school and day care centre and are funded on an ad hoc basis by organisations such as World Vision. The mission is not affiliated to any particular denomination and for Mr. and Mrs. Kapueja, the large family they maintain and the children who attend the pre-school and day care centre and receive a daily meal -the Lord provides. According to Mr. Kapueja they have lived by faith all their lives and he is serenely sure that they will continue to receive support for their valuable work. At the time of the research project, Vicki, her husband and her baby son were living with her parents because as Ernst Doësebs was a student and was being supported by Vicki their circumstances did not allow for independent accommodation. Vicki and her family speak English and Zulu and several other languages fluently but as Ernst is not Zulu- speaking, she and Ernst tend to speak English to each other.

Our first task was to find a suitable group to work with and because of financial constraints the project had to be completed within three months. Vicki suggested that we find a group in the area where she lived because this would solve transport and accommodation problems. I suggested that she begin by interviewing people in the



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community to discover whether or not they would be interested in taking part in an educational drama programme. While she worked on the feasibility of undertaking the project she planned to discover some general perceptions about drama and about education. We planned that the final stage of the project would be for students from the University to attend a performance of the play along with the rest of the community. We hoped that the experience of the performance would facilitate discussion between students and the local people.

Vicki and I discussed our aims in this project which were to find out whether it is possible to unearth deepseated problems and goals in a marginalised group through the processes of playmaking. In other words, could we undertake research that would be genuinely participatory and learn together with a group that do not normally publicly express their fears and difficulties? Furthermore, would taking part in a playmaking project enhance the group's sense of their own identity, self-confidence and class consciousness? The particular strength of drama is in its capacity to portray conflict which lends itself to a dialectical reading of the world revealing underlying relationships and structures which influence social situations. Would an unskilled group assisted by a facilitator be able to construct series of dramatized situations that articulate the contradictions of society? Would the group be able to use the language of drama to share their problems with an audience? Finally, what would the audience gain from watching the play and from the entire theatre experience? The primary goal was to find out whether any of these aims could be put into practice under local conditions.

## **INITIAL PHASE OF THE PROJECT**

### **Setting the Rural Scene**

Vicki began work in KwaDlangezwa which is a semi-rural area situated in KwaZulu along the east coast about sixteen kilometers south of Empangeni. Except for the University of Zululand which is autonomous, the area is under the control of Chief John Makwanazi. It is a fertile area with a high rainfall and the inhabitants are involved in subsistence farming. The vegetable gardens and orchards are tended by the women who are generally industrious and feed their families from their gardens

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and the sale of surplus produce and handcrafts at the roadside markets. Some of the men work in the vicinity and others are migrant labourers. The area conforms with what is now described as an 'underdeveloped' area because the people rely on subsistence farming, the sale of a small surplus and to some extent wage- labour <sup>12</sup>. In most cases these rural areas are deserted by those who have means to improve their situation and are populated by the women who work the farms, the elderly and the very young. Young men and women tend to move to urban areas where there are increased educational and job opportunities.

The mode of production in the KwaDlangezwa community bears out the proposition that migrant workers and particularly their families are supported by subsistence farming in rural areas. The level of production from subsistence farming is insufficient to meet all the family's needs which encourages wage labour, but sufficient to support the women and children under favourable climatic conditions. The migrant labour system exploits the traditional village economy, as in the Zulu way, women are conventionally tied to homestead and farming. They represent the core of the labour force involved in subsistence farming. As the migrant labour system and subsequent homeland policy were developed it became crucially important to keep these women in the rural areas and this was attempted through influx control. It is the women who keep the economy of the rural community going and who are expected among other things to raise the children and reabsorb the labour force when the men are ill, old or rejected from the advanced economic sector. This is not to argue that all women in this area are self supporting but that the cheap labour hypothesis is born out by the way of life of the women who eventually became involved in the playmaking project.

Even though this is the case there is no simple correspondence between the cheap labour power thesis and the rural community of KwaDlangezwa. The proximity of the University of Zululand that employs a large labour force means that there are job opportunities in the vicinity and a number of men live at home. However, a brief description of the circumstances of the women who took part in the play indicates their self sufficiency and the dependence of the family on their labour. Gogo is widowed, lives with her six school-going grandchildren and supports them from her

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garden, the sale of produce, her pension and money supplied from a daughter who lives and works in Durban. Two of the women are 'married' to migrant workers, two to workers employed by the University and one to a worker employed by the Port Durnford Forestry<sup>13</sup>. All of these women keep gardens and orchards and sell surplus produce and handcrafts at the roadside market which is run by women. As non-denominational missionaries Mr. and Mrs. Kapueja provide a focal point in the community. During the day, Mrs. Kapueja runs the Ekucathuleni Pre-school and Day Care Centre in a building adjacent to her home and in the afternoons and over the weekends she uses the building for the activities of the Hlengisizwe Organisation, a homecrafts club.

Although these women are breadwinners or at the very least provide a substantial amount of the family's income they are firmly trapped in conventional attitudes of deference and respect for men. They do not leave their homes without permission, they care for the children, undertake all the household work including collecting water and firewood and care for their gardens without help from the men. It seems that most of these women get some financial support from their men but it is not consistent and the men do not feel it necessary to make joint decisions about how money should be spent or to help with 'women's work'. However, as the play progressed we discovered that there is considerable latent resistance to male domination among these women and that some of them, for example Gogo, took the opportunity offered by circumstances to become independent of men and did not hesitate to advise other women to do likewise.

Because of the demand for education from university employees there are a number of schools in this area and most of the children attend school. School fees required at the beginning of each year vary and in some cases I was told that the initial fee is R14 per child and R10 for a child who is already enrolled and other informants claimed that fees are sometimes as high as R50 for admission to high schools. Children who do not wear uniforms are not allowed to continue attending school. During 1984 and 1985 there was an upsurge of school boycotts in the area and many schools were damaged, burnt and closed down.

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## **Finding a Group**

Vicki started the project by interviewing people in and around her home about their views of education and the educative potential of drama. She discovered that all the women that she interviewed considered education a 'good thing' and wanted education for their children. They expressed interest in the idea of a playmaking project but did not make connections between 'education', 'drama' and 'theatre'. Most expressed an idea of the theatre that was limited to school plays, church sketches and radio plays and these were perceived as entertainment. As one of our main concerns was that the work should be genuinely participatory and that Vicki should act as a catalyst for making a play rather than writing one herself and then finding a group to perform it, it was essential to set up a workshop situation followed by rehearsals. In order to achieve this we needed a group that would commit themselves to this project and Vicki's early work was an attempt to form or discover such a group. She found a willing collaborator in an elderly woman, Gogo Qulo<sup>14</sup>. She spent a good deal of time with Gogo Qulo and seemed very intrigued with her ideas and her vast store of knowledge of the Zulu way of life. It seemed to me that although Vicki and Gogo lived near each other, Vicki had not previously had the time or the inclination to talk to her at length about her views. Gogo was very enthusiastic about an educational drama project, she wanted to take part herself and she remained a central figure in the project right up to its conclusion.

In this phase of the project Vicki made contact with a group of women who run a small market on the side of the road. They sell farm produce that they have grown or purchased and mats, baskets and other craftwork to passersby. There are numerous roadside markets in this area and this appears to be one of the smaller and less lucrative markets. Vicki spent time with these women discussing the possibility of making a play. Although they seemed very receptive to her ideas they were unable to get together to work on the play as they spent all their time at the market place when it was quiet but this was unsatisfactory and she became very frustrated because we seemed to be making no progress. In her own words:

The problem was just the matter of time. The women were keen to work with me but at the same time they were interested in getting money from passing cars. Whenever a car

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passed on the road, their whole attention would be on that car and if it happened to stop, they would all chase the car to sell their goods. When they came back to resume their places they would be speaking a totally different language from what we had been talking about. Some would be insulting the 'poor' white man who did not buy from all of them, others complained about those blacks who stopped and did not buy because they did not have money. This type of situation needs a lot of patience and understanding.

Vicki gave up attempts to make a play with this group and it began to look as though we were not going to be able to achieve our first objective of finding a group to work with. She attempted some work with children after school but this was also unsatisfactory and she became very despondent but also determined not to give up on the project. Another concern was finding a job after the project was complete because as she was supporting her husband and a baby son.

### **Insika Candle Maker's Club**

When Vicki was utterly at a loss about the project, Gogo suggested that she attend a meeting at the Insika Candle Maker's Club that was being held in her mother's home. This club is a branch of the Hlengisizwe Organisation and was formed with the express intent of making and saving money for school money expenses. All the proceeds from the sale of candles are kept in a savings account and drawn at the beginning of each year to meet the costs of uniforms, school fees and until recently school books <sup>15</sup>. Gogo had observed that Vicki had run into difficulties with her project and she arranged for her to speak at the next club meeting.

In her report about how she made contact with the group, Vicki wrote as follows

This group of women belongs to a community project called the Insika Rural Development Association, They are a club that makes candles. I met them when they came to my parents' place to attend a meeting. This happened after I had Visited a number of neighbours trying to get them together for a play but all in vain, An old woman (Gogo Qulo) who happens to be my neighbour suggested that I wait for this meeting and she would ask the people> to give me time to speak to them. When the meeting was still on she called me to come in because the women realized that it was getting late.

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By this stage of the project Vicki was working under pressure because she wanted to complete the project before she took on a teaching post she has been offered which meant she would be moving out of the area and would be unable to complete the work even after hours. After months of patient discussion about making a play, she reported a very different approach when she began work with this group:

There was not time to explain anything to the people except for asking their permission to use them. I say 'use' because that is how I literally asked them. They were quite suspicious. Nobody said a thing until I insisted they reply. They agreed but one of them said "Don't kill us!" this was quite genuine because these people had no idea what was going on except for three who were present that I had interviewed before.

When I was given an okay sign, I immediately divided the women into groups and gave them different roles to play. Tension was building up. I did not know what I was doing, I am not even sure if this tension was from within or without, I need a breakthrough. I demanded that they talked or rather quarrelled. I left them for about two minutes. What made me come back into the room was the big laughter that I never expected. That was the breakthrough, I got what I wanted. They immediately after took their *own* roles and it was after this piece of drama that I explained what I was doing, They understood it quite well and they suggested that we meet again on Monday. They also wanted to know who would continue with what they had started after I left. I had no ready answer but I did assure them that something would be done. Before they left they promised to bring another member who would be very much interested in this kind of thing.

In retrospect, Vicki commented on some of her feelings while she was involved in initiating the project:

I began compiling this report after having gone through a very difficult time. This difficulty and confusion, I presume, was only experienced by me and not by the group of women I was working with. I had such a short time to work with them because I could not continue with the previous group. 'I did not know of any easier way of introducing drama to them and most of them were people that I had not even interviewed. I was really working against time. I had to do some sort, of improvisation with a beginning and an end. It was very difficult to think of an easier way because I knew how I had gone through it myself as a student. If I were like this group, I

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suppose, and innocent', of an understanding of drama, I should not have bothered that much

In a subsequent discussion of this episode Vicki explained that to begin with the women were nervous about becoming involved in acting-out. The comment "Don't kill us!" jokingly expressed real fear and the atmosphere in the room was tense. Vicki said that the group was afraid that they would be made to look foolish by an educated person. She was inspired to ask the group to 'quarrel' while she left the room. In this fictional situation the tension was released in a way that carried the work forward. The women found that they enjoyed the moment of role play and were prepared to continue with the idea. I pointed out to Vicki that she had successfully drawn on drama's capacity to depict conflict. Hers was an unusual approach to introducing improvisation but given the constraints of time and the situation she found herself in, Vicki 'improvised' successfully herself 'by responding sensitively to special and difficult circumstances. If she had been unable to win the confidence of the group and persuade them to engage in acting-out, it is unlikely that she would have been given another opportunity. Under this pressure she imaginatively found a solution to her problem. This connects with her own training in improvisation and I was pleased to note how she 'thought on her feet' when required to do so.

After this breakthrough Vicki was excited about the prospects of making a play and she set about preparing the workshops and rehearsals.

## **THE HEURISTIC FUNCTION IN PLAYMAICING**

The Insika Candle Maker's Club was specifically formed with the practical intention of saving money for school expenses. This is an indication of the value placed on education by this group of women and from the outset educational matters were a major point of discussion, Vicki reported that education is also a source of concern. During the first playmaking session there was a debate about the problems of school boycotts, damage to school property and children's attitudes towards schooling. She felt that what emerged was the women's sense that they are victims of the situation in

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that they are not reaping the benefits for their efforts in raising money to send their children to school.

Some attitudes to men emerged in an interesting way while the play was being workshopped. In an early improvisation, the women enacted a young girl begging her father for money to go to school. One of the women took the role of the girl's father. He indicated that he did not want his daughter to go to school because he claimed that educated women did not settle down, work hard and care for their parents in their old age. Vicki narrated some of the improvisation for me in a subsequent discussion of her progress with the work:

When the girl began to insist on going to school, her father said, "No I'm not going to educate you because you waste my money. After a while you will bring home a man who will take you away and all my money will be wasted. So the only people I can educate are my boys and not you". So the girl explained to her father how useless boys can be today. The moment they go out to work they forget about their parents. She even said, "Even if I get a man to marry - I'll still think of you - even if he does not want me to - I'll still give to you - I'll always think of my parents whereas boys forget. Even if I'm trying to make my brother aware that his parents need help - he'll say - I've got enough children of my own - I've got a wife - yet he may be Wasting that money drinking and doing other things". But the father still did not understand.

Gogo became involved in role in the debate and Vicki expressed here surprise at how vehemently Gogo demanded education for her 'granddaughter'. This group of women has a fervent belief in the value of education for their children but the play questioned the disappointing results of the sacrifices they made to send their children to school <sup>16</sup>.

In a later workshop the women decided that there would be no men in their play and they constructed a situation in which the girl wanting to go to school lived with her widowed mother and grandmother. Vicki and I discussed the 'disappearance' of the man who had been a central figure in the first improvisation. My initial reaction was that the woman playing the part of a man had felt uncomfortable in a male role and



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that this was the reason why the play was reconstructed. But Vicki had a different idea:

13. Vicki: I don't think they dropped the role of the man because they didn't want to play the role of a man. At first they did the role and then later they decided that a man - you see these women are breadwinners... Even if the man is there he is not doing much for the family. Or the man is just absent, he is not staying with them or he stays with someone else. Maybe the man buys some mealie meal and maybe beans and sometimes sugar and tea but before the end of the month these things will be out and the women will get everything. Some of the men work but even if they are working they don't do much.

14. Lynn: What do they do with their money?

**Vicki: I don't know. The women sell grassmats and some fruits because they have got orchards. So long as the men come in the afternoons and there's food its okay. Some of the men can't get work anymore and another thing is that sometimes the husband is away working, maybe in Durban and he only comes home maybe once or twice a year.**

15. Lynn: But you told me that men are still in charge since the women can't go out without permission?

16. Vicki: Yes. that's what happens. It happens everywhere. So I think that's why they dropped the men from the play.

Lynn: You mean they consciously decided that they didn't need a man in their play?

Vicki: Yes - they were actually showing that this child is supported only by her mother and grandmother. it is these two only who are sending her to school.

Vicki's analysis suggests that the women were working out their resentment towards men who do not support their families by omitting men from the play. This was not

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openly indicated by developing a situation that showed a man neglecting his responsibilities but by developing a family controlled by women. In the play the women are widows and the male figure is 'killed off'. In a conservative community of this sort open criticism of men by women is unusual and the form of the play indicates that resentment is internalized rather than openly expressed. However, in the final part of the play there was an open expression of dissatisfaction with the situation.

**The final part of the play is a parent's meeting at a school. When this part was first improvised it was done after all the problems the women encountered had been enacted. The participants had become involved in the play and gave the impression that they felt themselves realistically in situation. Each woman spoke convincingly at the 'parent's meeting' making her point about the damage to the school that had been burnt by some of the children. One spontaneous outburst appears to support Vicki's analysis about the relations between the men and women:**

Woman: Where are all the men? Does this mean we women must do everything on our own? Carry out decisions, repair the schools, pay school fees?

Gogo: My child I have brought up a number of children without a single hand of a man. Today my hair is white and I have never seen a man prepared to take responsibility. All they can do well is to bring children into this world. After that forget about them

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Gogo's advice is suggestive of a practical feminism that makes the most of opportunities to become independent. It also indicates a tendency to accept the overall situation without attempting to change things or discover the causes for the cleavage between men and women. However, there is an attempt to change things for the next generation. Vicki herself is an example of a member of the younger generation who has responded to her education and as a result she has a heightened awareness of herself as a woman and as a member of a divided society. She is deeply concerned about these cleavages and she became involved in a heated debate with some of the younger women about their position. She pointed out that her husband who is educated helps with household chores and even washes the baby's nappies. This was

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greeted with disbelief and Gogo brushed the debate aside as the grumblings of young women who do not yet know the 'way of the world'

Although the women taking part in the playmaking project are self-sufficient they still need permission to take part from the men who are living at home. This is an indication of their willingness to submit to established customs even though presumably if they took to making their own decisions and to going out the men would eventually accept this. To begin with there would undoubtedly be unpleasant repercussions and possibly the women do not consider the confrontation worthwhile or even morally acceptable. Apparently the men were quite willing for their wives to take part in an educational project because of the value attributed to education. However, it was not easy for the women to get away from home as they had to complete their chores and then wash and change before attending rehearsals. They all waited for each other at a central point and then arrived together, often an hour or more, after the pre-arranged time and there were occasions when they did not turn up at all. For the final performance one of the women had to be fetched in a car because she had not turned up. Although the women seemed excited and interested by the project it was definitely relegated to a place of far less importance than daily chores. Gogo was an exception and possibly because she is independent and does not have a man to care for she was able to come and go as she pleased and was always the first to turn up for rehearsals.

### **A Participatory Approach**

After the initial improvisation session, Vicki organized a series of workshops in order to make a play. She described how she set up the workshops:

When they came I gave them time to discuss because I said I'm not going to be the one who is going to tell you what to do. You are going to suggest. You know what your problems are and what you want to do because the idea of this work is that we should solve the problems that we are experiencing in our community. So the women sat and discussed and later they said okay we've got an idea about a play on education. They started taking roles. A young woman playing Nozilingo - a girl involved in school boycotts and riots who left the school but wanted to return. There was Gogo again who played the paternal grandmother.

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Everyone seemed a bit tense so I organised some warm-ups. We didn't do the same things as we did in drama classes but I showed them some exercises that drama students do just to help everyone relax. I said the exercises would help the voice and the body and actually activate the person. Everyone tried to do the warm-ups except my mother. I laughed because she was not willing. But they knew what they wanted to do. They suggested the play and they suggested the characters.

I asked Vicki how easy it was for the women to assume roles. She replied that it seemed very easy because the ideas that were being expressed in role were totally familiar as were the characters that were portrayed. The women were enacting what they had observed and experienced. I was interested in the actual technique of role play and I asked about this. Vicki said that although most of the women had never been involved in this type of activity before they had no difficulty with the concept of assuming roles. She pointed out that some of the women seemed to enjoy role playing more than others and that at the initial meeting some had been too shy to take part. At this meeting there had been a discussion about the concept of role play and mention was made of a woman who was absent but whom everyone agreed would enjoy 'acting'. Gogo was particularly interested in the concept and went beyond the play to the development of character in the part she portrayed. Although she played an old woman she assumed the character of a woman much older than herself, who had lost her teeth and was unable to speak clearly, who could only walk with a stick and was bent double. She played this role with relish much to the amusement of the other women who were more conservative in their attempts at creating character. In the play there is a shebeen scene which shows the corruption of school children who waste their parent's money on drink and in this scene there were some very convincing portrayals of drunken behaviour by some of the women who were conservative at first but later warmed up as the work went on and as they discovered a sense of enjoyment in the process of acting-out.

Vicki was convinced that the women were expressing their own feelings and attitudes as they shaped the play. She attempted to stay in the background and facilitate the process without imposing her own ideas. She noted:

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The women decided to deal with educational problems. They were expressing their own feelings about boycotts and riots in schools. It was clear that they felt that they were the victims of these riots in the end. As part of the play making we stopped for discussion and questions. From the talk I gathered that the women were dealing with actual experiences. The women were expressing feelings that they had in reality through the medium of the play.

Important themes that were beginning to emerge were the value of education for enhanced job opportunities and improved status and the inability of parents to control their children. In the final version of the play a young woman exploits her mother and her grandmother's belief in the importance of education in order to take her grandmother's pension to buy liquor. She promises that she will become a qualified nurse thus raising their hopes of improved status and financial security. They are duped by their own child who has no intention of returning to school.

In an interview that I had with Gogo, I asked her about the name of the play in order to elicit her response to the play-making experience. She suggested *ukhiphukwazi*, literally translated as 'bringing out knowing'. She said the play is about 'what the people know'. I was delighted with this title and felt that it confirmed Vicki's observation that the women were using the play as a means of working through their ideas about education.

## **UKHIPHUKWAZI: THE PROJECT**

### **The Communicative Function in Playmaking**

The play was rehearsed in the schoolroom that had been built to accommodate Mrs. Kapueja's pre-school classes<sup>18</sup>. The use of space was very straightforward with one end of the room set aside for the performance and benches arranged for the audience. The inevitable problem of establishing an appropriate set and properties was very simply dealt with. Furniture and stage properties that could easily be provided were used and the rest left to the imagination. The women had a sense of the importance of realism and were not inclined to mime simple properties. During one of the workshops when the shebeen scene was being rehearsed there were three glasses on a table and some beer bottles to indicate the set. When a fourth person came in there

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was no glass for her to use and so rather than mime that she was drinking (a strategy students usually resort to) she took the shebeen owner's glass saying "It's your job to serve the drinks not drink them".

The adoption of the convention of realism to depict ideas was consistently used throughout the play. All information was conveyed and ideas explored through dialogue between characters (there was no direct address to the audience in the form of narration, song or dance). There was careful observation and use of appropriate kinesic, proxemic, vestimentary and linguistic codes. In some cases these overrode theatrical subcodes, for example, in the first scene that took place inside a room, everyone sat on mats throughout although it was difficult for the audience to see the performers. Chairs were introduced as iconic sign-vehicles only for scenes in the school where chairs are conventionally used. In the scene that depicted a meeting all the details such as the opening prayer, reading and taking of minutes and correct modes of address to the chairperson were faithfully reproduced. The audience did not seem bored by this attention to detail but delighted by the accuracy with which a meeting was simulated although at this point they were receiving no information that advanced the plot.

The spoken text of the play was in Zulu and in the first scenes there was a heightened awareness of the way language itself is used. This was related particularly to concepts of respect and politeness; concepts that are highly valued by Zulu tradition. The schoolgirl, Nozilingo, used very disrespectful language when addressing her mother, "Hey *Siluka*" and also the older women in the shebeen, "Hey girls". When she was out of earshot the women commented on her lack of respect:

Children of today. Mow can she call us 'girls'. We! Mfo ka  
Dlamini, I will be buried the day my daughter calls me 'girl'

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They noted that the reason for the lack of respect is the breakdown of customs and a sense of the proper relationship between older and younger people:

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*Kodwa nathi sesaphuza nezingane zethu* (We are drinking with our own children). What else do you expect?<sup>20</sup>

The abbreviated translation of the play that appears in the appendix does not convey the way language was used to depict character or a sense of situation. Gogo used a style of language that differed from the language used by the younger women. She made considerable use of proverbs and idioms and spoke in a way that indicated her pride in her command of language. She spoke with the voice of authority - a Zulu matriarch - and compelled respect for her ideas. She achieved this in spite of her comic use of a lisp (to indicate no teeth) which was a remarkable acting feat. Nozilingo made constant use of slang and 'tsotsi taal' and her grandmother and mother reprimanded her for poor use of language. In attempting to translate the play and recover the text from memory, Vicki was very aware of the different registers that were being used. For this reason she left a range of comments and exclamations in the original Zulu to try and indicate the sensitivity that the women displayed to language usage. The scenes between the schoolteachers were actually played in English by Mrs. Kapueja and one of the other women who is fluent in English to indicate their educated status. The genuine observation of language interactions gave the play a sense of authenticity that is not suggested by the abbreviated English translation.

The tendency towards realism and the use of dialogue to convey narrative structure was strikingly western in form. I asked about the possible influences on the women's idea of the theatre. None of them had ever seen a play in a proscenium or any other kind of theatre but all had witnessed sketches that were presented in various churches at Easter and Christmas and all were avid listeners of radio plays. The enactment of nativity and Easter scenes is popular in some churches and generally imitative of western presentations of this sort. Vicki referred to these sketches as '*Imidlalo*' saying that they were usually put together without rehearsal as part of a church service. She preferred 'drama' for her work to make a distinction between the church sketches and the playmaking process. In the church sketches there is no exploration of ideas - they represent a particular view of history. The costumes depict Jewish characters of 4A.D. and supernatural beings as they were understood in Medieval Europe. The angels, for example, are dressed in white with wings and tinsel.

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The influence of radio plays seems very strong. All the women own a radio and Gogo is a particularly avid listener. When I enquired about the possible influence of a radio plays on the work, one of the women immediately launched into telling the story of a radio play. In these plays shebeen scenes are common but I thought the shebeen scene too well observed to have been merely a reproduction of a scene from a radio play. It seems to me that the play the women made was a vehicle for their conscious ideas but that it was unconsciously shaped by western perceptions of the theatre and thus by western modes of thought. Gogo had taken part in traditional Zulu rituals as a young woman but the ritual element was not evident in the play which was static and distanced from the audience. By this I mean there was very little movement, the characters tended to sit in the same place throughout and, there was no direct address to the audience.

### **The Performance and the Audience**

The play was performed in the schoolroom on the afternoon of a public holiday and I took a group of university students to the production. When we arrived the Kapuejas were hospitable and provided cakes and cold drinks before the performance. We waited several hours for the performance to begin because the cast were slow to turn up. One of the students entertained a large group of children who had gathered with songs and games. The students seemed to enjoy the situation and they chatted to the local people as they arrived and helped with serving the cool drinks and cakes. The atmosphere was congenial and the students commented on the sense of community and the friendliness of the local residents. One of the students who live in an urban 'township' was touched by the lack of suspicion and trust of strangers shown by the local inhabitants. He also commented on the acceptance of me - a white person - and indicated that I would not be so easily welcomed in the township where he lives. The play seemed to evolve out of the gathering of the local community and without any special signals the cast took up their position in front of the audience and the performance began.

The audience watched attentively as the women's ideas about education were depicted through the dialogue and characterisation. The irresponsibility of the young girl, Nozilingo, was established at the outset by the way she sat around carelessly doing



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nothing while her mother worked at making baskets. The play revolved around the theme of the greed and lack of purpose of young people. Nozilingo was shown deliberately exploiting her grandmother's concern for her education by claiming that she needed money for school, then taking her grandmother's pension and squandering it in a shebeen. Later in the play she was reported as having behaved destructively and being party to damage to school property. She was given a second chance by very sympathetically portrayed teachers and the play ended with a meeting in which the parents and teachers discussed ways of repairing damage that had been done to the school.

Money was a central concern in the play and was foregrounded in the opening scenes, In the first scene Gogo was asked for her pension money which was kept locked away. She built suspense by pretending to have lost the key and then produced the money tied up in a handkerchief. The little bundle became the focus of attention as it was counted and Nozilingo greedily took everything she could get. In the shebeen scene the money was poured onto the table where it was again the focus of attention as it was spent on liquor. In the final scenes the problem of raising money to repair the school was the main purpose of the meeting. It was clear that hard earned money was a central concern in the play and that there was a strong feeling that young people do not appreciate the sacrifices made by their parents to pay for their education in the hope that they will have a better life.

In a discussion, that I had with the university students after the performance, many of them expressed dismay at the image of students presented by this rural community. During the performance their attention was captured by the narrative line as was the whole community's. Some noisy small children were quickly removed from the room and the audience laughed and 'clapped to indicate their appreciation of the women's efforts. I was impressed by the unselfconscious way in which the women took their roles and it was only Gogo who started playing for laughs as the audience responded. The other women took the work completely seriously and held their roles throughout the performance. They spoke out clearly and confidently and held the audience's attention in spite of a very static structure. The university students were concerned that the women seemed so disillusioned with young people and after the performance

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made an effort to show, through polite comments about the play, expressions of appreciation and general interest that not all young people are as degenerate as Nozilingo. This was a spontaneous reaction to the warmth and hospitality shown by the community and it was only later in discussion that the depth of their dismay at the image that came across of their behaviour and the reasons for it were disclosed.

In the discussion with the women immediately after the play the students did not attempt to defend the behaviour of young people or tackle the women's perception. All their comments were confined to the way the play was presented and to expressions of appreciation and gratitude. My impression was that the students had an overwhelming need to show themselves as polite and concerned young people and that penetrating questions would have seemed like 'bad manners'. At the end of the afternoon, Mrs. Kapueja made a moving speech thanking everyone for coming and especially commenting on the fact that for the first time educated people' had shown an interest in the community's ideas. She said that this was especially appreciated and she thanked us for providing an opportunity for this to take place.

### **Stop Nonsense**

That the students were moved by Ukhiphukwazi was evident in a campus theatre play that was made subsequent to their attendance at this performance. This play depicted campus life and the students began by focussing attention on the image they presented to other communities. Unlike the women in the Candle Maker's Club who tended to portray themselves in sympathetic roles-as the hardworking parents and kind teachers - the students became involved in self critical analysis. One of the ideas explored in the play was the attitude of students towards uneducated people. 'Stop Nonsense is the name of a shebeen just outside the campus and in a shebeen scene the elitist attitude of students drew furious comment from one of the workers:

*Sfebe!* Is this your shebeen or ours? Is this the way you talk to your elders? Is that what you are taught at the University? Is this the kind of freedom you are always chanting for? Freedom to press other people? Just look at these people. They're ordinary people like yourselves. Yet you label them *dabukas*. If you don't change your attitude and show them respect you will no longer be welcome here.

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As a fight develops the play ends with direct address to the audience “Stop, stop this nonsense!” and a song:

Stop this nonsense  
Give up brutality  
Give up hostility  
Tribalism is out  
Racism is out  
It makes no sense

This shebeen scene compares in an interesting way with the shebeen scene in Ukhiphukwazi. In both scenes students were shown drinking with working class people and in both cases the students had no respect for their elders. However, in Stop Nonsense this attitude resulted in friction and a fight while in Ukhiphukwazi the older women simply exploited the student and enjoyed her money. This could be because the Stop Nonsense scene was played predominantly by men who are more inclined to resort to violent solutions to problems than women who are more inclined to exploit a situation to their own advantage. The Stop Nonsense scene was far more analytical than the Ukhiphukwazi scene because of the students’ experience in dramatising analysis and moving beyond realism into commentary on the action.

## **AN EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT**

The pilot project showed, that under certain conditions, it is possible to make use of processes of improvisation and discussion to identify problems and work towards solving them. The conditions are that there must be an identifiable group that can be persuaded to attempt the work because they see some value in giving up their time and a facilitator that the group trust. Vicki was unable to motivate the roadside traders into giving up time to work on playmaking because they could see no ultimate value in the work. When she was working with this group we discussed the possibility of putting on the play in order to raise money to buy materials for a shelter, which the women desperately needed, but this aim seemed to run counter to our aim of using drama to initiate critical thinking. If the play was put on simply to raise money all efforts would be to make it as entertaining as possible and the whole question of performance skills would become more crucial than consciousness raising. The

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women who belonged to the Candle Maker's Club had already identified one of their major concerns - to find the money required for their children's education - and were therefore interested in an educational project. As the play developed one of the main aims emerged as communicating to young people and students from the University that parents make sacrifices for their children's education. This was the impetus to continue with the work once the possibility of using the play in this way was recognised. The students from the University certainly picked up this message and were moved by it to be more self-critical about their elitist attitudes.

The women also enjoyed the opportunity to make use of creative abilities that they did not often exercise and there was a sense of surprise at their own capabilities. When I first mentioned the project to the University students some of them thought the rural people would be incapable of dramatising a social problem and they attending the function with a slightly condescending air. They were not only proved wrong about the women's skill in dramatisation but were also subjected to a devastating critique of their own behaviour and attitudes. One of the most striking comments made during the project was Mrs. Kapueja's comment that for the first time educated people had taken the time to listen to what ordinary people thought about a situation. Gogo's naming of the project as '*ukhiphukwazi*' also suggested a sense of pleasure in making manifest the knowledge of ordinary people.

Vicki's group was able to identify a social problem and show it through a series of dramatized situations. The central theme of the play that they made was the unreliability, negligence and disrespectfulness of young people. However, they did not attempt a deeper analysis of either this problem or the secondary theme of the lack of support for the family from men. There was no questioning of why young people of today are rebellious to the point that they burn down schools or what has caused a cleavage between the sexes in modern South Africa. The play does not explore the economic and political factors that are root causes of these problems. Instead the women tended to blame themselves for the situation. The school teacher comments on the raising of children:

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If your parents fail to teach your own children respect at home you must never expect us to do that miracle. We expect them to come to us with that respect they have been taught at home by their own parents, we can then add to that<sup>21</sup>.

One of the women is also openly criticized by the others for the way she brings up her children:

Yesterday I have seen her own child smoking in front of her. What must a teacher do then?<sup>22</sup>

The play ends with the women deciding to take all the responsibility for the damage to the school property and the suggestion that the government' might be liable is brushed aside:

If the building is washed away by a big flood or something beyond our control happens to it, the government will assist. But this is our own doing. These are our children who are destroying their own school. Who must pay?<sup>23</sup>

And the answer to this is:

Well, I think we parents must try and collect money from the candles that we are selling in order to repair the buildings<sup>24</sup>.

This response opens up a central contradiction in the play which is that the women choose to uphold a system that is itself a cause of the breakdown of family life and the rebelliousness of young people.

The central contradiction relates to the important themes of modernization versus traditionalism and common sense versus an awareness of causality. Traditional values are upheld throughout the play through the choice of sign systems; the use of linguistic, non-verbal and proxemic codes. There is concern for the preservation of the Zulu language and criticism of young people who do not speak 'properly'. The language itself embodies numerous codes of respect and it is these codes that Nozilingo does not observe. The students from the University commented on this use of language remarking that the older women in the play spoke 'Zulu 1' and not the

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more colloquial version that they are used to. Related to the use of language are all the appropriate nonverbal codes as noted above. As respect and politeness are highly valued by Zulu tradition these codes are prominent and were carefully observed by the women in relation to each other, The senior women were shown respect by the attitude and utterance of the younger women. This tendency to value respect at the expense of, for example, dissent is carried through into a modern situation, in this case the parent's meeting. When one of the younger women calls out in her enthusiasm to make her point she is admonished by the headmistress:

If you have anything to say please raise up your hand. That is part of respectfulness<sup>25</sup>.

It seemed to me that the women were enacting a common procedural tactic used at meetings to quell criticism when the dissenter was called to order for her lack of politeness. Far from receiving support from other members of the group when she attempted to raise the issue of the function of schooling, she was silenced through an attack on her personal behaviour. When she attempted to defend herself this too was ruled out as improper behaviour at a meeting. The whole question of silencing tactics is very significant in a society that pays high tribute to respectful behaviour. A strong sense of hierarchy is maintained through common sense perceptions of 'reasonable behaviour' and if opportunities for criticism and dissent are undercut by a sense of 'misbehaviour' then true dissent becomes very difficult. The women did not address this problem of 'silencing' and I think the way silencing tactics were used in the meeting scene was unconscious. What was happening in the scene was that procedures that the women had observed and experienced themselves were being played out without question. When I tried to broach the subject with some of the women in a discussion I found myself trapped in the same constraints. It was very difficult for me to appear critical of the value placed on respect without becoming disrespectful myself. I too became highly conscious of presenting myself as a respectful person in this set of circumstances. It occurred to me that a possible way of breaking through these constraints would have been to initiate further improvisations in which I took part myself as a dissenting voice. Protected by the fictional world of the play I may have been able to open up this contradiction but constraints of time prevented us taking the work further.

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In our final assessment of the project, Vicki and I concluded that it was successful in that we discovered that it is possible to utilise the processes of improvisation and discussion to uncover problems experienced in a community. We were able to understand the attitude of this group to education, to young people and to their menfolk in far more depth than if we had simply relied on, interviews and meetings in order to elicit this kind of information. As a participatory research methodology popular theatre projects have the potential to generate an in- depth learning process for both the researchers and members of the community. The entertainment value of performing in plays should not be overlooked and whereas interviews can become tedious and unproductive, playmaking gathers its own momentum and the participants become involved and want to see the work through to a satisfactory conclusion. Role play offers an opportunity to express ideas that might otherwise remain inchoate and we observed that the women who took part in the play made the most of this opportunity. This suggests that participation in a playmaking project does enhance the group's sense of identity and develops self-confidence. When I asked some members of the audience from the local community whether or not they would like to participate in a similar venture they expressed enthusiasm for the idea. When I asked their reasons for wanting to participate they said, "They all looked as though they were enjoying acting and we would like to enjoy ourselves also". The women were also able to construct a narrative line and scenario sufficiently interesting to capture and hold an audience's attention and make a point. The way money itself was foregrounded (in a bundle and then lying on the table in a pile in the shebeen) so that it gathered symbolic second order meanings was a simple but effective device that gave coherence to each scene. Clearly, this is not polished theatre, nor could it be successfully transported into another environment but in its own context this simple play was moving and the audience were deeply touched. There was no self pity in the play but the pitiful little bundle of money that was so lightly squandered, and that represented so much hardship and suffering was a powerful symbol. When it was suggested that the women start again and save their money I was moved to tears as were some of the University students who sat beside me. Community theatre projects do have the potential to build a sense of solidarity within a community and to create a situation where ideas may be successfully shared with outsiders. What the audience

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gained from watching this performance was a clear picture of how a group of women felt about an important area of their lives.

When I commented on the seeming lack of a sense of root causes of problems among the women, Vicky replied as follows:

It is true that this generation of women tend to just accept their lot. They count anything done for them by whites, colonizers, the government - however you want to refer to the ruling classes - as a blessing, whereas young educated people regard education as their right or in some cases refuse to accept it because of its poor quality. In the play the attitude of younger people in the community was not brought out and all the blame for difficulties was placed on liquor and lack of responsibility. What was not shown in the play was that as people are more exposed to western civilisation and begin to change their way of living in the townships and become literate they become more aware of their oppression. They try and solve the problem and I think drama is a way of getting at problems, but it takes time. We agreed that I would not tell these women what to do and so the play was one-sided - it is not that I am not conscious of the oppression of our present system.

Mere Vicki expressed the whole problem of the role of the facilitator in participatory research. Her feeling was that she could have deepened the perceptions of the women involved in the play if she had had more time and more experience in knowing how much to impose and how much to leave alone. Her parents are deeply Christian and their acceptance of the situation is in part due to a religious attitude that would be difficult if not dangerous to attempt to shake. The possibility of doing more harm than good by working in a community must also be taken into consideration. There is no value in undermining existing supportive structures if nothing is offered to replace them. A class consciousness cannot simply be imparted and if this is the aim of the work it must be linked to appropriate organisations which are concerned with raising consciousness and strengthening popular culture.

The value of community theatre projects for training cultural workers and prospective teachers should not be overlooked. Both Vicki and I learned a great deal from this



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project about life in the community and the use of theatre in adult education. As Vicki worked full time she, especially, gained an insight into the rewards and difficulties of participatory research. The advantage of a theatre project is that it comes to a definite conclusion with the performance. Although the performance is only one aspect of the project as a whole it does bring the efforts of those involved to a culmination which gives everyone a sense of achievement. The audience's reaction can be assessed to discover the general feeling of the community to the ideas depicted in the play. A theatrical event attracts the attention of the whole community and sets up an opportunity for the researchers from 'outside' to make themselves generally known and to win the confidence of the community to conduct further research.

In retrospect it seems as though we only reached the first stage in this work of making an abstract social problem concrete and particular in the form of a play. We were unable to deepen the work beyond the presentation of common sense perceptions. In other words we did not tackle the issue of common sense as a cultural system. The women's courageous attitude to hardship, their determination to attempt to solve their problem with their children by becoming 'better parents' and their resigned attitude to lack of support from their menfolk was very compelling. In the process of making the play these attitudes were revealed but not challenged. This indicates that the process of making the play did not really achieve an increased critical understanding of the social environment among these women. Instead it was used to communicate a belief system that was unchallenged to the younger members of the society. The women have not chosen to make another play since the project was completed because they saw no value in the playmaking process itself for exploring ideas. The perceived value lie in communicating ideas and once this opportunity fell away and without a facilitator there was no impetus to continue the work. I have returned to the community on several occasions after the project was completed and discussed ways of reviving it without a full-time catalyst. The group have expressed interest in making another play but it is clear that a great deal more work would have to be done if playmaking were to be established as one of the learning activities of the Hlengisizwe Organization along with baking and making candles.

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It seems to me that if silencing could be understood as a method of oppressing both young people and women, that progress could be made in gaining a deeper understanding of the root causes of problems. The whole process of education that the women value so highly undermines the fabric of traditional family life and it appears that new relationships will have to be worked out. The women's acceptance of the custom that they need permission to go out from the men could be challenged. The instilling of respect for a traditionally established hierarchical order no longer seems an appropriate solution to difficulties encountered in the relationship between men and women and different generations. Plays could posit new kinds of relationships and explore the problems that might then arise. However, this is always difficult because the mature members of the society do not necessarily want change or a challenge to basic assumptions and comforts. This raises ethical considerations for research of this type. What right does an outside 'facilitator' have to interfere in other people's lives? We may work from the premise that increased critical understanding of their social environment gives people an increased control over their lives and thus improves their ability to effect changes but the senior members of a hierarchy do not usually want change. The whole question of what will be achieved through engaging in playmaking as a vehicle for 'development' needs very careful consideration. It is imperative that everyone involved should be clear about what kind of 'development' is being posited.

This brings us back to the matter of the connections between community theatre projects and wider development schemes. Michael Etherton makes the important point that theatre work needs to be keyed into organisations which are concerned with raising consciousness and strengthening people's culture, rather than with acquiring and holding onto political power<sup>26</sup>. He suggests that drama may well become a key methodology for developing thought across a broad front as a basis for future collective action; but the drama group, the theatre company, the university drama department are all politically inadequate organisations<sup>27</sup>. This is the crux of the matter and the potentials and possibilities for developing adult education programmes that include drama will be taken up again in the conclusion to this dissertation.

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As far as the pilot project is concerned it is a moot point whether it would have met with the success that it did if it had not been for the fact that Vicki is well known and trusted in this area. Furthermore, she had the support of her parents who offer spiritual leadership and moral support in this community and without their backing it is doubtful whether she would have got the project off the ground. In some ways it seems surprising that she did not immediately turn to her mother to find a group to work with. My assessment is that the careful groundwork that she laid in the months of interviews and efforts to establish a group convinced the community of the seriousness of her intentions and that this set up the evening when the women were willing to improvise. They had in a subtle way been prepared for the event. Even though some of those present had not actually been interviewed the news of Vicki's activities would have filtered through the community.

We were lucky to 'discover' Gogo from the beginning. In my discussions with her I learned that as a young woman, traditional Zulu rites such as the *uNomkhubulwana* and *umemulo* ceremonies were an important feature in her life. With changing circumstances she had been cut off from this type of ritual performance. It appeared that church rituals had to some extent replaced traditional rituals. The lack of any sense of ritual in Ukhiphukwazi was a striking indication of the severance of traditional culture by processes of 'modernisation'. The play was firmly rooted in the westernized concept of radio plays. There is potential for recovering traditional performance forms through working with women like Gogo if the group can see the value of making use of developed forms and conventions to discover new ways of thinking. The difficulty with this concept is that in South Africa there is the danger of encouraging a divisive sense of ethnicity which cannot be overlooked. As Coplan points out, "the political history of 'African tradition' has made it one of the most contentious dilemmas in the development of black popular theatre"<sup>28</sup>.

However, he notes further that when the concept of 'tradition' is used to refer to expressive principles and processes rather than products then the use of historical forms is effective <sup>29</sup>. This means that the portrayal of these forms must be derived from contemporary reality. It is the interpretation of the meaning of historical forms from a contemporary perspective that is of interest rather than the recovery of

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products for their own sake. In any case it is impossible to literally recover past performance forms and the attempt to do so tends to reinforce entrenched ways of thinking instead of opening up an understanding of the way these forms functioned within the society as a means of social control.

This pilot project demonstrated the potential of popular theatre as a vehicle for education within a community or organisation. If properly introduced the processes of improvisation are accessible to most people and these processes offer a way of thinking that is challenging and innovative. Improvisation calls for a holistic approach to thinking that is rare in contemporary educational practice where very little attention is paid to the physical and effective aspects of the development of consciousness.

## CHAPTER NINE NOTES

- 1 I do not refer to the work as ‘T.I.E.’ or D.I.E.’ because these terms carry connotations of educational drama conducted in schools, it is often students who are engaged in drama courses at the tertiary level who prepare T.I.E. programmes and visit schools to promote drama and gain experience themselves in performance. Some T.I. E. specialists object to this practice arguing that T.I.E. is a Specialized field and that only trained experts should be encouraged to prepare programmes for schools. Adult education programmes that involve drama are usually referred to as ‘community theatre projects’ or even more broadly as ‘popular performing arts**

See for example, Ross Kidd, The popular performing arts, non- formal education and social change in the Third World: a bibliography and review essay, the Hague Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (Ceso) , 1982.

- 2 See Chapter 6 above, pp. 211-217.
- 3 Shirley Walters, ‘Participatory Research’, Perspectives in Education, Vol. 7, No. December 1983, p. 171. A debate on the nature of Participatory research was conducted in this volume.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid., p. 172.

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- 6 Kidd, op. cit. p. 6.  
7 See Chapter 6 above, p. 216

- 8 Kidd, op cit. p. 8.  
9 Ibid., p. 14.

**10 I presented this motivation as a research project in the Faculty of Arts in 1985. The pilot project was approved as a university research project.**

- 11 John Hodgson and Ernest Richards, Improvisation, London, Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1966, Preface.

- 12 In early 'modernisation' discourse the underdevelopment of rural areas, is ascribed to the shortage of both available capital for investment purposes and human capital by way of activated manpower to put that capital to work. To account for the existence of an advanced industrial sector side by side with a poorly developed subsistence agricultural sector it is posited that South Africa has a 'dual economy'. However, the concept of a dual economy has been incisively criticised and a variety of studies demonstrate how under the process of capital accumulation a self-sufficient peasantry was gradually destroyed through the appropriation of land, the concomitant ecological crisis and through taxation. These studies established that the reproduction of cheap migrant-labour power is the key issue to be grasped in explaining the social structures of South Africa in the 20th Century. The important insight in the 'cheap labour-power thesis' is that the dual economy concept does not stand up under rigorous analysis and that the indigenous population of South Africa has been changed from being 'undeveloped' to being deliberately 'underdeveloped'

See Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour Power in South Africa From Segregation to Apartheid', Economy and Society, Vol. 1 No 4, 1972. N. Legassick, 'South Africa Capital Accumulation and Violence', Economy and Society, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1974. There is a convergence of these writers distinct views in their joint article, N Legassick and H. Wolpe 'The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa', Review of African Political Economy, No 7, 1976 and David Webster, 'From Peasant to Proletarian: The Development v Underdevelopment Debate in Southern Africa' , Africa Perspective, 1979..

- 13 Vicki informed me that all the women involved in the play apart from Gogo and her mother are not formally married either by Christian or traditional ceremony. Some aspects of the Zulu marriage ceremony may have been observed such as the symbolic slaughter of an ox but in most cases the rituals were incomplete. This was because the full amount of *lobola* had not been paid or there was insufficient money to hold the final ceremony.
- 14 'Gogo' means grandmother in Zulu.

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- 15 School books were provided free of charge in black schools in this area from the beginning of 1987.
- 16 The influence of attitudes instilled through mission education is clear in the stress laid on the value of education. Education is connected with respectability, with status and its value in preparing children for the job market is recognised.
- 17 Ukhiphukwazi, Appendix 4, p. 1.
- 18 See Appendix .4 for an abbreviated translation of the play.
- 19 Ukhiphukwazi, Appendix 4, p. xlvii.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid., p. xlix.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., p. 1.
- 24 Ibid., p. xlix.
- 25 Ibid., p. xlvi.
- 26 Michael Etherton, The Development of African Drama London, Hutchinson and Co (Publishers) Ltd. 1982, p. 354.
- 27 Ibid.**
- 28 David Coplan, 'Dialectics of Tradition in Southern African Black Popular Theatre', Critical Arts, Vol. 4, No 3, 1987, p. 8
- 29 Sport is obviously an important way of developing the consciousness but like ritual it revolves around the inculcation of established patterns of meaning rather than setting up the exploration of meaning through movement. In army training physical discipline and training is an supremely important method of instilling an unthinking response to orders.

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE EDUCATIVE  
POTENTIAL OF PLAYMAKING**

In this dissertation I have explored the potential of theatre studies for the development of a pragmatic and relevant pedagogy for South African students and adults. It is my contention that the established approach to theatre studies in the shape of the discipline Speech and Drama is outdated and irrelevant to the present South African situation. After explaining why I hold this view in the opening chapters of this dissertation I examine the emergence of some new definitions of theatre, drama and performance. I undertook this survey of theories of performance because a methodology of theatre studies is of necessity linked to theories of performance. The development of an appropriate methodology is dependent on what is understood by 'drama', 'theatre' and performance and their function in society. In the second section of this dissertation I examined current contributions from South African scholars to a performance theory that is suited to this country's specific circumstances. Their

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contributions were connected to a larger body of theoretical work in the humanities and in the social sciences in context in order to make connections between political, economic and cultural forces. In Section 3 the development of an appropriate methodology for theatre studies was approached from a different angle. The kinds of learning processes that occur through practical involvement in drama, theatre and specifically playmaking activities were explored. These learning processes are connected to the distinctive functions in drama and theatre namely the heuristic, communicative and interpretative functions. In this concluding chapter I assess the educative potential of these functions and discuss some inherent contradictions in attempting a progressivist learner-centred approach. One of the basic premises adopted in this dissertation is that meaning is not fixed but that it is culture-bound. Culture is conceived of as a dynamic, created interrelation of semiotic signs that are learned and that are in a constant state of flux. The key question is the extent to which we can control the changes that occur. In drama and theatre we create fictional worlds and in so doing exercise the general capacity to represent, communicate and interpret experience through symbolic systems and experiment with new possibilities. This involves a constant process of negotiation and interaction with the ideas and actions of others. In other words the learning process involves the negotiation of meaning.<sup>1</sup>

## **17. PLAYMAKING: WORKSHOPS, REHEARSALS AND PERFORMANCES**

The playmaking process is multi-faceted. For those involved in the project, learning takes place on a number of levels; self- exploration, social interaction, the use of voice, body and language for self-expression, the refinement and extension of conceptual frameworks and the acquisition of knowledge of publicly developed traditions of thought. The learning process engages all the faculties and unlike in most modern educational practices, in practical drama classes there is no divorce between learning with the body and learning with the mind.

Drama teachers make use of a range of techniques to achieve holistic thinking and improvisation is one of the most significant of these.<sup>2</sup> In the making of Lolo Bambo Lolo extensive use was made of improvisation. In playmaking there is however a shift in emphasis from the use of improvisation for conceptual development to



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communicating outwards to an audience. A playmaking project exercises the full range of the educative functions in drama, Before turning to an assessment of these projects I suggest some of the fundamental reasons for claiming that improvisation for conceptual development is a significant learning technique.

### **Improvisation**

In Lolo Bambo Lolo and Ukhiphukwazi my aim was to stimulate an enquiring and critical approach to common sense perceptions and the use of improvisation was to this end rather than as a training in acting skills. Working from the hypothesis that although we are born and then socialized into cultural systems we have a basic capacity for creative reconstruction of our personal and public worlds, I sought to discover whether we can escape becoming victims of our own biography. The dialectic of social change indicates that we are formed by circumstances but simultaneously we are capable of transcending these circumstances in order to change them. We interpret our observations of facts and events through existing frameworks of ideas and values which form the web of consciousness itself. The difficulty is that if we perceive the world through existing frameworks how is the development of new perceptions generated? Raymond Williams posits that new perceptions are latent in the consciousness. He suggests that the actual alternative to received and fixed forms is ‘not silence, not the absence, the unconsciousness which bourgeois culture has mythicized but a kind of feeling and thinking which is in an embryonic stage’.<sup>3</sup> As discussed in chapter 5, he refers to these embryonic forms as “structures of feeling” and demonstrates ways in which they may be articulated in art forms.<sup>4</sup> I have adopted this hypothesis and through processes of improvisation have encouraged students to consciously articulate not only established cultural codes but inchoate and emerging forms of thought and feeling.

In the discussion of communication processes in Chapter 3, I observed that in any human communication system there are two processes of semiosis involved - between author and message and receiver and message. There is no direct correspondence between the making of meaning and the reception of meaning, There is more likely to be an overlap than a correspondence of codes which means that there is always a need for interpretation in the communication process. This suggests that meanings cannot

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be conceived of as fixed. There is a constant tension between attempts to fix meaning to facilitate communication and maintain hegemony and the individual and unstructured processes of making of meaning that Williams refers to as ‘structures of feeling’. In language usage this tension manifests itself in the production of a dictionary on the one hand in an attempt to settle the meanings of words and in the production of ‘slang’, ‘jargon’ and the contestation of the meanings of keywords on the other hand. As a result of the second process dictionaries have to be constantly updated.<sup>5</sup>

In Lolo Bambo Lolo we considered not only the ways in which women are dominated and oppressed by the cultural system into which they are born and socialized but ways in which they might discover new roles and relationships. This was difficult work because the image of the new woman was not yet formulated - it had to be discovered from within and manifested in action and interaction with others. In this work and in Ukhiphukwazi there were moments when the participants really surprised themselves in the improvisations as if there was a sense of discovery of latent thought during the experience. The spontaneous formation of a train in the second episode of Lolo Bambo Lolo to set the women free was a breakthrough on two Revels, in this particular group. At the level of the negotiations within the group of seven men and seven women, an actress was able to forge a new role for herself. At the level of selecting codes to make the meaning manifest the group discovered a set of codes to illustrate a character’s break with tradition.<sup>6</sup> In Ukhiphukwazi the decision to ‘kill off’ the men and show a family controlled by women was a breakthrough of another kind that released a spontaneous outburst in the final episode of the play, against men who do not take responsibility for their families.<sup>7</sup> There is a tension in this process between the group who are working to discover roles and codes and the facilitators. Any facilitators will inevitably strengthen certain themes by indicating approval or disapproval and both Vicki and I encouraged the groups we worked with to explore feminist issues. However, in this kind of work ‘imported’ ideas cannot be simply imposed on a group because the improvisations collapse if there is no impulse from lived experience to support them. As I have argued the impulses come from deep within the consciousness “where all that we do not know we know waits, silent, foetal and patient”.

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Another tension in the work Jay between bringing the symbolizing processes to fruition for a performance and continuing the hard search for contradictions and latent forms. Once the ideas have crystallized it is more difficult to work through contradictions and the play tends to become set. When this happens the workshop is over and rehearsals begin. However, some drama groups successfully workshop their productions after and even during performance runs in response to the audience and this seems an interesting line to pursue. For successful self-exploration the workshopping process must seem significant to the participants and it is difficult to persuade adults that the significance lies in the process itself, rather than in the product.<sup>8</sup> As discussed in Chapter 9 there must be a reason for engaging in processes of consciousness raising, particularly in the case of adult education projects, and the intention behind undertaking the work must be explicit. Even with students where the intention is ostensibly to provide an education the position adopted by teachers should be clarified.

A basic component of most improvisational work is that it is done through social interaction. As I have pointed out the negotiation of meaning in improvisation takes place on two different levels - the level of actual negotiation within the group as the participants find roles and interact with each other and the level of selecting symbolic systems in order to produce patterns of meaning. Involvement in collective action is an important facet of the educative potential of drama and the one that usually strikes students as being among the most telling aspects of the experience.

### **Group work**

The early stages of group work during the workshopping phase involve learning to trust the other members of the group and take risks in sharing ideas. This is often an exciting and stimulating phase of the work as the group learns to interact with each other and crystallize thoughts and feelings into forms that can be discussed. Often students who have nothing to say in class and especially those hampered by language difficulties become surprisingly articulate in role. When the emphasis is on fluency rather than accuracy of speech and the inhibitions of speaking up in front of the class are removed many students are forthcoming. As a first year student wryly remarked,

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“I soon realised that if I did not speak up and make a role for myself I would be left out and that would be boring”. Group work and acting-out are fairly standard procedures in most drama classes. What then is especially valuable about the playmaking process in this respect?

In my experience it is the knowledge that the play is going to be performed before an audience that really tests the ability of the group to work together. The advocates of D.I.E. have rejected the concept of making plays for an audience and focussed instead on disposable drama. This approach was partly a reaction to the school play’ but it also developed out of a fear of stifling children’s creativity and spontaneity. With the ascendancy of D.I.E. the communicative function in drama was discarded in favour of the heuristic function in progressive drama circles. The recognition of the educative potential of this function was an important development and in this dissertation I have emphasized its value for developing a critical consciousness. However, the significance of this learning process is not always understood by students and the impetus to improvise in a workshop is the result of the work of the teacher. When it becomes clear to the group that they are expected to perform before an audience negotiations among themselves begin in earnest and this is when underlying cleavages manifest themselves.

In the making of Lolo Bambo Lolo the interaction between the participants within the group reflected some of the difficulties experienced in the wider context. The struggle for identity experienced by black women was evident in the way the group worked together. Many of the ructions that were experienced were the result of the women being unable to assert themselves and resorting instead to disruptive tactics such as sulking, refusing to help with technical work and absenting themselves from workshops and rehearsals. Several of the improvisations dissolved into heated quarrels which the leader of the group was unable to control or often promoted because he felt that the group were not working properly. My attempt to persuade one of the women to take one of the leadership roles was unsuccessful. There was however a genuine desire to overcome these difficulties and the group stuck together and discovered that some of their attitudes were not ‘natural’ or ‘common sense’. In some cases good sense prevailed and there were perceptible changes of attitude

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among some of the participants about alternative and possibly more appropriate ways of behaving between the genders. As one woman remarked:

We became so close that sometimes when we bumped into one of the men at the Student Centre he would come up and hug us. Nobody felt embarrassed. But should this be done by any other male student you would assume a sexual advance and scream heaven and hell.

Although this group worked together for several months the men remained firmly in control. However, they became resentful because the women generally refused to take any responsibility and also were unhelpful in practical ways like carrying sets, painting the floor cloth and so on. The success of the production smoothed over many of the difficulties but it seems that although the group became aware of some of its internal dynamics they were unable to easily resolve problems or change deeply entrenched attitudes. I thought however that the first step of becoming aware of the difficulties inherent in collective work was an important learning experience and was encouraged by some of the student's observations about collective work.

Understanding in working as a group is essential. For instance if one's ideas are not used one should never feel rejected personally. It is only the idea that has been rejected. Furthermore, if one's idea has been rejected it doesn't mean that one should reject other people's ideas simply because of frustration. There should be reasons given for all suggestions both positive and negative. Be prepared to discuss ideas with the others. Never keep quiet in the group and then discuss ideas and complain to outsiders. That is very destructive. It is important to be sincere and say what you think promptly and then your colleagues are not in the dark. This facilitates group work and makes it exciting to be together all the time. What we need in group work is for the fighting to lead to good results rather than fights that emanate from jealousy, envy or ignorance. This type of fight is frustrating and causes unnecessary hatred. It is a waste of time and energy.

It is essential to bear in mind that a group making a play is a team. What affects you, affects the group. The whole process needs patience, dedication and understanding. These have got to be our food. Tolerance is the gateway to success. Group work needs a tremendous amount of discipline.<sup>9</sup>

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For drama practitioners there is nothing innovative in pointing out the educative potential of group work. This has long been recognised and utilized. From the production of a school play to a major university production everyone involved is aware of the importance of a team spirit for the success of the project. However, group work like most other educational practices can be carried out with different intentions. When the intention is to promote 'stars' who always take the leading roles and train 'the rest' into recognising their places in the hierarchy, group work can effectively be turned to this end. My aim in undertaking group projects was to attempt to encourage men and women to work together as equals sharing both the decision making and the responsibility. As I have pointed out this aim was not altogether successfully achieved but the objective itself was never in question.<sup>10</sup> There was a strong sense in the group that ideas and responsibilities should be shared to the point where one of the students suggested that the drama department should make rules to ensure this.<sup>11</sup> The playmaking processes have the potential to be utilised as a testing ground for democratic processes and for discovering concomitant results. For example, the women who took part, in Lolo Bambo Lolo came to the realisation that unless they were prepared to take responsibility they could not expect to command respect as equals. The difficulty of how to assume responsibility remained, but a first step was taken in recognising some of the dilemmas inherent in establishing democratic structures.

The Insika Candle Maker's Club were already a tightly knit group and as far as I understood in this case there were no difficulties experienced in working together. However, the status of the members of the organisation was mirrored in an interesting way by the status of the characters in the play. Mrs. Kapueja who is the leader of the community took the role of the headmistress, Gogo was the matriarch who was not afraid to speak up and the migrant labourer's wives played the lower status roles of drinkers in the shebeen. The play reflected relationships as they exist, and as discussed, these were not challenged except by Vicki herself. In the course of the discussions she questioned the women exhaustively about their attitudes but there was no equivalent of Vicki in the play. Any question of dissent was dismissed as bad behaviour. Possibly if the younger members of the group had received subtle support from the facilitator the hierarchy in this group could have been questioned and

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processes of democratic negotiation brought into play. As Sitas pointed out, once the organisation through which cultural activities are being undertaken is run on democratic lines the quality of the work itself is affected. Setting up democratic structures within an organisation takes time and care. Vicki was constrained by time in her project and she, correctly for her purposes, made no attempt to change the internal organisation of the Insika Candle Maker's Club.

Participating in workshops, rehearsals and performances does not only involve learning to negotiate within a group but also learning the skills of self-expression. Theatre draws on the most 'primitive' form of signification known in philosophy as 'ostension'.<sup>12</sup> In order to define an object or an idea one shows it- semiotization in the theatre involves the showing of objects and events rather than describing or narrating them. The body itself and the voice are among the major sign-vehicles utilized to make theatrical meaning and working with the body and voice results in gains in body and vocal awareness and therefore in communication skills. When the Work springs from personal experience there is far less strain on the use of body and voice to communicate than when scripts with different rhythms and speech patterns are attempted. Improvisation can release the body and voice from habitual patterns and when latent ideas are discovered they are at the basic and 'primitive' level of showing with the body.

### **Communicative Skills**

The recognition and release from habitual patterns of moving and thinking in order to free the personality is part of the basic training for most acting and dance styles. What is critically important when this work is undertaken is what happens next. The intention in the breaking down phase of the work may be a preparation for a specific training for an established performance form. This may be a dance form, an acting style or in the case of ritual a dramatised sequence of events that is designed to instill a particular set of beliefs and attitudes. This kind of training does not usually involve learning to think critically. In fact learning an established and conventionalized art form often means unquestioningly submitting to a rigorous imprinting of traditional ways of moving and thinking - neophytes in the ballet, Noh theatre or Xhosa initiation rituals do not question the ordeals and exercises that are part of the training - they

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submit to them. In other words the mastery of the techniques of established art forms is not usually connected with the development of a critical consciousness.

The close similarity between learning through drama for self- realisation and learning conventionalized western acting styles leads to claims that an actor's training is a training in the general development of the imagination, sensitivity and so on. This is not the case - a well trained actor for western theatre is not necessarily a generally more imaginative and sensitive person than a well trained lawyer. He or she becomes an imaginative and sensitive performer within a particular convention of performance. What happens is that this conventionalized approach to performance is posited as a universal. A training in the acting styles of western theatre is offered not only as a training for most kinds of performance but also as a training in becoming a 'better person' (more sensitive, imaginative, self-confident). A theatre studies course that is part of the B.A. structure cannot claim that its students will become masters of any conventionalized art form nor in my opinion is this the objective of a university education. What can be offered is an awareness and the experience of a range of different styles of performance in order to encourage critical enquiry into the possibility of developing new perceptions. A general approach is more feasible than a specific training for developing an enquiring mind.

There is obviously a central tension between exploring ideas through performance forms and communicating those ideas effectively. Some kinds of basic skills are required if a theatrical event is going to take place and some kind of performance style must be adopted. In student work and community theatre work for consciousness-raising the emphasis is on the sharing of ideas rather than on virtuoso performances and in my experience audiences that recognise this are very tolerant of a lack of performance skills if the work remains within its own environment. If it is taken out of its environment into an environment where the emphasis is on the aesthetic experience or entertainment rather than ideas then the audience are bound to be dissatisfied. University drama students can and do master some basic communication skills but it is not the intention of a university course to offer a specific training for one kind of conventionalized performance form. The focus IC workshops, rehearsals and performances can either be on achieving a training in a



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fixed form or on offering an education. It is to Elizabeth Sneddon's credit that she quite clearly recognised the difference between training actors for the professional theatre and working through drama and theatre as a way of educating the mind. Where I differ from her position is that I do not accept that the engagement with a selected tradition of works is the best way of achieving this kind of education. I have posited instead a learner-centred approach that begins with identifying, clarifying and giving value to the learner's own experience of life and then provides refined and extended conceptual categories through which this experience may be understood, modified and changed.

### **The Refinement and Extension of Conceptual Frameworks**

In line with the progressivist movement in education, a central tenet of the playmaking process I have described is that for knowledge to be valuable it must be meaningful and accessible to the individual and connect with his or her actual thinking and experience. In other words in learner-centred approaches the focus is on the active rather than the blank minds, of the participants. As knowledge is conceived of as socially constructed the value of individual experience cannot be neglected in favour of publicly developed traditions of thought. The eschewing of the value of the experience and knowledge of young people and the subaltern classes is a dominant educational practice in this country. The self-realisation of the individual is usually connected to that individual's grasp of knowledge communicated through lectures and textbooks. The possibility of an exchange in which teachers and students collaborate together in exploring new possibilities is not entertained. As I discussed in connection with the dominant approach in Speech and Drama this viewpoint translates into the presentation of a selected body of works as the great tradition that must be absorbed by anyone who wants to develop imaginative insight and creative awareness and indeed consider themselves educated. If and when (because meaning is culture - bound) the values articulated in this canon do not connect in any meaningful way with the actual thinking of students then the end result is a sense of inferiority that is instilled and reinforced. This approach is particularly pernicious in colonized countries where the culture of the indigenous inhabitants is negated and silenced with consequent disruptions to the sense of identity that I refer to later in this chapter.

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However the danger of allowing individual experience to turn entirely inward was recognised and in research that was undertaken to make Lolo Bambo Lolo attempts were made to refine and extend existing conceptual frameworks. In this work I drew attention to the way character and action are historically produced in order to develop a sense of causality. I concur with Freire that the more accurately causality is grasped the more critical our understanding of reality will be. Our understanding is magical to the extent to which we fail to grasp causality.<sup>13</sup> In the work on witchcraft and cultural codes that oppress women we attempted to discover the difference between magical perspectives and a sense of history. We noticed how diviners for example, tend to very powerfully delineate a territory with appropriate notions of causality in order to consolidate their own power. Dissenting elements in the community, even when they are unwitting as in the case of the barren woman, are demonised and this process may occur in both Christianity and ancestor veneration. The social order attempts to strengthen itself by simultaneously repressing dissenting elements and eliciting consent for this action.<sup>14</sup> When the cause of human suffering is thought to be the 'wrath of God' or the 'anger of the shades' then material causes of suffering are obscured and those who rule are able to present their sectional interests as universal ones. In grasping a sense of causality what is significant is our response to facts and events. It is the way these are interpreted that is important and not the events themselves. Interpretations are constructed and this is why it is important to provide conceptual frameworks which allow for different constructions that are historical rather than magical. Aitken's work was introduced with this intention but the group found it inaccessible and this points to the difficulty of introducing new conceptual categories.

In his paper, 'Masks as Cultural Defence: Further Reflections on 'English' as a Discipline in a Black Context', Aitken suggests that in their formative years many of our students are robbed of a sense of causality and rendered helpless to act against what appear to be arbitrary and accidental forces:

One of the fundamental ways in which the human mind structures the flow of experience into workable self-identity is through a growing awareness of causation; and one grasps this through a perception of some stability in the way disparate

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events are connected in the formative stages of learning. When the socio-political world begins to express utter gratuitousness, where individual fate is perceived as decided by incomprehensible, arbitrary and accidental forces, one can only begin to speculate about what happens to people's sense of causation. When the material conditions of existence are the origin, and reciprocally the product of duress, people are robbed of a deeply embedded, perhaps unconscious abstract understanding of causality, and this is to strike at the core of what constitutes volition and agency in individual human beings, certainly what, for the liberal-humanist perspective, might be called individual autonomy. It is in the interests of power to keep social forces incomprehensible, and this I should construe to be one of the central goals of Bantu Education.<sup>15</sup>

Here he suggests that when the response forced by the circumstances of people's lives seems interchangeable with the end results of acting under duress that people lose their sense of causality. This is because an awareness of causation is developed in the formative years through the perception of some stability in the way disparate events are connected. This stability is denied our students who in their formative learning stages experience a material existence in which violence from a range of different sources may erupt in a seemingly senseless way. Far 'from mitigating and explaining these experiences Bantu education with its alienated pedagogy functions to further obscure a sense of causality. When there is no "unconscious abstract understanding" of causality it is difficult to make connections between personal experience and conceptual categories. Notions of witchcraft and metaphysical intervention in the lives of human beings are more accessible than an understanding of determination through material causes. However, the question about whether analytical power can transcend experience remains unanswered. The Marxist insight is that there is a dialectical relationship between knowledge and circumstances. This is not to argue against the importance of attempting to penetrate the particular ways of seeing that are embedded in our society through progressive educational processes, but of recognising that it is circumstances which provide the parameters within which change may, or may not, take place. But, overcoming the dichotomy between theory and practice is a problem that must be faced in a wider arena than in a university lecture hall or seminar room.

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I make mention here that when discussing conceptual frameworks I draw no distinction between thought and feeling. Most drama teachers claim that they are stimulating their students' emotional growth and that this is important because it is a neglected aspect of education. I concur with these sentiments but not with a sense of the dichotomy between thought and feeling. We cannot get at feelings and somehow train them separately from ideas but the processes of symbolization materialize a way of experiencing or bringing feeling as thought out into the material world. As usual I found Williams illuminating on this point. With reference to his concept of structures of feeling he writes:

We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse restrain and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships; not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought; practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelated continuity.<sup>16</sup>

The workshop process aims at doing just this - making "feeling as thought and thought as felt" manifest in order to understand the implications of the pattern of meaning that is being shown. That is done through a constant search for contradictions and as each layer of contradiction is discovered the work deepens. However, the very concept of a contradiction is a conceptual category that has to be grasped and put into practice and so we cannot escape theory. The recognition of contradictions is important because it is this that provides space for resistance to dominant ideologies and opens up possibilities for dissent. The introduction of refined conceptual categories moves the work from self-realisation which is the aim of much progressive drama teaching to conscientization which is an awareness of causality. It can be seen that there are three distinct and different intentions behind teaching practices which on the surface may appear similar. These are 'civilisation' which is the imposition of the values and standards of the hegemonic bloc in the guise of serving the best interests of everyone, 'self-realisation' which is a search for meaning and understanding that tends towards extreme subjectivity and solipsism and 'conscientization' which is a search for critical and reflexive modes of thought that are not alienated but rooted in personal experience. The former aims tend to promote

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an acute sense of atomized individuality while the latter looks to promoting the concept of the 'individual- communal being' in Marx's terms.

The extension of conceptual categories relates to an understanding of the connections between ideology and form and in the work described attention was paid to the differences between realism in the theatre and more theatrical styles of presentation especially epic theatre. Brecht's work is seminal in this regard and I attempted to build on his concept of a theatre that is a reflection on reality rather than a reflection of reality. In introducing concepts of theatrical form to students I discussed the difference between simply expecting events' to speak for them], selves and guiding the audience's reaction through direct address, songs and dramatisations of the analysis. The inter- action between theory and practice can occur in the form of the play itself and we tried to build in the analysis through the use of the Feminist and Singer in Lolo Bambo Lolo. The women who made Ukhiphukwazi were trapped in the format of radio plays and it was interesting to see how limiting this format is. The view that we can set things down as they are was plainly evident in this play and the end result was that the play was openly contradictory in that the women sought both the old values of respect and submission and new values of the educated person simultaneously. They were bound in their thinking by form and the students response to this play in the form of Stop Nonsense was exciting evidence of what happens when realism, in the sense of relying entirely on verisimilitude, is abandoned. In this short piece a range of roles and levels of thinking that lie beneath the outward appearance of the real were explored through the media of multiple role play, short scenarios, songs, dances and the use of direct address to the audience. This was form in the making because ideas were drawn from a range of different sources including epic theatre, indigenous songs and urbanized modes of expression. Here lies the difference between attempting to offer the prolonged professional training that is required to master traditional forms and exploration and experimentation with new ways of presenting ideas. However the relations between the individual and culture are of the utmost importance and we cannot simply cast aside a cultural heritage, nor am I suggesting that this should be the intention of theatre studies.

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## IDENTITY, CULTURE AND PERFORMANCE

Cultural traditions are sources of meaning and identity and the individual's sense of self reflects the meanings and definitions common to the most significant others with whom interaction takes place, for example, family members, co-workers, colleagues and teachers. Through symbolic interactions based on the linguistic, proxemic, kinesic and other codes of the culture the individual learns how to behave, think, feel and what sort of objectives to pursue. The common sense, cultural and 'ideological systems of the culture interpellate or speak to the individual and become part of his or her understanding of the world. The sense of identity develops from relating to others and identifying with gender-specific and class-specific roles. In the concluding chapter of *In Township Tonight!*, Coplan cogently argues for the importance of the performing arts in shaping reality and the relations of people to their environment and thus their sense of identity.<sup>17</sup> In the context of urbanization in South Africa he argues that urban theatrical performances promote psychocultural change among their audiences.<sup>18</sup> The structured symbolism of the arts provides a way of understanding the environment and developing a sense of identity. According to Coplan:

Artistic performances are structured imagistic embodiments of values and qualities which people identify, at some level, with themselves. Metaphors extend as well as interpret and classify experience, giving situations both a form and an ordering significance they might not otherwise have. Performance then acts as a social instrument by ordering experience and by bringing values and identities to life.

People in situations of urban change use performance metaphors as instruments of social movement, order and self-transformation. Artistic performances are cultural patterns that reflect ideas and create images of ideal personality, involving both the elaboration and the learning of new modes of behaviour. By means of empathetic, emotionally charged cultural communication, they both symbolise and actualise changes in status and help to bring order out of the chaos of diverse and conflicting images.<sup>19</sup>

Here Coplan points to the way performance may both reflect ideas and create images of ideal personality, involving both the elaboration and the learning of new modes of behaviour. If performance forms are to be meaningful and valuable they must connect with the actual thinking of particular people. This, of course, occurs naturally in the

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urban environment of which Coplan writes where popular culture is being structured and communicated by the inhabitants of that environment. When it comes to systems of education the whole matter of choosing and imparting appropriate knowledge comes into play.

In the South African educational context this has meant a cultural imposition and a denial of the value of existing and emerging cultural forms. Beginning with mission education which black South Africans believed would provide an entrée into the dominant culture, indigenous performance forms and the forms that emerged in the struggle for adaptation to city life have been largely ignored and replaced with a particular selection of realised art from the dominant culture. This has meant that for most South Africans an education in the arts does not connect meaningfully with actual experience. The opportunity of exploring and presenting ‘images of the ideal personality’ with which young people can identify is lost and the symbols which can be used to interpret the world are inaccessible and incomprehensible. The proponents of the value of civilised art speak of universal values as discussed in earlier chapters in an effort to provide connections between these art forms and immediate experience but concepts such as ‘Macbeth’s ambition’ or ‘Othello’s jealousy’ are meaningless when taken out of context. When students are unable to make connections between the art forms of other periods or epochs (these connections can be made but not by extrapolating universal values from the text) then the conditions for alienation rather than either self-realisation or conscientization set in.

### **Relevance**

The learning process should include opportunities for the development of an appropriate sense of identity and if the arts are to play a role in facilitating this process they must be relevant to personal experience at least to begin with. If the symbols are not readily accessible it is difficult for students to make connections between their sense of themselves, their social environment and performance forms. I suggest playmaking combined with semiotic analysis as a way of learning to make these connections through working directly with processes of symbolisation. This is one way of engaging students in a relevant learning experience. Another way that relates to theatre studies is to engage students in the study, discussion and performance of

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immediately accessible plays. This means that popular performance forms should be an important feature of the syllabus. There is no need to provide three background lectures on apartheid before introducing Woza Albert or Egoli to South African students. The symbols are accessible and connections can be made between text and context. However the course would be limited if it were to stop at the point of learning through personal experience. Personal experience must be mediated through conceptual categories and this means the introduction of theory. Theory is of necessity imported - there is no point in trying to re-invent the wheel - and publicly developed traditions of knowledge must form part of a relevant methodology. Finally a relevant education would include a grasp of the way systems of education themselves play a role in winning the consent necessary to run an apartheid society.

#### **A SEMIOTIC METHODOLOGY**

Skill in interpretation is one of the major goals of theatre studies. The intention behind my discussion and demonstrations of semiotics in the previous chapters was to enhance the case for the role of semiotic studies in the teaching of interpretative competence. This is a new field for me and at the time that I was engaged in the playmaking processes outlined here I was unfamiliar with the possibilities of semiotic analysis. I have begun to use this method of analysis to reflect on my work and have introduced the concept of semiotics to my students. I am excited by the potential of a semiotic approach. Not only does it open up possibilities for in-depth analysis of performance but of making connections between symbol-systems that appear widely disparate and yet are ultimately speaking the same message. Consider the sexist messages conveyed by for example a bumper sticker, a kitchen tea, a television advertisement and a soap opera. Semiotics provides a way of reading across a range of messages or communications that are usually categorized as separate and therefore impossible to compare.

A socio-semiotic analysis pinpoints the ways in which codes are a product of history. Linguistic, kinesic and proxemic deference codes featured in both Lolo Bambo Lolo and Ukhiphukwazi to indicate the subordinate roles of both women and young people in some communities. The way these codes were observed in non- literate societies



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where respect is highly valued, was traced right through to modern situations. Mere the concept of respect no longer functions successfully to lubricate social interaction and yet the codes remain in force. They are now ossified but they still work on those who observe them to replicate a sense of subordinate status. Women literally physically indicate with their eyes and their bodies that they recognise their inferiority when observing these codes and the difficulty is to discover new ways of indicating politeness and self respect without observing outdated deference codes. I also commented on the use of theatrical sub-codes in the plays and discussed the way realism has come to be perceived as the appropriate style for modern performances. In some cases this means that indigenous codes have been abandoned in favour of western codes. The coupling of codes from different sources opens up exciting possibilities for the discovery of new performance forms whereas a reliance on verisimilitude limits the use of the theatre as a means of discovering metaphors of social movement and self-transformation.

**I noted further that languages and other sign systems are not to be seen either as expression, reflection or abstract systems but rather as a material means of production whereby the material body of the sign is transformed through a process of social conflict and dialogue into meaning. This semiotic intercourse forms our perceptions of the world and our intentions towards it and is, in its turn shaped by these perceptions. A semiotic approach has the potential to suggest ways in which we might understand ourselves and our world more clearly and thus refuse the manipulation of the sign that is a key feature of hegemony. Brechtian type-theatre insists on constantly reminding the audience that the sign is not transparent and a combination of this type of analytical theatre and semiotic approaches to theatre studies points the way to discovering new directions.**

#### **PLAYMAKING AND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

The recognition that language is a coding system which classifies and organizes the external world in a meaningful way and is part of the fabric of consciousness itself rather than a 'tool of thought' has important implications for learning languages through drama. Improvised situations provide ideal circumstances for practicing either a first or second language as the emphasis is on meaning and use in dramatised

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situations rather than correct usage. This is an aid to fluency because language learning is a creative process and learners need an opportunity to try out a range of registers, make mistakes and generally practice speaking. For students who are learning a second language practical drama classes are especially important because there are often limited opportunities for speaking in a second language. In the hypothetical situations of the playmaking process students develop their language ability beyond simple exchanges with teachers. Learners decide on the topics and the teacher loses her role as an authority and judge of what is valid for discussion. In this way learners become involved in making meaning and do not simply passively receive meaning. Language is social behaviour that cannot be learned in isolation from social circumstances. Improvisations provide a set of circumstances where language is practiced at the level of group discussion about the improvisation and in role during the improvisation. Different registers are explored that are appropriate for roles that are attempted. A sense of accent is also acquired through role playing and is a more valuable learning experience than measuring a student's 'non standard accent' against the teacher's perception of a 'standard' to be acquired. For instance, in the last episode Lolo Bambo Lolo students played the roles of sophisticated doctors and teachers who were fluent in English and in the improvisations this register was practiced and the implications of gaining this sort of command of English discussed. In the second episode a white couple was portrayed and this gave me an opportunity to discuss the difference between white' South African accents and 'black' South African accents and the whole group practiced accents that are considered more 'educated'.<sup>20</sup>

There is however a difficulty attached to using improvisation for setting up situations in order to practice a second language. This is often in direct conflict with the aim of eliciting a spontaneous response from students and the constraints of working in a language in which the group are not entirely at ease mitigates against the nature of improvisation itself for discovering inchoate ideas. As I discussed in the making of the first episode of Lolo Bambo Lolo when the characters and situations portrayed call for Zulu or some other indigenous language then it became particularly difficult to work in English. I work in any language the students choose for improvisations in the workshop phase when my intention is to unearth and discuss commonsense

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perceptions and discover contradictions. At this stage of the work trust and a sense of ease are the most important requirements for successful workshops. The use of English invariably becomes a factor in the next phases of the work because all the student groups that I have worked with want the dominant language in the plays they make to be English. This is because they are aware of the second order meanings of working in an indigenous language and perhaps more deep-seatedly of presenting themselves as educated and as having acquired the concomitant status. As the University functions in English I encourage the use of English although I am aware of the inherent contradictions in using the language of the dominant culture to build resistance to that dominance.

In the playmaking process the use of spoken language to fashion the dialogue of the play is reinforced with written language because all students are required to write down the dialogue as the play script is developed. The discussions that occur during the playmaking process are also valuable in that they offer practical opportunities for speech and a recognition that meaning is always negotiated and not fixed. We have discussed 'democratic', 'dissenters', 'political', 'sex' and 'gender' and other words in a process of establishing our Own 'keywords' in the plays. This throws light on the ways in which words derive their meaning from their embeddedness within a whole linguistic and cultural structure. The keeping of diaries as the playmaking process goes on is also an important technique for encouraging students to develop descriptive, analytical and explanatory forms of writing. All these kinds of writing emerge in the diaries as the students reflect on the work and we are able to distinguish between these different modes of thought when invited to do so and yet employ them in the struggle to describe and reflect on an experience that they have found meaningful.

The advantages of drama in second language teaching are clearly considerable and not the least is that in drama, language is not only cognitively but also affectively and physically experienced. As discussed in connection with a semiotic approach to analysis, non-verbal codes play a crucial role in the development of understanding and of communication skills. In the simulated contexts of drama classes these non-verbal codes are used with verbal codes in a natural and spontaneous way that then

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allows for reflection and discussion of their meaning. Research that is undertaken to make plays also means that reading skills and the ability to use a library effectively are not neglected.

#### **THE AUDIENCE AND WHAT THEY LEARN**

What is learned by interpreting a play as a member of the audience? A student summed this up rather well I thought with reference to Stop Nonsense. This student had himself been influenced by Ukhiphukwazi and here he expresses a conviction that the audience do learn from attending a performance:

In our production of Stop Nonsense we took the opportunity to question attitudes to status, tribalism and relationships between the sexes all in a humorous but serious way. I have discovered that if something is expressed with humour and light-heartedness it usually gains a lot of weight. The play, made through improvisations, tackles tribalism and elitist attitudes at university level among so called educated and enlightened people. To the audience who are actually laughing at themselves and their elitist and tribal responses, the piece is eye-opening because it challenges them directly over the vices that they fall into. The piece subtly questions chauvinism of both the tribal and sexual type and a sense of superiority over peasants and workers, The audience become involved in criticizing these attitudes but they are the ones who are themselves perpetuating the thing. In the end the audience is faced with the nightmare of being directly confronted with themselves. They are asked, "Do we really need to go at each other's throats because we don't speak the same language? Must we really despise others who have not been lucky enough to become educated?" And no surprise they sit still and listen. Not directly to the actors but to themselves. They tend to drop the me and look at the I which is the real self being deeply involved in a process of self-penetration. Whether or not they approve of tribalism and chauvinism is up to them but at least they know after watching the play that these attitudes make no sense. They have become trapped in the turmoil of apartheid around them and they don't regard each other as human beings anymore. After watching the play they realize that it is high time that they uplift the downtrodden.<sup>21</sup>

I found this comment by Boetie Mota, a student who had taken part in playmaking over a period of four years and was deeply familiar with campus audiences very encouraging for this type of project. The importance of entertainment combined with

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subtle persuasion in the theatre is stressed by Mota and he argues that when this is achieved the results are devastatingly effective. The critical consciousness of those who attend plays that are designed to heighten a sense of awareness is developed and in this way the theatre can be a potent educative force for both the playwrights and the audience. I was also impressed by the analytical powers shown by Mota in this analysis as he shifts from a psychological to a sociological analysis of audience responses. This in itself is evidence of the educative potential of learning through drama although ultimately there is no measurement for the success or failure of educational projects.

The potential of learning through experiencing other people's dramas is important for education. An audience is required to concentrate, comprehend different levels of meaning and become aware of the signification of the various coding systems. Live theatre has the advantage of direct interaction between the audience and the performers and T.I.E. takes advantage of this possibility and encourages the audience to become directly involved in the action of the play. Theatre can make a vivid impact and a live performance gives a sense of occasion and urgency that highlights the significance of the themes portrayed in the play. At the University of Zululand and in 'black' schools where we have presented performances this sense of occasion is very striking and a performance generates an atmosphere of excitement and intense interest. This excitement and interest has a high educative value that can be utilised by presenting plays on topics that will enhance the student's understanding in a range of fields including literature, history, geography and biology.

### **Theatre Company attached to the University**

I recommend that a theatre company attached to the University of Zululand's drama department be established in order to make plays that would be presented in schools and in the local community. It is crucial for both adult and children's programmes to be adequately researched and if the theatre company were attached to the University this would make adequate inter-disciplinary research a feasible proposition. A University Theatre Company must be flexible, mobile and able to adapt to specific developmental and environmental needs. In order to undertake research within schools and communities to make meaningful plays the company should be able to

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live and work within the community if necessary. Two kinds of plays are envisaged - plays that are made along the lines of T.I.E. programmes by the company and taken on tour of schools and communities and plays that are made by a school or community itself such as Ukhiphukwazi and facilitated by members of this company. A theatre company would engage in participatory research and this type of research is entirely in accordance with aims laid out in the University pamphlet, Facts 1986/87:

The geographical situation of the University is ideal for community-oriented research, especially in the fields of rural development, linguistics, folklore, history, religion, social work, politics, the natural sciences and indigenous law.

Issued by the Bureau of Development and Public Relations.

#### **TEACHERS, FACILITATORS AND CULTURAL WORKERS**

Throughout this dissertation I have commented on the difficult role of teachers who genuinely attempt progressivist and democratic approaches to education. There is a fine line to tread between encouraging and setting up situations where genuine participation between all those who are involved occurs and anarchy. Drama classes can very easily degenerate into pointless exercises in self-expression. I was dismayed to watch a newly fledged drama teacher ask his class to cry and then to laugh for no reason except that they were doing drama. I wondered if the impression that he had received after taking a four year course was that this is what drama classes are about - simply expressing emotion for no reason as a kind of exercise. Of course the class responded very well to the command to laugh - the situation was so grotesquely funny that there was good reason to indulge in hoots of laughter which they did at length. As for the command to cry! Suffice it to say that this drama teacher responded and wept inwardly. The aims of drama teaching are so often unclear that the teacher finds him or herself in the awkward position of being a figure of authority one minute and a nuisance for imposing unwanted ideas the next. The difficulty is, as I have frequently noted, a matter of timing, of knowing when to step in and when to keep out and it is impossible to always get this right. I have handed work over to students and it has been handed back to me when they found leadership roles difficult to maintain and I

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have often resorted to completely authoritarian practices when things seemed on the point of collapse.

The playmaking process is valuable in that it offers a range of opportunities for students to take leadership roles. Students learn the inherent difficulties of leading a group while at the same time working to maintain a democratic set of relationships within the group:

What I appreciate most about directing a play is that it taught me what I can do and what I cannot do. Right now I know that as a leader I am not very good. I still need experience. However, what I learned is more than what I suffered in the creation, rehearsals and performance of On the Road, I discovered that I have to understand myself first in order to accommodate other people's weaknesses. As a group leader you need to understand your group. You should know when to smile, to frown, to laugh, to cry, to persuade and to demand. So in conclusion I would like to say that this type of exercise that involves both males and females in a group together is invaluable in the sense that it helps the participants to grow in personality.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to note that drama as an activity has no inherent value in itself for developing a critical consciousness. It may as easily be used as a tool of oppression by teachers and cultural workers than as a tool for nurturing creative, sceptical and analytical systems of thought. It is the approach of those involved that is significant. As the authors of a paper presented at the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa (ASSA) Conference, University of Western Cape, July 1987 note in relation to the work undertaken by the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit at the University of Natal in Durban:

A consensus within the Unit is that we should analyse our own class interests and the contradictions inherent in academic practice and the role of universities within society as a whole. Individual motivations for co-operating with the subaltern classes in struggle against class domination should not be taken for granted, for motivations can be altruistic, individualistic, selfish, power related or materialistic, each masked by the process of struggle but also perhaps not always in the interest of collective struggle.<sup>23</sup>

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The nature of education itself is paradoxical because although the intention behind the curriculum, the choice of textbooks and of methodology may be to prevent critical thinking this aim is not necessarily successful. As observed in connection with the interpretation of texts, the readers or receivers of messages reformulate their own texts in response to message. Two processes of semiosis occur and, in the case of education, the educationalist has no guarantee that the educand will receive the 'text' as it is intended. Slogans adopted by students often suggest that the opposite is happening. 'We want education, not indoctrination' ironically contradicts itself because if processes of indoctrination were really taking place the poster would be impossible. Slogans like this suggest that present systems of education are a failure in every respect but they are also hopeful signifiers of an inherent quality in education itself - that in some measure it is apolitical. This comment is not meant in anyway to undercut my observations about the use of education to replicate apartheid, reinforce anti-feminism or reproduce classes but to suggest that there is a dynamic quality inherent in culture itself because of the difficulties and complexities of human communication. The interaction between the various parties involved is never a matter of straight-forward transmission but of semiotic tensions and conflicts. This gives culture, and education as an aspect of culture, a flexible and dynamic quality which means that there is always hope for the discovery of alternative possibilities.

The educational practices adopted in South Africa mean that white South Africans are privileged in that most have had the opportunity of receiving an education. Those who have received an education have the potential to think critically and it is important for us to recognise both the extent of our ignorance and the possibilities of the contribution to be made towards building a democratic society. There are people who are foolish and ignorant of all races, classes and genders and there is nothing to be gained by pretending otherwise. To hesitate and, for those who are white South Africans, to wallow in guilt about whether we are justified in sharing our knowledge and by so doing appear to look down on others achieves nothing. It is not elitist to be frank, forthright and realistic about these matters. What is elitist is to assume that some people are incapable of learning or organising themselves in democratic ways without the intervention of intellectuals. In my view it is essential for knowledge to be shared but this must occur under circumstances where every effort is made to work



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through democratic processes. This should begin in the classroom, be carried through into the organisation of university life in every sphere and saturate our way of thinking. Conscientization as a cultural action for liberation is ultimately impossible without the recognition that social and class struggles over access to economic and political power are the major dynamic of social change and these struggles are not synonymous with racial struggles. Sole points to the danger of refusing to adopt this perspective in a reference to the work of black artists which is also applicable to all educationalists in search of a democratic society:

Black artists and intellectuals are not necessarily at one with a vaguely defined 'black people'. If this is not seen the resulting ideology and literature will lend itself most easily to appropriation by an aspirant black bourgeoisie which may seek power and wealth for itself at the expense of ordinary black people.<sup>24</sup>

#### **A METHODOLOGY FOR THEATRE STUDIES**

My recommendations for a methodology for theatre studies are summarized in this final section of the dissertation. As I have concerned myself with underlying premises rather than the details of curricula I do not address these details now but suggest in general terms some of the features of such a methodology. In the work I have outlined the emphasis is on active participation in the processes of learning rather than passive reception and this is posited as the basis of self-realisation and conscientization. The work is learner-centred and concerns itself with an integrated approach to physical, affective and cognitive development. This is achieved through a focus on the students' active relationships with each other, their teachers and their environment, Teachers learn with and from their students and efforts are made to establish democratic structures as an aspect of the learning situation. I suggest that the playmaking process is one way of achieving these ends and of utilizing the educative potential of the heuristic, communicative and interpretative functions in drama. Another way of developing a learner-centred approach is to introduce students to relevant dramatic literature and a history in which the symbolisation is accessible and which fosters a sense of identity that is not fragmented and alienated. In the South

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African context the most practical way of achieving this is to start a drama course with South African theatre history and plays.

I have stressed the importance of mediating personal experience through refined and extended conceptual categories and the type of approach I envisage includes explanation and social theory in order to develop a sense of causality. I argue that experience is the place where ideology comes into being and that experience does not yield reality in any easy correspondence, therefore, if knowledge is to be derived from the experience of playmaking and play production, a theoretical position involving analytical and deductive thinking is a necessity. In the work described this kind of thinking was most successfully achieved by combining theory and practice in the actual form of the plays themselves and seeking forms that dramatise an analysis and reflection on the play's themes. A methodology for theatre studies should provide opportunities for the discovery of new forms rather than a training in the fixed and conventional forms of western theatre. The amount of emphasis to be placed on the acquisition of communication skills is dependent on the structure and intention of the course. When the course is one course in a B.A. Degree, the amount of time that can be spent on a training in even basic movement and projection techniques is limited. However, the holistic approach adopted in either playmaking or presenting a scripted play to an audience means that some proficiency in performance skills is developed simultaneously with analytical powers.

In order to fully utilize the interpretative function in drama I posit a semiotic approach to the analysis of all kinds of theatre including the cultural manifestations of the past, the dominant culture of the present day and popular forms. A semiotic approach to analysis tends to dissolve the false dichotomy that has become a convention between theatre history, theatre arts, movement and speech with their separate principles. If the focus is on presenting plays of both the collective and the scripted kind and on watching plays, then all these related aspects of the processes of signification can be combined and studied in a concrete situation rather than in a separate and unrelated way. The interpretative abilities of students which I suggest is one of the key functions of a university course, are developed in this approach through participating in productions, watching productions and in a comparative study of the performance

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forms of other periods and societies. The main focus of attention is therefore on contributing to the development of South African theatre and not on gaining knowledge of a 'great tradition' but this does not mean that the tradition is neglected. It is rather acknowledged as a tradition selected for specific purposes and it is critiqued.

Productions would therefore provide a focal point for the work of the department but at university level the work must move beyond productions into analysis and reflection. This involves encouraging students to constantly reflect on the work by learning to record, analyse and explain both the processes and the products of dramatization. This is the beginning of theatre research which is an important aspect of a university methodology. Finally at post-graduate level the work needs to move out into the community. As suggested this may be achieved through an involvement in T.I.E. and popular performance projects. A methodology that exposes students to a broader framework of social development is adopted with the intention of bringing life to the principles of study.<sup>25</sup> The Ukhiphukwazi project was a step in this direction but engaging in participatory research and forging links with democratic organisations in the wider community points the way to the road ahead. Many theatre practitioners attached to universities including Sitas, Mavis Taylor and present members of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company and the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit in Durban are paving the way for participatory research involving theatre and the media in the wider community. There is no doubt that this is a hard road and that not the least of the dangers is repression from the state. However, as Tomaselli et al note, no matter what the state does, it will not be able to close all the contradictions of apartheid that have split open since 1976 all the time. As one is closed, multiple other fissures create space within which progressives can work towards a democratic future.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, while recognizing the validity of the structuralist position that education does to some extent reproduce the existing society, I am not convinced that this is all education does. The only knowable certainty is the prospect of greater and more rapid social change and although education will be determined by this change it must in its turn determine what kind of future there is in store for us.

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## CHAPTER TEN NOTES

- 1 The concept of the 'negotiation of meaning' is important in Ken Robinson's work and I have drawn extensively on his elucidation of the aims and functions of practical drama teaching. See Lynn McGregor, Maggie Tate, Ken Robinson, Learning Through Drama London, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977 and Ken Robinson (ed.) Exploring Theatre and Education, London Heinemann, 1980
- 2 Movement education is of obvious importance in this regard but a detailed analysis of the value of this aspect of learning through drama is beyond the scope of this dissertation.
- 3 Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977, p. 131
- 4 After a discussion with Eleanor, Preston—Whyte on the concept of inchoate and latent 'structures of feeling' she drew my attention to the following passage in a biography of Charles Darwin:

Yet at first this is a process he must have resisted. Indeed, long before it had risen to a level of consciousness at which he had to recognise it as his own, he must have endeavoured to suppress the idea of mutable species. Such suppression would have been automatic: at some stage in the chain of

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inference, he would have turned away as from an absurdity, an impossibility. There must have been many such approaches and reversals, each one a hammering on a closed door. Just so fourteenth-century man would have turned away from the possibility of a globular earth. This idea was, however, already in being. It had been stated in various partial forms, and it had been refuted directly or by implication, on dozens of occasions. Here was Lyell himself immersed in its intricacies. It was not after all impossible; it was a concept one might accept. When Darwin finally realized that he believed it, it must have seemed like an awakening to a truth of which he had been long already aware, in his sleep, in his dreams in the acknowledged darkness of the mind where waits - silent, foetal, patient - all that we do not know we know.

Peter Brent, Charles Darwin, Middlesex, Hamlyn Paperbacks, 1981, p.278.

- 5 The same principle applies to the attempts to establish a standard version of English known as Received Pronunciation. Phonetic symbols are used in an attempt to settle patterns of pronunciation in order to facilitate communication. Received pronunciation is a useful concept in the attempt to maintain a balance between established and constantly evolving pronunciation patterns. It is not useful to attempt to rigidly impose this dialect because it is 'pleasing to the ear'.
- 6 In a westernized set of circumstances it might seem fairly commonplace for a woman to jump on a train in search of her husband. It must therefore be recognised that this group was improvising around the experiences of a rural woman in the 1950s and even today rural women may not even leave their homesteads without their husband's permission. University students are aware of these constraints -many of their parents live under them and so, in this context, the train scene was a discovery for the actress and the character.
- 7 Here again, in a western context for women to complain in public about their husbands may seem commonplace. For this group it is most unusual to publicly complain and when this occurred even though it was within the fictional world of the play it indicated the beginnings of an articulation of sources of dissatisfaction.
- 8 This is one of the difficulties of aiming at performance and the reason why some drama teachers insist on developing workshops in their own right with no intention towards performance. The difficulty with this latter concept is developing a sense of the work's significance in the group. It is done and very successfully with young children who seem to understand the value of play - and for them the drama class is organised play. For students and adults it is harder to establish a sense of significance without performance - it hovers in the background - the workshop is thought of as a training ground for later performances if the immediate intention is not to make a play.

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- 9 Interview, at my request, between Njabulo Mabaso (researcher) and Jethro Ndlovu (student) on the experience of playmaking. October 1985.
- 10 The way students work together and their sense of community suggests that the sense of community that was part of non- literate societies is not altogether lost despite the inroads of the cult of individualism.
- 11 See Chapter 7, p. 270 above.
- 12 Keir Elam, The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama, London, Methuen, 1980, p. 29.
- 13 Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness? New York, The Seabury Press, 1973, p. 44.
- 14 For example, King Zwelethini Goodwill ka Bhekuzulu claimed at a King Shaka Day Commemoration Service that “certain people aimed at destroying society. Such people were like witches who deserved to be ostracised”. He called on people to eradicate this evil. ‘Church-Linked Funds Being Used For Evil Says King’, Zululand Observer, 2 October 1987.
- 15 Richard Aitken, Masks as Cultural Defence: Reflections on ‘English’ as a discipline in a Black Context’, English Academy Review 4, 1987, p. 217.
- 16 Williams, op. cit., p. 132.
- 17 David Coplan, In Township Tonight!, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1985.
- 18 Ibid., p. 239.
- 19 Ibid., pp. 238 - 239.
- 20 Students at the University of Zululand almost invariably choose to portray some ‘white’ characters in their work.
- 21 Comments made by Boetie Mota in a written reflection on the work at third year level.
- 22 Comment made by Charles Halati in a written reflection on the work at third year level.
- 23 Keyan Tomaselli, Ruth Tomaselli and Eric Louw in collaboration with Ansuya Chetty and the students of the Contemporary Cultural Studies Unit, “Community and Class Struggle: Problems in Methodology”, Unpublished paper presented at the Association for Sociology in Southern Africa, University of the Western Cape, July 1987, p. 4.

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- 24 Kelwyn Sole ' Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance', South African Theatre Journal Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1987, pp. 58-59.
- 25 Tomaselli et al, op. cit., p. 2. In this paper a methodology is outlined in which connections between the University and progressive organisations are made. The writers make the important point that given our class, racial and intellectual privileges we cannot hope to 'overcome our position but rather need to recognise it and work from that basis.
- 26 Ibid., p. 21.

## **APPENDICES**

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **MODELS**



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## APPENDIX 2

### GENERATIONAL RECITATION

#### *Pre A— A world view*

*rather than character* These are the girls and mothers of the regiments. The Cosmology is unshaken, but the horizon has bewildering things happening on it. These women are distant spirits - their souls knew too little, are too innocent to be mediators in the contemporary crisis. When their men were cut down in the great regiments, consciousness was that of the lament, and they were not confused. But the burning of their crops and the crying of hungry children had no language, and this filled them with terror. They were the first generation of real terror. Our chronology traces this growth of terror. Do not cry for us our mothers, although your crying is only a distant dream.

#### *A— The Senior*

##### *Crone*

*The first massive cosmological disruption: The Zulu war. They were girls through it and knew it through the wailing of their mothers as they buried their sons, husbands and brothers, It was a childhood in which a few months, from January to April 1879, set the tone of their childhood. Apprehension coloured their lives - the lines of communication across the hills were alive, messengers came, and left, and the men disagreed and argued fiercely, but with fear. The older women spoke language of inevitability, of amelioration. Surely they said they could grow their crops and do the work of women. But this generations, shared much of*

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***the innocence of the previous generation: their anxieties were intense but lacked substance and the old language had neither words nor wisdom to tell them of the new times. Of the new authority, they had little notion; they were girls, and knew that in becoming women, they would come to know the work of women. In their youth, they came to know machines and missionary schools for the first time. Some of them to learn from the priest and catechist teachers. New ambiguities arose for some, the privileged few - but they did not see it like this. Their friends in the fields still made reality for them.***

#### B— The Great

Grandmothers The daughters of the last still knew notions Grandmothers of rebellion. There was Bambatha, Langalibalele. But that was remote. Their experience was of packing up and moving. They found new skills in themselves: making new fields where their mothers had not worked. Often the soil was poorer, and the stream from which they collected water was further away. They knew men who disputed land, and there were new wars to eat up their men, New lamentations. They knew much of the ancestral past. Strange chiefs peopled their youthful lives and there was much to be indignant about. But real fear came to these people for the first time. What was it like to be confronted by the new conditions of servitude on the white farms? To know for the first time the nature of drudgery, because in the old fields the earth knew them and they knew they were women and had women's work to do. These girls are the loveliest of all our mothers, because they gave us the language for the first time of tired bodies, of aching limbs, and yet, carried their children with compassion; but, there was forbearance in these women for the first time. They learnt for the first time what it was to be indignant.

#### C- The

#### Grandmothers

The next generation brings us to the daughters of the cities. New domestic service, and they wanted to follow their men and the things that came from the white man's shops were very delightful. This was the first generation to know of leaving babies with others, and the anguish of seeing them left behind. The mothers of these women cried to see their daughters going off to do strange work far away. The previous generation had pioneered the way into rootlessness - of living non-existent lives on the white farms. They had pioneered a radical disjunction from the soil. This generation learns to consolidate a new mythology of disjunction. And in this consolidation, they become beings of passage, toing and froing between the towns and white people's work, and their roots of reality, the scattered *imizi* to which they were connected by days in buses and trains. This is a new culture, a culture which works reunion into one of the great expressive forms of contemporary culture in South Africa. This is a world of parting, and returning, and coming to know children as the threads of continuity with what matters. New objects, new dress, a new language of relationships; time now matters, because time is known, not rhythmically, but in the duration of partings. it is a punctuated culture, for the women who are

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left at home, and for the women who go to the cities. And when they are together, they must work those moments into great intensity, for in that psychic formation must they reside during the long lacuna which the white man's work is. So the rituals of soul- filled intensity.

We love these women ambiguously, They have taught us our first lessons of living with oppression, They taught us how to love children with aching bodies and minds, but they also taught us to be suspicious of men. Man and woman were caught in something they could not understand, and for oppression to be successful, it was necessary that we never knew mutually what was happening to us separately. So these women taught us the meaning of discord and taught us to live with it. What if they had never learnt? But we cannot blame them for that - they could help their own humanity.

Some of the women become schooled and great Christians. But for the most part, they are left at home and listen to the new information about the new schools and colleges.

In middle life, this generation knows what it is to live under a hostile civil administration. They weave it into patterns of thought and find the white man inscrutable.

#### **D—The Mothers**

**Their daughters come to know the consolidation of apartheid. Political resistance is real. They come to know passes for women, and failure of their campaigns. Men are caught in a tightening and life-wrenching spiral and women become the shadowy marginals living lives in the interstices of the structural economy. These women learn something terrifyingly new: the redundancy of men. Sisterhoods of support become the instruments of survival for themselves and their children. Men and women can no longer learn from each other.**

This is the central problem: men and women enact an economic ideology in the fabric of their lives and suffer for it.

A whole generation of white babies is reared by these stupendous women. Their lives are suspended in cruel knowledge between the extraordinary superfluity of white affluence and perpetual awareness of hoarding and squirreling for children left on poorer and poorer soils. They are the true creatures of night, superb strategists of making do, of making plans and setting things in motion, and hiding babies in swelling bellies.

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This generation has taught us to live vicariously. The schools inhabit every thought because in these lie hope for their children, So they believe.

This is a possible way out of the pot that holds them in.

These women are dreamers, because life in garden huts, in bare servants quarters favours interiority, and their interiors are childreared with dignity.

They are not as politically aware as their mothers. They are too far, generationally and geographically, from the scenes of military conquest, and they have come to know the urgency of bare necessity. They feel compromised by fighting talk and their views are politically quietistic. Yet they are complex beings and have terms for the conditions of injustice.

And much more can be said. We all know these women. They are the mothers we knew and in the ideas of our maternity, lie the seeds of our destruction.

### ***E—The Women of***

#### ***Today***

***This next generation is not so easy to know. They are the children of Soweto and the townships. They are travelled, and know adeptly the routes taken by shadows. They are in country and city, a generation of divergence. They feel compromised, and hate themselves for being compromised.***

Impatient they flay the unaware. Tough and resilient, they are careful strategists of calculated means and ends.

But we cannot write contemporary history into a few lines. Their strong colors need large canvasses.

### **F— The Children of Today**

Their children. Knee high, some have reached first blood. Most of these are loved. Those a little elder, find their childhood eroded by careworn drudgery.

And these girls know mortality: how does a child know mortality? And how does her own death come to her? And how does it come to her mother?

What lessons does a child learn from a woman who is always tired?

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This is a generation of questions, and doubts. The women who have given birth to these little ones, for the most part, look on them with superb hope because despair is a luxury of super- abundance and privilege.

Their world is unclothed and dusty, and it is ragged and grimy, and it is rounded in dimpled joy, and it is emaciated in kwashiorkor, and it is bored in snotty-nosed ennui fatigued without effort on the hips of elder sister, and it is the contrary too and who would wish them otherwise because other small girls are sick and die.

The central metaphysical issues of the age could be mined here in this generation.

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **‘LOLO BAMBO LOLO’**

#### **CAST:**

Feminist

***Singer***

#### A REMOTE AREA OF ZULULAND — ABOUT 1884

Inkosikazi (Senior Wife)

Ntombizodwa (Mafenda’s first wife)

Gugulethu (Mafenda’s second wife)

Nomusa (Zingozi’s wife)

Nomadlozi (wife/sangoma)

Ntombizakazulu (daughter/thaswa)

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Missionary

Interpreter

Umunzane (Head of the Household)

Thembinkosi (his brother)

Mafenda (son)

Zingozi (son)

Imimoya Emibi (Evil spirits)

#### FROM ZULULAND TO JOHANNESBURG — ABOUT 1950

Ma Dlamini

Worker/Sam/Foreman

Shop Assistant/Nightwatchman/Factory Worker

Post Office Official/Drunk/Mzinga/Factory Worker

White man/Joe/Factory Worker

Cleaner/Zephenina Mkhize (Ma Dlamini's husband) /Factory Worker

Rural Woman/Jiki/Factory Cleaner

Shop Assistant/Maid/Zuzu/Factory Worker

Rural Woman/White woman/Linde/Factory Worker

Shopkeeper/Beauty/Factory Worker

Rural Woman/Zodwa/Factory Worker

Rural Woman/Ma Dube/Factory Worker

Rural Man/City Dweller/Factory Worker

#### EKUSENI HIGH SCHOOL — 1984

Mr. Mkhize (Principal)

Mrs. Mkhize

Dudu Mkhize

Mrs. Thwala (a Teacher)

Mr Majola (a Teacher)

Mrs. Mtolo (a Teacher)

Miss Zondo (a Teacher)

Mr Habiya (Chairman of the Parent's Association)

Mr Daliwonga (a Parent)

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Professor Daliwonga (Mr Daliwonga's Wife)

Head Boy

Head Girl

Sister Nkosi

Dr Sangweni