

Rights of Representation: An Ethics of Intercultural Theatre Practice

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PhD in Theatre Studies

2012

I declare that this thesis is all my own work

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Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Karen Fricker and Prof. Helen Gilbert, and my advisor, Dr. Lynette Goddard, for their generosity with time and expertise throughout this research project.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to Royal Holloway for supporting this project financially and to all at the Department of Drama and Theatre for creating a warm, encouraging and intellectually exciting environment in which to work. I'd like especially to mention Dr. Sophie Nield who was Dean of Graduate Studies during my first and second years of study.

I also owe thanks to all the practitioners who gave up their time to speak with me and whose thoughts have greatly enriched this research.

Heartfelt thanks to Eugénie Pastor, Mara Lockowandt, Karen Quigley, Sofia Apospori and Daniel O'Gorman for their feedback, ideas and friendship. Thanks also to all on the *Platform* board, especially Adam Alston.

Thanks to my mother, Mary, and my father, Pearse, for their love and financial help. Thanks to my flatmates Jack, Sophie and Chris, my brothers Ronan and Ciarán, my best friend Deirdre and my boyfriend Stephen, for their practical and emotional support.

Abstract

This doctoral thesis proposes an ethics of intercultural theatre, offering a materially engaged framework through which to approach both the problematics and positive potential of intercultural practice. Framing intercultural debates in terms of rights of representation, it suggests that the right to represent Othered people and cultures can be strengthened through 1) involvement of members of all represented cultures, 2) equality and creative agency of all collaborators, 3) advantageousness of a given project to all involved, and 4) positive socio-political effects of a production within its performance contexts. Working through four diverse case studies – Tim Supple’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Pan Pan Theatre Company’s *The Playboy of the Western World*, Peter Brook’s *11 and 12* and Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle’s *The Playboy of the Western World* – this project uses a Bourdieusian theoretical framework to flag elements of contemporary intercultural practice that strengthen and weaken rights of representation. It recognises that Orientalist and Eurocentric modes of representing Otherness still require address; equally, it points to laudable working practices, moving towards a pragmatics of best intercultural theatre practice.

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Introduction

Intercultural theatre practice is, at base, any theatrical fusing of two or more cultures.¹ Working with this definition, a collaboration between Lecoq physical theatre artists and a Royal Shakespeare Company director might be described as intercultural. Or, a version of *The Playboy of the Western World* produced by the drama department at New York University might be called intercultural also. However, in practice, these are not usually the kinds of performances under discussion in intercultural theatre scholarship. Much of the work of well-known intercultural practitioner-scholars, such as Richard Schechner, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, and Ariane Mnouchkine, straddles the contested borders between East and West, North and South, First World and Third World. There are, of course, renowned intercultural practitioners from outside of Europe and North America – Ong Keng Sen and Tadashi Suzuki are high profile examples – but, as Lo and Gilbert point out, ‘Even when intercultural exchanges take place within the "non-West," they are often mediated through Western culture and/or economics’ (36/37).

Arguably, one reason for intercultural scholarship’s focus on theatrical encounters between East and West, Third World and First World, is that the potential for new and exciting aesthetic interactions in such encounters is more pronounced than in, for example, an NYU production of Synge. Another reason that intercultural debates have tended to revolve around collaborations between theatrical traditions that are geographically and/or culturally far-removed from each other is that the ethical

¹ Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert define intercultural theatre as ‘a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions’ (36). Ric Knowles prefers the term ‘intercultural’ to other similar markers because it focuses on ‘the contested unsettling spaces *between* cultures’ (*Interculturalism* 4) which evoke ‘the possibility of interaction across a multiplicity of cultural positionings avoiding binary codings’ (4). This project accepts Knowles’s analysis of the semiotic usefulness of the term, but, ultimately, chooses ‘interculturalism’ above other similar markers because it is the term around which most of the useful scholarship on theatre between cultures is focused in the discipline of theatre studies.

dimension of such practice is a source of controversy. Material inequalities and Orientalist relationships resulting from colonial pasts inform many meetings across cultures. Intercultural practice can be read as a postmodern justification for the continuation of Orientalist dynamics of West speaking for East or of Europe speaking for Africa. ‘From the beginning of Western speculation about the Orient,’ says Edward Said, ‘the one thing the Orient could not do was represent itself’ (*Orientalism* 283). Further, interculturalism can be seen as cultural piracy – the appropriation and denigration of Othered² cultural artefacts for economic or symbolic profit. Rooted in historical, economic, social and political concerns, moral challenges to representing Othered persons and cultures abound. Ric Knowles calls the polarised debate arising from dichotomous ways of reading intercultural theatre – i.e. – universalist and aesthetic versus materialist and political (*Interculturalism* 13) – the ‘interculture wars’ (20).

The interculture wars, understood ethically, have at their core a concern with rights of representation. Rustom Bharucha asks us to recognise the significance of economic, national and linguistic boundaries; Schechner assures us that these boundaries are transforming. At base, Schechner holds that Western theatre practitioners have the moral right to represent Othered peoples and cultures; Bharucha holds that globally privileged Western interculturalists do not unproblematically have this right. Other theorists find a middle path. Brian Singleton notes that the controversial practice

² Throughout this thesis I use the term ‘Othered’ as opposed to the more common term ‘Other.’ The concept of the Other emerges from the work of phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas (whose work is briefly discussed later in this introduction). As an integral concept in Said’s *Orientalism*, a discourse of the Other has been inherent in postcolonial theory from the field’s inception. The Other opposes the self or the same, and, equally, creates the self/same through its symbolism of that which the self/same is not. While I find the term satisfying in phenomenology, and in continental philosophy more generally, I am uncomfortable with its use in postcolonialism. Contemplation of the I or the self is a cornerstone of phenomenology, and this works to complicate from the outset any understanding of the Other. The same cannot be said of postcolonial theory. Further, the colonial Other is defined as inferior, in turn creating the superiority of the coloniser. Given this important distinction between the term’s usage in phenomenology and postcolonialism, it seems crucial to destabilise the positionality of the Other in the latter discourse. Capital O notwithstanding, the postcolonial term Other fails to connote the subject position that creates the Other, or to connote the process of Othering. In using a verb rather a noun form (that is - Othered people, not Other people) such connotations are made plain, and any fixity in understanding Otherness is avoided.

of intercultural performance characterises ‘at best a sharing and mutual borrowing of the manifestation of one theatre practice by another’ and at worst ‘the annihilation of indigenous pre-modern practices by a rapacious “First World” capitalism’ (‘Interculturalism’ 628). He says ‘[t]he danger of following Said’s politics and Bharucha’s prescriptions is to produce hermetically sealed metacultures which do not exchange, trade, or evolve’ (‘Otherness’ 96), but equally advises ‘we must remember at all times that the unequal distribution of wealth, power and access to other cultures means that a “culture of choice” might only ever be a first-world postmodern possibility’ (‘Otherness’ 96). Similarly, Maria Shevstova critiques the notions of cultural purity inherent in Bharucha’s insistence that all works developed within a specific culture must be situated back in that culture (‘Interculturalism’ 100). She argues that ‘if theatre art were not appropriated by different groups, in different cultures, with different intentions, and for different goals, then it would be embalmed in its holiness, untouched and untouchable, and unloved’ (‘Interculturalism’ 101). All the same, she recognises that even transcultural theatre³ has ‘its own chronotype, that is, its own socio-historical time-space. It does not suddenly come out of nowhere, but is made by people living and working within the possibilities open to them’ (‘Interculturalism’ 99). This project treads a similar path, recognising that intercultural theatre practice is both good and bad, sometimes simultaneously, and proposing an ethics that allows practitioners and scholars to work and think towards best practice.

In 1985, Schechner conceptualised the emergence of intercultural theatre as a dialogue between theatre and anthropology. For Schechner, a new world gave birth to itself after World War II (*Anthropology* 149). This world of ‘colliding cultures’ was ‘no longer dominated by Europeans and Americans, and no longer capable of being

³ In Lo and Gilbert’s formulation, transcultural theatre is a subcategory of intercultural theatre that ‘aims to transcend culture-specific codification in order to reach a more universal human condition’ (‘Topography’ 37).

dominated by anyone' (149). He predicted: 'Soon enough, as the changed relations among peoples are more clearly manifested, the term "international" will be replaced by "intercultural"' (149). Over a quarter of a century later, the 'intercultural phase of human history' (149) foretold by Schechner has not arrived. While the world has become more globalized during this time,⁴ the nation state remains a strong determinant of cultural identity as well as economic and political power. Schechner's 1993 publication, *The Future of Ritual*, displays a more cautious approach to interculturalism, stating: '[f]itfully, unevenly, and with plenty of cruelty, a planetary human culture is emerging which is aware of, if not yet acting responsibly toward, the whole geobiocultural system' (*Ritual* 16). The caution evident here is analogous to ethical reflection on the processes that shift focus from the national to the cultural, from the local to the global, and from the specific to the universal. These processes can be cruel; they can be irresponsible: ethical engagement is required. Knowles asks: 'What if the goals of intercultural exchange were less formal and aesthetic and more political, the methods less idealist and more materialist, the understanding of audiences less monolithic, and the objects of analysis more multiplicitous?' (*Interculturalism* 30) He suggests that performance arising from such conditions 'might more effectively function to redress rather than perpetuate the colonial project and might help perform into being a more equitable basis for exchange' (30). In terms of rights of representation, Singleton, Shevstova, and Knowles's positions suggest that Western practitioners have the right to represent Othered nations, cultures and people, but that this right depends on the responsibility to adequately engage with the significance of history, global power dynamics, economics, politics, language, class issues and gender

⁴ Patrick Lonergan's conception of globalization as a 'paradigmatic shift from physical to conceptual space' (*Globalization* 17) provides a good grounding for the way I am using the term. Lonergan draws on theorists such as Immanuel Wallerstein and Malcolm Waters to suggest that while the world has been becoming globalized for centuries, globalization happens when people become aware of the shift from the physical to the conceptual, or the recession of geographical constraints, and begin to alter their behaviour accordingly.

relations (henceforth collectively ‘materialities’) informing intercultural exchanges.

This position constitutes a contemporary morality of the field.

The field of intercultural theatre studies is broad, and there have been many models and modes proposed for approaching its practice, politics, and, implicitly, ethics. This project will not offer an overview of the field, but instead refer the reader to the extremely useful short works by Knowles (*Interculturalism*) and Lo and Gilbert (‘Topography’) in this regard. The former synthesises core concerns of the intercultural field with brevity and insight, and the latter formulates taxonomies which offer the scholar a firm footing on complex intercultural terrain. Both works are referred to throughout the project whenever there is a need to return to first principles, definitions, and the accumulative knowledge of a field now in its fifth decade. There have also been a number of semiotic models proposed to deal with the cultural coding and reception of intercultural performance. Marvin Carlson, concerned with the extent to which a target culture absorbs the distinctive features of foreign elements in performance, delineates seven stages between the culturally familiar and the culturally foreign (‘Passages’ 82-84). Patrice Pavis’s semiotic model places the cultural modeling and sociological codifications of a source culture in the upper bowl of an hourglass, and imagines these to reorder themselves through stages of adaptation and various facets of the production process (*Crossroads* 186-216). At the neck of Pavis’s hourglass is the representation or performance, through which metaphorical grains of culture pass. In the lower bowl reception-adaptors (ways the director arranges the target culture’s reception (191)), readability, and reception affect the grains of culture resulting in cultural consequences (which Pavis roots in the reactions of the spectators (208)). In more recent scholarship, Carlson points to the decline of strong semiotic analysis in intercultural theatre and performance studies. Having experimented with Carlson’s suggestion that semiotics should be allowed ‘the freedom to explore the highly intricate and challenging patterns

of signification offered by the modern multicultural work' ('Semiotics' 141), and also with Pavis's model of intellectual and cultural exchange, this project persists within historical, socio-political, and cultural economic paradigms. My attempts at semiotic analysis of intercultural theatre in specific performance contexts became complex to the point of conjecture, and the ethical significance of a production and its process to a time and place became hidden behind convoluted interpretative wrangling. This may be a failure of my skills as a semiotician rather than of the power of Pavis's model or Carlson's suggestion for future intercultural scholarship.

This thesis examines four intercultural productions and lays out elements of each that strengthen or weaken its rights of representation. In the conviction that few theatre productions or processes fit neatly into pre-ordained categories or taxonomies, the research offers a strategy for working productively with the fact that intercultural theatre, like many human endeavours, is a pepper and salt mixture of virtues and vices. It aims to learn lessons where methods and ends are laudable as well as where they are dubious. It proposes ethical guidelines against which to measure intercultural productions, providing a tool for thinking towards best practice.

Culture(s) and Cosmopolitanism

Culture is 'a realm of uses and circulating energies' (Frow 2), an appropriate definition of which is the subject of much debate. Anthony Giddens understands it sociologically as 'the *values* the members of a given group hold, the *norms* they follow, and the material goods they create' (31). This sociological definition of culture differentiates itself from another common understanding of the term – that is, art, literature, music, and other constituents of a field of cultural production. Such a distinction is unnecessary where the specification of 'material' goods in Giddens's sociological formulation is

acknowledged as limiting. All the goods a given group creates are constitutive of what differentiates it culturally, and thus any sociological definition of culture can include language, music, poetry, art, and oral traditions (and, possibly, depending on one's relationship with positivism, systems of knowledge and belief). Further, because cultural analysis of art in the globalized era is often concerned with identity, this should be foregrounded in a sociological definition designed to address contemporary art practice. With these twin amendments in mind, this project's working definition of culture is: the values, norms, and sense of identity that a given group share, as well as the material, intellectual and artistic artefacts they produce.

Cultures operate within, to draw on John Frow (144) and Arjun Appadurai ('Commodities' 15, 57), 'regimes of value.' These regimes offer a broad set of agreements regarding what is desirable, what is reasonable to exchange for what, and who is permitted to exercise what kind of demand in what circumstances. Cultures can change, evolve, syncretise, hybridize and even disappear. Whether conceptually one considers cultures to assimilate objects at their peripheries (Roach, *Circumatlantic*) or one sees no cultural cores or peripheries, no inherent unities or fixities (Bhabha, *Location* 50-55),⁵ any theoretical discussion necessitating the delineation of two or more distinct heterogenous cultures must stand ready to answer charges of nostalgic preservationism or naïve notions of authenticity. National cultural identities have the

⁵ Bhabha formulates a third space of 'cultural enunciation' by channelling Fanon's discussion of representational uncertainty in *The Wretched of the Earth* and crossing this with a post-structuralist argument about the *différance* of writing. He says:

It is only when we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity. Fanon's vision of revolutionary cultural and political change as a 'fluctuating movement' of occult instability could not be articulated as cultural practice without an acknowledgement of this indeterminate space of the subject(s) of enunciation. It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew. (*Location* 55)

potential to be oppressive, acting to exclude minorities and restrict change (Harvie, *UK* 2), cultural pride can be co-opted and exploited by nationalisms to dubious ends (Bharucha, *Politics* 27) and, within nations, constructions of cultural authenticity can be used by dominant cultures to deny hybrid minority cultures a political voice (Griffiths, 'Myth'; Gunew, *Haunted* 67-78, 'Multiplicities'). Cultural protectionism can be proffered as justification for censorship (Knight, 'Cultural Identity') and pleas for cultural sensitivity meet staunch retorts from defenders of free speech.⁶ Cosmopolitan writer Anthony Appiah, while admitting that 'the connection people feel to cultural objects that are symbolically theirs, because they were produced from within a world of meaning created by their ancestors – the connection to art through identity – is powerful' (*Cosmopolitanism* 134/5), ultimately understands any important cultural artefacts to be the property of all humanity. He believes that '[t]alk of "cultural property," even when directed at imperialism, has imperial tendencies of its own' (*Cosmopolitanism* 128). Ideas of cultural ownership and cultural protectionism, in Appiah's view, can work against liberal and humanistic values. Appiah is right to be cautious about sectioning cultural products and practices into fields marked 'self' and 'Other.' There are potentially illiberal effects of ascribing different cultural rights and privileges to people in different contexts. However, crucially, the universalism that would seem an antidote to such effects often operates to the advantage of those with historically inscribed privilege and to the disadvantage of under-privileged peoples and cultures.

No one culture is intrinsically advantaged over any other culture. All cultural practices are capable of being exoticised (as Eastern practices often are in the West) or of seeming 'tired' to those who practice them (as many theorists and practitioners –

⁶ The *Jyllands-Posten* 2005 cartoon controversy is emblematic of this kind of cultural tension. The Danish cartoons of the prophet Mohammad were seen by some as mindlessly inflammatory, by others as an important statement about the limits multiculturalism places on freedom of speech.

Brook, Pavis and Mnouchkine included – understand the Western canon). Differences between the status of cultural practices in specific regimes of value (or, in Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, fields of cultural production) are symbolic: they are based on differences in cultural capital, and, in a globalized economy, some people are in better positions to exploit that capital than others. Therefore, this research proposes that a degree of recognition of cultural ownership – of a stronger right to represent and critique one’s own culture than to represent and critique the culture of the Other – is necessary to deal with a global culture industry built on historically inscribed inequalities.

Problematizing Universalism: Peter Brook’s (in)famous *Mahabharata*

Brook’s *Mahabharata* has long served as a focal point for tensions surrounding intercultural universalism, postmodernism, and neo-imperialism. I am using it here to tease out some of the reasons optimistic cosmopolitanisms may be premature, and to establish a model of exploitative interculturalism against which contemporary case studies can be measured throughout the project. Working with international actors at his International Centre of Theatre Research⁷ (CIRT) in the late 60s and 70s, Brook theorised and sought a third culture, the culture of links, situated between the culture of the state and that of the individual (Brook, ‘Links’ 63). Based on CIRT workshops, Brook came to believe that ‘popular clichés about each person’s culture were often shared by the person himself’ (‘Links’ 66). For Brook, what the actor took to be his culture was only the superficial mannerism of that culture; something different reflected the performer’s deepest culture and individuality. The culture of links is a universal

⁷ Centre International de Recherche Théâtrale

mode of culture, neither statist nor individualist, discovering relationships between people⁸ and ‘vital truths’ (66) through cultural acts.

Embodying the edicts of the culture of links, Brook’s retelling of the Indian religious epic about the origins of the world, *The Mahabharata* (1985), was adapted by Jean-Claude Carrière and enacted first in French, later in English by an international ensemble of actors. Brook spent time in India researching the production - studying ancient texts and observing folk and traditional performances of the epic. He also brought his CIRT ensemble to India in preparation for the performance. The resultant production toured the world to great critical acclaim, but never played in India.

‘The Mahabharata for thousands of years had belonged to its soil, India,’ Brook says, ‘But now, just like Shakespeare, it demanded to be opened to all humanity’ (Brook qtd. in Ancheri). For scholars such as Gautam Dasgupta, Pradip Bhattacharya, Bharucha and Carlson, however, Brook’s production glosses over the religious and cultural significance of the *Mahabharata* to Indian people, its universalism representing an unapologetic neo-colonialism and Orientalism. Carlson asserts: ‘the universal, like the unmediated, can be and has been a dangerous and self-deceptive vision, denying the voice of the Other in an attempt to transcend it’ (‘Passages’ 91). Dasgupta regrets that while in India performances of the *Mahabharata*, through heterogeneous enactments, address ‘a deeply engrained structure of ritual beliefs and ethical codes of conduct intrinsic to its audience’ (264), the epic becomes ‘nothing, an empty shell, if it is read merely as a compendium of martial legends of revenge, valour and bravura’ as ‘is the reading attributed to *The Mahabharata* by Carrière and Brook.’ (264). Schechner, who usually champions the potential for productive exchange in intercultural theatre, chides

⁸ While these relationships often take the form of archetypes, they are not to be understood in the Jungian sense (in Jung, archetypes are innate mental states of being that create subconscious symbols and experiences. See *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*), but, rather, as David Williams explains ‘as transcultural paradigms’ (‘Transculturalism’ 68). I would add, based on study of Brook’s written oeuvre as a whole, that the third culture has strongly spiritual undertones. This will be further supported in Chapter Three.

Brook's attempts to 'elide difference' in *The Mahabharata*, saying: 'Brook assumes – as the English who own Shakespeare do – that certain works operate at the human rather than the cultural level' (*Future* 17) and observing that Brook assembled an international cast to perform 'not only the epic story but also the universalist doctrine that under the skin all humans are the same' (17).

David Williams notes that Brook will always be the villain in postcolonial readings of *The Mahabharata* 'for the simple and unavoidable fact that he represents the economic, and *ipso facto* cultural, power and hierarchy of the west throughout the history of its relationship with Asia' ('Innocence' 25); Williams wishes 'to redress the balance somewhat by presenting both sides of the debate' (25). While for Williams Brook is a director who has 'fossicked through the scree of the world's cultures, digging deep into the bedrock of theatre forms in the hope of exposing an ore: a living theatrical language, radical in the etymological sense of the word (and a return to roots), of and for our time' (21), he regrets that Brook 'seems unwilling to confront the dangers concomitant with applying a culturally non-specific, essentialist/humanist aesthetic to [material such as the *Mahabharata*]' (24) and acknowledges charges of insensitivity, paternalism and neo-colonialism against the director (24).

Brook's own relationship to the intercultural ethics of his *Mahabharata* is difficult to pin down. In interview with Jonathan Kalb in April 2010, he explains that the Bhagavad Gita⁹ was distilled down to just a few lines in Jean-Claude Carrière's *Mahabharata* because he 'felt very strongly that when you are dealing with what is very rightly seen as the most sacred of sacred texts, you don't put it into a piece of theatre' (64). This signals sensitivity to the spiritual significance of (at least parts of) the *Mahabharata* for Indian people. Further, he notes that the *Mahabharata* 'is a great Hindu, Indian classic. It isn't an Esperanto classic. So India is in the names of the

⁹ The Bhagavad Gita, or Song of God, is the part of the *Mahābhārata* in which Krishna counsels the hesitant Pandava Prince Arjuna on the battlefield of the Kurukshetra war.

characters, in the presence of the Ganges, in the costumes, the gestures, and even in the manner of shooting a bow. We paid homage to it to the degree that would enhance the subject and not cloak the subject' (66). Again, this seems to imply some recognition that Indian culture was represented by and integral to the production. On the other hand, Brook dismisses political and ethical reactions to alleged exploitation of Indian culture in *The Mahabharata* as 'jargon' (69) and responds to such reactions thus:

[E]very country in the world, including India, hasn't hesitated for several hundred years to translate Shakespeare, to use Shakespeare. He is considered part of the world's heritage, and nobody in England has denounced the productions in Arabic and Swahili and Hindi. (qtd. in Kalb 69/70)

This reversion to an ahistoric, universal perspective, is blind to the colonial logic behind Shakespeare's global ubiquity and reverence, to the bard's use as a tool of cultural imperialism, and to education policies that lionised the culture of the coloniser at the expense of the culture of the colonised. This blindness leads Brook to say, as if by way of a compliment, that the *Mahabharata* is 'the only Shakespearean work [he] know[s] outside Shakespeare' (64).

Bharucha locates Brook's interculturalism in a colonial tradition. The British took Indian raw materials, transported them to factories in England where they were transformed into commodities, then 'forcibly' sold back to India; Brook acts similarly, as a 'maestro' who converts the cultural artefacts of the Orient 'into raw material for his own intercultural experiments' ('View' 229). In lieu of the idea that although a translated, Westernised telling of the *Mahabharata* has been created by Brook, traditional ways of performing the epic remain the prerogative of the Indian people, Bharucha suggests that 'tropes of an unacknowledged neo-orientalism, drawing on the archetypes of "eternal India" get transported back to contemporary India' (*Politics* 50)

and thus affect the nation in its strivings towards self-realization. Essentially, what is at issue is ‘the intercultural patronage of intracultural¹⁰ exchange within the boundaries of India, which feeds the globalization of cultural capital through agencies inimicable to the ethos of self-sufficiency’ (*Politics* 50). India buys back its trivialized artefacts and develops no sustainable system for intracultural exchange or a cultural evolution of integrity. Bharucha’s cultural nationalism¹¹ is open to cosmopolitan critiques. However, within a context of stark global inequality, and in the historical awareness that cultural relations that once seemed fair and rational to Western civilization are now largely recognised as exploitative and racist, Bharucha’s reading of the global culture industry as epitomised by Brook’s interculturalism deserves serious consideration. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, scholarly attention to Orientalist relations does not make such relations disappear (‘Artifice’). Orientalist power dynamics and modes of representation are still very much present in intercultural practice and scholarship, even if the racist ideologies which historically underpinned these relations are now disavowed by most.

To illustrate: in a troubling defence of Brook’s *Mahabharata*, Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe argues that:

The level of discourse adopted (consciously?) by Bharucha and other Indian and Western commentators is clearly set within the confines of the Western mind-set with its predominance and

¹⁰ Bharucha uses the term ‘intracultural’ to discuss the dynamics ‘between and across specific communities and regions *within* the boundaries of the nation state’ (*Politics* 6).

¹¹ In *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, John Hutchinson distinguishes the political nationalist from the cultural nationalist. The political nationalist has a legal-rational conception of the nation: citizens find dignity through the exercise of self-determination and self-government as members of an independent state. Cultural nationalists, on the other hand, regard the nation as a moral community; employing a historicist cosmology, they consider humanity to be divided into unique autonomous nations, each of which should have the right to publicly express its individual culture. Cultural nationalism, Hutchinson tells us, is perceived by some as a construction and its propagators as inventors of tradition who use symbols like language, religion or race to magnify the differences between proposed members of the community and outsiders, and to minimize the divisions within this group. He rejects the thesis that any demarcation of a distinct cultural group is arbitrary. There are, he argues, genuine communal memories linked to homeland, cultural practice and socio-political organization. Further, he distinguishes cultural nationalism from a retreat into an agrarian, utopian past free from the difficulties of industrialized modernity. For Hutchinson, cultural nationalism aims to move the nation forward to an advanced stage of social development without forfeiting its unique identity.

superiority of certain thought processes – such as reason, the intellect, concepts, historicity and understanding – over levels of the mind that in the context of the Western mind-set are considered inferior – such as intuition, anything that cannot be expressed in words, hunches, myth, archetypes, the spiritual, the universal (74/75).

Meyer-Dinkgräfe continues: ‘even the arguments “from India” against Brook’s production are clearly located within a Western mind-set’ (75). He calls this phenomenon a residue of colonialism, saying ‘Indian intellectuals, whether trained in India or the West, have (unconsciously?) adopted the paradigm dominating the West’ (75). For Meyer-Dinkgräfe, Indians who make rational arguments about the problematics of Brook’s *Mahabharata* are being inauthentically Indian insofar as they are using intellect, concepts, historicity and understanding. Meyer-Dinkgräfe goes on to describe what he understands to be the Indian model of consciousness, a model which his bibliography indicates is based on a single paper concerning Maharishi’s Vedic psychology of human development, written by four authors with Western names, based at the Maharishi¹² University of Management, Iowa. Like the intercultural practitioner that he defends, Meyer-Dinkgräfe is operating from a space of respect and reverence for ‘Indian’ culture as he understands it. However, the India he respects and reveres is a thoroughly Orientalist western-mediated image of India, an image of spirituality and traditionalism, while diverse modern Indian political consciousnesses are dismissed as inauthentic.

In the final part of Kalb’s interview, Brook recognises his place in a historicised, postcolonial world, noting that ‘If you’re white you can’t help carrying on your back all the background of years of exploitation’ (71), and, further, that ‘we have

¹² Maharishi was guru to the Beatles.

to pay the price for all the monstrosities that our forefathers committed' (71). This price, for Brook, is an uncomfortable, but ultimately historicised, awareness of 'years of exploitation.' Some parts of the world and groups of people continue to pay far greater prices for these years. If, as Brook believes, a history of colonial exploitation is palpably present in any meeting between Europeans and their Others, then the transcultural archetypes uncovered by Brook's third culture serve to obscure this presence – absolving those who are advantaged by past wrongs of responsibility. Such willed forgetting allows the equation of Brook's *Mahabharata* with Indian adaptations of Shakespeare; it erases the importance of materialities to current social realities. With these things erased, full responsibility for present inequality lies with the disadvantaged, unless by some charitable Western whim. While critiques of Brook in terms of his utilization of sacred texts must come up against moral and logical appeals to freedom of speech, it is far harder to offer a retort, of moral or logical parity, to counter the Marxist observation that the ideologies of meritocracy and individualism ultimately underpinning Brook's universalism operate to the benefit of the West in the global culture industry. Brook's cognitive dissonance on the ethics of his practice stems from the fact that universalist interculturalism is incommensurate with recognition of the globe as a most unlevel playing field.

Interculturalism and Postcolonialism

If the kind of materially engaged reflection required to ensure strong rights of representation is to be undertaken, the power dynamics inherent in intercultural practice require address. In this regard, Lo and Gilbert suggest matrixing interculturalism and postcolonialism¹³ (43-46). They explain that 'postcolonial theory has been [...]

¹³ Gilbert and Tompkins remind us that postcolonialism is not a 'naïve teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism,' but is, rather, 'an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies' (2).

consistently political, taking as its primary imperative the task of exposing and redressing unequal power relationships between cultures, whereas interculturalism has concerned itself more often with the aesthetics of cultural transfer' (44). They suggest that postcolonial theory offers current debates about interculturalism 'a framework for analyzing such thorny issues as agency, hybridity, and authenticity' (44). It can also provide scholars with means to talk about rights of representation without succumbing to essentialising, limiting and illiberal definitions of culture. Lo and Gilbert further state: 'With its insistent stress on historicity and specificity, postcolonial theory offers ways of relocating the dynamics of intercultural theatre within identifiable fields of sociopolitical and historical relations' (44). Such relocation addresses the cosmopolitan concerns of scholars like Appiah. It provides a space for Othered people and cultures to assert their right to represent themselves, as well as to challenge representations which perpetuate disempowering stereotypes, offer what Robert Stam and Louise Spence call patronizingly positive images,¹⁴ or propagate historically inscribed economic, social or symbolic inequalities.

For Said, 'Orientalism is more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient (which is what, in its academic or scholarly form, it claims to be)' (*Orientalism* 6). Similarly, much intercultural theatre that claims to tell stories or present performance practices from Othered places says more about Western maestros, funding bodies and primary target audiences than it does about the cultures it ostensibly represents. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reminds us that colonialism's 'most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonized, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship with the world' (16). In his formulation, the politics,

¹⁴ Insistence on positive images, argue Stam and Spence, 'obscures the fact that "nice" images might at times be as pernicious as overtly degrading ones, providing a bourgeois façade for paternalism, a more pervasive racism' (3).

cultures and economy of Europe continue to be controlled by imperialism while Africans struggle to regain their creative historical initiative through ‘a real control of all the means of communal self-definition’ (143). The postcolonial concern here for communal self-definition (or, in terms of theatre practice, communal self-representation) requires a discussion of the connotations of the communal self.

Although distinct cultures often exist within as well as across national boundaries, many theorists have argued for the importance of the national in escaping the cultural stranglehold that wa Thiong’o describes. For Frantz Fanon national culture is not folkloric, nor abstract, nor backward looking. Rather it is ‘the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence’ (*Wretched* 233). Similarly, Bharucha distances himself from any advocacy of ‘a vacuous retrieval of the past through an “invention of tradition,”’ denouncing the process whereby, in India in 1977, ‘a “back to roots” anti-modern/anti-realist/anti-western policy was crudely, yet tenaciously, propagated by the State and its accomplices’ (*Politics* 27). Still, he cannot embrace the assumed dissolution of national and cultural boundaries ‘without fearing that something is being lost or evaded’ (Bharucha, ‘Reply’ 258) in countries where people are just beginning to confront history on their own terms.¹⁵

These positions all urge Western interculturalists to consider their place in a historical tradition of Orientalism and colonialism, and to confront, as Bharucha advises, ‘their own implicit nationalisms’ (*Politics* 30). These postcolonial positions urge Western interculturalists to engage thoughtfully and practically with the materialities informing their cultural ‘exchanges,’ and to earn rather than assume the right to represent Othered peoples.

¹⁵ For a fascinating discussion of the element of loss accompanying intercultural interactions see Diana Taylor, ‘Transculturating Transculturation.’ Without implying reciprocity or equality between cultural systems, Taylor uses a transcultural model drawn from José Maria Arguedas and Bronislaw Malinowski which ‘simultaneously notes the co-existence of elements but, just as importantly, underlines the element of *loss* of the two systems in the creation of a third’ (62).

Defending Intercultural Scholarship: A Critique of Interweaving

Postcolonial models of intercultural scholarship focus primarily on the material and the political, whereas much prior focus of intercultural theatre scholarship was on the aesthetics of the stage performance. The aesthetics of intercultural performance practice are an important object of study, and recent scholarship on ‘interweaving’ by Erika Fischer-Lichte and others has taken steps towards addressing the ways that cultures interact in performance that avoid some of the more troubling aspects of Brook’s universalism. The problem is that, in reacting against what may appear to be a sidelining of aesthetics in postcolonial intercultural thought,¹⁶ discourses of interweaving have abandoned much scholarship that is integral to an ethics of intercultural practice.

Characterising the experience participants (both performers and spectators) undergo during a performance as liminal (‘Interweaving’ 392), Fischer-Lichte suggests that because of the inbetween-ness inherent in such spaces ‘performances become particularly suitable sites for processes to take place between people within but also outside of the same milieu, religion, social status, gender, ethnic group or culture’ (392). In lieu of the term intercultural, Fischer-Lichte champions the term interweaving. ‘Interweaving cultures in performance’ she tells us,

does not mean erasing their differences or homogenizing them. Rather [...] performances are particularly suitable sites for different cultures to meet and negotiate their relationships through various processes of interweaving that result in something completely new and beyond the scope of any single participating culture. (400)

¹⁶ For many postcolonial theorists, of course, the aesthetic is political.

Fischer-Lichte uses the concept of interweaving to circumvent the extreme politics that would disallow engagement with Othered cultures from a Western subject position. While the theory is primarily engaged with the aesthetics and meanings created within an interstitial space comprised of performers and audience, it implies a situation where postcolonial politics are not *a/the* defining factor of a given cultural phenomenon.

In some ways, interweaving theory is based on a false negation of intercultural scholarship. Fischer-Lichte believes the term intercultural assumes ‘the feasibility of clearly recognizing the cultural origins of each element and distinguishing between what is “ours” and what is “theirs”’ (399); the differences between cultures are, in her formulation, permanently generated anew, and thus she dismisses theories of theatrical syncretism¹⁷ and hybridity,¹⁸ saying: ‘[t]he notion of the hybrid, which is transferred from biology, assumes that we are dealing with elements that do not belong together “originally” or by their very “nature” but have been linked arbitrarily’ (399). The term hybrid, however, has a self-reflexive meaning in postcolonial theory – its connotations are subverted by theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak who, following Jacques Derrida, use *différance* to underline the incongruities and ambiguities of hegemonic discourse. As Ania Loomba, engaging with Robert Young, explains, although the term hybridization technically refers to the botanical practice of inter-species grafting and thus connotes the vocabulary of the Victorian extreme right, ‘in post-colonial theory it is widely used to gesture towards those discursive and behavioural ways in which this vocabulary was challenged and undermined’ (Loomba, ‘Othello Fellows’ 143). Far from a naïve denial that the attempt to draw a line between

¹⁷ See Christopher Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-colonial Drama*

¹⁸ For an excellent discussion of hybridity that takes culture, identity *and* embodiment into account, see Jacqueline Lo ‘Queer magic: Performing Mixed Race on the Australian Stage,’ especially pages 171-73. For an overview of critiques of postcolonial hybridity, see Salah M. Moukhlis, ‘Agents of Change, Critical Theory and the New Geographies of Postcoloniality.’ Moukhlis cites hybridity as ‘one of the most misconstrued and slippery concepts serving under disguise as a major tool used by late capitalism to incorporate and manage difference’ (94). Moukhlis’s argument is impassioned and materially engaged, but, conceptually, gives premature credence to the dissolution of nationalism and the nation state, which he configures as apparatuses required by the global economy to ‘police borders and oversee the traffic of commodities, monies and people’ (92).

‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ is futile (399), intercultural and postcolonial scholars use the term ‘hybridity’ in a way that at once symbolises and subverts that very futility.

Fischer-Lichte also criticises the discourse of intercultural theatre on the grounds that ‘non-Western elements imported into Western theatre are given a different emphasis than the use of Western elements in non-Western theatre’ (399) insofar as the former are seen as exciting aesthetic experiments and the latter as Westernisation. While this might be true of the attitudes of a select few interculturalists, it appears to be a critique of popular reception of intercultural work in the West rather than a critique of the field of interculturalism. Returning to notions of hybridity, syncretism, and mimicry,¹⁹ the use of Western elements in previously colonised contexts is often read in terms of subversion and empowerment. Intentional hybridity, Young argues, following Bakhtin, is ‘the ability of one voice to ironize and unmask the other within the same utterance’ (Young 20). This process, as Lo and Gilbert point out, calls notions of authenticity into question, without, of course, erasing difference (46). To illustrate, Poonam Trivedi, in a prelude to a discussion of Shiva Prakash’s *Maranayakana Drishtanta* (1989), a version of *Macbeth* that digresses significantly from Shakespeare, notes:

In the Indian literary tradition, translation, adaptation, rewriting and transformation are sanctioned practices of literary creation. Unlike the Western tradition in which even translation is a ‘fall’ from the origin and a condition of ‘exile,’ the Indian literary tradition recognizes these practices as legitimate modes of alterity. (‘Bloody Business’ 47)

The ‘initial indigenous response to Shakespeare’ Trivedi tells us ‘was to adapt and Indianize’ (47). After independence ‘this adaptive tradition has evolved into a

¹⁹ See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 121-131

deconstructive “play” with the text and themes of Shakespeare’ (48). Trivedi reads this use of Shakespeare as firmly rooted in Indian realities, not as symptomatic of Westernisation.

Further, the use of ‘Non-Western’ elements in Western theatre is not seen primarily as exciting aesthetic experimentation. Scholars have been probing deeper than the aesthetic surfaces of interculturalism for a long time. Since the 70s the anthropological/performative work of Victor Turner on the liminal space of ritual has been subject to the border critiques²⁰ of theorists like Renato Rosaldo, critiques which, as Donald Weber points out, are driven by ‘the implicit apolitical consciousness of the ritual liminar, his or her refusal to recognise the historically contingent power coordinates that inher in positionality’ (531). Schechner’s intercultural writings have also come under fire from scholars who certainly do not see the use of non-Western elements in Western theatre as simply exciting experimentation. In her review of Schechner’s *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, Joanne Tompkins decries Schechner’s attempts to collapse many cultures into one, his conversion to Hinduism to observe sacred rituals, his refusal to see voyeurism as invasion, and the fact he pays attention almost exclusively to Western critics. ‘Gesturing towards unspecified “crumbling national boundaries,”’ Tompkins says, ‘provides Schechner with enough justification for interculturalism and a lack of concern for the “other” culture and the way it might be consumed’ (138).

There is still a case to be made, however, for the assertion that ‘non-Western elements imported into Western theatre are given a different emphasis than the use of Western elements in non-Western theatre’ (Fisher-Lichte 399). This is not necessarily because the former are regarded as exciting aesthetic experiments, nor because the latter are regarded as modernisation or Westernisation. Rather, it is because intercultural

²⁰ Such critiques confront notions of liminality with the material and cultural structure of the border.

collaborations take place in a world that is materially unequal. When a culture has been historically spoken for by the West, it is a politically engaged and culturally sensitive practitioner or scholar who gives a different emphasis to representations of that culture or use of that culture's artefacts. It can be a positive thing that non-Western elements imported into Western theatre are given a different emphasis to Western elements in non-Western work. This does not have to lead us back into the cul-de-sac where, Singleton warns, sealed metacultures cease to evolve ('Otherness' 96). Rather, intercultural theatre practice can be ethically assessed in terms of rights of representation. While Fischer-Lichte's theory of interweaving offers a useful metaphor for thinking about cultural artefacts which come to represent more than their constituent cultural and aesthetic parts in the in-between space of performance, this project will remain concerned with the materially engaged intercultural discourse championed by Lo and Gilbert, Knowles, and others.

Addressing the Problems of Postcolonialism: Drawing on Discourses of Globalization and Multiculturalism

Discourses of hybridity and syncretism allow postcolonial theory to work with nebulous categories of culture and nation, and to avoid charges of authenticity-seeking or unproductive nostalgia. However, as Khalid Amine points out, 'economic and political power has been shifting away from a geographical location called the "West" and is now being both installed and contested at less identifiable sites around the globe' ('Taswir' 78). This leads to a situation where what Salah M. Moukhlis calls 'the spatio-temporal referentiality of the "postcolonial"' (89) is in dispute. While some theorists

propose broad formulations of this referentiality,²¹ postcolonial theory loses its footing in situations that cannot be deemed colonial in some historical sense, or where history seems increasingly irrelevant to economic and political modernities. Attempts to configure power relations between countries outside of a colonial history as postcolonial must always admit a logical lacuna. Shaobo Xie argues that even though China might not have been a colony of Europe, it can still be said to exist in a postcolonial relationship to the West.²² However, China is itself an imperial power, which continues to enforce hegemonic cultural policies within its borders, and this reading of its global status sits uncomfortably. There are problematic East/West power relations at play between China, Europe and North America, certainly, and while postcolonial scholarship can offer insights into these relationships, it does not provide a complete set of tools to get to the heart of this complex politics.

Further, with economic and political relations in flux, if postcolonial theory is to remain meaningful, there must be a point at which a nation or culture stops being postcolonial. For example, Ireland's postcolonial status has been integral to understandings of its literary and dramatic production since Field Day Theatre Company published pamphlets by Edward Said, Fredric Jameson and Terry Eagleton on Ireland's relationship with imperialism in the late 80s. Reacting against this status, Liam Kennedy shows through a discussion of socio-economics that 'the condition of Ireland prior to its partial breakaway from Britain bore little relationship to that of African and Asian societies at the historic moment of decolonisation in these continents' (Kennedy 111). For Kennedy, the language of postcolonialism in Irish literary and cultural studies has 'little serious intent, merely contributing to atmosphere and emphasis' (118).

²¹ For example, Simon During defines 'postcolonialism' as 'the need, in nations or groups which have been victims of imperialism, to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images' (125).

²² '[T]he Western master narrative of modernity retains its grip on the world [...] non-Western peoples including the Chinese, to a large extent, remain ideologically and culturally colonized without political and military coercion by imperialists' (Xie 14).

Writing at the height of the Celtic tiger boom, Patrick Lonergan opines that ‘it is difficult to sustain the notion that Ireland is postcolonial when it is also one of the wealthiest countries in the world’ (221). Yet the work of cultural materialists such as Raymond Williams, Alan Sinfield and Knowles convincingly complicates Marxist conceptions of culture as purely economic. The policies used to suppress Gaelic language and culture in Ireland look similar to colonial strategies elsewhere. In a country where the native language, culture, and art forms continue to evolve in dialogue with a mainstream culture of hybridised Anglophone Irishness and the myriad Irish cultures and identities that have been created by inward migration and globalization, postcolonial modes of addressing Ireland’s literary and theatrical culture remain, in one sense, valid. Yet, all this considered, it seems strange to pretend that economic considerations do not complicate the power dynamics implied by labelling Ireland postcolonial in relation to its global cultural interactions. Like many other countries in a globalizing world, Ireland’s relationship with postcolonialism is nuanced and even contradictory.²³ This project proposes a mode of analysis rooted in cultural capital to account for intercultural situations in which postcolonial theory leaves us on unfirm footing.

In a 2010 article seeking to situate the current state of interculturalism, Pavis argues that intercultural theatre has become globalized theatre and that modes of analysis suited to the complex questions of cultural identity that globalization raises are required to address this change. For Pavis, interculturalism ‘cannot avoid the question of its socio-economic basis and the political and economic analysis of the transformations created by globalization’ (‘Today’ 8). While Pavis has never been a proponent of postcolonial paradigms of scholarship, favouring a semiotic approach to the theorisation of theatre at the crossroads of culture, his observation that discourses of

²³ To complicate this analysis further, Chapter Four will discuss theorists who position Ireland as coloniser in relation to its Catholic missions overseas.

globalization are increasingly relevant to the field of interculturalism is astute. This is partially because the postcolonial discourses that infused interculturalism with politics are becoming increasingly enmeshed with discourses of globalization.²⁴ Interestingly, reformulating the central tension marked by the editors of a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* on theatre and globalization in terms of interculturalism does little to alter its sense or politics: ‘Culturally, globalisation[/interculturalism] has sometimes seemed a rather benign force, promoting cultural exchange, allowing us to share one another’s cultural heritage and find mutual inspiration there. [...] However, the mutuality of this exchange can be overstated and we need to note when cultural sharing becomes cultural imperialism’ (Harvie and Rebellato 4). Two of the main differences between the theatrical discourses of interculturalism and of globalization are a greater concentration on the postmodern politics of relativism and on cultural economics in the latter. These concerns of critical globalization theory align it closely with postcolonial hybridity, with Bhabha’s third space – a poststructuralist positioning from which an unstable subject speaks. Interculturalism, globalization and postcolonialism, then, form a discursive triangle of sorts. Using the emergent discourse of globalization to inform the evolving discourse of interculturalism (rather than vice versa) allows this project to retain a material connection to geographically inscribed cultures and to the abiding power of the nation state even while it uses a discourse of cultural capital to trace the reconfiguration of dichotomies of colonizer/colonised into the new inter-, trans- and supra-national hegemonies of globalized relationships.

Knowles, following Lo and Gilbert, acknowledges the benefit of matrixing the postcolonial and the intercultural, but argues for the application of ‘the more recent insights of a newly configured performance studies, of critical multiculturalism, critical race theory and whiteness studies, diaspora studies, and new cosmopolitanism to the

²⁴ See John C. Hawley and Revathi Krishnaswamy (eds), *The Postcolonial and the Global*.

field of intercultural performance' (*Interculturalism* 43). As well as aligning intercultural discourse with insights from critical globalization theory, this project also follows Knowles' advice, engaging with discourses of multiculturalism and race as it assesses contemporary intercultural ethics and works towards a model of best practice. To aid with critical globalization theory's concern with socio-economics, as well as to address the equality-centred race and multicultural discourses that Knowles champions, it employs Bourdieusian understandings of cultural capital, habitus and field, offering materially grounded delineation to power relations that fall outside East/West, North/South paradigms in global contexts.

Intercultural Ethics or Intercultural Politics?

Much thought has gone into deciding whether the materially engaged study suggested above should be framed as an ethics or as a politics. As will be discussed in more detail below, ethics is primarily concerned with the question of the good life – with how one ought to behave. Politics, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with power relations and with how groups of people make decisions. The two concepts are closely inter-related: how one ought to behave is contingent upon the power relations of the field in which one operates; the political decisions that groups of people take are contingent upon a conception of the good life. From early in its development, this research project has been concerned with rights of representation – yet rights can be legal, political, social and/or ethical. While both political and ethical modes of thinking through intercultural practice have distinct uses and limitations, in the end I found an ethical approach best suited to engaging with rights of representation and the materialities informing intercultural collaboration.

As the above sections 'Problematising Universalism,' 'Interculturalism and Postcolonialism,' 'Defending Intercultural Scholarship,' and 'Addressing the Problems

of Postcolonialism' have indicated, a large body of politically inflected materialist intercultural theory exists. What Knowles calls a materialist and political (as opposed to a universalist and aesthetic) approach to interculturalism (*Interculturalism* 13) has allowed theorists to delineate, describe and critique intercultural power dynamics. Such analyses have ethical ramifications. Writing on Brook's *Mahabharata* in 1988, Bharucha says 'Unavoidably, the production raises the questions of ethics, not just the ethics of representation, which concern the decontextualisation of an epic from its history and culture, but the ethics of dealing with people (notably Indians) in the process of creating the work itself' ('View' 1645). Almost from their beginnings, the intercultural wars have been concerned with the ethical issue of how interculturalists, their legal and social entitlements notwithstanding, ought to behave in relation to Othered cultures. Bringing ethical concerns to the fore provides a pragmatic way to move the debate forward, without dismissing past scholarship. Political analyses have laid out many of the advantages and disadvantages of intercultural practice, and have necessitated engagement with the implications of unequal power relations. Framing intercultural scholarship in terms of ethics shifts the focus away from what is and towards what should be done. An ethical framework enables intercultural scholarship to think towards best practice.

This approach should not be understood as a softening of the political impetus of intercultural theory, but, rather, as a recognition that intercultural practice has long happened, is happening, and will continue to happen. Even intercultural theatre's most strident critics are engaged in it. For example, speaking of his intracultural production of *Gundegowda*, a Kannada retelling of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Bharucha talks with enthusiasm about the ways in which the folk knowledge of his actors' imaginations enriched the adaptation, yet admits that he was not able to separate *Gundegowda* from his internalised Western understanding of Ibsen. He also suggests that the production

was Western in its ‘dramaturgical impulse to rewrite the text’²⁵ (*Politics* 83), but points out that the translator Raghu was ‘not just reproducing Ibsen’s text; in Benjaminian terms, he was reinventing Kannada according to the impulses of the original text’ (*Politics* 77). It seems illogical that Bharucha’s stance on interculturalism compels him to excuse the intercultural aspects of his practice. Working instead with what I have suggested is a contemporary morality within the field of intercultural scholarship – that the right to represent Othered people and cultures is dependent on the responsibility to engage ethically with the materialities informing intercultural exchanges – seems a more realistic and productive reaction to the problematics that have been highlighted by proper political interrogation of interculturalism.

Political scholarship has shown that intercultural work can be dysfunctional insofar as it represents Othered people and cultures in disempowering ways and disproportionately benefits maestro figures. However, when it comes to thinking about rights of representation in relation to these problematics, a political framework can be limiting. In terms of equality, political rights are closely related to legal rights: what one is politically entitled to do as a black/white gay/straight woman/man within a given cultural system is enshrined in law. This is not the case with ethical entitlements, which are socially and individually constructed. With regards to rights of representation, the legal and political right to freedom of speech which stands in most democratic states means that, under ordinary circumstances, one has the legal and political right to represent another culture as one sees fit. This right is important – it helps to prevent abuses of state power and to safeguard the freedom of the individual. However, recognising the right to free speech does not mean that the ethical entitlement of one person or culture to represent another person or culture should remain unquestioned and unchallenged. We are free to speak, but how this freedom should be used is an ethically

²⁵ A problematic assertion, as Poonam Trivedi’s work, cited on page 20 above, shows.

complex matter. Thinking through ethical rights and entitlements allows nuanced discussion of the most egalitarian and fair ways to use political, legal and economic freedoms.

The second reason that this project has been framed as an ethics rather than a politics is somewhat more contentious. Some practitioners are more willing to engage in debates about the ethics of their practice than about the politics of their practice. There is a long tradition of claiming that art is above politics or apolitical. In 1903, W.B. Yeats famously claimed that the Irish National Theatre Society had ‘no propaganda but that of good art’ (‘Notes’ 4), even while it continued to produce his and Augusta Gregory’s overtly nationalistic Irish play *Cathleen Ní Houlihan* (1902). While many artists, of course, understand their work politically (for Brecht, for example, art is a hammer with which to shape society²⁶), many profess that they do not understand their roles as artists to necessitate political analysis. Ethics is a more user-friendly concept. There are clearly ethical and less ethical ways of collaborating interculturally and of representing other cultures. Engagement with one’s own actions within the artistic sphere and within collaborative contexts is more straightforward and, arguably, more immediately personally resonant than engagement with the political systems within which one operates or with the possible political effects of one’s art within the economies of cultural practice in which it is consumed.

Aesthetically and Materially Engaged Intercultural Ethics

This is not the first study of intercultural theatre to adopt an ethical framework. The work of phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas has been employed by theatre academics, such as Alan Read and Nicholas Ridout, to think through the ability of the aesthetic to make an ethical impact on the spectator. Scholars have theorised a face-to-face

²⁶ See footnote 137 for elaboration on the genesis of this attributed quotation.

encounter in the live space of performance.²⁷ In terms of intercultural scholarship specifically, Helena Grehan's *Performance Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age* is a rigorous example of ethical criticism after Levinas. Grehan opens up a dialogue between ethics and performance, particularly in terms of spectatorship. For Grehan, performance occurs in the realm of Levinas's 'saying.' In the saying, according to Levinas, '[t]he Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us' (Levinas, *Totality* 194). This is what the phenomenologist designates a face-to-face encounter. Conversely, in the 'said' '[t]he unnarratable other loses his face as a neighbour in narration' (Levinas, *Otherwise* 166). This is because '[t]he relationship with him is indescribable in the literal sense of the term, unconvertible into a history, irreducible to the simultaneousness of writing, the external present of a writing that records or presents results' (166).

The overtly political nature of the case studies Grehan chooses allows her to use Levinas's ethics despite that fact that theatre, as a mode of representation, might equally be positioned in the 'said.' For Levinas, art 'lets go of the prey for the shadow' ('Shadow' 141). He believes that '[t]here is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting

²⁷ Alan Read pioneers this approach to theatre and ethics in his 1993 publication *Theatre and Everyday Life*. Reacting against the 'bewildering assertions' of postmodern critical theories, which leave 'the actuality of theatre, the face-to-face encounter that distinguishes theatre, largely unthought' (90), Read argues that although Levinas understands most art to belong to a shadow realm, his ethical phenomenology is still relevant to theatre. He says:

Theatre through the corporeality of the body and its objects, the fact that it is a living instant open to the possibility of becoming something else, makes different demands on the shadow world [...]. The transparency that Levinas sees as the characteristic property of the image is substituted in theatre by a renewed and deepened presence, which separated from the arts in general locates theatre in a unique cultural realm. (93)

However, Read backtracks on this stance in his 2008 title *Theatre, Intimacy and Engagement*, stating: 'the singularity of performance renders next to irrelevant any sense that theatre acts as a privileged example of 'face-to-face' encounters' (36). He says that he is sorry about the 'considerable effort in *Theatre & Everyday Life*' that went into trying to understand what Levinas meant by the "face to face" and then 'even more naively trying to apply this to an ethics of performance' (36). For Read 'the one thing that is obvious from any witness of performance, even to the most passing eye, is the lack of anything that could be described as "face engagement"' (36).

during a plague' (142). One of Grehan's case studies, Mnouchkine's *Le Dernier Caravansérail*, takes the stories of asylum seekers and dramatises them. It is, by the account of many reviewers and critics, a challenging work which encourages an audience to confront difficult truths. Contemplation of this work is clearly not a state of irresponsibility, as Levinas understands artistic enjoyment (141). The best way to theorise the ethical import of this work, using Levinas, might be to align the role of the artist in such political productions with the role of the art critic.²⁸ Artistic criticism 'exists as a public's mode of comportment. Not content with being absorbed in aesthetic enjoyment, the public feels an irresistible need to speak' ('Shadow' 130). Not content with engendering aesthetic enjoyment, the artist as critic also feels the need to speak – and, in the case of political theatre, to make an ethical demand on the audience. In this way, though necessitating a somewhat convoluted reworking of his theory, Levinas can help to interrogate the ethical elements of a production's aesthetic, particularly through a discussion of the relationship between performer and spectator in what Fischer-Lichte might characterise as the liminal space of enactment.

This project does not adopt a Levinasian approach to the ethics of intercultural theatre, however. For all the exciting scholarship that this theoretical trajectory has produced, I remain unconvinced that ethical analyses of theatre practice are true to the spirit of Levinas's phenomenology. Further, and more importantly in terms of this research project, an ethics based on Levinas is suited to aesthetic rather than materialist criticism. Like Fischer-Lichte's theory of interweaving, ethical performance analysis after Levinas is trapped in the performance space – in the face-to-face, in the liminal, in the live – and does not offer tools to account for conditions producing and produced by artworks. While Read's ethical theatre scholarship²⁹ and Grehan's intercultural ethical work provide productive avenues for exploration,

²⁸ See also Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas*.

²⁹ See Footnote 27

ultimately this project differentiates itself by moving beyond the performance space, by analysing the material as well as the aesthetic and symbolic, and by sounding out intercultural theatre's ethical significance to a specific time and place.

This is not to suggest that the material and the aesthetic are distinct and unrelated. The ethical element of art's aesthetic (and how this affects audiences) is an intrinsic part of the ethics of the material and social conditions that produce and are produced by artworks. This said, there are important modes of analysis that require materialist rather than aesthetic analysis. A thought experiment can help the intuition here. A famous artist creates a painting depicting, very graphically, skilfully, even beautifully, the horrors of Nicaraguan sweatshops. The aesthetics and the ethics of this painting are intertwined. The ethical is part of the painting's aesthetic – it makes a powerful appeal on the viewer. Following Levinas (remembering to reconfigure the artist as critic), one might argue that the painting exists as a public's mode of comportment, as an irresistible need to speak. However, let us imagine that the painting has been created using materials produced in Nicaraguan sweatshops. The contract for making prints of the painting has also been given to a sweatshop. If, with this knowledge, we refuse to distinguish between the ethical elements of the art practice and its aesthetics then there is something very wrong with our reasoning. The materialities surrounding intercultural practice are integral to ethical scholarship, and they should not be eclipsed by the content of a production's aesthetic. This project's ethics of intercultural theatre is defined by a commitment to looking outside the performance space, and to examining the ethical implications of the materialities producing and produced by intercultural theatre. In this vein, even where ethical analysis is rooted in the aesthetic, this project will privilege socio-political context over face-to-face encounters between actor and spectator or interwoven experiences in the liminal space of performance.

An Ethics for Materially Engaged Intercultural Theatre Scholarship

Ethics is primarily concerned with the question of what constitutes a good life (or, depending on one's relationship with positivism, 'the' good life). In the twentieth century, with an increasing acceptance of pluralism hard won by the civil rights movements of women, people of colour, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans-sexual/gender communities, as well as the weakening of cultural hierarchies caused by decolonization, ethical philosophy has become increasingly concerned with the political – with how national and international structures can ensure people fair access to the resources they need to achieve their conceptions of a/the good life. This project is ethical insofar as it proposes an answer to the philosophical question of the best (or, at least, a good) way to conduct intercultural theatre practice and scholarship. It understands ethics as a logical framework combined with material evidence to support fair, just and egalitarian moral positions.

There are a number of different ways to situate the distinction between ethics and morality. For scholars such as Ronald Dworkin and Appiah, ethics theorises the conception of a/the good life, while morality deals with how one should treat other people. While many use this particular ethics/morality distinction to great effect, in this thesis the impact of intercultural practice on the people and cultures involved in and represented by it is primarily what is meant by 'best intercultural practice,' and so the terms ethics and morality will be deployed to greater utility. According to Tom Beauchamp, the purpose of philosophical ethics is to 'introduce clarity, substance, and precision of argument into the domain of morality' (4). Morality, for Beauchamp, 'is a social institution, composed of a set of standards pervasively acknowledged by the members of a culture. It is comprised of practices that – together with other kinds of

customs, rules and mores – are transmitted from generation to generation’ (4). Morality is a social institution passed from generation to generation – the good life that is lived; ethics is a theoretical and logical construction that can support or challenge morality. Bernard Williams, who uses the terms similarly to Beauchamp, argues that morality is a culturally and temporally specific category of ethics, and, therefore, ‘something we should treat with a special scepticism’ (6). However, I find Appiah convincing when he argues that ‘what we are cannot be irrelevant to what we should be’ (*Ethics* 24).

Schechner’s moral position on interculturalism, loosely, is that while there can be some dubious forces at work in cultural exchange the practice should be celebrated insofar as it allows people to influence one another and learn from one another (‘Reply’ 252). This moral position is based on an ethical framework that understands cultural exchange as a two way street (*Performance Studies*; ‘Choice’; ‘Reply’) and which holds that ‘traditional boundaries not only between peoples and nations but also within nations and cultures are being transformed if not abolished’ (‘Reply’ 248). Bharucha’s moral position on interculturalism, again loosely, is that it is appropriative, exploitative, and ethnocentric. This moral position is based on an ethical framework that demands that intercultural exchanges are ‘confronted within the particularities of a specific historical condition’ (‘Reply’ 255); for Bharucha, ‘it should be acknowledged that the implications of interculturalism are very different for people in impoverished, ‘developing’ countries like India, and for people in technologically advanced capitalist societies like America’ (255). Schechner and Bharucha are clearly ethically engaged, providing clear, substantial and precise arguments for their moral positions. The moral position of this research is, like the position I earlier suggested constitutes a contemporary morality of intercultural field, located between the two poles represented here by Schechner and Bharucha. Interculturalism is a practice that has the potential to allow East and West, North and South, First World and Third World to

influence one another and learn from each other; however, the right to represent Othered people and Othered cultures can only be conferred through ethical engagement with those people and cultures. The ethical framework of this project reflects on some contemporary realities of intercultural theatre practice, in the conviction that ethical interculturalism is possible with due consideration of the materialities that inform it. Below, I suggest four criteria for of thinking practically about the materialities surrounding intercultural productions and the ways in which these affect intercultural productions' rights of representation.

1) Involvement of Members of all Represented Cultures

The argument that the right to represent (and, especially, critique) one's own culture is less problematic than the right to represent another culture is intuitive. It is sensed in practice; it is something like the distinction between laughing with and laughing at. I suggest that not only is the right to represent one's own culture less problematic than the right to represent another culture, but in intercultural situations the involvement of a member of a represented culture strengthens a production's rights of representation. To illustrate: during a seminar on London-Irish playwright Martin McDonagh's *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, I asked a group of undergraduate students to divide into groups and replace the stereotypical Irish cultural signifiers in a particular scene with signifiers from a different culture. The signifiers included accent, syntax, slang, foodstuffs, names, and, potently, an allusion to the Birmingham Six. One member of the class was Indian, and one of the groups chose to use Indian signifiers. A problem arose when it came to performing the newly adapted script, as the non-Indian members of the group felt their imitation of Indian accents to be potentially racist. They were coaxed into performing by their Indian classmate on the premise that, as she was involved, everything was all right. Permission thus granted, the group went on to enact a very

funny scene entitled ‘Miss Mumbai.’ The class was able to recognize the parodic representation of Indianness as potentially racist, and this helped them to racialise and politicise McDonagh’s portrayal of Irishness. The significance of the question of whether McDonagh ‘counts’ as an Irish playwright became clearer. If he does, it somehow gives him the right to ‘take the mick,’ and if he does not, then a critical rejection of his work might be rooted in justifiable political and cultural grievance.

This way of thinking about involvement and rights of representation risks the charges of insularity, absolutism and anti-humanist cultural ownership outlined under ‘Culture(s) and Cosmopolitanism’ above. Further it risks reinforcing East/West binaries, from which, Knowles argues, ‘the West invariably benefits’ (*Interculturalism* 28). However, while the East/West binary has, in the past, undoubtedly reinscribed Western privilege, it can be useful to an egalitarian ethics also. Race theorist Tod Olsun asks why ‘if race categories have such a shaky scientific basis’ (500) they are measured at all. He asserts that ‘racial classification is now used to protect the same groups it harmed in the past’ (500) and describes how governments rely on racial data to enforce antidiscrimination legislation. The ultimate end is an economic and political reality in which racial distinctions have no significant discriminatory or unequal content. A similar logic can be applied to intercultural theatre and East/West or North/South binaries. In the current economic and political climate, these categories do mark sites of disadvantage and this cannot be ignored, regardless how ideologically attractive universalist rhetoric may be.

In *Haunted Nations*, Sneja Gunew explores the problem of representation, which she discusses in relation to ‘appropriation of voice’ discourses (6,75),³⁰ and challenges those ‘who take the position that only members of [...] minority groups have the authority, or at least the moral right, to represent themselves’ (69). Gunew’s critique

³⁰ See also her article ‘Multicultural Multiplicities: U.S., Canada, Australia.’

rests on the skewed power dynamics involved in determining ‘who, institutionally speaking, decides the group membership, and who interprets and legislates whether this authenticity has been achieved’ (69). She thinks through the extraordinary example of Helen Demidenko/Darville, a young Anglo-Australian writer who posed as the daughter of Ukrainian immigrants and was awarded two of Australia’s most prestigious literary prizes for her arguably anti-Semitic book, *The Hand that Signed the Paper*.

Demidenko’s subsequent exposure as Helen Darville, the child of British immigrants, with no connection to the Ukraine at all, and with a history of rightwing political activities (Gunew 11), threw the Australian literary establishment into crisis. Gunew frames the event in terms of the dominant culture’s simultaneous creation of and desire for the authentic – a self-fulfilling cycle of Othering that ultimately disempowers Othered cultures. This is a convincing reading of the Darville/Demidenko affair and an important reflection on way Otherness is constructed within dominant systems to reinscribe privilege and prejudice. Authenticity hungry audiences and institutions that feel themselves equipped to judge ethnic authenticity pigeonhole and disempower Othered people and cultures in their attempts at both artistic production and self-representation. However, the incident also exposes a prevalent attitude to rights of representation, allowing the aftermath of the Darville/Demidenko affair, at least, to be read in a positive light. The Australian public and literary establishment recognised and were protective of Demidenko’s right to represent and critique Ukrainian culture when they believed her to be Ukrainian. When she was exposed as Darville, the quality of her literary fiction notwithstanding, they were wary of her rights of representation. Certainly, there is hunger for limiting authenticity apparent here, but there is also respect for an individual’s origins and experiences, and evidence of sensitivity surrounding speaking for Othered cultures.

No individual should be understood as emblematic of her culture. Rights of representation are not strengthened by native informants, who ‘can only provide data, to be interpreted by the knowing subject for reading’ (Spivak, *Critique* 49), but by individuals with complex selves and complex relationships with cultural identity. The evidence of the native informant is ‘unquestioningly treated as the objective evidence for the founding of so-called sciences like ethnography, ethno-linguistics, comparative religion, and so on’ (Spivak, *Post-Colonial Critic* 66). The result of this is that ‘theoretical problems only relate to the person who knows. The person who *knows* has all the problems of selfhood. The person who is *known*, somehow seems not to have a problematic self’ (66). While the involvement of a member of a certain culture confers a production with greater rights to represent that culture, it should always be remembered that individuals speak *of* their cultures and not unproblematically *for* them.

Cultures, as discussed above, are constantly in flux, ever assimilating elements at their margins, and never immutable. Yet, there are moral rights and embodied knowledges attached to cultural identity. To be of a culture is both to understand oneself to be of that culture, and also to have lived a life that shares in the product of a group’s collective history. The emotionally and intellectually embodied habitus³¹ formed by such cultural belonging confers a privilege to represent and critique: a privilege that those whose habitus are formed in different cultural spheres do not own. In spite of her misgivings about appropriation of voice discourses, Gunew asserts, ‘while no writer either wishes to be or can be described as being contained by a community, there is a sense that communities, however broadly defined, carry information about their members and what they are creatively generating’ (78). In a

³¹ ‘The habitus – embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate presence. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within a world’ (Bourdieu, *Logic* 56)

practical vein she recommends that ‘if funding bodies were to attempt to implement specific funding quotas as a way to encourage a wider range of artistic activities, it would make sense to ensure representatives from those diverse groups’ (78). While it is important to be attuned to Orientalist cultural desires, it is equally important to recognise and give due merit to the ways in which we respect the moral rights of individuals to represent and critique their own cultures. Western liberal democratic legislation rightly enshrines freedom of speech and works against illiberal censorship, but within our lived realities, within what Raymond Williams would call the ‘structure of feeling’³² of our time, there exists a commendable degree of cultural sensitivity that can be used to benefit and protect Othered people and cultures.

2) Equality and Creative Agency of all Collaborators

Where collaborators from all represented cultures have equality and individuals have agency to represent themselves and/or their cultures within an intercultural production, rights of representation are strengthened. However, artists can be instrumentalised. Postcolonial theory compels us to recognise instances where representations of Othered individuals are used to ethnographic and anthropological ends, and the individual reduced to a native informant, to ‘a blank, though generative of a text of cultural identity that only the West (or a Western-model discipline) could inscribe’ (Spivak, *Critique* 6). Bhabha theorises the position of the ‘mimic man’ to describe a subjectivity like that of the native informant, but with the capacity for agency through subversion

³² Raymond Williams suggests that art does not simply relate to society, but is a constituent part of society. He says: ‘the art is there, as an activity, with the production, the trading, the politics, the raising of families’ (*Revolution* 45) and asserts ‘[i]t is not then a question of relating the art to the society, but of studying all the activities and their interrelations, without any concession of priority to any one of them we may choose to abstract’ (45). Williams coins the term *structure of feeling* to describe ‘the particular living result of all the elements in the general organisation’ (48). In respect to structure of feeling, ‘the arts of a period, taking these to include characteristic approaches and tones in argument, are of major importance’ (48). Indeed, ‘[t]he connection between the popular structure of feeling and that used in the literature of the time is of major importance in the analysis of culture. It is here, at a level even more important than that of institutions, that the real relations with the whole culture are made clear’ (67).

(*Location* 125). Mimicry, Bhabha tells us, ‘emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge,’ constituting ‘the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*’ (122, emphasis in original). Similar to the subjectivity of the native informant as inscribed by the ethnographer, ‘[m]imicry conceals no presence or identity behind its mask’ (126). Yet Bhabha allows the mimic man agency through subversion of the hegemonic system: ‘[t]he ambivalence of mimicry – almost but not quite – suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter appeal’ (129). These postcolonial formulations are useful for describing subaltern subjectivities (or those camouflaged as subaltern) within systems with identifiably hegemonic power relations, and, in particular, for describing ‘the way in which strategies of appropriation, revision, and iteration can produce possibilities for those who are less advantaged to be able to grasp in a moment of emergency, in the very process of the exchange or the negotiation, the advantage’ (Bhabha qtd. in Olson and Worsham 39). However, often, where Othered people collaborate in intercultural theatre, they understand themselves to openly contribute to a finished production and to have creative agency over what that finished production looks like. It is important not to underestimate collaborators, labelling them instrumentalised to suit academic ends, or configuring them as engaged in subversive power dynamics rather than collaborating with outright agency and equality. Such underestimation is itself a form of instrumentalisation.

Bharucha critiques the figure of the maestro – an individual artist created by and creating the Western idea that art is the product and property of a sole genius. The maestro is in an advantageous position to use copyright and intellectual property rights to her/his advantage within the global culture industry, and this advantage is justified through individualistic and meritocratic ideologies. For Bharucha, the ‘cult of the

maestro' needs to be avoided 'in any intercultural search for equity' (*Politics* 40). Thinking through the position of the maestro encourages reflection on the East/West power dynamics that can be reinscribed through the hierarchy of the director in intercultural situations. Often the Western collaborator is both the party with the funding and the party that takes the director's role – the role of ultimate decision maker – within the production process. The maestro resists acknowledgement of this advantage through what Richard Delgado and Jean Stefanie call 'the language of imposition' (98-105). Colonial power relations or cultural hierarchies would be roundly condemned by the majority of Western artists, most of whom, Julie Hollege and Joanne Tompkins remind us, identify with oppositional elements at home (11). However, when voices such as Bharucha's ask Westerners to acknowledge not just Othered cultures' disadvantage, but also Western advantage they are suddenly seen to be 'imposing, taking the offensive, asking for concessions they do not deserve. Now they are the aggressors, and we the victims' (Delgado and Stefanie 98). When Brook points to Swahili performances of Shakespeare as a defense for his use of Indian sacred texts in his performances, or Schechner calls concerns about cultural appropriation 'reverse patriarchy' ('Choice' 45), Othered voices are being told that they are equal enough. For Delgado and Stefanie, 'the narrative of imposition appears at predictable points in history, namely, when reform has gained momentum and appears poised to produce changes that make us uneasy' (100). It is not that the maestro wishes Othered people to be disadvantaged; it is that s/he does not want to be divested of advantage, nor of the protection of 'universalist, meritocratic, neutralist rules' (Delgado and Stefanie 105) that ultimately benefit dominant demographics.

Critiquing the position of the maestro is not the same as critiquing a director-led production process. All collaborators have potential for agency even when a production process is hierarchical. Jen Harvie shows that after years of trying to

disperse power, international contemporary theatre practice ‘appears increasingly to value leadership’ (‘Introduction’ 4). As she explains, ‘after decades of attempts at democratic practice which were at best sometimes frustrating and at worst grossly compromised, many practitioners are now exploring strategies for *negotiating* democratic practices and relationships, in recognition that dispersed power is not necessarily democratic power and also that negotiated leadership can facilitate group agency’ (4). Director-led practice can be efficient, and, often, it is a structure that performers are trained to accept and be productive within – a structure with which everyone involved is comfortable. Where this is the case, different levels of agency and equality between collaborators serve only as warning flags, and more complex ways of thinking through a production’s rights of representation are needed.

3) Advantageousness of the Project to the Least Economically, Symbolically or Socially Privileged Individuals and Cultures within the Production Process

In Pierre Bourdieu’s formulation, different modes of capital – social, cultural, symbolic and economic – can be converted into one another in a circular type of cultural economy (*Homo Academicus*)³³ thus helping to reproduce dominance in social structures (*Field; Distinction; Logic; ‘Social Space’*). Although Bourdieu’s theory is primarily sociological in nature, it has political and ethical undertones. Inherent in his discussion of prescribed circulations of capital is a Marxist plea for greater fairness in the way that cultural forces reproduce hegemony. In terms of economic capital, the intercultural wars assume a monetary advantage on behalf of the Western interculturalist: an advantage which allows him or her to, loosely speaking, buy up chunks of Eastern culture.

Drawing on Bourdieu, economics alone do not determine an agent’s agency within a

³³ In *Homo Academicus*, Bourdieu deploys the concepts of social, cultural, symbolic and economic capital within the field of academia, showing how different types of capital have an impact on and convert into each other. See particularly Chapter 3: ‘Types of Capital and Forms of Power’ (73 – 127).

given field of cultural production. There are other forms of capital that make an impact on an agent's ability to author representations of another culture and reproduce dominance within a field of cultural production. Analysing the degree of social, symbolic, cultural and economic capital at play in intercultural situations can help to outline and account for the level of privilege and agency collaborators may have, and to do so in a materially engaged manner. Further, it can help to assess the effects of intercultural practice on all collaborators within the system of the production. That is, it can explore the impact intercultural practice has on the social, cultural, symbolic and economic state of all the artists working on a particular project. This impact can often be different at global and local levels. Finally, analysis grounded in Bourdieu's cultural economics can help to assess the impact intercultural practice has on the economies of cultural practice that produce it and/or are represented by it.

In much the same way that dominant classes reinscribe their privilege through the structures of a habitus that allows mastery of capital objectified in art, Western intercultural practitioners do not simply respond rationally to fluxes in the global economic and cultural system. Rather, they possess the habitus for such behaviour; they are 'defined by the possession of the economic and cultural capital required in order to seize the "potential opportunities" theoretically available to all' (Bourdieu, *Logic* 63). Or, in other words, the abilities to estimate, gamble and seize chances in the intercultural arena are dispositions that can only be acquired in certain conditions (*Logic* 64). Misrecognition of the causes of advantage and disadvantage forms a part of the habitus of all within the system, and leads the least well off to accept their deprivation. To knit Bourdieu to Bharucha, it seems necessary that Western practitioners acknowledge their own global privilege in the enterprise of intercultural theatre to put an end to such self-fulfilling cycles of belief. Ethical problems arise when practitioners use their global privilege in a way that reinforces rather than destabilises dominant

hierarchies. Disempowerment at a symbolic level is rooted in historically engrained materially inequalities, and in using their global privilege ethically, intercultural practitioners and scholars need to make the economy of cultural capital in which they are operating work to the benefit of the least advantaged.³⁴

4) Positive Socio-Political Effects of a Production within its

Performance Contexts.

What might count as a ‘positive’ socio-political effect is, of course, a value-laden issue, and, even when defined, such effects can be difficult to measure. For the purposes of this project, a positive socio-political effect is one that challenges rather than reinscribes hegemonic assumptions about, and Orientalist stereotypes of, Othered cultures and people. As the following chapters will show, stereotypes of Othered cultures often circle around gender and gender relations. Further, stereotypes can obscure class relations within Othered cultural contexts. Thus, this thesis pays special attention not only to race and ethnicity, as intercultural scholarship commonly does, but also, importantly, to gender and class issues.

Assessing whether an intercultural production challenges rather than reinscribes hegemonic assumptions requires attention to the specificities of performance contexts: to the intended/actual target audience/s and the materialities likely to affect reception. In globalized situations, where productions play in a number of different contexts, these effects change. Knowles suggests that international festivals transform ‘strong and culturally specific work into mere representation (in two senses): 1) metaphor, analogy or “local color,” allowing audiences and critics to detach themselves from the specific social issues under active negotiation in the play and retreat into

³⁴ This ideology is strongly influenced by the political philosophy of John Rawls, drawing particularly on his difference principle which states that, subject to other conditions being met, inequalities with a social system are just if they are to ‘the greatest benefit of the least advantaged’ (*Justice* 83).

discussions of theatrical form and technique; and 2) national representation' (*Material* 182). Festival contexts, he says, 'introduce particular kinds of constraint and, occasionally, opportunity, to which different productions respond in radically different ways' (200). In this vein he advises that 'producers, artists, and analysts would do well to take such contexts fully into account' (200). Taking these contexts into account means asking not simply 'what is this production trying to say?' but also 'what is this production likely to be saying to a specific audience?'

Gauging the socio-political effects of a performance in this way means looking at how it is framed for its target audiences. Discourses of marketing, branding and economics become part of our methods of cultural analysis. Lonergan advises that scholars should engage more fully with the language of commerce and trade (*Globalization* 219). He explains that global audiences can be encouraged to 'visit a production without necessarily knowing anything about the play being produced. They instead go to the theatre to consume an element of it that they are already familiar with in some ways – its authenticity, its national origins, and other examples' (86). In Lonergan's formulation, localising details diminish a production's palatability to a global market; regional specificities are often toned down and reflexive and mobile elements³⁵ promoted to produce productions that tour well internationally (85-89). Insofar as they pander to stereotype and exoticisation, these economically motivated artistic concessions can have (un)ethical effects.

Examining socio-political effects also involves thinking about what a production is likely to mean to the people it represents. This is easiest when they are a significant part of its intended target audience. Bharucha, in critique of Brook's practice, says that 'the Mahabharata must be seen on as many levels as possible within

³⁵ By reflexivity, Lonergan refers to an 'audience's capacity to relate the action to their own preoccupations and interests, as those preoccupations and interests are determined locally' (87); by mobility he means plays that 'make themselves sufficiently open to interpretation to be understood in different ways by different audiences' (88).

the Indian context, so that its meaning (or rather, multiple levels of meaning) can have some bearing on the lives of the Indian people for whom the Mahabharata was written, and who continue to derive their strength from it' ('View' 230). Shevstova, as mentioned, offers an important criticism of this position, but there is a case to be made in support of it. Representations that seem fair, accurate or pleasing to Western interculturalists or majority culture authors within multicultural situations are imbued with ideologies deeply rooted in the durable and transposable (rarely transformable) structures of the authors' habitus. Performing for the represented people indicates that an effort has been made to enter into their doxic³⁶ beliefs, and to see things from their perspectives.

Methodology and Case Studies

This project interrogates rights of representation in intercultural theatre practice through analysis of four case studies. Thinking through Tim Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2006), Pan Pan Theatre Company's *The Playboy of the Western World* (2006), Peter Brook's *11 and 12* (2010), and Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle's *The Playboy of the Western World* (2007), it engages with the materialities affecting each play's production and performance. It draws on theatre criticism, personal interviews, historical research, and critical theory to assess the ethics of these productions.

The four case studies are diverse. The aim is to avoid any monolithic pronouncements about interculturalism today, and instead to show that divergent strands of contemporary intercultural practice both replicate the ethical issues thrown up by the kind of universalist practice that produced Brook's *Mahabharata*, and also move beyond these issues – sometimes resolving them, sometimes presenting new ethical

³⁶ 'Doxa is the relationship of immediate adherence that is established in practice between a habitus and the field to which it is attuned, the pre-verbal taking-for-granted of the world that flows from practical sense' (Bourdieu, *Logic* 68).

obstacles in their stead. The case studies allow me to explore a different theme pertinent to the ethics of intercultural theatre in each chapter. Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* gives the scope to examine the significance of funding to intercultural collaborations, drawing out the symbolic implications and practical challenges that arise when intercultural projects are funded primarily by Western organisations. Pan Pan's *The Playboy of the Western World* permits me to discuss the dynamics of translation within intercultural processes, and, further, to draw on Bourdieusian translation theory to enrich intercultural theatre discourse. Brook's *11 and 12* facilitates in-depth interrogation of the concept of universality that underlies much intercultural practice. Finally, Adigun and Doyle's *The Playboy of the Western World* allows discussion of the intersections between interculturalism and multiculturalism, tackling in particular the difficult problem of racism.

With the aim of representing some of the diversity of contemporary intercultural performance, I have chosen mostly case studies that function globally, but also one (Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy*) that functions largely within a national frame. In some of the case studies, useful ethical reflection demands radical reconceptualisation of the East/West binary; in some, ethical reflection without recognition of the Orientalist histories informing contemporary practice would be blurred reflection indeed. I discuss case studies that can be read as trying to reinvigorate Western canons in an Orientalist mode, case studies where the weight of a national canon carries little cultural capital in a production's performance context, and case studies where Othered stories are told by canonical directors. Despite this consciousness of representing the varied nature of contemporary practice, there are a number of key issues largely absent from my discussion of the materialities informing intercultural exchange. Of these, the greatest is language politics. Where I write about translation and the reception of multilingual work, I do not deeply interrogate the power dynamics

inherent in the fact that English is increasingly the lingua franca of a globalized interculturalism. This subject could be a doctoral thesis in its own right.³⁷ Therefore, I flag it as absent from this scholarship, but not, I hope, from my future writing and research.

The choice of case studies is pragmatic. I have opted for relatively recent productions, performed in places where I had the chance to see them, or was likely to be able to access recordings. I have chosen productions likely to garner plenty of critical attention – allowing me to accrue a sense of reception and of scholarly reaction. Where practitioners made themselves available for interviews, I was more likely to pursue a case study. The interviews ground the project, allowing it to tell the story of individuals making art as well as the story of the cultures and socio-economic situations producing these individuals and their choices. Further, the interviews attempt to consult with artists from each culture represented within a collaboration.

It is important to flag at this point that all four case studies are predominantly male authored and/or directed, and a large number of the interviewees are male. While I am open to feminist critique in not having chosen a primarily female authored/directed case study, there is a feminist trajectory implicit in the absence of women's intercultural work from this project. Mnouchkine notwithstanding, making high profile intercultural theatre remains a male dominated occupation.³⁸ The fact that two out of my four case studies are versions of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* also deserves note. This is a happy accident of sorts. I wanted to ground this project partially in Ireland for two reasons: firstly, Ireland's ambiguously postcolonial and newly multicultural status adds important layers to intercultural discourse, which, I have argued, must increasingly take account of globalization as well as postcolonialism; secondly, I do not think that

³⁷ See Stephen May, *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Politics of Language*; Tsuda Yukio 'Speaking Against the Hegemony of English: Problems, Ideologies and Solutions.'

³⁸ Julie Hollege and Joanne Tompkins' book *Women's Intercultural Performance* provides analysis of women performers' contributions to the field.

Bharucha's demand that interculturalists should confront their own implicit nationalisms before seeking to represent other cultures applies only to practitioners – as an Irish intercultural scholar, I feel it is important to confront Irish issues. The two *Playboys* are the highest profile intercultural productions to have come out of Ireland in recent years. It is unsurprising that Synge's text has been the vehicle for these projects – *Playboy*, considered by many to be the founding text of modern Irish drama, is the nation's most famous play, and, in a country where drama has often been regarded as a 'mirror up to nation' (see Murray, *Mirror up to Nation*), any intercultural re-imagining is likely to be imbued with significant cultural capital from the outset. As Adigun explains in interview, Nigerians have a saying, 'if you want to eat frog you should eat the one with eggs' (Interview 302). Applying this wisdom to his dramatic work, Adigun suggest that if you are going to re-imagine an Irish play, you should re-imagine the biggest one, arguably the best one, in the Irish canon. Logic of this kind no doubt informed Quinn's decision to direct a Mandarin *Playboy* too. The *Playboys* in tandem give this thesis the ability to examine intersections between intercultural collaborations and the cultural capital inherent in canonicity.

Chapter One thinks through Tim Supple's pan-Indian and Sri Lankan spectacular, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Positioning Supple as an interculturalist following in the footsteps of Brook and Lepage, this Chapter highlights the postcolonial relevancies that cannot be ignored in some modes of contemporary intercultural practice. Chapter One traces the history of Shakespeare in India and its significance in the twenty-first century, arguing that Shakespeare's work is not a politically or ideologically neutral cultural artefact. Further, using archival research, this chapter investigates the role of British Council arts funding in India, sounding out the tension between neo-imperialist agendas and international support for the arts in a funding-starved economy of cultural practice. Finally, this chapter examines two key

dramaturgical choices in the production – namely, its multilingualism and its sexual and violent content. It locates these choices in the dynamics of the intercultural collaboration and, using reviews from international performance contexts, shows how their effects changed in international situations, so that the production spoke for India in a way that would have been unimaginable to its Indian audiences, and, in some instances, had troubling neo-colonial connotations.

Chapter Two argues that Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* is itself an example of imperialist intercultural theatre, suggesting that intercultural products authored by a maestro can and do come to represent Othered cultures in powerful ways. It goes on to interrogate Pan Pan Theatre Company's *The Playboy of the Western World*, looking at the power relations that allowed Gavin Quinn, an Irish director, to travel to China to reimagine a canonical Irish work, and also the power relations that governed his artistic production while he was there. Quinn originally wanted the protagonist of the Chinese *Playboy* to hail from Xin-Jiang – the troubled Uyghur and Sinomuslim province in the North West of China. However, the translators he worked with advised him against such a representation due to fears of state censorship and also due to concerns over ethnic and cultural sensitivities. Drawing on translation theory to work through this issue, Chapter Two demonstrates the usefulness of a Bourdieusian mode of analysing cultural capital in circulation in intercultural fields of production. Further, comparing the production's function in China to its function in Dublin, this chapter builds on Chapter One as it looks at the ways in which ethical effects can change with socio-political context.

Chapter Three examines Brook's *11 and 12*, reminding the reader that kinds of intercultural practice it may be tempting to resign to history are still filling houses in Western urban centres today, and further interrogating the universalist ideologies that continue to underpin some contemporary intercultural practice. Providing historical

context for *11 and 12*'s Malian tale of religious strife, the chapter explores the political agendas that can be unwittingly reproduced through ostensibly apolitical theatre. It argues that rather than understanding the characters on stage as transcultural archetypes, audiences read their difference and, accordingly, Brook's universalist *11 and 12* became a play about Africa and Islam. A historical contextualization of the story of Tierno Bokar reveals that *11 and 12* obscures the politics of class, clan and colony informing the story, offering a simplistic anti-colonial politics in its stead. In attempting to mystify the story and highlight its universality, Brook unintentionally glosses over the fact that the figure of Tierno Bokar was intended to be sympathetic to Christians in the first instance. This Chapter argues that Brook's search for 'simple' audiences and 'empty' spaces is Kantian, assuming universal human experiences that take place without recourse to concepts or conventions; it subjects Brook's work to the same Bourdieusian critique as Immanuel Kant's judgement of taste: that it ultimately serves to reproduce social and political dominance in the cultural economies of which it forms a part.

Chapter Four analyses Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy of the Western World*, exploring the intersections between multiculturalism and interculturalism. It locates the production in Ireland's rapid demographical diversification as a result of the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger period. The chapter asks if the best way to deal with racism or prejudice is to make art that interacts with it, or to make art that represents more utopian realities. Chapter Four also deal with issues of interculturalism and class, thinking through rights of representation in relation to not just cultural but also class-based demographics. Further, analysing legal disputes arising from the production, this chapter highlights the challenging issue that commitment to ethical interculturalism presupposes an economy of cultural practice that values intercultural practice.

Chapter One: Tim Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

In 2004, British director Tim Supple was commissioned by the British Council to create a show in India. The production was to knit together the efforts of the Council's arts initiatives in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, and Colombo, incorporating artists from different regions into a 'large scale work with popular potential' (Supple, 'Making' 14). In January 2005, Supple toured the sub-continent observing artists from different regions, cultures and performance traditions. He took another trip to India in April, and, over the course of a month, conducted auditions in Delhi, Kolkata, Manipur, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bangalore, Kerala and Sri Lanka. Using a workshop-based audition process, Supple picked sixty performers to travel to Mumbai for a week-long final group audition. Twenty-two of these hopefuls would be chosen to collaborate on the final production. During the January trip Supple decided that Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would be the ideal work for his pan-Indian and Sri-Lankan undertaking. He explains: 'I'd wanted to do this play since I was very, very young, but had become reluctant to do it in Britain with all the layers of tradition and habit, and I just wanted to do it somewhere where I would get completely away from the way that we've grown to see these characters and the play' ('Director's Talk' 3). Supple wished to celebrate the variety 'that is the nature of India' (2). Further, he saw that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* calls for such variety (2):

One of the great things about *Midsummer Night's Dream* is the difference between the aristocrats, the lovers, the mechanicals and the fairies. This is, I find, one of the things that is unsatisfying often in British productions – because we're quite a homogeneous society now, we don't have that respect for authority that the mechanicals have, nor do we have the kind of fear of authority. We don't have extreme difference between

rich and poor, we don't have, on the whole, in our society, parents who impose their will on their children to the degree that India has, nor do we have much belief in a spirit world any more. We just don't have a lot of things that are in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and we are largely and broadly a much more middle class and relatively homogenous society. (2)

This might sound suspiciously Orientalist, fuelled, to quote Brian Singleton, 'by a vision of the Orient as a nostalgic space of lost ritual, formalism, and religion, a nostalgic space for the authentically pure, sometimes barbarian, for everything the Westerner is not' ('Interculturalism' 630). When asked about his reaction to such critiques, Supple warned against speaking in general rather than in specific terms about social conditions. He said:

I think it is a very subtle line to tread between what is an Orientalist perspective and what is just true. Or as true as we know true. And what is to me true and not Orientalist, not exotic or romantic or nostalgic, is that there are certain aspects of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which are very complicated for British productions that involve interpretation and tying yourself up in knots conceptually.³⁹ (Interview 360)

³⁹ He continued to say:

That is, how do we believe that a father has the power to demand that his daughter be killed if she doesn't marry the man he wishes? How do we conceptualise a situation where the lovers have to run away in order to be themselves and free themselves? How do we contextualise a situation where the spirit world is alive and humanised, as I believe it is in Shakespeare? How do we contextualise a situation where the mechanicals are so afraid and so ignorant of the aristocratic world that they're afraid that they'll be hung if they say the wrong thing? (Or maybe that they're not ignorant - that is the truth, that is how it is.) So there are many of these things that are closer to reality in India. I have seen so many productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Britain that for me are hampered by having to contextualise those decisions in a conceptual way, which for me is very boring. They say: 'how are we going to do the fairies? So they're all mad or they're all like punks?' That for me is a kind of metaphoric Shakespeare, which doesn't interest me very much. Whereas in India I felt I could get right to a way of being on stage that connected with the text. (Interview 360)

Supple's conviction that certain aspects of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are closer to lived reality in India than in Britain remains strong, and his contestation that there is a fine line between what is Orientalist and what is true strikes an uncomfortable chord when operating in an awareness of postcolonial or intercultural scholarship. Saidian Orientalism, after all, has not disappeared. It can be seen daily, for example, in the Islamophobic content of much Western media. However, engaging with cultural difference means admitting the reality of difference. It is not useful to cry 'Orientalist' every time a practitioner makes an observation about her/his experiences working in the East. Rather, intercultural scholars need to weed out clichés and essentialising discourse from rhetoric that allows productive engagement with the ethics of intercultural practice.

The creative team Supple assembled was heterogeneous, contributing both global and local skills and performance techniques to the production. For example, actor Yuki Ellias (Hermia) trained at the Lecoq School in Paris; set designer Sumant Jayakrishnan spent time at both the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and New York University; Devissaro, the music director, 25 years resident in India, originally hails from Australia, where he trained as a classical pianist. Actors Ashwatthama JD (Peter Quince), Ajay Kumar (Puck) and Jitu Shastri (Snug) all studied acting at the National School of Drama, New Delhi, an institution which combines education, through Hindi, in various traditional performance forms with a grounding in Stanislavskian acting techniques (Nsd.gov; Bharucha 'Alternative' 1405); Theru-K-Koothu⁴⁰ performer and martial artist M. Palani (fairy, choreographer) and musician D. Prakash (percussion, wind) both originally learned their art from parents and grandparents; Brothers Dharmindar Pavar (fairy) and Ram Pavar (boy) are from a family of Bajaniya Nat⁴¹

⁴⁰ Tamil folk theatre and dance, performed outdoors with elaborate costumes, often representing scenes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata or classical Tamil epics.

⁴¹ The Bajaniya Nat are hereditary troupes of acrobats and tightrope walkers from Northern India. Traditionally itinerant, at least half are settled now (Phillips 383).

street entertainers and acrobats, and have travelled India, and occasionally to Europe, performing with their parents.⁴² Plainly, in terms of training, performance techniques, linguistic and cultural background, as well as class and caste origin, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had recourse to the skills and experiences of an exceptionally diverse creative team.

When the final twenty-two performers were chosen they spent an intensive two months rehearsing the production at Adishakti centre⁴³ in Pondicherry. Ellias describes this experience as 'joyous' (Interview 324). She says: 'Everyone loved it. It really felt like for once we were professional actors'⁴⁴ (Interview 324). The process was highly collaborative. Different members of the ensemble lead specialised workshops, and the performers engaged with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and each other in a variety of languages, both verbal and physical. Ellias refers to it as a process of figuring out what they could do together as a 'mad bunch' of people 'who spoke different languages and came from different creative backgrounds' (Interview 324).

In April 2006, Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* toured to Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata, before going to Stratford-upon-Avon in June. By 2007, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was on a world tour that included an extensive UK circuit, more shows in India, then stints in Australia, Canada, and the United States. The performers were on the road for almost three years. Although the acting leaned more towards realism than stylisation, the show was high energy and very physical.⁴⁵ It incorporated eight languages – Hindi, Tamil, Malayalam, Bengali, Sinhalese, Marathi,

⁴² Some of the collaborators had worked together before: a strong contingent (including Ellias, Sanyal and Toral Shah (stage manager)) were previously involved with assistant director Quasar Thakore Padamsee's theatre company Q Productions, while musician N Tiken Singh had previously worked with Supple in London on productions of *The Jungle Book* and *Haroun and the Sea Stories*.

⁴³ The Adishakti Centre is a guesthouse and centre for theatre arts research located in Pondicherry, an area on the South East coast of India.

⁴⁴ India has very little arts funding. Most Indian theatre companies operate on shoestring budgets compared to their Western counterparts. As Ellias explains, even professional stage actors are rarely paid for rehearsals.

⁴⁵ As I did not see the live production, all aesthetic description is based on the Victoria and Albert Theatre Museum's recording.

Sanskrit and English – and elements of numerous traditional and folk performance and martial art practices, including Kalarippayat (Kerala martial art), Silambam (Tamil stick fighting) and Bharatnatyam (classical Indian dance form). The performers climbed cloth and ropes, clambered about on bamboo scaffolding and rolled on the earth floor of the set. Reds and oranges lit the bamboo cane background and red clay floor. Interactions between the pairs of lovers were highly sexualised, and during the forest scenes the men often became aggressors, removing their belts with intent and leaping upon the protesting young Athenian women, leading one reviewer to quip that the show might be aptly retitled ‘lust in the dust’ (Benedict, ‘Dream’).

Supple’s production is a pivotal one to examine at this juncture in the development of intercultural theatre discourse. With interweaving scholarship moving away from the kinds of paradigms used to address the work of Brook, Mnouchkine, Schechner, Barba and Grotowski, Supple’s practice represents a reminder that Western director-led, Western funded intercultural spectacles drawing on Eastern performers and performance forms are still very much a part of global festival landscapes, and that there is much to be gained as a director from pursuing this kind of practice. This chapter will locate Supple within the intercultural tradition, locate his *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* within a Shakespearean tradition indebted to theorist Jan Kott, historicise Indian relationships with Shakespeare in order to problematise the two-way street rhetoric espoused by Brook, Schechner and others, and historicise the theatrical work of the British Council in India to show the necessity of postcolonial awareness in relation to Supple’s interculturalism. It will examine British Council arts funding in India in the twenty-first century, interrogating both its problematics and positive potential. Offering a Bourdieusian reading of Supple’s privilege in the Indian economy of cultural practice, it will call into question cosmopolitanisms that do not adequately address advantage and disadvantage. The chapter will explore the collaborative nature of *A Midsummer Night’s*

Dream, and the advantageousness of involvement in the production to all involved. Finally, an interrogation of the socio-political effects of the production in its performance contexts will point to instances in which the production reinscribes hegemonic assumptions and Orientalist stereotypes, and instances in which it actively works against such things.

‘Next Peter Brook’

Numerous critics, in India, the UK and North America, have compared Supple to Brook. Jasper Rees of *The Telegraph* notes: ‘It will do Supple few favours to pin a “next Peter Brook” label on him, but such is the supranational scale of his plans for the next few years, and so determined is he to flout theatrical practice, that comparison with Brook’s long-gestating, mould-breaking pieces for his Paris-based International Centre for Theatre Research is inevitable’ (Rees, ‘Wildest’). Benedict Nightingale invokes Brook in his review of the London run of the production, comparing the show to Brook’s seminal 1970 *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He calls Supple’s *Dream* more physically bold than Brook’s, but notes that ‘the circus gadgetry is in the Brook tradition.’. Geeta Doctor, reviewing for *The Hindu*, opines that the visual excitement stirred up by the cast, the set and directorial invention may be ‘a tribute to Peter Brook who brought back the circus arena of theatre.’ Sanjoy Roy of *Telhelka* magazine refers to the production as ‘an exacting exercise which was challenging for the audience and must have been doubly challenging for the performers, borrowing from the art of Peter Brook and Robert Lepage.’

Whether pinning a ‘next Peter Brook’ label on him will help or hinder his practice, Supple’s work clearly operates within an intercultural tradition and his practice provides a good locus for the evolving debates about universalism and neo-colonialism that have long circled the work of Brook and Mnouchkine. Mnouchkine, Singleton

writes, ‘thought that the surviving classical theatres of the Far East were suitable templates for constructing new forms for the presentation of ancient or medieval histories of Europe, given that Europe has no such equivalent’ (‘Interculturalism’ 628). Mnouchkine says: ‘When we decided to perform Shakespeare, a recourse to Asia became a necessity. Because Shakespeare is located within the metaphor of human truths. So we seek ways of staging him which avoid the realistic and prosaic at all costs’ (95). Western realism, Mnouchkine says, bores her (96), and the Asian tradition, which she understands to be dying, can provide a new base for Western practice (96). There are clearly parallels here with Supple’s professed attitude to the rationale behind his Indian *Dream*. Brook operates from a suspicion of Western theatre similar to Mnouchkine’s, wishing to avoid what he terms ‘The Deadly Theatre,’ or tired, conventional Western performance, at all costs (*Empty*). Supple recognises that his practice is greatly indebted to Brook. He believes Brook’s *Mahabharata* ‘gave it an identity on stage that belonged to no specific national or racial discourse,’ that it was ‘something utterly Indian in origin, but also universal in its humanity’ (qtd. in Ancheri). He describes Brook’s work as ‘something that’s opened doors,’ (‘Director’s Talk’ 11) something from which he inherited the possibility to work the way he does:

The idea of travelling so far, getting away from London theatre and opening yourself up to different ways of doing things [...] I didn’t consciously copy *The Mahabharata* [...] but I don’t think I would’ve thought of doing such a thing if someone hadn’t thrown open that door. So [Brook’s] influence is so immense it’s hard to disentangle it from one’s own instincts. It’s just deep in me. (11)

Supple’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* might not map onto Brook’s culturally universalist agenda in terms of international casting techniques – indeed, the pan-Indian

and Sri-Lankan nature of the production, while intracultural, might be seen to reaffirm the national – but it bears clearly discernible traces of Brook’s influence in terms of its aesthetic, scale, and attempt to traverse both national and cultural boundaries.⁴⁶ Increasingly, Supple is leaning towards cross-cultural or intercultural practice. For example, in 2006 the British Council paid for him to go to Egypt to begin research for a production based on the stories of the *1001 Nights*. He has since toured extensively around the Middle East to find collaborators for this project,⁴⁷ and, when the British Council could offer him no more funding, he secured support from Luminato, a Toronto based international arts festival. Supple’s *1001 Nights* premiered in Toronto in June 2011 and, following a cancellation of the United States leg of its tour due to visa issues, played in Edinburgh in September of the same year. Like Brook’s *Mahabharata*, it would not be performed in the countries from which the tales originated.⁴⁸ Rees may be misguided in thinking that it will do Supple no favours to pin a ‘next Peter Brook’ label on him. Supple is clearly building on the intercultural foundations laid by Brook in the ‘80s. One consequence of using these foundations is that the intercultural critiques of Brook mounted by Bharucha and others must continue to inform scholarly thinking on the brand of interculturalism that Supple builds.

⁴⁶ On this subject Supple says:

I think the path I’m on at the moment is absolutely one of engagement with difference. That’s a very good term for it. I am seeking to learn about worlds I don’t know, lives I don’t know, theatre practices I don’t know, and I’m seeking to weed out of myself the dangers inherent in your earlier question [on Orientalism]. I’m seeking to challenge my own preconceptions, my own clichés. I’m seeking to get beyond an exotic and Orientalist view of, for example, the Arabic world of *1001 Nights* [...]. I’m seeking to really know what it’s like to be an actor and to know what actors are like in Algeria and Morocco and Tunisia, in Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi. And I’m seeking to create theatre out of that journey so that people can have an experience of Indian performers that’s not Bollywood, but is *them*. [...] I see [Brook’s practice] as an ultimate goal that I want to get to: an international cast made up of artists that I have met through this earlier journey. You put it very well earlier: Brook’s journey is the transcending of difference. Mine is about the search for the common core of what makes a story connect with people onstage and offstage. So I want to explore the folk and classical canon with a cast who bring very different perspectives of theatre practice, culture, life, to the work. That’s what I would like to be achieving in ten years time (Interview 359).

⁴⁷ Interestingly, Brook also toured extensively through the Middle East at various points in his career, both as an invitee and a cultural/spiritual tourist (Brook, *Threads*).

⁴⁸ In April 2011 I travelled to Fes, Morocco to observe rehearsals of Supple’s *1001 Nights*. I am currently formulating this research into an article.

Brook, Lepage, Supple – Intercultural Dreaming

Brook, Lepage and Supple have all directed high-profile productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.⁴⁹ Brook's 1970 offering is widely considered a ground-breaking version of the play. With its white set, circus tricks and acrobatic artistry, it 'pushed beyond the realism that had long dominated the British stage' (Shevtsova, 'Brook' 17) and 'considerably enhanced Brook's already illustrious international career' (16). For Brook, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not the children's play that many of his contemporaries thought it; rather, it is a play that operates on many levels and deals exclusively 'with human realities and in particular the reality of love' (Brook, *Threads* 148). He felt his task was to make every element real and true, even the fairy element, the plausibility of which, he believes, suffers in modern times. Inspired by a performance of Chinese acrobats he saw in Paris, which gave an 'impression of pure speed, pure lightness, pure spirit' (149), Brook originally hoped to stage his *Dream* with a mixed group of Shakespearean and Chinese actors, but this proved a practical impossibility and he worked instead in Britain in the belief that such acrobatic skills are not outside of a professional actor's range (Brook, *Threads* 149). According to Shevtsova, Brook's production, which premiered in Stratford-upon-Avon, 'blazed a trail for young people of the calibre of Canadian Robert Lepage who took their cue from it for their own pioneering endeavours' ('Brook' 16).

Lepage has attested that his *Dream* was inspired by Brook (Fricker, 'Lepage' 241). Playing at London's National Theatre with a multicultural cast, Lepage's 1992 production 'read against the comic grain to see [*The Dream*] as a frightening rite of passage taking place in the lovers' collective imagination' (Fricker, 'Lepage' 239).

⁴⁹ Mnouchkine also directed a libidinous and earthy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1968), which pre-dates Brook's, in which she 'identified the fundamental cruelty and vigorously physical nature of the dream that is involved in Shakespeare's play' (Bradby, 'Cultural Politics' 116) and which included 'a treatment of the relationship between courtiers and mechanicals in which the differences of class were violently present' (116). As Brook's play is widely considered the seminal Kottian production, I am choosing not to deal with Mnouchkine's *Dream* here.

Barbara Hodgden's reaction to the piece was that the *mise-en-scène* – including black upstage screens, a mud-covered stage with a watery pool in the middle, and a single lightbulb on a long chord – 'engaged Brook's production through a process of negative quotation' (73). She argues that the review discourse surrounding Lepage's dream maps it 'as a transgressive domain where intersecting points of antagonism between high and low, between "Shakespeare" and "Other," signal powerful dissonances within British culture' (71). For Hodgden, situating Brook at the margins of Lepage's production hails the former into 'the space of genius to legitimate him as Shakespeare's "true" heir, the maestro who had reinvented non-illusionistic theatre' (72). Fricker elaborates on the points of antagonism broached by Hodgden, saying:

At the same time as Lepage's interventions brought the post-imperial anxieties of some of its British observers to the surface, the production also became a canvas for Lepage to play out his own fantasies of Otherness. As have several of his original productions, Lepage's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* used the theatrical language of Orientalism: his multi-cultural cast, African-inspired costume and make-up for the fairies, Indian style costume for the court and Indonesian gamelan playing were all part of Lepage's attempts to, in his words, discover something 'transcultural' in the play, 'something underneath that is universal.' ('Lepage' 242)

For both Hodgden and Fricker, Lepage was engaged at once in a postcolonial 'writing back' and a universalising Orientalism. Fricker has a different slant from Hodgden on Lepage's relationship to Brook however. She notes that Lepage's production is much indebted to the critic Jan Kott, and many of its staging choices represent 'a standard Kottian reading of the play' ('Lepage' 242). For Kott, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is

an intensely sexual drama, ‘the most erotic of Shakespeare’s plays’ (Kott 73). Fricker points out that Brook also adhered to such readings and opines that ‘the relationship of Lepage’s production to Brook’s was not rupture but continuum’ (‘Lepage’ 242).

Supple’s production falls within an established (anti-traditional) tradition of staging *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Brook, Lepage and Supple make efforts to distance their practice from conventional, twee, and innocent understandings of the play. Aside from scale and success, their productions share three key characteristics: firstly, textual faithfulness indebted to the work of Kott;⁵⁰ secondly, engagement with performance forms and/or actors from different cultures – a characteristic which simultaneously works to universalise *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and destabilise its Britishness; thirdly, use of spectacle characterised by physical theatre and acrobatics. The reasons for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in particular becoming the vehicle for such high-profile practice might have something to do with the popular appeal of the play. Speaking about aspects of his production that rendered it commercially viable, Supple said: ‘I think the big commercial decision was to do the *Dream* [...] Because the *Dream* is so popular and generally known and people want to see it. Everything else was done because it felt like the right thing to do’ (Interview 368). Perceived Kottian violence and eroticism might also explain the play’s appeal to directors wishing to avoid what Brook terms the deadly theatre when staging Shakespeare. According to Hodgdon, Lepage understood his decision to use multicultural actors to be based in a ‘transcultural poetics’ (80); the actors’ accents and skin colours were to function as poetic icons, carrying Indian-ness or African-ness onto the stage (80). For Brook and Supple, the intercultural impulse was grounded in faithfulness to Shakespeare’s text and the belief that Other cultures and performance traditions lent the action truthfulness. Supple says

⁵⁰ A distinction should be made here between faithfulness to Shakespeare’s text and faithfulness to Shakespeare’s language. As Hodgdon shows, ‘reviewers of Lepage’s *Dream* complained of the actors’ carelessness with words, of an inability to hear, and of physical activity distracting attention from the dialogue’ (76). Supple’s production, as mentioned, was performed in 8 different languages.

‘You need that ultimate touchstone where your ultimate loyalty lies. What is the most important thing? And the most important thing in *The Dream* was the connection, with as much brutal honesty as possible, to the nature of that play’ (Interview 369). For Supple, intercultural elements could bring the production closer to the truth of Shakespeare’s text (see footnote 35).

Indian Shakespeares

When Supple chose to direct a version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for his pan-Indian and Sri Lankan endeavour, he was contributing to a long tradition of adapting and ‘Indianizing’ Shakespeare. This tradition is the kind that allows Brook, Schechner and others to offer ‘two-way street’ defences of intercultural theatre practice: Western interculturalists might offer exoticised or stereotypical representations of Othered cultures for consumption by Western audiences, but Othered cultures and people use the universally relevant works of the Western canon, like Shakespeare, for their theatrical work too. As argued in the introduction, claiming parity between Western-led intercultural theatre projects and postcolonial Shakespeares lacks the material engagement required by an ethics of intercultural practice. Indian relationships with Shakespeare are complex, and, historically speaking, British Council funded Shakespearean projects in India have not been read as politically neutral.

Poonam Trivedi notes that the first translations of Shakespeare in major Indian languages started appearing within a generation of the British Empire’s systematic promotion of the English language on the subcontinent, a date which she ties to the opening of institutes like the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1817 and the passing of the education act of 1835 (Trivedi, ‘Introduction’ 15). Ania Loomba, ‘without minimizing the decimation of native cultures by colonial encounters or the repressive effects of colonial domination’ (‘Transformations’ 110), examines hybrid performances of

Shakespearean plays on the Parsi stages⁵¹ of Bombay from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century. She notes how these stages drew upon both folk forms and Western theatrical devices, thus eluding the two cultural models – Anglicisation or Orientalism – prescribed by the colonists (115/116). Further, upon considering the regional languages that the productions had to utilise when they toured, Loomba suggests that the drama staged by the Parsi companies ‘was not only modern India’s first commercial urban theatre but in a sense India’s first national theatre’ (117) She adds: ‘that it frequently performed Shakespeare is merely another of colonial India’s many ironies’ (117). Through the ‘bold and cavalier’ appropriations of the Parsi stages, Trivedi tells us, Shakespeare was ‘popularised, commercialized and insinuated into the psyche of these audiences – without them knowing it was Shakespeare’ (‘Introduction’ 16). In an article on the translation of Shakespeare into Indian languages, Sisar Kumar Das calls the enterprise of the Parsi stages almost a ‘cannibalisation’ of the Bard (52). Vasudha Dalmia shows that Indian theatrical interaction with Shakespeare was not only happening at a popular level, but, rather, that Hindu literary playwrights contemporaneous with the rise of the Parsi stages, like Harishchandra (1850-1885), were creating a new Hindi drama which adapted both classical Sanskrit texts and Shakespeare. Harishchandra was also a theoretical writer who believed, unlike the Orientalists, that the classical tradition should not merely be reconstructed, but should be contemporised and modified wherever modern practice appeared to demand it (Dalmia 33-35). This modification included tropes learned from Western drama and from Shakespeare in particular. Further, Trivedi shows that ‘the study and performance of Shakespeare in India coincided with the revival of Sanskrit drama’ (‘Introduction’ 33); C. Narayan Menon’s 1938 article draws similarities between Sanskrit drama and Shakespeare in ‘an attempt to account for Shakespeare’s initial appeal to Indians

⁵¹ The Parsi stages were Parsi owned and operated commercial theatre enterprises based mainly in Bombay with wide touring circuits (Loomba, ‘Transformations’ 109–41).

through the pleasure of recognition' (Trivedi, 'Introduction' 20). Kumar Das discusses historical and present day motivations as well as regional, formal and class-based issues to show some of the many ways in which Shakespeare has been adapted in India.

Shakespeare and Indian theatre and performance, then, have been in a reciprocally syncretic relationship over a period of almost two hundred years. However, this is not to proclaim that a hybridized Shakespeare presents no post-colonial problems. Indeed, as Loomba argues in dialogue with Bhabhian mimicry and Fanonian white masks, '[t]he problem with the invocations of hybridity in much post-colonial theory [...] is not merely that they downgrade the radical potential of notions of authenticity, but that they fail to account for *different* ways in which colonial and post-colonial subjects can be understood as hybrid' ('Othello Fellows' 147). She elaborates on this thesis further in an essay entitled 'Hamlet in Mizoram,' when she argues that postcoloniality does not allow a complete picture of Indian society's relationship to colonialism and nationalism; other factors, such as class, gender, religion, region and caste, have an impact on individual Indian relationships with Western culture, and by extension Shakespeare. India's long tradition of Shakespeare in performance is intertwined with colonialism, and thus there are historical and socio-political resonances to attend to when one chooses to produce Shakespeare in India. Trivedi quotes Lokendra Abraham, an alternative Manipuri theatre practitioner who was 'brought up on the adaptive tradition of Shakespeare performance' ('Local Politics' 51) and is responsible for creating loosely Shakespearean productions which reflect the political turmoil of Manipur, as saying 'Love and Hostility is my attitude towards Shakespeare' (51). Abraham uses Shakespeare – itself, as Trivedi points out, a colonial text – 'to protest a felt neo-colonialism' (53). Abraham has an individual relationship with both colonial, neo-colonial and hybridised culture; he is a uniquely hybridised subject. This hybridity is consciously questioned and made to perform a political function.

Even while commercially successful and regionally popular adaptations of Shakespeare have made up a significant part of the Indian theatrical landscape since the nineteenth century, an imperial aftermath in Indian scholarly circles holds ‘authentic’ Shakespearean texts as the proper subject for scholarship. For example, *Shakespeare in India*, a 1987 publication from Jadavpur University, contains eleven articles of Shakespearean criticism from Indian scholars. The work is accomplished and insightful, tackling plays such as *King Lear*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *Coriolanus* and themes such as theatricality, mimesis and tragedy. It explores relationships between Shakespeare and his contemporaries and outlines and analyses T.S Eliot’s relationship with the bard. However, other than the names of the authors, nothing in the collection betrays any connection with India. Shakespeare in India, the volume seems to imply, is the same universal figure he is everywhere else, and Shakespearean scholars in India have the same job to do as Shakespearean scholars in Europe or North America.⁵² Trivedi points to a number of other volumes of Indian Shakespeare criticism ‘which considered only the literary and not necessarily the Indian dimension’ (‘Introduction’ 19). Collections like this serve to show that one legacy of a colonial education system in which the bard was held to be incomparable is that practitioners working with Shakespeare in India have home-grown establishments of purists to contend with.

Those who would study or perform hybridised Shakespeare have other post-colonial difficulties to consider. Loomba explains:

Colonialist hangovers do persist in India, but they jostle with an increasingly militant Hinduism. Some of us who have spent much energy canvassing for a change in the way a colonialist Shakespeare is still institutionalised within English literary

⁵² The collection compares well with a 1984 British anthology entitled *Shakespeare’s Wide and Universal Stage*, which fails to discuss any productions that happened outside of Britain, or themes that do not directly relate to a conservatively ‘British’ Shakespeare.

studies in India increasingly find ourselves having to argue that a simple replacement of Western literature by ‘Indian’ or ‘Third World’ texts will not undermine existing ideological or critical orthodoxies. (‘Transformations’ 138)

Although Trivedi claims that while the ‘study of Shakespeare was an imposition, the performance of Shakespeare was not’ (‘Introduction’ 18), there is evidence that such orthodoxies have been long entrenched not just at a scholarly level, but at the level of performance too. During colonial times, groups of amateur Anglo-Indians performed Shakespeare as prescribed by British tradition to concretise the differences between British and Indian cultures (Loomba, ‘Transformations’ 114), while, in the lead up to independence, Geoffrey Kendal, the famous Shakespeare Wallah, toured productions of Shakespeare to the Indian provinces, playing for regional audiences often composed of school children. Loomba points out that while Kendal’s autobiography shows him to be proud of using some Indian musical instruments or occasionally dressing the characters in local costume, ‘there was nothing Indian about the Shakespeare he played. [Shakespeariana’s]⁵³ school audiences were fed on a steady diet of colonial literature and schooled in reverence for the Bard and the canon’ (‘Transformations’ 128).

The British Council

The British Council appointed representatives in newly-independent India and Pakistan in 1948, the year after independence (British Council, ‘Timelines’), and just over a decade later the organisation were picking up where Kendal left off, bringing high-profile British Shakespeare companies such as the Bristol Old Vic and the New Shakespeare Company on ambitious tours of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and parts of East Asia. The British Council is a UK government organisation, partially funded by the

⁵³ Shakespeariana is the name of Kendal’s Shakespeare company.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), mandated with the promotion British culture outside of the UK. It was set up in 1934 to promote a wider knowledge of the United Kingdom abroad,⁵⁴ to promote knowledge of the English language, and to develop closer cultural relations between the United Kingdom and other countries (British Council, 'History'). Jen Harvie writes about the Council's concerted rebranding of Britain under the 'Creative Industries' initiatives of the New Labour Government in the late 90s and first years of the twenty-first century. The Council helped to 'displace overseas promoters' and audiences' residual expectations that Britain's theatre export will primarily be based on old texts, grandly staged, performed in a particular style, and costly to import' (UK 30) and in the process broke down 'prejudices that prevent acceptance of changing, diverse expressions of British national identities' (30). However, Harvie recognises that 'by aiming to export British culture and English language, the British Council has always risked being accused of cultural imperialism' (30) and notes that the 'Cool Britannia' brand propagated by the Council under New Labour's initiatives 'make it vulnerable to this accusation still' (30)

The British Council engages with critiques of neo-colonialism and debates about its function. The Council's website has a history section that tries, albeit with an undeniable bias, to offer commentary on the contemporary politics of its enterprise from four different perspectives. Nicholas J. Cull's paper attacks the British Council on the grounds that it and the BBC were/are propaganda machines which 'facilitated the astonishing transformation of Britain from its pre-war image of perfidious imperialist manipulator into a new incarnation as truth teller and fount of fair play' (Cull, 'Propaganda'). Dr Morsi Saad El Din defends the work of the British Council on the grounds that cries of cultural invasion underestimate 'invaded' cultures. He says 'I believe that complaining of cultural invasion is a confession of the ineffectiveness of

⁵⁴ It is difficult to refrain from reading the first function ironically in light of the fact that Britain had, by 1922, colonised twenty-five percent of the world's landmass.

our culture. Our embracing foreign thought, be it from the East or from the West, does not in any way imply that we have become mere followers in the domain of culture' (El Din, 'Cultural Invasion'). Phil Taylor places critiques of the British Council in the same category as critiques of globalization that accuse Western powers of 'maintaining an imbalance in the flow of information from the First World to the Third World.' These anti-globalization theories, Taylor argues (in key with Schechner), belie the reality that cultural and economic transfers are not a one way street. Once this is recognised, it is clear to see that the money the British Council spends promoting British culture abroad is spent to 'benefit international relations through cultural exchanges' ('Cultural Imperialism'). Finally, Richard Weight somewhat euphorically praises the 'magnificent scope of the Council's work in the 109 countries it now serves' and goes on to assert that 'throughout almost seventy years of activity, the Council has proved that cultural propaganda, sensitively managed, can help to create international understanding, and with it, a more peaceful world' (Weight 'Selling'). In answer to Weight's paper, it is difficult to refrain from pointing out that Britain has recently been at the forefront of bloody wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, both countries in which the British Council has operated from 1940 (British Council, 'Timelines'). However, looking at the other papers, which are more objectively written, it is evident that the British Council, while choosing to publish both none-too-damning criticism and somewhat defensive praise, is engaged with debates about its function and the possible problematics of its cultural programme. There does seem to be one prominently omitted facet of criticism however. The defences of the charges of cultural invasion and cultural imperialism by El Din and Taylor underplay the significance of former British colonial involvement in many of the countries in which the Council now operates. When the language, culture, traditions and art forms of a people have been denigrated and damaged, and in some cases systematically and legislatively attacked, by British cultural and educational policies,

historical awareness, cultural sensitivity, and very careful consideration are needed in putting the British Council's primary objectives into play.

This awareness, sensitivity and consideration has, historically, been only dubiously present, if not absent, from British Council cultural interactions in India. Archival material on early British Council Shakespeare tours tells fraught tales. For example, on a 1964/1965 New Shakespeare Company tour, actors write to local newspapers to complain that no foreigner should be expected to stay in the accommodation offered them; heavy and unwieldy sets are transported to remote areas with extreme difficulty; a company director writes letters wondering why Tamil audiences received the performances with such little enthusiasm on the same page on which he casually remarks that floods have wiped out local fishing fleets; doctors' notes abound as stomach upsets attack all but the most hardened of thespians; and even the most hardened do themselves damage by drinking alcohol in the strong Indian sun. By the time the New Shakespeare Company got to Singapore, the British Council correspondent told the Council Home Office that 'they were sick of being a company' (British Council Archive, 'Shakespeare'), while the Hong Kong representative told Home Office that he could not remember 'a more disgruntled body of people' (British Council Archive, 'Shakespeare'). All this notwithstanding, the British Council regional representative's accounts of public reaction to the repertoire stress that the British companies offered Indians the chance to see Shakespeare as it is meant to be performed. The regional representative for Madras, for example, said:

For all amateur theatrical groups who produce English plays in Bangalore and Madras the company's performances were a revelation of professional expertise; and for university students and teachers of English their visit was a salutary reminder in the

quartercentenary year that Shakespeare is more than an examinations text. (British Council Archives, 'Shakespeare')

Such attitudes seem to fortify the idea that ownership of Shakespeare-par-excellence is British, while Indian imitations, adaptations and hybrids are deviations, and inferior. The press clippings contained in the British Council files show rather more dissent on the performance's merit than the representatives' reports allow, particularly in the bigger urban centres. For example, there is an interesting spat in Calcutta's *The Statesman*, dated December 1964. Critic Kisor Kumar Bagchi's comments that he did not think the performance very accomplished met with a letter from an Ivor Hickman reading 'If your critic felt parts of the play "dragged badly" and was somewhat bored, it could be because he possibly did not read the play before seeing it. All Shakespeare's plays should be read at least once before seeing them performed and this is especially true of his *Richard II*' (qtd. in British Council Archives, 'Shakespeare'). William Walker joins in to praise Hickman's stance, while Xerxes Mehta⁵⁵ writes 'caught up in the excitement and glamour of Shakespeare, [Hickman] seems to banish all analysis as heretical' (qtd. in British Archives, 'Shakespeare'). Or, in a letter to the *Hindusthan Standard*, dated January 3rd 1965, Mr. Sadan Kumar Ghosh calls the New Shakespeare Company's repertoire 'nothing to write home about' before proclaiming that 'The British Council [...] would be doing a more useful job if they prevented or arrested the Indianisation of Shakespeare. Shakespeare is diluted, distorted and ditchwatered every day by these ghouls, the cram-book makers, and little of his magic survives a perusal of one of the Indian editions' (qtd. in British Council Archives, 'Shakespeare'). It is clear from the archives that these British Council funded Shakespearean tours stirred up the tensions surrounding Shakespeare's function in India discussed above. Historically

⁵⁵ Xerxes Mehta is now Professor Emeritus at UMBC (University of Maryland Baltimore County), Department of Theatre, and an accomplished theatre director.

speaking, British Council funded Shakespearian interventions in India have certainly not been read as politically neutral.

In the programme for the Indian run of Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Rathi Jafer, the head of arts of the British Council India, celebrates the fact that the production constitutes a first for the British Council insofar as it signifies 'moving from a "presenter" of UK talent to a "commissioner" of a collaborative production' (Jafer 8). In fact, however, the British Council not only has a history of funding British Shakespeare companies to play in India, but also of hiring well-known British directors to produce Shakespearean plays with diverse casts. For example, as early as 1957, the British Council hired Robert Newton⁵⁶ to direct *Othello* in Madras using a cast of Indian and British actors. In the correspondence between the British Council home office and its Madras representative, S. H. Best, thinly veiled racism is apparent in insights like the following: 'the Indians came to see the English in a new light [...] to see the careful attention to detail, to see the necessity for discipline, to understand that such a production can only be a success by the individuals coming together to form a team. These were all new experiences the Indians owed the English' (Best qtd. in British Council Archives, 'Newton'). This is but one example of the paternalism and racism apparent in attitudes towards India and Indian people in the British Council theatre archives. As the years go on, the racism to be found in official documents lessens. As access to the archive is restricted to documents that are thirty years old or older, it is left to the researcher to hope that the trend continued, with institutionalised racism and paternalism crumbling along with the vestiges of official colonial authority. However, one would be foolish to believe that a few decades have eradicated such attitudes altogether. In 1995, when Supple toured with the Royal Shakespeare Company to India

⁵⁶ Robert G. Newton, author of *Acting Improvised* (1937), *Together in Theatre* (1954) and *A Creative Approach to Amateur Theatre* (1967), not (as some online sources would have one believe) Robert Newton the Hollywood actor, famous for playing Bluebeard the Pirate.

with *The Comedy of Errors* in conjunction with the British Council, the tour included workshops and outreach for Indian actors rather than a simple display of Britain's Shakespearean prowess. The work of the British Council no longer seems to be a flagrant continuation of the oppressive cultural and educational policies that preceded it. Whether related to the conscious rebranding that Harvie describes or the product of gradual socio-political change, the British Council is an institution that, ostensibly at least, engages in debates about its function in India.

Indian Arts Funding Today; Supple's Capital in the Indian Economy of Cultural Practice

In a telephone interview and e-mail correspondence, Adam Pushkin, head of arts and creative industries for the British Council in India and Sri Lanka, was enthusiastic about the need for debate about and constructive scrutiny of the work of the British Council. After all, he pointed out, the British Council is using public money, and the impact of that money is difficult to quantify. He claims that while colonial hangovers are an issue, when it comes to day to day operating they are not as *much* of an issue as one might assume. According to Pushkin, this is because in India the average age is twenty-six. Thus, a lot of participants in the arts and a lot of audiences are very young. With an age profile like India's, 1947 is a long time ago. All the same, in specific reference to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Pushkin says that he thinks the structure that informed the production process was regrettable. The interaction between Supple and the cast, he believes, was didactic, and he feels uncomfortable about this. Subsequent research on behalf of the British Council into attitudes among Indian practitioners to collaboration reveals that many Indian practitioners do not feel that the way the production process of

A Midsummer Night's Dream was managed represents best practice.⁵⁷ Pushkin says: 'The British Council now insists on equality of status between UK and Indian colleagues,' adding: 'it's fair to say that some people in India felt that this wasn't necessarily the case with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*' (E-mail). In this regard, the British Council India has set up an initiative called Connections through Culture. Part of the mission statement for this project reads:

What Connections through Culture demands from 'collaboration' is that the partners from each country have as close as possible to an equal role in the project: an equal role in shaping it, in leading it, and in benefitting from it. (British Council India and Sri Lanka, 'Connections')

Commitment to these aims is signalled by the publication of a large range of interviews with various Indian practitioners on the nature of collaboration, and by a number of current collaborative projects currently being funded by the British Council in line with the strictures of the Connections through Culture initiative.⁵⁸ Again, returning to Loomba's notion that there are many different types of hybridity, and many possible postcolonial relationships with nationalism and colonial culture, it should be noted that the East/West power relations inherent in Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* did not disturb all the collaborators working on the play. For Devissario, the music director,

⁵⁷ Details of this research, including interviews on collaboration with forty prominent Indian theatre practitioners, have been published on the British Council India's website as part of its new 'connection through cultures' initiative. Many of the interviewees place a strong emphasis on equality in collaboration. For example, KV Akshara, director of the Ninasam Theatre Institute, says 'Normally, when any visitor from the West comes to India there is an instant and implicit hierarchy – i.e. – that the West is developed while India is developing. It is absolutely essential to work against this tendency and to establish mutual respect between the collaborators' (Akshara 2). Dadi Pudumjee, managing trustee of Ishara Puppet Theatre, says 'International collaborations can sometimes be difficult because the international collaborator comes with funding and this may lead to a feeling that they have an upper hand in some way. It is important that everyone contributes and respects each other equally' (Pudumjee 2). Many of the interviewees also lament the lack of funding available to them.

⁵⁸ For example, the Council are funding a 2012 collaboration to take place between London-based theatre company Cardboard Citizens and Bengali theatre company Jana Sanskriti. Both well-established companies are heavily influenced by Boalian theatre techniques. They are to produce *Measure for Measure*.

it was ‘wonderful to be part of something that was such a success in such a broad range of contexts, and that became a genuine collaborative effort’ (Devissario 2). In an e-mail interview, Kutty Narayan, the translator responsible for the Malayalam portion of the multi-lingual production, expressed surprise when I told him about the new protocol surrounding collaboration that arose in part from the British Council’s involvement with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He said, echoing the sentiments of El Din above:

I am surprised that the issue of Indian collaborators vis-a-vis British counterparts is even open to discussion. In no way can Indian collaborators be considered inferior to British counterparts in this specific area. I cannot speak politically but as a lover of all fine arts I make no distinction between Supple and any other of similar talent. (Interview 3)

However, my interview with Ellias indicates that, on the ground, debates about the politics of hiring Supple to take charge of such a high-profile and highly funded production were very much an issue. Ellias has a vast amount of respect for Supple’s abilities as a director and the way he conducted the production process. All the same, she says:

The debate was in India ‘why has an Englishman been given so much money to come down to work with us.’ We had people in the crew saying ‘the British Council wouldn’t give so much money to Indians to do such a big production.’ And all of those things are there. But I didn’t necessarily choose to take a side. I wasn’t questioning why the British Council was doing it. I really was just enjoying being there. They looked after us pretty well, and it was quite a spectacular event. What I would say is that I

hope the money does go to an Indian someday to make a large scale production like that. (Interview 324)

Supple calls such sensitivities about the dream ‘totally valid’ (Interview 367), but points out that the money wasn’t only given to a director. Rather, it was given to ‘everybody who was involved and engaged and earned and lived and experienced through that project’ (361). Supple is wary of initiatives that are bureaucratically rather than artistically motivated, but adds that he thinks it would be great if some really good works came from the seeds of collaboration being sown by Connection through Cultures. However, he sees a thread of hypocrisy in the Council’s mandate. Astutely, he remarks: ‘I think it’s slightly laughable if the British Council thinks it can avoid the fundamental issue that way. I mean, they’re a wing of the Foreign Office and they’re in India. [...] Of course [...] they’re providing resources that otherwise wouldn’t be there, which is great. But they’re still a British agency’ (367). This tension is not easy to resolve. Is there a fundamental problem with institutions like the British Council and the Ford Foundation⁵⁹ dictating what artistic projects will be funded in India? Or is it positive that artists are receiving funding at all in India’s field of cultural production? The British Council seems to be moving towards new types of practice. It is taking on board the recommendations of Indian artists like Leela Samson, director of the Kalakshetra Foundation,⁶⁰ who says that ‘funding bodies should look for work that is already happening and give it the boost that it requires’ (Samson 2), as well as the recommendations of those who stress the importance of equality in collaborative and intercultural practice (see footnote 53). However, even if these recommendations are

⁵⁹ The Ford Foundation is a privately funded U.S. philanthropic organisation. Bharucha describes it as ‘one of the biggest global players in the area of culture and development, with its head quarters in New York and numerous branches in Third World metropolitan cities operating with a semblance of decentralized autonomy’ (‘Dimensions’ 54). See also: Bharucha, ‘Ninasam: A Cultural Alternative.’

⁶⁰ ‘Kalakshetra focuses on bharatnatyam, carnatic vocal and instrumental music, the visual arts, traditional crafts and textile design, textual heritage, aesthetics, history and philosophy. The director, Leela Samson, a student of Rukmini Devi, continues to be a performer and teacher of this tradition’ (Kalakshetra.com).

implemented, in deciding between the thousands of Indian funding applications that they receive, the British Council still wields an enormous amount of power over what Indian art is seen globally and what continues to have a local remit – thus allowing it to speak for India in a manner that has troubling neo-colonial connotations. In reading the forty interviews published by the British Council India, many of which appear to be very frank about the challenges of collaborative and/or intercultural work for Indian artists, it is clear that British Council funding has the potential to be a boon to the Indian cultural economy. To withdraw it on the basis of neo-colonial critiques would be to limit the opportunities available to Indian artists. The challenges, as the Connection through Cultures interviewees repeatedly attest, are that funding bodies should not be prescriptive, that they should foster equality and mutual respect in intercultural exchanges, and that they should support work already underway rather than commission projects to suit a particular agenda. The difficulty here, however, is that this function sounds like the remit of an Indian national funding body rather than that of a British governmental agency that aims to promote the English language and British culture abroad.

Clearly, incommensurable stances can be held on the relevance of colonial history to the work of the British Council in India today – from the assertion that the country's age profile dilutes anti-colonial feeling, to the assertion that these histories are completely irrelevant and directors are chosen according to talent, not nationality, to the admission that many people do react badly to collaborative processes in which British counterparts appear to have more power and prestige than Indian counterparts – it is apparent that the economic and power relations informing this production were neither invisible nor unspoken. That the British Council reviewed its policy on collaboration following this production is testament to the fact that something about the politics of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* rang intercultural and ethical alarm bells.

Ellias says that the question in India was ‘why has an Englishman been given so much money to come down and work with us?’ The rest of this section, drawing both on Bourdieusian cultural economics and postcolonial thought, will account for the capital given to Supple in order to map the power relations informing the production. A *Midsummer Night’s Dream* received over a quarter of a million pounds (£274,737.47) worth of funding from the British Council.⁶¹ This does not include the cost in personnel hours which the Council also incurred, which Pushkin explains was very considerable. Neither does it include the vast amount of corporate sponsorship acquired by Supple and the British Council for the endeavour, which brings the figure to almost half a million pounds. In a country with such a small amount of arts funding, the scale of this production cannot be over-estimated. In 2009, the Indian government spent GB £141 million on the arts (BBC, ‘Arts outside UK’). Compare this to the British Government’s £449 million (BBC, ‘Arts Council’s Budget’), where the population of Britain is approximately 62 million and the population of India is approximately 1.155 billion. In addition, according to the British Council, there are very few companies and trusts in India with an arts funding mandate, while corporate India does not have an arts funding agenda (British Council, ‘How To’ 7). As Pushkin and many of the Connections through Culture interviewees point out, while UK organisations have resources and full-time staff, Indian organisations often operate on a voluntary basis and on shoe-string budgets. These differences in expectations can create power dynamics when UK artists operate in India. Pushkin sees it as a significant challenge for the British Council to avoid such power dynamics. He acknowledges that the amount of funding and

⁶¹ This breaks down as follows: In 2006 the Council contributed £165,539.66; in 2007 it contributed £108,790.23; in 2008 it contributed £407.58 (Chavda, E-mail 2). The British Council acted as producer of the show and thus all income and expenditure went through its books. Total funding for the show (inclusive of the £274,737.47 specified) managed by the British Council was approximately £475,000, and included sponsorship from Hutch (at the time India’s biggest telecommunications company, since taken over by Vodafone), Reliance Communications, and the National Centre for Performing Arts. In 2008, the production was funded by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Reliance Industries, and media companies NDTV and DNA.

institutional support given to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* meant that other, smaller projects were less supported, and insists that the British Council India is now committed to making theatre on a smaller scale. Ellias's interview also provides evidence of how unusually grandiose the financial scale of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seemed from the perspective of the Indian collaborators; she says:

It was a really ridiculous amount of money that [the British Council] put in, and we were shocked. I remember seeing drawings for the set. We were like 'wow.' [...] We had no idea at the start of the production how big it was going to be. We didn't know what was going on. For us it would have been fine if we had done a play in India. We didn't realise it was going to go on tour for so long or that it was going to be supported so much financially. (Interview 324)

It is clear that in terms of economic capital, Supple was in a highly privileged position in relation to the Indian cultural economy. However, following Bourdieu, economics alone do not determine an agent's agency within a given field of cultural production. Social, symbolic and cultural capital circulates in economies of cultural practice and has an impact on an agent's ability to author representations of another culture.

Supple's Capital

Supple's support from the British Council, an organisation built on contacts and relationships that go back to colonial times (since many of the first representatives of the council were Anglo-Indians who had lived in India prior to independence), contributed to his social capital, furnishing him with an in-built network of influential contacts to aid his enterprise. The British Council has a long history of both, as discussed, touring British productions to India, and funding collaborations between

British and Indian practitioners – practices which still make up the mainstay of its theatrical programme today. The British Council in India, as evidenced by the date of appointment of its first representatives, was undoubtedly at its inception engaged in a process of Bourdieusian officialisation, whereby a group (or those dominant within a group) binds itself to certain rules regarding what is acceptable thus ‘contributing to the maintenance of the social order from which it derives its power’ (Bourdieu, *Logic* 108). As discussed, the social order from which Britain, and by extension the British Council, derives its power has been changing. Nonetheless, just as Harvie suggests that there may still be a ‘relatively elitist and homogenous’ (*UK* 30) profile of British culture which the Council is willing to recognize, there may well be an authorised profile of Indian culture that the Council is willing to support also. Supple, of course, does not necessarily have to ascribe to this vision in order to avail of the social capital represented by the British Council. Bourdieu claims that an agent can beat a group at its own game ‘by presenting his interests in the guise of the values recognised by the group’ (*Logic* 108/109). Supple was commissioned to knit together the Council’s efforts in various parts of India and Sri Lanka; once he ascribed to this notion, he could pursue his own interests within the bounds prescribed by the process of officialisation, furnished with the social capital required to operate effectively.⁶² However, when offering the argument that artists who take institutional funding can put it to reactionary uses, one must always remember to give institutions sufficient credit for intelligent engagement with the use and effect of their funding.

A combination of social and economic capital allowed Supple’s reputation as a successful director and artist, his symbolic capital, to transfer from a British to an Indian economy of cultural practice. Alice Ciccolini, head of arts for the British Council India

⁶² Indeed, although part of Supple’s original draft was to showcase artists from different regions, he felt that textual rigour was more important than showcasing folk forms. He says: ‘Otherwise I would have been more precise about choosing performers – there was no Kathakali in there, there was very little Bharatnatyam in there – I didn’t actually use the Indian performance very much’ (Interview 369).

at the time, had worked front of house at the Young Vic Theatre, London, during Supple's nine-year artistic directorship there. This had been a particularly successful point in Supple's career, during which he directed *Grimm's Tales* and *The Jungle Book*, both of which developed his distinctively 'playful narrative style' (Rees).⁶³ Thus, through the social capital embodied by the British Council and Ciccolini, Supple's symbolic capital transferred to the Indian economy of cultural practice. Ciccolini's recognition of Supple constituted an investment 'in the collective enterprise of creating symbolic capital, which can only be performed on condition that the logic of the functioning of the field remains misrecognised' (Bourdieu, *Logic* 68). The logic of the functioning of the field was facilitated through the process of officialisation mentioned above. To tie Bourdieu to Bharucha once more, this act of misrecognition is akin to reverence for the maestro in the global cultural enterprise; it disavows institutionalised inequality and knits privilege to merit. Misrecognising the functioning of the field allows Supple to be positioned as the best person for the job, ensuring his attachment to the British Council and the social capital it represents. This, in relation to the economic capital evidently available to him, clearly established Supple symbolically as an important British director. The expensive audition process, which involved flying 60 performers to Pondicherry for rehearsals, must also have contributed to Supple's symbolic power. The symbolic capital gained from these courses of action, in the cyclical way that Bourdieu suggests, also convinced external funding sources to attach their names to what had every appearance of becoming a high-profile production; thus, as 'the logic of accumulation of power takes the form [...] of a progressive accumulation of powers which attract solicitations that generate more power' (Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus* 97), symbolic capital transformed itself into more economic capital.

⁶³ After this, Supple's career hit a difficult patch when he directed two badly received shows, *The Beggars Opera* and *Romeo and Juliet*, at the National Theatre in 2000.

For Supple, the choice of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was a strong one in terms of cultural capital. As mentioned, he believes the choice of play to be the most commercial aspect of the production. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has cultural capital at an international level. It has even become, as shown, an exercise in expertise for high profile intercultural directors. This chapter has already discussed the significance of Shakespeare in India. It has already touched on some of the complexities of postcolonial relationships to Shakespearean texts from hybrid, purist or nationalist stand points. In an anthropological vein, Bourdieu writes that text, writing, reading and other decoding techniques make it possible to 'accumulate the culture previously conserved in the incorporated⁶⁴ state and, by the same token, to perform the primitive accumulation of cultural capital, the total or partial monopolizing of the society's symbolic resources in religion, philosophy, art and science, through the monopolizing of the instruments for appropriation of these resources [...] henceforward preserved not in memories but in texts'⁶⁵ (*Logic* 125). In terms of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Supple sees himself as having brought textual rigour and Stanislavskian attachment to realism to the collaboration, while the Indian performers, in his formulation, brought physical expression and stylised performance (Supple qtd. in Radosavljević). Therefore, where Supple controlled the performance text, he possessed more power to accumulate the capital of the objectified symbolic resources brought by the Indian collaborators. The structuring of symbolic resources into a Shakespearean dramatic structure represents a technique for the accumulation of incorporated culture. Further, the agency (based on economic, social and symbolic capital) to find and employ performers with folk and traditional performance skills, as well as Indian performers engaged with Western performance practice, imbued the production with cultural capital even from the

⁶⁴ Capital is either objectified or incorporated, insofar as it manifests in bodies/objects or institutions (*Logic* 56/57)

⁶⁵ For a different take on the significance of cultural artefacts inhabiting embodied, remembered and performed as opposed to written, recorded or archived spaces, read Diana Taylor's excellent publication, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

perspective of those Indian theorists and practitioners most involved with the idea of a culture of roots who would, as Loomba points out, replace all colonial cultural artefacts with indigenous ones.

Insofar as the abilities to estimate, gamble and seize chances in the intercultural arena are dispositions that can only be acquired in certain conditions (Bourdieu, *Logic* 64), Supple as a Western practitioner is equipped with a habitus which enables negotiation of intercultural situations. The next chapter will explore an instance in which the strictures of a given economy of cultural practice do not allow the Western practitioner to operate within it (or structure it) according to the durable, transposable structures of his habitus. Here, however, Supple has not only a Western habitus facilitating his negotiation of the global field of cultural practice, but also the distinct model of Brook and Lepage to follow, a cultural and class based ownership of Shakespeare that belongs to his demographic, and, most significantly, the social, symbolic, cultural and economic capital required to structure the Indian economy of cultural practice. As will be further explored in Chapter Two, cultural capital can circulate in geographically specific ways, weakening the efficacy of the habitus to structure specific national and cultural systems. Intercultural situations are often sites of competing aesthetic, cultural and ethical discourses, and Supple's *Dream* is no exception. A cultural capital focused framework allows insight into the degree to which an agent has the power to structure a foreign field. Where this agency is unbounded, there is cause for concern, and there is a need for postcolonial insights regarding the ethics of West speaking for East. The degree of Supple's privilege here raises an ethical warning flag, and some of the problematics of ostensibly egalitarian positions like Narayan and El Din's become apparent.

Narayan opines that there is no difference between appointing Supple or any other of similar talent director of this high profile event, and El Din rejects charges of

cultural invasion as patronising to postcolonial cultures. However, engagement with the functioning of habitus and capital within the field of cultural production shows that dispositions like Narayan and El Din's have an underbelly; these 'same dispositions,'⁶⁶ by adapting the economically most deprived to the specific condition of which they are the product and thereby helping to make their adaptation to the generic demands of the economic cosmos [...] lead them to accept the negative sanctions resulting from this lack of adaptation, that is, their deprivation' (Bourdieu, *Logic* 64). The nature of the collaborative space opened up by *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was unequal at a fundamental level, and to fail to recognise this is to root British privilege in merit, and Indian lack of privilege in demerit. Bharucha asks if 'the intercultural decision makers, the 'funding agencies, "experts", festival directors, impresarios, chairpersons of intercultural research institutes' are ready 'to rethink their hegemonic control over existing frames and circuits of intercultural interaction? Or are they afraid that in doing so their unquestioned rights of representing the other will be usurped?' (*Politics* 159) I would add here that it is not just for those with power to acknowledge their misrecognition of the accumulation and circulation of cultural capital in order to curtail self-fulfilling and disempowering cycles of doxic belief, but for everyone within the field. Indeed, Indian practitioners' vociferousness about the didacticism and inequality they perceived in British Council funded productions has led to policy change within the organisation.

Nature of the Collaboration

Bharucha points to a fissure between Western and Eastern understandings of artistic practice. In Western society the individual artist, the 'maestro,' owns the culture of

⁶⁶ Bourdieu is discussing the dispositions of economic theory that 'acknowledges only the rational "responses" of an indeterminate, interchangeable agent to "potential opportunities"' (*Logic* 63), and ignores the social conditions that produce habitus capable of responding rationally to these opportunities. The dispositions of El Din and Narayan here are commensurable here.

which she is the author,⁶⁷ whereas India's cultural artefacts are, often, communally authored: they have evolved from tradition, and, as such, no one person can take the credit for their creation. In the absence of an identifiable innovator the Western culture industry decides that it is for whoever 'discovers' these artefacts to introduce them to the rest of the world, and if there are rewards to be reaped from this entrepreneurial endeavour, then a cultural conquistador is entitled to reap them. Bharucha's reaction to this phenomenon takes the form of an 'unavoidably polemical' question: '[w]hat do the home countries and communities from where these resources emanated receive for their contribution to the creative process? Are they even acknowledged?' (*Politics* 23)

The practitioners who generated many of the resources that made *A Midsummer Night's Dream* a success undoubtedly received something from their contribution to the creative process. In a strong egalitarian argument, Supple states:

I'm exploiting my privilege to create work with people who, if it wasn't for the fact that I'm exploiting my privilege, wouldn't be doing that work, wouldn't be making that work, and wouldn't be showing themselves and their work to audiences all over the world. And the people who come and do these projects are the people who want to. So that's the bottom line. (Interview 366)

The Indian collaborators certainly gained from this production economically. Ellias could afford to go back to education when she finished working on *The Dream*, which meant a lot to her (Interview 329). Devissaro says, 'there's always a fear when working with international organisations that our Indian artists will be seduced by the higher fees and seek work abroad. It can lead to an erosion of artistic ensembles here in India [...]

⁶⁷ Theatre is, by its nature, a collaborative art form, and thus a site where capitalist ideologies of individualism can sit uncomfortably. One is reminded of some of the controversies that have arisen with regard to ownership rights of theatre efforts in the West. The legal bias often lies with whoever can be most strongly identified as the writer of the piece in question. For example, in 2004 director Pam Brighton lost a court case against playwright Marie Jones in which the former asked to be recognised as co-author of the latter's successful play *Stones In His Pockets*. Jones used Brighton's director's notes to inform her script.

One thing that Tim did was insist that all artists received the minimum British fee, so people committed to the project for its duration. It's important that the financial impact of such collaborations on the participants should be considered right from the start' (2).

The fact that the collaborators gained economically – and socially, symbolically, culturally – from their contribution to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would not confer rights of representation upon the production if the collaborators were simply native informants, or, to paraphrase Spivak, figures needed to reaffirm the West's preordained conceptions of the East (*Postcolonial Reason* 6). Though director-led, the collaborative nature of the process works against such interpretations. By Ellias's account, at the beginning of every rehearsal Supple would ask a different actor to lead a physical warm up in her or his own discipline (Interview 328). Ellias attests that 'The actors generated a lot, and Tim was interested in seeing what our backgrounds would bring' (323). Supple calls Ellias's reading in this regard 'broadly right,' but says that he had definite ideas for what he would like from each scene, and that sometimes he allowed the actors to find their way to his vision in their own time (Interview 357). All the same, there is agency apparent here that contributes positively to the ethics of the production. Each collaborator's discipline was valued and brought to bear on the finished theatre product. Aesthetically speaking, this collaborative strategy worked to spectacular effect. The mandala⁶⁸ shaped stage backed with bamboo cane scaffolding presented a perfect backdrop for Puck's mystical manipulation of the Sivalinga⁶⁹ or the fairies' deftly choreographed stick fighting and rope climbing. In one of the play's most visually beautiful moments, the fairies, suspending themselves, make a red cloth bed for their

⁶⁸ Mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning circle. Much sacred Hindu and Buddhist art takes a Mandala form. In Western psychoanalysis, Karl Jung uses the symbol of the Mandala to signify the unified unconscious.

⁶⁹ A Sivalinga (or Shiva Linga) is a sacred symbol of the Lord Shiva which takes the form of an elliptical (often phallic) anti-iconic form (usually, but not always, made of stone) set in a circular base. A container of water is suspended over the Sivalinga, from which water drips. The meaning of this icon is contested. Some religious scholars read it as an abstract symbol of God insofar as God can be worshipped in any convenient form. Others read it as a combination of Lingum (penis) and Yoni (vagina) in one object, and thus a symbol of energy, creation and enlightenment. Others give it an interpretation based in the Puranas (Hindu, Buddhist and Jain religious texts) and tie it to the installation of the phallus of Lord Shiva on earth (Society for the Confluence of Festivals in India, 'Shiva Linga').

mistress. Titania is aerially cocooned, then lowered gently to the ground, while the fairies sing a simple, unharmonised song. Oberon and Titania's final dance takes place to drum beats in a style that draws on Bharatnatyam but ultimately has a contemporary choreography. The lovers' violent sexual rolling bears traces of Western traditions of physical theatre, such as Lecoq. The costumes hover between Occident and Orient: Titania is djinn-like in brightly coloured corset, puffy pants and a gold collar. Oberon is bare-chested and bearded, also sporting a ring of gold around his neck. The lovers wear simple, light, green or orange dhotis and pyjama pants, until they return to court clad in pantomimic splendour in the end. The mechanicals sport an interesting mixture of dhotis, headscarves, collared shirts and baseball caps. Traces of kalaripayattu, the acrobatics of the bajaniya nats, and terukoothu suffuse the production, preventing the realistic style of acting ever taking this *Dream* too far away from the theatrical. This production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* bears clear signs of a multi-faceted collaboration.

On some levels, the collaborative nature of the production facilitated intracultural exchange. As noted, different actors led workshops in their individual disciplines, enabling, for example, artists from Kerala to learn skills from Bengal. Also, it helped the artists to make contacts in geographically removed corners of the sub-continent. Ellias explains:

[*A Midsummer Night's Dream*] changed the way I think about theatre, and the kind of theatre that I as an Indian in India would like to do. It has brought a whole new perspective to it. I've started learning Kalarippayat. I didn't know about it before *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. [...] I had been placed outside of India for so long and this production really brought me back

home. I'm a lot more aware of what is going on in India, of all these people, of what is possible. (322)

These intracultural effects are valuable and should not be discounted. However, like the question of whether Western organisations should have power over arts funding in India, the question of whether Western individuals should be orchestrating intracultural exchanges is fraught, and Bharucha for one is resistant to Western mediated intracultural exchanges in India.⁷⁰ The British Council, in commissioning a work to knit together its efforts across diverse parts of India and Sri Lanka, might be operating within a colonial paradigm wherein the subcontinent is spoken for and represented by its European Other in well-meaning, but ultimately West-empowering ways.

Notwithstanding this, if intracultural opportunities are generated by Westerners in a way that is non-prescriptive, advantageous to all involved, and generative of positive socio-political effects, then neo-colonial critiques risk subjugating the importance of opportunities for Indian practitioners to absolutist political stances. While there are neo-colonial problematics associated with collaborative space opened up by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Supple's acknowledgement of and engagement with the skills of collaborators from different performance traditions is less problematic than the homogenising impulse of Brook's intercultural practice. It values cultural difference rather than prescribing universalism.

Supple, of course, benefitted greatly from directing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As discussed, it contributed to his symbolic capital in a global economy of cultural practice, and affected his ability to secure funding for his next big production,

⁷⁰ An illuminating example of the neo-imperial potential of Western mediated intraculturalism can be found in Bharucha's criticism of Mnouchkine's simplistic and Orientalist discussion of the intracultural dissolution of communal tensions in India in her programme notes for *L'Indiade, ou L'Inde de Leur Rêve*. He quotes her as follows: 'It was vital for them to come here [i.e. France],⁷⁰ these human fragments of the large Continent, to "recognise" each other for the first time' (Mnouchkine qtd. in Bharucha, 'Eternal' 9). Bharucha then explains how 'the sheer effrontery of this Eurocentric protectionism gets lost in ecstasy' (9) as Mnouchkine writes 'We cross all borders, astride music, and the borders dissipate with pleasure. A fairy-like bewitchment reigns. The men reel in as women, the women brandish an ornamental masculinity. And the Hindus greet the Muslims respectfully' (qtd. in Bharucha, 'Eternal' 9). For Bharucha such rhetoric is an apology for the colonial legacy of communalism.

1001 Nights. This is not least because when the production toured to Britain, the U.S.A., Australia and Canada, critics were almost uniformly impressed by the range of performance styles and skills in this version of Shakespeare's comedy. The visual excitement that these tropes bring is seen by a considerable number of reviewers as one of the strongest points of the production (see Benedict, Fischer, Lathan, Alves). This seems to prove Bourdieu's point, above, that accumulation of a society's symbolic resources can be achieved through encoding techniques (*Logic* 125) – in this case the structuring of incorporated culture into a Shakespearean dramatic structure. As discussed in the introduction, Knowles argues that international contexts transform cultural specificity into shallow representation through focus on 'local colour' in terms of form and technique and through national representation (*Material* 182). In the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, theatrical form and technique were the best received elements of the production on an international level; the intracultural and/or neo-colonial effects of pan-Indian and Sri Lankan collaboration were not a talking point. Further, harking back to Lonergan's contention that international audiences can be encouraged to attend the theatre to consume familiar national tropes (*Globalization* 86), Indian performance practices are an easy to brand, saleable commodity in the West. The Indianness of this production became the 'authentic' element for consumption in a global theatre circuit. Contrary to Supple's claim, there is more that is commercial in the conception of this production than the choice of Shakespeare's much loved comedy.

For Supple, if the Indian performers brought their diverse cultures and performance traditions to the collaboration, he brought 'a greater attachment to realism than exists in India' (qtd. in Radosavljević). According to him, Indian actors usually stylise things like sexuality, sensuality or savagery and were shocked by how visceral he intended the physical relationships in the play to be (Interview 358). Further, Supple sees freedom with the text in India, and understands himself to have brought textual

rigour to the production (Interview 358). In this reading, the Occidental is realistic, while the Oriental is abstract. This is reminiscent of uncomfortable Orientalist conceptions of Eastern people having an inherent ‘disdain for the idea, for mental discipline, for rational interpretation’ (Said 253). Further, in the proposal that the Indians brought physicality to the collaboration, while the British director interpreted Shakespeare, there is the essentialising notion that the Occidental privileges the text, while the Oriental privileges the body.

Against this idea one could offer the argument that a strong tradition of realist English language theatre exists in most Indian metropolitan centres⁷¹ and that realist drama and Stanislavskian acting are part of the syllabus at the National School of Drama, New Delhi. When I put this to Supple he maintained his belief that his commitment to the text was much greater than that of the actors he worked with – not, he said, because they hadn’t come across realist drama, but because ‘in general, the theatre culture in India doesn’t see fidelity to text as particularly important’ (Interview 358). While it is important to be aware of Orientalist discourse when analysing this rhetoric, it is also important not to dismiss Supple’s observations as conjectural because of perceived Orientalist undertones. There are differences between the theatre culture in India and that in Britain, and greater acknowledgement of these differences in a non-hierarchical manner can facilitate intercultural exchange. For example, speaking about a collaboration on Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town* between Ninasam Theatre Company and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, KV Akshara, director of the former, notes that:

The main challenge was one of cultural difference, partly
because our students had not had very much exposure to

⁷¹ Indeed Ellias and Quasar worked together on plays such as *All My Sons* and *Macbeth* prior to Ellias’s emigration to study in France. By Ellias’s account there was no attempt to adapt these plays to an Indian context. ‘We were trying to be like English actors,’ she says (Interview 321).

Western theatre traditions. Teaching in India tends to be very performative, i.e. based on *showing* students what to do. But in Western theatre, a lot of the training is internalised. In this case, the MIT training method was quite introverted, whereas our students were used to a more movement-based approach. This resulted in a ‘clash of mediums,’ as a result of which the students and then the teachers got confused. The crucial question every day was how to bridge this gap. (2)

Supple’s idea that Indian actors brought physicality to the production while he brought realism is perhaps too black and white. There are many issues that complicate this East/West binary. For example, the physical tropes contributed by Ellias came from the Lecoq school in Paris. But it is still quite plausible that theatre culture in India puts greater emphasis on physicality in both teaching and performance than British theatre culture.

Evidence can be found for the contention that there is more freedom with the text in India too. The history and continued practice of Indianizing Shakespeare detailed earlier in this chapter adds weight to this argument. There remains the Bourdieusian critique raised already that in controlling the performance text, Supple possesses more power to accumulate the capital of the objectified symbolic resources brought by the Indian collaborators. Akshara attests in relation to the collaborative production of *Our Town*: ‘ultimately, the most problematic aspect of this project [...] was also the most useful. We all learned that there are many ways to do theatre, and other ways that are equally valid’ (2). For Supple, the meeting of his commitment to realism and the text with his collaborators’ physical performance styles and socio-economic realities constituted ‘the richness of the collaboration’ (Interview 358). The productive dynamics of these collaborative efforts exist within production processes and contribute to

exciting hybridised aesthetics. However, placing Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the global economy of cultural practice of which it is a part – an economy characterised by copyright, moral rights, textocentrism⁷² and what Bharucha terms the cult of the maestro – the power that comes with objectifying cultural material should not be underestimated.

The Effects of the Production

A Midsummer Night's Dream was daring in its physicality, both in terms of acrobatic feats and of the violent and highly sexualised nature of the staging. In Athens, we see a stormy and threatening Theseus throw his daughter Hermia to the ground in anger. In the forest, Puck bounds about mischievously, clad only in a blood red loincloth. As the sylvan action unfolds, the Athenian lovers lose increasing portions of their costumes. Orange lights play on the rust coloured clay of the forest floor. Titania and Oberon's fight is lusty and uninhibited: Titania pulls at her king's hair while Oberon pins his queen to the ground. When Demetrius appears in the forest with Helena in pursuit, the strap of her dress is cut at the shoulder and he is holding a scimitar. His subsequent treatment of her is rough. Later, as Lysander tries to woo Helena, he rips off his shirt and launches himself at her. The pair wrestles on the ground until Helena fights Lysander off and flees. Demetrius matches Lysander's sexual aggression as he tries to force himself on Hermia; he removes his belt with frenzied intent as she tries to escape him. Bottom boasts not only an ass's head, but also a sizable squash with a bell attached hanging and ringing between his legs. Titania, under the delusion of Oberon's spell, grabs or kneels before the phallus as Bottom thrusts from the groin, braying enthusiastically. At the fairy queen's behest, her servants tie Bottom with rope to take him to her bower, fastening a rope to the tip of the squash to pull it erect. In the second

⁷² For a discussion of textocentrism see Dwight Conquergood, 'Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research.'

act, Bottom lounges in Kama Sutra-esque embraces with Titania. In short, the production does not shy away from sexual imagery, nor from representations of violence against women.

As argued in the introduction, discussion of the socio-political effects of an intercultural production must take special note of gender relations. Supple's decision to play to the sexual and violent rhythms arguably underpinning Shakespeare's text necessitated that the four female performers chosen for this cast of twenty-two were of a similar demographic. They all hailed from Mumbai, and were, by Yuki Ellias's account, from theatre backgrounds that allowed them to be uninhibited about the kind of sexuality that the production required. Ellias says:

All four of us are pretty urban, Western – we're okay with touching boys and rolling around. We're not inhibited. Our theatre culture is pretty hands on. With a lot of the other theatre backgrounds, for women there is no touch – there's feminine distance. Well, there would be touch, but there wouldn't be the kind of touch, the scale of touch, Tim would want for this production, which is really physical [...] They would find it very hard, and they did find it hard in the auditions. (Interview 322)

In production, the fact that the four female characters speak mainly English, while their male counterparts act in a multitude of tongues, is notable.⁷³ This linguistic trait marks the women out as members of what Ellias describes as an urban, Westernised culture. The men, on the other hand, are more linguistically, culturally and regionally diverse. When asked by Mukund Padmanabhan of *The Hindu* if casting English speaking females was a concession to intelligibility, Supple explained:

⁷³ English is the first language of three of the four female cast members chosen, while Archana Ramaswamy (Titania/Hippolyta), whose first language is Tamil, also speaks fluent English.

The truth is that a lot of women in India would not have been able to engage physically on stage the way these women have to. They would not have been comfortable with that and it so happened that a lot of these women were non-English speaking. So as I went around the country auditioning, it was only when I got to Mumbai that I found women who could perform Shakespeare in that way, as I felt it had to be done.⁷⁴

Indeed, the sexual nature of the production took getting used to even for the urban, westernised female actors. Ellias herself found it difficult at first, and, in rehearsals, contested Supple's reading of the play on the grounds that the sexuality could be stylised. In the end, however, she began to enjoy the daring and violence of the dramaturgy, asserting that it took her closer to the reality of her character (322). For Supple, as discussed, the realism of the dramaturgy was part of his contribution to the collaboration. In his view, asking the Indian actors to be sexual, sensual and savage with Shakespeare's play represented a textual rigour and a realism uncommon in Indian performance (qtd. in Radosavljević).

Scholar Ananda Lal wrote an essay on the genesis of Supple's *Dream* for the British Council's promotional material placing the sexual nature of the production within the context of Brook's seminal 1970 production of the play. Lal speaks of the influence of critic Jan Kott⁷⁵ on Brook. Lal thinks of Supple as 'a disciple of Brook in many ways,' and notes that like Brook, Supple 'regards Kott highly' (12). From the legacy of Kott and the explorations of Brook, Supple inherits 'the transformative threat in all of us, uncovering latent bestial urges but hopefully exorcising them' (Lal 12). This kind of universalising discourse is problematic insofar as it assumes the universality of Shakespeare – a core tenet of colonial education and cultural policies that materially

⁷⁴ As discussed above, Supple's primary commitment or ultimate loyalty was to Shakespeare's text.

⁷⁵ Michael Billington also comments on the influence of Kott in his review of the production.

engaged intercultural discourse should seek to destabilise. Further, Lal believes that Supple ‘seeks to go beyond Brook’ in his exploration of the social, sexual and spiritual arenas in this play (12). The argument here seems to be, and this is evident from Ellias’s discussion of the dramaturgy also, that Supple’s directorial decision to emphasise and build on the erotic elements of Shakespeare’s play uncovers resonances that are already in the text. Kott, in his essay ‘Titania and the Ass’s Head,’ goes to pains to underline the realism of the themes of love, eroticism and sex in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, outlining his visions for the physicalities of the characters and situations in a tone that is sometimes troubling in its misogyny and racism.⁷⁶ Kott, of course, is of his time; his writing reflects what Raymond Williams calls a ‘structure of feeling,’ or a society’s ‘particular living result of all the elements in the general organisation’ (*Revolution* 48). For Williams, ‘[t]he connection between the popular structure of feeling and that used in the literature⁷⁷ of the time is of major importance in the analysis of culture. It is here, at a level even more important than that of institutions, that the real relations with the whole culture are made clear’ (67). Attitudes implicit in Kott’s 1960s scholarship mirror the particular living result of a society less properly politically correct than our own. As such, they provide a reminder that the erotic and violent truths Brook, Lepage and Supple find in Shakespeare’s text are as much rooted in these directors’ contemporary concerns as in the words of the bard.

Supple explains the sexual aspects of the dramaturgy as a process of ‘trying to reach that other side of you that is very untapped on a conscious level and that side of you that has more terrors, that has the dreams in the night, that has those unstoppable

⁷⁶ For example, in speaking of the bestial urges of Titania, Kott writes:

Since antiquity and up to the renaissance the ass was credited with the strongest sexual potency and among the quadrupeds is supposed to have the longest and hardest phallus.

I visualize Titania as a very tall, flat and fair girl, with long arms and legs, resembling the white Scandinavian girls I used to see in rue de la Harpe or rue Hutchette, walking and clinging tightly to negroes with faces grey or so black that they were indistinguishable from the night. (81)

⁷⁷ Or, equally, art and theatre.

sexual desires that none of us would admit to right now' ('Director's Talk' 10). While misgivings about how easily the sexual aggression against Hermia and Helena is firstly repelled and secondly forgotten certainly rear their heads, Supple's contribution to the Kottian tradition of dramatising Freudian undercurrents within Shakespeare is innovative and valuable. The sex and violence add a layer of psychoanalytic depth to the play, rooting it more firmly in the dream of its title – in the unconscious, unchecked abandon of the id. This interpretation contributes to the non-traditional trend of producing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and, as such, provides rich material for reflection on modern interpretations of Shakespeare. To draw on Fricker, the relationship of this production to the work of both Brook and Lepage is one of continuum.

However, there is a difference between choosing to explore the deep psychological themes of sex and violence present in Shakespeare in Britain and choosing to do the same in India. Such a choice might enrich contemporary conceptualisations of Shakespeare, but, as mentioned, it also has an immediate material effect on the demographic of female Indian and Sri Lankan performers that the production can use. Indeed, the necessity of choosing women from urban, Westernised backgrounds effectively excluded those female performers who might have benefitted most economically, symbolically and intraculturally from involvement with the highly-funded and globally publicised production. Privileging female performers whose mores are closest to those in the West makes the non-urban, culturally Othered female a Spivakian subaltern. Where the identity of the subaltern is difference (Spivak, 'Speak' 27) and s/he has no history and cannot speak, 'the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow' (28).

This reveals further problematics with the seemingly liberal and egalitarian stances of Narayan and El Din discussed above. It seems misguided to assert in an

instance like this that there is no difference between the British Council employing Supple or any other of similar talent for this enterprise. In an intercultural project, there are differences between the ways in which people from different cultures and nations will choose to approach themes like sex and violence. Some of these differences stem from individual taste, inclination and talent, but others undoubtedly spring from the socially conditioned and culturally specific durable structures of one's habitus. As shown, Supple's choice to sexualise the production was firmly rooted in a contemporary Western performance culture drawing on the work of Brook and Lepage. He felt that this raw realism was his contribution to the collaborative process. However, the choice worked against much of the female talent he encountered on his casting trip around India and Sri Lanka, denying them a voice in what was to become, outside of India at least, a showcase of Indian performance practices. Supple sees this issue in a different light. He says:

this is part of why I'm comfortable that [mine] is not an Orientalist, nostalgic, perspective, because my first commitment was to the play. [...] That's the truth I had to connect with. So yes indeed [this commitment] did limit who I worked with, but that had to be. Because the aim of the project wasn't to represent India or give an overview of actors in India. It wasn't to make a concession to what people will or won't do or can or can't do. So in that way, it was not treating [the Indian collaborators] in any way as inhabitants of a cliché. (365)

For Supple an Orientalist perspective would have been one that fetishised 'authentic' folk and traditional performance forms and put them on display in order to speak for India. This was not Supple's aim; primarily he wanted to be true to Shakespeare's text. The problem here is that when the production toured internationally, it became

representative and it spoke for India, whether that was Supple's primary intention or not. Because of this, the sexual and patriarchal aggression took on troubling Orientalist undertones in the international arena. Said notes that to the West 'the Orient seems still to suggest not only fecundity but sexual promise (and threat), untiring sensuality, unlimited desire, deep generative energies' (188). He calls this 'a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient' (188). Further, portraying Eastern women as subjects of patriarchal aggression has long been a trope of Orientalist literature. Think, for instance, of representations of Sati in Western literature of the colonial era such as *Around the World in 80 Days* by Jules Verne, where Phileas Fogg's valet literally rescues the opium-drugged Indian woman Aouda from a funeral pyre. As Spivak argues in 'The Rani of Sirmur,' an essay on Sati and archival history, the practice 'as an ideological battleground' is ignored and the self-immolating woman is constructed 'as an object of slaughter, the saving of which can mark the moment when not only a civil but a good society is born out of domestic chaos' (268). She adds: 'between patriarchal subject-formation and imperialist object constitution, it is the dubious place of the free will of the sexed subject that is successfully effaced' (268). If these colonial attitudes to Oriental women as victims of patriarchal abuse to be saved seem outdated, then we need only look at the rhetoric surrounding women's rights that is often used to justify military projects in the Middle East.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Take for example, the incident on 12 February 2010 when U.S. forces entered a village in the Paktia Province in Afghanistan and, after surrounding a home where a celebration of a new birth was taking place, shot dead two male civilians (government officials) who exited the house in order to inquire why they had been surrounded, and then shot and killed three female relatives (a pregnant mother of ten, a pregnant mother of six, and a teenager). The Pentagon then issued a statement claiming that (a) the dead males were 'insurgents' or terrorists, (b) the bodies of the three women had been found by U.S. forces bound and gagged inside the home, and (c) suggested that the women had already been killed by the time the U.S. had arrived, likely the victim of 'honor killings' by the Taliban militants killed in the attack' (Greenwald).

This sobering incident forms a part of the wider use of chivalric rhetoric as propaganda for Western military practice.

Indeed, British reviews can reflect troubling attitudes to India and gender relations. Pete Wood, reviewing for *The British Theatre Guide*, falls into the chivalric Orientalist trap when he states that the ‘Indian setting with its tradition of arranged marriages [makes] complete sense of the wrath of Hermia’s father at her defiance and of the harsh punishment Theseus warns will be meted out unless she corresponds to command.’ Charles Spencer, reviewing for *The Telegraph* notes that ‘when the love potion – here a red, pollen-like dust – is forcefully applied, Lysander and Demetrius come close to turning into rapists in the forest,’ before concluding that he ‘left the theatre wanting to catch the next flight to Bombay to rekindle [his] own dormant love affair with the subcontinent’ (‘Dream’). In Canada a study guide issued by the National Arts Centre cites the sexual nature of the production as one of the three main challenges presented to the audience, warning the viewer that ‘many will find that the sex and violence of this production perhaps overwhelms the airy poetry they are seeking in this most whimsical of Shakespeare’s comedies’ but rooting the choice in fidelity to Shakespeare’s text, and also in the socio-political realities of India.

In India the aggression and sexuality contained in the production raised eyebrows, but it was not read as representative of India.⁷⁹ A clear conception of the production as Shakespeare, directed by a British director, drawing on a diverse range of cultural forms and regional performers emerges from a sample of Indian reviews. Ellias asserts that even the actors did not think of the production in Indian terms, stating ‘there was never this kind of awareness that we were doing an Indian *Midsummer Night’s Dream*’ (317). Returning to Knowles, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* came to represent India on the international stage in a way that would have been unimaginable for spectators to whom the cultural, linguistic and performative diversity on display was

⁷⁹ While Indian reviews are tactful about the eroticism of the production, it did not go unremarked. Charukesi Ramadurai, writing for *Himāl Southasian* magazine remarks that while for UK audiences the music and movement in the production marked it out as unusual, ‘to audiences in India, [...] familiar with the concept of bhava and rasa, the play offers other surprises.’ The most apparent of these, Ramadurai says, is ‘the particularly “earthy” physical interactions between the characters.’

more than merely representative. Outside India, Theseus's violent patriarchy was no longer a facet of Shakespeare's text – it became representative of an assumedly violent and patriarchal Indian social reality. Demetrius and Lysander's rapine tendencies formed part of an 'intense physicality' which 'sets this production apart from home grown fare' (Wood). In recognising the branding of the production as an 'Indian' play in the global network of theatre festivals of which it became a part, the problematic aspects of Supple's rights of representation are apparent. Unchecked by the Indian economy of cultural practice, Supple made the dramaturgical choice to explore the harsh sexual and aggressive undercurrents of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Rather than allowing Indian female performance practices to inform the representation of women in the play, he chose Indian female performers with backgrounds in Western theatre practices who were capable of giving the play the Kottian reading Supple believes most truthful. International Festivals, according to Knowles, 'display national cultural products in much the same way that other products are displayed and promoted at international trade fairs and through aggressive government/business trade delegations' (*Material* 181). *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, branded and publicised as a production combining diverse regional folk and traditional practices from India, came to stand for Indian culture to audiences in international contexts. For Knowles, 'the placelessness of disembodied festivals and touring circuits may not be the appropriate venues' for 'productive and fruitful meetings across cultures and societies' (*Material* 91). Taking international context into account in analysing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the effect of the decision to produce a violent, sexualised and Kottian play creates dubious socio-political effects and weakens this production's rights of representation.

Conversely the fact that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed half in English and half in seven Indian languages strengthens the production's rights of representation. While this ratio remains unbalanced, the impetus behind Supple's

decision to create a multilingual production was, I will argue below, a pragmatic and inclusive one. From a purely phenomenological perspective, the effect of the eight different languages is striking. Shakespeare's iambic metre is disrupted by the staccato of Oberon's Malayalam or the rolling rhythm of Lysander's Bengali. When Demetrius and Helena argue, there is something immediately visceral about the familiar, for a Western audience, iambic feet of Shakespeare's verse meeting lines in Sinhalese. In more ways than one the lovers are speaking different languages, their clash of minds reflected by striking differences in the music of their speech. There are times too when, without the plain narrative of one language, the audience's attempts to make meaning are directed wholly at the production as sensory experience – at the actors' gymnastic physicalities, at the visual impressiveness of the set, and at Devissario's unmistakably South-Asian musical score.

The impetus behind Supple's decision to create a multi-lingual production was a pragmatic and inclusive one. Speaking to the Indian *Financial Express* he says 'Shakespeare's work must [...] reflect the time and place in which it is made honestly. I wanted to work in different languages as to restrict oneself to English would mean missing out on a wealth of different ways of telling stories' (*Financial Express*). If Supple had restricted himself to working with actors able to deliver the Shakespearean text in English, he would have missed out on working with the vast majority of performers he encountered on his casting trip around India and Sri Lanka. The choice to work in a multitude of languages meant that the economic capital and intracultural opportunities represented by the production could be shared with performers who might benefit from them the most, extending the possibility for involvement in the project to performers from diverse regional, class and caste demographics. Also, using regional languages allowed a good deal of creative agency to collaborators. Kutty Narayan describes his translation as 'the result of a mixture of a spirit of adventure and the urge

to use [his] linguistic ability for a challenging assignment. It was clear in [his] mind that what mattered was a product which would hold the attention of an audience – meaning rhyme and rhythm’ (Interview 1). Clearly, the translator’s task afforded him a good deal of agency in contributing to the aesthetic quality of the production. Moreover, in the rehearsal process, a linguistic situation was created whereby no one culture, group or individual was at a total advantage. Supple explains there were:

three languages that became the meeting points [...] Some people spoke English. Then we had two actors who would translate. One into Hindi for some of the actors, and one into Malayalam for the other actors. So broadly speaking the actors who spoke Tamil, Malayalam, the Southern languages would understand Malayalam, and the actors who spoke the Northern languages would understand the Hindi. But then people spoke in their own language individually [...] There was always a way for people to meet, there was always a connecting point. The most difficult thing was with the one Sri Lankan actor who spoke Sinhalese, because he didn’t have a connecting language so he was a little bit out on a limb sometimes. (Interview 358)

Supple insists that in spite of the challenges posed by multilingual work, the group managed well and soon became a community, a reading that Ellias confirms. The use of eight languages disseminated authority from one central directorial figure, potentially allowing performers to create with a level of autonomy that may have been hindered by concrete linguistic direction. Ellias asserts that while in India the group never thought of themselves as creating an ‘Indian’ production, when they travelled they became increasingly aware of themselves as an Indian group. She says: ‘we looked out for each

other, everybody's other language got much better, the kids' English got better,⁸⁰ my Hindi got better, I picked up some Tamil' (Interview 328). In this way, intracultural exchanges were facilitated at a linguistic level by the multi-lingual nature of the production.

The use of eight languages had another, more contentious effect. It limited the ability of any one person to completely comprehend the play, and it limited the ability of anyone not already familiar with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to follow the plot. Supple insists that one does not need to know the original in order to enjoy the production, but, while the play as spectacle is a highly skilled and entertaining piece of work, it seems overly optimistic to think that everyone would be able to divine the plot from the physicality of the staging, and somewhat naïve to suggest that nothing is lost if an audience cannot follow the story. On one level this issue enforces the hierarchy of Shakespeare, allowing those with the cultural capital to know the works of the bard greater insight into the production, and denying those Bourdieu would say have 'the taste of necessity' rather than 'the taste of distinction' the pleasure of fully understanding the piece. On another level, the linguistic obfuscation of the plot destabilises the dominant position of Shakespeare as colonial cultural artefact. The casual sidelining of Shakespeare's plot and language tells the audience member that what is noteworthy about this production is not that it is Shakespeare, but that it showcases so many diverse Indian and Sri Lankan talents, thus giving the art of these actors more symbolic importance than Shakespeare's language. Further, in certain Indian performance situations the translations added depth and layers of meaning particular to a time and place.⁸¹ Practically speaking, should surtitles have been

⁸⁰ This production chooses to show the boy that Titania and Oberon quarrel over, and so two children toured with the production.

⁸¹ For example, Ramadurai, reviewing for *Himāl Southasian Magazine*, writes that the languages allowed the viewer to interact with the play in a way that is personal and unique. He says:

For this reviewer, such a moment came on most strongly as the moon (the tailor Starveling, carrying a light), was discussing the nuts and bolts of the

provided, they would most likely have been in English, as providing surtitles in eight different languages would have been difficult to orchestrate, in terms of both scenography and translation, and, further, would have made little sense outside India. Providing English surtitles would have been logistically simple, but would have discredited Supple's contention that audiences did not need to be *au fait* with Shakespeare to enjoy the production. Indeed, the decision to allow the physicality of the production to speak for itself internationally signals a strong commitment to translinguistic intelligibility and accessibility. Overall, creating a multi-lingual *Dream* allowed for a more just distribution of cultural capital and creative agency than an English or Hindi version, and even if it, in one sense, privileged the comprehension of the elite, these factors contribute to the production's right to represent the many cultures which formed a part of it.

Reception of the multilingual nature of the production varied internationally. Reviewing for *The Hindu*, Geeta Doctor states that at first the different languages shock the audience into 'imagining that this is a play being performed entirely in gibberish.' She adds 'very soon, however, because of this disruption in what you imagine is the basic need of theatre – language, that too Shakespearean language, that is almost sacred to those who have been trained in it – you have to pay a much greater attention to the sound, the intonation and the body language.' Ramadurai asks if the different languages are tokenistic when he says 'Ultimately, the tricky part in this production is not the way the different languages (spoken and performance) come together, but rather the way they stop short of being "exotic."' Vasanthi Sankaranarayan, reviewing for *Narthaki*, believes that the intention to 'give representation to the variety of languages in India and

Pyramus-Thisbe love story to be performed before the duke. Suddenly, he breaks into 'Inda nilava than naan kaiyile pudicchen en rasavukkasa!' (I held the moon in my hand for my prince), a long-forgotten silly song from a Tamil movie of the 1980s. Suddenly, there in the midst of a Shakespearean comedy, came a sharp twang of nostalgia for a childhood in madras watching an enjoying obscure Tamil films.

Sri Lanka' is a good one, calling Supple's explanation that the languages were essential in order to work with actors from different regions and performance traditions 'reasonable.' The Indian reviews tend to comment, from different perspectives, on the ethical function and aesthetic effectiveness of the multilingual nature of the production. Michael Billington, reviewing the production on its initial tour to the World Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-Upon-Avon asserts that the result of the seven South Asian tongues is to 'heighten attention to the language, because the action is perfectly suited to the word,' adding that 'although a ravishing spectacle, this is a production rooted in textual understanding' (Billington, 'Dream 2006'). As Hodgdon notes in her discussion of Lepage, critics reacted badly to the seeming textual irreverence in Lepage's *Dream*, while even the purists saw and praised the textual rigour of Brook's production (76). Billington's remarks here constitute high praise in British theatre circles. Peter Lathan, reviewing the production on its 2007 British tour, attests that the mixture of languages allows an audience to see the play 'through other eyes,' but points out that 'one really does need to know [*A Midsummer Night's Dream*] pretty well to fully appreciate it.' Alice Jones, reviewing for *The Independent* during the production's run at London's Roundhouse in 2007, proclaims that 'it is really quite thrilling to see the straitjacket of the Bard's sacred word thrown off in favour of something far more fluid, more visceral. Stripped of classical dialogue, Supple's production digs down to the dramatic heart of Shakespeare and discovers the very essence of his theatre.' Jones's perspective assumes a universal essence to be present in Shakespeare's works, while most of these British reviews, like many others, share a concern with how the production adds new perspectives to Shakespeare. They also assume a deep knowledge of the play on behalf of the audience, something perhaps not unreasonable when addressing the British theatregoing public. While firmly rooted in Shakespeare's well-

known, well-loved, oft-performed text, these reviews say, the production makes Shakespeare new, and that is an exciting thing.

Conversely, Roberta Alves, reviewing the production on its 2008 tour to Australia, complained that the production did not have surtitles. She says: ‘it took me ten minutes to realise it wasn’t a production problem. [...] Okay, now everybody knows *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*! Nevertheless, it is always good, especially because His Majesty’s Theatre was packed with very young people, to be able to understand and follow what the actors are saying.’ Where the Indian reviewers focused on the social necessity of the languages and the attention they directed towards the physical and sensory spectacle of the production, and while the British reviewers praised the choice in terms of the ways it drew on and enriched the Shakespearean tradition, the *Australia Stage* reviewer makes the pragmatic, and Bourdieusian, suggestion that surtitles would have made the production more accessible and increased the enjoyment of young or inexperienced theatregoers. In the United States, Dennis Harvey reviews a San Francisco performance, asking ‘What is Shakespeare without the language? [...] But what is his work with most of the language rendered unintelligible by being spoken in heavy accents or foreign tongues?’ He feels that ‘frequent, subtitled passages of dialogue and speech [...] have a dead air effect.’ Noting that much of the audience didn’t return after the interval, he concludes, ‘with Shakespeare’s words so obscured, emotional involvement is absent. One almost wishes Supple had cut most of the text, thrown in a few supertitles, and gone for broke with this production’s strengths as a multidisciplinary pantomime spectacular.’ While these reviews are not, of course, representative of the entire gamut of Australian or North American criticism over the production’s long worldwide tour, hostility to the sub-continental languages is, in general, much more apparent in reviews from these places, with many reviewers noting walk outs and general audience discontent.

The choice to make this production multilingual worked against the reflexivity and mobility that Lonergan calls characteristic of globalized theatre (87-88). The multilingual nature of the production necessarily obscured some resonances from international audiences, but it contributed positively to the aesthetic and ethics of the production in a number of ways. Lonergan's contention that regional elements hinder the international appeal of a production in global theatre networks certainly holds true here. Supple says that, on paper, the production was 'the most unlikely thing to have some kind of long life, because it had nothing commercial in its conception' (qtd. in Rees). 'Nothing commercial' may be an exaggeration, but the different languages, when alienated from contexts where their social reality shone through or from contexts where Shakespeare is beloved but jaded, adversely affected the reception of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This adverse effect, however, sprung from a dramaturgical choice that allowed dissemination of cultural capital and collaborative agency. In respect to language, this production followed one of Knowles' recommendations for theatre at an international level – it kept and guarded its own sense of place (91). However, aspects which contributed positively to the ethics of the production sacrificed some of the characteristics that Lonergan argues are a boon to globalized products.

Reflections

A Midsummer Night's Dream can be understood in the context of intercultural theatre practice such as that of Schechner and Brook. In terms of involvement, it moves beyond some of the problematics of this type of practice: it collaborates with members of all represented cultures; it engages with difference in a meaningful way; it keeps a sense of place; and the Indian performers and their performance practices are certainly acknowledged and gain from the exposure, money and intra/intercultural experiences afforded them. Further, the performers had a good degree of creative agency within the

production process. However, due to his powerful position in the Indian economy of cultural practice, it was Supple who was able to structure the content of the production in accordance with the structures of his habitus, and Supple whose symbolic capital received the biggest boost from the production's success. This inequality has its roots in colonial history. An understanding of the ambiguities and complexities of Indian relationships to Shakespeare – from purism to militant anti-European Hinduism – indicates that Shakespeare produced in India has not been and is not now politically neutral. There are different perspectives on the postcolonial politics of Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: from Narayan's persuasion that there is no difference between Supple directing the show and it being directed by any other of similar talent, to Ellias's observation that on the ground people were vocal about the problematics of so much capital and power being vested in an Englishman to work with Indians, to Supple's own assertion that the resources attached to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were not only given to a director but also to everyone involved in the production.

The inequality inherent in the fact that a British director wielding Shakespeare should have such a significant amount of social, symbolic and economic capital within the Indian economy of cultural practice is ethically problematic. As evidenced by a Bourdieusian analysis of this capital, Supple's position is due in part to history – to postcolonial ties and power relations rooted in dubious pasts. An ahistoric reading of his status has the potential to create negative conceptions as to the abilities of Indian vis-à-vis British practitioners. Claiming that there is no difference between Supple and any other of similar talent directing this show effaces the history informing his privilege and contributes to acceptance of Indian disadvantage within the Indian economy of cultural practice (which relies on sources like the British Council and the Ford Foundation for a significant portion of its funding) and within the global economy of cultural practice more generally. Conversely, acknowledging this privilege allows us to talk about how it

is used: how far it benefits the less advantaged within the system, how far it perpetuates traditions of West speaking for East, and how far it benefits everyone involved in the production.

The British Council's Connections through Culture is a welcome development and those interested in intercultural ethics can afford to be cautiously optimistic about the work that it engenders. Supple makes the point that this new bureaucratically motivated initiative might well help to create some interesting work, but that focusing on small scale and equal collaborations will never create a spectacular like *The Dream*. Commitment to the egalitarian intercultural goals of Connections through Culture might mean that pan-Indian and Sri Lankan productions on the scale of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will be impossible under British Council directives. In commitment to equality and ethics, spectacular aesthetics might be sacrificed. In terms of sustainable development in the Indian economy of cultural practice, no doubt many Indian practitioners would consider the gains greater than the losses.

All collaborators contributed skills and expertise to the production. If, as Supple claims, he brought textual rigour while the Indian collaborators brought their various disciplines and talents, commitment to a Kottian reading above all else suggests that negotiation between the textual and the physical was hierarchical. This is not surprising in a director-led process, as Supple had ultimate control over the aesthetic. It points to the potential problematics of the hierarchy of the director in intercultural situations.

In terms of socio-political effects in performance contexts, ethical problems arose in the international arena, when the production came to speak for India in a way that none of the collaborators, Supple included, intended. In light of the fact that Supple's ultimate commitment was to a sexualised, violent, Kottian reading of the play, the way *A Midsummer Night's Dream* spoke for India bore troubling Orientalist undertones, particularly in relation to representations of gender. Thus the production's

rights of representation are curtailed. Failure to consider the significance of a Kottian reading in the international context resulted in an uncomfortable, if unintentional, instance of West speaking for East. Conversely, the multilingual nature of the production opened up a space in which linguistic hierarchies were problematised, and one which allowed all collaborators agency. It destabilised the authority of Shakespeare's language, facilitated intracultural exchange, allowed inclusion of performers from different class and caste demographics, and added specific linguistic resonances for local Indian audiences while working against the effacing of cultural specificity that Lonergan calls characteristic of theatre created for global consumption.

The effects of the multilingual nature of the production show that high-profile intercultural theatre can function without essentialising or glossing over difference. However, this aspect of the production was not as popular globally as the Orientalising sexual and violent focus of the dramaturgy. Ethical elements played against less ethical elements, facilitating success in the global arena. As some aspects of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* show, it is possible to create intercultural theatre in a way that is ethical and strengthens its rights of representation. As others show, international popularity might be more easily achieved with stereotypes than with culturally sensitive dramaturgy. Elements that strengthen this production's rights of representation seem to operate in a loosely inverse relation to elements that strengthen its global popularity. This presents a challenge for contemporary intercultural practitioners who wish to work at an international level.

Chapter Two: Pan Pan Theatre Company's *The Playboy of the Western World*

Pan Pan Theatre Company's Mandarin Chinese production of *The Playboy of the Western World* (2006) was a colourful and energetic retelling of Synge's classic. An incident arising from its premiere at Beijing's Oriental Pioneer Theatre provided the Irish press with an amusing story, and generated some good pre-publicity for the Dublin run of the show. Pan Pan's adaptation was set in a 'whoredressers,' or hairdressers/massage parlour/brothel, on the outskirts of contemporary Beijing. Following a complaint about the shortness of an actor's skirt, the production was attended by police from the Chinese cultural ministry. 'Peegen Mike Evokes a Blush in Beijing' proclaimed *The Irish Times* modestly, while *The Sun* cast proper nomenclature aside in favour of the sophisticated pun 'Peking at your Knickers.'⁸² The obvious resonance with the riotous reception of Synge's now canonical play in Dublin in 1907 prompted reflection on how much Irish moral attitudes have changed in the hundred years since Abbey audiences were offended by Christy Mahon's references to women's undergarments. It allowed consideration of *The Playboy of the Western World* as globally significant cultural artefact, which retains the power to provoke.

The Pan Pan *Playboy* was performed by an all Chinese cast. It played in Beijing and Dublin, and was surtitled in English for its Dublin run. The production was ostentatiously sexy. The female characters wore gaudy colours, furs, lace up stiletto boots and glitzy hoop earrings; the pink and red lighting scheme was a reminder of the seedy nature of the business behind the ostensible beauty parlour; chrome and black swivel chairs and rows of bottled unguents added a recognizable modernity to the mise-en-scène. Bold reds, yellows and greens gave the set a cartoonish feel, while television screens positioned around the stage played live footage of offstage actors, directing the

⁸² See Gary Meneely, 'Peking at Your Knickers.'

audience's visual attention to close ups of, for example, La La's (Pegeen's) heavily made up face. Chinese electro tracks played as the 'village girls,' Sha Sha, Shan Shan and Na Na (Sara Tanzey, Susan Brady and Honor Blake), danced raucously and seductively around Ma Shang (Christy Mahon), drinking and dousing his naked torso with beer. The mud-slinging between La La and Kun Guafu (the Widow Quin) over Christy's attentions culminated, in this version, in a scantily clad cat fight. The adaptation, it is safe to say, strayed a long way from rural Mayo at the turn of the nineteenth century.⁸³

Pan Pan has been producing well regarded and award winning theatre since its fringe beginnings in the early 90s. It successfully tours both nationally and internationally, and its work tends to have high production values in terms of innovative sets, lighting, and technological devices. Pan Pan makes edgy, often politically incorrect, often sexually explicit theatre. For example, they chose a staging of Lars Von Trier's controversial film *The Idiots* for a slot at the 2007 Dublin Theatre festival: a cast of thirty-five animated a white, clinical set with parodies of people with special needs – certainly a risky undertaking in terms of rights of representation. *Oedipus Loves You* (2007), Pan Pan's successful retelling of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, opens with Tiresius standing stark naked with his genitals tucked between his legs, singing the lyrics 'I only speak the truth' to dark and angsty rock music, and continues in a similarly in-ye-face vein. Pan Pan's productions are contemporary, alternative, and, for some, shocking. The Mandarin *Playboy*, short skirts notwithstanding, is certainly one of the company's more conventional undertakings.

It took Gavin Quinn, one of Pan Pan's two artistic directors, nearly four years to develop *The Playboy of the Western World* in Beijing. He had toured work to Asian

⁸³ As I did not see the live production, all aesthetic description is based on Pan Pan's video recordings.

countries in the past,⁸⁴ but a sense of adventure coupled with a self-professed fascination with China prompted him to try to make a show in, rather than simply tour to, East Asia (Interview 341). Pan Pan are funded by the Irish Arts Council, and *The Playboy of the Western World* project received further funding from Culture Ireland, a governmental organisation set up in 2005 to promote Irish arts abroad. Pan Pan also received financial support from its Chinese business partner: a shipping company. The production premiered in Beijing in 2006, where it was attended by Conor Lenihan, then Irish junior minister for overseas development and human rights, before touring to Dublin for a second run.

This chapter will argue that Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* is itself an example of imperialist intercultural theatre, showing that intercultural products authored by a maestro can and do come to represent Othered cultures in powerful and lasting ways. Then, briefly, it will explore the links between Ireland, imperialism and interculturalism, pointing to the nuanced power relations inherent in a Chinese/Irish intercultural collaboration such as the Pan Pan *Playboy*. Next, using a Bourdieusian critical framework it will analyse the translation process that produced the Pan Pan *Playboy* in-depth, showing that intercultural analysis grounded in capital can help to think through complex intercultural power relations and also to avoid the intercultural limitations of habitus-focused Bourdieusian theory. Finally, this chapter will assess the effects of the production in its Beijing and Dublin performance contexts respectively.

Intercultural Synge

As noted, theatre discourse tends to locate the origins of the intercultural field in the anthropologically motivated performance practice of the 70s.⁸⁵ However, the kind of

⁸⁴ The Pan Pan show *Cartoon* toured to Suwon in South Korea in 1998.

⁸⁵ Although Artaud's writings on Balinese dance, Yeats' experiments with Noh and Brecht's thoughts on Chinese acting are often acknowledged as precursors to the field.

intercultural practice that scholars like Lo and Gilbert and Bharucha critique bears striking resemblance to the Irish National Theatre Society's 'peasant plays.' Insofar as *The Playboy of the Western World* represents a culture Other to Synge, Synge can be positioned as an intercultural playwright, whose working methods bear many similarities to the work of late-twentieth century interculturalists, and whose rights of representation can be framed in analogous ways.

For many years the common stance in Irish theatre studies was that the protests accompanying the premiere of *The Playboy of the Western World* were the response of an uncultured and ignorant mob to the emergence of what W.B. Yeats would later term Irish genius. A reference to women standing about in their shifts, or undergarments, was deemed the cause of the public consternation. Lady Gregory's famous telegraph to Yeats – 'Audience broke up in disorder at the word shift' (Ellis-Fermor 50; Fraser, *Playboys* 17; Greene, *Politics* 80; Kiberd, *Inventing* 44) – was often quoted as proof of this official reading of events. Painting the protesters' motives thus made it easy to dismiss their nationalist concerns as prudish and ridiculous. Twenty-first century scholarship problematises this view. Christopher Morash suggests that theatre protests were well within the remit of acceptable audience behaviour in Dublin in the early twentieth century (137), and Lionel Pilkington draws on the work of scholars such as Adrian Frazier and Helen Burke to challenge the 'automatic assumption that the protests were illegitimate' ('Historicising' 724). Pilkington sees the need for 'a heightened realisation that actions that are deemed histrionic are so described because of the extent to which they offer a radical, and yet easily imitated, departure from conventional views of agency' (730).

In the eyes of the protesters, Yeats, Synge and the elite of the Irish Literary Theatre did not have the right to represent, particularly in what was understood to be a derogatory fashion, the people of the West of Ireland. In the socio-political climate of

growing nationalist pride in Gaelic culture, a representation of the people of the West of Ireland (who for many nationalists embodied the survival of Gaelic tradition) as violent, drunken, irreligious caricatures, was offensive. The protesters who shouted ‘That’s not the west’ from the pit during the first week of *The Playboy*’s run were questioning Synge and The Abbey’s right to portray, for an elite target audience of upper class Anglo-Irish Dubliners, the disenfranchised Gaelic peasantry, who had no agency to represent themselves.⁸⁶ It was not clear that the Irish National Theatre Society was laughing with rather than laughing at the people it represented. To borrow from Pilkington, the riots might be understood not as acts of barbarism, but as protests motivated by ‘well-grounded religious and political grievance’ (726).

Paul Murphy grounds Synge’s authorship of the peasant plays in class consciousness. He notes contempt on behalf of Synge and the Irish National Theatre Society towards the upwardly mobile turn-of-the-century Catholic bourgeoisie, and reads the peasant plays from a historical materialist perspective:

The colonized Catholic Irish populace became enfranchised and constituted a *bourgeois* class precisely at the expense of the Anglo-Irish landlords, as the Encumbered Estates Act of 1904 enabled former tenant farmers to buy up their landlord’s property with loans sponsored by the British Government. In an effort to maintain their leading role in a rapidly transforming

⁸⁶ *The Playboy of the Western World* was commissioned by the Irish National Theatre Society, whose founding members Yeats, Gregory, Moore, Martyn, Russell and Synge, were all members of the Ascendancy class. From 1904 to 1910, the INTS had Annie Horniman, a rich Englishwoman of a merchant family, as its main sponsor. Adrian Frazier tells us that Horniman’s imperatives included that The Abbey ‘could not be used to advance the Gaelic language, to proselytise for nationalism, to entertain the sixpenny public (that is, the mass of Dublin Irish), or to direct its destiny unhindered by the veto power of the English owner’ (154). Horniman’s ‘maniacal hatred of Irish politics’ (Hunt 60) has been well-documented, but an inherent distrust of Gaelic culture can also be deduced from her reluctance to use The Abbey stage as a means of advancing the dying Irish language. Horniman was determined to make The Abbey ‘the most fashionable place in Dublin’ (qtd in Morash 128), and in this determination stipulated that ticket prices at The Abbey should be kept high ‘to prevent cheap entertainments from being given’ (128) and exclude the working classes or six-penny public. Although six-penny tickets were in fact available in parts of the pit for the first staging of *The Playboy of the Western World*, it remains clear that The Abbey wished to attract an upper class audience.

Irish society, the Anglo-Irish writers constructed a cultural programme manifest in the Irish Literary Theatre [ILT] (1899) and its successor the Irish National Theatre Society [INTS] (1904), in which they produced plays that evoked an Ireland where the peasantry lived in union with nature in a pre-modern and specifically pre-bourgeois society. (126)

The writings of Yeats and Synge often display contempt towards Irish Catholic townspeople or the Catholic bourgeoisie as Murphy theorises them.⁸⁷ Murphy's insistence on the importance of class consciousness in reading Synge is well warranted. However, it perhaps does a disservice to the probability, so convincingly argued by Declan Kiberd and Nicholas Grene, that Synge was deeply interested in the language, folklore and customs of the people that he studied.

Much of Synge's fame was originally founded on Yeats's keen praise of his genius, and Yeats's writings on Synge still influence the way the latter's work is thought about and taught in Irish theatre studies today. Yeats paints Synge as an apolitical man, who drew all his creative inspiration from what was wild in Ireland's people and landscape (Yeats, 'Synge' 25), and who had great knowledge of and respect for the Irish language and peasantry. This conceptualisation of Synge as an apolitical Gaelic scholar and avid linguist was disregarded by most of the nationalist critics and scholars of Synge's day and many scholars of the decades proceeding. Nicholas Grene's reading of his plays, however, while acknowledging the class biases inherent in Synge's attacks on the Irish middle classes and city-dwellers (5-10), argues that 'those who denied in Synge a sense of national identity wronged him' (28). Declan Kiberd develops this thesis further in his study of Synge's relationship with the Irish language, in which

⁸⁷ Idealisation of the peasantry to preserve an aristocratic order is a common literary trope. See, for example, Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, in which he analyses the politics of English pastoral poetry. See also Louis Adrian Montrose, 'Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form,' and Robert E. Stillman, 'The Politics of Sidney's Pastoral: Mystification and Mythology in *The Old Arcadia*.'

he traces Synge's involvement with Gaelic literature and philology from its scholarly beginnings at Trinity College, to its anthropological development among the Irish speaking people of the Gaeltacht regions, and to its incorporation into the plays. Kiberd argues that the work of Synge is so immersed in both the Gaelic literary tradition and the Anglo-Irish literary tradition that 'each of his plays and poems represents a fusion, *in a single work*, of both traditions and an attempt by the power of his imagination to make them one' (Synge 10).

To complicate Kiberd's argument: Synge was not simply representing literary traditions, he was representing a people culturally different from himself, for an urban, and largely upper class, Dublin audience. Reading his preface to *The Playboy of the Western World*, we find that he is glad to acknowledge the debt his writing owes to the country people of Ireland, and, further, that he believes his representations of them to be apt and realistic. He attests that '[a]nyone who has lived in real intimacy with the Irish peasantry will know that the wildest sayings and ideas in this play are tame indeed, compared with the fancies one may hear in any little hillside cabin in Geesale, or Carraroe, or Dingle Bay' (*Plays* 174). He never questions his rights of representation, discussing his drawing of inspiration from the rural poor thus:

All art is collaboration; and there is little doubt that in the happy ages of literature, striking and beautiful phrases were as ready to the story-teller's or the playwright's hand, as the rich cloaks and dresses of his time. It is probable that when the Elizabethan dramatist took his ink-horn and sat down to his work he used many phrases that he had just heard, as he sat at dinner, from his mother or his children. In Ireland, those of us who know the people have the same privilege. (174)

Synge's collaboration, then, is between the artist's learned sensibilities and the inspiration to be drawn from the natural creativity of the people around him. In the case of the Elizabethan dramatist, inspiration is drawn from the beauty of the language in his domestic sphere – the language of women and children; in the case of the Anglo-Irish playwright, it is his privilege to draw inspiration from the Gaelic peasantry.

Reminiscent of Matthew Arnold's thesis in *The Study of Celtic Literature* published forty years previous, Synge's Gaelic peasant is nature to the Anglo-Irish playwright's culture, feminine to his masculine, and positioned as native informant, regardless of the sophisticated literary fusion that takes place at a textual level in the dramatic work.⁸⁸

Synge was a member of the Ascendancy. This was a landlord class created in the Cromwellian plantation of Ireland that followed the failed 1641 rebellion of the Gaelic aristocracy and the English lords of the first plantation (who had famously become more Irish than the Irish themselves, adopting the Irish language and customs, and intermarrying with the natives). The Gaelic and first plantation aristocrats were dispossessed and their lands were settled by English planters, including about 7,500 soldiers of Cromwell's New Model Army who were given Irish lands in lieu of payment for their services. The displaced Irish were sent, in Cromwell's famous adage, 'to hell or to Connaught,' accounting for the relative strength of Gaelic culture in the West of Ireland, where the land is poor. Following the Cromwellian plantation, Gaelic culture declined, in part due to penal laws, economic issues and famine. While it can be misleading to conflate language too strongly with culture, it is notable that by 1891, the census showed that Irish speakers constituted only twenty percent of Ireland's population. Ninety percent of these people lived in the remote West and South West of the country. In this particular historical instance, language serves as a useful cultural marker; speaking sociologically, the norms, values and goods (both cultural and

⁸⁸ For more on the parallel between Synge and Arnold, see Mary C. King, 'Yeats Enquiring Man Revisited' (31).

material) of the people of the Gaeltacht (or Irish speaking regions) remained more Gaelic than the norms, values and goods of Irish people more firmly within the English sphere of influence. Michael Cronin, in analysing the history of translation in Ireland, shows that colonial cultural relations were not only defined by East/West or North/South binaries, but also existed within Europe. By the early nineteenth century, Cronin explains, popular works such as the preface to James Hardiman's 1833 volume *Irish Minstrelry* were already drawing analogies between Gaelic and Oriental cultures (104).

By the time Synge was living among them, many of the people of the Gaeltacht regions were bilingual and many were literate in English; Synge himself was born in Wicklow and was exposed to the talk of the Irish peasantry, he informs us, by the servants in his own nursery before he could read the papers (Synge, *Plays* 174). The positioning of Synge and his dramatic subjects as culturally Other from each other might seem jarring when the tendency has been to understand both these positions as 'Irish,' and to differentiate them in terms of class. However, the culture of the Gaeltacht was not native to Synge; he had to learn it before he could write about it, and, reading his accounts of his time in the West, it is evident that he understood himself to be culturally, not just economically, removed from the people he encountered. There are endless examples from *The Aran Islands* that lend support to this thesis – accounts of the islanders' language, poetry, storytelling, mythology and supernatural beliefs; accounts of their physical characteristics; accounts of their funeral rites, industries, clothing, and systems of naming. In describing his passage by curragh from Inis Mór to Inis Meáin, Synge illustrates his excitement and feeling of cultural alientation thus:

It gave me a moment of exquisite satisfaction to find myself
moving away from civilization in this rude canvas canoe of a

model that has served primitive races since man first went to
sea. (*Aran* 15)

Synge's collaborators are native informants in Spivak's terms; their authenticity is constructed by a hegemonic voice and their own voices are impossible to reach (Spivak, *Post-Colonial Critic* 61). When Synge writes of the people of the Gaeltacht, he often transcribes conversations he has had with them about fairies and supernatural happenings, framing these stories within his own Anglo-Irish, 'civilized' sensibilities. He takes stories from the lived reality in which they are believed and accepted and places them within 'civilized' discourse. His interlocutor is typically framed as quaint and charming, yet unreliable. Any confidence Synge's objects of study expect of him will be betrayed. Though he admires them, just as, as Carlson argues, Brook and Mnouchkine express respect and even reverence for their imagined Indias, Synge's loyalty is not to the Gaeltacht people, but to his civilized readership. Take the following passage:

Old Pat Dirane continues to come up every day to talk to me,
and at times I turn the conversation to his experiences of the
fairies.

He has seen a good many of them, he says, in different
parts of the island, especially in the sandy districts north of the
slip. They are about a yard high, with caps like the "peelers"
pulled down over their faces. On one occasion he saw them
playing ball in the evening just above the slip, and he says I
must avoid that place in the morning or after nightfall, for fear
they might do me mischief...

...Yesterday he took me aside, and he said he would tell
me a secret he had never yet told to any person in the world.

“Take a sharp needle,” he said, “and stick it in under the collar of your coat, and not one of them will be able to have power on you.”

Iron is a common talisman with barbarians; but in this case the idea of exquisite sharpness was probably present also, and, perhaps, some feeling for the sanctity of the instrument of toil, a folk belief that is common in Brittany. (Synge, *Aran* 60-61)

Synge does not try to find a basis for the doxic beliefs of the natives; rather, he places their stories within a scientific and anthropological paradigm, often rendering his informant’s perspective ridiculous, or as Spivak would have it, impossible: ‘That apparently benign subordination of “timing” (the lived) into “time” (the graph of the law) cannot of course be re-traced to a restorable origin, if origin there is to be found’ (Spivak, *Critique* 66). Synge’s work places the ‘uncivilized’ within the discourse of the ‘civilized,’ a discourse that renders it what it is not, and changes the lived to what can be recorded.

While Synge’s representations of the people of the West initially sparked uproar, soon after his death in 1909 nationalist feeling against him died away. By 1910, an article had even appeared in the nationalist paper *An Claidheamh Soluis* praising Synge’s artistry. Kiberd remarks: ‘All of a sudden, and for no apparent reason (other than the fact that it is demonstrably true), Synge was received into the Gaelic literary tradition’ (Synge 257). Synge was also established as a founding father of Ireland’s dramatic tradition, and *The Playboy* quite quickly became the stuff of proud and dull tradition. The Abbey player Cyril Cusack recalls:

When first I joined The Abbey Theatre at its old Marlborough Street house, in 1932, the Synge repertoire was staling into a

collection of museum pieces. No longer did *The Playboy of the Western World* conjure up a popular reaction of any kind. (I can recollect only a sentimental salute of applause for the love-scene – at the height of the tourist season.) (49)

Cusack and his Abbey colleagues endeavoured to make Synge fresh again, but in the decades to come *The Playboy* would fall into the same trap – taught to teenagers in schools and upheld as a beacon of the Celtic Renaissance, *The Playboy of the Western World* was regarded by many as stuffy traditional fare for consumption by tourists. It was precisely as tourist fodder that Garry Hynes and Druid Theatre Company chose in 1975 to produce the play in Galway in time for the seasonal influx of the Galway Arts Festival. Speaking at a round table discussion at the Synge Summer School in 2007, Hynes recalled the surprise she and the Druid company felt when they began to get close to the dark humour, daring and grit of *The Playboy* and realised that it was not at all the bland play they had believed it to be. Druid's famously bawdy and energetic productions of *The Playboy* were, and are, hugely successful, touring to great commercial success globally, and a 'hot ticket' at home. They have starred some of Ireland's most celebrated acting talent, such as Mick Lally, Marie Mullen, Seán McGinley, Ruth Negga, and Cillian Murphy. The work of Druid has helped to keep Synge current. *The Playboy*, to argue along Patrick Lonergan's lines, is now a definitively branded Irish product for export, and its success and recognition globally feeds back into understandings of national identity in Ireland. In spite of its questionable anthropological origins, *The Playboy of the Western World* has become an Irish cultural product that itself defines Irish cultural identity. Perhaps it is this kind of process that Bharucha fears when he says that Western authored neo-Orientalist tropes get transported back to the cultures they ostensibly represent and thus affect the nation in its strivings towards self-realization (*Politics* 50).

The Playboy of the Western World shows that the imperialistic impulse towards capturing the authentic and the folk in Othered, subjugated cultures was underway in Ireland decades before intercultural productions such as Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* or Ariane Mnouchkine's *L'Indiade ou L'Inde de leurs Rêves* raised the hackles of critics like Bharucha. Gaeltacht people were involved in Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* only as native informants, and these 'peasant' people certainly had no equality or agency within the artistic collaboration of which they were unwittingly a part. The considerable symbolic and social capital arising from the play lionised the work of the Irish National Theatre Society to such a degree that their artistic output at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries was for decades considered (and is still considered by some) to mark the beginning of an Irish literary and theatrical tradition. In terms of the play's first production at The Abbey, the social effects were to aggrieve those involved in nationalist and revivalist pursuits. In terms of rights of representation, Synge slots neatly into a problematically Orientalist mode of representing Otherness, and the ethics of his voyeuristic artistic practice are, by contemporary standards, unacceptable. Yet *The Playboy of the Western World* is a work of enormous cultural import and artistic merit. Synge was of a time before cultural representation was politicised and problematised as it is now. Unethical artistic processes are not essential to artwork. As we can admire and appreciate the pyramids without condoning the labour that produced them, or we can be thankful for the small pox vaccine without wishing that more Edward Jenners would run medical tests on their servants' children, we can admire intercultural artworks, through a lens of history, that would seem questionable to us should they be produced today.

Reinvigorating Synge: Irish Interculturalism and Imperialism

Patrice Pavis, in examining the filters that are interposed between ‘our’ culture and that of others (*Crossroads* 5), exhorts: ‘let us admit it [...]: our western culture, be it modern or postmodern, is certainly tired’ (8). Once, the canon of European Literature ‘arrived in alien climes as a ready-made unit, detached from its separate origins of context, signifying the power of European print culture as the horizon of colonialism’ (Simon and St-Pierre 9), but now such power is exhausted. Western maestros look to the East to bring jaded classics back to life. The problematics of such appropriative intercultural modes of practice have been teased out in the theoretical introduction: relying on native informants and reinscribing disempowering stereotypes, this kind of practice cloaks Orientalist tropes that ultimately serve the dominant culture in universalist rhetoric.

Yet, in spite of over four decades of academics conscientiously pointing out such problematics, appropriative practice aimed at re-invigorating the Western canon still exists.⁸⁹ Can Pan Pan’s *The Playboy of the Western World* be understood within a paradigm of appropriative interculturalism? We have the ingredients: a Western maestro who has the global privilege to cross national borders in search of inspiration for his art, and a canonical Western play to be infused with Eastern elements. Writing for the *Irish Times*, theatre critic Peter Crawley seems to cite the function of the intercultural element of the production as rejuvenation when he opines: ‘Pan Pan Theatre Company could only make *Playboy* seem new again by taking it to the Eastern world [...] By mapping interculturalism with the compass of tradition, they proved that the canon was open, and

⁸⁹ Many Easternised reimaginings of Shakespeare produced by Western practitioners have been subject to scrutiny in this regard. Indeed, such productions can be problematic if they fail to recognize that, alongside the Shakespeare who espoused universal themes, there was ‘a Shakespeare who celebrated the superiority of the “civilized races”, and, further, that colonial educationalists and administrators used this Shakespeare to enforce cultural and racial hierarchies’ (Loomba and Orkin 1). For example, Gilbert and Tompkins point to David George’s 1987 production of *The Tempest* as a work that ‘tended to reinforce some of the hierarchies implicit in Shakespeare’s text, and to exoticize non-Western performance conventions’ (27).

flexible, to all.’⁹⁰ Charlotte McIvor sees the production as analogous to the work of arguably appropriative interculturalists, saying ‘for Pan Pan, mounting *Playboy* brought Ireland “bang up to date” by reaching literally outside of the nation through transnational artistic networks made accessible by the formation of Culture Ireland. This experiment recalls the working method of several key intercultural theatre practitioners, such as Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Robert Wilson’ (317).

Yet, when I have given presentations at conferences framing the Pan Pan *Playboy* in terms of Bharuchian intercultural theory, I have met much resistance. On one occasion, a scholar told me that the production should not be theorised in this way because Ireland is postcolonial and China is an imperial power. As argued in the theoretical introduction, while analysis of Ireland’s cultural production can be enriched through postcolonial theory regardless of the economic state of the country, the power dynamics implied by labelling Ireland postcolonial are no longer fitting when addressing the politics of Ireland’s global cultural interactions today. I agree with my detractor here that positioning Ireland as ‘West’ to China’s ‘East’ in order to theorise this reinvigoration of Synge is not satisfactory – perhaps because Ireland’s economy, though booming at the time Quinn was working in China, is tiny; perhaps because the total population of Ireland is just over a fifth of the population of Beijing; perhaps because China was never colonized; perhaps because the work was small scale rather than a globally touring spectacular. Yet none of these neutralise the fact that Quinn was a Westerner working in an Eastern context, reimagining a canonical text, and representing China in a way that had powerful symbolic potential in its socio-political context (particularly during the production’s Dublin run). Intercultural and postcolonial theory almost certainly has useful insights to bring to any analysis of the production.

⁹⁰ *The Sunday Business Post* also stressed the universality of Synge’s play, claiming that ‘[t]he playwright’s anti-hero and protagonist Christy Mahon, who claims to have killed his father, and his beloved Pegeen Mike, have parallels in both contemporary Chinese literature and classical Chinese philosophy’ (‘Prepublicity’).

Through a close reading of the translation process that produced Quinn's adaptation, the next section will show how a Bourdieusian analysis of the circulation of cultural capital can allow productive ethical engagement with intercultural theatre practice, without taking an eye off the East/West binaries that can and do demarcate unequal power relations.

Interculturalism, Translation, Agency, and Cultural Capital

Quinn penned an adaptation of *The Playboy of the Western World* in English, and worked with Chinese translators to produce a performable Mandarin script. The development of this script was a complex affair. On arriving in China, Quinn consulted professors at Beijing University to find out if there had ever been a Mandarin translation of the play; he was told that there had not. Pan Pan employed a translator to render Synge's text into Mandarin Chinese. When this first translation was finished, a dramatist, Sun Yue, was employed to work on it, adding idiom and style. As this process was underway, a Chinese translation of *The Playboy* was unearthed. It was from the 1920s, and written in a classical Chinese idiom difficult for modern Chinese people to understand.⁹¹ Some of this classical script was used in the audition process and also to inform Sun's text. As Sun worked with the first translation, Quinn created an adaptation, written in English, which contemporised and re-situated *The Playboy of the Western World* to the 'semi-legal' and 'semi-tolerated' situation of a whore-dressers. Sun's completed script was used as a model and guide for Quinn's adaptation to be translated into contemporary Chinese by another translator, Zhaohui Wang. Finally, this second translation was adapted to 'the language of the moment' (Quinn, Interview 334),

⁹¹ Interestingly, the work of Synge and the Irish National Theatre Society influenced the Chinese National Theatre Movement in the late 1920s. Min Tian tells us that the nationalist orientation of the NTM was 'reinforced by the Irish dramatic movement' (150). Further, '[t]he advocates of the NTM introduced with great enthusiasm the ideas and works of W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory and J.M. Synge, in sharp contrast to their ambivalent attitudes towards Ibsen and G.B. Shaw. They clearly shared Lady Gregory's and Yeats' refusal to imitate Ibsen in their efforts to build their drama on native subjects and native traditions' (150).

the colloquial street language of contemporary Beijing, by Sun. My interviews with Quinn, Sun and Wang indicate that all three were very much in dialogue about the content of the finished script throughout the translation process. According to Quinn, the actors further enriched the translation, suggesting appropriate terminology during the rehearsal period.

Quinn originally wanted the protagonist of the play, Christy Mahon/Ma Shang, to hail from Xin-Jiang, the troubled Uyghur and Sinomuslim province in the North-West of China. He claims that he was advised against such a representation due to fears of Chinese state censorship. Accordingly, for the Chinese run of the play, Ma Shang hailed from Har Bin in the North East province of Dong Bei. When the play toured to Dublin, the playboy became a Uyghur once more. Of this decision Quinn explains:

We changed the province of origin back for the Irish version, because we always liked the idea of the playboy being a Muslim [and] we could do it here. The Northern version was more a simple reference to farmers in the North than anything else. This version is a little bit stronger, being a Muslim playboy. It's a tetchier subject. (Interview 335)

Sun, however, explains the decision on the Uyghur Christy in terms of ethnic sensitivities as well as censorship:

The reason we made the changes is not only because of censorship. It is also because of ethnic complexities. The adaptation makes sense as long as we make Christy an intruder. Our work needs to nurture the feelings of other ethnic groups. (Interview 355)

The province of Xin-Jiang, meaning ‘New Frontier,’ was conquered by the Chinese empire in the mid eighteenth century.⁹² Despite Chinese imperial pronouncements as early as 1757 that ‘Xin-Jiang should now be considered part of the interior (neidi), it remained, in the eyes of many Chinese officials and literati, a distant land beyond the fringes of the Chinese cultural world’ (Newby, *The Khanate* 17). This was not least because the conquered Altishahr region, a desert land of prosperous oasis cities, was home to the Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim people who ‘shared a discrete group consciousness’ (Newby, ‘Us and Them’ 16) and who, time showed, would be very difficult to assimilate into Han Chinese culture.⁹³ Islam proved an obstacle to sinicization, and remained a strong symbol of regional identity (Newby, ‘Identity’ 72). The Qing dynasty, though originally tolerant of the religious and cultural practices of Uyghur people in Xinjiang and Sinomuslims (or Hanhui) living throughout China, became more discriminatory as leaders changed and personal prejudices were allowed to seep into the administration of the Empire (Lipman 88-91). From 1759 onwards there was mass Sinomuslim migration to Xin-Jiang, due to persecution and economic factors. This was encouraged by the Qing administration, who hoped that the Sinomuslims would bring the Han Chinese culture with them to Xin-Jiang. However, there is no clear evidence that there was significant sinicization in Qing Xin-Jiang, and there is, despite centuries of assimilation projects, still little evidence of erosion of Uyghur cultural identity among Uyghur people in the province today (Millward and Newby 113-134).

In recent years, the political situation in Xin-Jiang has worsened. As Michael Friederich explains:

Many Uyghurs have come to regard the increasing Han Chinese nationalism and chauvinism as a more dangerous assault on their

⁹² Although much of it was seized by Russia during a politically unstable time from 1871 to 1881.

⁹³ For example, Chinese schools were founded and promoted in the province from the 1860s, but the local elite preferred not to use them. Meanwhile, Muslim schools flourished (Newby, ‘Identity’ 73-74).

national identity than socialist ideology was in the past. In contemporary Xinjiang anything Uyghur which is not confined to mere folklore (in the Soviet understanding) is regarded by state authorities with suspicion and is readily condemned as ‘nationalism’ or ‘separatism.’ In this situation, many Uyghurs feel deprived of the right to be proud of their own national history and traditions. (94)

Increasing migration of Han Chinese to oil rich Xin-Jiang has further exacerbated tensions. In July 2009, communal riots in the now predominantly Han Chinese Urumqi city left 200 dead; civil unrest in July 2011 resulted in the deaths of an unconfirmed number of Xin-Jiang civilians and Chinese state police. The Chinese government blames the unrest on overseas groups inciting Uyghur protests (*The Guardian*, ‘Uyghur’). There is a long tradition in China of painting the Uyghurs as ‘a fierce and brutal people’ (Lipmap 83).

The intercultural translation process that produced Pan Pan’s *The Playboy of the Western World* became a site of competing aesthetic, cultural and ethical discourses. For Sun and Wang, aware of historical prejudices and contemporary stereotypes regarding Uyghurs in China, a patricidal Uyghur character cavorting with prostitutes posed too great a risk of causing serious offence. The translators favoured other, arguably less ethically problematic, ways of establishing Ma Shang’s status as an outsider and of adding cultural layers to the adaptation. For Quinn, active in Ireland’s alternative theatre scene and accustomed to producing daring, provocative art, sacrificing aesthetic liberty in pursuit of offence-free theatre represented ethically abhorrent censorship. A Bourdieusian analysis of the translation process focused on cultural capital can address this tension, avoiding problematics associated with habitus based approaches to

intercultural translation and, further, answering an ethical call for materially engaged intercultural theatre criticism.

Cultural Capital in Intercultural Contexts

Laurence Venuti, working towards what he calls an ‘ethics of difference’ in translation studies, writes: ‘[i]nsofar as translation involves an intercultural collaboration, my aim extends to the global reach of my topic: to address translators and users of translations throughout the world, but with attentiveness to their different locations that influences the terms of address’ (*Scandals* 6/7). Venuti’s ethical approach to translation has many similarities to the materially engaged morality of intercultural theatre that I have argued has emerged from the scholarship of the latter quarter of the twentieth century. As discussed, intercultural debates often assume a significant monetary advantage on behalf of the Western interculturalist. In an increasingly globalized world, with power relations between East and West, North and South shifting, this assumption no longer holds true in many intercultural situations. Nonetheless, there are often more subtle imbalances at play. Analysing the degree of social, symbolic, cultural and economic capital circulating in intercultural situations can help to outline and account for the level of privilege and agency a Western collaborator may have, and to do so in a materially engaged manner.

Since the late 90s there has been scholarly interest in Bourdieusian paradigms of translation, much of which is relevant to intercultural theatre studies. Following the cultural turn of translation studies, much of this scholarship argues for the importance and usefulness of considering the translator’s habitus, a concept which Bourdieu explains thus:

The habitus - embodied history, internalized as a second nature
and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole

past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate presence. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within a world. (*Logic* 56)

Daniel Simeoni, in striving to understand the historically engrained subservience that he perceives to characterise the translator in the West today, suggests that ‘it is not so much the activity of the translating, nor the translator himself, nor objective norms as such, but the internalized position of the translator which may turn out to be the single most determining factor’ (‘Habitus’ 12). Insofar as the subservience model holds, Simeoni sees the products of translation as ‘the results of diversely distributed social habituses, or specific habituses governed by the rules pertaining to the field in which translation takes place’ (19). Simeoni recognises that the limits of Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the habitus ‘have been exactly those of the borders of nation-states and state societies’ (20) and further, that these limits pose a problem to our globalized modernity ‘where the circulation of products is unhampered by tariffs, and the financial markets dictate the behaviour of agents and institutions’ (20). Outside of the nation state model, the translator’s habitus becomes ‘a locus of tension revealing an extreme yet very representative configuration of intercultural, as well as global, influences’ (21). This is also true of the habitus of directors and adaptors in intercultural contexts.

However, in Bourdieu’s formulation, the habitus as a set of structuring structures, arbitrary and embodied, is a durable system, produced by ‘conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions’ (*Logic* 53). Although we live in an increasingly globalized world, nation states, as Bharucha compels us to remember, still

demarcate sites of difference and privilege. Simeoni's positioning of the habitus as a configuration of intercultural and global influences presupposes intercultural domestic and educational conditioning. While this might be a reality for a number of translators, the continued existence of geographically determined linguistic and cultural difference means that translators and adaptors still have to work in systems other than those which formed and are formed by their habitus. In the case of contemporary intercultural theatre practice, where perceived cultural difference often motivates collaboration, this is particularly the case.

Rather than allow this fact to reinscribe the limitations of Bourdieu's theory in intercultural contexts, it is helpful to think of socio-cultural and linguistic systems operating within relatively autonomous fields, but also within a global economy of cultural practice. Maria Tymoczko, arguing against ideologies of translation that would place the translator 'in-between' languages and cultures, suggests that 'one must conceptualize the translator not as operating *between* languages, but as operating either in one language or another, or more properly in a system inclusive of [Source Language] and [Target Language], a system that encompasses both' ('Ideology' 196). This formulation allows her to highlight a 'view of a translator embedded in and committed to specified cultural and social frameworks and agendas' (199) – a view commensurable with Bourdieusian thought. Agents operate within intercultural systems, but their habitus remain both the products and producers of specific, embodied, arbitrary norms. Again, it is not much of a stretch to apply this to intercultural practitioners.

In dialogue with Simeoni and others, Moira Inghilleri points out that 'amongst individuals and institutions in complex and socially diverse societies, different habitus – linked to different or unequal access to forms of cultural capital – may give rise to or emerge from contrary action between agents or within fields' ('Habitus, Field and

Discourse' 245). She advises that 'any real or perceived submission to norms must be viewed in the full context of its occurrence, for in translational/interpreting activity, *both* constancy and shifts in normative practice – at the macro-structural and local, international levels – can and do occur. At these points [...] translators/interpreters often do play a pivotal role' ('Habitus, Field and Discourse' 249/250). I suggest that the shift in focus from embodied structuring structures to contexts that Inghilleri proposes here – and, indeed, that intercultural (or multicultural) situations, linguistic or theatrical, seem to demand – should be framed in terms of capital. While considering the translator, adaptor or director's habitus remains important, analysis of the circulations of economic, symbolic, social and cultural capital within specifically delineated fields of cultural production – national or global – can provide materially engaged insight into both relations of subservience and the literary/theatrical artefacts translation and adaptation produce.

A limitation of understanding translation/adaptation primarily in terms of the habitus is that it affords the practitioner more theoretical individual agency than s/he may realistically possess in intercultural situations. Jean-Marc Gouanvic believes that 'if a translator imposes a rhythm upon the text, a lexicon or syntax that does not originate in the source text and thus substitutes his or her voice for that of the author, this is essentially not a conscious strategic choice but an effect of his or her specific habitus, as acquired in the target literary field' (157). Leaving aside for a moment that this is quite an extreme application of Bourdieu (one which makes conscious strategic choices incompatible with the habitus; a more flexible understanding of the habitus, as an organised and organising system, incorporates both structure and agency), such a formulation cannot account for the fact that the practitioner may be operating in an intercultural system where the accumulated cultural capital constituting her/his autonomy does not allow for the interpretations, adaptations or impositions supported

by her/his habitus. The habitus operates within a field in possession and pursuit of cultural capital. In intercultural situations, practitioners' choices can be more easily observed and analysed in terms of capital, because the structures of the habitus often meet resisting structures in their attempts at structuring, rendering the habitus difficult to objectify or observe.

Cultural Capital and the Pan Pan *Playboy*

Pan Pan had the economic and cultural privilege to go to China to adapt a canonical Irish work in the first place. Rather than thinking of Quinn as an agent responding rationally to fluxes in the global economic and cultural system, we might think of him as someone possessed of a habitus that enables intercultural distinction. This could lead to the suggestion, to knit Bourdieu to Bharucha once more, that even if cultural dominance cannot be understood primarily in economic terms, it is still the Western practitioner who is equipped with the habitus that facilitates success within an increasingly complex global field of cultural production. Yet the resistance that Quinn met in his attempts to structure the cultural system in which he operated suggest that this habitus focused reading does not sufficiently address the intercultural realities of certain situations.

Quinn points out that 'you can make more money out of doing a short show in Ireland than you can out of making a show in China' (Interview 337), ostensibly marking *The Playboy of the Western World* as an example of intercultural art for intercultural art's sake. For Bourdieu '[t]he system of cultural goods production and the system producing the producers also fulfil ideological functions,' although as a 'by-product,' 'owing to the fact that the mechanisms through which they contribute to the reproduction of the social order and the permanence of the relations of dominance remain hidden' (*Logic* 132-133). While ticket prices akin to those in Dublin were out of

the question in Beijing, there remained the capacity to return the symbolic capital that an Easternised *Playboy of the Western World* would undoubtedly objectify⁹⁴ to the greater Irish economy of cultural practice. The field of art lays claim to autonomy, but it is subject to the laws of the field of power (including economic power) in which it is contained (Bourdieu, *Field* 29-74). The fact that the production was co-funded by Irish and Chinese sources complicates this analysis. China is, increasingly, an economic force to be reckoned with, and its rapidly developing industrial and corporate sectors supply funding for the arts. The economic capital available to Quinn was not enough to cover the entire cost of producing a show in Beijing. Regardless of the global privilege discernible from Quinn's ability to work in China, the economic power relations implied by this choice are not as cut and dried as those Bharucha critiques when he describes the situation of Western maestros such as Peter Brook in India.

In terms of social capital, Quinn found himself at no advantage in the East. The Chinese system of Guan Xi (contacts/partners) epitomises Bourdieu's concept of officialisation, thus 'contributing to the maintenance of the social order from which it derives its power' (*Logic* 108). Quinn found it difficult to navigate what he perceived to be a very strict social system. He explained: 'there are so many things that are inflexible in China - things you simply can't get around' (Interview 336). Prestige within a social system 'almost universally rewards actions apparently motivated by respect for the rule' (*Logic* 109). Groups demand and reward respect for their own social practices; an outsider wishing to structure a given cultural system will encounter resistance. Consequently, Quinn found it difficult to find Chinese partners to endorse *The Playboy of the Western World*. As he told me:

⁹⁴ For Bourdieu, cultural capital can exist in embodied, objectified or institutionalised states (*Homo Academicus*: 243-248)

No one will work with you if you don't know anyone, or if they don't know who you are. You have to have a contact. The system of contacts is quite political. (Interview 340)

In the four years it took to produce *The Playboy of the Western World*, Pan Pan went through five partners before it found a suitable match.

Pan Pan has been producing well regarded and award winning theatre since its Dublin fringe beginnings in the early 90s. It has the support of the Irish Arts Council and also of Culture Ireland. However, Quinn's cultural competence and symbolic capital did not precede him in China. Many organizations expressed enthusiasm about working with Pan Pan when they thought it was a global touring operation on the scale of *Riverdance*, but lost interest when it became apparent that the project was a much smaller affair. Symbolic capital does not easily transfer from one cultural system to another, because the acts of recognition that 'constitute investments in the collective enterprise of creating symbolic capital' (*Logic* 68) rely on belief in the doxic assumptions of agents operating within a certain field. Thus 'those who want to believe with the beliefs of others grasp neither the subjective truth nor the subjective experience of belief' (68) and the symbolic capital, itself constituted by this belief, is much reduced or disappears. A well-known alternative theatre director reimagining Ireland's most famous play with Chinese collaborators would clearly represent distinction in Irish theatre circles, but in China Quinn had to struggle to acquire both social and symbolic capital in the field of cultural production. For Bourdieu, 'cultural competence in all its forms is not constituted as cultural capital until it is inserted into the objective relations set up between the system of economic relations and the system producing the producers' (*Logic* 124). The cultural capital Pan Pan possessed was difficult to reconstitute within the alternate economic, cultural and social system of China. However, its symbolic capital remained extant in Ireland. Just as an art collector might

‘enhance his prestige by making a purchase at an exorbitant price, for the sake of his point of honour, just to “show he could do it”’ (*Logic* 119), the act of going to China to adapt Synge’s canonical play created symbolic capital of its own in the global field of cultural production – a system which, to return to Tymoczko’s argument, encapsulates all inter-related cultural systems.

Pan Pan’s dearth of cultural capital within the Chinese economy of cultural practice meant that the decision on representing a Uyghur Ma Shang ultimately lay with the translators, who were established in the local cultural field and possessed the requisite cultural competence to gain distinction for their work. This is in spite of the fact that Quinn, as adaptor and director, officially had the most control over the project. Understanding the roles of Sun and Wang in relation to Quinn in the same way as the work of translators is understood in relation to the work of adaptors or directors in Europe and North America would render their agency anomalous. Western contexts tend to regard literal translation an inherently less valuable undertaking than the making of creative translations (performative translations in theatre contexts) or adaptations. As a result of such understanding, a two-tiered translation process has become prevalent in Anglophone theatre practice. Famous playwrights create performable adaptations based upon the literal translations of others; their names attract audiences to new versions of foreign language plays or classics, while the person who produces the literal translation often remains in the shadows. The logic of this practice is congruent with the set of norms that Simeoni argues creates subservient translators who internalise external pressures ‘to the degree that they have come to be desirable’ (‘Habitus’ 12).

Susan Bassnett takes issue with the prevalent two tiered translation model. She rejects the notion that as the theatre text exists in a dialectical relationship with the performance text it is something ‘incomplete or partially realized’ (99); further, she rejects the idea that ‘real translation takes place at the level of the *mise en scène*’ (100).

Bassnett states that ‘translation is, and always has been, a question of power relationships, and the translator has all too often been placed in a position of economic, aesthetic and intellectual inferiority’ (101). Phyllis Zatlin, a scholar and theatre translator, conducted research involving the distribution of questionnaires to over 130 established theatre translators from 26 countries. In the answers provided she interprets ‘a collective translators’ protest against the use of “literal translation” as a stepping stone to a “performable adaptation”’ (26). The translators variously saw the literal translation to performable adaptation process as a marketing strategy, a devaluing appropriation of the work of the literal adaptor, and a process that allowed the original text to become lost. Simeoni, recognising that the attitude of subservience is not innate, but has group and individual histories (‘Habitus’ 8), and recognising the turn towards increasingly autonomous modes of translation, suggests that for translators ‘this period may have the potential of being analogous to the one which saw a projected emancipation of authors in the wake of the Enlightenment’ (‘Habitus’ 12). In spite of the scholarly interest in redressing the unequal power relations of contemporary theatre translation practice as well as the collective translators’ protest that Zatlin describes, it is fair to contend that Quinn’s experiences of and attitudes to translation were the product of a field where a subservient model of practice was normative.

In China, translation practice works differently. Tymoczko explains that ‘teams of translators have traditionally worked together, with each member of the team operating primarily within a single linguistic and cultural framework’ (198). The structures of this team-based system, wherein each stage is carried out by a person with linguistic and cultural loyalties, leads, arguably, to an understanding of translation imbued with more agency. For her part, Sun believes that translation is a creative act, in which not only language, but also culture, is translated (Interview 355). She did not understand her role in the creative process to comprise simply adding idiom to Quinn’s

adaptation, but rather of changing and moulding Quinn's Westernized depiction of China into something that would be acceptable to Chinese audiences (Interview 354). In spite of her efforts in this regard, Sun is adamant that the Mandarin *Playboy* is not representative of contemporary Chinese life. She says: 'Gavin is a Westerner: the portrait of China in his play is from a Western point of view' (Interview 354) and stresses that some aspects of his adaptation 'are not very logical to Chinese people' (Interview 353). The most challenging aspect of working on the project for Sun was 'how to make the characters believable to the Chinese audience without misleading Quinn's interpretation' (Interview 354).⁹⁵ She thought the best way to do this, without upsetting any ethnic groups, was to have the outsiders come from Dong Bei in the Northeast of China. About this decision she says:

One of the most interesting things for me was how to re-create the character of Christy and his father. They are two intruders who are different from the locals. They are two powerful forces, capable of breaking the stability of and restructuring the place. The folk culture of the Northeast is very popular in China. The language is very lively and witty. I chose this language for the two characters in order to enhance dramatic effects. (Interview 354)

Wang originally liked the idea of a Uyghur Christy for two reasons: firstly, because Uyghurs look different from Han Chinese, and this, she thought, would make Christy's status as an outsider seem more believable;⁹⁶ secondly, according to Wang, many local Beijing people dislike Uyghurs for numerous reasons: for example, she told me, many Uyghurs sell drugs in Beijing. This prejudice, Wang believed, would make the

⁹⁵ I have not edited this quotation, as I think Sun's point is clear here, and I want to avoid 'misleading' her meaning as far as possible.

⁹⁶ Nick Knight contends that the view that Han Chinese culture is national culture is prevalent in China. It might be that Wang thinks physical difference is the clearest way of marking Christy and his father as Other.

adaptation more interesting. However, as she worked on the project she also found that a Xin-Jiang Christy might offend both Han Chinese and Uyghurs. She thought changing Christy's origins to the North-East of China was a good idea, pointing out that a Dong Bei Christy would also add cultural layers to the adaptation. The Christy from the North-East was imagined as half Han Chinese, half Russian, as many people from that region have such a background: they look like Europeans, but grow up in the Chinese culture, and often know little of the world outside their village (Interview 355). The choice of a Dong Bei Christy, then, is far more than a simple reference to farming folk, as Quinn believes: rather, it is an adaptation choice designed to imbue the production with cultural depth.

Where Quinn's habitus-structured view of the translation and adaptation process placed his artistic vision at the centre of the process, working within a field of cultural production with more communal conceptions of translation meant that in spite of what Quinn calls the 'strange hierarchy of the director' (Interview 338) – that is, the powerful role that a director tends to play in a production process – the translators had considerable power over the artistic product. The translators' habitus had the agency to structure the field of cultural production due to the translators' cultural competence and the kinds of symbolic, social and cultural capital that they embodied. The fact that Ma Shang became a Uyghur once more during the production's Dublin run is further testament to the effects of geographically specific modes of cultural capital upon the process and product of intercultural translation and adaptation.

Reflections on Capital and Interculturalism

Even within a global cultural economy that facilitates intercultural theatre projects such as Pan Pan's *The Playboy of the Western World*, cultural capital can circulate in geographically specific ways, weakening the efficacy of the habitus to structure specific

national and cultural systems. The tensions arising within the translation and adaptation process of *The Playboy of the Western World* mark this intercultural situation as a site of competing aesthetic, cultural and ethical discourses. Postcolonial paradigms of intercultural theatre scholarship are not entirely sufficient to address the power dynamics here, as it is a situation in which the ‘spatio-temporal referentiality’ (Moukhlis 89) of the postcolonial is in dispute. Further, habitus-based translation analysis cannot sufficiently speak to the tensions apparent here, as it requires a pre-judged assumption about the power relations inherent in practice. A cultural capital focused framework, however, allows insight into the degree to which an agent has the power to structure a foreign field. Where this agency is unbounded, there is cause for concern about the intercultural ethics of West speaking for East. Where this agency meets resistance in its attempts to structure we need worry less about exploitative power relations. Pan Pan’s trials in attaining social, symbolic and cultural capital in China are testament to the fact that cultural systems are structured and maintained in ways that reproduce officialised norms. On one hand, this provides an in-built cultural protectionism against the totalizing proliferation of Western values; on the other, it creates strict codes of artistic practice that can be read as censorious. An examination of how this tension played out in practice – with a Dong Bei Ma Shang in Beijing and a Xin-Jiang Ma Shang in Dublin – shows cultural negotiations that ultimately defer to the agent with most cultural capital and competence in geographically specific parts of the global field of cultural production.

Effects in Beijing

According to an *Irish Independent* article written on the day the Pan Pan *Playboy* was to premiere, pre-publicity for the play had been heavily featured on local Beijing television and radio. In terms of its small scale and collaborative nature, the production might be

seen as an ideal intercultural project for a state with leaders that ‘vociferously assert the need to defend China’s culture’ (Knight 6) even while asserting ‘their intention to further open China to the influence of globalisation, and to continue to reform in the cultural area, involving both expansion of the cultural market in China and increased access to Chinese audiences by global media’ (6).

Quinn’s choice to plant television screens around the stage on which off-stage performers’ faces were seen might have spoken to the censorship culture in China,⁹⁷ the screens offering a Beijing audience commentary on the significance of being watched. This thematic reading is lent support by the fact that Pan Pan’s next collaboration with Sun and Wang, *Fight the Landlord*, aims to find ‘a voice for individual conscience versus silence’ (Ireland Expo 2010), suggesting an interest on behalf of the collaborative team in critiquing the societal difficulties of an arguably post-Communist China. Further, the striking colours and pop-art influenced curves of the set, complementing the unreality of the characters, created a world in which appearances and actions were ostentatiously for show, provoking reflection on how people act when they are under scrutiny. Offsetting this was the view the production gave into the world beyond the whoredressers’ window, into the semi-legal and secretive goings on behind the façade of chrome and mirrors. The theme of urbanisation would have resonated for

⁹⁷ China has a long history of theatre censorship, ‘especially during the Ming (1368 – 1644) era and Qing (1644 – 1912) dynasties when scripts deemed subversive or indecent were heavily censored’ (Liu 389). Censorship continued in the republican period, although at a more local level. As a communist state from 1949 onwards, China attempted to use the theatre as an instrument of social change. For example, the communists built theatre spaces that were uniform in architectural style and had no difference between seating sections in terms of comfort (Mackerras 187). Also, they decreed that actors, who had previously occupied a low position in society, should be well recognized, and spent money in improving the conditions of acting companies (Mackerras 193). In addition, the Chinese Communist Party committed itself to reforming traditional xiqu theatre, which they thought of as an oppressive tool of the old ruling classes. However, this reform soon turned into a stringent form of censorship, and the resultant eradication of many elements of traditional theatre now provides ‘evidence of the particularly destructive nature of theatrical censorship on ephemeral memories of performance’ (Liu 405). In recent years, China’s policies have changed considerably, and the country has found itself in a double bind situation in relation to censorship. In the face of cultural globalization, China censors in the name of cultural preservation. While Chinese cultural borders have been opened, the government still tries to keep a tight rein on the cultural material and journalism that enters and leaves the country. A small scale project like *The Playboy of the Western World* would, under Chinese law, be subject to far less stringent censorship than a spectacle intended for 1000 people or more

the Beijing audience. In a social context of mass migration of workers from rural to urban areas, Quinn describes the choice to set the production in the ‘semi-legal, semi-tolerated’ location of a ‘whoredressers’ as a metaphor. He explains that ‘[whoredressers] start on the outskirts of Beijing, and women come there for all sorts of reasons. It’s their first job in the city in some cases’ (Interview 335). The location – not quite city, not quite country, not quite legal, not quite illegal – speaks to the tensions that lie at the borders of a rapidly industrialising, globalizing society.

McIvor’s reading of the collaboration as one that ‘embodied the agenda of the newly formed Culture Ireland’ (317), ‘capitalized on the creative capital of artists from different countries’ (319), and ‘ultimately staged an intercultural exchange founded on limited communication and blind reliance on a ready repertoire of “best-known” Irish plays rather than on immediate points of intersection based in the now’ (321) is somewhat harsh. The production, after all, was not just funded by Culture Ireland, but also by a Chinese shipping firm. It was not primarily created for Irish audiences: it premiered in Beijing.⁹⁸ Further, and perhaps most importantly, due to the circulations of capital in the Chinese economy of cultural practice, the Pan Pan *Playboy* had significant input from two strong and capable Chinese creatives, who were concerned with making the performance meaningful for its Chinese audiences, who added important cultural layers to the script, and who were protective of the sensitivities of China’s ethnic minorities. Pan Pan worked with Sun and Wang again in 2010, this time to produce an original work by Sun. *Fight the Landlord* deals critically with the housing problem in China’s rapidly urbanising society, an issue which prices many young people out of the housing market, and, consequently, out of marriage, as one must own a home to get married in China (Coonan, ‘Shanghai’s Property Crisis’). Pan Pan undoubtedly gained much cultural capital from its Chinese *Playboy*, particularly in Ireland, where it was

⁹⁸ Pan Pan always hoped to be able to tour the production to Dublin, but its ability to do so was incumbent upon the show’s success in China.

seen as a major cultural event. However, Sun and Wang are far from native informants and Pan Pan did not take the cultural capital and run, but, rather, built on the relationships they made in China. Sun and Wang gained both significant economic capital (in terms of Irish funding for *Fight the Landlord*) and significant cultural capital (in terms of their successful collaborations with artists from different countries), while Pan Pan had a chance to increase their social, economic, cultural and symbolic advantage within Chinese and Irish economies of cultural practice.

On the other hand, while there were certainly thematics and threads of this adaptation that arose from and were intended to speak to contemporary Chinese social issues and lived experiences, Sara Keating's assertion that 'Although the [Beijing] audience had little or no knowledge of the original play or its history, Pan Pan's production allowed them to view it entirely through their own cultural lens' ('Evolving' 253) is perhaps too starry-eyed. As mentioned, Sun stresses that the portrayal of Beijing in the play is from a Westerner's point of view, and that she struggled to make its logic believable to Chinese audiences. Further, she found the choice to set the story in a whoredressers unusual, and particularly Western, noting that her foreign friends often comment on the fact that many of the shops you find in Beijing are hairdressers and restaurants – something too commonplace for Beijingers to notice. When asked if she thought Quinn's adaptation was an apt representation of life in contemporary Beijing, Sun answered:

It didn't reflect China completely. It is true that views from the Oriental are so different from the Westerners. Their understanding and presentation of life are different. For instance, it is the worst sin to kill your own father in Chinese culture, so no one will worship someone who claims that he killed his own father. (Interview 354)

An aspect of the adaptation that proved challenging to Beijing audiences was its sexual content. The smoking, drinking, libidinous, and physically aggressive female characters offered an unorthodox representation of Chinese femininity, and, indeed, the overtly sexual nature of the play did prove shocking to some. Speaking to the *Irish Independent* following previews of the show in Beijing, Quinn, reported to be happy with the audience reaction, says: ‘They really understood the story, although there were huge gasps when Pegeen had a snog with Christy’ (Quinn qtd. in *Irish Independent*, ‘Eastern World’). The scene in question involves La La repeatedly ripping the lusty village girls one by one from tight embraces and kisses with an unresisting Ma Shang and banishing them from the shop before jumping up into the playboy’s arms and wrapping her bare legs around him. One audience member called the cultural ministry with concerns regarding the shortness of an actor’s skirt. Police from the cultural ministry attended the show, and found it acceptable, but the incident at least points to the fact that not every audience member was comfortable with the highly sexualised female characters portrayed. Irish media dismissed such concerns as prudish and ridiculous, which, like longstanding readings of the protests that accompanied the premiere of *The Playboy* in 1907, fails to consider the legitimate concerns over rights of representation that complaints like this can contain. Quinn says:

Some Chinese people went to see it and they actually thought they were seeing a contemporary Chinese play. Other people said to me that this wasn’t really like contemporary Chinese life and what have you done? (Interview 334)

Where audience members thought the production was a contemporary Chinese play, they were more likely to accept the provocative nature of the dramaturgy.⁹⁹ However,

⁹⁹ China has an avant-garde theatre tradition dating from the 1980s, where the exploration plays of Liu Shugang, Ma Zhingjun, Qin Peichun, Tao Jun and Wang Peigong and Gao Xingjian played with the form and content of both Western style and traditional Chinese performance, often fusing the two. Its ‘little

where audiences knew that Quinn, a Westerner, was the director, they were, understandably, suspicious of his gendered representations of China. In terms of rights of representation, perhaps it would have been better to ask Sun to pen the adaptation in the first place, rather than employing her to make Quinn's adaptation culturally logical to Chinese audiences.

The Playboy of the Western World opened up a space of intercultural exchange between the Irish theatrical canon and contemporary Chinese theatre culture. It might have been strange, however, for any Chinese person made aware through pre-publicity that she was attending an 'Irish' play to have encountered the portrait of contemporary Chinese life the production offered. What was created, essentially, was a hybrid in which the plot of the Irish classic was discernible to those very few who might be familiar with it, while all the cultural signifiers had been replaced by ostensibly contemporary Chinese ones. While pre-publicity might have guided certain factions of the audience towards the Irish significance of the piece, it would be hard, without paying close attention to framing devices, to pick out anything particularly Irish about the mise-en-scène. The fusion between Gaelic and English literary traditions that Kiberd argues is present in *The Playboy* is most strongly embedded in Hiberno-English language, not in the drawing-room farce style structure of the plot.¹⁰⁰

Effects in Dublin

Given both the cultural significance of Synge's *Playboy* and the socio-political climate surrounding Pan Pan's 2006 production in Dublin, Pan Pan's Chinese *Playboy* was read

theatre's movement also began at around this time and had a strong experimental bent. See Cheung and Lai; Zhao; Shiao-Ling; Xiaomei; Quah.

¹⁰⁰ Kiberd sees influences of the Gaelic literary tradition in the plot of *The Playboy* too – linking the story to the Cúchulainn legend. While Kiberd's thesis is well-argued, these resonances are so opaque that even those with significant knowledge of Gaelic literature might struggle to see them. They could not, of course, resonate for a contemporary Beijing audience.

as an immediate metaphor for a changing Ireland's new ethnic diversity and globalized status. Keating, reviewing for the *Irish Times*, states:

Complemented by the naturalistic staging techniques of the early Abbey, Synge's play soon set the standard which the Irish dramatic canon would come to be governed - and ultimately limited - by: that Irish drama should reflect the true nature of Irish life.

The prospect of Pan Pan Theatre's production of *The Playboy of the Western World* translated for the Eastern world thus excites a wealth of theatrical possibility for a play that has often been stunted by its status as the foundation text of 20th-century Irish drama. ('Playboy')

Lonergan, reviewing for *Irish Theatre Magazine* says 'Pan Pan's *Playboy* is not just a theatrical performance of a well-known play; it's also a social performance about contemporary Ireland, and its attitude to multiculturalism and immigration' (94). For Lonergan 'Quinn's production is a glimpse into Ireland's future – to a time when the country's culture will be expressed not just in Irish or English, but in Mandarin and other languages too' (96).

The economic boom of the Celtic Tiger years made immense changes to Ireland's ethnic and cultural topography. In 2006, the year Pan Pan's *Playboy* played in Beijing and Dublin, the Irish census of population showed that 11,161 Chinese nationals were living in Ireland, an increase of 91% from 2002 when the number was 5,842 (CSO, 'Non Irish Nationals' 48). Two thirds of these were based in Dublin. In the somewhat downtrodden Parnell Street area of the North city centre a host of Chinese-run restaurants and shops sprung up. The new Chinese community in Ireland have had to face racism and violence. In 2002, Chinese student Zhao Liu Tao was killed by two

Irish teenagers in what was the first officially recorded racist killing in the Republic. This instigated an anti-racism rally in the city centre (Indymedia). In the cultural arena, growing appreciation for the Chinese community's contribution to the character of Dublin is evidenced by the fact that the Dublin Chinese New Year Festival Association in association with Dublin City Council has been organising week-long city-wide events to celebrate Chinese New Year since 2008 (DublinCity.ie).

For McIvor, Pan Pan's objective with *The Playboy of the Western World* 'did not include highlighting minority-ethnic communities in the republic through a partnership between Chinese and Irish theatre artists' (317). She makes the important point that 'Irish discourses of interculturalism and use of the arts as cultural diplomacy in international and domestic contexts frequently marginalise the very minority-ethnic communities that the works claim to represent or speak for' (318), and raises the valid concern that 'Pan Pan's interpretation of "interculturalism" in a contemporary Irish context celebrates global exchange by locating China outside Ireland, despite the rapid growth of Chinese and other minority-ethnic communities North and South' (321). Pan Pan are undoubtedly closely aligned with government funding agencies concerned with the profitability of the Irish cultural brand.¹⁰¹ On top of their backing from Culture Ireland and the Irish Arts Council, *Fight the Landlord* played as part of the official cultural programme at the Irish pavilion during the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. Using language laden with the values of commerce and marketing, the Ireland Expo website proudly declares Pan Pan 'a great example of an Irish company recognised internationally for world class innovation' (Ireland Expo 2010). Lonergan expresses similar concerns to McIvor in his review of the Dublin run of *The Playboy*, saying 'Watching the junior minister, Conor Lenihan, take the stage before the action began, I couldn't help thinking of Pegeen's reminder that there is a world of difference between

¹⁰¹ For in-depth analysis of Irish cultural branding through agencies like Culture Ireland, see Chapter One of Lonergan's *Theatre and Globalization*.

gallous stories and dirty deeds – that it’s great for the Government to support this production of *The Playboy*, but there’s a risk of that support being used to disguise their record on immigration and the arts’ (96). These are important points. The Pan Pan *Playboy* should not be seen as a substitute for state funded cultural support to Ireland’s minority communities. Further, it should not be used to obscure the state’s draconian immigration laws and racist citizenship laws (which will be further analysed in Chapter Four). However, taking all of this into account, Pan Pan deserves considerable credit for the ethical content of its intercultural theatre practice.

Firstly, theatre companies need to secure funding from somewhere. While the argument that artists can take government funding and put it to progressive ends must always meet the criticism that government funding agencies are not peopled by dupes, Quinn insists that Pan Pan never follows funding, but make the art it wants to make and tries to raise the money for it however possible (Interview 337). Admittedly, such assurances are not the most solid basis on which to rest one’s scholarship. McIvor is right to highlight the fact that ‘Pan Pan’s intercultural Chinese *Playboy* came at a moment when the Irish state was in the process of intensifying its economic and cultural relationship with China’ (317). However, in terms of the content of Pan Pan’s Chinese productions – broaching contemporary Chinese societal issues such as urbanisation, housing prices, and prostitution – the company cannot be said to have played into the hands of those seeking smooth cultural relations. Rather, in collaboration with Chinese artists, Pan Pan offers provocative works that resonate differently for Chinese and Irish audiences. Secondly, Pan Pan is a professional company; it does not pretend to be a community theatre collective. While Ireland’s Chinese population was significant in 2006, it was unlikely to provide the writers, translators, producers and acting talent required for an artistic collaboration on the scale of *The Playboy*. Government funding directives aimed at inclusive cultural projects are necessary, but it is probably best if,

like Bisi Adigun's company Arambe (which will be discussed in Chapter 4), these cultural projects are motivated by people from within minority communities. This has been the case with Ireland's Chinese population, which is instrumental in organising and publicising Dublin's Chinese New Year celebrations. These celebrations are, in part, state funded, and they include a cultural programme. Further, Pan Pan made a significant effort to make the production appeal to Dublin's Chinese community. It hired a Chinese-Irish public relations consultant, Oliver Wang, to publicise the production (White, Email). He advised, among other things, that ticket prices would be a factor in attracting Chinese spectatorship. Notices about the show appeared on the *Irish Born Chinese Forum* (interestingly, descriptions of the production were much toned down, without a mention of the word 'whoredressers,' which was used in the rest of the English language publicity material). A low price preview was mentioned, but not stressed. A notice about the show also appeared in the Irish-Chinese Cultural Society's programme of events for autumn 2006. Despite these efforts to entice Dublin's Chinese community to the production, Chinese attendance at the play was not as great as Pan Pan had hoped. But it is not the case that Pan Pan was not concerned with highlighting and engaging with the Republic's Chinese community. Further, Pan Pan have since taken part in Chinese community driven cultural projects, with Aedin Cosgrove giving a talk about *Fight the Landlord* as part of the Chinese New Year festival 2011. Finally, in terms of McIvor's criticism that the Pan Pan *Playboy* located China outside Ireland (321), it can be countered that this is not, overall, how the production was read. A cursory glance at reviews and scholarship on the production (such as Keating's, Lonergan's and even McIvor's) reveals that Irish theatregoers were quick to associate the creative endeavour with Ireland's changing cultural and ethnic landscape.

Although it is unfair to decry Pan Pan's Chinese-Irish interculturalism on the basis of the company's funding and interaction with artists from China proper (rather

than China-in-Ireland), it should be recognised that when the production toured to Dublin, the socio-political situation changed, and so too did the intended target audience and the meaning of the piece. This brought its own challenges to the ethics of Pan Pan's production. A significant change prompted by the socio-political difference between Beijing and Dublin was the decision to make Ma Shang a Uyghur character once more. One of the interesting parallels that a Uyghur Ma Shang creates between the adaptation and Synge's original is a similar religiosity of language. As highlighted in the Dublin production's programme, the language of the Xin-Jiang Ma Shang refers to Muslim festivals such as Ba Zhai (Ramadan), adding context to the Widow Quin's question as to whether Christy is 'fasting or fed,' and enabling Ma Shang to make holy oaths that resonate with the language of Synge's original. Sun had no real objection to this. She felt that a Muslim Christy would make more sense to Western audiences (Interview 355), perhaps helping to establish his status as outsider for people with no knowledge of the culture of North East China. In terms of rights of representation, however, this is questionable. Just because the portrayal of a patricidal Uyghur Christy who spends his time among prostitutes is unlikely to be seen by Uyghur people in Dublin does not mean that it is unproblematic – particularly as the production was marketed to Dublin's Chinese community and, as Wang intimated, prejudice against Uyghurs is common among Han Chinese. Further, while the Dublin programme briefly explains that the playboy is from Xin Jiang, it makes no mention of the political turbulence in the region, showing that the purpose of a Muslim Christy was not to raise Irish awareness of the situation of Uyghur people. For Lonergan 'Christy's isolated status is intensified by his being Muslim [...] making him seem like an outsider to both Chinese and Irish audiences – which interestingly recalibrates any "us and them" dynamic in the auditorium' (96). But, of course, an 'us and them' dynamic is created through the device of a Uyghur Christy – the Muslim character is marked as Other, the cultural specificity of Uyghur

oppression is glossed over, and a representation of a Uyghur man likely to be very insulting to Xin-Jiang Muslims is offered to audiences without any comment on the situation of Uyghurs within China.

The gendered significance of the provocatively dressed and sexually predatory female characters also changed for the Dublin run. The provocative dramaturgy did not have the shock factor it had in China. Rather, arguing along Laura Mulvey's lines, the production objectified the women on stage, 'subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze' (Mulvey 24) which elicited scopophilic pleasure. The male characters wear sharp suits, or baggy trousers and tank tops, while the females flit around in very little. Their high boots, short skirts and skimpy tops are clear signifiers of the disempowered position of a sex worker – the 'whores' of the 'whoredressers,' themselves 'semi-legal' and 'semi-tolerated': the women become their clothing. The village girls lean provocatively against counter tops, hands on hips, or press themselves enthusiastically against Ma Shang; Kun Guafu lounges in a swivel chair and swings her boot clad legs suggestively onto a counter; La La slowly unzips and removes her white patent high-heeled boots. These poses and movements are reflected in the mirrors behind them, allowing their bodies to be watched from all angles at all times by eyes in the dark auditorium. The female figure is thus styled according to the male gaze (Mulvey 27); the 'women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*' (27). All this suggests 'the skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure' (24). The scene previously described in which La La forcibly pries Sha Sha, Shan Shan and Na Na from a still and unresponsive Ma Shang before leaping upon him herself is redolent of male sexual fantasy. We have moved here from the look of 'the spectator in direct scopophilic contact with the female form displayed for his enjoyment' to the look of the spectator 'fascinated with the image of his like set in an

illusion of natural space, and through him gaining control of the woman within the diegesis' (28). This scene specifically, and the representations of women throughout the play in general, disempower the traditionally very strong female characters in *The Playboy of the Western World*. In short, the gender politics at play here are problematic, and the likely effect of such representations of Chinese women on an Irish stage is to create disempowering stereotypes, particularly at a time when a Chinese diaspora is forming in the country.

The production was framed for its Dublin audience by pre-publicity, which stressed the success of the production in Beijing and drew on the coincidental complaint about the shortness of an actor's skirt; by Hiberno-English surtitles, taken almost directly from Synge's original playtext, with a few words and phrases in Mandarin interspersed throughout; and by programme notes, which include Synge's 1907 preface to *The Playboy*, a short literary biography of Synge, a plot synopsis of the Chinese version, notes on the more unusual words in Synge's lexicon, notes on some of the Chinese phraseology, and five projects for the audience (all of which require reflection on the Gaelic and Irish significance of Synge's original). Dennis Kennedy lambasts the function of the programme note in general as 'an artificial method which hopes to force an intellectual shift in the spectators, if they bother to read it' (*Spectator* 124).

Programme notes are not necessarily an artificial device, but the idea that they try to affect an intellectual shift in the audience is important: programme notes direct the audience towards meanings not contained, phenomenologically speaking, in the performance itself. In this case, the programme notes, and the projects for the audience in particular – which include exercises in translating the play into Irish, compiling a glossary of all the Irish words in the playtext, and adding to this glossary Irish words in common currency – try to affect an intellectual shift towards the Gaelic elements of Synge's work. One of the five projects invites the audience member to reflect on W.B.

Yeats' contention that *The Playboy of the Western World* is more Irish in its artistry than any of the patriotic literature of Synge's contemporaries who were popular with the nationalists of the day.

Given both the cultural significance of Synge's *Playboy* and the socio-political climate surrounding Pan Pan's 2006 production in Dublin, Pan Pan's Chinese *Playboy* was read as an immediate metaphor for Ireland's new ethnic diversity and globalized status. Keating, reviewing for *The Irish Times*, criticises the effect of the surtitles, saying: 'instead of illuminating the action unfolding on stage, the surtitles shift the focus from the contemporary production to the original text [which] creates a space for an Irish theatre audience to satisfy their own fixed ideas about *The Playboy of the Western World*.' In an article on the same subject, she says the Hiberno-English surtitles 'created a sort of double vision for the audience in which text and performance competed with each other rather than acting as complementary forces' ('Evolving' 254). Further, she opines, 'Where Pan Pan's production in Beijing provided a fine example of how globalization brings Irish culture into contact with new cultures through immigration (among other cultural exchanges), its Irish transfer suggested the continued necessity of reformulating the (textual) boundaries upon which Irish cultural identity has been traditionally constructed' (255). I have already called into question the extent to which the Beijing production really brought audiences into contact with Irish culture. Further, I do not find the Synge-centred framing devices as problematic as Keating.

The edgy, sexualised action unfolding onstage through the linguistic medium of Mandarin Chinese certainly served to destabilise many fixed ideas an audience might have about Synge. Pan Pan's decision to surtitle the production in Hiberno-English presented its audience a challenge. The production did not frame the action unfolding onstage as something completely knowable, something eminently translatable, but rather as something to be approached from one's own cultural and linguistic

perspective. In envisioning a self-reflexive cross-cultural theatre, Lo and Gilbert stipulate that ‘the hybridizing of cultural fragments would be far from seamless: cultural tensions would not be hidden nor difference naturalized’ (Lo and Gilbert 48). The surtitles denaturalised the difference inherent in this production, and, in doing so, confronted the nationalism implicit in choosing to produce a Chinese *Playboy of the Western World* at all. They prevented the audience from Othering the languages and people on stage, and asked them instead to see the production as something in which they were deeply embedded and involved.

Reflections

Applying the contemporary ethics of this project to Synge’s practice, we find an explanation for the protests that accompanied the premiere of *The Playboy of the Western World* grounded in rights of representation. The people of the West of Ireland were involved in the authorship of *The Playboy* only as native informants; they had no agency over how their way of life was represented by Synge, a man culturally and economically removed from them. In terms of cultural capital, *The Playboy* was not advantageous to the people of Gaeltacht regions – it did not enfranchise them, and it did not play for them. In terms of socio-political effects in its performance contexts, *The Playboy* stirred up cultural and class tensions, and the discourse that arose from this controversy vilified Irish nationalists and lionised the ‘genius’ of the INTS for almost a century. Synge’s *Playboy* shows that intercultural works authored by dominant agents within a given system can and do come to represent Othered cultures in very powerful ways, the ethical problematics of their creation obscured by time and, perhaps, by national pride in the representation’s global recognition and success. If this is the case, the need for an ethics of interculturalism becomes even more pressing. Where intercultural products authored by maestros may come to define the Othered people they

represent due to symbolic capital in a global sphere of cultural production, artists with agency, not native informants, are needed within the production process to ensure rights of representation.

An ethics of intercultural exchange needs to account for collaborations that take place away from what Bharucha calls the ‘inroads of institutionalised interculturalism’ (*Politics* 30) but without failing to be aware of Orientalist modes of representation. In the case of the Pan Pan *Playboy*, geographically specific circulations of cultural capital ensured the Chinese collaborators’ agency, boosting the production’s rights of representation. Thinking through circulations of cultural capital in intercultural fields allows recognition of instances in which hegemony and dominance are reinforced, as well as instances in which conflicting agencies and ideologies are negotiated. No habitus equips an agent for success in all cultural systems. While the relations of dominance that inform the production of cultural goods remain as hidden in intercultural fields as in national ones, this chapter has shown that interrogation of cultural capital can help to identify if and when such relations need redress.

The Pan Pan *Playboy* was more culturally advantageous to Ireland than to China. This is partially due to scale. The Pan Pan *Playboy* was a significant socio-cultural event in Dublin, but a small scale happening in Beijing. Economically speaking, *The Playboy* allowed Culture Ireland to exploit the success of Ireland’s overseas cultural endeavours, creating an international profile of innovative Irish art, and fuelling the state sponsored Irish cultural brand that Lonergan outlines in *Theatre and Globalization*. The production allowed a reimagining of the Irish canon, reasserting Synge’s contemporary relevance, and providing a locus for discussion of Ireland’s new ethnic, linguistic and cultural topography. While the production was certainly more culturally significant in Irish theatre circles, it also had significant social resonances specific to China and directed at Chinese audiences. Further, through collaboration with

Pan Pan Irish arts funding has been fed into the Chinese economy of cultural practice, allowing the production of Sun's socio-politically important play, *Fight the Landlord*.

In terms of positive socio-political effects of the production in its Beijing performance context, the thematics of urbanisation and censorship present in the production are significant. The potentially insulting representation of a Uyghur Ma Shang was prevented by the agency of the translators within the economy of cultural practice. The portrait of China in the play was from a Western point of view, and this portrait upset the sensibilities of some. As argued, this issue of rights of representation might have been avoided if Sun has been the author of the adaptation; such practice would ensure that the representation of China was strongly informed by someone from within Chinese culture. In Dublin, the very act of reimagining *The Playboy* in a Chinese context had significance. While some argue that the production actually alienated the audience from the socio-political context of a changing Ireland by placing China outside Ireland, I suggest that the programme notes and surtitles encouraged audiences to see the languages and nationalities on stage as things in which they were deeply embedded and involved. They confronted what Bharucha calls the 'implicit nationalism' behind the intercultural drive in the first place. In Dublin, the sexualised Chinese female actors came to stand for China (or Ireland's Chinese diaspora); they imbued the production with Eastern 'authenticity,' even while the eroticism asked of them was Quinn's invention. In Dublin, the actors' bodies were imbued with cultural meaning that would not have been present in Beijing. As argued in Chapter One in relation to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, differing socio-political effects in changing performance contexts is a challenge to ethical intercultural practice. The choice to turn Ma Shang into a Uyghur character was also ethically questionable, placing Muslims outside the Chinese-Irish identity forged on stage, and failing to engage in any productive way with the significance of Uyghur difference.

In applying the proposed ethics of interculturalism to Pan Pan's *Playboy*, we see many intercultural relationships, working processes, and effects that strengthen rights of representation. Some of these effects are assured by circulations of capital that deny Western maestros the agency to represent Othered cultures as they see fit, and some are the product of professional bonds and relationships that grow out of relatively egalitarian intercultural practice. There are aspects of Pan Pan's rights of representation that are questionable, and perhaps of Sun and Wang's in relation to Uyghurs too, but, overall, through the involvement and agency of Chinese artists, the advantageousness of the production to Chinese and Irish individuals and cultures and the partially positive socio-political effects of the production, Pan Pan's practice is in many ways ethically admirable. The fact that the next collaboration between Sun, Wang and Pan Pan was one in which Sun had increased creative agency and generated clear socio-political effects within China, speaks to a development of this intercultural ethic.

Chapter Three: Peter Brook's *11 and 12*

Simply staged on a sand-dusted orange carpet, *11 and 12*¹⁰² is typical of Peter Brook's post-1973¹⁰³ style. The all-male international cast includes European, African, Middle Eastern and North American performers who play Malian and French roles with no attempt to make their skin colours or accents conform to the cultures and nationalities portrayed. Sparse wooden trees on casters are wheeled about to create a sense of place, and small star-shaped logs provide stools on which characters can sit to reflect and talk. At one point, a square of red cloth is bunched at each end and held between two men to become a softly swaying boat; at another, a single mahogany chair represents French colonial power. Handsome young Amadou (Tunji Lucas) plays narrator; in a simple robe of soft blue, he guides his audience through the story with energy and gravity. At the centre of the action is Tierno Bokar (Makram J. Khoury), dressed in neutral sandy shades, radiating warmth and wisdom; he rejects politics, calling for tolerance and peace and thus represents an archetype all can recognize: a holy man, gentle and deeply faithful. Sitting serenely amid cushions stage right, Brook's long-term collaborator Toshi Tsuchitori provides unobtrusive and atmospheric music that complements the slowly unfolding action. With a characteristically simple staging, Brook transforms the imposing stage of The Barbican Theatre into a mystical and meditative space.

11 and 12 is an adaptation by Marie-Hélène Estienne of Fula¹⁰⁴ writer Amadou Hampâté Bâ's semi-autobiographical book, *Vie et Enseignement de Tierno Bokar, Le Sage de Bândiagara*. Set in French colonial Mali (then Sudan) in the 1930s and 40s, the book outlines the life-story and spiritual teachings of Tierno Bokar: Tukolor¹⁰⁵ Prince

¹⁰² Seen at The Barbican, London. February 2010.

¹⁰³ On December 1st 1972, Brook took a research trip to Africa which profoundly affected his aesthetic thereafter. The trip will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

¹⁰⁴ A pastoralist West African ethnic group living in Macina (present day Mali).

¹⁰⁵ Or Toucouleur. An ethnic group closely related to the Fulani.

by birth, Sufi mystic, sage and teacher in Bândiagara, and close family friend and spiritual advisor of Hampâté Bâ. At the centre of the book, and of Brook's *11 and 12*, is a religious dispute that erupts within the Tijani branch of Sufism over whether a particular prayer – the hailahah (Whitman 24) or the pearl of perfection (Hampâté Bâ, *Inspiring Life* 40) – should be recited eleven or twelve times. Tierno Bokar privileges religious knowledge over clan loyalty and meets with Tijani mystic Sharîf Hamallah to discuss the significance of the twelfth prayer and come closer to the religious truth of the matter.

The Tijani order is a fundamentalist and egalitarian school of Sufi Islam, at its most vibrant in the nineteenth century. Sufism is an esoteric and reflective type of Islam that reacts against *taqlîd* or a religious attitude of ‘simple, blind and narrow imitation’ (Hampâté Bâ, *Inspiring Life* 155). Followers perform *ijtihād*, an effort at personal reflection, and *istikhāra*, supplication to God to remove uncertainty, in order to live as good Muslims. Sufism adheres to the teachings of the *Qur’an*, the *Sunna*¹⁰⁶ and the *Ijmā*,¹⁰⁷ but also studies and honours revelations, visions, and secret teachings. Tijani Sufism was founded by Shaykh Ahmad al-Tijani in Fes in 1784 (Whitman 155). In the 1840s it was championed by al-Hajj Umar, who was a Tukolor ruler and founder of the theocratic empire of Macina, the modern region of Mali (Whitman 155). Umar taught his followers to recite the pearl of perfection twelve times (Bâ, *Inspiring Life* 40), and Tierno Bokar and the ruling Taal clan in Bândiagara were descendents of Umar.

Sharîf Hamallah was committed to reciting the pearl of perfection eleven times, as outlined in al-Tijani's writings. As Hamallah gained in popularity as a religious leader, he became ‘the unwitting leader of an intensely active politico-religious movement’ (Whitman 24) stemming from the political discontent of his followers with

¹⁰⁶ Meaning ‘Custom’: the sayings and deeds of the prophet, a source of jurisprudence (Bâ, *Inspiring Life* 116)

¹⁰⁷ Meaning ‘Consensus’: the sayings and deeds of the companions of the prophet, a source of jurisprudence (ibid).

the compliance and collaboration of the dominant Umarian Tijani with the French (24). The French administration became involved, reckoning all those with twelve beads on their rosaries to be anti-imperialist subversives and ignoring the spiritual underpinnings of the issue. Bokar's spiritually motivated conversion to the way of the eleven was understood by his Taal family as a betrayal and he became an outcast. Hamallah was exiled by the French administration, and died in France in 1943.

As Shawn-Marie Garrett observes, Peter Brook's eschewal of the trappings of conventional theatricality 'virtually guarantees his enshrinement in the pantheon of significant twentieth-century theatre directors' (Garrett 101). Along with this enshrinement, as we have seen, comes the less savoury legacy of epitomising, for many scholars, an ethically questionable interculturalism: an ideology that smuggles Eurocentric Orientalism onto Western stages under a cloak of universalist ideals. Patrice Pavis believes that *11 and 12* 'reveals the considerable evolution of intercultural theatre since the beginnings of interculturalism in the 1970s' ('Today' 12). He argues that in reference to Africa, 'Brook avoids any kind of exotic performance thanks to his use of actors of different origins, thanks to a very warm way of lighting the show, and to simple and poor objects' (13). According to Pavis, these directorial tropes make Brook's Africa and Islam universal: that is to say, representative of all humanity rather than of a specific people in a specific time or place. While respectfully acknowledging the great contribution that Brook has made to contemporary Western theatre practice throughout his long and pioneering career, this chapter shows that due to the ideological concerns of the situations in which it played, *11 and 12* is about Africa and Islam rather than about a universal condition. Interrogating the mystified ideologies of universalism and simplicity inherent in Brook's practice, the chapter argues that the figure of Tierno Bokar has a political history and present and, accordingly, *11 and 12*'s universalism ultimately reinscribes representations of Africa and Islam that serve Western agendas. It

argues that the figure of Tierno Bokar was originally propagated because it was palatable to Western audiences, suited to Western mores, and useful to Western cultural imperialism, and that *11 and 12* functions to reinforce epistemological divides, not uncover links that exist between cultures.

This chapter outlines Brook's celebrity in terms of cultural capital in the global field of cultural production, and the privilege and agency with which this capital endows him. It assesses *11 and 12*'s benefit to all collaborators and also how it operates in a global regime of value, before moving on to examine a number of possible ethical readings of the production's aesthetic. Then, it outlines how and why *11 and 12* was read politically in its performance contexts, in spite of the apparent apolitical and spiritual intentions of Tierno Bokar in both Brook's staging and Hampâté Bâ's text. Next, it argues that Brook's work is Kantian, and, using Brook's relationship with Africa as a lens, it reads his mysticism and his lionising within the culture industry in the Bourdieusian framework of mystification of art more broadly. Finally, this chapter uses a historical perspective to interrogate the politics of class and colony that have had a significant role in shaping the figure of Tierno Bokar as presented to Western audiences. It argues that the play's anti-imperialist politics, though well meaning, are ultimately disempowering for Islamic cultures and for postcolonial peoples.

11 and 12 and the Brook Brand

11 and 12 was developed from an earlier, shorter staging of the same story called *Tierno Bokar*, which played at the Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord (CIRT's¹⁰⁸ Parisian home) alongside the equally spiritually reflective pieces *The Grand Inquisitor* and *The Death of Krishna*. *Tierno Bokar* had already played in the United States and United Kingdom (at Columbia University and the University of Warwick respectively), before

¹⁰⁸ Centre International de Recherche Théâtrale/ International Centre for Theatre Research

rehearsals began for Estienne's full length adaptation. *11 and 12* opened at the Bouffes du Nord in 2010 and toured for seven months internationally. With its Malian story, international cast and links to Grotowski's Wroclow centre (where the ensemble workshopped and rehearsed the production), it was a recognisable example of Brook's brand of intercultural theatre, and attracted the celebrated director's many fans.

Lo and Gilbert position most intercultural theatre practice on a continuum between two binaries – collaborative interculturalism and imperialist interculturalism. The latter is characterised by 'a sense of Western culture as bankrupt and in need of invigoration from the non-West' (39). Further, '[t]he resulting theatre tends to tap into "Other" cultural traditions that are perceived as "authentic" and uncontaminated by (Western) modernity. Intercultural practice in this mode is largely an aesthetic response to cultural diversity' (39). Lo and Gilbert suggest that imperialist theatre tends to have 'a discernible difference in agency between partners' (39), a difference which often has its roots in history. A Bourdieusian analysis of the economy of cultural practice in which intercultural theatre functions is designed to complicate binaries that have typically dominated intercultural discourse. As Chapters One and Two in particular have shown, this kind of analysis allows assessment of the scale of unequal power relations between collaborators and helps to situate specific intercultural productions and practices on the continuum between collaboration and imperialism Lo and Gilbert describe. In the case of Brook and *11 and 12*, Bourdieusian analysis leaves many traditional binaries in place. As one of the most celebrated theatre directors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Brook's symbolic capital places him in a very advantageous position in relation to the global economy of cultural practice. Bourdieu says:

When one knows that symbolic capital is credit, but in the broadest sense, a kind of advance, a credence, that only the

group's belief can grant those who give it the best symbolic and material guarantees, it can be seen that the exhibition of symbolic capital (which is always very expensive in material terms) is one of the mechanisms which (no doubt universally) makes capital go to capital. (*Logic* 120)

Brook's symbolic capital transforms itself into social, economic and cultural capital in a globalized sphere of cultural practice. It is a kind of credit. In much the same way that in the context of the market an agent may manage to 'conclude a deal without laying out a penny in cash, either by mobilizing a number of guarantors, or, even better, by virtue of the credit and the capital of trust that stems from a reputation for honour as well as wealth' (Bourdieu, *Logic* 119), Brook's reputation is such that work like *11 and 12* will play at international festivals and on the main stages of Western metropolitan centres regardless of its content. This is not to say that Brook's reputation has not been hard won, nor that his work lacks intrinsic value. Rather, it is to recognise that Brook is a successfully functioning brand, and that a climate of belief in his 'genius' makes him a maestro in Bharucha's sense, giving him a significant amount of agency to represent Othered cultures according to his individual and cultural tastes and desires. As such, the ethics of his representations and processes deserve serious attention.

11 and 12's Advantageousness to all Artists Involved

There is strong evidence to suggest that Brook's practice is, in the main, advantageous to the artists involved in his production process. Since his accrual of three million dollars in funding from the Ford Foundation, the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Anderson Foundation and UNESCO in 1970 (Williams, 'Innocence' 3; Brook, *Threads* 155-159), Brook has been in an unprecedented position in the global economy of cultural practice. In Paris, this position enabled him to use theatre for research rather than for

entertainment, importantly shifting focus from product to process, something which differentiates his work from the imperialist interculturalism that Lo and Gilbert define. His dedication to his art, and his desire to carve out pioneering paths in what he saw as an increasingly moribund or deadly theatrical tradition, meant that he chose to use the economic capital he secured not to fund touring spectacles that would gain him increased notoriety and fame, but to found the CIRT. Working with an international company of actors, he asked through practice what theatre is, what it can do, and if it can be rid of tired convention in order to communicate meaningfully with people regardless of their backgrounds.

For Brook, the purpose of this work ‘is to be instruments that transmit truths which otherwise would remain out of sight’ (*Shifting* 107). Read in conjunction with his writings on The Holy Theatre in *The Empty Space*, it is clear that Brook’s work at the CIRT aimed to reinvigorate theatre with a vital and even sacred function. While this might be a difficult concept for a secular mind to grasp, one concrete result of the transfer of focus from product to process is that it gives actors agency. Although Brook is an advocate of the necessity of the director - claiming that ‘for actors to develop something alone, they would need to be creatures so highly developed that they would hardly need rehearsal either’ (*Empty* 109) – his process, his focus on research and communication, offers the actors who work with him creative freedom and the opportunity to develop their craft and express themselves in a way that feels personal and truthful. As a symbolically and economically powerful director, Brook has the luxury to provide this experience for his actors in a way that a director forced to focus on product does not. Within his production processes, Brook’s capital circulates in a way that allows all collaborating parties agency.

For Maximilien Seweryn, who played a number of roles within the *11 and 12* ensemble, Brook's direction allowed him an engagement with the story of the play uncommon within other theatre practice:

I know that Brook is unique, in a way, because you never usually get that much freedom and that much time. He talks to you. He lets you think. [...] He's never going to make a 15 minute speech about the philosophy of the Tijani or whatever. [...] He leaves the actor the space to find himself. That's why you see his actors and you think 'they're so true, they're so simple.' Because they found it themselves. (340)

Khoury describes the creative process of *11 and 12* as 'highly collaborative' (Interview 331) and says that Brook is 'very patient with his actors, trusting you will understand things in due time through the process and giving you all the freedom to develop' (Interview 331). Further, Brook's process gives his collaborators the chance to engage deeply with the specificities of the stories they are enacting. For example, Seweryn was given the chance to take a research trip to Bândiagara, to encounter the 'places, people, atmospheres, smells' (Interview 351) of Tierno Bokar's story. Of this, he says:

That's why it's so amazing to work with Peter Brook, because you just go so deep into the thing that you're doing. [...] You take the time so that it can really be part of your body, so that it can mature inside of you before you do the first show, which is a luxury, I think. (Interview 351)

The Otherness of international actors and stories helped Brook to gain his reputation, and continues to enhance his symbolic capital today. At the same time, for many of the actors he works with, collaborating with Brook is undoubtedly a boost to their symbolic capital and their distinction in both local and global economies of

cultural practice. This is made more valuable by the fact that Brook often disregards the symbolic capital represented by institutional training, allowing his capital to circulate to those with less official distinction within the field. As Seweryn explains:

he doesn't think at all about the influence of technique on an actor. He'll never think 'oh this guy didn't go to RADA so I'm not going to take him.' I was not trained when I started to work with Peter Brook. [...] he's looking for personalities, he's looking for human beings before actors. (Interview 344)

On the evidence of the actors, capital certainly seems to circulate within the production process in a manner that advantages all involved. The international demographic of actors Brook chooses means that this capital does not stay within one national regime of value, but is disseminated widely. However, it deserves mention that in casting *11 and 12*, Brook attempts to transcend skin colour, nationality, ethnicity, accent, and, in some cases, age, but not gender. The two representations of female characters in this play, “a comic anxious mother and a shrewish widow” (Morse), are delivered in a caricatured manner by pouting or shrieking male actors. This might indicate that Brook thinks of gender as a physical marker of difference that is fixed, or one that is not important to destabilise in pursuit of universalism. The many admirable aspects of Brook's working process notwithstanding, *11 and 12*'s all male cast indicates that the benefit attached to involvement in Brook's production was not open to all artists regardless of their demographics.

***11 and 12* in a Global Economy of Cultural Practice.**

While Brook's production processes are in many ways exemplary, the logic behind his intercultural theatre experiments, explored in part through the analysis of his *Mahabharata* in the introduction, often seems in accordance with the imperialist mode

of practice outlined by Lo and Gilbert. *11 and 12* is informed by this logic and operates, in a variety of ways, to reproduce Western dominance in the global economy of cultural practice. In a 1973 interview with Margaret Croydon, Brook says:

The world, at the moment, is, perhaps, divided into two very distinct categories. In parts of the world, people can rediscover meaning in what they are doing through a return to their roots. In the West, a particular global culture is shifting and is made up from hundreds and hundreds of sources. [...] What is very typical today is a very complex mass of elements coming into this floating urban culture. If only we had the *simple authenticity* of a person born in one place who is all of a piece with his neighbours. (Brook qtd. in Croydon 98/99, my emphasis)

In *11 and 12*, Brook tells the story of an Othered nation, a nation that he regards as simple and authentic. Africa is spoken for by Europe and the resultant simple representation is intended to bring complex Western audiences back to roots. This kind of philosophy denies multiple modernities, and, as the work below will argue, gives rise to a discourse that primitivises, essentializes and disempowers. In a Saidian sense, Brook speculates about Othered people in a way that denies Othered people the right to represent themselves. Malian actor Abdou Ouloguem is a part of the *11 and 12* ensemble, but other than this link to the story's country of origin, there is little evidence of any attempt to make the capital objectified¹⁰⁹ by this production work to the advantage of Malian theatre artists, or to pump any capital into the Malian economy of cultural practice. In Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's formulation, 'imperialism continues to control the economy, politics and cultures of Africa [. . . while] pitted against it are the ceaseless struggles of African people to liberate their economy, politics, and culture

¹⁰⁹ I am using the word 'objectify' here in Bourdieu's sense, whereby cultural capital can exist in embodied, objectified or institutionalised states (*Homo Academicus* 243-248)

from that Euro-American-based stranglehold [. . . and . . .] to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space' (4). While one could argue that interest generated in West African Sufism and Malian history by this high profile production injects symbolic capital into the Malian economy of cultural practice, overall, *11 and 12* seems to keep Africa in the Euro-American cultural stranglehold wa Thiong'o describes (4). In this regard, it feels like the gathering of authentic, marketable cultural resources from postcolonial countries that Bharucha so strongly critiques in his scholarship ('View'; *Politics*). Further, when there are no/few members of the culture represented in the target audience, the way it seems appropriate to represent that culture changes. As Patrick Lonergan argues, localising details negatively affect a production's success in the global market (*Globalization* 85-89). Ric Knowles shows that international contexts can transform 'strong and culturally specific work into mere representation' (*Material* 182). In *11 and 12*, the specificities of Hampâté Bâ's story are glossed over, resulting in a universal parable that speaks easily to Western audiences. For Karen Fricker, 'the world has radically changed in the six decades that Brook has been making theater, and the African and Middle Eastern cultures to which he historically toured his work in the 1970s are now creating their own productions for export' ('*11 and 12*'). The continued success of both Brook's filtrations of Othered stories and a Eurocentric interculturalism is testament to the continuing power of symbolic capital to produce Orientalist modes of representation.

Ethical Readings of *11 and 12*'s Aesthetic

Although *11 and 12* works to the benefit of the West in a global economy of cultural practice, the mise-en-scène contains elements that can, in Gaut's sense, non-trivially teach us, and thus have ethical effects. Shawn-Marie Garrett describes a conversation

between Brook and Croydon at Columbia University, where the director says that while *Tierno Bokar* is not about Iraq there is a clear parallel between the lessons the U.S. has failed to learn in the early-twenty-first century and the lessons the French failed to learn in the early-twentieth century (101). This confluence is part of the ethical content of the aesthetic – the way in which the production adopts a moral position in relation to the events portrayed.

Makram J. Khoury, who played Bokar, told me in interview that it is the political undercurrent of the play that makes it universally relevant:

Stories like this are universal as long as colonialism exists. *11 and 12* is an undertone, a metaphor. The basic element in the doctrines of colonialism is ‘divide and win.’ Modern colonialism has changed outfits: from the military to ties and suits controlling the economy and cultures of the Other. The uprisings of the peoples of North Africa recently against their tyrant leaders who were supported by the West, [means that tyrants] are leaving these countries through the window, but, they are returning through the main door in the name of democracy. The artist can and should represent the people of Other nationalities and cultures. Moral and ethical issues should concern us all. (Khoury 333)

Seweryn also thinks that the political lesson of the play designates it a universal story:

This *11 and 12* thing can be seen in many places in the world. In Iraq, between the Sunni and the Shia, in the Lebanon between the Christians and the Muslims, in Israel between the Arabs and the Jews. It’s a universal story. That’s why Brook wanted to do it, I think. He picked a good time to do it. (Interview 349)

Seweryn and Khoury's points about the play's political import are astute. As performers, they saw wider political relevance in the story they told of colonial Mali – relating the happenings to global events that are a part of a modern ethical consciousness. The kind of universalism they laud is productive. It compels recognition of the realities of neo-colonialism and of the political tensions that exist between many different spiritual groups. It is a universalism that Appiah might label cosmopolitanism (*Cosmopolitanism*) and Paul Gilroy might label convivalism (*Empire*). It points to history to show precedents for specific political injustices in the present. Insofar as this cosmopolitanism is present in Brook's staging, the play makes an important ethical demand on the spectator.

Eric Kornhaber reads Brook's take on the story as largely apolitical, but gives this political quietude an ethical value. Speaking about *Tierno Bokar* (2004), Kornhaber says that, in lieu of political engagement, the play fosters understanding of Sufi Islam at a time when understanding between Islam and Christianity is key. For Kornhaber, 'Brook presents Islam as a system of beliefs too profound to be simplified or interpreted, too important to be overly concerned with politics' (30). Further, he says that the 'much-vaunted theme of tolerance at the play's centre is actually a cipher: the play's tale of attempted charity and reconciliation ends in utter failure, and Brook seems as determined to portray the faults and intolerances of Islam as to foster easy cross-cultural acceptance' (28). Kornhaber's reading is strong in dialogue with the profundity of religious belief apparent in the play. Many of the mystical moments – for example, Bokar's profession to Hamallah that he recognises in him a divine superior – ask the audience to concentrate on the spiritual rather than the political import of the choices Bokar makes. However, as an exploration of the deliberately Christianised elements of Bokar's Sufism in *Vie et Enseignement de Tierno Bokar* will show, Kornhaber's idea that the call for tolerance is a cipher, while complex interaction with Islam is Brook's

core concern, is contentious. Kornhaber points out that in Brook's *Tierno Bokar*, 'We are given no background on the tenets or practices of West African Sufism, no explanation as to why the prayer dispute has proven so significant, no reconciliation for the story's seemingly disparate threads, not even the briefest description of the all important "Pearl of Perfection"' (29). This observation is very applicable to *11 and 12*. However, to read this observation contrary to Kornhaber's argument, it is difficult to see how stripping the story of locally/geographically specific referents really encourages engagement with Muslim world views. Islam, and particularly Sufi Islam, is not the same everywhere. The 'incomprehensible minutiae' Kornhaber mentions are not recondite, but have concrete political and spiritual histories. The lack of nuance in *11 and 12* in this regard works against real engagement with difference, leaving only a transcendently spiritual shell of what emerges from Hampâté Bâ's writings as a grounded and embodied spiritual way of life. It masks the fact that, as will be shown below, the form of Sufism portrayed in *11 and 12* is one originally promulgated by the French colonial administration largely because of its appeal to Christian sensibilities. Further, from Kornhaber's observations it might equally be argued that *11 and 12* reinforces stereotypes of Islam, insofar as it offers primarily spiritual motivations for actions that many audience members would interpret politically. Just as Western publics are told that suicide bombers act so they will be martyrs, and thus posthumously rewarded, Brook's audiences are asked to concentrate on the spiritual rather than the material aspects of the story of Tierno Bokar – aspects which render it incomprehensibly Other.

There is much more one could say about the ethical content of *11 and 12*'s aesthetic. For example, one could point out that if the message of the play is that persecuted people should behave tolerantly like Bokar, there would be no resistance to oppression. Or one could argue that in *11 and 12*'s message that purity is in the man,

not the place – that, as Bokar tells Amadou, ‘You could find God in my courtyard, in the market, in the commandant's office, even in whole in the tooth of a pig’ (11 and 12) – there is an implicit plea, strongly rooted in Sufi wisdom, to change political systems from the inside, rather than revolt against dominant forces. These kinds of readings of the aesthetic have ethical implications and are deserving of further examination, but they must always be somewhat conjectural. They take on most ethical weight when related to the socio-political concerns of the play’s performance contexts, to the specific sites at which the meaning of representations is produced

The Politics of the Apolitical: Meaning and Performance Contexts

Walking slowly shoulder to shoulder across the stage three times, Bokar and Hamallah (Antonio Gil Martinez) enact an unrushed and meaningful religious congress. Each crossing of the stage represents a night spent together in prayer and reflection. Slow and deliberate, the men walk in time, their flowing robes, beatific expressions, and gentle elegance otherworldly. Their shared concern is God, not Tijani or colonial politics. At the end of this calm and contemplative scene, Bokar accepts Hamallah as his spiritual elder and adopts the eleven prayers. Bokar is a man who hopes, at his death, to have more enemies to whom he has done nothing than friends. In his search for deeper spiritual truth, he is tolerant of all. When a colonial official comes to offer Bokar a position within the administration, the Sufi sage treats him with warmth, but explains respectfully that he refuses to serve France not because he reviles imperialism (indeed, later, he encourages his protégé Amadou to return to French school), but because a man cannot serve two masters, and his master is God.

Despite the fact that the scene in which Tierno Bokar meets Hamallah to discuss the dispute offers little to suggest that Bokar adopts the eleven prayers to heal the rift, and that at numerous points in the play Bokar’s spiritual commitments are offered as the

primary motivation for his actions, *11 and 12* played in socio-political contexts which lead to the holy man's actions being read politically. The political aspect of the relationship between Islam and Christianity is so much a feature of the 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 'Dramatic'; *Revolution*) of the early-twenty-first century that when a play deals with Islamic themes it is bound to be located in this contemporary concern. Rather than reading Bokar as a transcultural archetype, audiences read his difference and, because they do, Brook's *11 and 12* is a play about Africa and Islam. Brook's aesthetic – his international cast, Tsushchuri's world music, the simple staging – cannot make *11 and 12* a universal story.

Pavis argues that because the story of Tierno Bokar is historical it has 'little in common with our current life' (13). When he leaves the Bouffes du Nord he finds himself in a Paris characterised by 'other ways of living, other transplanted cultures, a whole new politics of migrations and of the circulations of minorities' (13). In viewing the story as at once historical and universal, he seems to be able to divorce it from the riots of disaffected youths, largely of North African and Islamic heritage, that took place in the banlieues of Paris in 2005, or, perhaps, from the horror of what happened to protesting Algerians on the streets of the same city in 1961. However, Pavis's reading of the motivations of Bokar and Hamallah in *11 and 12* betrays the fact that he very much locates the story in a paradigm of 'our current life.' In his reading, 'the play shows two religious individuals in conflict because of futile theological arguments. When confronted with the French colonial administration they will finally be reconciled' (12). Brook's Bokar and Hamallah never understand themselves to be engaged in 'futile theological arguments,' and the play offers little reason to locate the characters' reconciliation in anti-colonial sentiments. The meaning of the play for its audiences, it seems, has much more to do with the political concerns of the present moment than Pavis would admit.

Reviewers Garrett, Kate Kellaway, and Charles Spencer argue, albeit from different political persuasions, that the play's concentration on spirituality, mysticism and martyrdom at the expense of nuanced or contemporarily relevant political engagement can be frustrating, preventing it from speaking meaningfully to the moral and political concerns of its performance contexts. Reviewing for *The Telegraph*, Spencer says:

The problem is that Brook is preaching to the converted.

Lessons about love, peace and tolerance go down very well among the bien pensants in the Barbican. But they are not being delivered to those Muslims who believe that it is their duty to strap explosives to their bodies to blow up their enemies.

(Spencer, '11 and 12')

One might counter, of course, that the taxes of the 'converted' pay soldiers who believe it is their duty to destroy Afghani farmers' poppy fields or to bomb the homes of Iraqi civilians (and, as recent disciplinary hearings against UK and US soldiers involved in Iraq and Afghanistan have shown, some who do much worse). Both Christians and Muslims perpetrate acts of destruction and violence in the name of higher causes, and it is emphatically not the case that a Barbican audience has nothing to learn about tolerance and understanding. Further, critical reception of the play shows that audiences did not receive the play as a 'cosy history and philosophy lesson' (Spencer, '11 and 12'), but, like Pavis, read it against its spiritual grain, finding political motivations in Brook's transcendent Bokar.

Two reviewers (Leo Benedictus; Ruth Morse) compare the religious dispute over the prayer, represented by a single prayer bead, to the Lilliputian dispute in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* over the correct way to crack an egg. Swift's clever satire of the political motivations behind the changing religious affiliations of the

British crown in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries highlights the often pragmatic nature of professed religious belief. In using such a metaphor to understand the dispute in *11 and 12*, critics assume the arbitrary nature of religious practice rather than engaging with the possibility of spiritual truth. Where Pavis reads Bokar's motivation in terms of anti-French sentiment, reviewers Paul Taylor and Karen Fricker see Bokar's decision to adopt the eleven prayers of the rival clan differently: as a political move, albeit a spiritually motivated one, designed to create peace between Umarian and Tijani factions.

As argued, Brook's Bokar chooses the way of eleven not to bring an end to the dispute, but because he recognizes in Hamallah a mystic who, although younger in years than he, is older in spirit. Even where this is recognised by Western scholars, it is placed within a contemporary political framework. Kornhaber, in praise of *Tierno Bokar* remarks: 'it is something of a marvel to see Islam depicted as a religion that inspires not only violent martyrdom or fundamentalist politics, but deep moments of wholly apolitical, intensely spiritual introspection' (30). A similar phenomenon is true of scholars of Hampâté Bâ's writing. Louis Brenner, in his introduction to *A Spirit of Tolerance: The Inspiring Life of Tierno Bokar*,¹¹⁰ notes that through Tierno Bokar 'we hear a voice of Islam of a kind that has been almost totally obscured by the anger and militancy of many contemporary Muslims' ('Introduction' xvi). The obsession with a violent Islam that informs post- (and much pre-) 9/11 critical thought in the West is strongly present in responses to the story, making *11 and 12* inherently political. One could argue that the proliferation of these political interpretations of *11 and 12* signals an intentional ambiguity as to Bokar's motivations in Brook's staging, although this

¹¹⁰ An edited English language version of *Vie et Enseignement de Tierno Bokar, Le Sage de Bândiagara*

seems at odds with Brook's own comments on the play,¹¹¹ and is certainly contrary to his and Estienne's source material.

Hampâté Bâ's writing leaves the reader in no doubt as to Hamallah's divine superiority and Bokar's spiritual motivation. Hamallah proves that he is a blessed and divinely appointed individual – what Hampâté Bâ calls 'the Pole of the Time' (54) – at numerous points in the narrative. For example, when Hamallah is a young man, an eminent Shaykh writes a secret name of Allah in the sand and asks him if he recognises it from life or from dreams. Hamallah not only recognises the secret name, but is able to correct an error in the Shaykh's spelling, proving that the name has been revealed to him by God (Bâ, 'Inspiring Life' 54). Further, we are told that Bokar, years before meeting Hamallah, was initiated into a secret prediction that a spiritual master (or Pole) would appear within the Tijaniyya and reinvigorate the order in the face of *Wahhabism*¹¹² (Hampâté Bâ 39). When Bokar meets Hamallah, he tells him of a dream sent to him by God seven days after an *istikhāra*. In the dream, Bokar and the enemies of Hamallah are covered with heat sores. They come to a pool, but are forbidden by a winged man to drink until the pool's owner arrives. A cloud of winged men appear and enter the pool, but Bokar and his company are not permitted to follow them. A second and third cloud of winged men enter the pool, but once more Bokar and his company are not permitted entrance. Hampâté Bâ has Bokar tell Hamallah:

Behind the third cloud, there appeared a man on a horse. The rider was masked, and he held a rosary in his hand. [...]

¹¹¹ Paul Taylor recounts Brook's reactions to political critiques of *11 and 12* thus: "I would not want to engage directly with the criticisms but say something parallel to them," says Brook. He argues that, rather than stage the kind of even in-depth debates you can find in newspapers and on television "the theatre should be about touching something of the hidden feeling behind certain events, of bringing the invisible into palpable life. For one moment, one's own emotional prejudices can be opened. The English, of course, have a terror of mysticism even though Shakespeare is drenched with it very deeply and with a sense of something that we can't name."

¹¹² 'Wahhabism is an Islamicist movement that doctrinally espouses a return to the origins of Islam as recorded in the Qur'an and in the traditions of the prophet as the basis for all aspects of Muslim life' (Brenner, 'Introduction' xxv).

A gust of wind made the horse's mane stand upright and
caused the face-covering of the horseman's turban to slip away.
I attest before God that I now realize that the face which
appeared to me then was yours. (Hampâté Bâ 76-78)

Readers of the book are steered forcibly toward a spiritual reality, to a Sufi world-view in which there is religious truth. There is no doubt that, for Hampâté Bâ's characters, the proper recitation of the pearl of perfection is of much more real import than the cracking of an egg. However, wherever *11 and 12* played, despite the spiritual focus of Brook's dramaturgy, social context won out; it was the play's politics, not its spirituality, that the theatre-going Westerners could relate to. Where the ostensibly universal/spiritual is read in terms of the particular/political, it is important to, firstly, interrogate the ideological underpinnings of the former and, secondly, consider the effects of representations in relation to the latter.

Mysticism and Primitivism: Brook's Universalism and Africa

Brook has a reputation as 'master of mysticism' (Taylor, 'Spirituality'), and his oeuvre is imbued with the concerns of his spiritual life. When interviewer Croydon questions him on the otherworldliness associated with him, he answers reluctantly: 'I think every human being, if he stops to reflect for a moment, would recognize (as I do) that 99.9% of universal experience is completely outside one's own possibilities of understanding' (qtd. in Croydon 275). Brook's autobiography, *Threads of Time*, is much more open about the centrality of spiritual searching, exploration and wisdom to his life and work. It details his discovery of and devotion to the spiritual teachings of Gurdjieff, a mystic who believed that human beings are not properly conscious of reality because they live in a state of waking sleep. *The Empty Space* also provides evidence of the importance of religion and spiritualism to Brook's conception of theatre work. For Brook, The Holy

Theatre tries to make the invisible visible: theatre has its origins in rituals that made the invisible incarnate, but ‘apart from certain Oriental theatres these rituals have either been lost or remain in seedy decay’ (*Empty* 45). Further, evidence of the close ties between Brook’s mysticism and his art is available from even a cursory examination of his oeuvre, where concerns of religion, deities, spirituality and the supernatural are central. From *The Conference of the Birds*, to *The Mahabharata*, to *The Grand Inquisitor* (2004), to the film of Gurdjieff’s semi-autobiographical book *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (1979), to *11 and 12*, the mystical, the invisible and the spiritual are integral parts of Brook’s art.

On December 1st 1972, Brook took a research trip to Africa which has shaped much, if not all, of his work since. The trip comprised a group of about thirty people, including actors from the CIRT, a writer, Brook’s personal assistant, a stage manager, a French government observer, a photographer for *Life* magazine, a musical director, a team of Safari specialists from an English firm called Minitrek, and, for a time, a five man film crew and Brook and Natasha Parry’s two children (Heilpern 37). The trip was an attempt both to rid the troupe of conventions and to discover a universal language through performance. Brook decries the fact that so many people find these functions abstract and difficult to comprehend, claiming that when he told people in Africa of the goal of his enterprise he unerringly found approval and acceptance. When Africans asked him why he and his group were there, his answer took only one sentence: ‘We are trying to see if communication is possible between people from many different parts of the world’ (*Threads* 180). Brook recounts: ‘This would be translated, the old men would murmur, nod their heads understandingly, and the chief would invariably say. “That is very good. You are welcome here”’ (*Threads* 180).

The ideological underpinnings of Brook’s art, though mystified, are Kantian. His attempts to escape conventions to approach universal aesthetic experience are akin to

the attempt to escape concepts (adopt a pure gaze) to apprehend universal beauty. Brook has a spiritually inspired belief in a universally shared human experience that underpins his right to represent Othered people and cultures. On the one hand, this universalism can affirm a respect for all people and a cosmopolitan ethics of care for those who are culturally and geographically removed from us. On the other hand, the obvious critiques of this position are very similar to the critiques that have long been made of Kant: this kind of universalism is based on an ungrounded assumption that everyone is somehow the same underneath, it imagines an impossible human space outside of historical, cultural and social experience, and definition of that which counts as universally beautiful is in the hands of a privileged elite.

In his *Critique of Judgement*, Kant distinguishes the beautiful from the agreeable and from the good. For Kant, the beautiful is that which, without concepts, pleases universally. In Kant's theory of cognition the 'imagination' receives and organises information given to us by our senses, while the 'understanding' applies learned concepts to this information (Kant *Pure; Practical*). When we find something beautiful we do so without using the understanding – without applying concepts; instead, we allow the sense data organised by the imagination to fill us with delight. Because we have not applied concepts to this data, the feeling of delight experienced is not a result of any personal bias or preference, but, rather, a result of a quality of the object itself. This quality is beauty. Others, if they also regarded the object without applying any concepts (adopted a pure gaze, or an aesthetic attitude), would also find the object beautiful. Thus beauty is universal (Kant, *Judgement* 45-96).

Bourdieu distinguishes between the taste of distinction - the taste of the dominant classes - and the taste of necessity - the taste of the dominated classes: popular taste. The former he ironically calls the 'pure gaze' and historicizes in terms of Kantian aesthetics. Kant strove 'to distinguish disinterestedness, the sole guarantor of the

specifically aesthetic quality of contemplation, from the interest of reason which defines the good,' while 'working-class people expect every image to explicitly perform a function, if only that of a sign, and their judgements make reference, often explicitly, to the norms of morality or agreeableness' (Bourdieu, *Distinction* 5). For Bourdieu, the pure gaze is both 'a historical invention linked to the emergence of an autonomous field of artistic production' and a 'product of history reproduced by education' (3). It is rooted in an ethos which 'presents the aesthetic disposition as a universally valid principle and takes the bourgeois denial of the social world to its limit' (5). Bridget Fowler argues that for Bourdieu 'the prevalent approach to cultural production is represented by an essentially religious attitude to the operation of a mystery' (*Cultural* 43). Locked into the aesthetic ideology of a Kantian pure gaze, it becomes barbarous to ask what art is for. Culture is the 'present incarnation of the sacred' (Bourdieu, *Distinction* xiii), its value indisputable to initiates of high culture, and its worth and purpose ostensibly irrelevant to those who have the taste to appreciate art for art's sake. This devotion to the fetish of art, and the positioning of its value as 'universal' if one's gaze is sufficiently pure, serves to mystify the circulation of cultural capital in the field of artistic production. Those socialised and educated to have Kantian taste enjoy the social privilege that goes hand in hand with their aesthetic preferences, but this advantage is obscured by quasi-religious rhetoric of the universal and indisputable value of high art. Bourdieu's analysis demonstrates the ways in which a field of cultural production based on Kantian aesthetics subtly reinscribes dominance and capitalist values through socialisation, education and ideology.

Bourdieu stresses the historical production of taste; we can stress the historical production of Brook's desire for unconventionality and simplicity. Bourdieu takes issue with the idea that any judgement of taste can be valid for everyone insofar as his anthropological and sociological field-work shows an enormous variety of tastes (which

he explains in terms of different kinds of habitus); we can take issue with the idea that there is an ‘empty space,’ an ‘ideal audience,’ or a theatrical encounter that can happen outside of any sort of cultural convention. We can opine, as Bharucha does, that ‘there is no “pure” universal base for intercultural practice within theatre, or for that matter, in any other art form’ (*Politics* 36). Writing on *Tierno Bokar* for *Performing Arts Journal*, Lenora Champagne delights in the spirituality, wisdom and lightness of the production, and observes that ‘this African Muslim tale felt as universal as we in the West like to think Shakespeare is’ (111). Bourdieusian thought compels us to problematise the universal that Champagne attests to here – to ask who has the habitus to apprehend it, to ask who it advantages and disadvantages. A Kantian reading of Brook’s mysticism and universalism is not intended to act as a critique of spiritually motivated art. Rather, it functions to interrogate Brook’s reasons for locating simplicity, emptiness and ‘roots’ in Africa, and to allow the scope to explore ramifications – in terms of symbolic capital – of Westerners telling Othered stories as if they are universal.

In making Africa simple and pure where Europe is complex and polluted, Brook’s universalism primitivises Othered people and cultures, making *them* nature to *our* culture. David Moody convincingly shows that Brook’s writings on the CIRT Africa trip continually reinforce an ‘image of the innocent and “simple” African audience’ (36) and that they construct Africa and Africans as monolithic categories. He is highly critical of the positioning of the African audience as a tabula rasa, and Africa as ‘the true context of the famous “empty space”’ (36), pointing out that Brook ignored the many theatres operating in the African regions he visited, preferring to find instead the ideal, simple audiences he went looking for. Cuttingly, Moody remarks ‘While the “Africans” may be part of the universalist jigsaw, it is left to the European specialist of research from the aptly named Centre to fully know that part, and to “universalise” it in shows like *The Conference of the Birds* and *The Mahabharata*’ (37). This insight is

immanently applicable to *11 and 12*, where Hampâté Bâ's nuanced story is both simplified and mystified, allowing Brook to decide what is universally relevant and what is not.

Brook's writings on the African trip, to be found primarily in *The Shifting Point* and *Threads of Time*, stress primordialism, simplicity, purity and lack of cultural convention. He says, 'We went to Africa because in the theatre the audience is as powerful a creative element in the primal event as the actor' (*Shifting* 125), and, further, 'what we wanted to do in Africa was to go to what could be considered an optimum audience – an audience vivid in its responses and having a total openness to forms, because it has not in any way been conditioned by Western forms' (127). In Bourdieu's conception, artists and intellectuals often 'have affinities with the ascetic aspect of aesthetics and are inclined to support all artistic revolutions conducted in the name of purity and purification,' refusing 'ostentation and the bourgeois taste for ornament' (*Distinction* 176). Elsewhere, Bourdieu notes that 'in the mythology of artists and intellectuals, whose outflanking and double-negating strategies sometimes lead them back to "popular" tastes and opinions, the "people" so often play a role not unlike that of the peasantry in the conservative ideologies of the declining aristocracy' (*Distinction* 62). That is to say, 'the people,' or the Othered group, are seen as simple, pastoral, and representative of a purer, simpler time 'before' the decay that a dominant class perceives to accompany its downfall – before the stagnation that Brook is convinced characterises deadly Western performance culture.

An anecdote from Heilpern's account of the African trip helps to illustrate the disempowering effects of this quest for purity on African peoples. Brook travelled to Niger in advance of the trip to obtain permission to play in rural areas and villages from the country's president. The fact that a theatre director could engineer a meeting with and extract a promise from Niger's president is testament to Brook's symbolic capital

on a global level. However, according to Heilpern, when Brook and the CIRT arrived in Agades, the *préfet* of the province refused them permission to play, being particularly suspicious of the French film crew accompanying the group (Heilpern 114). Heilpern's account of the exchange between Brook and the *préfet*, though undoubtedly dramatised (Heilpern's book is written to entertain; its politics are often questionable and it does not baulk at using caricatures and stereotypes), has Brook rhapsodising to a 'cunning,' 'hypocritical,' 'steely' and 'dangerous' (116) African official about 'how tragic it is that all the emerging nations are trapped in the false choice of a return to folklore or a small step towards an imitation of a foreign culture' (117). Brook offers in the stead of such binaries 'the possibility of a *giant leap* forwards to a new culture of shared human impulses that has nothing to do with the traditions of the past or with the traditions of over-developed countries' (117, Heilpern's emphasis).¹¹³ The *préfet* remains unimpressed by this universalist rhetoric and is only finally persuaded to allow Brook (minus the film crew) access to the villages of Agades when Brook draws on his social capital: his meeting with and promise from the president of Niger. The problem that arises from the discourse on Brook's practice is not the desire to create new and inclusive theatrical languages that function across cultures. Rather, it is the assumption that people from less economically advantaged countries are as keen to transcend identities grounded in cultural nationalism or postcolonial hybridity as Brook himself; it is Brook's seeming lack of awareness that many of the African people he meets agree to take a *giant leap* towards a universal future not because they want to, but because he has the economic and symbolic capital to compel them to do so. There is never any consciousness of the fact that the African realities encountered might represent alternative modernities rather than surviving anthropological relics of a past all humanity once inhabited and thus a particularity in which the universal resides, nor that

¹¹³ While Heilpern is most likely dramatising the situation, this rhetoric does seem in keeping with Brook's ideology as discernible from his theoretical writings and interviews.

an intercultural performance language is engendered between parties, not discovered at some mystical, primordial (African) level.

As noted in the introduction, Brook recognises that utopian universalism is complicated by history – that the ‘monstrosities our forefathers committed’ (qtd. in Kalb, ‘Interview’ 71) haunt interactions between people in the postcolonial era. Such universalism is rendered problematic not only by history but also by the inequalities and neo-colonialism of global enterprise in the present era. In intercultural situations made unequal by colonial history and global capitalism, Western practitioners need to exercise caution in deferring to the universal as a justification for their right to represent Othered cultures. As Fanon (*Wretched*), wa Thiong’o (*Decolonizing*), Bharucha (*Politics; World*) and others have passionately argued, national and cultural difference is a precious thing for many people in previously colonised countries, both economically and symbolically. Writing in 1975, just two years after Brook’s experimental African journey, Chinua Achebe says ‘Africa has had such a fate in the world that the very adjective African can call up hideous fears of rejection. Better then to cut all links with this homeland, this liability, and become in one *giant leap* the universal man. [...] But running away from oneself seems to me a very inadequate way of dealing with an anxiety’ (164, my emphasis). In a similar awareness Fanon suggests that: ‘The claim to national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native’ (*Wretched* 210). For Fanon, universalists make a mistake with potentially serious consequences when they advocate that colonized cultures skip the national period (247). There is a tension between the capacity of Brook’s practice to liberate from stereotypes and its contemporaneous capacity to stifle expressions of identity rooted in difference.

Heilpern attests that Brook ‘never went to Africa to “please” an audience’ (89). He searched for new, powerful ways of communicating ‘on human terms alone’ (89), hoping that Africa would teach the group ‘simplicity’ (89). He attributes one of the troupe’s notable failures to communicate with an audience in a town called Tamanrasset to the town’s ‘wordliness’ (84). The people of Tamanrasset reject the CIRT’s experimental improvisations because they are tainted by convention and expectation, not because the ensemble’s work is lacking. When the group played in the Yoruba capital of Ife, however, where the audience was almost exclusively middle class – composed of artists, dons, intellectuals, students, and quite a few Europeans – the CIRT’s simple improvisations were greeted with respect, which Heilpern suggests might be symptomatic of the audience’s over-reverence for Brook’s reputation. In a Bourdieusian observation, Heilpern remarks: ‘The applause at the end seemed too self-conscious. It was the applause which verges on something which often happens in “serious” drama. The audience ends up applauding itself’ (296). Brook’s universalist simplicity, his mystical ascetic aesthetic, is read by cultured elites in an avant-garde light contributing further to his cultural capital

Particular Universals: The Historical Construction of Tierno Bokar

When Brook makes a universalist claim for the communicative capacities of simple or naïve theatre he reinscribes the essentially religious attitude towards art that Bourdieu critiques in capitalist society. The universal is a fiction of the privileged which quickly fragments when confronted with materialities of history, geography or economics.

Where audiences read the universal and spiritual in terms of particulars and politics, Brook’s representations speak for Othered people, and their historical and ideological construction requires address. *11 and 12* offers very simple anti-imperial politics. The rigid, formal, upright body language of the actors playing colonists (or mistreated

Africans in the presence of colonists) contrasts with the relaxed physicalities of the Africans in prayer or conversation throughout the rest of the play. As Pavis notes ‘everything in the acting, in the characterization, in the use of the body, helps us distinguish, sometimes as in a caricature, the colonizers from the colonized, European arrogance from African common sense’ (‘Today’ 13). These ostensibly positive portrayals of Africans hide the fact that the exemplary figures of Hamallah and Bokar, received by Estienne and Brook through the writings of Hampâté Bâ, are, in significant ways, Western constructions. The postcolonial politics discernible from Hampâté Bâ’s writings are much more complex.

Hampâté Bâ was born in 1901 in Bândiagara, Mali, into a family of religious leaders. His father, a warrior, died, and he was adopted by his mother’s new husband, Tidjani Amadou Ali Thiam, chief of the Louta province (Whitman 10). In 1912, Bâ was taken hostage by the French, whose policy it was to remove the sons of powerful native families from their homes and train them as medical aides, postal officials and administrative clerks (Whitman 10). This policy ensured ‘a personnel that was bright enough to understand, but not intelligent enough to enact... not cultivated enough to demand more’ (Hampâté Bâ qtd. in Whitman, ‘Interview’ 132). Bâ passed his certificate of studies in 1915, and then escaped to join his parents, where he received education in Fulani and Bambara oral traditions from a traditional educator who lived in his father’s house, and Islamic education in theology, literature and jurisprudence from Bokar (Whitman 11). In 1918, he voluntarily returned to French school and three years later was admitted to the Ecole Normale de Gorée. At the urging of his mother, he refused to go and was punished by the governor by being sent to a remote Northern province, far away from his family, to work for a decade without leave of absence. He spent the years between 1933 and 1937 as interpreter for the governor and secretary to the mayor in Bamako. His association with Sharif Hamallah (through Bokar) caused him difficulty

during this time, but he was protected by his friend and teacher Théodore Monod, the founder of the Institut Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN). In 1951 Bâ went to France for the first time on an UNESCO scholarship. In 1957, having been elected to IFAN, he co-authored the first edition of *Vie et Enseignement de Tierno Bokar, Le Sage de Bândiagara* with Captain Marcel Cardaire of the French Office of Muslim Affairs.¹¹⁴

Hampâté Bâ attests that Cardaire had initially been sent by the French administration to arrest him (qtd. in Whitman, 'Interview' 147), explaining 'Cardaire is a very smart man who had been through the Algerian war [...]; they sent him to Bamako to take care of the Hamallists' (147). The Captain undertook a year-long investigation and concluded that the administration had been wrong-headed with regard to Hampâté Bâ. Hampâté Bâ says: 'he wanted the administration to understand the truth, nothing more. So he became my friend and we worked together' (147). However, the writer admits that Cardaire 'was under pressure to make certain observations in the book' (147). He says: 'I went along with it, they never showed me the manuscript, they published it with things he never understood very well' (147). Following Cardaire's death, Hampâté Bâ reasoned he could do the Captain no political harm and he wrote a second edition of the book alone, although quoting some 'remarkable' passages of Cardaire's (qtd. in Whitman, 'Interview' 148).¹¹⁵ Even though all his own work, the second edition is much kinder to the French administration than other of Hampâté Bâ's writings. Further, the literary construction of Bokar that has firm roots in the Cardaire/Hampâté Bâ collaboration is one that serves particular objectives and agendas.

Brenner sees Cardaire's interest in the project as a political attempt to stem the influence of Wahhabism that was gaining momentum in French Sudan. He explains:

¹¹⁴ More information on Hampâté Bâ's life can be found in his two memoirs, *Amkoullel, L'Enfant Peul* and *Oui Mon Commandant*

¹¹⁵ In *A Spirit of Tolerance* only three passages of Cardaire's remain: two sentimental impressions of meeting Bokar's widows and a paragraph on the simplicity and universalism of Bokar's teachings.

By the 1950s, the French administration in Sudan was much more concerned about the possible political threat of Wahhabism in West Africa than the Hamalliyya [...]. Shaykh Hamallah had died in exile in 1943, Tierno Bokar had died three years earlier, and the Hamallist movement had lost much of its driving force. ('Introduction' xxiv)

Hampâté Bâ orchestrated Sudan's counter-reform movement, founding Muslim, local language schools with the backing of the French administration. Brenner notes that 'these schools were meant to teach an ecumenical, open, and tolerant form of Islam of the sort that Hampâté Bâ had received from Tierno' (xxv). This worked to the advantage of Cardaire. As Brenner explains, 'from the perspective of the Office of Muslim Affairs, the publication of *Le Sage de Bândiagara* could serve [...] the promulgation of a "sympathetic" version of Islam' (xxv). For Brenner, Hampâté Bâ's choice to cooperate with Cardaire and the Colonial Administration represents a commitment to taking advantage of 'any opportunity that presented itself to disseminate the ideas of Tierno' (xxv).

Critics of Hampâté Bâ, such as Lansiné Kaba, whose book *The Wahhabiyya* argues for the doctrinal and political importance of Wahhabi Islam in French West Africa (5), are scathing about his involvement with Cardaire and the French colonial administration. Cardaire, Kaba attests, wished to refute Wahhabism as heresy (8). Kaba draws a distinction between modernists and reformists in French Sudan in the 1950s. He cites Hampâté Bâ as the spokesman of a small group of modernists in Bamako, and notes that Hampâté Bâ's work reveals 'strong influences of European education and important elements of Western thought' (22/23). Kaba reads Hampâté Bâ's Bokar character as a combination of Socratic and Christian virtues. For Kaba, modernists like Hampâté Bâ want to adapt 'Islamic traditions to modern thought as it has emerged in

the West' (23), while reformists intend 'to conserve and reinforce Islamic dogma by using all the relevant products of modern science' (23). Kaba implies that modernism in Hampâté Bâ's vein constitutes a denigration and underestimation of Islam:

Many modernists have thought of Islam as an encumbrance to progress, while reformists believe that the present weakness of the Muslim world is a consequence of the decline of faith rather than an inner inferiority of the doctrine. Thus, the first group looks towards Europe for ideas; the other, oriented towards the Middle East, focuses on Arabic language and Quranic ideas.

(23/24)

Kaba's critique of Hampâté Bâ is most acerbic when he points out in an ironic tone that the writer 'through his office in the Institute Français d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) collaborated on historical projects with many French administrators and scholars, who subsequently have portrayed him as an open-minded person, a man of wisdom, and a judicious scholar able to synthesise the broad ideas of Africa and Islam with the complex and rich ideas of the West' (24). While never quite resorting to name-calling, Kaba permits himself the comment: 'It is clear that the modernists during the colonial era were in contact and on good terms with the anti-Wahhabi forces. This collusion accounted for the appellation "lackeys of colonialism" given them by the reformists' (24).

Brenner recognises that 'Hampâté Bâ's association with Cardaire has indeed been interpreted by some as a 'nefarious form of collaboration with the colonial powers' ('Introduction' xxvi). He recognises the contradictions and ambiguities that informed colonial French attitudes to West African Islam. By the 1950s

the terms of discourse had changed: words like 'fanaticism' and 'domestication' were being replaced by the terminology of post-

war social science, such as ‘modernization’ and eventually ‘development.’ In the context of counter-reform, the French could even discover a model Muslim, in the form of Cerno Bokar, whose teachings as interpreted by Amadou Hampâté Bâ they helped to disseminate. But whether these tactical manoeuvres reflected any fundamental modifications of attitude is doubtful. (*Controlling Knowledge* 156).

Brenner acknowledges that ‘money and jobs flowed through the counter-reform network as a way to reward those who participated in the project. Indeed the development of Hampâté Bâ’s career from the 1930s to the 1950s depended largely on his ability to gain the support of well-placed patrons in the colonial service’ (174). All the same, Brenner sees in Hampâté Bâ’s Tierno Bokar ‘a model of African Muslim educational policies which was deserving of attention and respect in its own right’ (160). He regrets that, ‘like the program it inspired, it became immediately tarnished in the eyes of many Muslims because it was made public in the context of the administration’s efforts to contain the nascent reformist movement’ (161). It is not the purpose of this thesis to take a moral position on this complex debate; rather, the objective here is to show that the reason Tierno Bokar was written about and promoted in the first instance was to serve Western agendas. It is entirely plausible that Bokar’s teachings have ethical, doctrinal and spiritual merit, but this is not the reason that Western audiences receive this particular representation of Islam through Brook. The figure of Tierno Bokar is not universal in Brook’s Kantian sense. It is, I will argue below, a deliberately Christianised depiction of Sufism. To use this ‘archetype’ as evidence of the culture of links is to situate authority over the universal in Brook’s culturally specific aesthetic sensibilities. The reason the figure of Tierno Bokar takes centre stage in *11 and 12* is because the story of this Sufi sage once allowed the French

colonial administration to promote a sympathetic form of Islam and vilify a threatening kind. The cultural bias inherent in the figure of Tierno Bokar is still relevant to the twenty-first century, where Western media roots Muslim actions in spiritual rather than political concerns and where Islamophobia and neo-colonial interest in Muslim states is rife. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the appellation of universality here serves to mask relations of dominance in terms of the circulations of cultural capital that allow North to speak for South and, by extension, Brook to speak for Africa.

The framing devices of Hampâté Bâ's narrative, in terms of the anecdotes he chooses to relate or the teachings he chooses to emphasise, often seem intended to familiarise Sufism or to ease European and Christian fears about Africa and Islam. For example, Hampâté Bâ compares Bokar to St. Francis of Assisi in the following passage (which is also chosen for inclusion in The Barbican programme for *11 and 12*):

Love. There was but this word on [Bokar's] lips. One of the greatest spiritual beings of Christianity called himself the spouse of 'Lady Poverty.' Tierno had married 'Lady Charity.' If one were to remove the words 'Love' and 'Charity' from Tierno's teachings, then his sayings would become hollow. (*Inspiring Life* 35)

In another passage, Bokar reacts to the intolerance of some in Bândiagara towards an American Protestant missionary by launching an 'out-and-out call for tolerance' (127). In so doing, he also critiques 'those attached to the letter' (127) – the Wahhabbiya. Further, as Bokar lies dying, shunned by his family and friends, Hampâté Bâ tells his readership that Bokar had never heard of the prayers of Jesus on Calvary, and gives him the following speech:

Poor Bândiagara. ... If Bândiagara only knew! If the people of Bândiagara had only known ... they would have taken much

money out of their pockets to prolong my life. But they do not know ... My God, forgive me and forgive them because they do not know (102).

This overtly Christianised dying speech is omitted from *11 and 12*, but the familiar thematics of Bokar's martyrdom remains. This representation serves a culturally imperialist end, dressing intolerance in the guise of liberal respect for 'good,' Western-approved Islam. Bokar's sympathetic spirituality is defined (explicitly in Hampâté Bâ's writings and implicitly in *11 and 12*) against an unsympathetic and threatening kind – that of Wahhabism. This serves to strengthen Western ideological conceptions of Christianity (or sympathetic forms of Sufism) as tolerant and peaceful and of doctrinally conservative Islam as inflexible, aggressive and fundamentalist. Bad Muslims allow their faith and belief to lead them towards violent political acts. Good Muslims turn the other cheek, ignoring injustice and colonial power relations, and practicing tolerance towards their oppressors.

Complex Simples: Mimicry and Class in *11 and 12*

Speaking of the evolution of postcolonial African literature, wa Thiong'o celebrates that 'instead of seeing Africa as one undifferentiated mass of historically wronged blackness, it now attempted some sort of class analysis and evaluation of neo-colonial societies' (21). In this regard, *11 and 12* represents a *giant leap* backwards. With its unproductively simple anti-imperialist politics, it obscures the logic of class and clan in order to pit good Africans against bad Europeans. In *11 and 12* the French administrators are almost uniformly portrayed as cruel, intolerant, and stupid. There are only one or two laughably ardent and nationalistic exceptions to the brutish norm (including an enthusiastic teacher who cries with emotion at hearing France's Sudanese citizens sing the Marseillaise). For Fricker, the production's politics 'feel basic and

dated.’ She remarks that ‘[p]laying nearly all the French characters as authoritarian buffoons is not the subtlest way to make an anti-colonial critique’ (*11 and 12*). In *11 and 12* the tyrannical governor Henri Terrasson de Fougères (Seweryn) treats Hamallah with a disrespect and irrationality that is in clear contrast with the tolerance and presence of mind the holy man displays throughout the encounter; De Fougères imprisons and exiles gentle and Godly Hamallah for his beliefs, and even, it is suggested, has him tortured. Further, on finishing school, Amadou gets a job as a clerk in the French administration. In direct address to the audience he recalls with contempt how the words ‘yes commandant sir’ fell from his lips like ‘urine from a weak bladder’ in response to the humiliating treatment he endured at the hands of French officers (*11 and 12*). The inner rebellion these words of mimicry mask is made plain. In the presence of the colonizers, all of the African characters become mimic men; in seeming to accept French culture they ambivalently suggest ‘that the fetishised colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal’ (129). While this black and white portrayal of colonized and coloniser might seem sufficiently critical of European hegemony for, to borrow a phrase from Spencer, ‘the bien-pensants at The Barbican,’ as we have seen, it actually idealizes a type of Islam that is a useful colonial construction, implicitly vilifying an Othered Islam. Further, it obscures the class politics at work beneath the surface of the affair. The only power relations discernible in *11 and 12* are between colonizer and colonized. There is no hint, for example, that Hampâté Bâ comes from an aristocratic Fula family in Bândiagara or that Bokar is a Tukolor prince.

Conversely, In *A Spirit of Tolerance*, Hampâté Bâ allots much of the blame for stirring up tensions surrounding the eleven and twelve prayers to scheming lower class Tukolor who have the ear of the colonisers. For example, due to a misunderstanding over a silver teapot – which leads to an eleven-bead cleric being accused of theft by a twelve-bead widow – and a mischievously fabricated sleight of their ancestry, the

Tukolor decide to organise a campaign against the eleven-beads. According to Hampâté Bâ, '[a]s most of them worked for members of the Colonial Administration, they were well placed for this kind of action. Each Tukolor was given the mission of setting his employer against Tierno Sidi [an eleven-bead cleric] by painting the blackest possible picture of him. [...] The commandant of the Bamako district began to hear from several sources about an "eleven-bead" marabout who was the very incarnation of dishonesty and of all possible faults' (61). These petty Tukolor, Hampâté Bâ tells us, were illiterate and unschooled in the finer points of religious doctrine (60/62). They were motivated by a perceived insult. All the same, 'the lions were unleashed and the formidable administrative machinery was put into action' (63).

There are a number of questionable aspects of this account of the manipulation of the French administration by prideful, vengeful enemies of Hamallah. Firstly, the idea that illiterate Tukolor working for members of the French administration were somehow 'well-placed' to influence colonial affairs seems to betray a class-based suspicion on behalf of Hampâté Bâ. At a meeting of five hundred illiterate Tukolor concerning the eleven-bead cleric Tierno Sidi, Hampâté Bâ's adoptive father, the only nobleman present, is ejected for saying, 'If Tierno Sidi is to be challenged with religious objections, it is for others to do it, and certainly not you who know nothing' (62). The illiterate Tukolor have no authority over religious matters, despite the egalitarian Tijani ethos. The power they do have over the religious and aristocratic classes is gained through influence with the French administration. Hampâté Bâ says the Tukolor in question were 'intoxicated by their success against a man of Tierno Sidi's standing' (62) and by their discovery of strength in unity. This seems to acknowledge the class tensions present in the affair.

In *11 and 12*, these class issues disappear and the affair of the teapot is rendered ridiculous. There is no logic apparent behind the strife the disputed teapot causes,

making the agitators appear absurd and ignoring their possible engagement in subversive political practices. The twelve-bead widow (Jared O'Neill) who demands the return of her dead husband's silverware from an eleven bead cleric is played as a shrieking and selfish caricature, a choice which successfully effaces the rebellion of the lower classes against their aristocratic and religious superiors. Although the motivations behind the Tukolor's actions seem petty when read in light of a misunderstanding over a tea-pot, when complicated by class consciousness Bhabhian mimic men emerge, using the machinations of the colonial administration to gain power in a stratified society. Bhabhian mimicry is at once resemblance and menace (Bhabha, *Location* 123). The lower class Tukolor's imitation of obedient colonial servants comes from an 'area between mimicry and mockery, where the reforming, civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double' (*Location* 123). To knit Bhabha to wa Thiong'o, the Tukolors' actions not only disrupt the authority of ambivalent colonial discourse (*Location* 126), but also the authority of voices that gloss over class issues in postcolonial societies (wa Thiong'o 21).

Reflections

The moment the specific and material are reinserted into Brook's ideology, we find that universalist discourse smuggles in many problematic cultural and political assumptions. In spite of what Knowles calls 'the intercultural wars' the theatrical establishment still celebrates intercultural practice in which Europe speaks for Africa in Orientalist ways. Pavis believes that cross-cultural theatre has changed significantly since the 70s and 80s. However, Brook's brand of interculturalism is still packing out houses in New York, London and Paris, and claims that Othered cultures are no longer filtered through Western sensibilities to be palatable to Western audiences are premature. Erika Fischer-Lichte champions a move away from the discourse of interculturalism towards analysis

of the interweaving of cultures that takes place in the in-between space of performance (392-400). However, as materially engaged analysis of *11 and 12* illustrates, the ethics of intercultural productions are only partially discernible in the space of performance. The previous chapters have used Bourdieusian theory to complicate East/West or North/South binaries and to offer ways of reading nuanced and shifting power dynamics in a globalised era. This chapter serves as a reminder not to do away too soon with the binaries that have traditionally been used to theorise sites of advantage and disadvantage in intercultural interactions.

The Christianised construction of Bokar and the erasure of class tensions in *11 and 12* would not be so problematic if the production was read as Brook's staging indicates that he intended: as representative of the universal rather than the specific and concerned with spirituality and religious truth. However, as this chapter has shown, due to the structure of feeling of the socio-political contexts in which it played, Tierno Bokar's actions were read as politically motivated and *11 and 12* represented Africa and Islam. Because of this, the historical construction of Tierno Bokar takes on weight. It constitutes a speaking for, but, to draw on Said, it tells us more about European imperial desire than it does about Africa. In Brook's mythical world of archetype, the villains are the villains and the heroes the heroes. The erasures required to create this mystical world out of African realities are justified through recourse to universalist ideology. Yet, when these Kantian ideologies are laid bare and subjected to Bourdieusian scrutiny, the circulations of cultural capital that Brook's mystified simplicity reproduce are apparent. Brook's location of universality in the empty space of Africa bestows him with a symbolically pure Kantian gaze, which, in Bourdieu's terms, serves to mystify the cultural capital that gives him power.

Due to the focus on process in Brook's working model, his international collaborators have much creative agency. I have argued that it is less problematic to

represent one's own culture than to represent another culture, and thus that there is a relationship between a collaborator's agency in authoring representations of her culture and the rights of representation of a given production. In Brook's practice actors are specifically *not* supposed to represent their national or ethnic cultural identities. Rather, they are asked to embody the culture of links – the transcultural archetypes that transcend human difference. Ironically, it is the actors' difference that lends authority to this universalist doctrine; their difference gives Brook the ability, as well as the right, to represent universalism. Because *11 and 12* fulfils criterion 2 but not criterion 1 of the ethics laid out in the introduction, the collaborators' agency functions within the system of the production process, but does not make its way into a broader scheme of global representation. Like Brook's *Mahabharata*, *11 and 12* was not performed in the country and context from which its story originated. As Chapter 2 showed, when cultural capital has to flow from one system of cultural production to another, its value can be restricted, and a maestro's ability to represent Otherness according to his individual and cultural ideologies can be curtailed. Playing only in Western contexts sidesteps the interruption of the flow of Brook's cultural capital from one system of cultural production to another, leaving his work to operate in a global regime of value in which his brand has much power.

Brook's universalism, in its search for transcendental archetypes at the expense of cultural specificities, fits well into Lonergan and Knowles' paradigms of work likely to succeed internationally. *11 and 12* contributes to an economy of cultural practice in which Western artists are dominant – in which the West speaks for its Others. The simplistic politics of the play and the ideologies behind the version of history it propagates are symptomatic of this power dynamic. The privilege embodied by Brook does not operate to the benefit of the cultures he represents. I agree with David Williams that it is unfortunate that Brook, in his many writings and interviews, never adequately

engages with inequality and privilege ('Innocence' 24): with what Bharucha would call his 'own implicit nationalism' (*Politics* 30). It is for a new generation of practitioners, institutions, producers and scholars to use the valuable intercultural lessons to be gleaned from Brook's experiments in universalism.

Chapter Four: Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle's *The Playboy of the Western World*

Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle's adaptation of *The Playboy of the Western World* played at Ireland's national theatre, The Abbey, in October 2007 to mixed critical reviews, but to such popular success that it returned for a second run in December 2008. The story is removed from its original context in the rural West of Ireland at the beginning of the 1900s and set in a modern-day working class West Dublin suburb. For many critics and scholars, the most important element of this adaptation is the re-casting of Christy Mahon as Christopher Malomo, a Nigerian asylum seeker. Adigun and Doyle's script follows the bends and twists of Synge's plot beautifully, updating each event with humour and urban edge. It starts with the arrival of a dishevelled stranger whose tale of patricide impresses the locals, and concludes as does the classic, with Christy's father arriving very much alive and attempting to spoil his son's good fortune.

The dark brown oaks of the set – wooden floor, wooden bar, wooden tables and stools – should resonate as familiar for an Abbey audience; the hues and lighting are similar to the earth floor and rustic furnishings of more traditional productions of *The Playboy* (such as Garry Hynes'¹¹⁶ version for the *DruidSynge*¹¹⁷ in 2005). On the walls of O'Flaherty's pub hang pictures of Mary Robinson, Michael Flatley and Roy Keane. This choice of icons, each representative of a certain type of modern, cosmopolitan Irishness, already marks the space as a site of globalised encounters, an Ireland that must be understood in wider context, even before Christopher Malomo makes his blustering entrance. Old-fashioned Guinness signs and an ornamental bale of turf beside an artificial fire draw our attention to 'an invented form of Irishness' (Adigun and Doyle

¹¹⁶ Tony award winning Irish director Garry Hynes founded Druid Theatre Company with Mick Lally and Marie Mullen in 1975.

¹¹⁷ *DruidSynge* is Hynes' and Druid's production of all six of Synge's plays.

1), a form that seems outdated when juxtaposed with the markers of rough urban reality - CCTV, lycra-clad women, leather-clad men, drugs, and the constant threat of violence. We are reminded aurally that the world outside the pub is an inhospitable one - sirens sound, tales of gangland killings pour from the radio, and the action is punctuated by the at once comic and ominous pop music ringtone of Pegeen's mobile phone. In spite of all this, Adigun and Doyle's faithfulness to the dramatic framework is impressive. In the retelling, the plot is what survives, while Synge's Hiberno-English is upturned, replaced by a brashly eccentric working class Dublin idiom and the refined, religious and proverb-laden speech of the upper class Nigerian Malomos – each of which, the authors believe, has a poetry of its own.¹¹⁸ Perhaps the best illustration of Adigun and Doyle's linguistic register is that when faced with the quandary of how to rewrite Pegeen's famous closing lines, 'Oh my grief I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World' (Synge 229), the pair decides on 'fuck off' (Adigun and Doyle 67).

Critics almost uniformly admired the piece's energy and wit, but were divided on its artistic and socio-political merit. Steve Cummins, reviewing for *RTE.ie*, says 'Doyle and Adigun have succeeded in producing a work that is culturally sensitive, hugely entertaining and, though copiously rewritten, still manages to retain Synge's themes of community, heroism and the conflict which emerges when fantasy becomes reality' (RTE.ie).¹¹⁹ The *Sunday Business Post* notes a 'refreshingly mixed audience at The Abbey who were rolling in the aisles,' but calls the translation too literal, laments the production's lack of political engagement, and concludes that the play is 'more crowd-pleasing than thought-provoking' ('Romping'). For Peter Crawley of *The Irish Times* Christopher Malomo's language has 'the dull thud of a literal translation' (16); Crawley does not comment on the socio-political import of the adaptation, but regrets

¹¹⁸ See pages 301 and 313 of Adigun and Doyle interviews respectively. Not all critics agreed with this sentiment. See Crawley 'Dublin Theatre Festival.'

¹¹⁹ Unless otherwise stated, all reviews are of the 2007 production of *The Playboy*.

the ‘sacrifice of lyricism for funny yet disposable punch lines’ (16). Karen Fricker, reviewing for *Variety*, is intrigued by the production’s ‘hook’ – a black Christy Mahon – but is ultimately intellectually disappointed, if entertained, stating that Adigun and Doyle’s *Playboy* ‘delivers an engaging evening of theatre despite the authors’ failure to fully explore the radical socio-political implications of their proposal’ (*Playboy*).

Playing at Ireland’s national theatre during the 50th Dublin Theatre Festival, on the centenary year of Synge’s original play, and at a time of immense and rapid demographic change in Ireland, Adigun and Doyle’s *Playboy* also engendered much academic commentary. Many Irish theatre scholars recognise the production as socio-politically significant, even while they disagree on its politics and aesthetic efficacy. Charlotte McIvor notes that ‘the symbolic gesture of re-visiting Synge’s canonical play reworks Irish theatre literally from the inside: inside its canon and inside the walls of the national theatre’ (318), but sees lack of confidence in the authors’ failure to depart from Christy’s torture and departure at the end of the third act (318-319). Melissa Sihra notes a significant moment of creative intervention in Adigun and Doyle’s ‘interrogation of the outsider through their deeply politicised figure of Christy’ (229), and reads the Nigerian/Irish co-authorship of the play as ‘a kind of indigenous intercultural reading of an Irish text within an Irish setting’ (230). Singleton finds in Adigun and Doyle’s *Playboy* a positive example of ‘how the Irish canon can be contested in a spirit of social change and where Ireland’s own colonial missionary legacy in Africa might begin to take responsibility for the geopolitical changes in the world out of which Ireland emerged as “refuge”’ (*Masculinities* 20). Playing in 2007, the year now seen to mark the end of the Celtic Tiger boom, the import attached by scholars and critics to the production is grounded in the way it speaks to and/or for a transformed and transforming Ireland. With Irish drama so often taken to be a ‘mirror up to nation,’

Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* was expected to articulate a role for theatre in a newly multicultural society.¹²⁰

This chapter argues that ethical intercultural collaboration in multicultural situations can embody the ideals of progressive multicultural ideologies. In order to locate Adigun and Doyle's *The Playboy of the Western World* in relation to one of its most serious and pressing relevant socio-political specificities, this chapter first examines racism in Ireland, at both institutional and societal levels. Following Jason King, who calls for greater use of the wider debate surrounding intercultural theatre in the Irish setting ('Ryanga' 157), this chapter briefly discusses the emergence of an inter/multi-cultural theatre tradition in Ireland, highlighting the strong individual roles Adigun and Doyle played in this movement before their collaboration on *The Playboy*. Multiculturalism is a multifaceted phenomenon, materialising differently in different countries, and constantly interrogated and changing even in fixed geographical specificities. This chapter theorises emergent Irish multiculturalism through engagement with a number of multicultural discourses and anti-multicultural critiques, and in particular through comparison with British multiculturalism. Next, contributing to the debate surrounding the (a)political nature of the production, the chapter examines the role of intercultural art in relation to prejudice, asking if art has the most efficacy when it grapples with racism, or if there is a case to be made for painting the world as one

¹²⁰ The idea of Irish theatre as a 'mirror up to nation' was firm in Irish theatre scholarship even before Christopher Murray's *20th Century Irish Drama: A Mirror Up to Nation* (1997). Much contemporary scholarship still espouses this view. For example, Shaun Richards argues that 'In global culture, spaces for the consideration of national concerns are jostled to the margins by the market dominance of communications and entertainment media whose interests (and ownership) are frequently external to the nation state itself. In such a context, theatre provides a location where national desires can be expressed and debated by local voices, a point underlined by the origins of modern Irish theatre itself' (1). Lonergan's work on globalization represents a stark challenge to this viewpoint: he points to the many ways in which Irish theatre is the product of global influences, including the tourist trade and the kinds of representations of Irishness that are saleable in a global market (*Globalization*; 'Tears'). The strength of Lonergan's thesis notwithstanding, Jason King's well-supported argument that Irish theatre has been more involved with discourses of immigration than any other Irish art form (further outlined later in the chapter) points to a strong role for Irish theatre in engaging with multiculturalism, immigration (both remembered in terms of Irish economic migration and Irish Catholic missionary endeavours and present in terms of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers to Ireland), asylum, racism and a changing Ireland.

wishes to see it. Rights of representation in relation to class are also pertinent to Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy*, where Christy is polite, upper class and well-educated in comparison to the rough, gangland Dubliners. This chapter will argue in support of the authors' use of class, grounding it both in material realities and in the authors' individual relationships with their cultures. Finally, this chapter examines the conflict that arose in the wake of the 2007 run of *The Playboy of the Western World*. Adigun launched myriad legal actions in relation to the production, including accusing The Abbey of racist discrimination, suing co-writer Doyle, director Jimmy Fay, and The Abbey for violation of his copyright and moral rights as an author, and suing Doyle and Doyle's agent John Sutton for breach of contract. These actions are still playing out in the courts. This chapter will delve into the ideological processes at work behind this controversy, arguing that Ireland's economy of cultural practice is such that intercultural artworks have less symbolic capital than 'Irish' ones, and sounding out the significance of Adigun's withdrawal of support for the second run of *The Playboy of the Western World* in terms of rights of representation.

Irish Racism

The boom of the Celtic Tiger years, taken to encompass the period of economic growth from 1995 to 2007,¹²¹ saw Ireland change from a place of economic stagnation, religiosity and insularity with underdeveloped industrial and tertiary sectors to a wealthy, increasingly secular country, with a globalized and industrialised economy. One of the most transformative social effects of this change was the replacement of outward migration with inward migration as the dominant social trend. With the influx of migrants from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe the fabric of Irish culture and identity changed with unprecedented rapidity into something more heterogenous and diverse

¹²¹ UK Economist Kevin Gardiner coined the phrase in an August 1994 Morgan Stanley Euroletter, in which he compared the unexpected success of the Irish economy to the Asian 'Tiger' economies.

than the people of Éamon de Valera's 'self-sufficient' Ireland could have imagined. Up from a figure of 7% in 1996 (CSO, '31, 1996'), the 2006 census indicated that 14.7% of the total population was born outside the Republic of Ireland (CSO, '32, 2006'). This statistic serves only as a rough marker of demographic change, as it does not indicate the nationalities of the people born outside the Republic of Ireland. Nationality only became a question on the census in 2002, a fact which speaks to the reality of demographic change as much as the doubling of residents born outside Ireland cited above. The Central Statistics Office's 2011 Quarterly National Household Survey indicates that immigration rose from 39,200 in 1996 to 107,800 in 2006 (CSO, 'Population and Migration, 2011'), and the 2006 census shows that 11.15% of people ordinarily resident in Ireland were not of Irish nationality (CSO, '35, 2006'). As Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh compel us to remember, there was pronounced racism towards national minorities in Ireland before the economic boom (Lentin and McVeigh, 'Introduction'; Lentin 'Disavowed'). Unsurprisingly then, there have been racist and exclusionary reactions to Ireland's new multiculturalism,¹²² both institutionally and individually, and African immigrants have experienced the brunt of racism more profoundly than other ethnic groups (Fanning, *Social Cohesion*; McGinnity et al., 'Migrants' Experience').

In 2000, the Irish government removed asylum seekers from the mainstream welfare system and put them under a system of 'direct provision,' with lower rates of benefits, administered by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), which had no history of welfare provision. Bryan Fanning understands the DJELR to be charged with the job of deliberately excluding asylum seekers from Irish society (*Cohesion* 133). In 2004, the Irish people voted four to one to ratify the

¹²² While Ireland was never monocultural, and racism was always an aspect of Irish policy and attitudes towards those it internally Othered, understanding the huge change in the ethnic make-up of Ireland as a 'new multiculturalism' is a useful theoretical marker in addressing contemporary specificities.

government's proposal to remove the automatic right to citizenship from Irish children of non-national parents. Fanning argues that this was strongly influenced by top-down governance;¹²³ it raised an 'ethnocentric barrier' (11) and was 'not too implicitly directed against Africans' (145). Contemporaneously, the Irish state became one of four European Economic Area states to open its doors to migrant workers from new European Union countries, causing large-scale immigration from Eastern Europe – a move which was 'justified within a national interest discourse of economic growth' (Fanning 19) and which 'barely caused a political ripple' (16). This created a system where immigrants were treated differently both to each other and to existing Irish citizens based on their countries of origin. Clearly, racial concerns underpinned Irish immigration policy in this period, policy which 'imposed barriers to integration through the selective removal of some rights to welfare goods and services from some immigrants' (11)¹²⁴ and excluded immigrants from state social inclusion programmes (Fanning 127-151). Racism is not only apparent in Irish state propaganda and policy; there is also strong evidence to suggest that immigrants to Ireland experience racist discrimination and abuse in social spheres. Black African respondents to a 2005 EU-wide survey on migrants' experiences of racism, conducted by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) (McGinnity et al.), and to a 2009 Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) survey, reported proportionately higher levels of institutional racism, and racism in the workplace, in public places and in pubs and restaurants than any other demographic. In the FRA survey, 73% of sub-Saharan African respondents believed that racist discrimination is widespread in Ireland (Fanning, *Cohesion* 73; FRA). Clearly, racism – and particularly racism towards Africans – is a serious problem in

¹²³ 'Governance [...] can be seen to include the political management of debates about asylum and immigration. In the Irish case this included the introduction of direct provision without any demonstrable politically articulated demands beforehand; the aggressive legal assault on the rights of Irish-born children of immigrants and their families as interpreted by the High Court; and the introduction of the Referendum on Citizenship, again as a top-down attempt to manage immigration' (Fanning, *Cohesion* 47)

¹²⁴ See also Fanning, *Cohesion* 36-59

Ireland's new multicultural republic, and artists and scholars have differing theoretical and practical ways to address it. Some critics attest that Adigun and Doyle's *The Playboy of the Western World* shirks the responsibility of responding to this issue; however, the production can be understood both as a product of and response to the challenges that immigrants face in Ireland, and, further, it adopts a distinct ideological stance towards the role of art in addressing these challenges.

Irish Interculturalism: The Roles of Doyle and Adigun

Jason King, who has been at the forefront of documenting representation of asylum seekers, refugees and other immigrants on the Irish stage, claims that

[m]ore than any other literary or performing art form, the Irish theatre has proven highly receptive to the experiences of immigrants in Ireland, and provided an impetus for expressions of intercultural contact between them and the collective self image of the Irish as an emigrant people that is enshrined in historical memory. ('Portrayal of Immigrants' 25).

King discusses Donal O'Kelly's *Farawayan* (1998) and *Asylum, Asylum* (1994), Doyle's *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner* (2001), Maeve Ingoldsby's *Mixing it on the Mountain* (2003), Joe O'Byrne's *It Come Up Sun* (2000), Charlie O'Neill's *Hurl* (2003), Gavin Kostick's *The Ash Fire* (1992) and Arambe's version of Jimmy Murphy's *Kings of the Kilburn High Road* (2006) in an effort to trace the beginnings of an intercultural theatre movement in Ireland, and to move beyond Irish theatre discourse dominated by the challenges to postcolonial models of scholarship posed by globalization. More recently, King has studied the 'imaginative recuperation of the missionary experience in Irish theatre' ('Ryanga' 157), utilising Ronit Lentin's configuration of 'the return of the national repressed' (discussed in further detail

below). Usefully, King positions Ireland in the role of coloniser within a postcolonial intercultural discourse, highlighting the colonial agendas of Irish religious missionaries and configuring Ireland's political rejection of her spiritual conquests in a similar light to Britain's socio-political rejection of postcolonial immigrants. King focuses on the dramatic work of O'Kelly and George Seremba, both of whom focus on the travails of Ugandan asylum seekers in Ireland; these artists, he argues, highlight a contradiction between Ireland's self-conception as a hospitable nation and its simultaneous renunciation of the obligations that attend its missionary legacy (165). King is positive about the effects of this overtly politicised and confrontational practice, arguing that such work offers the potential for humanitarian transformation in the Irish arts community and wider public (165). Arguably, in the wake of the high-profile and professionally produced Pan Pan and Arambe *Playboys*, there has been the further critical attention to Irish intercultural theatre that King desires. McIvor's 2011 article in the international journal *Modern Drama* is particularly noteworthy, arguing, in dialogue with both political and artistic discourses of interculturalism present in Pan Pan and Arambe's productions, 'that contemporary Irish discourses of interculturalism and use of the arts as cultural diplomacy in international and domestic contexts frequently marginalize the very minority-ethnic communities that the works claim to represent or speak for' (318).

Adigun and Doyle were at the heart of the nascent intercultural theatre movement outlined by King prior to their collaboration on *The Playboy*. Doyle, as a winner of the Booker Prize, has both a national and international reputation, and is a well-known contemporary voice in Irish literature. He made his name writing about working class Dublin, challenging limiting configurations of a Catholic, rural, Irish speaking national ideal. As Dermot McCarthy explains: 'Doyle's characters represent a class that feels no connection to the nationalist or colonialist versions of Ireland, Irish

history and Irish identity through which it is expected to see itself and understand its position in Irish society' (*Parade* 229). Doyle has always reacted against and tried to dispel the idea that the culture of the Dublin streets is not really 'Irish'; his high profile Barrytown trilogy put Northside Dublin culture¹²⁵ at the centre of contemporary understandings of Irishness, both at home and abroad. In recent fiction, he attempts to do something similar with the immigrants who are now an intrinsic part of the island's culture. In the foreword to *The Deportees* (2007), a collection of short stories about immigrants in Ireland, Doyle comments on his inspiration thus:

I'd written a novel, *The Van*, in 1990, about an unemployed plasterer. Five or six years later, there was no such thing as an unemployed plasterer. A few years on all the plasterers seemed to be from Eastern Europe ... In 1986, I wrote *The Commitments*. In that book, the main character, a young man called Jimmy Rabbitte, delivers a line that became quite famous: - the Irish are the niggers of Europe. Twenty years on, there are thousands of Africans living in Ireland and, if I was writing that book today, I wouldn't use that line.

(*Deportees* xi)

Doyle continues to be inspired by the language and culture of Dublin's streets, and his writing consciously reflects the changing nature of Dublin, and of what it means to be Irish. In terms of Doyle's writing for the theatre, his work with the Passion Machine Company in the late 1980s produced 'vigorous, often comic, plays of urban life' that attracted 'a young, predominantly working class audience who for the most part did not enter other theatres' (Morash 262). This inclusiveness, this ability to attract non-theatre-goers, was something Doyle also aimed for when collaborating on *The Playboy*, and

¹²⁵ Dublin's 'Northside,' or the part of the city to the North of the river Liffey, is traditionally working class, while the Southside is usually considered to be middle and upper class.

something, he told me in interview, that he is very proud of *The Playboy* having achieved (Interview 315). Doyle's *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner*, based on a short story originally published in *Metro Eireann*,¹²⁶ is a play about an ostensibly liberally minded Dubliner named Larry Linane who is forced to confront his own racism when his eldest daughter Stephanie becomes involved with Ben, a 'black fella.'¹²⁷ *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner* was directed by Bairbre Ní Chaoimh of Calypso,¹²⁸ and performed at Andrews Lane Theatre in October 2001, before being taken on a nationwide tour, which included a performance at Mosney in County Meath. The choice of Mosney as a performance space was politically loaded. As a former family holiday complex turned asylum seekers' residential centre, ill-equipped for its new purpose and badly managed, Mosney is a potent symbol of Ireland's exclusionary policies towards asylum seekers.¹²⁹ The play was performed again at the Civic Theatre in Tallaght in March 2002 to coincide with International Day Against Racism. *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner* was consciously produced as a response to the multicultural situation in Ireland, and was used as a tool to engender greater public awareness of the conditions of immigrants in the country. Doyle's commitment to working towards and writing about a just and equal multicultural Ireland is also signalled by his involvement with Let Them Stay – an organisation that campaigns against the deportation of asylum seekers – and his continued regular contributions to *Metro Eireann*.

Bisi Adigun is an academic and theatre maker who came to Ireland in 1996 to study for a master's degree at University College Dublin. In 2002, Adigun co-presented *Mono*, RTÉ's flagship multicultural television show (since disbanded), bringing him

¹²⁶ *Metro Eireann* is Ireland's multicultural newspaper, set up by Nigerian journalists Chinedu Onyejelem and Abel Ugba in 2000. Roddy Doyle continues to contribute fiction monthly.

¹²⁷ Doyle received help with writing the part of Ben from journalist and political activist Abel Ugba.

¹²⁸ Calypso is a multicultural theatre company which aims to produce theatre that is inclusive of people across racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

¹²⁹ See Jamie Smyth, 'Ireland's Direct-provision Hostels Like "Refugee Camps"'

into the public eye. He is the founder of Arambe, Ireland's first African theatre company,¹³⁰ for which he has produced and directed numerous plays, including Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame* (2003), Jimmy Murphy's *The Kings of the Kilburn High Road* (2006), Ama Ata Aidoo's *The Dilemma of a Ghost* (2007), Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* (2008) and Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* (2009).¹³¹ *The Butcher Babes* (2010), a new dark comedy by Adigun, deals with the murder in 2005 of Kenyan immigrant Farah Swaleh Noor by Ireland's 'scissor sisters,' Linda and Charlotte Mulhall. Performed by African actresses in white-face make-up, Adigun's Dublin Fringe Festival production marks him out as a committed artistic commentator on race relations and integration in Ireland.

Adigun is also positioned as a critical African voice in Irish theatre studies. In one article, he criticizes the tendency of Irish screen and stage to present black characters in a negative light ('Fear Gorm'). He argues that 'with the exception of one or two productions, when black characters, especially Africans, are featured in Irish drama, they are portrayed as foreigners, intruders, asylum seekers, or refugees' ('Fear Gorm' 53). Further, in *Irish Theatre Magazine* in 2004, Adigun notes as problematic that he has 'yet to see an Irish theatre production where a black actor comes on stage to play a role that has no relevance to his/her skin' ('living colour' 31). These twin grievances against Irish stagings of race inform *The Playboy*, contributing to the idea that it glossed over racial issues and shied away from making a strong political contribution to an emergent Irish interculturalism, but also furnishing the piece, as will be argued below, with a politics of representation of its own.

The intercultural work of Adigun and Doyle allowed two artists with significant social and symbolic capital and with strong liberal commitments to Irish multicultural

¹³⁰ Arambe's mission statement is 'to afford members of Ireland's African communities the unique opportunity to express themselves through the art of theatre' (Arambe Productions).

¹³¹ All dates refer to productions by Arambe, not first performances.

and immigration issues to create a hybrid containing cultural and individual vantage points and perspectives made possible only through collaboration. Doyle says, 'I could never have written the *Playboy* as it is now on my own. The idea would never have occurred to me in the first place. Bisi I would suggest couldn't have written it on his own. It's very much one of those rare things that a piece of work is created by two people working together' (Interview 319). When people ask Adigun which part of the play he wrote and which was penned by Doyle, his response, he says, is to show them 'the picture of my beautiful daughter that I have on my keyholder and ask if they could tell me whether it is my wife or I who is responsible for her good looks' ('Wow' 6). Equitable intercultural collaborations like this one imagine into existence canons owned by all comers, and public spheres in which new voices work with old to create exciting change.

Irish Multiculturalism

Lo and Gilbert split cross-cultural theatre into three broad categories – Multicultural, Postcolonial and Intercultural ('Topography' 32), and argue for matrixing theorisations of the latter two. The term multicultural refers to distinct phenomena in different places. Lo and Gilbert explain that in countries like Canada and Australia, multiculturalism is an official state policy, whereas in countries like Britain and the United States, multiculturalism is a bottom-up phenomenon that functions as 'a descriptive term for interaction among major ethnic groupings' (33). Broadly, multiculturalism 'denotes diversity of race, class, gender, language, culture, sexual orientation, or disability within one society' (Reichl 305); more narrowly it denotes 'ethnic diversity within one society' (305). Ireland is a newly multicultural society in the narrow sense, and any attempt to locate its multiculturalism must acknowledge that the country is still figuring out what its multicultural state is likely to look like in the long term. In 2010, the Trinity

Immigration Initiative released a report based on three years of research entitled ‘Addressing the Current and Future Reality of Ireland’s Multicultural Status,’ stating that Ireland will remain multicultural despite the end of the period of mass immigration and that multicultural governmental policies are urgently needed (Trinity Immigration Initiative 1,12,16). In Ireland, multiculturalism has not been adopted as an official state policy (Multiculturalism Index Project), and thus can be aligned with U.S. and British models, although at an earlier stage of its development. Fanning draws parallels between British multicultural policies of ‘benign tolerance’ and Irish integration policy (*Cohesion* 6, 178). The problem with ‘benign tolerance’ is that, though based in liberalism, it manifests as ‘benign neglect’; without the capabilities (in Amartya Sen’s sense) or the social capital (in Bourdieu’s sense) to avail of the opportunities and rights theoretically afforded to them, immigrants cannot successfully integrate in host societies (1-15).¹³² For Fanning, targeted integration policy in line with the social inclusion goals understood to apply to all Irish citizens is urgently needed in Ireland. As in Australia, Irish multicultural discourse is dominated by concerns of recent immigration rather than focused on multicultural dynamics, such as those pertaining to Ireland’s travelling community, present in the state before mass immigration. For Lentin, this helps to support the wrongheaded ideology that multiculturalism causes racism, and contributes to a lack of recognition of indigenous racism as the cause of multicultural problems (‘Disavowed’ 2.9). Multicultural Ireland also has its particulars – according to 2001 OECD data, only one other country (Canada) had a higher percentage of its foreign-born population with third level qualifications (Fanning 63). Fanning argues that the Irish case is also made distinct by the fact that ‘the recent globalization-era immigration it experienced has not been superimposed on pre-existing patterns of ethnic segregation’

¹³² Although Britain does not support multiculturalism as an official state policy, it does support affirmative action towards disadvantaged immigrant groups (Multiculturalism Index Project), and thus goes some way to tackling the ‘benign neglect’ Fanning speaks of.

(66). In the relatively monocultural pre-boom Ireland, ‘socio-spatial segregation reflected class inequalities rather than prior histories of ethnic segregation’ (66).

Lo and Gilbert outline two different types of multicultural theatre – Small ‘m’ multicultural theatre (33) and Big ‘M’ multicultural theatre (34). The former often draws on techniques of colour-blind and non-traditional casting and does not actively draw attention to cultural difference or tensions; at other times it engages in folkloric display, fetishizing cultural difference. The agenda of the latter speaks to a politics of marginalization; a counterdiscursive practice, Big ‘M’ multicultural theatre manifests itself in a variety of forms, including Ghetto Theatre, Migrant Theatre and Community Theatre (34). Migrant Theatre is ‘concerned with narratives of migration and adaptation’ (34), and ‘cross-cultural negotiation is more visible in migrant theatre where there is an emerging exploration of cultural hybridity reflected in aesthetic as well as narrative content’ (34).

Interculturalism is the hybrid result of intentional encounters between traditions (Lo and Gilbert 36). Both Bharucha’s scholarship (*World; Politics*) and Holledge and Tompkins’s work (*Women’s*) remind us that interculturalism is subject to the power of state and market. Adigun and Doyle’s *The Playboy of the Western World* can be situated as at once a Big ‘M’ multicultural and an intercultural production. Adigun’s theatre company Arambe Productions, which commissioned the project, is, in line with the kind of migrant theatre delineated by Lo and Gilbert, actively concerned with narratives of migration and adaptation. Arambe’s 2006 Dublin Fringe production of Jimmy Murphy’s *Kings of the Kilburn High Road* – a play about Irish immigrants in London – with a cast of African immigrants made a valuable contribution to these narratives, and received a lot of critical attention. According to Adigun, the impulse to re-imagine *The Playboy* sprang from a similar place: from his desire to use theatre to contribute to Ireland’s emergent ‘discourse of migration, otherness, diversity’ (Interview 301). In choosing to

collaborate with Doyle, Adigun made the production intercultural, fusing the experiences and traditions and well as creative talent of two artists from distinct cultural milieux. Further, as will be discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter, the Adigun and Doyle *Playboy* was ultimately subject to the field of state and market power encapsulating the autonomous artistic field in which it was created.

Ethical intercultural collaboration in multicultural situations can embody the ideals of progressive multicultural ideologies. According to Knowles, both interculturalism and multiculturalism begin with similar ‘humanist assumptions’ (*Interculturalism* 45). Further, ‘both have been criticised for the violence these visions and assumptions can enact in practice in effacing real, material and cultural difference’ (45). There are both conservative and liberal critiques of multicultural policy. Conservative critiques are built on the idea that multiculturalism as a policy fails to defend the traditional culture, moral values and ethnic make-up of a state. These views are exclusionary or assimilationist; they either imply that immigrants have no right to live outside their country of origin, or that newcomers must take on the dominant cultural norms and values of their country of residence. Liberal critiques, on the other hand, draw on ideas of individual freedom and equality to counter the suggestion that minority groups might be afforded different rights or treatment to the majority. Liberal critiques of multiculturalism do not take into account marginalization and disadvantage within minorities, do not account for fair access to opportunity, and do not acknowledge cultural difference, thus feeding into the climate of ‘benign neglect’ outlined by Fanning. Debates over cultural difference and specialised rights within a democracy have played out productively in feminist thought. In a world where attitudes to women’s rights vary significantly culture to culture, Susan Okin famously argues that multiculturalism is bad for women insofar as it tolerates culturally specific misogynistic practices that happen in the private sphere. Multicultural gender theorists have met such

questions with nuanced cross-cultural answers. For example, both Sarah Song and Monique Deveaux productively suggest that individual cultural practices should be assessed and accommodated in conferring group rights and supporting affirmative action, thus facing the problematics of broad cultural tolerance head on.

Postcolonial critiques of multiculturalism are multifaceted and, according to Monica Mookherjee, rest on three challenges to its socially progressive potential, namely: '(i) its tendency to rely on falsely universal ideals; (ii) the risks of "tokenism," or a failure to defend cultural diversity in a way that responds to the real disadvantages confronting minority groups; and (iii) the problem of "essentialising," or attributing immutable features to, cultures' (181). For Mookherjee, a postcolonial multiculturalism must acknowledge the paradoxical nature of group rights¹³³ (197) and must be 'attuned critically to the intermeshing of cultural and economic inequalities that exclude certain citizens from participating in debate' (197). Jocelyn Maclure's suggestion that multiculturalists should forgo a preservationist ethic¹³⁴ and replace it with arguments based on the right to self-determination (for national minorities) and against full cultural assimilation of immigrants to the majority culture (47) is also useful to the formulation of a socially progressive multiculturalism.

Intercultural collaboration in a multicultural situation provides an excellent opportunity for avoiding false universalism, tokenism and essentialising and strengthening opportunities for minority self-determination and self-expression in dialogue with the majority culture. In addressing 'migration, otherness, diversity' (Adigun, Interview 301) in a way that combines both the experience of the migrant and

¹³³ Wendy Brown sums up the paradoxical nature of group rights within the women's movement clearly and concisely thus: 'The more highly specified rights are as rights for women, the more likely they are to build that fence insofar as they are more likely to encode a definition of women premised on our subordination. [...] Yet the opposite is also true – the more gender neutral [...] a right, the more likely it is that rights are liable to enhance male privilege [...] The paradox, then, is that rights that entail some specification of our suffering, injury or inequality lock us into the identity defined by our subordination and potentially even enhance it' (423). This paradox is equally applicable to the rights of minorities.

¹³⁴ A preservationist multicultural ethic is one which defends multicultural society on the basis that minority and majority cultures have a right to preserve their distinct and immutable cultures and traditions. It does not admit of cultural hybridity.

that of the native, Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* presents both an African reaction to Irishness and an Irish reaction to Africanness, which should be understood not as representative of either culture, but as a Janus-faced collaborative artefact in which all representations bear the imprint of two distinct voices and two distinct cultures. For Adigun, 'the epitome of intercultural work was the writing of *The Playboy of the Western World*' (Interview 308), and he would like the piece to be read within an intercultural paradigm. The production certainly sits well in this frame, but an eye on the multicultural context that informed the play can help to create a fuller picture of its significance. Intercultural collaboration in multicultural settings works to highlight the migrant's right to self-determination at the same time as it offers a solid articulation of potential and actual hybridities. However, in a Bourdieusian vein, keeping in mind the cultural and economic power relations that have the power to help or hinder the efficacy of such collaboration can determine the actual positive socio-political effects of individual collaborations.

In *After Empire*, Paul Gilroy accounts for racism in Britain in terms of postcolonial melancholia. He wants us 'to consider the political and psychological realisations which attend the discovery that imperial administration was, against all ethnic mythology that projects empire as essentially a form of sport, necessarily a violent, dirty and immoral business' (102). For Gilroy, Britons are captives of the imperial process (103). Empire created unprecedented security and privilege (109), and thus the end of Empire began to disrupt this privilege. Making postcolonial immigrants appear to be responsible for the disruption of England as a place of 'safety and consolation' (126) instead of acknowledging the loss of empire and the horrors of the colonial past results in repressed racism. Gilroy makes a case for acknowledging past

colonial atrocities and present racism in order to achieve a convivial¹³⁵ culture. He says that because race ‘ought to be nothing (according to the tenets of liberalism), it *is* prematurely pronounced to be of no consequence whatsoever’ (159). Proclaiming equality of opportunity seems ‘to have no impact on the fact that inequality is increasing’ (135). For Gilroy, seeing more ethnic and cultural diversity in advertising and on television does not make up for its relative absence in ‘Parliament, the police service, or on the judge’s bench’ (136).

Gilroy finds useful responses to multicultural Britain in the controversial cultural articulations of *The So Solid Crew* and *Ali G*. For Gilroy, *The So Solid Crew* make a strong statement about black marginalisation in British society. Their referencing of U.S. film genres speaks to an alienation from British life. Gilroy also credits Sasha Baron Cohen’s comedy persona *Ali G* with showing that ‘the globally broadcast American thug life is ridiculously inappropriate to the more innocent habits of marginal young Brits’ (147). While noting the problem that some *Ali G* fans are ‘probably laughing at the black parts of his monstrous hybrid’ (148), Gilroy concludes that the hybridized character helps to ‘break laughter’s complicity with postcolonial melancholia and to locate new sources of comedy in a remade relationship with our heterogenous selves, working through the effects of empire in a self-consciously multicultural nation’ (149). For Gilroy, such cultural representations can aid the nation as it tries ‘to conjure up a future in which black and brown Europeans stop being seen as migrants’ (165); racism should be privileged over migration in historical and social analysis because ‘it was racism and not diversity that made [migrants’] arrival a problem’ (165). Intercultural collaboration is a means to this end. As argued in the introduction, involvement of members of all represented cultures in an intercultural

¹³⁵ Gilroy uses conviviality ‘to refer to the process of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere. [...] It does not describe the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance. Instead, it suggests a different setting for their empty, interpersonal rituals, which [...] have started to mean different things in the absence of any strong belief in absolute or integral races’ (xi).

production strengthens rights of representation. By including both minority and majority culture perspectives, interculturalism has the potential to embody the ideals of progressive multicultural ideologies outlined above.

As mentioned, multiculturalism and racism in Ireland have different histories and take different forms to those in Britain, but there is much that is relevant to the Irish Republic's attitudes to these issues in Gilroy's analysis. Ronit Lentin offers a specifically Irish account of racism and multiculturalism, which has some parallels with *After Empire*. Lentin constructs Ireland as 'multiracist.' She notes four specificities of Irish racism, including 'the evocation of cultural authenticity, and the call to preserve the right that Irish people have to the integrity of the national homeland' ('Disavowed' 2.7); 'parallels between past discourses of Irish emigration and present-day discourses of immigration into Ireland, racialising incoming migrant and refugee "others"' (2.8) (other theorists see the positive potential of linking these discourses, creating commonality and understanding between minority and majority groups); 'blaming outgroups and incoming migrants for causing racism' (2.9); and 'projection' (by which she means projecting the country's ills onto a minority group, e.g. – constructing Travellers as 'dirty' projects Ireland's serious waste and litter problems onto the travelling community, whose halting sites are often under-equipped with water, sewage, refuse and sanitation services) (2.11). For Lentin, these specificities lead to anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, anti-refugee sentiments and anti-travellerism (2.13). To these racisms, I would add anti-immigrant racism, which affects Ireland's Eastern European populations, and other immigrants who are not refugees. Lentin offers a liberal critique of multiculturalism, taking issue with top-down Irish multicultural policies, which she theorises, following Barnor Hesse, in terms of Charles Taylor's much criticised 'politics of recognition' – an ideology rooted in liberalism that has many of the same dangers as policies of 'benign tolerance' critiqued by Fanning above. As many multicultural

theorists point out, such politics always construct a recogniser and a recognised, a tolerant and a tolerated, one who has the power to accept and one who, at the discretion of the acceptor, may or may not be accepted. Lentin calls Irish multiculturalism ‘disavowed multiculturalism.’ What is disavowed is ‘the official version of the Irish nation, a western construction despite its colonised past, which at the same time constructs a non-national “other” as both “difference” and “pathological”’ (1.6) Similar to Gilroy’s demand for greater recognition of racism in British society, Lentin’s argument is for a ‘politics of interrogation’ in Ireland, specifically for an interrogation of the Irish ‘we.’ Provocatively, she links Irish nationalism to racism, and argues convincingly that the Irish government’s contradictory stances on multiculturalism – pushing for tighter immigration controls while funding anti-racism initiatives – along with media responses to the immigration that accompanied the economic boom ‘are the primary causative factors in contemporary Irish racisms’ (3.6). In a psychoanalytic vein, commensurable with Gilroy’s use of melancholia, Lentin understands multiculturalism as ‘the return of the national repressed,’ where ‘the national repressed is the pain of emigration, returning to haunt the Irish, through the presence of the immigrant “other.”’

Lentin’s theorisation of multiculturalism is very reliant on Hesse and decidedly over-sceptical of multiculturalism’s progressive potentials. She criticises multiculturalism on the basis that it ‘assumes that racism is caused by the “strangeness” of incoming immigrant groups (rather than by the “host” society) and that by integrating and eventually assimilating outgroups, the “problem” would disappear’ (3.1). This is, of course, a very illiberal formulation of multiculturalism, and directly opposed to the progressive model, imbued with feminist and postcolonial insights, articulated above. In a democratic and globalising world, governments need to have policies on multicultural issues, and decrying all top down initiatives is not helpful. Further, scrambling the terms integration and assimilation interrupts the efforts of those, like Fanning, thinking

towards equality for minority groups.¹³⁶ Lentin's suspicion of both group rights and discourses of respect for difference in Irish multiculturalism is well-grounded, but multicultural policies that really work towards social inclusion and avoid cultural and ethnic essentialism are the best way of tackling the problems with both of these doctrines. The problem in Ireland is a lack of recognition of institutionally and culturally enshrined racism and the exclusion of minority voices from discourses on integration, not multicultural programmes aimed at integration (as opposed to assimilation), nor policies which defend cultural difference and attempt to gain differential rights for minority groups. Like Gilroy, Lentin sees hope for multiculturalism in social and cultural articulations from people of colour, citing playwright Ursula Rani Sarma and pop star Samantha Mumba as important cultural icons (5.2). Intercultural projects involving both recent immigrants and multiculturally engaged Irish born people (of whatever race or ethnicity) can also meet these ends. Multiculturalism is not just about minorities: it is a mode of social and political organisation in which it is crucial for the majority to partake. Intercultural responses to changing ethnic and national topographies have the potential to create multi-faceted, multi-angled, multi-perspective art which speaks of and to the experiences of a diversity of citizens, both minority and majority, within a state.

Both Gilroy and Lentin highlight some pitfalls that multicultural endeavours, both political and (implicitly rather than explicitly in Lentin) artistic, may have to face in Ireland, pitfalls which ethical intercultural collaboration finds itself in an advantageous position to overcome. In both Gilroy and Lentin's theories, the suspicion of engagement with difference is too pessimistic. More helpful are feminist and postcolonial formulations of multiculturalism that assign group rights whilst being

¹³⁶ In a later version of the same article, Lentin adds some context to her use of Hesse and recognises, despite her critique of 'Westocentric multiculturalist assumptions,' that 'the fight against racism must begin from the top' ('Anti-racist' 230). However, she continues to scramble the terms assimilation and integration, failing to recognise the positive potential of the latter.

cognisant of their paradoxical nature, engage ethically with individual practices within broadly delineated cultural groups, and recognise barriers to inclusion in debate specific to minority communities. Further, while psychoanalytic frameworks yield interesting theoretical fruits for many theorists, I argue, following memory scholar Fiona Schouten – whose short essay ‘The Paradox of Memory Studies’ offers a brave rebuttal of established discourse – that the application of terms like ‘working through,’ ‘trauma,’ ‘mourning,’ or ‘repression’ (and indeed, though she does not mention it, ‘melancholia’) to entire nations is normative and may obscure the divergent effects of history on different social groups (Schouten 144-147). Further, I would add that such terms take for granted the (by no means obvious) idea that citizens within these ‘sick’ democracies are, at least subconsciously, aware of and affected by national histories. What Gilroy and Lentin usefully contribute to an analysis of the role of intercultural art in multicultural society is, to follow Ric Knowles’ formulation of cultural materialism, resistance to ‘interpretative discourses of the universal and the individual’ (*Material* 13) as well as ‘rigorous attention [...] to the realms of the historical and the social’ (13).

Art and Racism

As mentioned, a number of critics and scholars comment on the lack of racial tension in Adigun and Doyle’s *The Playboy of the Western World*. For Fricker, this elision, along with the decision to make the Malomos upper class (which will be discussed further in the next section) is the play’s great weakness. She says: ‘Adigun and Doyle’s impulse to tell a new story through Synge honours the author and argues for the play’s continuing relevance. It’s only a shame they did not use their inspired concept to dig deeper into the hidden recesses of today’s Irish culture’ (*Variety*). In one way, the absence of prejudiced responses to Christy (on behalf of all but the cowardly and jealous Sean Keogh) sugar-coated Ireland’s racial tensions. But in another, as Singleton argues, it

‘revealed a good deal about the presentation of race [...] in a post-colonial society’ (*Masculinities* 40). Singleton observes: ‘when Christy walked onto the stage as a black man he was doubly othered and there were audible intakes of breath in the audience’ (39); he reads these gasps as an anxiety for Christy ‘in the particular environment that had been set up on stage, an environment and class not renowned for its inter-cultural understanding’ (39). This anxiety turns out to be ill-founded within the dramatic world, but it reveals an acute consciousness on behalf of the audience of the kinds of racism that black people in the Republic of Ireland experience, and potentially effects a much needed questioning of the inevitability of this racism.

The lack of racism in the play, to borrow Adigun’s favourite Brechtian quote, is acting not as ‘a mirror to be held up to society, but a hammer with which to shape it.’¹³⁷ Doyle recalls that he often had to reassure himself and check with Adigun that this was the right road to take (Interview 316). Adigun believes that the line between reality and fiction is blurred, and the more normalised representations of otherness a public is given, the more it will accept otherness. Adigun, for instance, believes that the representations of black people in positions of power on television shows such as *24* led to the election of President Obama in real life (Interview 305). This is an interesting thesis, and one which deserves serious attention in a debate about rights of representation. Said’s argument in *Orientalism* is that cultural representations of Eastern people by Western artists and politicians tell us more about the West than they do about the East, and also that these representations have power – they provide justification for imperial power relations and prejudiced attitudes, both historically and in the present day. Similarly, following Lentin and Gilroy, media, political and cultural responses to immigrants in the postcolonial West tell us more about attitudes to race in Western

¹³⁷ The origin of this quotation, commonly attributed to Brecht, is in fact contentious, as it does not appear in any of his published writings. In *The Political Psyche*, Andrew Samuels attributes the quotation to the 1920s Russian Futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky (Samuels 10).

society than they do about the actions of immigrants. These representations also have power, garnering public support for specific immigration policies and influencing the way that immigration, immigrants and minorities are understood and treated in multicultural societies. Adigun's ideology of representation entails subverting the Orientalist dynamic of this power, providing representations that influence attitudes to diversity in positive ways without being didactic. Adigun is irritated by the Irish media's tendency to racialise black people rather than taking them first as individuals, observing that 'every time you see a black man on *The Late Late Show* there will be a discussion about immigration that night' (Interview 305). He believes that if black people were represented foremost in their social roles as doctors, journalists, artists or such, this would naturalise white Irish people's reactions to black people in real life. If this were the case, Adigun cleverly quips using a commonly heard refrain in Irish advertising, then a white Irish person's encounter with an immigrant doctor would simply be 'As seen on *The Late Late Show*' (305). As Doyle explains, the important issue with Christy for the other characters in the play is not where he comes from or the colour of his skin; rather, it is how useful he is to them (Interview 316). In the conviction that fiction has the power to shape reality, Adigun and Doyle's dramatic choices create a fictional Ireland in which race does not matter.

Gilroy and Lentin call for greater acknowledgement of racism as the cause of problems in multicultural situations. This is particularly pressing in the Irish case, as there is a tendency, pointed to by Lentin, to deny that the Irish are capable of racism due to histories of emigration and anti-Irish racism ('Disavowed' 2.1). The lack of import the Irish characters in *The Playboy of the Western World* attach to Christy's skin colour and origins might feed the widespread 'denial that Irish people can be, and are, racist' (Lentin, 'Disavowed' 2.1). While it is evident that Ireland needs more cultural articulations which highlight this reality, Adigun's theory of representation remains

convincing, and there is a place for drama that uses idealised representations rather than realistic representations to effect social change. Hard-hitting dramatic work like that of Seremba and O’Kelly serves to draw the attention of the Irish arts community to uncomfortable truths about their country, its missionary history, and the unfairness of its institutions, perhaps opening up possibilities, as King argues, for humanitarian transformation; however, Adigun and Doyle’s funny, entertaining, accessible and populist adaptation of Synge’s classic reached wide audiences, including working-class and youth audiences who would not usually go to the theatre and, further, it was inspired and informed by a strong ideological commitment of its own. Both strategies are productive, both have socio-political worth, and those who say the adaptation lacks depth do Adigun and Doyle a disservice.

Semiotically speaking, whether the authors wished to highlight race issues or not, a black Christy Mahon signified strongly in the newly multicultural and increasingly racist Irish performance context. Reviews and criticism attest to this, as does Singleton’s observation that the audience were palpably worried for Christy’s safety in what would likely have been in reality (if not in Adigun and Doyle’s fiction) an inhospitable environment. Christy’s race also made certain parts of the script and plot signify differently. In the third act, Seán Keogh calls the newcomer a savage: an insult present in Synge’s original, which when directed at Christopher Malomo takes on racist overtones and causes him to fly into a rage. Race signifies too when Christy is bound and burned at the end of the third act. Christy, clumsily disguised by the Widow Quin in a pink hooded tracksuit with the word Bitch emblazoned across the backside, is tied by the Dubliners and burned with a cigarette by his erstwhile sweetheart Pegeen. At the *Irish Theatre Magazine*’s 2007 International Critics Forum on the 50th Dublin Theatre Festival a significant conversation revolved around the fact that, the context and castings of these stagings notwithstanding, two of the festival’s primary offerings – *The*

Playboy of the Western World and Fabulous Beast's *James Son of James*, ended with iconography recalling the lynching of a black man (*Irish Theatre Magazine* 21-29). For Singleton, 'the representation of a black man feminized as well as roped and tied subsequently is a troubling representation of the Irish: no longer the feminised other, the white Irish are now configured as the patriarchal colonisers, all through the representation of the male body' (*Masculinities* 43).

Because of the semiotics of the black body in its socio-political context, the play could not work to remove race as a motivating factor for violence against Christy, regardless of the writers' efforts in this regard. Further, it could answer neither Adigun's complaint about the dearth of black actors on Irish stages playing roles that have no relevance to their skin colour ('Living Colour'), nor his grievance with the recurrent representation of black characters on the Irish stage as foreigners, asylum seekers, intruders or refugees who are ultimately returned to where they came from ('Fear Gorm'). In this regard, McIvor sees Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* as politically dysfunctional; it does not gather 'enough courage to push convincingly against the text or break past its proscribed ending' (318). The project breaks down 'from the moment Christopher appears as an outsider with no real claim to the space he enters, whether Pegeen's bar or the Abbey's stage, because there is no way he will be permitted to stay at the end of the three acts' (318). For McIvor, the production 'does not depict immigrants, asylum seekers or otherwise as already truly present within Irish society' (319), and situates immigrants only in relation to white majority culture demographics, not to other minority-ethnic communities (322). When I asked Adigun about the tension surrounding representation of race and Christy's ultimate fate, he pointed out that at the end of *The Playboy of the Western World* Christy is empowered – he leaves the stage as master of his own destiny, with his head held high (Interview 304) – something which

marks the production out from the more problematic representations of black characters Adigun has observed on the Irish stage in the past.

The status of Adigun and Doyle's production as an adaptation of a well-known canonical text is important here, and McIvor's suggestion that it would have been braver to break out of Synge's diegesis – to give Christy the chance to stay, to marry Pegeen perhaps – fails to recognise the ideological commitment of Adigun and Doyle's decision to focus on Christy's character and not his race. For Doyle, 'it's well established by the time the rope goes around [Christy] that it's not because he's from Nigeria. He's just a pain in the arse' (Interview 317). As with much of his writing, Doyle's seemingly flippant frankness here reveals a subtlety. Ultimately, the things that happen to Christy in Adigun and Doyle's *The Playboy of the Western World* do not happen to him because he is black, but because he is Christy. The knowledge that the play is a relatively faithful adaptation of Synge's classic means an audience must logically trace the reasons for the violence against Christy to a source outside the black body before them. The violence exhibited towards the outsider is part of a canonically enshrined Ireland, and awareness of its origins addresses Gilroy and Lentin's call to position pre-existing attitudes to outsiders and not immigrants as the cause of racial tension in multicultural societies. If the production is utopic, presenting a racism-free present where racism exists, then the strange utopia offered is complicated when it comes into contact with the audience for whom it is intended. The audience expects to see prejudice and is made to confront this expectation. Thus, Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* highlights unfronted beliefs in the inevitability of racism.

Rights of Representation and Class

Christopher Malomo, unlike Synge's Christy Mahon, is of a notably higher class than the people he happens upon. He might be dishevelled, but he is also well-dressed. He

might be seeking asylum, but he is no economic refugee. He is a son of a successful businessman; he holds a degree in economics and a Master's in business administration. For Fricker, this is the production's 'major wobble': the writers 'might be trying to counter the prevalent Irish representation of black people as oppressed refugees and asylum seekers, but the explanations needed to make this new twist work are way too convoluted' ('Playboy'). On two occasions, when I have presented conference papers on rights of representation in relation to Adigun and Doyle's *The Playboy of the Western World*, delegates have made comments on the clear class divide in the play, suggesting that it is problematic for Doyle, as a writer whose success places him quite firmly in the middle class, to author representations of working-class, gangland Dubliners. However, if communities, as Sneja Gunew argues, 'carry information about their members and what they are creatively generating' (*Haunted* 78) and representatives from diverse communities can encourage a wide range of artistic practice in multicultural situations (78), Doyle's origins and upbringing on Dublin's Northside strengthen his rights of representation. Doyle sees himself as having grown up with 'a foot in each class' (his father had a working class background and his mother a middle class one), something which he believes places him in a good position as a novelist, because it gives him a double sense of loyalty and insight. He sees himself and his work as existing in a grey area between two classes (McCarthy 52, 114, 115), and it would be hard to situate him as an anthropological figure in relation to native informants (as this research has situated Synge, for example). Doyle grew up in working class Dublin, has working class origins, and remains committedly involved, through activities like his *Fighting Words*¹³⁸ initiative, with the cultural life of the Northside of the city. All this accounted for, Doyle's rights of representation might be rendered

¹³⁸ Fighting Words is a creative writing centre based on the Northside of Dublin city. Modelled on David Eggers 826 Valencia project, the centre pairs professional writers with local school children and adults for creative writing mentoring and tuition.

problematic if Doyle's success was based on patronising or insulting accounts of Dublin's downtrodden working classes aimed at middle-class literati. However, Doyle's unpretentious prose is accessible and has popular appeal, his novels have been turned into nationally successful films which, as argued above, help to place working class Dublin people at the centre of conceptions of Irishness, and his plays, as mentioned, bring working class demographics into the theatre. Doyle's commitment to writing for the people he represents is apparent, and this roots his work in a politics of laughing with rather than laughing at. The idea, outlined in the introduction, that rights of representation are conferred by individuals speaking *of* their cultures, not *for* them, can also be applied to class. Doyle's relationship with Dublin and with working-class Dublin in particular is an individual one – one that inhabits a 'grey' space, and this should be taken into account when assessing his rights of representation, but the content and socio-political effects of his work in this regard seem to compensate for the ambivalent status of his class belonging.

Similarly, the decision to make the Nigerian characters refined and upper class is representative of Adigun's individual relationships to Nigerian culture. The reason Christy is upper class rather than working class is the same reason that he is Nigerian rather than Senegalese – that is, these choices allowed Adigun's personal experiences to inform the work (Adigun, Interview 303). Adigun says

...my experience is [...] that in my culture, Yoruba culture, your parents will not let you be until you have your first degree ...

The moment you become a graduate you can fly ... Most Nigerians I know are graduates. Most Nigerians you see driving buses are graduates. A degree in that culture is much like a school cert here. (Interview 303)

In response to a similar line of questioning, Doyle suggested that the figure of the educated African could be seen as a stereotype in itself, and noted that there was nothing original at all about representations of highly educated African characters in literature and film. By and large however, he was of a similar persuasion to Adigun:

... in my own limited experience, the Africans that I do know, with the exception of one or two, are all Nigerian, and they're all highly educated, with a whole bag full of degrees behind them as they walk through life ... Talking to Bisi about where he came from ... these are people who come from a class beyond what most of us would consider to be middle class: propertied people who are probably close to major decision makers and have a lifestyle that might seem absurd from our distance. (Interview 314)

This privileged Nigerian perspective shines through in the adaptation. For example, Christy tells Pegeen, who already has positive ideas about education in Africa (perhaps due to the ideology in relation to representing racism outlined in the section above), that his two degrees are typical in Nigeria:

PEGEEN: All you Africans have graduated, haven't yis?

You've all been to college.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, in Nigeria, especially where I come from, you don't have a choice, really.

PEGEEN: Choice?

CHRISTOPHER: Most parents will do their utmost to ensure that you go to university, to get a degree.

(Adigun and Doyle 20)

Christy's class and education is not representative of a norm in Nigeria however.

According to USAID's 2004 Demographic and Health Survey, only 35% of Nigerian youths aged twelve to seventeen attend secondary school. Nigeria is not a country where getting a college degree is akin to getting a school certificate in Ireland.¹³⁹ Of course, domestic statistics do not accurately reflect statistics in diaspora, and there is a discernible brain drain phenomenon in patterns of Nigerian migration. According to April A. Gordon, 'It is estimated that more skilled, professional Nigerians now live outside of Nigeria than inside' (233).

OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) data indicates that 41% of Nigerian immigrants in Ireland were found to be educated to degree standard or higher (Fanning 63). There is also evidence to suggest a more diverse demographic of Nigerian immigrants than exists in other countries. Until 2003, due to a judicial ruling on the landmark Fajujoni case in 1987, parents of Irish born children were accorded residency permits in Ireland. This attracted illegal immigrants from other EU countries seeking to legalise their status (Kómoláfé, 'Searching' 7). According to the Central Statistics Office, there were 16,300 Nigerians living in Ireland in 2006, a figure that represents an 80 percent increase from 2002. Julius Kómoláfé stresses the complexity and diversity of the Nigerian population in Ireland, and interviews people from a variety of educational backgrounds with a variety of reasons for immigrating, including 'those who migrate to Ireland to extend their visa, those who migrate to seek legal residence, "Celtic Tiger" migrants, who were attracted by the Irish economic boom, refuge-seeking migrants, employment-seeking migrants and providence-seeking migrants' ('Searching' 6). In sum, not every Nigerian immigrant in Ireland has a bag full of degrees, and Adigun and Doyle's Christy must be understood

¹³⁹ Adigun may be referring to individuals from his own Yoruba culture, which constitutes approximately 21% of the Nigerian population, rather than Nigerian culture at large, but even in this case he is referring to the upper classes of Yoruba culture. Reports in the Nigerian *Guardian* newspaper and independent Nigerian media indicate that in Yorubaland approximately 2.2 million children do not have access to any formal education.

as a representation based in the individual relationship of Adigun to his culture. Adigun and Doyle's experiences better lent themselves to informing a character like Christy than an economically displaced person, a person seeking European residency, or a person fleeing religious or ethnic persecution. Thus the representation of Christy and his father presents the Irish theatregoer with a picture of a Nigerian that they *might* meet, giving them an individual character from a specific walk of Nigerian life.

Even though the cultural representations authored are rooted in individually specific relationships to communities and cultures, the meeting of middle (or upper) class Nigerian characters with working class (or gangland) Irish characters does important work in a socio-political frame. A feature of immigration in Irish contexts 'has been the arrival of well-educated newcomers in some deprived localities' (Fanning 56). Fanning points out that, from a developmental perspective, Irish residents in the disadvantaged Liberties area in Dublin are less integrated than recent migrants, many of whom have high levels of economic participation (56). *The Playboy of the Western World* stages a class discrepancy that is a common occurrence in Ireland's capital. In a similar vein to the play's treatment of race, class seems not to matter to Adigun and Doyle's characters. Christy does not mind that Pegeen is not as well educated as he, and their class difference no more impedes their ability to communicate, find common ground, and, of course, fall in love, than does their cultural difference. If this play functions as a hammer with which to shape society, then it drives home nails of equality in its dealings with both race and class.

Intercultural Conflict

The Playboy was so successful that The Abbey programmed it for a second run in December of 2008. However, behind the scenes deep rifts had formed which continue to play out in the courts. Adigun withdrew his support from the second production and

initiated myriad legal proceedings in relation to it. On hearing about The Abbey's proposed remounting, Adigun brought the theatre before the Equality Tribunal, alleging discrimination. He claimed to be an employee of The Abbey on the grounds that the theatre had reserved exclusive rights to produce *The Playboy* and that he had played a significant role in media coverage, casting and rehearsals. As an employer, Adigun claimed, The Abbey had discriminated against him on grounds of race: he claims he was treated less favourably than Doyle while working on the original production, was denied over €20,000 due to him in royalties, and was denied employment by being excluded from the second run (*Bisispeaks.com*). The Abbey said that it had no employment contract with Adigun, and in November 2010 Equality Officer Vivian Jackson deemed Adigun's case to fail 'in its entirety' (Jackson). Adigun appealed this verdict in the High Court, where he was ruled against in July 2011. In August of the same year, he lodged an appeal against this ruling in the Supreme Court; this legal action has yet to be settled. Following the second mounting of the *The Playboy*, Adigun sued The Abbey, Jimmy Fay and Roddy Doyle for infringement of his copyright in relation to the unauthorised staging and for violation of his moral rights as an author due to his belief that the script used for the second version was 'a mutilated and distorted version' (*Bisispeaks.com*). This action was thrown out of the commercial court in 2010 (Frawley 12), and remains to be tried in the High Court. Adigun is also suing Doyle and Doyle's agent John Sutton, alleging that Doyle breached his contract with Arambe productions, an allegation which Doyle denies, claiming the contract with Arambe was terminated legally (Doyle, Interview 318; Carolan 4). This action has also yet to be settled. As well as this, Adigun is suing the *Sunday Tribune* for defamation in relation to their coverage of the controversy. Further, in 2008 he brought his solicitor Linda McEvoy before the Solicitor's Disciplinary Tribunal for professional misconduct in dealing with his interactions with The Abbey. When she was exonerated, he appealed

the finding before the High Court, where the judge upheld the Tribunal's judgement. In 2009, he launched proceedings against the solicitor's firm, Moran's Solicitors, again alleging professional misconduct in relation to Adigun's dealings with The Abbey. This case is also yet to be tried. The volume of legal actions embarked on here indicates much psychological distress on Adigun's behalf, and doubtless much distress caused to Doyle, Fay, Sutton, personnel at The Abbey, McEvoy, and personnel at Moran's Solicitors also.

This is a bitter end to a collaboration which fulfils all of the ethical guidelines I suggest in the introductory chapter. In terms of involvement of members of both represented cultures, equality and agency of collaborators within the creative process, advantageousness to all involved, and positive effects in its socio-political context, this production seems to represent ethical intercultural practice. I propose that the controversy has much to do with the misconception of the collaborative process on behalf of critics, academics and the public, and a wider understanding of the work's importance in national rather than intercultural terms. To draw on Bourdieu, the field of cultural production operates within the fields of power and class, and although it has a high degree of autonomy, it is necessarily controlled by this exterior logic (*Cultural Production* 38-40).

The initial idea for the production was Adigun's, and was, as discussed, inspired by a desire to use theatre to contribute to the emergent discourse on immigration and integration in the Republic. In an article for *The Irish Times* Adigun calls the idea for, collaboration on, and commissioning and producing of *The Playboy* his 'greatest achievement by far, since arriving in Ireland in 1996' ('Wow' 6). He stresses the collaborative nature of the piece - '[i]n my opinion, this play is a perfect synergy of creativity rooted in two distinct cultures and would definitely not have been such a unique play if it was written by either myself or Roddy Doyle singlehandedly.' Doyle

paints a similar picture. When I asked him in interview about the choice of *The Playboy of the Western World* for his collaboration with Adigun, he replied: ‘Well the choice wasn’t mine, the idea was Bisi Adigun’s’ (Interview 311).

While Adigun stresses the fact that the idea for the collaboration was his, and both authors insist that the rewrite happened line by line together, this jars with the general reception of the piece, which Emer O’Kelly sums up succinctly in her description of the new *Playboy* as ‘pure Doyle.’ An *Irish Independent* review ran with the headline ‘Doyle’s Synge-lite has laughs but not subtlety’ (*Irish Independent*), and plenty of other reviewers highlight Doyle’s authorship of the piece and sideline Adigun’s. Scholar Christopher Murray, speaking at the Irish Theatrical Diaspora conference in Galway in April 2009, suggested that Doyle must have written the Dublin characters’ dialogue, as it was clearly in his style. At the 2007 International Critics Forum, Peter Crawley repeatedly refers to the play as if the language and humour are Doyle’s alone. These kinds of attitudes did not go unremarked by the writers, and are, understandably, a cause of upset to Adigun. He told me:

A lot of people would prefer if it was like, okay Roddy you’re going to write the Irish bit, Bisi you’re going to write the Nigerian bit ... As a matter of fact that would have made them more comfortable and more fulfilled. But that isn’t how it happened. (Interview 310)

Doyle was aware that the popular reception of the play as ‘pure Doyle’ was a source of tension, telling me:

one of the reasons I was approached about co-writing the play in the first place was because I’ve got two and a half decades of experience, and I’m also very well known, frankly. It’s what marketing people would call ‘the brand’ y’know? ... There was

a lazy journalism where one or two people referred to it as
'Roddy Doyle's play', including, ironically, one of the reports
about the high court proceedings. (Interview 318)

Symbolic capital, Bourdieusian theory shows, can be turned into economic and cultural capital in an economy of cultural practice, and having Booker Prize winning Doyle on board undoubtedly contributed to the production's ability to attract an Arts Council grant of €10,000 and to secure a run at The Abbey. Doyle says that he does not think it reasonable that he should feel guilty for his success, and that controlling feelings of resentment is up to Adigun (Interview 318). Doyle also says that Adigun accused him of failing to acknowledge in public that the play was originally Adigun's idea, an accusation which caused him much personal hurt. For his part, Adigun, though more reluctant to talk about the controversy than Doyle, intimated to me that black people's ideas are often not acknowledged as their ideas, and indicates that The Abbey treated him with a lack of respect:

The reason why *The Playboy* was very good was because Roddy Doyle never gave me the opportunity to doubt myself while we were writing [...] If The Abbey had given Arambe even a little bit of the kind of respect that Roddy Doyle gave Bisi, this production by now would have been invited to heaven.

(Interview 308)

Neither author has the monopoly on hurt and anger in this dispute. Adigun feels that, due to his race, he has not received appropriate credit and monetary recompense for, nor adequate control over, his ideas and work; Doyle feels used for his celebrity, then unfairly attacked for media responses that were beyond his control.

Adigun's complaint against *The Abbey* is multifaceted. In interview he took issue with the fact that *The Abbey* did not see or market the play as intercultural, claiming:

In the whole world, the epitome of intercultural work was the writing of *The Playboy of the Western World*. It is when I am dead that people will be talking about it, not now, because they've got eyes that can't see. (*Interview 308*)

Adigun opines that *The Abbey* did not see the production as intercultural, and points out that the word is not used in any of the theatre's publicity (*Interview 304*). Sure enough, the emphasis in the promotional material on *The Abbey* website is on the new *Playboy* as a 'contemporary reimagining' of 'the most famous and infamous play in *The Abbey Theatre's* repertoire' (*The Abbey, 'Playboy 2007'*). The promotional images highlight the blackness of the stranger on the CCTV screen, but the accompanying text does not suggest that we engage with the cultural difference that blackness might imply. Rather, we are told that in 'this vivid retelling Synge's play rediscovers its ability to tell the truth of a contemporary Irish experience and continues its legacy, vibrant as ever' (*The Abbey, 'Playboy 2007'; 'Playboy 2008'*). Further, the outreach resources issued by *The Abbey* for students wishing to engage with the production, comprising performers' diaries, interviews with Adigun and Doyle, extensive notes on the production and guidelines for writing a review of the show, do not mention the words intercultural or multicultural at all (Lucey, Blackhurst and Kingston). Although the 64 page guidance notes do touch on issues of national identity, refugees and asylum seekers, contemporary Nigeria,¹⁴⁰ and the significance of being an outsider, in the main the focus is on Synge re-imagined and *The Abbey*. The concern of national identity is simply one

¹⁴⁰ The material on Nigeria focuses on political instability and AIDS, even though these things are only briefly referred to in the text. It offers no information on Nigerian culture other than a link to a Nigerian website.

of many themes outlined, and Nigerian affairs are listed alongside violence and ‘happy-slapping’ under ‘Contemporary Issues.’ This deserves note, because the impetus behind Adigun’s idea in the first instance was to use interculturalism to speak to multicultural realities.

As discussed, Adigun says that he would have liked more respect from The Abbey. He believes that the Abbey treated him ‘less favourably compared to his co-author whilst working on the premiere production of the new version of *The Playboy* at the Abbey in 2007’ (*Bisispeaks.com*). This must refer to work during the rehearsal period, as The Abbey was not involved in the collaboration until the play was written. Both Adigun and Doyle attended many of the rehearsals for the first production. Adigun believes the script to be a finished artefact, and was protective of his and Doyle’s writing. For example, he tells the following story:

Giles Terera used to say ‘I am the son of a businessman.’ I said ‘no no no, not *the* son, you are *a* son. There is a difference between “a” and “the,” so you can’t say “the.”’ What I’m trying to say is the play was *finished*, so that an actor wasn’t allowed to say ‘the’ instead of ‘a.’ (Interview 309)

This protectiveness of the text likely also feeds Adigun’s belief that the second production of the play was ‘mutilated’ and ‘distorted’ (*Bisispeaks.com*). As an audience member at both productions, I noticed very little difference in the second staging other than significant casting changes, but, of course, I would not have been as sensitive to changes as someone deeply involved with the piece.

There is evidence that there was tension and conflict during rehearsals for the first run. In the performers’ diaries available as part of The Abbey’s outreach resource pack, Aoife Duffin (Susan Brady) describes an incident in which patience wore thin and there was a lot of tension (Duffin 8), although she is discreet about names and the

causes of strife. In interview, Adigun says that though the process was amazing and he was glad to be a part of it, it was at times fraught, admitting: ‘there were lots of problems, but at least we worked together’ (Interview 308). It might be the case that Adigun was not given the degree of control that he would have liked over the production in rehearsal, although this must remain somewhat speculative. If this is the case, I would like to suggest that the overarching issue is not with The Abbey’s reluctance to produce and market the play in harmony with Adigun’s dramaturgical and ideological commitments. The Abbey acted according to accepted protocol for theatre production, where, usually, it is the director rather than the writer who is the ultimate decision maker in relation to the *mise-en-scène*, and – though again I must restate the fact that I do not have access to events in rehearsals – many theatre practitioners know that a writer demanding directorial control during the production process can be very taxing on all involved. As a party entering into an agreement to stage two authors’ work, The Abbey also has rights.¹⁴¹ As Fintan O’Toole observes in relation to Adigun’s appeal to copyright and his moral rights as an author, ‘there is an inherent tension between the nature of theatre open, collaborative, fluid on the one hand and the closed, precise notion of legal ownership on the other’ (‘Uncertainty’ 9). Without denigrating the idea of authors’ moral rights, O’Toole points out that the production itself is an adaptation, and asks where Synge’s moral rights are ‘when his famous closing line, Pegen Mike’s “My grief, I’ve lost him surely. I’ve lost the only playboy of the western world” becomes, in the Adigun/Doyle version, Fuck!?’ (9) Placed in this framework, Adigun’s allegations of substantial alterations and mutilations to the script seem somewhat hypocritical, and his conviction that if Synge were alive today he would have

¹⁴¹ The Equality Officer notes that ‘Clause 12 of the Agreement between Arambe Productions and the respondent entitles the respondent to produce and present the play in Ireland for a period of five years from the date of the last performance of its premier run, subject to certain conditions being met’ (Jackson).

written the same play (Interview 302) presupposes that the canonical writer would be much less attached to the immutability of his art than is Adigun himself.

The evident intercultural import of the adaptation exists within a certain regime of value, and is limited by that regime. The field of art in which *The Playboy* functions is subject to the logic of the field of power and class relations which encompass it. In Ireland, the field of power is such that many immigrants, and African immigrants in particular, are denied rights afforded to Irish citizens, and class relations are such that many middle class and educated African immigrants are socio-spatially relegated to a different class bracket, and, further, are read as lower class by an uninformed and racist society. Taking this social context into account, the play's success – its accrual and embodiment of cultural capital – is based not in its intercultural achievement, but in its more readily marketable aspects – Doyle, Synge, and national relevance. The Abbey did not unsettle its regime of value in order to give Adigun, as co-writer of a new play, the level of respect, perhaps in terms of control over the piece, that he wished for. If its first commitment was to intercultural articulations, then perhaps it would have done so. Lonergan tells us that '[b]randing tends to work against the possibility of theatre practitioners being prepared to challenge their audience's sense of what is normal and familiar' (Lonergan, *Globalization* 218). In terms of the logic of the field in which The Abbey operates, high production values and spectators in seats are privileged over intercultural and multicultural concerns. The challenge is not to convince The Abbey to sacrifice high production values to intercultural ideology, but to create a society in which minority culture artists have the same cultural capital as majority culture ones and in which intercultural art is not potentially alienating to an Irish customer base, but integral to national identity.

Reflections

This chapter has argued that ethical intercultural collaboration in multicultural situations can embody ideals of progressive multicultural ideologies. Adigun and Doyle's *The Playboy of the Western World* was the product of two artists from distinct cultures who lent experience and authorisation to a multi-faceted hybrid. The authors wrote the play line by line together, meaning that they both had agency and equality within the collaboration, if not, as the legal controversy that arose from the production might indicate, within the production process. This thesis has stated on several occasions that it is not opposed to director-led production processes, but that within intercultural situations attention is required to the function of director-led processes in relation to agency, equality and hegemony. Here, there is a case to be made for the argument that removing agency from the artist of minority culture within the production process interferes with the second production's rights of representation, insofar as it complicates the degree to which members of both represented cultures were involved in the project. On the other hand, the second staging looks very like the first, it does ethical work in relation to both race and class in its socio-political context, there was clearly adequate involvement, agency and equality in the writing process, and, when Adigun signed a production contract with The Abbey on behalf of Arambe, he chose to afford the theatre rights over his work, which include activities that frame the play for the public. In *Outside Ethics*, Raymond Geuss stresses the 'need to avoid inappropriate, excessive or fraudulent clarity in studying the human world' (6). Taking Geuss's advice here, I suggest that the above ambiguity points to a limit of my ethical framework. The dispute between Adigun and The Abbey shows that thinking through the four methods of strengthening rights of representations suggested in this thesis will not provide all the answers. However, I hope it also shows that even where uncertainty must remain, the method suggested allows rigorous and nuanced investigation of intercultural ethics.

What is clear is that commercial and national concerns were privileged over intercultural dynamics in the marketing and outreach processes, signalling a conflict between the ideological and the commercial. Were the field of power encapsulating the field of artistic production less discriminatory, perhaps this conflict would not exist. However, in an awareness of the racist nature of Irish society, a practitioner wishing to effect social change and contribute to the debate about diversity in Ireland might have to work outside of national institutions and commercial regimes of value to maintain the control of proceedings necessary to achieve these aims. This is what Adigun did with his next piece of writing, the fringe production *The Butcher Babes*, which received much attention for the import of its subject matter and the addition of a much needed African commentator to discourse on the grisly, racially loaded crime depicted, but which many critics also note was not a polished or professional looking production.

The Playboy of the Western World was advantageous to both Doyle and Adigun in terms of cultural capital. Though Doyle had written drama before, this was his first time on the Abbey stage. This boost in the cultural capital of his dramatic work probably fed into The Abbey's willingness to stage his latest play, an adaptation of Gogol's *The Government Inspector*, in late 2011. Writing with Doyle and having a production at the Abbey certainly boosted Adigun's symbolic capital, and, as noted, he sees the production as his greatest achievement in Ireland. There is also a chance, however, that the high-profile legal controversies arising from the production may have damaged Adigun's symbolic capital in Ireland, and it will be telling to see which venues stage his work in future. In terms of cultural advantageousness, an accessible, contemporarily relevant *Playboy* offered Irish theatregoers important reflections on Irish culture in the twenty-first century, while it gave a chance for the Nigerian diaspora to see itself represented on the Irish stage in a way that was true to Adigun's life experiences, rather than rooted in the observations of a member of the dominant culture.

There is tension evident in thinking through the ability of the play to challenge dominant hierarchies and stereotypes and create positive socio-political effects. On the one hand, Adigun and Doyle's decision to use the play as a hammer to shape society rather than a mirror with which to reflect it obscures the reality of racism and discrimination endemic at both institutional and socio-cultural levels in Ireland. On the other, it works against the tendency to racialise black people and exposes Irish people's naturalisation of racism. As argued, there is a place for both drama that explicitly exposes social problems and drama that paints more desirable realities in the conviction that life imitates art. Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* remains an important contribution to the discourse on immigration taking place in Irish theatre, and to the emergent intercultural theatre movement more generally.

In the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha thinks through the metaphor of the stairwell, suggesting that 'the temporal movement and passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (4). Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* is very close to Bhabha's idealised conception of hybridity. Bhabha says that '[t]he social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorise cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation' (*Location 2*). In this instance, due to the involvement, agency, equality, advantageousness and positive socio-political effects of *The Playboy of the Western World*, the play, authored individually by Doyle and Adigun, and, culturally, by the moment of Ireland's multicultural transformation, *was* authorised; the social articulation of difference was the result of a very successful negotiation, regardless of the unfortunate legal controversies influenced by the field of power in which the emergent intercultural theatre movement in Ireland necessarily sits.

Conclusion

This project has asked the ethical question: what is best intercultural theatre practice? Much ethical theatre scholarship focuses on the message of the *mise-en-scène* – following Levinas, on the ethical demand that a performance makes on the spectator within the face-to-face space of enactment. While this is vital scholarship, this thesis has taken a different approach, arguing that the ethical content of a production is not fully visible in the space of performance. Yes, representations have power; they can, as the scholarship of Raymond Williams and Edward Said suggests, subtly reflect or reaffirm hegemonic systems that disempower Othered people and cultures. In awareness of this, when discussing the social effects and cultural advantageousness of intercultural projects, this thesis has examined the ethics of the messages, aesthetic and symbolic, that intercultural productions contain and portray. However, this kind of ethical interrogation does not provide a complete picture. We must also ask, in a materialist vein, what ramifications these messages are likely to have in specific performance contexts. The effects of intercultural productions on the people and cultures they involve and/or represent must be central to an intercultural ethics.

Intercultural practice is a diverse phenomenon, both in terms of variety of productions and in terms of differing processes at work within each production. Thus, a challenge for this project has been to formulate an ethical framework broad enough to be applied meaningfully to a wide range of practices, yet focused enough to take into account specific aspects of individual productions that either strengthen or weaken rights of representation. In this knowledge, this thesis has used the four principles below, theoretically justified in the introduction and used as yardsticks throughout the thesis, to probe the materialities informing intercultural theatre practice and think through productions' rights of representation:

- 1) **Involvement** of members of all represented cultures
- 2) **Equality** and **Agency** of collaborators from all represented cultures
- 3) **Advantageousness** of the project to the least economically, symbolically, or socially privileged individuals and cultures within the production process
- 4) Positive socio-political **Effects** of a production within its performance contexts

This project has confirmed that most contemporary productions cannot be simply labelled ‘ethical’ or ‘unethical’; there are always aspects of intercultural productions that are ethically laudable, and, certainly in each case study analysed here, aspects that are ethically dubious. The ethics proposed here builds on the vital taxonomies and moral positions offered by intercultural scholarship, using them as markers, but with the liberty to avoid consigning a production to any one box. It offers a pragmatic system of thinking through the various aspects of an intercultural collaboration that can render it ethical or unethical, which is potentially more productive than analysing a production’s ethics based on the number of characteristics it shares with other problematic or promising forms of intercultural practice.

This thesis has carved a path between polarised views on intercultural theatre practice. Convictions that intercultural practice is exploitative and convictions that it is humanistic each have strong ethical arguments in their favour, but ultimately clear, useful strategies are needed for determining which convictions sail closer to the truth in specific situations. In moving the focus away from Western interculturalists’ (often admirable) ideologies and intentions and towards the effects of their work on cultures, artists, and socio-politics, this project enables scholarship to take account of a rapidly changing world. East and West, North and South, Black and White are still categories that demarcate sites of global and social privilege, and, like the taxonomies mentioned above, continue to serve as useful markers in a discussion of ethical interaction between cultures and nations. This notwithstanding, methods are needed to analyse power

relations in situations where these categories are destabilised and destabilising. To meet this end, this project has proposed and utilised a sociological method of analysing circulations of cultural, symbolic, social and economic capital in intercultural collaborations. Sociology (as much as Bourdieu would have it otherwise) is an inexact science, but thinking through the different forms of capital at work in interculturalism, how these forms of capital transfer from one geographically inscribed economy of cultural practice to another, and how they operate internationally can give intercultural scholarship a firm political and ethical grip in an era of significant global change.

This conclusion will briefly recapitulate some of the main arguments made in each chapter, and will then examine the chapters comparatively, pulling together themes and trajectories that emerge from the project as a whole. It is necessary to note at this stage that four case studies cannot be representative of an entire field. Rather, taken together they can highlight issues present in and pertinent to contemporary practice, provide comparative models against which to measure other productions, and offer examples of materially engaged ethical intercultural analysis.

Main Arguments Recapitulated

Chapter One argues that in international contexts Tim Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* came to stand for India in a way that would have been unimaginable in Indian performance contexts, showing the extent to which the changing socio-political effects of the same play in different performance contexts are relevant to a production's intercultural ethics. In light of the fact that Supple's ultimate commitment was to a sexualised, violent, Kottian reading of the play, the way *A Midsummer Night's Dream* spoke for India internationally bore troubling Orientalist undertones. Failure to consider the significance of a Kottian reading in international contexts resulted in an uncomfortable, if unintentional, instance of West speaking for East. Conversely, the

multilingual nature of the production opened up a space in which linguistic hierarchies were problematised, and one which allowed all collaborators agency. Reading the way in which these dramaturgical choices affected reception in international contexts leads to the observation that elements that strengthen the production's rights of representation adversely affect its international appeal. The significance of this will be teased out further in the comparative section below. Chapter One makes a strong case for the continued relevance of postcolonial scholarship to the field of intercultural theatre studies. Dealing with history, funding structures and the nature of the collaborative process, it argues that the collaborative space opened up by *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was unequal at a fundamental level, and to fail to recognise this is to root British privilege in merit, and Indian lack of privilege in demerit.

In order to suggest that intercultural products authored by a maestro can and do come to represent Othered cultures in powerful ways, Chapter Two argues that Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* is itself an example of imperialist intercultural theatre. It is in this chapter, where East/West binaries are tenuous and problematic, that the efficacy of a cultural capital based Bourdieusian framework is demonstrated most fully. Analysing the translation process that produced Pan Pan's *Playboy* in-depth, Chapter Two negotiates East/West binaries and also the intercultural limitations of habitus-focused Bourdieusian theory to show that the Chinese economy of cultural practice limited Quinn's ability to act according to the culturally specific structures of his habitus, ensuring his collaborators' agency and equality and strengthening the production's rights of representation. Postcolonial paradigms of intercultural theatre scholarship and habitus-based analysis can imply pre-judged assumptions about the power relations inherent in practice, which intercultural analysis grounded in cultural capital has the power to complicate, justify or dismiss. Building on the theme

established in Chapter One, this chapter also explores the different socio-political effects of the *The Playboy* in its Beijing and Dublin performance contexts respectively.

Chapter Three demonstrates the importance of socio-political context over and above dramaturgy or semiotic intention in determining *11 and 12*'s ethics and meaning. It argues that, the spiritual focus of the dramaturgy notwithstanding, *11 and 12* is about Africa and Islam insofar as the play is read in light of these specificities. In attempting to mystify the story and highlight its universality, Brook unintentionally glosses over the fact that the figure of Tierno Bokar was promoted by the French colonial administration in the first instance because it was sympathetic to Christians. Further, in aiming towards a universalised representation of Africa and Islam, Brook's production obscures the complex colonial and class politics at play in the historical production of the figure of Tierno Bokar. Mysticism clouds the material and political content of the story, allowing *11 and 12* to perpetuate Eurocentric ideas of good Muslims and bad Muslims which are ultimately disempowering for many Islamic peoples. Brook's aesthetic asceticism and pursuit of 'simple' audiences and 'empty' spaces is Kantian, assuming universal human experiences that take place without recourse to concepts or conventions; it can be subjected to the same Bourdieusian critique as Kant's judgement of taste: that it ultimately serves to reproduce social and political dominance in the cultural economies of which it forms a part.

Chapter Four argues that ethical intercultural collaboration in multicultural situations can embody the ideals of progressive multiculturalism. Further, it examines the ideology behind Adigun and Doyle's decision to feature very little racial tension in their version of *The Playboy of the Western World*. Multicultural Ireland is also, in Ronit Lentin's terms, multi-racist, but Adigun and Doyle's decision to paint it otherwise functions both to place emphasis on Christy's character rather than his race and to expose audiences' naturalisation of racism. Further, the class divide between the

Nigerian and Dublin characters in the play stages a class interaction common for middle class immigrants to Ireland, and excludes class as a motivating factor for the action.

Adigun and Doyle's oddly utopian *Playboy* asks us to focus on Pegeen's character, not her class, and, again, exposes audience prejudices regarding intrinsic differences between people from different economic strata in society. Analysing the legal controversy arising from the collaboration brings another conflict between the ideological and the commercial into focus. Commitment to ethical interculturalism presupposes that interculturalism is valued within an economy of cultural practice. Again, the implications of this will be teased out more fully below.

Findings Based On Comparative Analysis

The arguments and concerns of individual chapters offer information and lessons to intercultural practitioners and scholars in their own right, but drawing them together can help to establish some pertinent themes for the development of an intercultural ethics in the twenty-first century, and some of the more pressing challenges that interculturalists face as they work towards best practice

Members of represented cultures were involved in all productions, although only tenuously in *11 and 12*, where Malian actor Abdou Ouloguem's nationality was in no way integral to collaboration. Where *11 and 12* erases specificity and uses Othered bodies to lend support to a thematic and aesthetic universalism that Brook inscribes, the other case studies engage with difference. Insofar as such involvement strengthens a production's rights of representation, this is a positive finding. As discussed in the introduction, there is a danger that such involvement is simply designed to meet Western desires for 'authenticity,' a term that is loaded in postcolonial scholarship. However, it can also signal respect for Othered people's and cultures' right to represent themselves in ways that are not determined by or aimed at Western sensibilities. In

these case studies there are examples of both phenomena. The best way to determine whether involvement strengthens rights of representation in a meaningful way is to examine the extent of this involvement – that is, the equality and agency afforded to collaborators from all represented cultures.

In the case of *11 and 12*, the agency afforded to international artists represents good practice, but, because no Malian artist has agency comparable to Brook and Estienne within the production process, this good practice does not contribute strongly to Brook's right to represent Mali or Sufi Islam. The levels of equality and agency available to all collaborators in the three other case studies vary, and have varying effects on rights of representation. In terms of gaps in equality between the director and other artists, Supple's practice is the most akin to Brook's. While performers lead workshops and Ellias feels that they generated a lot, it is clear from Supple's interview that this agency was quite tightly contained within the bounds of directorial intention. Further, given Supple's commitment to a Kottian reading of the text above all else, the agency of the performers to create alternative readings, perhaps readings more grounded in their individualities and cultures, was curtailed. Therefore, the involvement of Indian performers in the production seems to feed into the Western desire for authenticity that Gunew describes rather than speak to the recognition of the right of Othered peoples and cultures to represent themselves that I have suggested is a positive feature of the structure of feeling of our time. Lest this criticism of Supple's *Dream* appear too damning, it is important to reiterate that there are four aspects to take into account when determining a production's rights of representation, and findings on Involvement and Equality and Agency give only a partial picture.

There is evidence of some equality between collaborators from both represented cultures in at least part of the artistic process in both adaptations of *The Playboy of the Western World* analysed. Admittedly, in the case of Pan Pan's *Playboy*, the equality

between Quinn, Yue and Wang has more to do with constraints on the structuring power of Quinn's habitus within the Chinese economy of cultural practice than it does with egalitarian intercultural intentions. I argue that this fact does not have an impact on its ethics: for the pragmatic ethics proposed here it is material relationships and products that are important, not intentions.¹⁴² In spite of the hierarchy of the director that Quinn notes in theatre practice, Yue and Wang's capital within the Chinese economy of cultural practice lead to significant changes in Quinn's script, making it meaningful to Chinese people, and altering aspects that were likely to offend minority cultures within China's borders. Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* was instigated by a minority culture artist in a newly multicultural situation, and, in spite of Doyle's celebrity relative to Adigun, both authors insist that the adaptation was written line by line together. This equality in the writing process contributes to the production's rights of representation. However, Adigun's withdrawal of support from the 2008 run of the show potentially has a negative impact on the production's rights of representation. Adigun was operating with a significant amount of capital within the Irish economy of cultural practice, but not enough to structure the system in accordance with the structures of his habitus. He wanted the production to contribute to discourses of immigration and interculturalism. It is probable, based on his legal actions, that he would also have liked some directorial control over the show. However, these desires were not permitted by the economy of cultural practice in which he was operating. Where in the case of Pan Pan's *Playboy* such restriction assured equality and agency for artists from all represented cultures, with the Adigun and Doyle *Playboy* it resulted in lessened involvement and agency for the Nigerian collaborator. Adigun did not want to see a staging of the play of which he did not entirely approve. The question of whether this desire should be, or even can be, respected in an artform as collaborative as theatre is complicated further by the

¹⁴² There is much ethical discourse that values intention, particularly that relating to healthcare and criminality.

intercultural nature of the production; with Adigun's consent and approval removed from the equation, The Abbey is left playing a representation of multiculturalism approved by and pleasing to the majority culture. Although there are strong arguments to be made for the conflicting legal rights of The Abbey within the production process, this fact must sit uncomfortably in a discussion of the production's rights of representation.

Comparing information on the advantageousness of the productions to the individuals involved and cultures represented, the first finding is a positive one. The production processes analysed were found to be advantageous to collaborators in all cases, with some query over effects on Adigun's cultural capital resulting from the legal controversies arising from the production. The pattern in the intercultural collaborations studied is that actors, co-writers, translators and other artists tend to be valued and treated respectfully. Interview material in the case of all the productions indicates that collaborators do not understand themselves to be instrumentalised, but, rather, to contribute meaningfully to the art produced. Further, while high-profile directors often benefit disproportionately from their involvement in such international projects, most of the collaborators also gain social, symbolic, cultural and, of course, economic capital from their involvement in projects with international and global remits. This is undoubtedly positive and points to an ethically laudable trend in contemporary intercultural theatre practice. In 'A View From India,' Bharucha alleges that Brook callously treated Indian artists involved in the creation of *The Mahabharata*. There is no evidence of this kind of dynamic in the productions studied, and, in the hopeful supposition that this represents a trend in the intercultural field, we can celebrate a job well done in moving beyond practice that exploits and instrumentalises artists. However, this should not mask the fact that the productions to which these artists lend their talents can be disadvantageous to the cultures represented.

In the case of *11 and 12*, Brook's Western filtered portrayal of Mali idealises a version of the Muslim faith made palatable to Christians through colonial involvement, a version that implicitly vilifies Wahhabi forms of Islam. Pan Pan's *The Playboy of the Western World*, when free of the constraints of China's economy of cultural practice, returned to the use of a Uyghur Christy Mahon, a representation likely to be offensive to this ethnic group, and one which Othered Uyghurs, without offering any insight into their position in Chinese society. Further, in its depiction of the female characters as prostitutes, playing in the context of Ireland's new multiculturalism, it created an objectifying sexualisation of Chinese women. In international contexts, Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* drew disadvantageous portraits of Indian gender relations, creating opportunities for spectators to fulfil their historically inscribed Orientalist ideas about the East and providing justification for Eurocentric notions of an uncivilized Other. The finding that three of the four case studies analysed were disadvantageous on cultural rather than on individual levels makes a strong case for continuing to use the insights of postcolonial theory to look at the subtle yet significant ways in which people are disempowered in global fields of representation. Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* is an exception to the trend outlined. The racism, classism free representation of Ireland allowed audiences to focus on Christy as an individual, not first and foremost as a black man, and allowed audiences to focus on Pegeen first and foremost as an individual, as opposed to as a symbol of her socio-economic status. This supports the suggestion that where artists from all (in this case both) represented cultures have equal control over the hybrid cultural representation authored, this representation is more likely to avoid stereotype, exoticising and orientalising, and have strong rights of representation.

In terms of the socio-political effects of the productions discussed, there is a clear problem with Western authorship or mediation of the *mise-en-scène* being rendered invisible in the space of performance. Brook's universal Africa is framed as

the story of Hampâté Bâ, and the contribution of Marcel Cardaire and the French colonial administration to the construction of the figure of Tierno Bokar is erased as Brook's international cast plays out the fantasy of universal equality. In its Beijing context, Pan Pan's *Playboy* raised criticisms when audience members knew that a Westerner was authoring the picture of China presented, but was accepted as a contemporary Chinese production when they did not know of Quinn's involvement. Without framing devices, the intercultural aspect of the piece was not apparent in any way from the staging. This creates a situation in which Western sensibilities inform cultural representations, but these sensibilities are effaced as the instigator of the representations in the space of performance, meaning that the illogical notions, cultural insensitivities and skewed observations that Yue notes are the product of Quinn's 'Western eye' are circulated without being adequately examined for prejudice and stereotype. With Supple's *Dream*, the bodies on stage created an 'Indian' aesthetic that encouraged critics and audiences to understand the patriarchy, class divisions, and misogyny in the play in terms of Indian social realities rather than in terms of Supple's Kottian dramaturgical and directorial commitments. In all these cases the absence of the white, male, European 'maestro' (or in Quinn's case would-be 'maestro') figure from the physical mise-en-scène creates an illusion of monoculturalism (or in Brook's case universalism) in the space of performance. With Quinn and Supple's work in particular, there is a sense that though the text is from the Western canon, the performance is Eastern. Of course, this is not the case – the dramaturgy is, in Quinn's case, heavily based on his adaptation of Synge, and in Supple's case, deeply rooted in the director's relationship with the text. With Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* this critique is less applicable. No maestro or would-be maestro existed in the first place – the collaboration was egalitarian from the outset with no one artist actually or ostensibly in charge. The end result is that the production presents Irish and Nigerian cultures in a way that

contains the cultural and individual experiences of both authors, destabilizing hierarchies of representation. The observation that intercultural performances can obscure Western involvement in the space of performance, thus allowing the West to continue speaking for Othered people and cultures while creating an appearance of involvement, agency, equality, and advantageousness for those cultures, calls into question the ethics of intercultural encounters, and diminishes rights of representation.

While all four case studies show that consideration of the socio-political effects of a production in its specific performance contexts is integral to an understanding of its ethics, Supple's *Dream* and Pan Pan's *Playboy* show that if an intercultural production is intended for more than one performance context, care should be taken with regard to how it is likely to signify in each context. This is not to advocate a bland toning down of regional specificities: quite the opposite. It is to advocate that productions that are likely to read as 'Indian' or 'Chinese' or 'African' in global contexts (particularly festival contexts) actually contain some dramaturgical, directorial or authorial input from people from those contexts. Otherwise, India, China, Africa and elsewhere will continue to be represented in ways that contain historically inscribed Western (mis)conceptions, which Said argues, and the Pan Pan *Playboy* and Supple's *Dream* show, say more about the Occident than about its Other.

Looking comparatively at the socio-political effects of the plays, it is clear that representations of gender are a significant issue. As flagged in the introduction, the four case studies chosen are spear-headed by men. In the Pan Pan *Playboy*, the female translators had a significant amount of agency over the narrative, but the decision to set the adaptation in a brothel and make Synge's traditionally strong female characters 'semi-tolerated' sex workers was Quinn's. Thus the female Chinese characters on The Project Arts Centre's stage in Dublin were prostitutes. The male characters were not. In Supple's *Dream*, his commitment to a sexualised version of Shakespeare's comedy was

such that he chose only female performers from what Ellias describes as Westernised, urban contexts to enable this vision. Thus the Indian women performing on international stages were, in an Orientalist vein, sexualised, and, in a colonialist mode, forgiving victims of attempted rape. In Brook's play, there is an all male cast, though there are two prominent female characters – Hampâté Bâ's mother and the Tukolor twelve-bead widow. Both of these parts are played for comedic value by men, and the strength and wisdom of Hampâté Ba's mother, which shines so strongly from his biographical writing, is absent. In Adigun and Doyle's play, I can see no apparent problems with female gender stereotyping – the female characters remain strong, and are not defined (or indeed cast) according to their sexual function.¹⁴³ Again, perhaps this is a result of having representatives from both represented cultures with equal levels of agency on the creative team – where the women on stage are not culturally Othered their representation may be less likely to be imbued with Orientalist fantasy. To reflect on the significance of the Western male-authored highly sexualised portrayals of Eastern women in Supple and Quinn's productions, it is useful to return critically to Susan Okin's discussion of whether multiculturalism is bad for women. If we need to be sceptical of discourses of difference that would encourage us to accept culturally sanctioned misogynistic practices, we must be equally sceptical of Western practitioners hoisting the contentious idea that sexy equals empowered onto women from contexts, ideological or geographical, where over-sexualisation of the female body is regarded as demeaning and disempowering.

In the chapters on Brook's *11 and 12* and Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy of the Western World*, class is a significant concern. In *11 and 12*, the erasure of Malian class plays into the hands of postcolonial critiques. With its simplistic anti-imperial politics, *11 and 12* fails to recognise the complex class relations at play in aristocratic Hampaté

¹⁴³ See Singleton, *Masculinities* for an analysis of the signification of the male body in the production.

Bâ's story, obscuring the existence of complex cultural and political systems before European colonialism and making the actions of the Tukulor senseless and prideful rather than subversive. Conversely, Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* stages a meeting of classes common, though not commonly talked about, in (post)Celtic Tiger Dublin, and also asks its audience to look beyond class for explanations of characters' motivations and capabilities. Like so much of this project, these opposing ways of looking at class remind us that while intercultural theatre exists that reinforces dominant hegemonies and must answer to the critiques of Bharucha and others, new collaborations are producing ways of representing the meeting of cultures that destabilise not only the hierarchies of culture, race and ethnicity, but also the hierarchy of class.

Another trope that arises from reading the productions comparatively is the observation that, at times, there is a clash between ethical intercultural ideologies and commercial or critical success. In a recent article on the globally successful community theatre group AfroReggae, Poppy Spowage argues that global theatre projects can collaborate with corporate and governmental funding structures without sacrificing their political or ethical commitment, while engendering strongly positive socio-political effects. The findings here show that while this potential abounds, there are still many commercial obstacles to ethical interculturalism. With Supple's *Dream*, the sexy spectacle of the piece, which excluded so many female Indian performers from collaborating on the production, was highly popular in international situations, while the multilingual nature of the piece, which spoke to a commitment to intelligibility for non-English speakers, was unpopular, suggesting that success may be more easily won in international arenas with stereotype than with cultural sensitivity. On the other hand Quinn's production, while maintaining a high funding profile for Pan Pan, did tackle some pertinent social themes in China. Further, as Adigun and Doyle's *Playboy* shows, strong ideologies of representation can inform intercultural productions in a way that is

entertaining and non-didactic. However, even in this circumstance, the overarching economic and ideological framework in place limited the efficacy of this ideology, suggesting that while making intercultural collaboration more ethical can lead to a fairer world perhaps we will only see the true potential of intercultural collaboration when the world is fairer.

This project has proposed an ethics of the long contentious and hotly debated practice of intercultural theatre. It is my sincere hope that others will critique this ethics – pointing to any unjustified political or cultural assumptions that I, as a Western researcher under the guidance of other Western researchers, have brought to the project. Further, I hope that others will add to it, submitting further ethical criteria to both theoretical and analytical scrutiny. Most of all, I hope that this ethics moves debates about interculturalism forward, offering strategies of analysis that account for the unfixing of historical binaries without ignoring geographically and culturally specific advantage and privilege, and pointing to the ethical problems in the field that still require redress, but also to those elements of the field that deserve recognition, praise and emulation. The ethics offered here, along with pragmatic demonstrations of how it can be applied to complex case studies, is committed to the achievement of that which is just, equal and fair – best intercultural theatre practice

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Appendix: Interviews

Bisi Adigun

Date: 13 January 2009

Venue: The Central Hotel, Exchequer Street, Dublin

EMER: The first question I want to ask you is about the choice of *The Playboy of the Western World* for this kind of a modernising intercultural collaboration. It was always going to be a double edged sword. On the one hand it was going to generate a lot of critical attention – yourself and Roddy Doyle writing it, coming up to the 100th anniversary of the first staging – and on the other hand you had a lot to live up to. Were you afraid of upsetting the purists, and were you glad to court the critical attention?

BISI: As regards the choice of the play, I've been in Ireland for about twelve years now, I came in 1996, and because of my theatre background I would be generally drawn towards plays and theatre. Of course, *Playboy* was a play I had heard about. When I came over I quickly started my masters in UCD. One of the things that was on the curriculum was for us to go see plays and review them. I saw a students' production of *Playboy of the Western World*. It didn't have much meaning for me then – I was new; I was very unfamiliar with the language.

I think it was 2000 or 2001 that a lecturer of mine in UCD was going to write a book called *The Power of Laughter*. He wanted to look at comedy and things like that and he asked me if I'd be able to contribute to the book. What he wanted me to do was look at how I taught myself to laugh at Irish jokes. The premise of my essay was - if you come into a place you might not get the jokes until you get the culture. So he said he'd like me to work on some of the plays that I saw when I first came, and, of course, I remembered that I saw *The Playboy of the Western World*.

It was when I went back to look at the play that I began to see, oh - there's resonance here. And of course around that time there was a lot of media coverage of the influx of immigrants etc, etc. And a lot of people who are pro-immigration will say 'well don't forget that we've travelled.' So I thought - how I can contribute in my own way to the discourse of migration, otherness, diversity, is to use my theatre to talk about how in order to understand what it means for people to come in, you should understand why people left. So it has been one of the things I've wanted to do since around 2001, or since the book came out. I think the book was published in 2003, if I'm correct.

Then I set up my theatre company in 2003, when I did something in the Project Arts Centre. One of the objectives of the company is to introduce Irish people to African theatre. But being an interculturalist I felt stupid to keep on doing African plays when we could also look at Irish plays and re-interpret them from an African perspective. So my first attempt was Jimmy Murphy's *Kings of the Kilburn Highroad*. I used that to test the water. And the play resonated big-time. I went to see it with a niece of mine from Nigeria, and I could see that she didn't have to be an Irish person to understand that

play. I thought that play had a universal resonance. That was the first play Arambe productions did as a re-interpretation.

So the choice of *The Playboy of the Western World* then, it was like, you have a good idea and it keeps pawing you, and you think 'ooh that's a good idea.' Then you go and look at the play and you read it and you think 'come on, let it work, let it work.' So when I read *The Playboy* from that perspective I thought - this is it. And that's how the play became the subject of a re-interpretation.

Were we afraid of the purists? I personally believe that no idea is original. An artist is an imitator. So basically I thought, well, my people say if you want to eat frog you should eat the one with eggs. *Laughs*

EMER: You'll have to unpack that one for me I'm afraid!

BISI: Eating frog is a bit disgusting. Why don't you do it with style, you know? If you're going to do something, do it and do it proper. So you want to re-interpret a play? Why don't you choose the best play, or the most controversial play, or the most known play in the Irish canon? And it happened by coincidence to have the same kind of resonance that I was trying to portray.

EMER: So there was no worry then that it wouldn't go down well with the purists. Were you surprised at the good critical and commercial reception the play received?

BISI: I have to say to you I wasn't surprised. I was not surprised, because when we went into doing the play it was with serious respect, and that grew as we started writing. Because we quickly realized that any attempt to deviate from the plot led us into a cul de sac, you know what I mean? We had to ask ourselves 'where are we going?' and reign ourselves back. From that perspective I would like to say to you, that as a co-writer of the play I know more about the play than the purists. Because I slept with it, I woke with it, I drank it, I dreamt it. I was asked the same question by one of the journalists at Meet the Makers, and I said 'if Synge was alive today he would have written this play.'

EMER: One aspect of the play for which there has been a good deal of criticism is the language, and of course you're not going to find an idiom parallel to Synge-song in 21st century Dublin, but I've seen a number of reviews and papers where people decry the replacement of Pegeen's famous closing lines 'oh my grief I've lost him surely, I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World' with 'fuck off.' There is obviously a drop in the lyrical content there. Was that an agonizing decision for you, to have to replace such lyricism with expletives? Or do you feel that it's simply representative of its time?

BISI: I would later find out that that was the most challenging thing for Roddy – what do we do with the last line? And that was actually before we started. I said 'listen...' and it stuck, and he actually said 'yes!' It was like a mathematician – you get the solution, then you work back the problem. So we've got the answer, and now how do we arrive at 'fuck off'? To answer the question of lyricism, someone said that critics are like people who cannot drive who tell you how to drive. They said we lost the lyricism, they said we sacrificed the last line - let them give us an idea of what we should have written.

EMER: Another aspect pertaining to the language as well of course is that there is lyricism in the play, but it's mostly in the mouths of the Malomos. The Malomos speak

very lyrically, and the Dublin characters speak more prosaically. They still speak colourfully, but it's a little stronger most of the time. There's a lot of religiosity in the Malomos language; there's a lot of swearing in the Dubliners' language.

I thought, watching the play, that the difference in linguistic quality didn't just represent cultural difference; I thought that it also represented a class difference. I thought that it obviously pointed to a difference between Pegeen's social standing and Christy's social standing. He was obviously more respectable. He was an affluent, well-educated young Nigerian. And because this doesn't necessarily coincide with the relative social standings of the lovers in Synge's script I thought it was probably a conscious effort to challenge stereotypes. Was it an attempt to challenge an Irish stereotype of a Nigerian immigrant as poor or uneducated?

BISI: Well the thing about it is that sometimes when you are writing you are being creative and you are being inspired, but it is important for us to accept also that any artist is a plain slate that experience writes on. Now the idea was, should we get a Senegalese in? Or a Sudanese? Eventually we settled for a Nigerian. Why?

EMER: Because you're Nigerian?

BISI: Exactly! So the question of the way Christy Mahon speaks – now, my experience is, and I've said this to Roddy Doyle, that in my culture, Yoruba culture, your parents will not let you be until you have your first degree. You know all these things people talk about, if you're sixteen you can do what you want? In my culture, no way! Until you have your first degree you can't do what you want. And your parents will do everything in their power to ensure you get your first degree. The moment you become a graduate you can fly. I'd like to tell you that most Nigerians I know, most of them are graduates. Most Nigerians you see driving buses are graduates. So what I'm trying to say is that a degree in that culture is much like a school cert here.

It's important to say, yes of course there's classism, but it's important to argue that opposite attracts. We could have decided to write about an upper class Dublin family that Christopher Malomo comes into, but that would be another play.

It's important also to say that we are highly inspired by the original. A lot of people are saying that the Malomos are very well spoken, but the fact is that Michael O'Flaherty in the original is a buffoon, is an asshole! People will read anything they want into a play, but I don't think we were discussing stereotypes and class and things like that. The question you ask that is interesting is about the religiosity.

Things have come full circle. Irish people used to be very religious people. So when this play was written, people would have been very religious, people would have been very Catholic. But now people have lost their religion, and now a typical Nigerian person will be a Pentecostal person. So the idea of language, of the religious language, is there.

The last thing also is the lyricism. A lot of people think it is only poetry where you don't understand it. Poetry means alliteration, it means assonance, it means simile, it means metaphor, it means the use of language. And in the play there are all these things. So because we are not talking the Hibernian language that people used to does not mean we're not talking lyrically. I actually said it on The Abbey stage: the rappers are poets, they might say 'fuck you,' but they rhyme. Some writers are poets. So it doesn't mean that, because we are not talking a certain kind of poetry that people are used to in high art, that we're not being poetic.

EMER: Onto another area of the play that's of interest to me, and I know I keep theorising about race, but it really is where my research is directed - in your essay 'Arambe Productions: An African's Response to the Portrayal of the Fear Gorm on the Irish Stage' you noted with a certain degree of remorse that when black people were portrayed on the Irish stage they were portrayed as immigrants, as refugees, as asylum seekers, and at the end of the production they tended to be returned to where they came from. Do you think that *The Playboy of the Western World* challenged these stereotypes at all?

BISI: *laughs* Good question! Somebody said the best thing about *The Playboy* is it has murder, it has a stranger, it has romance. So we have a blueprint, and as I said already deviating from the play would mean a cul de sac.

What I'm going to say to you is this, that one thing I have achieved as BISI Adigun is that every time I've seen a play with a black person in it, some of them I've been involved with, the black person comes in like this *holds head proudly*, and by the time he goes he's like that *cowers and cringes* - he disintegrates. But this time around this guy came in like this *cowers and cringes*, and how does he go out? Like that *holds head proudly*.

EMER: That's interesting.

BISI: That's a journey. This guy has to come here to find himself.

EMER: And he is empowered.

BISI: Oh come on, the master of his own destiny! So it's classic.

EMER: Another question along the same lines, in your piece for *Irish Theatre Magazine* you decried the idea that you've never seen a black actor on an Irish stage playing a role that has nothing to do with the colour of his own skin. Obviously with Christy's character his nationality and the colour of his skin is instrumental. Do you think that's a negative thing, or do you think that's as it should be - that we're using Irish theatre as a mirror up to nation to deal with the multicultural situation, which is quite new in Ireland? Do you think it's a positive thing to stage race as race, or would you like to see more colourblind casting?

BISI: Very good. You just said something there I like. I don't know if you know, but my favourite quote is 'art is not a mirror to be held up to society, but a hammer with which to shape it' by Bertolt Brecht. So to answer your question, before I left¹⁴⁴ we talked about an ideal - there is nothing wrong with showing the bad parts of life. I want to say to you, and I don't know if you've read Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, that the status quo is used in art forms to influence the masses on how to think on certain issues. Now that is what I love about being a scholar, but if you like I'll give you the name of the essay I just wrote for this new publication. Malcolm Gladwell, you know him?

EMER: I don't.

¹⁴⁴ Referring to an earlier conversation between the two of us

BISI: You should check him out. He wrote a book called *Blink*. He says we human beings rationalise on conscious and unconscious levels. Our unconscious attitudes are fuelled by aesthetic values, our conscious attitudes are influenced by things that we see – television that we see, movies that we see, plays that we see, radio programmes. I'm going to say to you right now, every time you see a black man on *The Late Late Show* there will be a discussion about immigration that night.

EMER: I suppose that might be because we're still at a point where it's not the norm for white Irish people to encounter black people in situations where they're used to encountering white people yet.

BISI: No it is the norm, but it is resisted. And it is resisted on *The Late Late Show*. I'm going to argue that the reason is this, if you see something you start to become desensitised. I said in my article that the fact that we see black men on telly playing the presidency, and playing it very well, that means that this man *points to Obama badge on lapel* becomes the president in real life.

So what I'm saying is, if once a month there's a black person on *The Late Late Show*, why not have a chat? Why not ask 'how are you doing?' Don't even talk about my colour, ask:

'How's your company? Are you doing well?'

'I'm doing fine, thank-you'

'Ladies and gentlemen, that's it!'

And the *next* time, talk about immigration. Next time talk about driving. Next time talk about culture. Next time bring on something like *Metro Eireann*. What is *Metro Eireann*, what is it doing? Next time talk about cultural differences - it's no good beating your wife etc. Next time bring a doctor who works in St. James.

'How long have you been in Ireland?'

'I've been here about twenty years'

'Have you been working?'

'I've been working as a doctor'

'Fantastic!'

So when you walk into a hospital and you see a black doctor, you say 'I saw a black doctor on *The Late Late Show*.' As a matter of fact, there's a line that goes 'As Seen on *The Late Late Show*.'

EMER: *laughs* It was funny, I was talking to Giles Terera who played Christy in the first production in London, he's a friend of a friend...

BISI: Excellent. I would like to hear what he says about me.

EMER: Actually, he was talking about his experience of Dublin and he said that when the play was running people started coming up to him in Easons and on the street addressing him as Christy and asking after his father and stuff like that. And I thought it really made a case for, you know, when you encounter something on stage you're more willing to encounter it in reality.

BISI: There was a time, whenever I was doing my Master's in drama, there was a time that there was something on Coronation Street that they discussed in the House of Lords.

EMER: Really?

BISI: It was Deirdre Rachid, I don't know if you know Coronation Street.

EMER: Not very well.

BISI: Her husband was using her credit card and she was about to be convicted for it. They discussed it in the House of Lords. So what I'm trying to say to you is that at the end of the day there's no blurring between reality and art or fiction. There's no difference *per se*. Don't forget, this is my theory, most of the time when you see television - and people have the television on from about five o'clock until they go to bed - if you see a kid around, they don't care about the television until there's a cartoon, but most of the time when a good commercial comes on, what happens?

EMER: It gets everyone's attention

BISI: Whoosh! Why? They spend money on commercials because they want you to be bought over. Now if you are a theatre practitioner and you don't take drama as a good commercial you are in the wrong business. My argument has always been that in this country a lot of theatre practitioners don't have a clue of the power they've got.

EMER: So I'd like to move on, if possible, to talk about the current controversy surrounding the production. I know there are things that you are probably not at liberty to discuss, I'm aware of that, and anything you're uncomfortable with, please don't feel under any pressure to elaborate. I'm not a journalist, I'm not trying to stir anything, I'm just interested in informing my research. So I'd like to ask if the dispute is solely financial, or are there ideological issues involved?

BISI: No comment.

EMER: Do you think that the branding in the Irish media, on behalf of some journalists, of the play as 'pure Doyle' led to tensions?

BISI: No comment

EMER: I'll ask a more general question. Do you think that Western theatre generally and Irish theatre specifically tends to privilege, in that Rustom Bharuchian sense, a 'cult of the maestro' - tends to privilege one author over two and possibly makes communal authorship a more difficult enterprise, and in fact impedes intercultural collaboration?

BISI: Yes, I would... *pause*
I don't know if you know, there's a piece I wrote for the Irish Times recently..

EMER: I'm pretty sure I've read it. About the 'how' and the 'why'?

BISI: Exactly. I think that kind of answers this question. I was thinking about this when I was leaving you earlier. I'm thinking of an idea in my head that I'm a sexist.

EMER: Oh dear.

BISI: Yeah. What did you say?

EMER: I said 'oh dear.' *laughs*

BISI: Fantastic. Well if I wrote it down... will I write it down?

EMER: Sure, go ahead.

BISI: *writes* What does that mean?

EMER: I am a sexist dot dot dot dot. I suppose there's a 'but' there. You've left an ellipsis.

BISI: God bless you. Now what I'm going to say to you is, do you know why I'm a sexist?

EMER: Why?

BISI: I'll tell you why I'm sexist. When I was growing up, in my culture a man can have as many wives as possible; when I was growing up the only man I ever saw in the kitchen was a man who was schooled in Britain; when I was growing up I never saw any man carrying a kid or playing with a kid - I never saw it. Never. You know what I mean? Growing up, these are the things I saw. That's how I was brought up. I was brought up to see women as not on a par with men. Now I'm married to an Irish woman.

EMER: I'm sure she loves that!

BISI: But the fact of the matter is that for me to eat my food, African food, I have to cook it. For us to have a good relationship I have to do my fair share of taking care of my daughter. I'm a sexist, but I'm not acting on it.

Let's turn it around. Every Irish, every white person, is racist, because you are being brought up to believe that black people are inferior. That's history. There was a time when black people couldn't vote in The States.

EMER: And a time when women couldn't vote either.

BISI: Exactly. As we're speaking now, it was just 1955 that a black person refused to stand up for a white person. Now let's cast ourselves back to those days, when it was unacceptable for me to sit down with you. So what I'm saying to you is this, if a black man has an idea, it is very likely that he doesn't have an idea because he's not supposed to have an idea. If a black man can do something it's very likely that it's not him doing it because he is a black man. So what I'm saying is this, how many men would come out and say that it is his wife who is the breadwinner in his family.

EMER: I suppose the men for whom it's true.

BISI: No, how many of them, confidently. What I'm trying to say is the macho man would not come out and say 'my wife is the breadwinner, I'm taking care of the kids.'

I'm trying to answer your question by using a metaphor.

The thing about it is ... let me be frank with you, the reason why *The Playboy* was very good was because Roddy Doyle never gave me the opportunity to doubt myself while

we were writing. And when you give anybody the opportunity to blossom - somebody said we only use about ten percent of our ability, when I was writing with Roddy Doyle I used about 150%. I was glowing with ideas; I was at my zenith. What I'm going to say to you is, The Abbey didn't do that with Arambe. Roddy Doyle did it with Bisi Adigun.

We collaborated and wrote a very good play, and if The Abbey had given Arambe even a little bit of the kind of respect that Roddy Doyle gave Bisi, this production by now would have been invited to heaven. And that's what I'm going to say about that.

And I used the example of 'I'm a sexist,' because my wife would not know I'm a sexist. I'm being very frank with you. And the reason for being sexist is because I believe women are there for us, I can have four of them, you can have only one man. It's not fair y'know? Is that fairness? That's the way I was brought up. That's the way it is right now in my culture - men can have as many wives as they want. But I am not acting like that, because I've moved on. I've learned, and I've moved on.

Barack Obama was unknown three years ago. I've been thinking, you know in his children's school, somebody might be bullying them for being black. Three years ago. They are now the first family. What I'm trying to say is, it is time to acknowledge everybody's strengths and weaknesses. I know my weakness; I know my strength.

EMER: Do you think that the withdrawal of Arambe's support from the present production interferes with its status as an intercultural production?

BISI: I have to say to you that on a personal level I don't know. I don't know. All I know is, the first production I was glad I was part of it. I don't know what Giles said to you. The process was amazing. There were lots of problems, but at least we worked together. I'm not sure - it's for you the theorist to analyse.

Of course, having read Rustom Bharucha, he has warned us of all these pitfalls. But it's important for you to realise, maybe if you can get The Abbey to talk to you, that they don't see the production as intercultural in fact.

EMER: Really?

BISI: No, they don't. Did you see 'intercultural' in any of their publicity?

EMER: No. Would you have liked to see 'intercultural' in their publicity?

BISI: You know what? I do a bit of intercultural study myself. In the whole world, in the whole world, the epitome of intercultural work was the writing of *The Playboy of the Western World*. It is when I am dead that people will be talking about it, not now, because they've got eyes that can't see. Myself and Roddy wrote that play the way people make babies. That's how we wrote the play. You cannot make a baby on your own. You need someone to make a baby. And that's what I wrote in the Irish Times. I meant it, I'm not joking. I've read about interculturalism. This is the first one on earth.

EMER: On earth?

BISI: On earth.

EMER: I do think it's a wonderful example of an intercultural collaboration.

BISI: It is! Most of the time it's just propaganda. Like Peter Brook and Augustus Boal.

EMER: It's unequal: there's always a maestro.

BISI: This work. This *Playboy of the Western World*? Come on...

EMER: It's truly intercultural?

BISI: As a matter of fact, the best one for me was, Giles Terera used to say 'I am the son of a businessman'. I said 'no no no, not *the* son, you are *a* son. There is a difference between 'a' and 'the', so you can't say 'the'. What I'm trying to say is the play was *finished*, so that an actor wasn't allowed to say 'the' instead of 'a.' You know why? Because both of us gave 75% each and what do you have?

EMER: 150.

BISI: Vóila.

EMER: So you think it was a script in which every word was imbued with a lot of meaning.

BISI: And if you change anything it will fall apart. You don't just say 'the script says necessary, I will say compulsory'. No, they are two different things. Both of us sat down and decided to use necessary instead of compulsory. It could be because of the way it sounds, it could be because of the consonants, or the emphasis. So you can't say compulsory just because you like compulsory. No!

So what I'm trying to say is, on a personal note, I would like to see another example of intercultural theatre. Roddy Doyle himself said it. He had not worked like that before. The first few days we were working, I thought I was losing my head. The first week, I thought I was going out of my head because I didn't know what day it was. It felt like the first time ever I went to my college, UCD, in 1997. You know the way you come to do boxing? That's what I felt like. So I told him, I don't know what's going on, and he told me 'it's the intensity of the work.' You know the way when you are working creatively you are working on your own? Well this time round we were thinking and talking and working, and... y'know what I mean?

EMER: Do you think you're a natural collaborator, or do you work better on your own?

BISI: That's a good question. For this work I think... let's see, if I was writing in Nigeria I would know my audience, my audience would know me. But I always ensure that whatever I do as Arambe is intercultural, so as to appeal to both audiences. So I don't know if you know, but I worked with Jimmy Fay before, we co-directed my first production *The Gods are not to Blame*. And the reason was because I always loved to take care of the Irish angle, so that somebody was there to look at it from an Irish perspective. So answering the question about how I write collaboratively, I don't know, because if I were to be in Nigeria I could easily write about what I write about, and talk about what I talk about because I have the past experience of my audience. But here, it is good to have somebody to share an idea with. So, more or less, Roddy Doyle is taking care of what Irish people are thinking.

For example, I remember there was a proverb I used before, I don't know if it's in this one,¹⁴⁵ but it's 'the bug...'

EMER: The bug that eats the spinach also lives in the spinach.

BISI: In Yoruba I wouldn't use spinach - I'd use vegetable or use something else - but you have to use spinach because you guys know what spinach is. That isn't the proverb I was going to use originally. There was another proverb I was going to use originally. So what I'm saying is, the fact is that he's there checking things, and I'm doing the same thing to him as well.

A lot of people would prefer, a lot of people would be comfortable or happier if it was like, okay Roddy you're going to write the Irish bit, Bisi you're going to write the Nigerian bit. A lot of people would prefer it. As a matter of fact that would have made them more comfortable and more fulfilled. But that isn't how it happened. Genuinely speaking, I think that is how he wrote *The Commitments*. Somebody wrote one bit, somebody wrote another bit. But this was genuinely - every line. I'm happy to say that, because I think it's good that it's possible. As a matter of fact I think that's where the world is going, because you're looking at a globalised world. This play wouldn't have resonated twenty years ago.

EMER: It wouldn't have made sense.

BISI: Exactly. Collaboration is the way to go. You can call it cross-breeding, you can call it interculturalism, we can call it multiculturalism, we can call it whatever. The reason Obama is Obama is because of that. He is the embodiment of two cultures. The fact is that we're living in a globalised world where everything is becoming one. It's better if you have two things to talk about, because you're talking to two people at the same time.

EMER: But it certainly creates difficulties, once you have two people with ownership and influence over a piece it's harder to... like, I know at the moment there might be problems with the play touring Ireland. And I don't know if you've any intentions of taking the show to Nigeria, I don't know how well it would go down in Nigeria, but it might be an interesting experiment. But I suppose, when you have two or more people who have a say over a piece, a communally authored piece, it's harder to do whatever you want with it, and then I suppose there's a huge temptation for the artist to just work on their own, because then at least, you get to say where it goes and what is done with it.

BISI: I don't think that's a very good way to look at it. With due respect what I'm going to say is, in whatever you do in life, do it with integrity. Do things the way you would want somebody to do it to you. Whether it's communal, whether it's collective - if you were in the other person's shoes would you like that person to do what you're doing? If you can answer that question, then fine.

EMER: Do you think the play would go down well in Nigeria, and do you have any desire to bring it there?

¹⁴⁵ Referring to the second run of *The Playboy of the Western World*, from which Arambe has withdrawn its support

BISI: No comment. As you can imagine Arambe Productions have a lot of unresolved issues about the play that I hope will be resolved legally. And then we can begin to think about the future.

EMER: Okay, well I think we've covered a good deal. Is there any final remark you'd like to leave me with?

BISI: All I can say is best of luck, and I hope I've been of help.

EMER: You've been wonderful. Thank you very much for your time.

Roddy Doyle

Date: 12 January 2009

Venue: Fighting Words, Behan Square, Dublin

EMER: The first question I wanted to ask you is about the choice of *The Playboy of the Western World*, which might be seen as a double edged sword. On the one hand it was bound to generate plenty of critical attention, what with it coming up to the 100th anniversary of the play's first staging, and the intercultural impulse informing it. On the other hand you're going to run the risk of upsetting the purists. So the question really is – did you court the critical attention, and were you afraid of having too much to live up to and upsetting those who idolise Synge.

RODDY: Well the choice wasn't mine, the idea was Bisi Adigun's. And he came to me with the idea asking me to co-write it. And the decision at the time for me, I thought it was a great idea immediately. I think it was sometime in 2005 when he came to me, I'm not sure. We wrote it in 2006. And really the choice for me was whether I wanted to co-write, whether I could co-write, because everything else I'd done I'd written by myself, including the film scripts. One of the film scripts was co-written but it was me who wrote one version and the other two men wrote on top of that, but I never sat around the table and co-wrote something. So it was potentially a new experience for me with someone I didn't know very well. I'd met him a few times, but didn't really know him. So then when I went away from the first meeting with Bisi that's the only thing I thought about. I didn't give any thought whatsoever about possible repercussions or possible reactions to anything that we might or might not do. I thought it was well worth doing but whether or not I was the one to do it or not, that was the big decision, that was the only decision.

As to courting criticism or trying to deflect criticism or anticipate criticism, it's a minefield that you're never going to get out of if you decide to go in. I'm on my ninth novel and I've written or been involved in four films and five or six stage plays so I'm no stranger to both very good and really dreadful criticism. You can never anticipate what's going to be said about a piece of work. If you do you're probably going to produce a piece of work that is ho-hum, somewhere in the middle that nobody reacts to. I mean I started writing in a really habitual way more than 25 years ago, and I always put on a pair of blinkers like a racehorse and I just look at the page and I try not to anticipate anything beyond what I'm working on at the moment. So for example I'm

finishing up a novel at the moment, I'm editing a novel over the next three to four months, and if I start reading what I wrote say two years ago I'm beginning to judge it wondering what such and such a paper or such and such a critic will think of a particular page I'm in big big trouble. It's just me and the page, and that was the way, certainly I can't speak on behalf of Bisi, but that's the way I was thinking anyway when we were writing. It just seemed like a very good idea. And as for Bisi's point that often someone will get the permission to stay in the country not because of the truth of their predicament but because of the way they tell the truth or don't tell the truth – it's the quality of the story is more important – that struck me. That resonated right through the original play. I can't think of another of the Irish plays that a lot of people are acquainted with in the country through the Irish education system or through going to the theatre now and again, I can't think of any other play I'd be interested in updating. It just made good solid sense I thought. I thought it was a terrific idea.

EMER: And I suppose that even though you're not thinking about courting attention or upsetting purists you'd still have areas of interest: you'd still have themes you'd be interested in tackling and themes that you wouldn't be interested in tackling. I know that you're not new to staging race – your 2001 short story, *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner* was staged by Calypso, and that was very much met as a production that did deal with race and it was met with a lot of encouragement I think. Do you think it's important, do you have a strong interest in staging issues of race and immigration.

RODDY: Well yeah, I think one of the things about it is that we were always going to do a line by line, not quite in a literal sense, but we went through the original play line by line and tried to make sure that we stayed close to it. Now sometimes a decision we would make would send it off away from the original slightly, but we always came back to the original you know? So the whole exercise really was trying to maintain the characters, plot and spirit of the original.

EMER: Did you find it difficult?

RODDY: Yes of course, to a degree we found it difficult but to be honest an awful lot of the anxiety of any piece of writing is wondering what happens next. And a huge piece of anxiety is wondering how to end it. Endings are such an awful pain, really they are. But there we had the skeleton in front of us, so from my point of view, again I can't speak on behalf of Bisi, but having been through it, not just in play form but in every piece of work I've ever done – the only piece I ever wrote where I knew how it was going to end was a book called *The Snapper*, because it was about a young woman who was pregnant. She has a baby, and that was always going to be the beginning, middle and end of the story. Maybe that's why I took so long to write such a short book because I always knew how it was going to end. But all other things I've written, be it longer pieces of work or shorter stories for children, I've never known how they were going to end. So in this case at least we had the skeleton of the plot which was a huge chunk of the work really. It made it possible for us to write the thing. We wrote two days a week over six months, and possibly if we'd been writing the play afresh I doubt very much if we could have done it in that space of time, certainly looking back on it now, three years later, I don't think we could have done it.

EMER: And were there any things that when you were trying to follow the bones of the plot, were there any things that leapt right out at you and you thought 'great I know what that substitution's going to be' and were there things that you agonized over, going 'what on earth are we going to do here?'

RODDY: To me the one huge big agony was the last line. 'I've lost him surely', you know it. 'I've lost the Playboy,' was never going to be, that line in any shape or form was never going to sit in a modern context you know? And I suppose it's the line that everybody knows, there's been parodies of that line, and everybody when they're half pissed can come out with 'Ah I've lost him surely' and then Siobhán McKenna, I'm sure you know, or maybe you're too young to remember...

EMER: Oh I've acted in her memorial trophy competition in Galway.

RODDY: *laughs* That says enough, it was her memorial, presumably she was dead. So that was one of the huge big, how are we going to cope with that, when we came to that line. But luckily it's the very last line, so it wasn't something we had to get around. We had to get to it.

EMER: And how do you feel you treated it in the end, replacing Synge's 'Oh my grief I've lost him surely...' with 'Fuck Off'?

RODDY: I'm very happy with it. You know Eileen Walsh delivered it in the previous production in 2007 and Ruth delivers it in a different way this time. And I'm very happy with both, and it just struck, it eh, it seems of its time, so to speak. You know, that line 'fuck off' just seems of its time. Telling your father to fuck off, which is something that wouldn't be conceived of 100 years ago.

EMER: 'Quit my sight' doesn't quite have the same ring.

RODDY: No *laughs*, it doesn't really no. So eh, that was one of the big things we worried about. Then there were staging practicalities that ended up being part of the play. For example, the notion of them looking out the window at the sports. It wasn't going to work, y'know? It just wasn't going to work in the inner city suburbs of the wilds of the West of Dublin.

EMER: Thank God for modern technology, hey?

RODDY: Bisi at one point thought that they could be looking at something on the telly, that the sports could be on the telly, but I was saying I don't think that'll work either, so somewhere along the line, I suppose quite early on, when we decided that Michael O'Flaherty and the lads would have been involved in things that, well the law doesn't arrive in that play, so the notion of something being legal or illegal is probably a little bit irrelevant, so we were on the borderline of legality and illegality and once you supplant, and that was a very early decision, the action from the West of Ireland to the West of Dublin it was probably quite an easy decision to make them somehow vaguely criminal. That became sharper as we got deeper in, and once they became vaguely criminal, they became sharply criminal, gangland figures, not very impressive in that way, but then when you've got that gangland notion there are other gangs. Even at the time we were writing the play I think there were several killings, I think there was one in Clontarf and there was one at the top of the road where there was a guy just driving, I think he had just dropped his girlfriend home and he was stopped at the lights and somebody just shot him in the head, and there was a bouquet to his memory, these things appear all over the place, at the bus stop. That was about three years ago when we were writing the play. So these things were very current at the time so it made sense for them to become gangland criminals. So then what Christopher does to impress the

locals is to take on the guy from the next parish or the next gangland area. That stops being leppin' and hoppin'...

EMER: ...and becomes good old fashioned violence. That brings me on to another question actually. We were talking about the language there and also about the decision to make the Dublin figures gangland figures, and I mean if there's any remnants of Synge's poeticism in the script I think the Malomo's speak quite poetically and lyrically and then the Dublin characters are slightly rougher around the edges. But to me watching it, and I suppose with my research I am quite sensitive to class issues and race issues, what occurred to me was that difference in the way they spoke didn't just indicate a cultural difference but a class difference too. And it seemed to me that Christy was infinitely better educated, more respectable than Pegeen, and that doesn't correspond directly with Synge, and of course it can't all correspond directly with Synge, but what I wondered was, was it an attempt to challenge Irish stereotypes of Nigerians by making Christy affluent, well-educated, respectable in comparison to Pegeen's rougher around the edges character?

RODDY: Yeah, I think I suppose it was. I suppose to an extent you make a decision to do something and it becomes a challenge to peoples' stereotypes. I suppose it could be seen as a stereotype in itself – the educated African, which is nothing original at all – these very impressive, highly educated African characters.

EMER: There's a similar character in *Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner*.

RODDY: Yeah. But you know, in my own limited experience, the Africans that I do know, virtually, with the exception of one or two, are all Nigerian, and they're all educated, highly educated, with a whole bag full of degrees behind them as they walk through life. So to an extent it was a class thing, because immediately, talking to Bisi about where did he come from and talking about the compound, they [the characters] ask the same, y'know, 'what's a compound?' You're talking about moneyed people. His mother had a driver to drive her. I don't know of anybody, I don't think I've ever met anybody, perhaps a head of state, just for the period of time they were head of state, or a major politician, who was driven. So these are people who come from a class beyond what most of us would consider to be middle class. Propertied people who are probably close to major decision makers and have a lifestyle that might seem absurd from our distance; they are literally very far, financially far, culturally far, socially far from the experience of most Irish people.

It was one of the interesting and amusing things that the directness to God, the direct talking to God that was very common in the original play has fallen away almost completely in the language of the Dublin characters. And it's almost a generational thing. I'm an atheist and I've no belief whatsoever in the afterlife but I often say things like 'thank God' – it's part of the language that I grew up with. But I do notice that my kids now, my teenage boys, never refer to God at all – he's not there, she's not there, it's not there, whatever. They are blissfully ignorant of the presence of the supreme being, even in their language. Whereas immediately the African characters, not just Malomo – who you sense is almost a delegate, some committee has sent him down from heaven to punish us, to spite his son, you know with all that biblical language – not just him, but his son as well has a belief that beyond the clouds is God. And y'know it was nothing to sneer at all. The Widow Quin's language is close to the Widow Quin in the original play. And then the two Africans, in their direct conversation with God, find that their dialogue is being listened to by this bearded individual in the sky, and this is the

nearest to the actual play. But one of the things that had to go was the peasant language. But I find the language of Dublin's streets is poetic in a different kind of way.

EMER: I mean when you're talking about Synge people do get a bit defensive but if you can re-use the text, it argues for its continuing relevance.

RODDY: Yeah, I mean the thing about critics as well, I mean if some people think it's offensive, there's no way around that. I've been often surprised by reactions of people to something I've done. There could be an accusation of crudity, and then sometimes people react very, very differently. My own mother for example didn't like my first novel *The Commitments*. She was delighted that I'd written it, but she didn't like it. She didn't like the language on the page, but she had no problem whatsoever listening to it or hearing it. So the first play I did *Brown Bread*, which probably, pound for pound, page for page, had a lot more bad language in it, expletives, she had no problem with whatsoever, she didn't mention it. Not with the movie either when it came out and she went to see it. Sometimes it's what people hear that jolts them, they don't react to the page, with my mother it was the other way round.

But again you can't ... I find when I'm working, and again I can't speak on behalf of Bisi, that really it's just me and the page, going back to that first thing I said. It's not the consequences. If you're lucky and if it's healthy, the consequences are so late in arriving that there's nothing you can do about it.

EMER: But there are of course consequences. I interviewed Giles Terrera, who played Christy the first time round, when I was over in London. He's a friend of a friend, so I managed to sit him down for a chat. I was asking him about his experience of Dublin, because we're so newly multicultural and there are so many critics and academics writing at the moment about how racist the Irish are and we're coming in for a lot of flack for our citizenship laws – quite rightly – so it was really heartening to hear Giles account of his time in Dublin. He said that people would be coming up to him in the street during the run and addressing him as Christy and asking him how his father was. And although it might be a bit sentimental, it does make a case for the willingness of Irish people to see people of colour or immigrants in roles that they're used to encountering as white roles. And I do think that theatre can be particularly instrumental in helping to bring about that change.

RODDY: Well I think, one of the sources of pride for me, and I would hope Bisi, was the fact that people on the street went to see the play. Because often you might go to The Abbey and it's a third full. You go to somewhere else and it's ten people watching a play with seventeen people in it. And that's not to suggest that it's not a good exercise, that it's not worth doing, but the thing with the theatre world, both in terms of the people who go to see it and the people who are professionals within it, is that it's a small world generally. And one of the great sources of pride for me was that the play seems to be packed out every night with people who tend not to go to the theatre, because they've seen something or they've heard something about this one that rings home. It was the same apparently with Olu Jacobs who played the original Malomo. The Nigerian bus drivers were honking the horns at him

EMER: Cause he's a bit of celeb in Nigeria isn't he?

RODDY: He is a bit of a celeb, yeah. So yeah, it's very heartening and it's great. How to measure the success of a piece of work, it's never about how many people read it or

how many people go to see it because it has to be in the work itself, but I think the fact that people are turning up and are continuing to turn up. There's a limited amount of time it can run for, but whether it reaches its natural end at the end of this month is another thing. It just seems that there are a lot of people going to see it and that's tremendous, y'know?

This whole issue about race is a tricky one y'know. *With Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner*, at heart it was all about a white man meeting a black man. He meets this black man and shakes his hand, and it's the first time a white man has shaken hands with a black man, which would be the case for an awful lot of people in this country. His attitude changes immediately. That sense of foreboding he might have or that guilt he might feel about how he's going to react to this guy falls away completely because he's just shaken somebody's hand y'know? And that's the case perhaps when people go to this particular play, they do actually see the human potential there. So maybe that's why Giles had that experience – leaving aside the fact that he's a good actor, I never saw anything as athletic as him jumping over the counter.

EMER: He was brilliant. So energetic. Can we talk about the portrayal of racism in the play? Even though it's a social class that you would think might espouse racism, and you might be expecting Christy to get some abuse, there's very little racial baiting of him at all.

RODDY: As I recall it now we were constantly – even though it's three years ago, we would have been on act one, we would have just started acted one three years ago, and we were finished it in about a month, and then moving into act two in February – as I recall it we were constantly reassuring ourselves, or maybe I was asking, trying to check with Bisi that this was the right road, but there was very little overt racism. But that was the case, with these characters, the issue with Christopher wasn't where he came from or what his colour was. The issue in a way was how useful he was to them – if there was a beating to be handed out, who was the one to do it? And then Pegeen sees an exotic man where there are none. *Laughs* And so we were constantly saying not a lot about race, and again it worked dramatically, because we came across the word savage in act three, and in the original play it's just another word, it's just another insult, nobody reacts to it. In this case, savage was much more significant. So Christy reacted violently to the word savage. When Seán Keogh refers to him as a savage he loses the head completely. And that was a big difference – same word different reaction.

EMER: That's a little gift from Synge right there

RODDY: Yet again – you turn the page 'oh there it is' y'know? That was the way we went through it, page by page and line by line, and there it was, and Bisi knew and I knew, and I would have known anyway I expect because savage is not in the top twenty words you'd throw at people to hurt them. When the cultural context changes it does become a loaded word. But the play was never really in a very overt way about race.

EMER: Did you worry at all about the prospect of, I mean, Christy basically gets lynched at the end. Was there an awareness that that was going to have a lot of racial connotations?

RODDY: There was no getting around it. I suppose the cheap way would have been to have Billie Holiday singing 'Strange Fruit' in the background, but that would have been really stupid. But I mean it's so farcical anyways at that stage. I mean the play really

does become one of the great farces. When you dissect the original play and you start assembling your own and you start doing up three or four drafts and then you see it in rehearsal, the precision, and the entry of the Da after he's been killed yet again, so it's like a Victorian farce in many ways except she was dead a few years, so it's not literally Victorian and the setting is different, but it's like one of those drawing room farces – you know, they go out one bay window and somebody else comes into the room, you know, one of these 'who's she sleeping with' type of things.

EMER: I do.

RODDY: Well a bit like that. With blood. But the lynching never arose in many ways. The rope goes down lower, and it's well established by the time the rope goes around him that it's not because he's from Nigeria. He's just like a pain in the arse, and he is. My tolerance level for Christopher would be, total respect, but a pain in the arse, you know?

He's terrific, as a character. But how often do you want to hear someone blowing about the same story again and again and again? That's part of the great humour of it as well. It's wonderful that he grows in self confidence, but he needs a new story badly by the end of it certainly.

EMER: You sound like you really enjoy the theatrical process. It sounds like you get a kick out of it.

RODDY: It's extraordinary really to see the whole potential of something. Even in a little way today, you missed the beginning of the session.¹⁴⁶ We had two young ones, one Lithuanian and another is Irish born and they stood up in front of the class and pretended that they were talking about one of their brothers. It only lasted for about a minute, and the pitfall was that it may not have worked and we'd be stuck staring at each other for an hour and half, but all the girls started writing these stories about broadly similar situations. And in a way it was just a small little version of what happens in the creative process. To write the lines and then see it coming alive, and then to sit with an audience as they're howling with laughter, in the case of a comedy anyway. If you write what you hope is the defining tragedy of the 21st century and you're surrounded by people laughing, you might make a few quid from the royalties, but it may not compensate for the fact that you've been misinterpreted. But I think it's fantastic myself. Yeah.

EMER: I wanted to ask you some questions too about the controversy that's unfolding over the production at the moment. And if there's anything you're not comfortable answering...

RODDY: Don't worry, I'll let you know. I'll be open as much as I can.

EMER: Okay. Well the Arambe website states quite clearly that Bisi Adigun and Arambe are distancing themselves from the present production because The Abbey have failed to honour the contractual agreement they entered into with Arambe. And there's a number of newspaper articles that have told that story and not a whole lot more.

¹⁴⁶ The interview takes place at Fighting Words, a writing initiative that does a lot of work with inner-city Dublin children.

RODDY: May I ask have you spoken to Bisi?

EMER: I'm speaking to him tomorrow. I know that he's been advised not to speak about the legal side of things, so I'm aware that it's sensitive, and I'm not trying to stir anything. But I'm just wondering if you can elaborate on the situation for me. What I'm primarily interested in is if it's purely financial or is it ideological. Is it the result of an intercultural collaboration that didn't quite work?

RODDY: Ach, y'know, it's a tricky one for me to answer because he's not in the room. I actually haven't been in the company of Bisi since October 2007 when we did a public interview together in The Abbey. It was agreed that we would do it, and I actually haven't spoken to him since. So it's more than a year and quarter since I spoke to him. I know that Arambe have instigated proceedings in the high court against both me and The Abbey. But the writ was delivered to my solicitor last week and I know nothing about it. Nor does my solicitor, as he was away. The writ I believe was just one page, and the next thing that has to happen is that Arambe or Bisi Adigun's solicitor gives the case to my solicitor. So I don't know what the basis of their claim is.

It's for breach of contract, and my contract was with Arambe. So three years ago both Bisi and myself were writing a play for Arambe. Bisi also happened to be the artistic director and founder of Arambe. Then Arambe sublicensed the play to The Abbey. And the root of the problem to an extent I think is their interpretation of the contract. So I'm being sued for breach of contract. I didn't breach the contract. I terminated my contract and I had very good reasons to terminate my contract. I went about it the proper legal way, and I have not been in contract with Arambe since I think November 2007.

There's a bit of a hole then, because Bisi himself has accused me of things both publically and privately, which are just outrageous. Basically assaults on my character. And I'm not going to go into detail and bat them off and defend myself. So y'know one case being that he said I've never acknowledged that he was the creator, that he came up with the idea – that I've never said it publically.

There's an absurdity to that, because say for example last year I had public events in New York, Pittsburg, Dublin, Manorhamilton, Ennis, Ramal, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Toronto, Paris. And I know I didn't often talk about... but it often depends on questions from the audience, but the play didn't come up in several of those events because I wasn't there about the play, but it did in others, and I did, whenever I talked about the play, I'd always acknowledge the fact that he came up with the idea. I'd see no reason to hide it.

EMER: And do you think that there was a certain degree of tension raised by the fact that you're a household name, you're a well known writer. I heard the play described, I think Emer O'Kelly of the independent described it as 'Pure Doyle'. That's obviously going to....

RODDY: Again, basically one of the reasons I was approached about writing the play, co-writing the play in the first place was because I've got two and a half decades of experience, and I'm also very well known frankly. It's what marketing people would call 'the brand' y'know? So to a degree I suppose it is the case that he did suffer to an extent, although suffer is probably too strong a word from my point of view. But basically it's his first piece of work it's my fifteenth or something piece of work, so there was a lazy journalism where one or two referred to it as 'Roddy Doyle's play,'

including, ironically, one of the reports about the high court proceedings, which seems to defeat the purpose of the high court proceedings in the first place.

But I don't think it's reasonable for me to feel guilty about the fact that I've written plays and screenplays and novels and things that have been produced and been well received, or badly received, but that would be well known in this country. I don't feel a burning need to try to deny the fact that I am who I am. And as to controlling any feelings of resentment, that's up to him, not up to me. I never claimed credit for anything that I didn't do. But I'm not going to not claim credit for things that I have done. The play was co-written. It was written line by line together, and if some people decide that I wrote certain lines and he wrote certain lines, that's their ignorance, not mine, not his. And I'm not going to run around, y'know, you could spend the rest of your life defending yourself. The healthy way for a writer to be is to be writing the new thing before the old thing comes out.

Other than that, I can't go into detail. I'm loath to go into details, but I will say as emphatically as I can do, and it seems quite a strange thing to say having spoken enthusiastically about the play and the theatrical process, given the opportunity to change my mind, if I could go back to 2005 and he asked me the question would I work with him again I'd say no. It's one of the big regrets of my professional life that I said yes. Not because of the writing process which was an extraordinary thing, but because of everything, virtually everything, that has happened since then.

There have been times, say even over Christmas, we had a house full of sick children, and the two of us were sick, myself and the wife, and it was a bit of a family crisis, and then *The Sunday Times* announced that legal proceedings have started with Arambe and we end up talking about Bisi Adigun at a time when we should be talking about other things. It's been going on for a year and a half now, and to my mind its ludicrous. But we'll see how it goes.

EMER: Would you be loath to enter into a collaborative effort with anyone again?

RODDY: No. I'd be wary of it, but I'd always be wary of it. No I wouldn't. I think this is probably a once off strange and unique experience. It wouldn't change my mind about people in general. It would certainly change my mind about that particular individual. But it doesn't change my mind about people in general at all. Despite the, what word should we use, I don't know, anyways, despite *everything* shall we say, to see the actors take on the lines and to watch a director like Jimmy Fay give it the pace and the rhythm that it has, y'know, it compensates a good deal for the personal hurt. Yeah, I think that's probably the best way to describe it. The personal hurt.

But no it wouldn't stop me from collaborating. It's not something I'd jump into. Ever. But if it was somebody from whom I thought I would creatively gain so to speak. Gain from not in a financial sense.

I could never have written *The Playboy* as it is now on me own. The idea would never have occurred to me in the first place. Bisi I would suggest couldn't have written it on his own. It's very much one of those rare things that a piece of work is created by two people working together. So if I felt the same thing could be done, certainly in theory I'd be open to it, then time would come into it as well, because I'm pretty busy at the moment.

EMER: Well I think that's all my questions. Thank you very much for talking to me.

RODDY: You're very, very welcome. You're very welcome.

EMER: I've enjoyed it. And I'm going to see the play again tonight.

RODDY: You haven't seen this new production?

EMER: Not this one, I saw the last one.

RODDY: I'd be interested in knowing what you feel. Considering it's line for line the same, although out of necessity some of the people have changed – Eileen is pregnant and she wasn't available to play Pegeen, so we have this young woman Ruth. Giles as you know wasn't available either, so there's another guy Chuck, and there's a George Seremba who's a Dublin based actor playing Malomo, so it's quite amazing how different it is despite the fact that it's line for line, I mean I'd say even every delay between the lines is the same, the set is the exact same, and yet it feels quite different.

EMER: Different people's energies. That's theatre.

RODDY: True enough.

Yuki Ellias

Date: 11 June 2010

Venue: Bow Road, London

EMER: The first thing I'd like to know is a little bit about your own background and actor training.

YUKI: I started in Bombay. I did some stuff in college there – so that was my first introduction to acting. So then some friends and I formed a company and did some pretty decent productions. And we took them to the professional stage in Bombay. So very early we were doing professional work – before we had any kind of training. We learned from each other, and one of the guys his father was a director, so he'd had a whole education from him. But we kind of found our way through theatre training on our own.

Then a director I worked with recommended that I go to theatre school, and I was looking at coming to England, because most Indians go to England to study because it's familiar and English [language] theatre in India has a history quite linked to England. So I was looking at schools in England and a friend of mine says – why would you go to England, all the schools are so straight laced, the syllabus is always the same: have a look at the Jaques Lecoq school in Paris. So I had a look on the website and it seemed really kooky and totally bizarre, full of things I'd never done before: I couldn't understand the stuff on the website. I said, let me try this one because it seems so mad, and I won't know Paris, I won't know the language – I won't know anything. So I

decided to go to Paris, and I spent two years there. I heard about the auditions for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* towards the end of the second year of Lecoq. Someone told me 'there's an English guy, he's auditioning in India,' and I thought I'd missed it – but I called Tim, we got in touch with each other. And I came to London for the audition. So just after school finished, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* started.

EMER: So what kind of theatre were yourself and your friends making in India before you went to the Lecoq school?

YUKI: The first few plays we did were English, very straight-laced. One was a bit more experimental. We have a quite poor theatre, because we can't afford anything – so it's always going to be experimental in terms of use of space and object. But in my opinion we were really trying to be what English people would be acting in a play. They weren't adaptations to fit an Indian context. Our reading has always been English books – Enid Blyton when we were children – so our imagination has always been in this imaginary land rather than in India. We're part of the urban modern youth who have obviously got more links with the outside than with our own folk culture or the traditional classical arts – at least in terms of theatre arts. And so in the plays we were trying to be like English actors – we had never seen English actors so we didn't know what we were trying to be. Towards the end we did an English language Indian play, and it felt good because it really felt like this was a bit closer to what we should be doing.

EMER: Could we jump back to the audition process. Could you tell me a little about what you understood the audition process to be. And also, perhaps, your own audition, and why you think you got the part.

YUKI: We really didn't know what to expect. I had never auditioned for a play. Maybe just once where you came and you did a speech. Usually I was just cast. So this was the first audition. I had done an audition with Tim in London. Apparently with the first round of auditions he was going around India, he was watching people, people were coming in doing things, I don't know exactly what he did. There were always workshop processes. But seeing as I was alone and I went to London we met up in an old factory. What did we do, I can't even remember. I think we did a piece. I'm not very good at auditions and doing a speech like that. So then he really workshoped with me. And that was fun and we started creating something and it felt right. So it was a workshop one-on-one like that. When we went back to India it was a seven week workshop. I missed the first day because I just flew back in, and there was sixty people. We were going to be doing this workshop –working with each other and working with Tim like an ensemble for about a week. We would start in the morning and go 'til late in the evening. It was absolutely amazing, because no audition I'd ever done before was ever like this with so many people. And there was no kind of competitive spirit – we were just having so much fun with each other. Tim was often coming in and leading the sessions, but it was also about us getting a chance to interact with other Indian actors. And I would never have had that sort of an exchange before. I really got to play with people from Folk backgrounds and music backgrounds. And everybody would lead a session, so somebody was leading a martial arts session – so that was my introduction to Kalaripayattu – and a couple of other guys would lead the physical sessions. So we would do scenes every day. Tim would give us scenes to do and we would break up into groups. We would, through the week, play different characters and different scenes. And so we would see what a group of us can do. And we were all different languages, all different theatre styles and backgrounds. We'd come up with something. We'd show it off at the end, and that's how the audition was.

EMER: Did you communicate with each other in English or in Hindi?

YUKI: It was whatever language was preferable. We must have had maybe ten languages going during the auditions. Malayalam, Hindi, Tamil, a little bit of English. Whatever people could speak – you just tried to figure it out.

EMER: And why do you think you got the part?

YUKI: I think there were a lot of damn good women. The play only has four women in it – in our production. There's only Hermia, Helena and Titania, and we made one of the fairies a girl as well. The funny thing is all four of us are from Bombay. And why is because – all four of us are pretty urban, Western – we're okay with touching boys and rolling around. We're not inhibited. Our theatre culture is pretty hands on – it's okay, we're okay with it. A lot of the other theatre backgrounds, for women there is no touch – there's feminine distance. Well, there would be touch, but there wouldn't be the kind of touch, the scale of touch Tim would want for this production, which is really physical – I mean, you've seen what it's like. They would find it very hard, and they did find it hard in the auditions. And if this production was going to be done in another style they would have been there maybe and not me. Maybe it would have been them. So it was really a question of performers who were going to be able to be physical – so we had to be fit. And a lot of the other women – the dancers – they were fit, but it was really the question of touch and proximity. It was that. For the guys it was fine. Because they usually, in the villages, the guys are fine with the touching, it's a very physical theatre. And Indian theatre can be so physical. For the women, it's physical, but without the touch and the proximity. So that's probably one of the reasons why I was chosen.

Another reason was that I was fairly creative, experimental, physical in the way I worked, I could work with some of the people no matter what language we were working in. This is partly because the Lecoq is an international school – there were many languages always being spoken there. And I think I'm a decent actor. I came from Lecoq physical. I had a set of baggage that I brought into this production. I had to relearn a lot of it. I never had a classical training with Shakespeare. And none of us really – say Archana who played Titania or me – we were never trained to really do text. So all of us [women] did our parts in English. I think it was good to balance out the non-English that was going on. So all our partners spoke in Bengali, Tamil, Sinhalese. So it was a balance again in terms of language to balance the whole production. At least one of each of the pairs had a bit of English going into the production. English is the strongest performing language for all the girls. So it was English but in an Indian sense. For Archana Tamil is actually her strongest language. So it's a mix of the physicality, of the cultural contexts as actors that we have and I think the potential of being able to deliver a Shakespeare text in English. I think it was a combination.

EMER: Can we move on to talk about the actual process that created the production. Can you tell me a little bit about how much you guys interacted with each other, with the director, how much creativity you were allowed – how much of your own skills you were able to bring to the production.

YUKI: Basically, Tim didn't start with directing. We would read a scene, we would try to understand the dynamics going on. He never told us what the play was about. It was really about us trying to figure it out together as a group – through translations or whatever. But he was curious to know what everyone thought about it. And he would

have his own ideas. So the reading of it was really about a group understanding of the text, rather than Tim saying 'This is what it means, this is what the play's about and this is what it's going to mean for you. So that was really nice. And that process continued when we got on the floor. We'd get together, and we'd create something, and we'd see if it worked or not. And then the kind of fine-tuning in direction and the leading would happen later on. It was quite seamless with the actors' creative input. The actors generated a lot, and Tim was interested in seeing what our backgrounds would bring. But it's quite seamless. So it was really for us, pretty much like the audition, to figure out what we could do together as people who spoke different languages and came from different creative backgrounds. So some are more stylistic actors, some are more realistic actors. So it was to see what would come of this mad bunch. And Tim was part of the mad bunch. He was not really an outsider.

EMER: So you think it was quite collaborative?

YUKI: It was extremely collaborative. I don't call it anything else. I'd not done a production as collaborative before. Only because of the scale and the number of people involved. This was on a different scale, purely because we were nearly thirty people: dancers, musicians, actors altogether.

EMER: Can you think of anything in particular creative that you contributed – something you're proud of, that you think 'this definitely came from me.'

YUKI: Yeah. At the end of Helena, Hermia, Lysander and Demetrius in the forest – Lysander and Demetirus are chasing each other through the woods. It's like the climax. And we were doing it on the ground, and I said to Tim, why don't we do it on the scaffolding, so that we just take it into a vertical space rather than a horizontal. So we just did that, and it worked really nice.

EMER: So you found that Tim as a director was very open to suggestions?

YUKI: Yeah, absolutely.

EMER: There's still of course the hierarchy of the director. Did he still every so often step in and say 'okay thank you very much for your suggestions, but we're going to do it this way – did he lead it?

YUKI: Yeah. At times, somebody has to make a decision in a collaborative process. And if there's something at these points that he clearly wants, then fair enough.

EMER: Thinking about the production itself – what is your opinion on how it turned out? When you were told that you were going to do an Indian *Midsummer Night's Dream*, what did you think, and how the production you created compare to this?

YUKI: The first thing is we were never told we were doing an Indian production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. So there was never this kind of awareness that we were doing an Indian thing. There were no definitions of what this thing was going to be like, and we really didn't know what it was, because we were just having fun. So we never wanted to label it ourselves. I can't remember anyone calling it an Indian production with an English director or anything like that. It was just 'we're doing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.' We knew that it was Tim Supple. We knew the British council was involved of course. It seemed like there was a lot of money in it. It was very exciting of

course, because we moved to Pondicherry to work for two months. That again had never been done before for us. We moved there and we worked from nine in the morning to nine in the evening. And for most of the actors – certainly for the Bombay actors – that’s unheard of, because you always have a job and you need to do rehearsals in the evening – about four or five hours at the end of the day. So the fact that we were waking up in the morning, we were doing martial arts or yoga and then we were rehearsing the rest of the day, right up to the evening, in this beautiful place that was really just joyous, for everyone, everyone loved that. It really felt like for once we were professional actors. And we were getting paid, very well, for this rehearsal process. You don’t get paid – at least in Bombay – you don’t get paid for rehearsals. So you can rehearse for three months, and then you do five shows, you never have a run, you get paid nothing. So this was really very fulfilling – the number of hours. And Tim was really a very good worker. He would be there from 9 to 9. We would go in and out according to our scenes. Tim’s very efficient. He doesn’t waste time with a lot of faffing and talking and speech making. We really work and that is all we do and I really appreciated that.

EMER: Why do you think the British Council did want to fund this production that was going to take place in India with Indian actors?

YUKI: I think it’s a good thing that they did. Because if you are in India and you act, it is good to have a production that involves 30 people. They do fund smaller projects all the time in India. That is part of one of their jobs, other than bringing productions down here from England for us to see. That is one of the things they do. They went down with a show called *Comedy of Errors*, I don’t know if you know that. And they did a workshop. I went to the workshop. I was very young; I must have been 13 or something. And they wanted to do this production with a group of Indians. They chose which play to do. But it really took about five or six years for it to actually happen.

Why? I don’t know. I don’t think they really gambled for such a big production. I don’t know how they did money wise, whether they recovered all their funds, I don’t know. But it was a really ridiculous amount of money that they put in, and we were shocked. I remember seeing drawings for the set. We were like ‘wow.’ We never imagined it was that big. We had no idea at the start of the production how big it was going to be. We didn’t know what was going on. For us it would have been fine if we had done a play in India. We didn’t realise it was going to go on tour for so long or that it was going to be supported so much financially. Why they decided to do it I have no idea. But for us it was very good because we earned a decent living.

The debate was in India ‘why has an Englishman been given so much money to come down to work with us. We had people in the crew saying, you know, the British Council wouldn’t give so much money to Indians to do such a big production. And all of those things are there. But I didn’t at that point necessarily choose to take a side. I wasn’t questioning why the British Council was doing it. I really was just enjoying being there. They looked after us pretty well, and it was quite a spectacular event. What I would say is that I hope the money does go to an Indian someday to make a large scale production like that. And if not, I think for a bunch of Indians to meet in this kind of scenario, it was a celebration. First, it wasn’t like Tim had come down and there was this English man, at least for me and for a lot of us. Even for a bunch of actors if it began ‘oh we’re working with Tim Supple and he’s English and the British council is funding it’ it eventually became about something else, which was, again, this whole group of Indians

meeting, and Tim being part of that – he’s pretty much Indian in that way – and just doing a production together. I think that’s what it became about.

EMER: How did the production go down in India and how do you think it spoke to its Indian audiences?

YUKI: The first round was I think a better round of shows. We were outdoors – we built the theatres in these huge open spaces. People really were so excited to come and see it. People had collaborated before, of course, between different theatre forms, but on this scale there was a lot of hype. The venues were so beautiful. People came, it was under a starry night, it was very exciting. The first round I think was highly celebrated. People really enjoyed it. The people who didn’t enjoy it had problems with – it was funny because it seemed like a lot of the intellectuals and a lot of the academic people, who I came across anyway, because you can’t make any generalisation in India, but the ones I came across who had a problem with it would be the intellectuals and the academics. They even had problems with the languages – why is it in so many languages? It’s so confusing, why are you running around so much? – and things like that – why do you have to go through scaffolding? It’s just like a fusion of different things and you’re not really exploring the wealth of each traditional form. It’s just a mess – you’re taking a bit of it, but not really getting down to understanding it fully. And the people who enjoyed it – I had neighbours coming who are housewives, who don’t speak five languages, who have never seen theatre, they don’t go to the theatre. They came and they had a blast. For them it didn’t matter that it was how many languages. They had never read the script before. A lot of the Indian audience didn’t know *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. They didn’t know anything about it, but they just had a good time, you know? So it was strange, I don’t know why they enjoyed it and the other guys didn’t – did they come with a preconceived idea ‘oh there’s this English guy and he’s directing 20 actors’ so they didn’t already have a problem with it.

Some had a problem, they didn’t mind that it was an English director and it was this process, but they had a problem with the artistic work as a piece of theatre, they didn’t enjoy it, fair enough. And some had a problem that they didn’t see the dance as dance, and they couldn’t understand what it was or what it was about. So it was mixed. But for the first set of shows there was definitely a sense of celebration, so I would say that that was the majority feeling over the ones that had a problem with it.

EMER: Was there anyone who objected to the sexual nature of the piece. You mentioned that some of the female performers from different traditions wouldn’t have been willing to partake in it because – it is quite sexy and physical. Was there anyone who saw it and went ‘why does this have to be so sexual?’

YUKI: You know I was never ever confronted with that ever. I mean the one thing was, I guess, in the Madras tabloids where they’re a little bit more conventional than say Bombay. They said it was a sexy play, but it was in an exciting way, like ‘you must go’ – it was a tabloid. But I don’t remember any reviews which talked about it in a negative way. Maybe Tim would have gotten more of that. Maybe people were more sensitive when they were talking to us about it – and maybe they didn’t ask us. I can’t remember anyone asking me. Oh maybe they asked and they said ‘how do you feel about it’, but they wouldn’t say ‘oh that was bad.’ All they’d ask was ‘what do you think about it?’

EMER: And what do you think about it?

YUKI: I'd done a lot of physical theatre things where I'm very close. But this was not in a stylised way – this was real. It was a kind of real time thing. It was difficult in the beginning because I didn't know my co-actors, but then in the end, we would just laugh about what was on stage, we would joke about it. But y'know, it was difficult in the beginning. I could understand what Tim was trying to say about the sexuality and at times I wouldn't always necessarily agree because you can always stylise it and you can always transpose it. But he wanted it real. He wanted those forest scenes to be as real as they would be. I may have disagreed and I'm sure I did when it was happening. I was saying 'why are we doing this?' But I really started enjoying it, and I thought it was good fun and it really helped me in the scenes to be so close and so real and to have that kind of violence and that kind of passion in the scene. And I think it's important in the sense that it was so different from a lot of *Midsummer Night's Dreams* that I have seen, including the movies, where it's so clean. And I was like 'that's not really how things would be.' And then I understood. I mean, at first my instinct was, as a girl, as an actor, to be like 'oh I don't want to do it.' But then to understand it and to really enjoy it, because in so many other versions it's so clean. And then you start questioning your own ideas about 'what do you think is real, what do you think is love, what do you think is bad, what do you think is sex for girls and boys at that age.' And then you start thinking about what you've done in your own life, and you think, yeah well, this would be close to it. And I think we really enjoyed it. I think all four of us began to really enjoy playing our scenes like that. It was not the sexuality. It was I think we enjoyed the violence of it and the daring of it, and just being on the ground and pulling each other and pushing each other. It was so real, it really helped for us in understanding the characters and the acting. And I think it takes the emotional state of the scene to a much higher level. And a much more believable level for us, where, really, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is not a cute play. When I read it I hated it, I thought 'this is one of those cute things,' because, again, I'd always seen it done clean. And for actors, our version was very fulfilling.

EMER: And how about when you toured to Britain. Do you think that the reaction in Britain was different from the reaction in India.

YUKI: Again, it's different from tour to tour. The first time was Stratford. It worked very well there, people loved it. It's a small venue which suited our show nicely. People are very educated about the play, they know it inside out. So the fact that it had so many languages is not a problem – they know the play. They loved it. We were nervous. Especially the English speakers, we were like Fuck, we're in Shakespeare-land, we don't speak English like the English do. We do not perform Shakespeare like they do. And I remember the first night of the show we were like 'Shit, this is going to go horrible, what are they going to think about us and how we speak verse?' And we said, 'it doesn't matter, we'll just have a blast and we can always run back to India and no one will know who they are.' So that's what we did as a group and as a team. We just decided to have fun. And fun is the physicality of it, the sexualness of it and the dancing – for us it was really fun. And I think the audience felt that. And loved that. And I think in a group of Indians there is a certain amount of madness and energy and love which we can perform. And it is very, very infectious. So if we don't do verse like the English do verse, we can really share those feelings of love and what not. I think Shakespeare's different here – it's more held back. And we don't hold back! And I think they loved that. I think they enjoyed it.

EMER: It got great reviews.

YUKI: At Stratford it did. When we came back from tour, The Roundhouse was a huge venue. I think logistically it was a nightmare. Performing was very tough. I still prefer it in slightly smaller venues. Newcastle was my favourite theatre when we were on the English tour. It was a proscenium but it was designed so that, although big, the audience is close to the work. Acoustically it's beautiful, so I never had to strain too much. Then again at The Lowry it was again huge. People would enjoy it then as a spectacle – as from far away all you get to see is all the colours and the big movements, but you lose out on I guess, the acting, the finer bits of the show. So then the show became more about spectacle, although it began as a piece of theatre. So for us, we had to change how our acting was. It was good because we were constantly challenged by the spaces we were working in. And I think some of the people in the bigger venues either liked it or they didn't. And I think in different places people aren't as educated about *Midsummer Night's Dream* as in Stratford. So if they hadn't read the play before it might have been a little difficult. Tim always insisted that you don't need to know the play before watching it. I think it's a bit better if you know the play.

EMER: You said earlier that when you were making it in India you didn't really have an idea of it being an Indian *Midsummer Night's Dream*, it was more that you were all diverse people doing this play, making this adaptation together. When you moved to the UK did you get more of a sense that it was being marketed as an Indian *Midsummer Night's Dream* – that the Indianness of this production was really intrinsic to the way that English audiences were viewing it?

YUKI: Was it sold as an Indian *Midsummer Night's Dream*?

EMER: Yes. It was fairly hyped as an Indian production.

YUKI: We just arrived on time to rehearse and put the shows up. We really weren't aware of what was going on in England. We weren't that aware of the hype. Only later on.

The concept of 'what is Indian' even for us is very questionable, because we're so different from each other. And the question of 'is this an Indian production,' well we never really sit and think about these things. India changes from door to door, literally. I mean when we were in Stratford, of course we felt Indian. But we enjoyed that feeling. We worked like a team, and we enjoyed being the Indian group that were doing something so bizarre. It's a small town Stratford: we thought it was a funny little town. And we felt Indian, because it's such a predominantly white town.

There were a lot of Japanese also in the first round because it was the RSC's year of Shakespeare and the festival was on. There was a Japanese production of *Titus Andronicus*. So I'm sure they felt Japanese and we felt Indian. But you know, we didn't think so much about these kinds of things. We just had a good time. If we felt different, we enjoyed being different.

EMER: Can you talk a little bit more about that feeling that you're all from very different Indias? And about that interaction between lots of different cultures within one national culture. Was it at times challenging?

YUKI: Absolutely, I mean from the auditions it was challenging, because we had so many styles blending together. Theatres of gesture, and realistic acting. I wondered what we would do. And the languages. And economics. So one is language, one is theatre background, one is cultural backgrounds are very different, and there's different

economic stratas. So this was challenging when we were working. But then once we found a style, something emerged, an understanding of how we're going to be able to form this play, then it was much easier. Of course, finding music between the actors, Chandan speaking Bengali and I'm speaking in English, that was tough at the beginning, because I speak in one rhythm and I expect to hear it back in the same rhythm, and suddenly it comes back in a different way, so then to make music together, that takes time. And then it becomes natural. So it's always a process of 'ugh what's going on' – finding a way to make it work – then it becomes natural. It was the same with the sexuality. And when we travelling we really became the Indian group. We looked out for each other. Everybody's other language got much better - the kids' English got better, my Hindi got better, I picked up some Tamil. We always cook and eat together. Those are the common things of Indians: we love eating, we love cooking and we love spending time together, and so we were always together.

EMER: What do you think you took from the production? What did you gain in terms of performance style, life lessons for your craft? What do you think you got from it?

YUKI: I really liked Tim as a director. While we had lots of freedom to experiment, he was very clear about when I was not being honest or truthful in my acting. He was very tough on that, and I really appreciated that. He's an excellent director I think for actors. He gave us a lot of exercises and a lot of tools to handle texts, which was great, because I'd never worked with texts before. So a lot of his exercises for acting and getting a scene to life were excellent and I still use them. I think training with Tim as an actor was brilliant. Working with him and the others throughout the production trying to figure out how we're going to create work – that's been good. I worked with him again a year later, and I went in as a movement director, because we found as two people we work well together. Tim always has his rehearsals start with a physical warm up, start with the breathing, and that would always be led by someone else, it would never be him. So every single actor in the group has led a workshop in whatever field that they come from, including the kids, which was dead cute. I was Lecoq, so I did a lot of Lecoq work with the actors that he would want me to do. And so I went on to work with him on an Opera as a movement director. And so with Tim we work well together because he is text oriented and I am physical oriented. And in the same way we know what we want to get towards the end, so we balance each other out that way.

As a production generally, it was the first time for me that I had worked with so many people and that was so exciting. I prefer it so much more than working with a group of English speaking actors in Bombay doing Arthur Miller like we used to. It changed the way I think about theatre, and the kind of theatre that I as an Indian in India would like to do. It has brought a whole new perspective to it – which is very nice. I've started learning Kallaripayattu. I didn't know about it before *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I may have gotten to know about it at some point. I had been placed outside of India for so long and this production really brought me back home. I'm a lot more aware of what is going on, of all these people, of what is possible. I am more likely to leave Bombay and see what's going on because there's so much happening. So it brought me back home.

And then of course to tour with such a big production, that's such a big opportunity. And even now I don't know if I'll get back to performing at the Lowry or The Swan – I do hope so. But the best theatres, the best festivals, and 2000 people as your audience: that's pretty wicked. The travel has been exciting.

I earned a lot. So much that I could afford to go back to school. That was a big thing for me. And I could pay back my parents, for other education. So that's a huge thing. So really, more than anything, I went back to school, when it was finished.

EMER: Can you tell me a little bit about your practice at the moment. What are you doing now, and what are you hoping to do creatively?

YUKI: So I quit *Midsummer's* before it ended to go back to school and I went to study a teacher's perspective of Lecoq's work. So I finished that and went back to India. The pressure is, after what you have done, to go back then and do the small kind of business. I thought, I can't go back to that work yet. But what I did do was I started writing. I started concentrating on writing a film. We're going to start shooting soon.

EMER: What's the film about?

YUKI: It's a Bollywood film. It's an independent film, we're hoping it will be promoted. *Midsummer's* actor Chandran who played Lysander is going to be in it as well. So we're going to play off each other again, in this case. He's done pretty well for himself – he's got his foot in the door of Bollywood. So we're going to work together again and that should be pretty good fun.

Also, going back to what I got from the production, I got a husband from it as well. So the sound engineer and I got married. So yes, I got the most I could out of that!

EMER: Money, love, experience, travel – you got everything.

YUKI: And of course now, with the company, we've got friends in every single city.

Makram J. Khoury

Date: 14 February 2011

Via e-mail

EMER: How familiar were you with the work of Peter Brook before working on *11 and 12*? How did you feel about his work?

MAKRAM: In 1972, I saw *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Aldwych theatre in London while I was still a theatre student. I was amazed at the style and how unconventional it was. At this time, I had already read *The Empty Space*. In the late sixties I saw the film version of *Marat/Sade*. I considered, then, that Brook is one of the most exciting directors in the world. Years passed by, I came to see *Sizwe Banzi* at the Israel festival in Jerusalem in 2007, and had the chance to meet Brook: a very exciting encounter indeed. Then I ordered DVDs of *The Mahabharata*, *King Lear*, *Lord of the Flies* and *Meetings with Remarkable Men*. I read *Threads of Time* and saw *Fragments* during attending a workshop in Wroclaw, Poland, with the ensemble of *11 and 12* at the Grotowski Centre. Again, I saw direction simple in form in a never ending open space and atmosphere full of details and depth.

EMER: How did you get the part? Was there anything noteworthy about the audition and/or casting process?

MAKRAM: It happened that Marie H  l  ne Estienne saw me in a production of *Jedariyah* by the Palestinian poet Mahmood Darwish, which I produced and in which I played the lead. We were in Geneva, winter of 2007, during a European tour. Afterward we were invited to the Th   tre des Bouffes du Nord in Paris, and performed our play for a week. During this time, I did some readings from *11 and 12* and workshopped with Marie H  l  ne and Peter.

I then was offered the role of Tierno Bokar. The time passed and until we started officially rehearsals in Paris, I participated in three workshops in Paris at the Bouffes du Nord, London at the Barbican, and Wroclaw at the Grotowski center. This was always with new actors, except the last one, where the casting process was finished. It took two years, but it was most noteworthy indeed. Choosing a group of talented actors who could tolerate each other and be able to live and travel for a year in a world tour together was studied carefully and organized very professionally .

EMER: Brook is committed to transcending physical markers of difference in performance. He ignores the accents, skin colours and nationalities of his performers when casting plays, and he expects an audience to do the same when watching his work. What do you think of this approach? What are its strengths and/or limitations?

MAKRAM: I suppose, what would be curious and interesting for Marie H  l  ne and Peter to research, would be the same for the audience. The company were from different origins, countries and backgrounds. Each one of us brought with him a load of history: behaviour, conduct, religious practices and folklore. Accepting the other as equal is as important as the theme of the play and even more. That's its strength. This kind of form, company and theme, is part of the theatrical language and human message, which we the company want to share with our audience.

EMER: How important is your cultural and/or national identity to your creative work?

MAKRAM: My cultural background and identity, the values of my multicultural education, enrich my creative work tremendously. I am an Israeli citizen, born in Jerusalem, Palestine, during the British mandate, to Palestinian Christian Arab parents who adopted British manners and spoke to me in English, especially my mother, during my childhood. We moved to Haifa, then. My father was a judge and my mother a school teacher. During the war of independence, 1948, we fled to Lebanon and were refugees for five months, but managed to return home - infiltrated, by now. Israel was established and the official language of the country is Hebrew which I had to study and speak. I learned Arabic as a second language. Thus was the syllabus of the school I attended, the Terra-Sancta in the old city of Acre, a Catholic school owned by the Vatican. The main teachers were Franciscan monks and the studies were in English, adding to all this, we had the choice of Italian or French as another language. Acre was my hometown. Its inhabitants were Arab Moslems and Christians and Jews. Walking in its tiny streets and alleys, any day of the week, one would hear different tunes of prayers in different languages. There were three cinemas and twice a week I saw movies.

In contrast to all this, on the weekends and holiday I would visit my grandfather and uncles in Kafr-Yassif, a village in Galilee. Water was obtained only from the village

well and the nights were lighted by oil lanterns. Only in 1965-67 electricity and water came to the village. Arabic was the only language you could hear with lot of humour and juicy stories about the simple folks and their animals.

I grew up in the very complicated conflict of the Israeli – Palestinian drama. I watched many wars, with great anger and sorrow, that took place in our region and sympathized with my people's struggle for independence. I faced crucial issues of identity. To avoid living in contradictions, the theatre was a great refuge and therapy, education and knowledge.

EMER: How would you describe Brook as a director?

MAKRAM: Very patient with his actors, trusting you will understand things in due time through the process. He gives you all the freedom to develop. Thoughtful and understanding, observant, a great storyteller, a great sense of humor, revolutionary, non-conformist, curious, a researcher, hates to be idealized, humble, humane, but most of all has a great capability to give love and be loved.

EMER: In comparison to other theatre you have worked on, would you describe the process that created *11 and 12* as highly collaborative, somewhat collaborative, or not particularly collaborative?

MAKRAM: Highly collaborative.

EMER: Did you feel that you had creative agency while developing the show?

MAKRAM: Very much so. We improvised a lot. While doing our daily voice and movement exercises with live music played by our maestro Tushi Tsuchitori and our physical coach too, we would slip into situations similar to certain scenes in the play naturally and un-deliberately. There were always constant changes of text, and changes of structure on stage according to each actor and each space and theatres we performed in. We were always on guard and fresh.

EMER: Was this first time that you had encountered the story of Tierno Bokar and the work of Amadou Hampâté Bâ? How do you relate to the story?

MAKRAM: Yes, it was my first encounter. Of course preparatory research had to be done, but it wasn't difficult to understand. I felt very much at home with it, even though the story takes place in North West Africa. Tierno Bokar for me is the sort of man that utters the words you are not capable to say, but feel them with intuition.

It would have been difficult to examine his life and try to tell his story without adding fragments of his words to events that accompanied his existence. The master's word is the principal fact of his life. What could be the better way, now, than to give a clear definition of the 'message' that he has left, than to give the word to the one who spoke it ...

(from the *Life and Teachings of Tierno Bokar*, by Amadou Hampâté Bâ)

When ever I am down and troubled, I always go back to Tierno's words.

EMER: What do you think of the way in which the relationship between coloniser and colonized is portrayed in *11 and 12*?

MAKRAM: It's a kind of a double-edged sword sort of relationship. There is a scene in the play, an encounter between Hamallah and Terrasson de Fouger:

Terrasson: A person is either with France or against her. The time has come for serious measures. No one can despise France with impunity. We are a great nation; strong, rich and just. We are here to bring happiness to the poor, to wipe away ignorance, sickness and famine. Can a Qutub (pole) cure famine?

Hamallah: Can France take the place of God ?

Terrasson: I have decided to exile you. You'll discover soon enough where you are being sent. Enough. Out.

In another scene between Amadou Hampâté Bâ and Tierno Bokar, there is a contrasting approach to the one above: tolerant and realistic.

Amadou: Tierno, I saw many terrible things during these years. The French don't understand us. They don't listen to us, they only think about themselves ... Up till now I managed to keep my mouth shut, I won't be able to carry any longer. I decided to send my resignation to the French administration.

Tierno: Amadou, the need to criticize is a contagious disease. Take what is good in the French administration, and let go what you think is not good. Leave them their faults – that's their business not yours. Your work is support for your family and it allows you to intercede with the administration on behalf of victims often wrongly punished. For you to resign is out of the question. Purity is in the man, not in the place. You could find God in my courtyard, in the market, in the commandant's office, even in whole in the tooth of a pig.

EMER: Speaking of post-colonial African literature, the Kenyan writer and theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that Africa must stop allowing the West to speak for it. He says:

Imperialism continues to control the economy, politics and cultures of Africa while pitted against it are the ceaseless struggles of African people to liberate their economy, politics, and culture from that Euro-American-based stranglehold ... [and]... to seize back their creative initiative in history through a real control of all the means of communal self-definition in time and space.

Would you agree with Wa Thiong'o that there is an ethical issue attached to a work like *11 and 12* - that there are undertones of imperialism in the fact that this tale of Mali and Sufism is being mediated and defined by a British director and a French writer (Estienne)? Or do you think that ownership of stories like this is universal - that artists should be free to represent people of 'Other' nationalities and cultures?

MAKRAM: Stories like this are universal, as long as colonialism exists. *11 and 12* is an undertone, a metaphor. The basic element in the doctrines of colonialism is 'divide and win.' Modern colonialism changed outfits, from the military to ties and suits controlling the economy and cultures of the Other. The uprisings of the peoples of North Africa recently against their tyrant leaders, who were supported by the West, are leaving these countries out through the window, but they are returning through the main door by the name of democracy.

The artist can and should represent the people of other nationalities and cultures. Moral and ethical issues should concern us all. At the least, to think and be aware about it.

EMER: *11 and 12* has female characters, but an all male cast. Why do you think this is?

MAKRAM: At the beginning we had an actress playing two small characters; Amadou's mother and Mamadou Salim's widow, but then it was decided to work without them. Possibly for economical reasons.

EMER: Do you think it might be possible for theatre to transcend markers of gender difference in the same way that *11 and 12* attempts to transcend markers of difference like accent, race and ethnicity?

MAKRAM: As long your approach is clear and that people are people, their stories and dramas can move you and make you think.

EMER: Overall, as an artist, what lasting impressions did you take away from *11 and 12*?

MAKRAM: A new life and a beginning.

Gavin Quinn

Date: 15 August 2009

Venue: Pan Pan Offices, Curved Street, Dublin

EMER: So I'm just going to start by telling you a little bit about what I'm doing. I'm working on the ethics of collaboration in intercultural theatre practice, and I think that your *Playboy* is a good example of an intercultural collaboration. When I say the ethics of collaboration I mean how the people within a production work together, and how people from one culture gains the right to represent another culture, a culture that is not their own.

I'll just run through what I'm going to cover, and then I'm hoping that you'll do most of the talking. I better mention first what I'm using this interview for - it wont be used for any journalistic purposes, just academic ones...

GAVIN: That's fine

EMER: Lovely. So I want to talk about the translation process, I want to talk about how the work was funded, and particularly any relationship between the funding body and the piece. I'd like to talk about the rehearsal process and the extent to which you would consider it collaborative, and finally I'd like to talk about any little cultural specificities which you feel were relevant to the intercultural situation in which you were working. So, starting with the translation process. I know it's a new translation...

GAVIN: Well originally we couldn't find, well we discussed with a few professors in Beijing University whether they thought there was ever a translation done of *The Playboy of the Western World*, and they said that there wasn't, and so we began a fresh literal translation. The first thing to do was to translate the original into contemporary Chinese, literally – just a translator's copy. So we started that process, and then simultaneously we employed a writer to come into the picture, to come into the discussion once the translation had been done. Then, during that period, we found a translation from the 1920s, which was in Classical Chinese, very old style Chinese, very difficult for younger Chinese people to read, and we used some of that in the audition process.

Then I made a translation myself. Once the translation was done of the original, then I did an adaptation of the original, which was set in contemporary China, and used all the references I needed for the new telling of the story – so it was kind of a re-translation of a translation. So it was a process involving three or four people. And eventually then the characters names were changed, the settings were changed, some of the characters were reduced, so the whole thing was changed around. And then we implemented the language of contemporary Beijing. We wanted to use very much the language of the moment, street language. And so, that whole process took forever. Eventually we finished it.

The actors then assisted in translation as it went on, as Chinese is quite complicated in terms of the way things are said and the way things are pronounced, some words have the same meaning, or different meanings etc. etc. And also the fact that in the version we were supposed to do the Playboy came from Xin-Jiang, which is the Muslim province. And in the end we couldn't do that, because it wouldn't have got by the censors. So we were using a lot of Chinese Muslim idioms, but we changed it then to come from the North of China, from Har Bin because we couldn't do the Muslim version in China because of the fact that Xin-Jiang was kind of seen as a problem state. So it was kind of complicated, but also many of the references needed to be got right. I've got a small little dictionary of some of the phrases that were used. When we did it in Dublin we reverted back to the Muslim playboy

EMER: Oh that's interesting.

GAVIN: So we have for example Ba' Xi, which is a Muslim festival which means that they fast for the day during the month of Ramadan. So the idea of him not having eaten was because he was fasting. So 'Heavens Above' is 'Tian Na' and 'Xien Ju' is 'praise to Allah' or 'praise to God.' So there's all these kind of references, just to illustrate.

So in the end what happened was that some Chinese people went to see it and they actually thought they were seeing a contemporary Chinese play. Other people said to me that this wasn't really like contemporary Chinese life and what have you done? So there was a kind of strange reaction to it.

EMER: It's really interesting that you changed some specificities to bring it to Ireland. Was there anything else that you changed?

GAVIN: No we just changed the province of origin, because we always liked the idea of the playboy being a Muslim. We changed that back for the Irish version, because we could do it here, and that was the original idea before we changed it to the Northern version. That was more a simple reference to farmers in the North than anything else. This is a little bit stronger being a Muslim playboy. It's a tetchier subject.

EMER: So just to go through that again to make sure I'm clear on everything, you employed a literal translator just to do an idiom-less translation...

GAVIN: Exactly

EMER: And then someone who added the idiom and translated it into a more colloquial Chinese...

GAVIN: Yes

EMER: And then the adaptation – the setting, the characters – that was mostly your work?

GAVIN: Yeah. I adapted that.

EMER: In English?

GAVIN: In English, and then the translator re-translated that into contemporary Chinese, and added more idiom. So it's sort of a collaborative thing between two or three people. Four people perhaps really. So that's how eventually we came up with the script.

EMER: Do you think the production might be done again without you? Is that likely?

GAVIN: It's unlikely. The script itself... Well, I'm not sure. We're actually in the process of trying to tidy up the Chinese script, so it will be available hopefully. But it's unlikely it will be done again, unless by students or something in China, but we'll see.

EMER: So, the tabloids latched on to the length of Pegeen Mike's skirt and the reactions that provoked, and you just told me of the changing of the original wish to work with the Xin-Jiang province. Did you feel that a lot of the time you were walking around cultural sensitivities, and did you feel that they were difficult to negotiate?

GAVIN: In terms of China, there's strict laws on a lot of things. China's difficult because when it's below a thousand people the censoring's quite mild, if it's above a thousand people it's a different stringency. And so, effectively, the situation was that the show was based in a kind of brothel, what's called a whoredressers. These are semi-legal foot massage parlours, they kind of come and go in Beijing. Sometimes they're open, sometimes they're closed down, but they're kind of tolerated. It's kind of like a metaphor, because these places, they start on the outskirts of Beijing, and women come there for all sorts of reasons. It's their first job in the city in some cases. So that was kind of one issue. And another thing was that they kind of wear these weird costumes, they don't really look like prostitutes – they're wearing half children's clothes, half

borrowed things, they don't even know what to wear. It's very unprofessional, very weird looking. So we tried to mirror that in the costumes. And then somebody complained in the audience about the shortness of the skirts. And the police *do* come. Now they're police from the cultural ministry, not armed guards. They're police that come from the cultural ministry to view the show, and they stayed and watched the show and said it was fine at the end, but then obviously it mirrored the original, which was a coincidence, and *The Sun* put in the 'Peking at your Knickers' headline, and it was noticed by *The Times* correspondent in Beijing, and became a funny little story.

But there are massive differences. It's very hard to know what's going on half the time in China if you don't speak Chinese, and even if you do speak Chinese. As a foreigner you're going in there and you're focused on making this project. But along the way you pick up so many things. There are so many things that are inflexible in China. Things you simply can't get around. There's no way. If you can't do something, you can't do something. So China often operates on the basis that you do what the government says, or else you don't do it at all. People just tend to go with what the government says basically. Many other countries do too.

EMER: So I'd like to move on now to talk about funding, and my first question on funding is very simple. Where did most of the funding for the production come from?

GAVIN: Well, obviously we are a company that are funded by the Arts Council: we're a regularly funded organisation. So our resources are managed by artistic directors, myself and Aideen, and any physical resource, or part of that, is funded by the Arts Council. For the particular project in China we got some additional funding from Culture Ireland to facilitate some of our accommodation costs etc. etc. and then the rest of the funding came from a private company, Shu-Ping company in Beijing, who became the sponsor. And they sponsored a cash amount plus logistical support and helping us out here and there, and organising things in China. So it was a mixture of the box office, a private shipping company, Culture Ireland, and then the fact that the Arts Council had funded us. So only two or three of us went to China, the rest of it was organised by Chinese people who were there. It was all kept quite simple.

EMER: On a slightly more complex level then, particularly with Culture Ireland funding, there's a lot of talk in theatre scholarship about the relationship between funding and promoting Ireland's international reputation or doing something that will help to foster good international relations. And while I wasn't there myself, a friend of mine who was at the opening of *The Playboy* said that the minister for the arts all but broke a bottle of champagne off the side of the production.

GAVIN:

I'll tell you who was there, it wasn't the minister for the arts, it was the minister for international affairs I think, Conor Lenihan. I forget what his title was – enterprise and development perhaps? He actually opened the show in Beijing. He happened to be over in Beijing, so he gave a speech in China, and we simply got him back to speak again in Dublin.

Culture Ireland specifically has a mandate, where they're helping to fund Irish arts abroad, and what they're doing mostly is helping to facilitate the practicalities of that. So it's mostly with travel, transport, accommodation, giving grant aid for this type of thing so that you have a level playing pitch when it comes to competing internationally. And it's particularly difficult because we're an island. It's pretty expensive to get out of

Ireland and everything like that. It's an agency that tries to promote international cultural exchange, the same way that IDA promotes international business. It's just another government agency, but it's very useful: if you do have an international project you can help facilitate that. It's one mechanism that you can avail of, providing you are working internationally.

EMER: So you wouldn't say that you take into account as a theatre practitioner those economic and political concerns.

GAVIN: No, not at all, because you only make the work you want to make, and you try to raise the money for that work through all kinds of different ways. You don't follow the funding. You just make the work you want to make, like any artist, you just make what you make, and then you see how that might be facilitated or produced, but it's irrelevant.

You can make more money out of doing a short show in Ireland than you can out of making a show in China. It's a very poor country. Poor in terms of what people pay for tickets, and people don't really buy tickets. So it's not about money, we're non-profit organisations. So it was never about that. The money that you get from places like Culture Ireland and the Arts Council, they're just amounts that help you pay for some of the costs. That's all it does really.

EMER: Do you think perhaps that sometimes government agencies or ministers will latch on to artist's work to further their agendas?

GAVIN: Well, they are a government agency, and they're fully entitled to exploit, promote, use that as much as they can. It's a good thing to promote Irish arts abroad. Irish arts are very underfunded; they've always been underfunded, misrepresented in the media, and misunderstood in terms of cultural commentators, because the funding in Ireland is really really low for the arts. It's the lowest for any European country. People talk about it in terms of millions, but it's nothing in terms of a country. So per capita it's one of the lowest of any developed country.

It's a tiny amount of money what they spend on the arts. Culture Ireland spends 4 million, and they should really have 40 million or 100 million. One small state in Canada, say Quebec, would spend five times that, ten times that, promoting their arts abroad. They get it really cheaply, and there is no real enthusiasm for the arts. It's mostly seen as just colouring in. It's not seen as something to be taken seriously.

So yeah, they need to have these good news stories, they need them. They need to have the fact that three Irish writers were up for this year's Booker Prize. They need to have these things to help promote Ireland's reputation abroad. At the same time, if they're going to do that then they also have to fund the arts properly. That's always been the issue.

Funding has always been about what the public will tolerate, how much funding the public will tolerate for the arts has never really been tested, but it depends on what they want, what they value. I don't think people really value the arts in Ireland, they more value other things. People aren't really interested in the arts in Ireland; they don't really take it seriously.

EMER: That's really interesting. Just as a little aside, I just finished a book by Patrick Lonergan on theatre and globalization.

GAVIN:
He won a prize for that didn't he?

EMER:
Yeah, the STR theatre book prize. It argues that the economic boom in Ireland was very much tied into a better international perception of Ireland's playwrights, writers, artists and the arts generally. That it was as much the case that the economic boom benefitted from the arts as the arts benefitted from the economic boom.

GAVIN: That's the way it always seems to have been in terms of rejuvenation. Artists move into a certain part of a city, and the developers come afterwards. Ireland has done well out of its reputation for arts, unfortunately the artists themselves have not done that well. Some have, but I'd say that Ireland probably has the poorest actors in all of Europe, it has the worst infrastructure in terms of the arts. It has all these new venues around the country, but without really any artistic planning or programme. So you've got these 54 venues that want funding to pay for their cleaning bills or overheads, but no coherent programme. It's very poor planning in many ways, you know?

EMER: Moving on so to the rehearsal process. I'm quite interested in what ways it can be described as collaborative. I read an interview in which you said that one of the challenges that you faced in working with Chinese actors is that they'd been trained in a Stanislavski-esque style, and that it was difficult to get them to use more characterised versions.

GAVIN: They were all quite different in fact. Some of the younger actors are trained just to do what they're told, more even than Stanislavski, so it's very hard for them to break out and be told they can have more of their own personality and try things out. They also thought they had to act in a Western way in many ways. So I had to get them to have more of a sense of themselves, more of a sense of reality. And the other actors, the older actors were from an older tradition of Beijing – that was quite Stanislavskian. But they had, at least they had technique and they were able to manipulate that technique. Mostly the Chinese directors shout at the actors and throw things at them, so it was more or less to get them to break down and be more relaxed on stage, be more in control of what they're doing, but for the most part to show more of their personality – that was the more difficult part.

Yeah, it's like anything, it's a collaborative art form, but there's a kind of strange hierarchy of the director as well, so ultimately the director is supposed to decide. It's more that you involved them. If you involve them in the decision making process it's a little bit daunting. That's the way China works, y'know?

EMER: Did you find it difficult then as an Anglophone director trying to get across what you wanted from them, especially when there were concepts that they weren't used to?

GAVIN: I just explained things as best I could, and I work very individually, I don't really work in the Anglophone tradition, I very much work in my own idiosyncratic way. It was fine. It was really fine. I have no system for directing, so it's all about your sense of your own taste, your own aesthetic, but ultimately it's about trying to find

something within the piece. And I knew what I was looking for, but you also have to grow it together with the cast and try to get them to give it their own individual spirit in performance.

EMER: Did they speak English, or did you have a Chinese co-director?

GAVIN: I had an interpreter. They spoke a few words of English, not very much, especially some of the younger ones had the odd word, and they could sing the odd musical songs.

We had a bit of a trial with the first interpreter, because they were not interpreting what I was saying. They thought that the Chinese actors wouldn't understand what I was saying, so we had to fire them and get another interpreter who was younger and who just simply interpreted, allowing them to decide whether they understood or not. The initial interpreter was filtering in Chinese what I was saying, sort of readapting what I was saying, he wasn't really translating what I was saying, so we got a new live translation, as it were.

EMER: Then you said that the actors themselves kind of contributed creatively...

GAVIN: They contributed creatively to the process of making it. So, it was actually trying to make them understand that it was a process rather than a finished product that we were looking for. In the end they were able to contribute to it, able to feel more like we were making the show together, that it was less a case of a director ordering them what to do basically.

EMER: Do you think that's left them with some theatrical life skills that they perhaps would not have had before.

GAVIN: I presume so. I met some of the actors recently when I was back in China, and definitely they say they've learned a lot from it in terms of being able to have different ways of working, a more contemporary way of working, perhaps a more free approach to things, that things aren't so cut and dry or fixed. There is definitely a very important flexibility needed to make theatre, to make art, and to be responsive to what's in the moment. So, just as I learned from the Chinese actors, there is always a sense that there is left behind a certain feeling of legacy between the two parties that were involved. Of course you always learn in those situations.

EMER: What did you learn?

GAVIN: I learned that Chinese actors generally work harder than Irish actors. I learned a lot of things actually. It's hard to know. Theatre wise, when you go to work abroad and you work with people you don't know internationally, you rediscover, you start from the beginning again and you have to re-explain yourself as if you've never directed before. You end up having to choose your words carefully, but you also examine the language you use and examine how you explain yourself. In a way, you're objectively looking at yourself again. So from a point of view of self reflection, you're being aware of yourself as much as you can be I suppose. That was very interesting, because you have to choose your words very carefully, start again, re-explain things that haven't been explained in years. So from that point of view it was interesting.

EMER: When you were auditioning the actors, did you find it more difficult to know who was going to be suitable for what role because of the intonations and resonances? Was it harder to tell, in short, who was a good actor?

GAVIN: It can be. Usually you can tell though. You can tell actors are good because of their timing, their sense of presence, general vocal skills. You can tell their skills. Of course, a couple of times someone would say 'her voice sounds terrible' when it sounded okay to me, and that would be an opinion by the Chinese who might be saying her voice is too regional, so you've got to kind of cut through all the smoke. We had issues where they thought that one of the Chinese girls was too parochial in her accent. That's a sort of an old fashioned snobbery on behalf of the Chinese about how you should say things correctly – about how you should say things right or say things wrong. I'm sure there were moments at which I didn't quite understand, but then I'd just talk to the interpreter and he'd break it down in such detail.

When we were auditioning it was a different thing. It was quite easy to cast. We knew exactly what we were looking for, so when they arrived it wasn't difficult really.

It's quite prominent to get rid of people if it doesn't work out, so it's quite interesting to persevere. They're not usually in that situation. If there was an actor who wasn't working out, they would just change straight away and in a few days it'd be all right. So he'd say to me, the producer, do you want to get rid of any of the actors? So you can do that in China, you know? There are so many people obviously.

So it was interesting when you persevere with people who were initially quite weak. That's the way it works. Not everybody is strong at first week of rehearsal.

They don't really have the same sentimentality we do.

EMER: So we've got through everything fairly quickly, I just have one last set of questions about culturally specific barriers within China that you encountered. I know that you talked about the difficulty of finding partners. What other things would you recommend other people who wanted to work interculturally in China to be aware of?

GAVIN: The most important thing I think is that you take your time. It just takes a while. It's probably a thing that you need to do a research trip first, or a second trip before you even begin your project. It's about doing things very carefully and very slowly. They don't want to hear the whole plan straight away. They want to do it piece by piece. So to use a bit of analogy, we'd want to see a budget for the whole thing, whereas they'd just want to know how much the costumes cost and then you can move onto the next thing. So it's all about developing it piece by piece.

And it's about having relations with people. The most important thing is your personal contacts and your relationships with people. So you develop that first, and then you work from there. No one will work with you if you don't know anyone, or if they don't know who you are. You have to have a contact. The system of contacts is quite political. The way the society works is you have to have those contacts, you have to be introduced to people, and you have to research to get the right people or the right partnership, or else it won't work. So it's actually very important to develop good partners first. And that's why we changed so often. We went through five partners, four different organisations before we found the right one.

You have to talk to people who are experienced in working in China. There are many people who are, who have worked in China before, in whatever walk of life. But it's important to listen to them before you begin your project. If you do want to work in China that's probably the best way to do it.

EMER: And what made you choose China?

GAVIN: We were talking about exchanging directors between Ireland and China because we thought that rather than tour to China it would be interesting to make a show there. We'd made shows in other countries before, like Germany, and we thought it'd be an interesting adventure to make a show on the ground rather than just bring a show. So a spirit of adventure, but also this kind of instinctive interest in China that I suppose people have generally – it's so mysterious, and I don't think people know much about China even today to a degree. So I thought that was interesting – the fascination.

EMER: Do you have the same fascination now you had at the start?

GAVIN: Yeah, I really like China. It's great knowing it. I know it quite well now, to a degree, as much as you can know it.

We've actually brought other projects there in the meantime. We've toured another show there – *Oedipus* – and we're thinking about doing another show there, but in the long term. And we're thinking about doing other stuff there, perhaps a film project, and also maybe thinking of doing another play with Chinese actors, maybe a Shakespeare. We're still connected to it, so it would be a shame for all that knowledge to go to waste. It'd be good to try one or two more projects.

EMER: Well I think I'll leave it there. Thanks for your time.

GAVIN: Okay great, thanks a lot.

Maximilien Seweryn

06 February 201

Brick Lane, London.

EMER: I'm going to start by asking some questions about the production itself and your experiences and then I'm going to move into questions that are a little bit more political.

MAX: So why did you choose *11 and 12* as a subject for your PhD?

EMER: Because a lot of the debates around ethics and intercultural theatre started with Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*. And currently the debates are saying that the world is a different place now, that there are not the same ethical issues as there were in the 80s when he was doing *The Mahabharata*. So I'm looking at contemporary productions and seeing if we can apply that logic. *11 and 12* is a good example of Brook's contemporary stuff.

MAX: Where did you see it?

EMER: The Barbican.

MAX: Which night? Did you come for the talk?

EMER: I didn't come for the talk; I missed the talk. I think I came on a Wednesday.

MAX: So your PhD's on intercultural theatre, and one little part of it is on *11 and 12*.

EMER: Yeah – about a 5th of it is on *11 and 12*. I have five chapters.

MAX: And what are the other chapters?

EMER: An Introduction, Tim Supple's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and because I'm trying to look at Irish intercultural theatre alongside British based intercultural theatre, I'm looking at versions of *the Playboy of the Western World*. There was a Chinese version and a Nigerian/Irish version.

Okay, so I'm going to start on my questions. So – how familiar were you with the work of Peter Brook before you did this production and what was your opinion of this work?

MAX: Before I did the production I saw *Tierno Bokar* in French when I was 13 or 14, but I didn't remember much of it. And I saw *Fragments*, Beckett, and that's pretty much it. That's what I knew of Peter Brook and his work. And I was really, really amazed by *Fragments*, by the Beckett. The humanity of it and the simplicity was really striking. I was going to the theatre very often after I stopped university, just to familiarise myself with all of that in Paris. And I was seeing guys acting very *big*, like semi-Gods on stage – with big bodies and big voices and big technique. And then I go to the Bouffes du Nord and I see these three guys talking to each other, just talking to each other and playing with each other and speaking normally, without any theatrical accent, in a way that was very close to life, or so I felt. *Fragments* was a big thing.

EMER: So you were aware of his reputation and the reputation of the Bouffe du Nord?

MAX: Yeah, I was. Absolutely.

EMER: So how did you get the part? What was your audition like?

MAX: There's no audition with Peter Brook. He invites people that he knows or that friends of his know to workshops and from there things just go naturally from one workshop to another workshop. And at some point you receive a contract and you do the show. I was invited to a workshop for *Measure for Measure*, for three days, and then after that he came to talk to me and he said 'Why don't you come back in three weeks for another workshop.' So I came back and did a workshop on *11 and 12*. Months passed, and from workshop to workshop he ended up creating a group. And we all went to the last workshop in Wroclaw in Poland. So he was sure that we were all part of the ensemble at that time. The three week workshop in Poland really brought us together. It let us meet in a very good way in a good atmosphere, under the patronage of the Growtowski institute, who are co-producers of the show and helped with all the rehearsal spaces.

EMER: One of the characteristics of Peter Brook's aesthetic and practice is that he tries to transcend, as you know, accent, nationality, skin colour in his casting. What do you think of this approach? What do you think are its benefits and drawbacks?

MAX: I never really asked myself this question, but I think he's interested in how two people from different cultures and backgrounds meet on the stage and communicate. He strongly believes, and I believe as well, that if it's possible to make people exist and communicate – 7 people from 7 different nationalities: One Jew, One Christian, One Arab, One guy from Nigeria, one from Spain, one from Sweden – if it's possible to make them live together, be together, on the stage, then it might be possible in real life. That's a part of his approach.

It's really interesting to work with actors from different nationalities. It's really interesting because you take a lot from them. There's a richness to it. You learn to understand the rhythm of their language – we don't all speak English in the same way. The inflections, the intonations are really different. A French guy speaking English and an Arab guy speaking English are really different. And you learn how to understand their rhythms, you get inspired by that. You feed yourself with their culture; they feed themselves with yours, and it becomes something quite unique. There's a unique blend and a real colour to the work. It really feeds the story as well – what the story does to each of the actors in his own personality, ethnicity and background. We're not obliged to share this – but you just feel that when you bring something like this on stage, that there's an invisible thing going on that makes the magic of his [Brook's] theatre. It's beautiful, I think.

EMER: So just to draw that out a bit. You're talking about how you all bring different aspects of your culture – of language. How important do you think – not just in relation to 11 and 12, but in relations to your creative work in general – your own cultural and national background is?

MAX: That's a hard question for me, because I'm a bit confused about my background and nationality. I'm French, but I have no French family. My only passport is French and French is my mother tongue, but my parents are from different countries. Everybody tells me that it's a great quality to be multicultural, but I tell them 'you have no idea what it is.' Because you're constantly torn apart between languages and cultures. And I think, what am I doing in London then? Why am I not in Paris? To find the place that you belong to is quite hard.

In the work, speaking different languages is really good. It's a great tool and quality, and it really helps me. I don't know why – it makes the job more fun, because you can do it in different languages. Sometimes when I play in English, because it's not my mother tongue, it can be more spontaneous, because it comes from the body and not from the mind. When you play in your mother tongue, you analyse it from a mind point of view, from the brain. But if you read a text in a language that you can read, but not understand properly it comes really from the guts and the body. It's more spontaneous, which is really good. That's something I realised when I went from French to English. And now when I go back to French, I try to keep this approach. Speaking other languages allows you to understand these kinds of things.

EMER: You might almost say that because your cultural background is mixed – that although you identify as French, you don't really have family there; that although you have what your friends call a wonderful multiculturalism, you find this challenging –

that makes you a perfect actor for a play like Brook's, where we're not concentrating on ethnicity, class, accent, skin colour.

MAX: Yeah, probably. I'm the perfect Brook actor! *laughs* I know what you're saying, but sometimes it feels a bit confused and lost.

EMER: Returning to the idea of the international group and how lovely it was to work with everyone: You're bringing a very specific cultural situation – I know that you feel lost or lacking roots – but that's still a specific cultural space to operate from and you bring that to the table, that sense of rootlessness. Everyone else is bringing different things also. Some of them might be very attached to their cultures and nationalities, some might decide to ignore all that. But an international situation is always going to throw up those conflicts of ways of being. While the actors bring a lot to the table, in some of the productions that I've been studying there's a lot of conflict. Was there any conflict or difficulties of comprehension or communication that arose from the international context of this production?

MAX: Surprisingly not. At all. We had no conflicts at all. Maybe something one day in the changing rooms, but it was something really small. There was no tension whatsoever. Because Peter Brook is the most talented person to create a group and that's one of his biggest qualities I think. That's what makes his work so good, is that he is a genius at just bringing people together and creating a group that's going to work peacefully together towards some project. No, the fact that we were an international group and that we were all from different backgrounds didn't bring any tension at all.

EMER: And how does he do that then? How does Peter Brook bring people together, in your experience.

MAX: I can't tell you because I don't know what's going on in his mind when he says 'this one is going to do this show and this one is not going to do that show.' What I can tell you is that he doesn't think at all about the influence of technique on an actor. He'll never think 'oh this guy didn't go to RADA so I'm not going to take him.' I was not trained when I started to work with Peter Brook. I was an untrained actor, and he took me. He's not into the training at all – he's looking for personalities, he's looking for human beings before actors.

EMER: Energies?

MAX: Yeah, energies. Positive energies. People just being able to go there and not give a fuck about technique or what people think, and instead, just propose something in improvisation. That's what he's looking for. He's looking for different energies. And then he *feels*. He's someone who feels a lot. His brain is enormous. He knows so many things – he's an intellectual. But his greatest quality is that he feels. You can really feel that balance in him between thinking and feeling. So if you have this balance as a director, I think that's when you can really create the group. I mean, I can't really tell you because I'm not in his head, but he just brings us together and we think 'it's obvious that I should be with this guy and that guy.'

EMER: That's really interesting. So, he thinks and he feels and he obviously has a certain vision for the play, but would you call him an authoritative director? Or would you say that he gives you a lot of freedom?

MAX: For the actors?

EMER: Yeah.

MAX: He's not authoritarian at all. First of all, he doesn't have any idea of the shape of the show when you start the first day rehearsal. He doesn't know where it's going. He has the text, but he doesn't know exactly how it's going to end. He's not a director who works with a designer and a costume designer, and who's going to say 'okay, so now that tree is going to be there, and we're going to have a big wall back there.' It's not at all like that. He leaves a lot of freedom to the actors to create, and he takes from what the actors propose. There's a space of freedom on stage, and it is extremely secure. You can do anything you want. Sometimes he's going to say no, sometimes he's going to say yes – there's no judgement whatsoever. There's no struggle of influence, no power struggles, nothing said behind the curtain or to some actor in a corner. It's great. It's very lucky for an actor to work with him. There are good conditions.

EMER: Tell me a bit more about that freedom that he allows you. Do you feel that because you have that freedom that you are a co-author of the piece? That it's a collaboration between artists rather than a production by Peter Brook.

MAX: I mean, yeah, it's a collaboration between actors and a director and Marie-Hélène Estienne, who adapted Amadou Hampâté Bâ's novel. We were 13, 14 people working together. The lighting designer, Philippe Vialatte, who watches things, the stage manager, Arthur Franc, everybody's always there during rehearsals, even though there's no light and even though it's work, but it's under his eye. He's always looking and feeling, and he decides in the end of course, but we propose, and he takes from what we propose. It's very fluid. It's a very simple and very pure movement of energy. He gives us something – an idea, a piece of text, an improvisation, and we improvise, he takes things, or he says 'maybe not, maybe next time' we see what happens to a scene. Maybe two weeks after that he's going to bring it back. It's always moving, always evolving, all the time. It's never stuck, and as soon as something is stuck he'll break it and we'll try to find something else.

EMER: So compared to other theatre or projects you've worked on, would you say that it's one of the most collaborative things you've done, or have you worked on devised work yourself at any point?

MAX: I haven't done much work. I've done some school stuff in Paris – a long show by Howard Barker, *Scenes of an Execution*, and it was very different. It [11and12] was definitely the most collaborative thing I've ever done – it was ensemble work, all about ensemble and being together and listening to each other in a state of readiness. We knew – at one point there was an actor, he was *that* close to not being able to play the show. Why? Because we were going to Newcastle and this big volcano in Iceland erupted, so there was an ash-cloud and no flights. And he was in South-East Spain and he had to come to Newcastle. He came to Newcastle by car and train and everything on land and he got to the theatre in Newcastle 15 minutes before the show, before the premiere. So half an hour before the show we were all like 'okay, he's never going to make it.' But we were not that afraid, because if somebody just steps away, if somebody isn't there, we can just work it out. Because the ensemble is so strong, if somebody is not there, becomes sick, we can always turn it around and do something else. We owned the story.

EMER: How long were you guys working together before that happened?

MAX: It took us about two months and then we realised, we could really change parts if we want to. We can take over if something happens, if someone falls down on stage.

EMER: And are you going to take that into your creative work in the future? Do you think you'd be more comfortable taking those skills and devising something yourself with a group? Or do you think you need the director's voice, that authoritative eye?

MAX: Well I have to be able to work with any kind of director if I want to be a good actor. I mean I know that Brook is unique, in a way, because you never usually get that much freedom, and that much time. He talks to you. He lets you think. And then you come back with something - it's always work. It's not like you go back home, smoke a cigarette and think 'Oh my God, How am I going to do this.' It's never complicated. He's never going to make a fifteen minute speech about the philosophy of the Tijani or whatever. He goes to the essence of it and to the pure, deep simplicity of it. He's very good at unlocking things as well, when you're blocked on something. He unlocks it very smoothly, but he never tells you exactly what to do. He leaves the actor the space to find himself. That's why you see his actors and you think 'they're so true, they're so simple.' Because they found it themselves. They were not under the pressure of a director who says 'at this point you need to laugh, or at this point you need to do that, or this is the intention here.' He's not blocked like that.

EMER: This might be a nice point to move into a discussion of *11 and 12* itself, of the actual story. Was this the first time that you'd encountered the work of Amadou Hampâté Bâ?

MAX: Yeah.

EMER: And what did you think of it? How did you relate to the story? Personally?

MAX: Well it taught me a lot about my French culture, the places they had in Africa. It gave me the beginnings of answers about my approach to religion as well. I think that's what's quite amazing with his work. He was Muslim, writing about Allah, Sufism, Tijani. You can really take some of his questions and some of his thoughts and apply it for any other religion. And that's the most amazing thing. It's totally universal. When we played to show in Poland, so many people came and said 'my God, I got so many answers about Jesus and God.' And obviously it's not about God, it's about Allah – not about Christianity, but Islam. And this is the beauty of it: when you go into the essence of everything you realise that there are many other things around that this is related to. That's one of the big things that it brought to my mind.

EMER: Do you mind me asking – what are your spiritual or religious affiliations?

MAX: I'm really not into religion much. I was born Christian, but I never went to church, I don't pray. I consider myself, I think, an atheist. Religion is something interesting, but it's really not the time for me at the moment.

EMER: So maybe agnostic more than atheist.

MAX: What's that?

EMER: Agnostic is when you don't know what you believe, and then atheist is when you believe that there is no God.

MAX: I don't know about God. I'm quite a spiritual person, I believe in many many things.

No, I don't believe there is no God.

EMER: So you're an agnostic

MAX: I'm an agnostic.

EMER: That was a bit of a tangent, I was just interested to know.

MAX: I'm probably not the person you should ask these questions to. You don't have to be religious to work with Peter Brook, if that's what you want to ask me.

EMER: Well, I was just interested because you said that the play allowed you to confront a lot of spiritual questions, and, as I'm probably the same as you – agnostic/atheist, it's interesting to hear that the spiritual journey of a man from a religion that you're not connected to can touch you, in spite of the fact that your faith is so different, your culture is so different. I thought it was interesting, so I thought I'd draw it out.

On a slightly more political level – you're a French person, affiliated to France and there's a very strong condemnation of French colonialism in the play. The relationship between colonizer and colonized is quite simplistic: colonizer bad, colonized good. How did that make you feel? Or do you disagree with me that the relation is simple?

MAX: Perhaps that's how you see it from the audience point of view. There was never statement 'colonization is shit.' It was never put like that. People have said this, that [in the play] colonization is good or bad or whatever, but it's also something that they felt from the outside.

EMER: What do you think of the way that the relationship between colonizer and colonised is portrayed in the play? What do you think of the way that it's brought out?

MAX: Well I know that everything we're describing in the play is completely true. It happened and there's no exaggeration. We don't overdo things. We got documents and read things and went to Africa. We didn't do anything that was in our minds clichéd. What we were describing in the play is what happened, literally. I mean, it is true that one Sharif Hamallah was sent to France to a prison/concentration camp. It's true that they detained all of his wives and children in one house for one month with little access to food and water. There were real persecutions. They burned all his books. He had about 2000 books and the French army just burned everything. They wanted to exercise a very strong authority on Malian people and people from West Africa. And it was extremely violent – the violence, the torture, and how to submit these people to the French powers was extremely violent. I think it's quite just what we're saying in that play.

EMER: And do you feel, as a French person, ashamed of that history, or that that history is history, or that you're making up for it now by taking roles like this and telling the truth of the situations.

MAX: Of course I'm a little bit ashamed of it. I don't know where to place myself once again. My father was in prison in the sixties because of the soviet union repression in Poland. My mother lived through the civil war in Lebanon. So I don't really have anything to do with colonisation in France and Algeria and Africa and wherever. As a French person, I feel that colonisation is a failure. It does many bad things. Colonisation is going on right now. Chinese people are building highways in Bamako that are, on purpose, not good, so that they can redo it once every two years so that they can have money for it. We don't know that much about it, but China has a lot of influence on Africa. Nobody talks about it – CNN, BBC world – nothing. Everything is focused on Iran and Iraq.

EMER: You could also argue that Western involvement in Iraq is colonisation.

MAX: Absolutely. It is in a way. There's always different powerful countries fighting each other and that will never stop. It's always about tribes that fight for power in a region. It happened in prehistoric times – with twenty people on one side of the river and fifteen people on the other side of the river. Have you seen *2001 A Space Odyssey*? It's my favourite movie. There's this big monolith and there's these monkeys just fighting and shouting at each other because they want the stone. That will never stop. It's sad, but it's the way it is. We can fight against that, work against it.

EMER: Just to draw that out a little bit more, I'm going to build on your metaphor of *Space Odyssey*. If we look at that monolith and we imagine that it's culture – stories, cultural artefacts, music, all those things - there's been a lot of critiques of Western countries – America, the UK, Europe – for exoticising and trying to take or appropriate the culture of other nations, in a way that misrepresents those nations and in a way that takes power away from them. In other words, there's a branch of criticism that says that the West is still trying to speak for Africa, for Asia – trying to tell their stories in a way that makes sense to the West rather than a way in which is truthful to the nations themselves. So let's imagine for a second that we could level that criticism at *11 and 12*.

MAX: You could talk about this even with the *Mahabharata* – that there's exoticism, that Peter Brook is bringing actors from all over the world together for a tourist show. But does that mean that we can't get interested in other cultures? Okay, I'm white, I'm going to be only interested in French culture? I think that's dangerous. I think then we'd stay focused only on ourselves. If you feel that you're driven by something that is not your culture, I feel that you need to follow that, even if people tell you 'you have nothing to do with this.' Who can say that? Maybe my French culture is related to your Chinese culture in a way, but you don't know it, and me neither, but I feel there's something. Maybe not. I feel East can bring answers to West and West to East. But we need to be curious. What you're saying [about appropriating cultures] just kills curiosity. People stay in their own thing and think 'I'm not going to go there, I'm not going to get interested in that, I have nothing to do with it.' No, that's not good.

EMER: Of course, at the same time, while it's horrible to think that people could/should only ever be interested in their own culture, there *are* inequalities, there are economic inequalities that inform these things. And for some it would be significant that this tale of Mali and Malians, written by a Malian, wasn't playing at The Barbican directed by a Malian director or an African director. It was playing there because it was directed by a famous European director. Some would argue that there's an ethical issue there. Do you agree or disagree?

MAX: I think I totally disagree with this. There are a lot of Malian artists, musicians for example, who fill big big stadiums and concert venues. I'm not sure I understand the questions – it's maybe a bit too political for me. I don't know what to tell you.

EMER: Just your gut – what do you feel about it? About the fact that someone would say 'why is the Barbican giving the stage to Peter Brook instead of to a Malian director to tell this African story.'

MAX: Of course, Brook is very famous. One of the most famous – if he wants to do something... well, it's not easy, but should Brook not take that story and direct it because he's not from Mali and that story only belongs to Malian people to treat? I really don't know how to answer that question. Sorry. If a Malian director comes and says 'I'm going to do this...' well, y'know ... it just didn't happen, I think. You should ask the Barbican that question.

EMER: I might just.

MAX: I can't really tell you what I think about this, because I got asked by Peter Brook to do it. Of course, chances must be given to anyone. I don't know what is the status of things with Malian culture, if there's a very strong theatre there. It's not a show only about Mali, you know. If it really was a show about Mali they would have brought in seven Malian actors, but there are only three black actors in the show. And it's not a realistic show about Mali – it's a show about tolerance and communication between different parties.

EMER: That brings me onto my next question. I mean, it's a political play and a spiritual play. How much do you think it's a political play?

MAX: People are making it political. We never thought of making it political. We never talked about politics or anything. We read the books. We tried to put together on stage the questions that were asked in the book. But never in a political way. We never thought about that.

Hopefully people who see it will think, well let's communicate more and listen to each other and tolerate more the other point of view. This *11 and 12* thing can be seen in many places in the world. In Iraq, between the Sunni and the Sh'ia, in the Lebanon between the Christians and the Muslims, in Israel between the Arabs and the Jews. It's a universal story. That's why Brook wanted to do it, I think. He picked a good time to do it. You can analyse world political situations in this way, but it was never a starting point for our work. It was not like 'we're talking about Iraq and we're talking about Israel in our show.' Not at all. Of course, after the show, when we are asked, we can really see that these problems that were here in 1943 and before that with French colonialism can still be seen today.

EMER: And how about the spiritual side of things? How much was that an impetus for your work? You've said that the political side of things was there, but it wasn't a starting point for your work. How much do you think that the spiritual side of the play was a starting point?

MAX: We read the books and we got in touch with people in Bandiagara, Niore du Sahel, Bamako – people that knew Sharif Hamallah, Amadou Hampâté Bâ, Tierno

Bokar: children, relatives. [The story] makes you think a lot. It makes you question yourself a lot. I can tell you what happened to me when I went to African, to illustrate that a little bit. Going there really brought me something amazing because I realised that the rhythms were really different there. Whatever happens there, there is something in the people, in their soul, that tells them 'that's okay.' They don't have much. They don't have big cars and big buildings. I mean people have TV and phones and motorbikes – not everybody, but some. But, obviously, there are less *things* than we have in Europe and the US. But people are happy and smiley and their energy is really positive. There is nothing heavy there. Whatever happens, it is not heavy and problematic. There's a lightness in the air that's really nice, and the rhythms are really slow. They take their time to do things. They taste things. They're really sensitive. This really opened my eyes on some things. On the place of nature. Nature is omnipresent there. In the play nature is quite important as well. It's all about the sand, the desert, the light, travelling and the snake story and all of that. Nature is really important in the Sufi and in the Tijani philosophy. It really opened my eyes on the importance of protecting Nature, our earth. Because to me nature is the truth. It's where we all came from and we completely forget about it these days. I now feel and understand that you are in contact with the truth about the essence of the human being and his existence when you are in a natural environment. When you're in a forest, standing in front of a tree, or in the middle of the ocean. I know it can sound a bit silly and you might want to say 'well...yeah, of course, we know that, thank you very much, man comes from nature' but to actually having that deep realization was a turning point for me. It was obvious when we were in Africa: we were driving one night and we had to stop because the lights just stopped working, just like that, in the middle of the fucking desert. And we had to put it back on. And there was no light anywhere. There was the moon, only the moon, the desert and the shadow of some little trees on the sand. And suddenly I was like 'my God, this is like nature at its first base.' When you're there you can start thinking as Tierno Bokar and Sharif Hamallah did. They were in nature, and nature gives that.

EMER: How long were you there for?

MAX: A month. It is hard to think about philosophical things right now because we're in the city. Everything goes so fast and everything is not really clear in my mind. I'm constantly evolving as a person. Sometimes things appear really clearly to me, and then three days after that, I'm like 'yeah, but...' I'm questioning myself all the time so sometimes it is hard for me to answer these kinds of questions. Because it's really important for me, spirituality, your place in the world. How to answer it properly is quite hard.

EMER: Well that's the sign of intellect - questioning yourself all the time. Just to perhaps draw a parallel between your situation of questioning, and the situation in the play when Bokar and Hamallah are conversing – you know there's that point where they walk across the stage together. That's a very spiritual moment and a moment that's quite difficult for most people to understand, because Bokar basically says 'I feel like you are closer to God than me.' Or 'I feel like you are closer to the truth.' And a lot of people read that decision in terms of politics – that Tierno made the political decision to side with the way of the eleven. But I think that's a very spiritual moment.

MAX: What's amazing about that moment is that he's quite old at that time, Tierno Bokar, maybe 60-something. He's been believing in the twelve for all his life. He's been strongly believing in it. He's been preaching it. Then at some point he meets that guy, and listens to him. Tierno is not stuck in anything. He's not stubborn. He listens.

And then he realises, okay maybe I'm not twelve, I'm eleven - at 65, after all his knowledge, experience and preaching. He was convinced for 65 years that he was a twelve. And so he just listens to the Other. And that's Sharif Hamallah, but it can be anybody – it can be you and I. You can be convinced of something until someone comes along and says 'look at that.' And if you just make the effort – you say 'I'm going to look, I'm going to listen, I'm going to open myself to it,' and maybe you're going to change. Maybe not. But maybe you're going to change. This is the most beautiful thing in the play, to me, this guy who knows so much just realizes that there's another guy who can convince him to change his mind. But there was nothing like pressure. They were talking about their religion, about their vision of life. So that's quite amazing to me – that openness.

EMER: I'd like to hear a little bit more about your time in Africa. How was it decided that you were going to go?

MAX: I went to Africa with three other actors. We went to meet some people.

EMER: Who did you meet with?

MAX: We met some people from the Sharif Hamallah family, from Tierno Bokar's village, stuff like that.

EMER: So you saw where the story was based and then you met people from his line.

MAX: Yeah.

EMER: Were you in touch with African actors and theatre groups there?

MAX: Not much. It was places, people, atmospheres, smells.

EMER: So you read the books, and then you went there to see the place and meet the people. That's so much more connection with the part than you'd usually be expected to develop.

MAX: That's why it's so amazing to work with Peter Brook, because you just go so deep into the thing that you're doing. It's not like sometimes at the National or the Royal court where you have 4 weeks rehearsals, 5 days tech and then you perform. You go deep into the subject. You go deep into the plot. You take the time so that it can really be part of your body, so that it can mature inside of you before you do the first show, which is a luxury, I think.

EMER: I'd like to ask one last question that is a bit of a departure, and then you are free to go about your Sunday! In the play there are female characters. There's the mother – there's the shrewish widow – but there were no women cast; it was all men. So if you look at the idea that you're transcending accent and you're transcending race, you're not supposed to take people's skin colours into account. Do you think there's anything hypocritical about the idea that all these people were played by men – that the play didn't try to transcend gender at all?

MAX: We tried to transcend gender – we were playing women.

EMER: Okay, but it certainly wasn't gender-blind casting.

MAX: You would have wanted a woman to play a man? *Laughs* A man playing a woman – no! It has to be a woman playing a man.

EMER: Well the casting was not gender-blind: it's an all male show.

MAX: You should ask Peter about that.

EMER: What do you feel about it?

MAX: I think it was just really small female parts and it was really good for the playfulness of the show to have it played by these brilliant guys. We could have brought in an actress, but when Tunji for the first time played his mother, put the scarf on his head and played the African mother – that was so amazing, why would we want to bring a woman into that? Just to play that five minute scene, and that other six minute scene, so she would have played about ten minutes in the show. She would have suffered for the whole tour, for the seven months tour, playing ten minutes in the show.

EMER: But you know the way that you're ignoring all the other markers of difference? You're ignoring skin, you're ignoring accent. Do you think it's possible, maybe not just in *11 and 12* but in general, to also transcend gender in that way? Or do you think that's something that people won't accept? That a woman as Tierno Bokar is never going to work?

MAX: I think Peter didn't think about that. I can't really tell you about that, because I am not directing the show, so I can't really talk about these things. I know what you're saying. I don't really know what to answer to that. You mean you would have wanted a woman to play Tierno Bokar?

EMER: Well, as a thought experiment, just thinking about it, would that be possible? Would an audience accept that?

MAX: I don't know – you should try. You could try to do that *laughs* I mean, everything is possible. Prospero is going to be played by Helen Miren in the American movie. See, everything is possible. I think it never occurred to Peter to do that. I think everything can be transcended, so long as it's a good actress. If the actress is really good, she can do whatever she wants. It's about playing, it's about the magic of it – it takes some magic to take someone who's a man as a woman. I'm really not closed to anything at all. I'm really interested in this cross border stuff.

EMER: Well I've got through all my questions. Your answers have been very interesting. Would you like to add anything further about your experiences on *11 and 12*?

MAX: I've talked to a lot of people about the show. It's not a show you can bring all the way to the audience – the audience has to come half-way. And as soon as the audience does this – meets a scene half way – it can really bring some answers to questions you have about religion, whatever religion yours is, and that is the most beautiful thing about the show. It was a beautiful life and artistic experience for me to meet an American guy from Kentucky playing the wife of a Spanish guy who lived in Sweden, then playing his brother in an African village. It was really beautiful for your imagination and your creativity. I'm very happy to have done the show.

Sun Yue and Wang Zhaohui

15 December 2009

E-mail

EMER: Could you please tell me a little about your translating and playwriting backgrounds?

SUN and WANG: Sun Yue graduated from China Central Academy of Drama in 1998, majoring in script writing. After her graduation, she worked as an editor, writer and director for many top Television programs. *The Playboy of the Western World* was her first theatrical adaptation.

Zhaohui studied in Australia for many years, and returned to China in 1998. She has translated several television series and screenplays in both countries. Most of these are contemporary works.

EMER: From an interview with Gavin Quinn, I understand that the translation and adaptation process involved in *The Playboy of the Western World* was as follows:

- a) Someone was employed to make a literal translation of Synge's original text into Mandarin Chinese.
- b) Sun Yue worked on this script, adding idiom and style, to make a dramatic translation.
- c) Gavin Quinn wrote an adaptation, in English, set in a 'whore-dressers' on the outskirts of modern day Beijing.
- d) Using the dramatic translation of J.M. Synge's original as a model, Sun Yue translated Gavin Quinn's adaptation into the street language of contemporary Beijing.

Is this understanding correct? If not, what is incorrect? Can you offer me any further information on the translation process?

SUN: The translation process described by Gavin Quinn is accurate. Gavin is a Westerner, the China Portrait in his play is from a Western point of view. My job emphasizes choosing the right language and making the characters more believable and more 'Chinese.'

EMER: Was this your first experience of the drama of J.M. Synge? If so, what is your opinion of *The Playboy of the Western World*, both from a personal perspective, and in terms of how it resonates with Chinese culture?

SUN: It was my first experience of the drama of J. M. Synge. I think it is a wonderful play. What I like the most is the theatrical structure and the discovery of the human nature. It appeals to everyone in the world.

EMER: What, if any, aspects of translating Synge did you find challenging?

SUN: It is a very challenging but also fun project.

EMER: What, if any, aspects of translating Synge did you find particularly interesting?

SUN: One of the most interesting things for me is how to re-create the character of Christy and his father. They are two intruders who are different from the locals. They are two powerful forces of breaking the stability of, and restructuring the place. The folk culture of the Northeast is very popular in China. The language is very lively and witty. That's why I chose this language for the two characters in order to enhance dramatic effects.

EMER: What, if any, aspects of translating Gavin Quinn's adaptation did you find challenging?

SUN: Quinn's adaptation is completely new to Chinese. He looks at China from a Westerner's point of view. In some places the adaptation is not very logical to Chinese. What is most challenging for me is how to make the character believable to the Chinese audience without misleading Quinn's interpretation.

EMER: What, if any, aspects of translating Gavin Quinn's adaptation did you find particularly interesting?

SUN: It is interesting to change the bar to a 'whoredressers.' Many of my foreign friends noticed that most of the shops you can find in the streets of Beijing are hairdressers and restaurants. It is too common for the locals to notice but is so strange for foreigners.

EMER: Do you think that Gavin Quinn's adaptation was an apt representation of life in contemporary Beijing?

SUN: It didn't reflect China completely. It is true that views from the oriental are so different from the westerners. Their understanding and presentation of life are different. For instance, it is the worst sin to kill your own father in Chinese culture, so no one will worship someone who claims that he killed his own father.

EMER: Originally, Quinn told me, Ma Shang/Christy was supposed to be from the Muslim and Uyghur province of Xin-Jiang, but this was changed due to fear of censorship. In Dublin however, Ma Shang/Christy became from Xin-Jiang once more. What is your opinion on all this? Do you think that Chinese censorship is too strict? Do you think that Quinn, as a westerner, had the right to represent Christy as a Muslim from Xin-Jiang?

SUN: I don't think it is important whether Christy is Uyghur or from any other places. The reason we made the changes is not only because of the censorship. It is also because of ethnic complexities. The play makes sense as long as we make Christy an intruder. Our work needs to nurture the feelings of other ethnic groups. However, I think it makes Christy more relevant to contemporary Western audiences if we make Christy a Muslim.

WANG: I'd like to make Christy a Uyghur for two reasons: one is because they look different from Han Chinese. Therefore, when Christy tells his story it makes people believe it more. Secondly, many local Beijing people dislike Uyghur Muslims. There are lots of different reasons. For instance, many Uyghur Muslims sell drugs in Beijing. I think this would be more interesting. However, I also found it might offend both Han

and Uyghur if we were not careful. That's why I suggested to change Christy's origin to Northeast China, but he is half Han Chinese and half Russian. Many people in that area have this back ground. They might look like Europeans, but they grow up in China, and know nothing about the world outside of their village.

EMER: Do you believe translation to be a creative act?

I believe translation is certainly a creative act. It is not simply to translate the language but also the culture, and to find what is relevant for both cultures.

EMER: Did you have any input into the rehearsal process?

SUN and WANG: We were at rehearsals every day. This is not a realistic play but more abstract and postmodern, although it has a realistic appearance. We helped the actors to understand their characters during rehearsal.

EMER: Are there any further thoughts or opinions that you would like to share regarding your work on *The Playboy of the Western World*?

SUN and WANG: This is a fantastic play which is worth people re-reading and re-staging. People from different times will have different understandings. It is always relevant to our contemporary lives.

Tim Supple

15 October 2012

Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham.

TIM: I just wanted to know, before you ask me questions, what your PhD is on.

EMER: I'm working on intercultural collaboration. So I'm studying various productions and thinking about them in terms of the socio-political and material conditions that inform them and the agency that various collaborators have. Just to give you an idea of the other stuff that I'm working on, I'm also working on Brook. Peter Brook's work at one point was a locus for a lot of these debates, and I think that your work is continuing to be a locus for them, and so I'm looking at your *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as one of my case studies.

TIM: And you hope to have this finished by next summer?

EMER: Yes, hopefully.

TIM: Because you know I'm working on another big production, *The Arabian Nights*, which will open in June in Toronto. So if you wanted, if it were interesting for you to reference that, which is still in progress, then we could talk about that.

EMER: Wonderful. I have mentioned in the chapter that I'm currently writing that you're working on this new production, but I don't know a huge amount about it so I'd be delighted to learn more.

So the first thing I'd like to ask you about is the audition process, which I know was very intensive, with sixty performers flying to Pondicherry. Can you tell me what you were looking for in the final 22, and also were there many broken hearts among the 38 who had to go home? Did you find any difference between actors' ability to handle that kind of rejection in India as opposed to the UK.

TIM: The audition process begun at a stage before the 60. Through the course of 2005, I travelled to different key places – Chennai, Kerala, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Delhi, Manipur, Kolkata, Bangalore, and two more – I can't quite remember where. And I did group sessions there and these group sessions were organised by some key local director or producer or group. So that was the first stage. And out of those sessions I selected the sixty who came to the last audition in Mumbai. The criteria for selection was in a way quite simple. There were three things that I realised I was looking for: One was that the performer had to continue to excite me and feel exciting to me. Second was that they had to be right for the part. This was Shakespeare. In the end that was a very simple factor. Thirdly, I had to feel that their spirit was good and that's one reason why I worked for a week. I mean who am I to judge whether someone's spirit is good or bad, but what I mean is whether I could imagine them working with other people for three years and for that to be a positive experience for them and for the other people with them. It was really not possible to cast someone who was going to be very troubled or troubling in that situation. So in the end I had some very difficult decisions to make about casting the part right, or about someone who excited me but I wasn't sure how their personality would evolve in that situation.

In terms of people's upset, that is an issue that I think about quite a lot with this process and with *1001 Nights*. There isn't the culture of auditioning in the same way. There aren't the professional structures in the same way. So even people who are highly skilled and work a lot will not be used to auditioning very much – they'll be used to being asked to do something. The process of being asked to audition, maybe being asked to audition quite a few Times over quite a few days for a project which was attractive to them for various reasons and then being rejected was very difficult for some. I didn't know about everyone's reaction but from what I knew it was very difficult for some and less difficult for others. That bothers me and it's something I need to keep exploring and I feel the same with the *1001 Nights*. I'm auditioning in broadly speaking the same way. I've been travelling for two years. Working with people who have come voluntarily to have a go with this. And then I have asked a group of 50 or 60 to come to Egypt for a week's work this November. And when the rejection comes I can't be there with everyone of course because they all go back to their separate cities. So when they find out that they haven't gotten it they're far away from everybody back in their homes. So that's difficult, and, as I say, met with varying reaction.

EMER: I spoke to Yuki Ellias who played Hermia and she described the rehearsal process as a very collaborative thing. She described it as a mad bunch of people trying

to figure out what they could do together with their different backgrounds and different languages. She said that you were very much a part of this mad bunch rather than an authoritative director. So how much to you share this view of the rehearsal process. How much do you think, practically speaking that there's a necessary hierarchy of the director in any collaborative process?

TIM: I'd like to think that we can get beyond hierarchy. I'd like to think that hierarchy isn't quite the word. But I've certainly not yet done anything that has proved to me that you don't need a leader. Or a selector, or an editor or an ultimate arbitrator of decisions. And that's what the director becomes, or the choreographer with dance or the director in collaboration with their colleagues – the designer, the dramaturg if you have one, the music director. So I think that Yuki's description is broadly right, in some ways very right; it's very unnatural for me to behave as someone apart from a group that I'm working with. And I do rehearse a scene or find a scene through asking people to try things, to find what they can do, and feeding from that and giving back to them. So a lot of the scenes in a *Midsummer Night's Dream* were very much built around them and their creative proposals. But it's an interesting thing that there's an aspect of this that I think the actors were never quite so aware of. Not even Yuki, who's very alert and insightful. That's that the designer and I established the parameters or set the parameters of certain physical things, and then didn't share them with the actors initially, because it might be that through the process of work something better would come up. And actually sometimes the actors found their way to the same place that we had at the beginning. And I'm very happy that that worked, that that was the case, because that's what I hoped would happen. But there was more ready to be acted upon between myself and the designer than I think the actors were aware of if you see what I mean. Did you see that show?

EMER: I've seen a recording. Unfortunately I wasn't in Britain at the time.

TIM: Do you remember the scene where Puck weaves a kind of web around the lovers?

EMER: Yes.

TIM: The designer and I had come up with that as a way of achieving this scene. But I'm not the kind of director who's going to walk in the first day and say 'this is how we're going to do this.' We tried many ways of doing that scene and in the end one of the actors came up with that idea. That was great because that means we were working towards a similar place. But also we had that ready, so at any stage I could say 'okay, this is what we're doing.' So that's the truth of it, but to all intents and purposes, Yuki's right.

EMER: And how did you negotiate the different languages in rehearsal? Did there tend to be one language or two languages that were the mediators, or did people work in their own languages. How did you achieve the kind of communication that this highly collaborative work needed?

TIM: There were three languages that became the meeting points: there was English, and some people spoke English. Then we had two actors who would translate: one into

Hindi for some of the actors, and one into Malayalam for the other actors. So broadly speaking the actors who spoke Tamil, Malayalam, the Southern languages would understand the Malayalam, and the actors who spoke the Northern languages would understand the Hindi. But then people spoke in their own language individually. You know in India people are so multilingual. There was always a way for people to meet, there was always a connecting point. The most difficult was with the one Sri Lankan actor who spoke Sinhalese, because he didn't have a connecting language so he was a little bit out on a limb sometimes.

EMER: He played Demetrius? In a talk for the Royal Shakespeare Company that I managed to get a DVD of, you spoke about bringing greater realism and greater attachment to the text to the collaboration. Did you find that the actors who had trained at the National School of Drama, New Delhi, that this was new even for them? Because they've trained in Stanislavski and Brecht and things were they more attached to realism. Or did you find that as a whole your commitment to text and realism was much greater than any of the performers you worked with?

TIM: Yeah, it was. Not because they hadn't come across it. As you say, at the NSD they learn it. Also the English language speaking actors from Bombay do realistic plays. But the difference is, for a start, in general, the theatre culture in India doesn't see fidelity to text as particularly important. There were big shifts between what they thought of as fidelity and what I intended as fidelity – that they had to really, really connect with the words, they can't just use the words as a broad template. Secondly, what we mean by realism can shift, so when we came to the sexual and physical relationships, it was a shock to the actors that I intended it to be so visceral and so physical. And that, even within the terms of a realistic performance in India was unusual. And what I brought to them that was unusual, was my extreme commitment to those two things. They brought other things that were new to me. And that was the richness of the collaboration.

EMER: In terms of intercultural theatre practice then, to take a little bit of a jump towards more theoretical things, I've read in various places and heard you say in various contexts that you feel very connected to the work of Peter Brook that you see yourself as influenced by him and working within that tradition. Of course the work of Peter Brook has been the locus for a lot of the debates about intercultural theatre practice and has come up against many ethical critiques.

I'm just going to read you a quote from a professor called Brian Singleton at Trinity College Dublin. He's speaking about the theatre practice of Brook and Mnouchkine and he says:

Interculturalism is fuelled by a vision of the Orient as a nostalgic space of lost ritual, formalism and religion. A nostalgic space for the authentically pure, sometimes barbarian – for everything the Westerner is not – his or her cultural opposite is morality, fixity, devotion, tradition and belief.

So, my question is: how seriously do you take these kinds of critiques of intercultural theatre practice?

TIM: Very seriously intellectually. I think it's a very, very good point. It's an extremely subtle conversation from that point onwards. It has an absolute validity as a statement, and I would take it seriously on the level of being happy to debate with that. As you read that statement I'm debating in my mind 'how much is that true in my own case and how much do I feel that's true of Brook's work, for instance or Mnouchkine?' And I think my starting point for that debate would be considering the specific experience I have of conceiving these projects and working with people and what I see them do and ask them to do. I don't think that everything that I do necessarily fits into that template, that formula of research. Whether I take it seriously in terms of it causing me anxiety or to question what I'm doing – I think I question what I'm doing all the time. I don't think I'm overtly more or less anxious about it than other things in my life. I question it, and this I would find a very helpful statement in the journey of questioning.

EMER: So just then to take an example from your own practice, you've said before that you think *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is particularly suited to India because their performance practices are so much more rooted in spirituality than are those in the West. So what would you say to an intercultural scholar who says 'this is an Oriental stereotype'?

TIM: This is what's interesting about this debate, because I didn't actually quite say what you just said. I didn't say it was particularly suited to India because they're closer to spiritual practices. What I said was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a life in India, and the actors are in some ways, they can access some aspects of the *Dream* that actors here can't. In a way I'm very boringly pedantic about what I say because I don't see things in such generalities. And what I meant by that was that in India you've got the full panorama of theatre practices, and some are very like our practices – are dealing with realistic plays, are dealing with experimental theatre techniques as we would understand them. Some are, from our perspective, very old fashioned, aping how Western theatre was 50 years ago. Some are working within old forms and trying to preserve exactly those forms. And we don't really have that. We have that with ballet perhaps, and that's not that old. Whereas, they have things like Kathakali, Bharatnatyam, they have actual physical dramatic practices, both classical and folk that are 500, 1000, in some cases 1,500 years old. And they do those things and we don't. Also, In India, there is a more current feeling, in some communities you can access a more vivid belief, in the supernatural. And that's where the spirit thing came in, but that's only one thing I said. And it's true, you go many places and you can see the dummies outside to keep away the evil eye. You come across Theyyam possession rituals that are still alive as a performance practice. You come across performance, theatre, as part of ritual that is believed in. You also come across, hugely, which you don't in Europe, theatre which expresses religious narratives – the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*.

And the other things in terms of the *Dream* that you come across is a greater disparity between rich and poor in a particular way that meant when it was time to access, say,

the mechanicals, they could be accessed in a way that was more readily understood than in Britain where people are more broadly middle class. If a British actor acts the mechanicals in a realistic and truthful way that immediately makes the production old-fashioned because you have to look to the past. If an Indian actor makes the mechanicals true that could be as present day as anything else. You'll find that in Calcutta, you'll find it anywhere. So, I think it is a very subtle line to tread between what is an Orientalist perspective and what is just true. Or as true as we know true. And what is to me true and not Orientalist and not exotic or romantic or nostalgic is that there are certain aspects of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which are very complicated for British productions that involve interpretation and tying yourself up in knots conceptually. That is, how do we believe that a father has the power to demand that his daughter be killed if she doesn't marry the man he wishes? How do we conceptualise a situation where the lovers have to run away in order to be themselves and free themselves? How do we contextualise a situation where the spirit world is alive and humanised as I believe it is in Shakespeare? How do we contextualise a situation where the mechanicals are so afraid and so ignorant of the aristocratic world that they're afraid that they'll be hung if they say the wrong thing? Or maybe that they're not ignorant – that is the truth that that is how it is. So there are many of these things that are closer to reality and closer to people's connection in India.

I have seen so many productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Britain that for me are hampered by having to contextualise those decisions in a conceptual way, which for me is very boring. So you have 'how are we going to do the fairies?' So they're all mad or they're like punks, which for me is a kind of metaphoric Shakespeare and doesn't interest me very much. Whereas in India I felt I could get right to a way of being on stage that connected with the text. And I don't think that was me suggesting to them something, in fact I had to rid them of as many bad habits of Western theatre as you would any British group of actors. But once they were plugged into the reality and the theatre animation that was around them it was very natural for them to bring that text to life. So it's quite a subtle thing, and of course, we could carry on having that debate for a long time and I think it's very interesting and I don't dismiss it, but I think it's about being very detailed and not general. And then when we are I feel clearer about what that debate's about.

EMER: That's a good point. I think often when you pull apart broad statements you get to much finer details, which brings me on, very nicely, to my next question actually, which is a comparison between your work and Brook's. In Brook's work he tries to transcend cultural and national difference in order to have universalist casting and a universalist aesthetic, whereas your work is very much grounded in a particular place and there is difference implied by the bodies on stage as opposed to in Brook where we're supposed to transcend those things. Do you feel that Brook's way of making universalist theatre is something that you would embrace or would like to embrace in the future or do you think that this engagement with difference is part of how you work.

TIM: Both. I think the path I'm on at the moment is absolutely one of engagement with difference. That's a very good word for it. I am seeking to learn about worlds I don't know, lives I don't know, theatre practices I don't know, and I'm seeking to weed out of myself the dangers inherent in your earlier question. I'm seeking to challenge my own preconceptions, my own clichés. I'm seeking to get beyond an exotic and orientalist view of, for example, the Arabic world of *1001 Nights* by putting myself in a situation where it would be explicitly possible that one could do that. I'm seeking to really know what it's like to be an actor and to know what actors are like in Algeria and Morocco and Tunisia, in Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi. And I'm seeking to create theatre out of that journey so that people can have an experience of Indian performers that's not Bollywood and not this and not that, but is *them*. And I'm seeking to put on stage the *1001 Nights* as they are in the Arabic texts, to truly see them as an Arabic work, not as a multicultural melange of Eastern myths but as something concretely based in the Arabic world. And to put on stage actors who come from the real living world of Arabic theatre, actors from the Arabic world, again, not exotic veiled women and tyrannical bearded men. To put on stage the flesh and blood of who they are. So for me, that's my journey. But I do see ultimately the thing that Brook tried to do swiftly, well it wasn't swiftly in his life, because he'd been doing lots of different things, but when he decided to do it he decided to do it. I see that as an ultimate goal that I want to get to, which is of an international cast made up of artists that I have met through this earlier journey. You put it very well earlier: Brook's journey is the transcending of difference. And for me it's about the search for the common core of what makes a story connect with people onstage and offstage. So I want to explore the folk and classical canon with a cast who bring very different perspectives of theatre practice, culture, life, to the work. And that's what I would like to be achieving in ten years time. But I want to go on a journey through the former Soviet lands and the former Persian or Iranian lands. I want to go on a greater journey in China, in South America. I want to go on a journey in Africa. I want to go on a journey through the aboriginal theatre cultures, because for me dealing with it in a focused way is me digesting and confronting particular issues. But I question this all the time. I ask – am I falling into the trap of defining people by a group – a national, racial, regional group. Even if my ultimate intention is to transcend that in myself and in the people I work with am I in an inescapable trap by being so fascinated by it? Like when I decided that the *1001 Nights* should be an Arabic project, that was a big step for me. What does that decision mean? Actually, it's mostly a linguistic thing. It's mostly about saying that there was in time a perspective, historically. That perspective was through the Arabic language, it was from an Islamic base, but it was an Islam very different to Islam now, and the *1001 Nights* came out of that time. They absorbed Indian influence and Persian influence, but they were an Arabic perspective. Now that same world that produced *1001 Nights* still exists as a block of Arabic speaking countries, largely Islamic but not entirely. And those early influences of India and Persia have been buried deeper into the ground. That block of countries, people and language still exist. And that, I've decided is the parameter of what I put on stage. Otherwise I could do *1001 Nights* and have anybody in it, of course I could, and that's possible. But my path is to focus and to understand that particular identity.

EMER: For me that's much more interesting. My problem with Brook's work is that sometimes we're transcending differences that we actually need in the text in order to really get an understanding of the story. This is a bit of a digression, but I just wrote a short article on *11 and 12* which is going to be published in a Canadian magazine soon, and that was one of my critiques – you're transcending difference, but there's so much in this story that is rooted in Africa, and we need that to really understand the story.

TIM: Did you feel that about *The Mahabharata*? Did you see it on video?

EMER: Yes. I think there's something slightly different there. And I think it's very open to critiques. I mean you hear from people like Rustom Bharucha that it's appropriation and it's cultural piracy and you find from other people like David Williams that it's finding a core of human experience. I suppose there's no way for me to give an out and out answer on *The Mahabharata* but what I do think is that it meant something in an Indian context that it lost when it became an international production. And I also think that there's a reason that it didn't play in India. And I think that's problematic. I think if you're going to take a story from a particular place, like you said about the *1001 Nights*, grounded in a particular place, time, language, culture, you need to not just acknowledge it, but also make it relevant to those people.

TIM: I'd say just three little things about that, because it is a very interesting debate. The first is that with *The Mahabharata*, I mean I still saw the core of what I love about Brook's work in *11 and 12*, but I think times have changed very much and *The Mahabharata* did something of its time and things have now changed because of it, partly because of it. I think what *The Mahabharata* did so profoundly for me, which you're quite right, had nothing to do with India really, although he would say it did, and he has a point, but anyway, what it did for me was it showed me, it released me from seeing theatre in very specific and localised terms, it really blew open what I felt could be received as theatre in terms of there being an incoherence in language, personality type, background on stage. It felt like its own world. I also felt that it gave *The Mahabharata* to me in terms of a connection with a different way of seeing theatre. Not just in the casting, but in the lack of polish, in being given the story very directly, in a very simple, childlike and open way. And I think that was very important at its time and times then moved on perhaps. But at the time it was like a trapdoor opening up to a set of possibilities I felt.

Also, the *Mahabharata* and the *1001 Nights* are very different. I mean, it doesn't either confirm or contradict what you're saying. *The Mahabharata* is still very much alive in India as a generally well known, well-liked and often-referred to work. The weird thing about the *1001 Nights* is that the Arabic world was robbed of that work so early and it's been so comprehensively altered by the West, which is not true of *The Mahabharata*. So the *1001 Nights* became, through the West, the Arabian nights and was then brought back to the Arab world as this Western influenced thing. So for instance when I travelled to the Arabic countries and I asked people what they know or have read of the *1001 Nights*, they say exactly the same as Western people – that they know Aladdin and

Ali Baba, which were not in the *1001 Nights*, they're complete Western constructs. And most people, 99.5% of people don't know the Arabic text of *1001 Nights* in the Arabic world, because they're censored of course because they're highly sexual and erotic. They know versions of them which are post-Western versions which are anodyne and childlike in the less good sense of the word, which is very interesting.

Then I'm walking into another mine-field. Am I saying that I know it better than them? Well yes I do actually. But not 'them' as in all Arabic people. Only academics of *Nights*, obsessives, know it as well as I do because people just don't read it. And in the West people don't read it. So that's really interesting. But with *The Mahabharata* it really was still alive and intact for an Indian public. So that's where what you're saying comes into view.

There's a similar set of issues for me though and there might be a similar set of feelings about me taking this Arabic work. It might be mitigated by the way I've done it. The fact that all the artists are Arabic might help here – I don't know.

EMER: How about your collaborators. Do they have agency? Do they have the creative ability to author representations of this story that they think are fitting? Are you working very closely with people who would have as much authority in the project as you?

TIM: At this stage, only the writer knows it as well as I do, and she's Lebanese. We've read them together over the last two years. She's an Arabic writer. So the chief collaborator is 100% in step. Obviously as I start working with the designer and the lighting designer, they'll have to catch up. We won't work with all the stories, we'll work with a selection. Given that the selection is already made, then of course the designer will become as well versed in the stories as me, and will know much more than me about the worlds that they come from. And the musicians will bring their knowledge and the actors, and everyone will, in the end, have to digest the stories that we're working with.

EMER: In a way it's a very different process from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, because in that context you were bringing a text that definitely comes from your cultural background, one that you could lay claim to and one of course that has a long history in India itself. It was used as a tool of colonial education and then it was Indianised, and it still exists through these Shakespeare societies in various places in India who still enact it in that stale British tradition. How did you find that using Shakespeare as your core text either helped or otherwise affected your endeavour with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

TIM: I think it largely helped and I think the *1001 Nights* is a tougher process for me as a result. And I think if Brook had decided to do *Mahabharata* with Indian actors that would have been a tough process. Doing the *Dream* was, as you have alluded to, a very clear collaboration. I was bringing something from my world. Something which the

Indian actors were not completely unfamiliar with but that they felt I had more ownership of, knowledge of, than they had. And I did have a background steeped in it. And I was then inviting them to bring all of their experience and skills as performers and the designer to bring his work. So I wasn't asking them to be British in the way they acted in it. Although some of them wanted to be weirdly, instinctively, because that's what they were used to. I was purposely not referencing that whole Indian tradition of doing Shakespeare. I didn't go near it. We just did our thing in a very fresh way. So it had its equality as a collaboration if you see what I mean. And of course some of the complexities of that project, like the regional differences between people, the caste differences between people, the different ways of viewing the relationship between men and women that could have been difficult between them were somewhat neutered by the neutral ground of Shakespeare. We all focused on Shakespeare.

With the *1001 Nights* there's the danger that the actors from the Arabic countries are going to see me as an outsider trying to distort or bully or somehow tell them what to do within their work, but I'm pretty sure that a lot of that would have been already cleared up with the work we've done in auditions. And that all of the people that I've invited to the sessions in Egypt are already well beyond that way of thinking, as I am. I'm not treating the *1001 Nights* as their work. I don't see great work like that. I don't see Shakespeare as ours. Work transcends its ownership on one level because that writer deserves to be possessed by everybody. On the other hand the story of the *Nights* is a story of robbery and distortion by the West. And the culture which has been abused in that is the Arabic culture, which is the least respected of the three great middle-world cultures. So even if people are clichéd about India, they'll say 'we love India, we love the films, we love the clothes.' And generally, Iranian culture has a lot of respect even if people don't know so much about it. I think Arabic culture has been really neglected. So in a way I don't feel a responsibility that I must do *1001 Nights* in a way that will be acceptable to Arabic people. I mean that's deadly for art anyway. For a start everybody's going to disagree. And it's like other people trying to do Shakespeare like they think we might like it – we'll probably hate it, it'll be very Elizabethan and terrible. I think the greatest service I can do the *1001 Nights* is to treat it as a great, living, universal piece of culture that I can allow to be absolutely honest in itself and I don't have to distort and change and lie about. At the same time, in this historical moment, unlike Brook with *The Mahabharata*, I think that means making it absolutely Arabic. That's how I feel I can do it that service.

EMER: And working closely with Arabic people then by extension.

TIM: All my collaborators are Arabic. All the artists apart from me are Arabic and from the Arabic countries. They're not second generation from here. They're people who have all been born within the Arabic world. Even if now one or two may live in London and one or two may live in Paris. It's important to me that my collaborators will be seeing the Arabic world from within. I mean I may disagree with them on some things. My artistic instinct will not be compromised of course. I wouldn't expect anyone to compromise their artistic instinct and if we clash we have to fight it out. The designer

may be from Beirut, but if he proposes a clichéd design I'll still say – I mean I've seen it in the auditions, and I'll tell you this is where it's so interesting, and of course I fall into dangerous territory. I've seen in auditions women and men portraying Sheherazade as the absolute cliché of the seductress/temptress and you think 'where does this come from?' You have this most astonishingly brave young woman who's sacrificing her virginity and maybe her life to try to save the rest of the women. Who is hanging her life by a thread by telling these stories. And the *Nights* is full of that. It's full of clichés that need to be busted. So I won't just sit there and let people do shit if I think it's shit.

EMER: That's what Brook says too when he's talking about his culture of links. When he brought people to the Bouffes du Nord and he said 'enact your culture or tell me about your culture,' what they came out with invariably was stereotypes of that culture that everyone shared. And his justification for his transcendence of culture is that these are stereotypes that we have learned, and that really, our real culture comes from something that's more innermost than that. It's not completely individualistic, it's still linked to the culture in which you are born, but there's more truth to be found in this inner experience, in this culture of links than in these stereotypes that we learn about our culture.

TIM: I broadly speaking deeply agree with that and it's a question of how we journey to that. And I suppose what I'm doing, which you kindly said you find interesting, is to say that might be true on an ultimate level, but there are specific things that we have access to and inherit. Like for me access to the English language has given me access to Shakespeare and given me a certain relationship to Shakespeare. So I'm very grateful for whatever process and people have unlocked for me, have shattered the cliché so I can get to a more pure blunt connection with Shakespeare. I wouldn't say he's mine or that's me but I'd say I've got to that point. And I suppose that the journey I want to go on with my Arabic colleagues is to find with them a kind of frank, clear connection, with all those clichés busted. With what that text is and means and represents in a specific way. Not yet a universal in any language way but in a specific and concrete way. So even though my ultimate goal is not actually dissimilar from Brook, the path is very different. I see how much people present their own culture in clichéd terms and that's really interesting and I wouldn't say to them 'you're lying, your culture's like this.' But I will say let's just look at this piece of work and find an honest, frank, fresh and clear connection with it. And I have initially an artistic aim – it's to do good work, to make exciting theatre, initially. That for me is the primary project, more than universalism or transcendence. I'm not quite there yet. I don't have my own version of that, yet.

EMER: You spoke there about inheriting Shakespeare, inheriting the English language, the tools this gives you to interact. Of course there are other things that we inherit in the West and that's our global privilege, the privilege to cross the boundaries, the passports that allow us to go to different areas of the world. And also of course there's a colonial history which can often inform these works. I'm interested to know if you were aware of any tensions arising from this in your work in India. I did an interview with Kutty

Narayan who was the Malayalam translator for the piece. When I put this question to him, when I said - what do you think about a British director getting so much capital from the British Council to do a production with Indians, he said 'that's ridiculous, there's no difference between Tim Supple doing this job and anyone else of equal talent.' But then when I spoke to Yuki about it she said, 'for me I'm not taking sides it's not an issue, but it certainly did come up on the ground,' y'know, people saying 'they wouldn't have given this much money to an Indian to make this production.'

TIM: It can't be ignored. Let me put this as simply as I can – I'm exploiting my privilege. I'm exploiting my privilege to create work with people who, if it wasn't for the fact that I'm exploiting my privilege, wouldn't be doing that work, wouldn't be making that work, and wouldn't be showing themselves and their work to audiences all over the world. And the people who come and do these projects are the people who want to. So that's the bottom line. And I'm doing it because I think it's important for me to evolve as a human being. And it's important for them to evolve in having a relationship, a connection, an experience that they wouldn't otherwise have. I'm having an experience I wouldn't otherwise have. And ultimately it's important to me that audiences all over the world see what the nature of acting is, what the nature of those stories are and the possibilities that might arise from that kind of communion with actors from another world. And I saw that connection many times with *Dream*. And the manner of that communion is worth all manner of barbed wire complexities such as those we're talking about. So I'm very clear about its worth. Having said that, I would absolutely respect people who wanted me to engage in the debate. I am exploiting privilege as I said, and I'm exploiting privilege in order to transcend that privilege ultimately – to give myself to a process beyond that privilege. I think it's extremely valid – but what wouldn't actually be the perspective there? The perspective would be that there is something wrong or ironic or distasteful, there is something not right about all those resources being given to a director from that world, when those resources wouldn't be given to a director from our world. So then, would people say 'therefore it shouldn't happen' or 'therefore it should happen but the resources should be given...' I mean, what do you think is the need behind that question?

EMER: Well, to answer it terms of what the British Council told me – I spoke to Adam Pushkin, he's currently head of arts at the British Council India and he's put forward a new initiative called Connections through Culture. So the basic premise of this initiative is that the people collaborating should be of equal status, and no one person should be given all of the capital or all of the authority. What do you think of that – do you think it's a step in the right direction, or a bit idealistic? Do you think it would work?

TIM: I think that anything that's bureaucratically motivated is questionable. It's not that it's in itself a bad idea, nor not a worthy idea. I know that scheme – and you can work like that, but you'll never do something like *Dream*. And that's okay. If you decide that you don't want to do something like *Dream*, because all the projects are smaller and they're all based on earlier stages of collaboration. It goes back to one of your earlier questions I think – if there is equality in the process of art, you can't impose that from

above. Another body can't impose that. That equality can't be imposed. Equality arises. Any creative process has its own shape. And there's nothing wrong with an artistic process that is absolutely based around one person's vision with everybody else as puppets. Some people love that – if they're dancers, or – that is what some performers want. Or people want to be absolutely within someone else's vision artistically, or people want a proper collaboration, or people want to get rid of directors and just have a collective. All these things are valid. For me the test is only if they're making good work. So I don't think there's anything wrong with that scheme or the ideals behind it. Except that I don't think it's a solution to the issue to have bureaucratic involvement. The *Dream* was artistically motivated, the *Nights* was artistically motivated. You might say there's a different politics because with the *Dream* a UK government body decided that they had a lot of money and they were going to give it to a director to make a work. With the *Nights* a UK born director has decided that he wants to make a work and has gone out and found the money from a non-governmental financial source. So you might say that the politics are slightly different. Whatever Adam Pushkin is doing is obviously motivated by however he and the British Council feel that they should spend money. I might be out of my era here. I might be old fashioned in this way. Really good artistic work happens when it's artistically motivated and the artistic motivation determines everything. And then you use your conscience and your good sense and your humanity to make sure that on the way things aren't sacrificed for that. But things might be challenged by that. But if you lose that you lose the quality of the work. I think those sensitivities about the *Dream* are totally valid. Other people felt differently. And of course the money wasn't given only to a director. The money was given to everybody who was involved and engaged and earned and lived and experienced through that project. But if, for example, the new initiative comes up with some really good works, from these seeds of collaboration - great.

But, by the way, I think it's slightly laughable if the British Council thinks it can avoid the fundamental issue that way. I mean, they're a wing of the foreign office and they're in India, so what the hell are they doing anyway?

EMER: Founded in 1948 in India - a very telling date.

TIM: Exactly. But of course they could say, and I would say, that they're providing resources that otherwise wouldn't be there. Great. But they're still a British agency. So who are they to say it should be an equal collaboration? Maybe a group of Indian actors want it to be an unequal collaboration because that for them would be equality anyway – they want to be directed or choreographed or... who's to say? It's whatever the artists want. That's my feeling. But I don't think it's in any way un-laudable or a bad idea or un-worthwhile. We've all got to do what feels right for us.

EMER: We'll have to see how it pans out I suppose.

TIM: Yes.

EMER: One of the things about *The Dream* and one of the things that you have said before, is that there is nothing commercial in its conception. I'm quite interested in that – as something that went on to tour and managed to secure funding and things. And I think one of the things that marked it out as being not a particularly commercial concept was the languages. When I think about that, I think that it did two really big things - on the one hand it let you work with people from all over India. So, as you say, the money wasn't just given to you, it was given to everybody, and so using different languages allowed you to share the money with people from a lot of different backgrounds – from places where there isn't any arts funding, to people who could appreciate it the most – and also allowed you to avail of the different skills that they were bringing. So that language choice allowed that. And then on the other hand, it also hindered comprehension. I think particularly reading reviews from American and Australia and Canada – it wasn't an issue in Britain for some reason, maybe because people know the play so well, and it wasn't much of an issue in India – but it seemed that when it toured to North America and Australia, people were like 'we want surtitles, we don't know what's happening, we demand a Shakespearean text from Shakespeare.' When you made that choice, were you thinking about it in terms of 'how will this travel?'

TIM: I think the big commercial decision in the *Dream* was to do the *Dream*. I think that's what made it commercial. Because the *Dream* is so popular and generally known and people want to see it. Everything else was done because it felt like the right thing to do. When I started the process I didn't think it would be multilingual, because English is what I work in and I knew some people spoke English in India. But as I travelled I met so many wonderful performers who didn't speak English and who didn't work in English and I just thought, well this has to be multilingual because I can't afford to lose people who don't speak English – that'd be terrible. So I let it be multilingual. Then in rehearsal we found that needed a lot of work. And in fact it became one of the most profound things that was happening in the show; by the time it was on in India I realised that it had become one of the main characteristics of it as a work. And I think it actually increased its commercial possibility, although maybe it limited it in the end. But for a while it increased it because it became a unique thing about it. No decision was made based on commercial factors. I can't work like that. I can't think in terms of what's going to work commercially.

With *1001 Nights* there's a lot of interest in it, and of course I want there to be a lot of interest in it. But I have no idea if what I do will have any real connection with audiences. And of course I want it to, because I want my work to connect with audiences. And then I suppose things become commercial if they connect with audiences. But y'know, a five hour show in Arabic with stories that nobody knows even though they think they do – I don't know. And its stories, not a play, and I don't know. But that's just how I work.

EMER: Can I ask about another dramaturgical choice – about the sex and the violence, that reality of sexual urges that you demanded from the actors. So in my own analysis, again, I think that choice did two things. On the one hand it engages with those deep

psychological rhythms in Shakespeare – Jan Kott talks about them, Brook talks about them. Kott calls *The Dream* Shakespeare's most erotic text. And on the other hand, the choice limited the performers you could work with. Especially the female performers who all ended up being from Mumbai. Can you speak to that issue?

TIM: Yeah, I'm not sure I've got anything more insightful to say than what you have just summarised very brilliantly. But that was the whole project, and going back to one of your earlier questions, this is part of why I'm comfortable that this is not an Orientalist, nostalgic, perspective, because my first commitment was to the play. And because of that deep resonance, that's the truth I had to connect with. So yes indeed it did limit who I worked with, but that had to be. Because the aim of the project wasn't to represent India or give an overview of actors in India: it wasn't to make a concession to what people will or won't do or can or can't do. So in that way, it was not treating them in any way as inhabitants of a cliché.

It's like people say to me now – isn't it going to be difficult doing the *1001 Nights* in that honest way with actors. So I suppose I would say that through being true to the text, I'll keep our light clear. And again, it will limit who I work with and maybe where it goes to as well.

EMER: I think that's a fair point, and when I spoke to Yuki she pointed out that when they were in India they never thought of themselves as doing an Indian *Midsummer Night's Dream*, but then the fact is that it did tour internationally and then it became an Indian *Midsummer Night's Dream*. And then, even if you didn't intend it to be a showcase of Indian performance practices, it became a showcase.

TIM: I'm happy that it is a showcase, don't get me wrong. With the Arabic actors too – I'm happy that it's a showcase. Or a communion, I prefer that word. I'm happy that on that stage for five hours, people will witness and experience Arabic actors and commune with them. I'm just saying that that's not my primary... I think that good artistic work, and this is kind of what I was saying when we were talking about bureaucratic practices, that good artistic work needs the group to be unified in an ultimate touchstone. You need that ultimate touchstone where your ultimate loyalty lies. What is the most important thing? And the most important thing in the *Dream* was the connection, with as much brutal honesty as possible, to the nature of that play. That was the first thing. The revelation of Indian practice was another thing. Otherwise I would have been more precise about choosing performers – there was no Kathakali in there, there was very little Bharatnatyam in there – I didn't actually use the Indian performance very much. Most of the acting was driven into the play. It was a hybrid between Shakespeare and India in a funny kind of way – through the eyes of a realist British director. That ultimate touchstone for me is what's going to be vividly true for the work.

EMER: I feel like I have taken up a huge amount of your time.

TIM: It's been really enjoyable.

EMER: I've really enjoyed it too. It's really made me reflect on – well what you said about constantly trying to reflect on your practice and work on your own particular journey – and for me when I'm writing I sometimes feel like I've ended up moralising, when I really want to deconstruct a play and say 'this part does this work', 'this part does this work.' I'm trying to lay out a pragmatics of best intercultural practice. And from doing interviews with people, some people are really engaged with these questions and some people are just like 'meh.' So it's really interesting to talk to someone who has reflected deeply on these things.

TIM: Well I've enjoyed it very much and I'd love to read it, and it's very, very good for me to be asked these questions. I'm doing two things at once. I am reflecting on it all the time and I'm also having to stay clear as well, because I'm on a journey. So I'm trying to stay questioning, but also persistent and focused. So it's very good to stop and pause and think.