alt.theatre

vol.4, no.2 & 3 May 2006

cultural
diversity and
the stage

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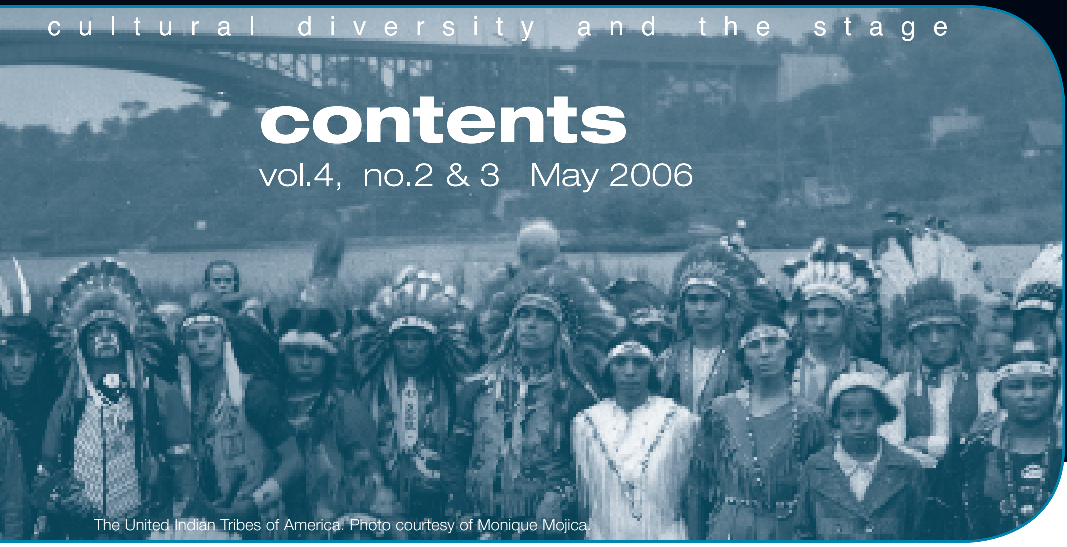

The United Indian Tribes of America. Photo courtesy of Monique Mojica.

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"Change the World, One Play at a Time."

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Editorial

The State and the Discourse

This special double-issue of *alt.theatre* marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of Teesri Duniya Theatre. For a quarter of a century, Teesri Duniya has been insisting that culturally diverse arts, artists, and communities must not be systemically, practically, or ideologically excluded from the discourse of Canadian multiculturalism; that art and social action must not be cast as mutually exclusive; and that a theatre truly rooted in community must resist what Baz Kershaw characterizes as the "commodification of the theatre estate" – where audiences are treated primarily as consumers and the potential for self-reflective social critique (Kershaw's "radical in performance") is either constrained or eradicated. In pursuing its mission to "Change the World, One Play at a Time," Teesri Duniya Theatre has sought to produce work that exposes hegemony by positioning marginalized voices centre stage in a dialogic relationship with their mainstream counterparts in a theatre of action situated at a striking distance of socio-cultural change.

In 1998, to further pursue Teesri's mandate, Kapil Bawa and Rahul Varma launched *alt.theatre* as a forum where artists, academics, and activists might contribute to a uniquely Canadian discourse about intersections between politics, cultural plurality, social activism, and the stage. The occasion of Teesri's twenty-fifth anniversary seems a fitting opportunity to reflect on *alt.theatre*'s trajectory. Over the past eight years, in four volumes and fifteen issues, we have published opinion pieces, poems, reviews of books and performances, information, and descriptive analysis about arts policy, education, training, projects, and productions. Our writers include a balance of emerging and established voices united by a shared concern with the essential role of arts and artists in a pluralistic society. Over this period of time, there have been have been a number of significant gains for artists of colour. Since the early 1990's, cultural diversity and Aboriginal arts have been strategic priorities of the Canada Council for the Arts. More recent Council initiatives such as the Inter-Arts Program and the Artist in Community Collaboration Fund have helped to challenge and broaden received notions of Euro-centric aesthetics to include more multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and evolving arts practices, and to bring the ethical concerns and culturally democratic practices of community-engaged arts to bear on more mainstream practice. These initiatives have helped to promote meaningful collaboration between professional and community artists and activists within our shared social, cultural, and political life. They are attracting a new generation of culturally diverse artists and audiences. And they are helping to break down inherited modernist assumptions that have perpetrated rigid separations between art and life.

But while significant progress has been made towards a vision wherein artists of many cultural backgrounds might share the same stage, the successes of the past few years are also giving rise to a new complexity as an increasingly hybridized (and often more profoundly politicized) generation of artists take their rightful place within the arts in Canada and other multicultural societies. Earlier issues of access, marginalization, identity, appropriation, and representation are further complicated by competing visions of multi/inter/intra-culturalism; by deeply naturalized notions of public and private; and by calls for public scrutiny of social injustices enshrined in "unquestionable" cultural and religious practices transplanted to Canadian soil. Increasingly within the pages of *alt.theatre*, our contributors are wrestling with the implications of a pervasive experience of miscegenation that refutes reductive dismissals of neo-European or any classical forms based on simplistic binaries of "them and us." We are challenged to engage in heightened debate about internal and external forms of censorship. And we are called upon to examine the role of the arts and the state in supporting interdisciplinary artists with roots in various diverse communities who struggle against aesthetic codes designed to perpetrate hegemony and power within both secular and sacred spheres of influence.

These complexities raise any number of additional questions about authorship and authority; about individual responsibility and complicity in the status quo; about globalization and how difference is being contained within notions of universalism; and about the nature and role of artists in shaping the cultural legacy of our increasingly hybridized society. As the writers in this special issue suggest, the pursuit of an evolving vision of arts practice produces a multiplicity of responses that are creative, distinct, and even at times contradictory. And so, I suggest, they should be, for in our creative diversity we find our common strength.

In celebration of Teesri Duniya Theatre's twenty-fifth anniversary and on behalf of *alt.theatre*'s associate editor Denis Salter and the members of our editorial board (Rahul Varma, Shelly Scott, Lina de Guevara, and Paul Lefebvre), I would like to extend our profound thanks to all the contributors to date who have made the ongoing discourse of *alt.theatre* possible: Svetlana Zylin, Suleikha Ali Yusuf, Marcus Youseff, Andrea Wilson, Robert Wallace, Savannah Walling, Jay Whitehead, Guillermo Verdecchia, Bobo Vian, Troy Emery Twigg, Rebecca Todd, Shelley Tepperman, Tamar Tembeck, Winston Sutton, Floyd Favel Starr, Sarah Stanley, Ken Smedley, Julie Salverson, Judith Rudakoff, Barbara Rockburn, Soraya Peerbaye, Robert Nunn, Glen Nichols, Jane Needles, Monique Mojica, Donald Moerdjk, Judy Mckinley, Ken McDonough, Zab Maboungou, Ehab Lotayef, André Loiselle, Geraldo Ferreira de Lima, Gabriel Levine, Leanore Lieblein, Sue Leblanc-Crawford, Russell Krackovitch, David Kornhaber, Penny Joy, Ruth Howard, Leith Harris, Rawi Hage, Jazwant Guzder, Dipti Gupta, Jayanta Guha, Christopher Grignard, Helen Freshwater, James Forsythe, Alexander Ferguson, David Fancy, Comfort Adesuwa Ero, Lisa Doolittle, Maria DiCenzo, Misty Cozac, Peter Copeman, Kate Bligh, and Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti.

Edward Little, Editor in Chief

Staging Peace in Times of War

Celebrating Teesri Duniya Theatre's Twenty-fifth Anniversary

by Rahul Varma

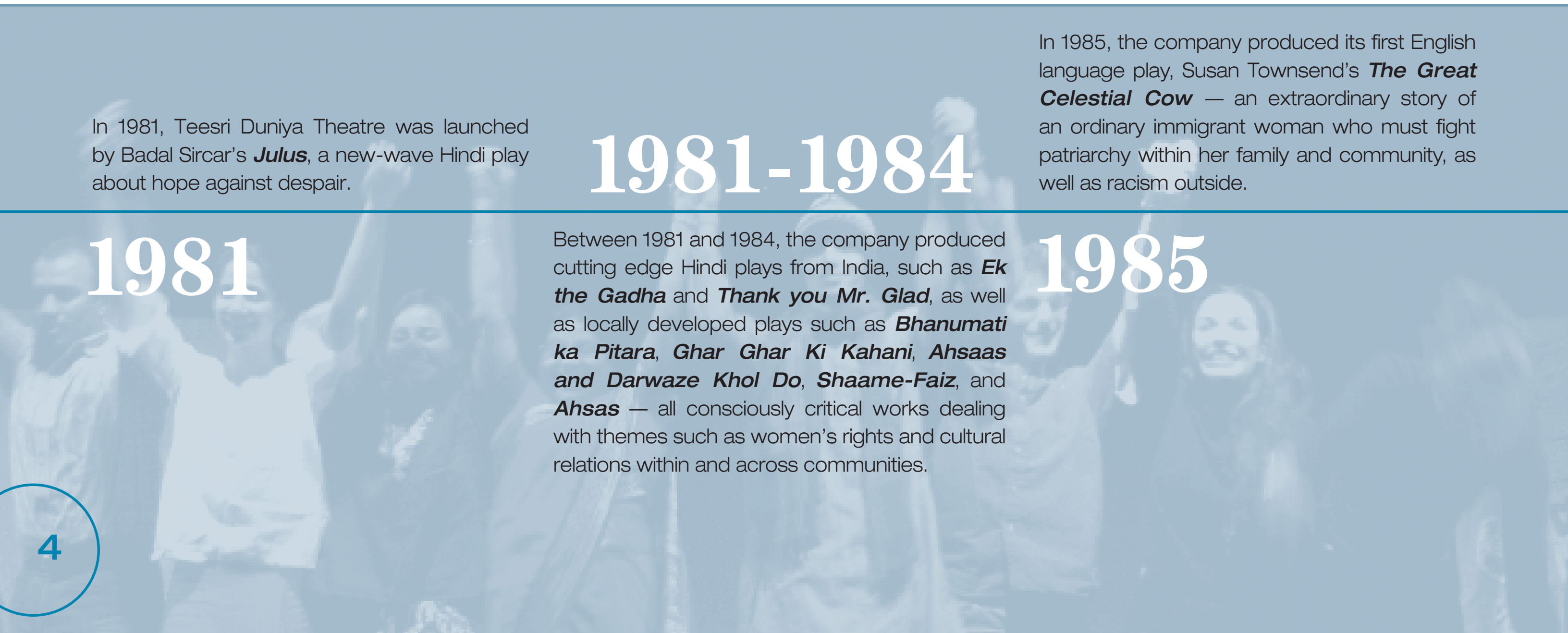
In the wake of 9/11, President George Bush went live on TV telling Americans that if the US army didn't destroy Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, the weapons would be used to destroy the US, and along with it the rest of the civilized world. Under the pretence of locating and destroying these weapons, Mr. Bush launched a "pre-emptive" war that to date has resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 US soldiers — plus tens of thousands of Iraqi civilians whose deaths are not tabulated on American TV. As Iraq lies in ruins and this colossal destruction of human lives continues, one dictator sits in jail and people are finally asking Mr. Bush, "Where *are* the weapons of mass destruction?" The president, who is in the habit of using the phrase "make no mistake," has been asked by the media to recount *other* mistakes he may have made since 9/11. On this, Mr. Bush is silent.

The truth is that the weapons of mass destruction are not in Iraq; they are embodied in American foreign policy and in the complicity of America's marauding multinationals, which continue to implement a merciless economic agenda on the globe's poor with horrifying disregard for human life. The weapons of mass destruction are to be found in places like Bhopal, where the deadly chemical Methyl Isocynate (MIC) exploded at the Union Carbide plant in 1984, killing more than 16,000 people to date. The weapons of mass destruction are to be found in the US-instigated wars that have caged men, women, and children in refugee camps—often on their own lands—with no hope for the future. They are to be found in the armies strategically based in foreign lands in order to control diamond mines, oil reserves, uranium deposits, or raw materials. They are to be found in the policy of pitting old Jewish survivors of the Holocaust against new Palestinian victims of occupation, and in America's old itch to fight new wars—overt or covert—in countries like Korea, Vietnam, Kampuchea, Tibet, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Yugoslavia, Chechnya, Rwanda, Sudan, Congo, Somalia, Haiti, Chile, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Granada: a list that is far from comprehensive. The weapons of mass-destruction are in the hands of terrorists, unpopular dictators, mercenaries, and genocidists financed and protected by the US until they turn against their handlers.

> **"Depriving the vast majority of people of any access to modern cultural goods is in itself a "way of life" for the big powers and their media conglomerates."**

The weapons of mass-destruction are contained in man's inhumanity against man, in the denial of social justice, in the suppression of civil liberties, and in the increase of control and state repression in the pursuit of global supremacy in the name of just war and the spread of liberty.

Samuel Huntington caught the attention of the West with *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, in which he argues that the fundamental conflicts in the world today aren't ideological or economical but cultural. He argues that the fault lines between cultures and civilizations will constitute the battle lines of the future. He pitted Western civilization against the rest, particularly—and to a fault—against the Arab, Muslim, and Islamic world. He values non-Western societies only in terms of their monetary usefulness and political risk to the West and assigns larger blame to "cultural differences," ignoring the policy of dominance by which the Western powers, particularly the US, govern themselves. Experience however amply demonstrates that cultures *connect* humanity and civilizations despite historical differences, para-



1981

In 1981, Teesri Duniya Theatre was launched by Badal Sircar's ***Julus***, a new-wave Hindi play about hope against despair.

1981-1984

Between 1981 and 1984, the company produced cutting edge Hindi plays from India, such as ***Ek the Gadha*** and ***Thank you Mr. Glad***, as well as locally developed plays such as ***Bhanumati ka Pitara***, ***Ghar Ghar Ki Kahani***, ***Ahsaas and Darwaze Khol Do***, ***Shaame-Faiz***, and ***Ahsas*** — all consciously critical works dealing with themes such as women's rights and cultural relations within and across communities.

1985

In 1985, the company produced its first English language play, Susan Townsend's ***The Great Celestial Cow*** — an extraordinary story of an ordinary immigrant woman who must fight patriarchy within her family and community, as well as racism outside.

1986-1989

Between 1986 and 1989, the company created and produced controversial plays in record time. ***On The Double*** dealt with gender inequalities, and ***Job Stealer*** and ***Equal Wages*** tackled the exploitation of immigrants and refugees, particularly the female labor force in urban Canadian sweatshops. ***Isolated Incident*** was written to commemorate the anniversary of the death of an unarmed black teenager at the hand of a Montreal cop, marking Teesri's radical new approach of engaging with present realities both within and outside of the minority communities.

1990

In 1990, ***Land Where the Trees Talk*** raised questions about aboriginal land rights in the face of institutional dispossession.

1992

In 1992, ***No Man's Land*** dealt with the predicament of an immigrant family who fled the violent aftermath of the partition of India and Pakistan — only to find itself in the midst of Quebec's separatist movement. The Strathearn Centre, alleging that the play failed to promote intercultural dialogue, refused Teesri its facilities. We considered this an act of censorship instigated by members of the Strathearn Board with ties to separatist Party Quebecoise, and we produced the play in a garage turned into theatre space.

doxes, and ironies.

Today's world is a one of Internet culture, which we are told has become a "new way of life." Indeed, the Internet culture is capable of instantly connecting the global community through information sharing. But does it? The fact is that the number of Internet users and those who actually control information is miniscule next to the number of people in the world who are denied their basic human needs, much less access to the Internet. Information sharing means little when the majority of the world's people don't have the means to use it. Depriving the vast majority of people of any access to modern cultural goods is in itself a "way of life" for the big powers and their media conglomerates. For semblance sake they "share" the information; but the "information" they share is politically safe and kept within the consensual limits. It is a media ritual of "newsy entertainment"—a kind of cocktail of fact, fiction and official line designed to keep the public tuned in as if there were in fact freedom of information and voice. So we find ourselves living in a world that is run much like a transnational corporation's business plan, which greedily holds to the idea that cultural capital and information, like monetary wealth, must be profitably controlled rather than shared.

The theme of this article obligates me to lay out a little background and scrutiny of US policy with regard to the world we share.

Mr. Bush has mandated his armed forces with special goals: they must not only win the war but rebuild the broken nation and implement "democracy." His aim is to create the climate and conditions necessary for America's military-business complex to succeed. The US defense (read offence) spending dwarfs that of the next ten largest military powers combined, thus giving them a clear signal as to where their loyalties must lie. With such aims, the present war has not been declared in order to protect America from an external enemy, which it would be duty-bound to do in accordance with its constitutional mandate. Instead, it is motivated by a militarized system of plunder masked behind words like nation-building and liberation. This is the same belligerent plan that has driven many conquered countries into unrepayable debt, loss of control of their resources, ethnic strife, anarchy, and dire poverty. Thousands of children are dying from malnutrition and diarrhea because of Western-sanctions and the lack of clean water. That this is the common practice of successive US administrations is clear through the words of Madeline Albright, US secretary of state during the Clinton era, when she was asked if the death of half a million Iraqi children was a price worth paying for the first Gulf war and the ensuing sanctions. She replied, "[W]e think the price is worth it..." Mr. Bush hasn't simply extended this historical belligerence: instead he legitimizes his deadly plan of plunder by telling Americans that he is doing this to rebuild a nation, end terrorism, and provide a common defense for homeland security.

> **"Our work at Teesri has been something like a war — a war to build a better world, not destroy it; a war to restore social justice, not suppress it."**

There is a word for this — it is called militarism. Its official policy term is "full spectrum dominance." It means control of sovereign land, sea, air and sky, and resources of nature.

How can theatre respond to such human conditions and social and political discords? Human catastrophes, wars of aggression, genocide, political exile, and other such human upheaval have become the most recurring and yet least resolved problems of our time. Can theatrical imagination rival in magnitude the live images of destruction of the twin-towers that television beamed incessantly into every drawing room? What is the relationship between a world in a state of socio-political chaos and the arts in a country such as Canada, which has embraced cultural diversity as a key national characteristic? Can theatre make a positive difference despite fears that the world we live in will never be the same? Is theatre relevant?

At Teesri we insist that theatre be used in every way possible to help create a future of diminished violence and enhanced human possibility and hope. The year 2006 marks Teesri's twenty-fifth anniversary. For twenty-five years, Teesri Duniya Theatre has creatively responded on social and political themes, such as racism, feminism, the environment, war and peace, land rights, cultural identity, heritage, minority rights, and cultural and political controversy, through plays such as *Job Stealer, Isolated Incident*, *No Man's Land*, *Land Where the Trees Talk*, *Counter Offence*, *Reading Hebron*, *Ali & Ali and the Axes of Evil*, *Miss Orient(ed)* and *Bhopal*. For artists who believe in being rooted in community and who are creatively inspired by historical crises and cultural controversy, this world endlessly presents fresh subjects to grapple with. They feel the need for art to respond to those things that affect the well-being of society.

To this end, theatre becomes a pacifist

humanitarian war, supporting a just peace, human dignity, and positive values through creative analysis of our political order. In retrospect, it could well be said that our work at Teesri has been something like a war — a war to build a better world, not destroy it; a war to restore social justice, not suppress it. Our plays have fought peacefully for equal cultural representation, for inclusion in building solidarity among communities, and for social justice. And now, on the occasion of our twenty-fifth anniversary, our moniker has become "staging peace in times of war."

All expressions of art — conscious or unconscious, engaged or escapist, positive or desolate — are being created in a time of war. We can no longer allow ourselves to be seduced by America's warships, cruise missiles, and F-16s blowing up targets with star wars' precision, rendered to us via CNN and Fox news. We cannot afford to delude ourselves into believing that the best hope for peace lies in dispatching cadres — ceremoniously proclaimed "America's best and the brightest" — to the war of a mad president who wants to "smoke out" terrorists who were ex-allies until yesterday, rebuild a country after destroying it, and transform the world by conquering it. We can no longer limit our emotional response to when the body bags are brought home: we must remember the estimated 25,000 dead Iraqis and others starving to death while waiting to be killed.

Artists can opt for esoteric and sense-pleasing personal dramas that pose no risk and ask no questions about human conditions or the horror that plagues the world today. While this choice leaves the artist free of moral judgments and dictates — and moralizing artists sometimes miss the whole point of what art is all about — ultimately the choices artists make determine the purpose of their art. Great works of art may possess a voice or be voiceless — we must remember that our predecessors fought hard to give us the freedom of voice. What is worse than censorship is self-censorship. The task of the artist is to make choices, take risks, and shape a voice strong enough to rise above the confines of "neutrality," and most importantly above self-censorship.

I remember an instance from the 2002 annual general meeting of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres (PACT). I proposed a motion denouncing the US-led war against Afghanistan and Iraq. Those present at the meeting were artistic directors and administrators of mostly big companies. The motion was soundly defeated. The artistic director, who spoke against the motion leading to its defeat, said he understood the concerns but it wasn't this meeting's business to pass motions of peace. The defeat of the motion was a minor event but it revealed something almost common to the big professional theatres — that the most important issues of the world weren't their business.

> **"Artists are more than professional creators — they are also citizens and human beings capable of stepping beyond the limits imposed on them."**

There is a powerful tradition that art and politics don't mix, which in effect implies that political theatre is not (good) theatre. To me that represents a crisis and insecurity within the ranks of professional theatre. Because it is too busy catering to the taste and wants of paying and not necessarily engaged audiences, professional theatre has lost the ability to respond to world events and crises, and along with this has lost a connection to the community. It also evinces a conservative orthodoxy, categorizing plays that rock the boat, make authorities uncomfortable, or challenge the status-quo as political events rather than professional theatre. But the two are not mutually exclusive. And stipulating that artists be *professional* limits them to the confines of the conventional norms of the profession. But artists are more than professional creators — they are also citizens and human beings capable of stepping beyond the limits imposed on them.

That said, political theatre faces two adversities: those on the outside who dismiss political theatre simply as a message and manifesto; and those on the inside who — constricted by prejudice, biases, and a unitary perspective — sacrifice objectivity and present a sermon in the name of political theatre. All artists are benefactors of the freedom of choice and responsibility. Yet the best among them know that abuse of this freedom — by not working towards the highest possible quality, beauty, and imagination — can only lead to bad art. And there are no excuses for bad art, particularly for political art and artists.

Some conservative artists believe that "art is for art's sake" and nothing more. It seems questionable that they define their own work only thorough its divergence from and juxtaposition to political theatre. By defining political theatre, the conservatives actually create boundaries that help them define their own work, rather than allowing all creative expression to co-exist and expand the scope of the arts. For example, they have developed a vocabulary that theatre of the "art-for-art's-sake" kind is personal, relatable, and reflective only because political theatre is impersonal, communal,

THE ADVENTURES OF
Noah's
Ark747

In 1997, Teesri produced ***Counter Offence***, with its French version ***L'Affaire Farhadi*** following in 1999. In this play, an immigrant is arrested for beating his wife and becomes a pawn in a battle between a race-rights activist and a women's rights activist and the cop trying to keep his job.

1997-1999

2000

In 2000, ***Reading Hebron*** dealt with the Hebron massacre of Palestinians by a "deranged" Jewish settler — a controversy with implications for Canada's Jewish and Palestinian communities.

In 2002, ***Noah's Ark 747*** drew attention to the Balkan war, and the ***Adventures of Ali & Ali and the Axes of Evil*** in 2004 revealed the two heads of the same demon of war — George Bush's war of aggression against the terrifying simplicity of Osama Bin Laden attacking civilian targets.

2002-2004

and didactic. So, to put it in the present context, while bombs are exploding, homes are burning, and children are being orphaned, our stages serve us soap-operatic stories of sloth, cheating, infidelity, perversity, trickery, decadence, and so on instead of the madness of war, the human "passion" of suicide bombing, suffering, or the deadly lies of the superpower.

Art is not for art's sake; it is, with highest possible artistic imagination, for society's sake.

A cursory look at the kind of theatre that is produced across the country in large part confirms a powerful tradition of avoiding compelling issues and dismissing the existence of politics in arts. It is how the conservative theatres protect their interests and the interests of those who benefit from wars of aggression, political discord, and the destruction of human lives, mostly in other countries. Denying political ideology in theatre, as Brecht pointed out, is an ideology in itself. When artists deny dialectics, human discord, and politics a place in the theatre, they are denying most significant accomplishments of democracy and critical thinking.

Against this trend, we can engage in creative dissent — a kind of pacifist war against war of aggression. We may be able to demonstrate that the arts are not only necessary for redress and healing, but they can make a difference. Artists can show the world not only how things are, but what is possible. Insistence that theatre respond to war creatively and effectively underscores what Sartre said about theatre: that it is the most political of the arts because it provides the possibility of engagement in a much more immediate way than other forms of arts

We believe that in a world taken in by inequities, the world of theatre and culture cannot afford to be non-partisan. Neither theatre nor the search for truth in theatre is neutral. At the same time, there isn't one truth — there are many, and they compete, deny, overlook, and oftentimes dismiss each other. The kind of plays one produces speaks to which particular side of the truth one is on, which in turn expresses political leanings and world outlook. In this way, a play is a catalyst for dialogue, and therefore it must have a strong point of contact with both the subject community it is about and the larger society it is created in. A play is an act of dissent manifested in the form of a challenging work that pushes the boundaries, worries authorities, questions existing notions of morality, brings to the fore the voiceless, raises the voice that needs to be raised, and says what others don't. Such an exploration allows artists to establish a transcendent relationship with their society — a relationship in which they go beyond the limit, beyond the immediate, beyond the conventional norms, beyond orthodoxy, and are present above and apart from what is handed down to them by the top-down democracy, governments, and the media enterprise.

On the occasion of our twenty-fifth anniversary, we remain committed to an artistic response in support of peace and in opposition to war. The overarching theme of our twenty-fifth anniversary season — *staging peace in times of war* — is contained in "Leaf in the Whirlwind," a ground-breaking dance theatre inspired by a short story by one of India's most celebrated Malayalam writers, the late Ms. Lalithambike Antherajan. The project, which explores the impact of war on women, is spearheaded by Aparna Sindhoor. And we will continue to present works that rock the boat, attack mental complacency, enrich emotions, share experience with the humanity we share the world with, and — as we say in Teesri — *change the world one play at a time*.

Aparna Sindhoor(standing) and Tova Roy in the French-language production of *Bhopal*. Photo: Idra Labrie

2005

In 2005, against the backdrop of Filipino beauty pageants, ***Miss Orient(ed)*** fought to erase the negative stereotype commonly held against minority cultures by challenging the values propagated by exoticization.

2001-2006

Teesri's most recent play, ***Bhopal*** (2001 – 2006), produced in English and French as well as in Hindi (as ***Zahreeli Hawa***) in India, is based upon the deadly explosion at the Union Carbide plant in 1984, which killed over 16000 people to date. Thus, it continues Teesri's tradition of seeing theatre as a social process for justice through the creative examination of our political order.

Rahul Varma is a playwright and community activist who emigrated from India in 1976. He has been artistic director of Teesri Duniya since 1986. His plays include ***No Man's Land***, ***Trading Injuries***, ***Counter Offence*** and his most recent work, ***Bhopal***. ***Counter Offence*** has been translated into French as ***L'Affaire Farhadi*** and Italian as ***Il Caso Farhadi***. ***Bhopal*** has been translated into French under the same title and into Hindi under the name ***Zahreeli Hawa***.

Reflections on a transplanted African Theatre

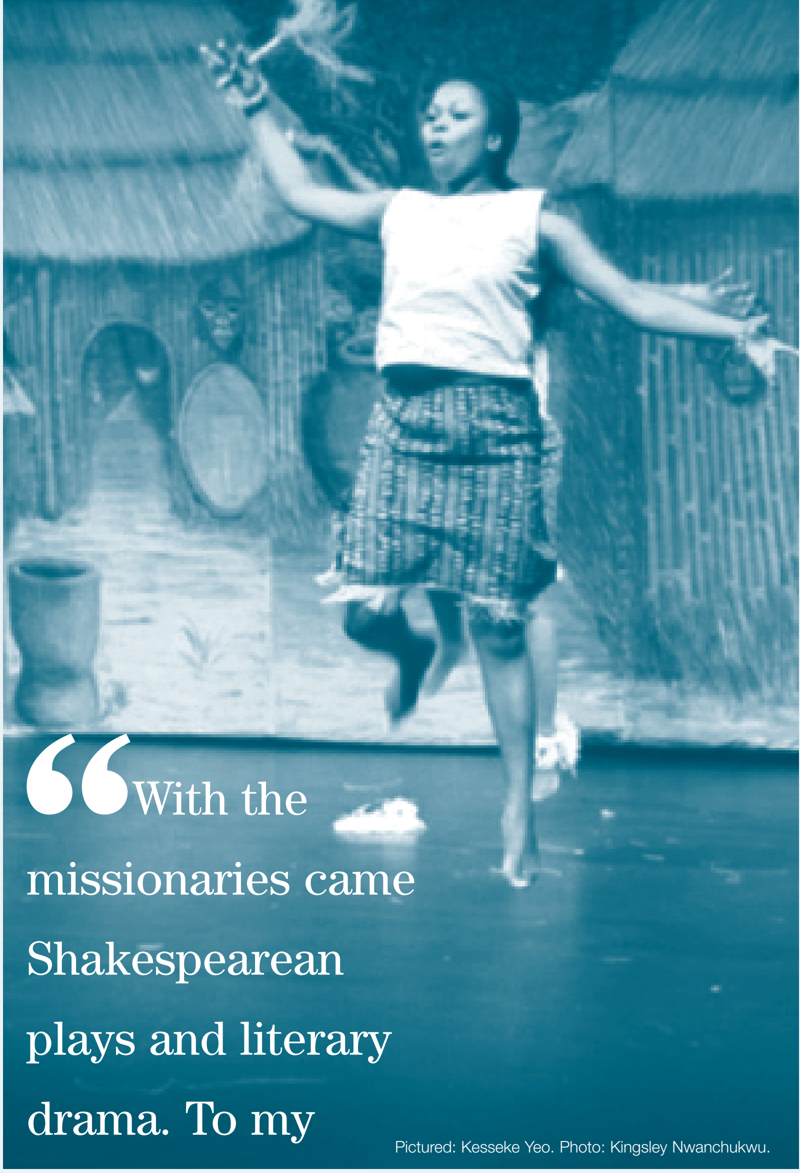
by Comfort Adesuwa Ero

My childhood was spent in a village near Benin City, Nigeria. I am told that at the age of three I regularly amazed my father by retreating to a quiet corner to sing, dance, and dramatize commonly told folktales. Apparently, I made up new stories as well. This prompted my father to send me to the village school when I was five. While it was very unpopular to send girls to school at that time, my father was the village's head chief and not easily deterred.

St Matthew's was an Anglican missionary school that also employed a few African teachers. As a consequence, our school plays focused on historical and cultural drama and folktales. When I was nine years old, I was sent to the big city of Ibadan to continue my education. Here, under the tutelage of Catholic nuns, students performed European poetry, Shakespearean plays, and opera. Now, as an adult theatre artist living in Canada, I reflect on the ways in which the diverse nature and quality of these experiences has influenced my vision for a transplanted African theatre.

Before the arrival of missionaries in Africa and the advent of colonialism, itinerant actors would go from place to place to entertain people in village arenas or market places. Plays were based on popular folktales or historical and cultural themes with which the villagers could easily identify. Actors were content with the little money given by their obviously pleased on-lookers. It was a fun and very popular way of maintaining community harmony and educating the people about political issues or matters affecting their health and social well-being.

With the missionaries came Shakespearean plays and literary drama. To my mind this was the beginning of a profound erosion and a crossroads in African theatre. Community theatre was discouraged and school children were forced to act, speak, and dress in the Elizabethan fashion to dramatize European poetry. While this produced a growing number of Western-educated elite, it also greatly alienated the peoples of rural communities. African community theatre went into a kind of limbo.



Pictured: Kesseke Yeo. Photo: Kingsley Nwanchukwu.

> “With the missionaries came Shakespearean plays and literary drama. To my mind this was the beginning of a profound erosion and a crossroads in African theatre.”

In the early sixties, just after independence, an attempt was made to re-awaken community theatre; however, aspiring artists faced many challenges. There was a general belief that no future or good job awaited African theatre artists. Many believed that theatre arts were not suitable for the educated, and students of theatre quickly switched over to read languages and literature because these would readily fetch them jobs after graduation. With little education or resources, performers were generally self-trained on the job. The trend was for the director of a troupe to marry all his female actors! Over a period of time a director could build a large cast made up mainly of his wives and children. This reduced costs, and more importantly, made it possible to build and sustain trust, stability, and allegiance within the troupe.

At first, these artists attempted to integrate African popular theatre into the imported theatre by performing on stages in town halls and similar venues. This was a foreign idea to the people and did not meet with much success. Next, artists tried radio and the newly imported media of television. While this fascinated the general public, the new political class had no tolerance for criticism. This was a post-independence era. The people were afraid of this new and powerful class. When so much injustice and violence resulted from their antics, the only way the theatre practitioners were able to get back at them was to resort to the traditional way — through popular theatre. They would act, sing, dance, drum, and use metaphors to address the politicians. This type of political criticism was and still is a part of the African community theatre traditions. When artists used metaphors, idioms, or proverbs in their plays and songs to criticize the government, the politicians feared popular uprisings. They quickly hounded these artists out of existence — actors were arrested or jailed, and TV and radio shows were cancelled.

The politicians' fears were justified. In the mid-sixties, Hubert Ogunde, one of the great directors of community theatre, created a play and a song to criticize the rigging of elections. The song was titled *Yoruba Ronu*, meaning "My people, let's reflect on our lives." It rapidly became the most popular song in the Western Region of Nigeria, and it soon brought the corrupt government to its knees. Since it is not easy to accuse the one who uses metaphors, idioms, or proverbs to criticize, Ogunde was able to escape some persecution. Although he was banned from touring some states in the Federation and his music was banned from radio and television, his song could not be kept out of people's homes. He remained the people's hero until he died in the early 1990s.

The era of military rulers from 1966 to early 1999 wreaked further havoc on actors, artists, and writers. Theatre and literary works were heavily censored. Artists who were lucky enough to escape with their lives either fled abroad where they could continue with their literary works without fear or stopped writing and producing plays entirely. During almost three decades of dictatorial regime in Nigeria, literary works and drama essentially disappeared. This suppression of creativity was repeated across the African continent wherever war or dictatorships existed.

> “During almost three decades of dictatorial regime in Nigeria, literary works and drama essentially disappeared.”

In spite of these challenges, and because the regimes focused mainly on tertiary institutions and the general public, Nigerian elementary and high schools were able to develop fertile ground for popular drama. I was among the teachers who popularised drama, not only in teaching but also on the stage in high schools in Nigeria. It gave voice to the teachers and students who were pushed way down the social ladder.

These days, although many parts of Africa, including Nigeria, still lack playwrights and functioning arts theatres, the root causes of the problems facing popular theatre have shifted. Governments would rather build stadiums than pay attention to the arts, and corrupt officials are able to divert financial resources designated for the repair of theatres. Violence continues, and home videos have become hugely popular in Nigeria. Videos reduce the demand for live theatre as people can elect to watch videos in the safety and comfort of their homes rather than risk potential violence at live performances.

Relocating to British Columbia, Canada, I worked as an actor and facilitator with PUENTE — a Victoria-based theatre specializing in the immigrant experience. PUENTE's artistic director, Lina de Guevara, encouraged me to highlight differences between theatre practices in Canada and my home country and to consider my traditional Nigerian experience as an enrichment of Canadian theatre. In 1997, Lina and PUENTE's vision inspired me to create Ebonie Academy of Performing Arts, a forum for training and showcasing African culture through drama, dance, and storytelling by African immigrants. In June 2003, Ebonie Academy became Zibota African Moonlight Theatre.

Perhaps it is to be expected that the transplanted artist will not take root, grow, and bloom immediately after relocation. Like most artists in Canada, they will struggle to earn a decent living. In addition, they will face the problems of settlement in a new culture — language, acceptance, integration, and adaptation. Funding poses particular challenges for the immigrant artist. While government and private agencies in Canada are increasingly sensitized to diversity in the arts, the African immigrant community is young and struggling, and there are no big businesses within the African community able to sponsor companies such as ours. Most immigrant artists are not aware of government grants, and when they are, they are not familiar with the application process. Our limited ability to pay actors and production costs often results in a lack of commitment from artists and technicians who must support themselves elsewhere. We struggle to find enough people who understand the African culture to perform in our shows. While I believe it is advantageous to have mixed cultures on stage, there are roles that only someone who has lived an African life can internalise and play. On the other hand, transplanted African artists often experience difficulty adapting to Canadian cultural approaches. African art and theatre deal mainly with the real. Plays are often very wordy and down to earth. In Canada, much theatre dwells more on the surreal and the abstract. Figures of speech differ, and English is not the first language for most Africans. The bulk of African writers write in English, which in most cases becomes "Africanized."

But in spite of these challenges, we continue to survive in Canada by working hard, depending on volunteers, and getting what little bit of help we can from funders and the young African community. Our Canadian experience and training may come from affiliation with an existing artist or theatre director who will serve as a mentor, or the immigrant artist may elect to go back to school to study different ways of doing things. It is my opinion, however, that new immigrant artists should be cautioned about hybridising or Canadianizing their art too soon — their best work will come from portrayals of the culture they grew in. As an African writer and theatre practitioner living in Canada, I seek to carve a niche for a transplanted African theatre, and I encourage other immigrant artists to do the same — and to aim at the sky, because it is the limit.

A teacher, playwright, and storyteller, Comfort is the artistic director of ZIBOTA, African Moonlight Theatre. A very prolific writer, she has written, directed, and produced public readings of many plays — such as *The Dance of the Leopard*, *The Surrogate Mother*, and *The Lioness Can Also Roar and Izabobo* — in Toronto, Victoria, and Vancouver.

How Theatre Educates:
Convergences & Counterpoints

Edited by Kathleen Gallagher and David Booth.
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003. 282 pp.
Reviewed by Robert Nunn

Kathleen Gallagher and David Booth—both connected to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), she as assistant professor and he as professor emeritus—have assembled a wide-ranging collection of essays and interviews on the incredibly broad topic of the relationship between theatre and education. Among the contributors are educators, researchers, theatre practitioners, a reviewer, and a fan. Their articles deal with the use of dramatic techniques in the classroom (drama in education), the teaching of theatre arts in schools and universities, the practice of sending students on school trips to see plays, the educative function of theatre for young audiences, and the ways in which theatre may be said to educate its audiences, whatever their age. The editors express the hope that these approaches will strike sparks off each other. To some extent they do.

HOW theatre EDUCATES
Convergences & Counterpoints
edited by
KATHLEEN GALLAGHER and DAVID BOOTH

However, the effectiveness of the book is limited by a couple of problems. One is that the topic is so enormous that many of the responses to the question “How does theatre educate?” are equally vast. Maxims tremendous but trite, as Lewis Carroll would say. Another problem is that little attention is paid to the possibility that not all the ways theatre can educate are necessarily positive and progressive (as most of the writers in the book seem to assume). Brecht’s argument, seconded by Boal, is unassailable. Theatre can lull spectators into uncritically accepting prevailing ideology as normal and natural. And that can be its overriding educational function. Ric Knowles, in his book *The Theatre of Form and the Production of Meaning: Contemporary Canadian Dramaturgies*, underlines the point that the form of a theatrical work “educates” more potently than its content. For instance, he argues that the legacy of Aristotle, reinforced by Freud and further universalized by Frye — the structure of rising action, reversal, recognition, and denouement leading to catharsis and closure — has produced “the standard structural unconscious of dramatic naturalism in Canada as elsewhere,” and further that “the meanings and ideologies that it inscribes, fundamentally conservative and patriarchal . . . constitute the primary and affirmative social impacts of the plays that use it, whatever their (conscious) themes or subject matters”(31). Indeed, theatre can educate in a whole spectrum of ways: it may reproduce and hence reinforce ideology, enhancing its aura of naturalness and inevitability; it may negotiate a place for a broader range of social realities than is normally permissible; it may render visible “the *ideology* from which it is born, in which it bathes, from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it *alludes*” (Althusser 204); it may subvert ideology from within its own terms; it may allude to counter-ideologies, and thus actively produce certain elements of counter-hegemony with practical consequences in the social formation.

> **“Little attention is paid to the possibility that not all the ways theatre can educate are necessarily positive and progressive.”**

The most interesting articles in the book are the ones that go beyond affirmative statements about how theatre educates to look more closely at complexities and difficulties. To illustrate the two approaches, consider how the same item is dealt with in two articles. Larry Schwarz is a theatre educator at OISE and consultant for the Peel District Board of Education. In “Theatre for Young People: Does It Matter?” he argues eloquently that it does. One of the plays he holds up as an example of excellent theatre for young people is *Two Weeks with the Queen*, produced at the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People in Toronto (LKTYP, formerly YPT), a play that “sensitively deals with the experiences of cancer and AIDS.” Maja Ardal produced and directed *Two Weeks with the Queen* during her tenure as artistic director of the LKTYP. In her article, “Theatre for Young Audiences and Grown-Up Theatre: Two Solitudes,” she illustrates a problem at the core of theatre for young people with the example of that play. It was co-produced with Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary. In Calgary it was mounted as part of the adult theatre season. Adult subscribers brought their children to see the play; it was immensely successful. At LKTYP it proved next to impossible to get anybody to see it, even though it received seven Dora Award nominations. Why? Partly because it dealt with issues of homosexuality. Ardal points out that theatre for young people does not have unmediated access to its audience.

“The most interesting articles in the book are the ones that go beyond affirmative statements about how theatre educates to look more closely at complexities and difficulties.”

Between the theatre and its target audience are parents and teachers. They are the ones who finally decide who gets to see the play, and in this case, the resistance from parents and teachers to taking children to a show about “gay people, AIDS, and terminal illness” was next to impossible to overcome. The mere fact that theatre for young people is expected to educate its young audiences is thus at the very heart of the problem. Her conclusion is radical:

> The reason for the play’s success everywhere but at YPT is disturbingly simple. Painful though it is to admit, the play was successful because it was produced by adult theatre companies. The adult world did not have a protective layer around it when it came to buying tickets. It became a ‘Theatre’ and not an ‘Educational’ experience. . . . by specializing in producing theatre for young people, have we broken the direct line of communication between the voice of the artist and the young audience member? . . . I came to this conclusion: I no longer feel that it is of value to have theatres with stages that exist exclusively for children. I believe, rather, that more companies in Canada should merge with the TYA [theatre for young adults] companies who produce stage productions. (195-97)

The point I’m trying to make in singling out these two articles is that an argument engaged with complexities and contradictions — the devil that’s in the details — gives the reader a lot more to chew on than a cheery bird’s-eye view. In the jargon of the day, it *problematizes* the relationship between theatre and education.

Several other articles are engaging in the same sense as Ardal’s. Guillermo Verdecchia’s “Seven Things about Cahoots Theatre Project” states the company’s mandate at the outset: “[T]o develop, produce, and promote new Canadian plays that reflect Canada’s cultural diversity” (133). In the rest of the article he unpacks the complexities in the terms “cultural diversity” and “reflection.” He outlines the thinking he found he shared with the company: “Reflecting cultural diversity. . . meant not thinking of cultures as isolated entities that could be ‘represented’ objectively or scientifically, but rather looking at the fluidity of culture, the variety of responses to the questions posed by life. We could, I thought, look at the points of intersection, of overlap, of fusion; we should, I thought, focus on the shifting border zones” (134). So he takes issue with the common misunderstanding of multiculturalism as “the promotion and celebration of folkloric, frozen-in-time, cultures of origin” (135). Janice Hladki writes about her study of a complex and difficult but exciting collaborative project involving Monique Mojica (Native), Djanet Sears (African-Canadian) and Kate Lushington (Jewish), in which issues of race were deliberately foregrounded. She writes, “[B]y troubling the significance and implications of racialized relations in theatre production and theatre research, I hope to suggest that relations and practices in drama activities are negotiated in contentious, mutable, and complex ways” (161). Sky Gilbert, founder and former artistic director of Buddies in Bad Times Theatre, voices his opinion that gay theatre is losing its radical edge and is being co-opted into the mainstream. Lori McDougall reports on a project in India that compared the effectiveness of the use of television/radio and live drama in an educational campaign in rural India. The result may surprise many readers of this book: while both live drama and television/radio were effective, the latter came out ahead by a clear margin. Cornelia Hoogland’s “The Land inside Coyote: Reconceptualizing Human Relationships to Place through Drama” reports on a project to get kindergartners to experience a connection to the natural world through direct contact recollected in dramatic play. Judith Thompson writes about her own development as a teacher of acting and her discovery that the dangerous edge of powerful acting can be, very disquietingly, directed at the teacher.

So if readers can pick up this book without being overly concerned about getting an answer to the question of “How Theatre Educates,” they will find much food for thought.

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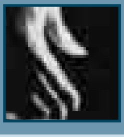
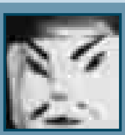
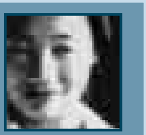
Robert Nunn taught dramatic literature and theory as well as theatre history at Brock University until his retirement in 2000. He has published numerous essays on Canadian plays and playwrights, including Hrant Alianak, David Fennario, David French, Sharon Pollock, Judith Thompson, and Drew Hayden Taylor. Two of his essays were awarded the Richard Plant Essay Prize. He was co-editor of *Theatre Research in Canada/Recherches théâtrales au Canada* from 1993 to 1996, and is on the editorial board of that journal as well as *Essays in Theatre/Études théâtrales.*







COMMUNITY, COTERIE, COMMERCIAL:

Narrative Structure and Intercultural Theatre

by Peter Copeman

This article makes an intercultural case for the importance of traditional beginning-middle-end narrative structure in intercultural theatre, especially when that theatre is community based. "Intercultural" and "community" are, of course, contestable terms. But for present purposes, intercultural theatre is that which aims to explore and represent both the ties and the tensions between communities of different cultural heritage living within an overall shared culture, such as a nation state (and so indeed most closely aligns with what Rustom Bharucha calls intraculturalism) (151ff). By a community I mean any group with a common interest that might include geography and demography but especially refers to cultural heritage. Community-based intercultural theatre is thus a process involving collaboration between professional arts-workers and culturally based communities to develop and stage theatre underpinned by community involvement, inclusivity, ownership, and value.

> "Suspicion of narrative is an orthodoxy of postmodernist thought, particularly concerning grand, encompassing narratives like religious texts, the Enlightenment, Darwinism, or Marxism (Lyotard xxiv)."

In the early 1990s, I researched, wrote, and directed an intercultural play called *Hearts and Minds* that tells a story of a budding romance between an Anglo-Australian university student and a fellow student from a Vietnamese refugee family. This relationship releases suppressed disorders in the young man's father and the young woman's mother, culminating in violent behaviour on the part of the father. The play was worked up from extensive story-gathering through networks in the Vietnamese-Australian community and with Vietnam War veterans and their counsellors. I also took a research trip to Vietnam. The project had strong support from the local Vietnamese community and enjoyed a successful season with Theatre South, a regional theatre company based in the industrial town of Wollongong, south of Sydney.[1] The play has a beginning-middle-end narrative structure (though not linear because of flashbacks) and reflects its intercultural content formally through a fusion of "low budget realism" (minimal, multifunctional sets; actors doubling characters; and so on) and Vietnamese water puppetry. In addition, significant passages of the play are in the Vietnamese language.

Hearts and Minds was also the central research project for my doctoral degree in Creative Arts, so the project and accompanying documentation were thoroughly assessed by academic examiners. While these examiners' responses were mostly very favourable, there was a consensus among them about what they felt to be the primary weakness. This was not, as I might have expected, that I had "appropriated" an Asian performance tradition, but that I had chosen a conventional narrative structure and a generally realistic form as the overarching modes of representation. One examiner asserted that "interculturalism and pluralism raise complex problems of narrative and representation which seem to demand ... a more postmodern approach to form," and also made the challenging claim that "there are very few serious writers who still follow these rules [of narrative] outside Hollywood and Broadway."[2]

Suspicion of narrative is an orthodoxy of postmodernist thought, particularly concerning grand, encompassing narratives like religious texts, the Enlightenment, Darwinism, or Marxism (Lyotard xxiv). These, so the theory goes, give legitimacy to some worldviews to the exclusion of the marginal, the silenced, the different, and the transgressive and are therefore instruments of social repression. Mistrust is extended towards all narratives — including dramatic fiction — that impose any kind of closure on the events they depict and in doing so, according to the theory, induce a moralizing or ideological impulse. Postmodern theatre attempts to redress this impulse with "a paradigm shift from linear, story-oriented performance to something much more disjointed and layered" (Whitemore 206). All the givens of narrative that provide much of historical theatre with its central organizing principles — such as plot, suspense, dialogue, and three-dimensional character — are replaced by concepts such as "themed experience." The idea of a "play" gives way to the notion of "performance," the ele-

[1] A more detailed description of *Hearts and Minds* is given in my article "The *Hearts and Minds* Project: Towards an Austral/Asian Theatre," *Australasian Drama Studies* 25 (October 1994): 166-176.

[2] These quotes are taken from the unpublished reports of my doctoral dissertation examiners.

ments of which are collaged and counterpointed to provide an "aesthetic experience that does not limit the capacity for audience interpretation" (Kilch 67).

In intercultural theatre, it is argued, postmodern forms are more appropriate than conventional narrative because the latter privileges the dominant culture over the minority, the centre over the margins, male over female, West over East. In particular, interculturalists should have a "profound suspicion of narratives of reconciliation and unification" (Lloyd 173). Yet I found it hard to accept such assertions in the aftermath of the success of *Hearts and Minds*, which had the best box office of that year's season and brought new audiences to Theatre South. Was I totally misguided in my sense that what most people — regardless of ethnicity, gender, or social status — seem to like above all when they go to the theatre or cinema, or even when they buy a book, is a "good story"? Was that just a projection of my own white, Western, male, middle-class, university-educated conditioning?

About this time I became aware of Joseph Campbell's comparative mythography, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which distils from the myths and legends of a wide range of cultures — Aboriginal creation stories from Australia, North and South America, and the Pacific Islands, as well as from Nordic fairy tales; plays by Sophocles and Shakespeare; classical Greek and Roman myths; Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic and Christian texts; and many others — a similar basic story structure that has the same fundamental aim: to articulate the universal struggle, welling up from our common heritage as humans, to overcome contradictions, create meaning, and determine values in human existence.

Campbell's monomyth has been reformulated by Christopher Vogler as follows:

> Heroes are introduced in the ORDINARY WORLD, where
> they receive the CALL TO ADVENTURE.
> They are RELUCTANT at first or REFUSE THE CALL, but
> are encouraged by a MENTOR to
> cross the FIRST THRESHOLD and enter the Special World, where
> they encounter TESTS, ALLIES AND ENEMIES.
> They APPROACH THE INMOST CAVE, crossing a second threshold
> where they endure the SUPREME ORDEAL.
> They take possession of their REWARD and
> are pursued on THE ROAD BACK to the Ordinary World.
> They cross the third threshold, experiencing a RESURRECTION, and are transformed by the experience.
> They RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR, a boon or treasure to benefit the Ordinary World. (30)

On their journey, heroes (the word applies to either gender) encounter or assume the functions of archetypes, including mentors, threshold guardians, heralds, shape shifters, shadows, and tricksters. What is more, "the stages of the Hero's journey can be traced in all kinds of stories, not just those that feature 'heroic' physical action and adventure. The protagonist of every story is the hero of a journey, even if the path leads only into the mind or the realm of relationships" (Vogler 17). The journey does not have to follow the steps in strict order — flashbacks are common — and the hero does not even have to be singular — group heroes abound, especially in stories involving quests, sieges, or reunions.

The universalist tendencies of Campbell's "meta-narrative" has met with predictable suspicion from postmodernists, who of course also assert that myths are themselves repressive meta-narratives. Yet it seems a fallacy to conflate the *content* of a myth, which may indeed reinforce social institutions, with its underlying *structure*, which is flexible enough to carry a vast variety of content, from conservative (Shakespeare's Henry V, for example, or most nineteenth-century melodrama) to progressive (such as the epic plays of Brecht). The overall ideological stance of any play depends on the choices made about plot trajectories, character types, and how the play ends, not on the mere fact that it *has* a plot, characters, and an ending.

Indeed, Campbell's monomyth suggests that conventional narrative structure in the theatre (and in other forms of storytelling) may in fact be what Patrice Pavis calls transcultural — a form that "transcends particular cultures on behalf of the universality of the human condition" (6). Most of Peter Brook's work, for example, has been a search for a transcultural theatre language, or what he calls the "culture of links" to "articulate a universal art which transcends limited nationalism in an attempt to reach the human essence" (Pavis 6) — a quest that has led him to the conviction that the theatre can only account for the modern world by appropriating and re-enacting past mythical stories. Could it be, however, that narrative structure itself — not the grand mythological narratives of specific great cultures of history — may provide the universal theatre language, and thus a means for contemporary stories to connect and resonate transculturally?

These were issues I was grappling with — without resolution — in 1993 as I went to the Philippines researching my next play, looking for another Asian theatre form to "appropriate" to help explore the trade in sex tourism and pen-pal brides between Australia and the Philippines. What I found was a form of Lenten folk theatre called *sinakulo* — broad, brash, comic/tragic re-enactments of Christ's passion, gaudily costumed and sometimes masked. As a form, the *sinakulo* has become naturalized in the Philippines along with Catholicism, and like Catholicism it has both absorbed and been changed by indigenous traditions. During the Marcos years, when overt forms of political theatre were banned, the *sinakulo* became a thinly disguised vehicle for creating narratives of political dissent, and it is still used that way in parts of the Philippines where struggles of resistance persist.

Here, then, was a form that was already intercultural — appropriated by the Filipinos from a European colonial original. Re-appropriating and transforming it yet again in the European-dominated theatre context of Australia was appealing, both for its irony and because it seemed to circumscribe the issues of cultural misrepresentation so often associated with intercultural exercises involving ancient, "pure" Asian performance forms. "Passion" resonated ironically with the commodification of sexuality represented by sex tourism and the pen-pal marriage industry. And Christian mythology is a central part of Australia's heritage, so therefore is already less exotic — less "Other" — than many other Asian myths.

The story I developed (deciding, on the strength of Campbell, to experiment further with intercultural narrative rather than embrace a more overtly postmodern form) involves a young Filipina, Chari Letaba, who is sponsored by her sister Joi and Joi's pen-pal husband Harvey Osbome to migrate from the Philippines to Australia. She discovers on arrival that Harvey is a former client from her work in prostitution in Manila, and she seeks help from an Australian priest, Brian Fingal, she met on

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the plane. Brian has problems of his own, related to his inserting allegedly inflammatory content into a village *sinakulo* performance, which turned into a riot. Chari and Joi, veterans of their own village sinakulos, offer to help Brian stage one in Australia to help clear his name with church authorities. Parallel to this, the low-budget realist main story is ironically counterpointed by more presentational *sinakulo* scenes depicting a "Gospel according to Saint Mary Magdalene" (who is of course traditionally portrayed as a prostitute). A contemporary story of oppression, sacrifice, and struggle against authority is thus linked directly to a great historical myth with similar though somewhat grander themes, both of them following Campbell's structural paradigm.

Sinakulo took joint honours in the inaugural Playbox Asialink National Playwriting Competition in 1995. None of the feedback from subsequent workshops took issue with the play's use of narrative structure. However, I was told that its content was too raw and confrontational for the audiences of Theatre South, who had commissioned the work, though I suspect it had more to do with the fact that at that stage of its development it simply was not well enough written. It was not until 2000 that a company in Brisbane, Another Country, took up the play, got the local Filipino community involved, workshopped the script rigorously, and put me through another two drafts of the script. Even then, funding was not secured until 2001, and a full production finally hit the boards at Brisbane's Powerhouse Arts Centre in 2002. Again, the use of narrative drew no negative feedback — indeed, the play's story structure drew considerable praise from co-director James Kable, who called it one of the best-integrated stories he had ever worked on,[3] while the review in the local newspaper described it as "sparse and to the point as it intertwines sexual oppression, cross-cultural misunderstanding and Catholic guilt" (Harper A3). The Filipino audiences appreciated the story while finding the subject matter confronting; as one said, "I enjoyed the evening, but many ... Filipinos still shy away from public dialogue about sex tourism, trafficking and prostitution" (Hunt). The script went on to win an Australian Writers' Guild AWGIE award for community theatre in 2003.

While working on *Sinakulo* I was also involved in other intercultural projects. In 1995 I was invited by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation to adapt the earlier *Hearts and Minds* for radio. The stage play, which had run more than two hours, had to be condensed into a fifty-three-minute "ABC hour." The highly visual puppetry sequences became inner monologues and dialogues, and the ABC insisted I cut all the Vietnamese language. So the radio *Hearts and Minds* was devoid of the two things I had felt were the crucial intercultural sensibilities of the stage play, and which had, incidentally, most impressed my doctoral examiners. All that was left, really, was the story, to which around a hundred thousand people listened when it went to air — probably more than would have seen the play if every major company in the country had mounted it.

Was it an intercultural performance in its radio manifestation? Certainly it had lost a good deal. But it carried the same themes and concerns, modelled the same intercultural relationships, and pointed to the same possibilities. The ease with which the puppetry elements were shed probably indicates that they were not as well integrated as I had imagined. But it also suggested some support for conventional narrative in the broad field that is intercultural performance.

Of course, it did not suggest that story is *all* that matters in intercultural theatre, but enough evidence in the projects so far, underpinned by Campbell's theories, encouraged me to feel that it might be premature to reject narrative altogether in an intercultural theatre informed by postmodern sensibilities. Indeed, I was interested now to investigate whether narrative structure and postmodern form were intrinsically incompatible. So for my next project, *After China* (a post-doctoral research project at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane), I attempted to push the boundaries in both directions — intercultural storytelling and postmodern form.

"The fact that **commercial** theatre narratives tend to **conservatism** and demonization of the marginal is not a **reason** to denounce **narrative** structure per se."

Brian Castro, from whose novel of the same name the play was adapted, is a Chinese/Portuguese-Jewish Australian who has been described as the quintessential postmodernist Australian novelist, and the novel certainly displays the pastiche, parody, quotation, self-referrentiality, and eclecticism associated with postmodern fiction. Yet for all that, it is also a conventional story — a difficult, delicate, hesitant intercultural love story between a cancer-riddled Anglo-Australian writer and a Chinese-Australian architect. It has a beginning, middle, and semi-tragic end. Moreover, it is also a story *about* storytelling: its power to help us cope with the transitory, illusory, and contradictory nature of existence and mortality. The characters tell each other stories as a way of pursuing their mutual attraction, deal-

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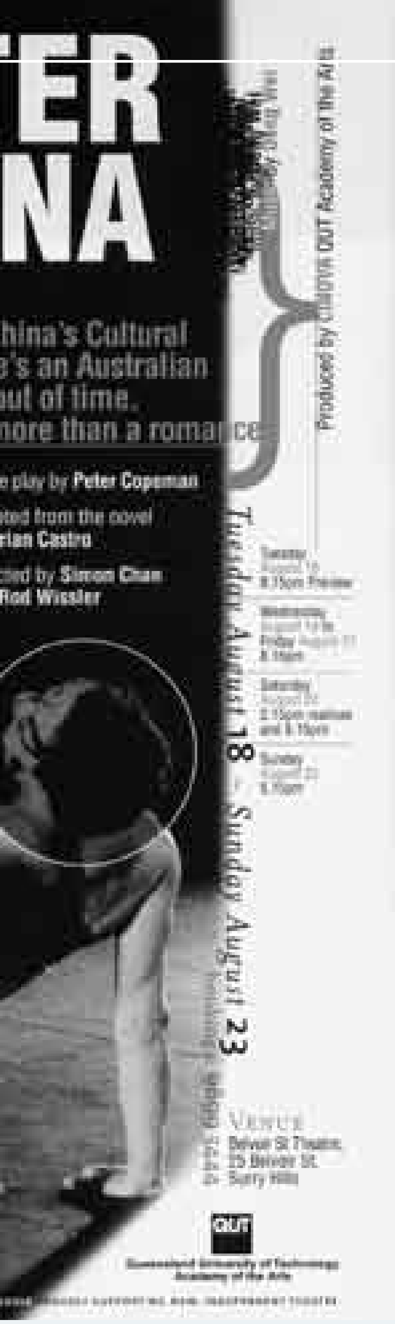
[3] Personal feedback during rehearsals. I must acknowledge here my debt to the dramaturgical advice I received from the director, Don Batchelor, in arriving at such a tightly structured story.



ing with their dark pasts, and ultimately moving towards psycho-social healing. The stories are couched as plays within the play, each with its own stylistic influence appropriate for the content and period of the story — traditional Chinese opera, "model plays" of the Cultural Revolution, Gilbert and Sullivan, Beckettian absurdism, even early Rice/Webber musicals.

The play was initially developed through a student production in 1997, then produced professionally and toured to Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney in 1998. The issues that arose from the production and its associated research revolved around questions of appropriation, especially a sense among the cast that they did not have, nor would they ever have, time to acquire the range of culture-specific skills to do justice to stylistic demands of the script. No one raised a question about the play's basis in and exploration of narrative. From audience feedback questionnaires, the pastiche of styles caused moments of confusion for some, but the overarching story the play — conventionally structured with characters, predicament, obstacles, crisis and resolution, and conforming to Campbell's mythic formulation — was clear.[4]

Of the three theatre projects described here, *After China*, the most postmodern, was also the most highbrow — not rooted in community stories. The academics who assessed it as performance-based research were generally impressed. Its audience in both Brisbane and Sydney tended to be a coterie of regular theatregoers — the exclusive, educated, "theatre literate" elite who make up the majority of audiences for our subsidized mainstage theatre). The audiences for *Hearts and Minds* and *Sinakulo* were mostly non-theatregoers or at best irregular attendees. A sample of three projects is of course too small to draw much in the way of general conclusions, but the notion that postmodern theatre is primarily for the coterie is reinforced by the kind of audience attracted to the work of its acknowledged masters, such as America's Robert Wilson or Australia's Barrie Kosky.

Moreover, it is probably no accident that the commercial theatre — which in Australia these days consists almost entirely of global blockbuster musicals —seems to have shown little interest in postmodernism. Whatever may be said about the insensitivities of commercial theatre's forays into interculturalism — its portrayal of the Other as exotic, feminine, submissive, and licentious (think of *South Pacific* or *Miss Saigon*) — its plays are usually based on well-structured stories without which they would probably have little appeal to the busloads of once-a-year theatregoers who make up the bulk of their audiences. Even *The Lion King*, arguably the most postmodern of commercial shows with its pastiche of appropriated intercultural forms, is based on a well-structured narrative that is itself a pastiche of story elements from Shakespeare. The fact that commercial theatre narratives tend to conservatism and demonization of the marginal is not a reason to denounce narrative structure *per se*.

Perhaps, after all, it is the marginal, the oppressed, who most need and desire stories. If, as Paul Ricoeur has argued, the making of narratives is a basic human impulse, addressing a desire in all of us for form and structure in subjective experience and suggesting possible future courses of action (94), or as Jeremy Tambling puts it, "To be able to give a narrative means to be able to visualise a future" (102), then it is likely that those who are not of the coterie, not of the mainstream, will be those with the strongest need to visualize an alternative future and consider courses of action. Further, to structure experience and plan future actions necessarily implies ideology — accepting a particular way of viewing the world and planning a path through it, and thus perhaps excluding other viewpoints and paths. Those in the centre, in the mainstream, often tend to regard their worldview as pre-eminent and relatively stable. Seldom do they view their own ideology as ideology and therefore contestable. Ideology is the province of the Other and so to be ignored, denigrated, or suppressed. Ironically, however, as Sneja Gunew notes, the body of work that constitutes postmodern theory has itself displayed an ideological "propensity for universalising ... as a master narrative of crisis and delegitimation" (39), with critics such as Frederic Jameson arguing that its emphasis on pastiche and schizophrenia underscores the ideology of consumer capitalism.

Rather than a suspicion of all narratives, perhaps the most valuable contribution of postmodernism is to engender an awareness of their ideological underpinning, and therefore of their potential instability and contestability. In the theatre, conventional structure *insists* on contested narrative; because each character is the hero of her or his own story, each represents a different worldview, a different ideology. The conflict in the drama derives almost exclusively from the clash of these worldviews and their attendant needs and objectives. In *Sinakulo*, for instance, Chari's goal to reinvent herself in Australia is pitted against Harvey's opportunism in re-establishing a sexual relationship with her, as well as against her sister Joi's desire for social stability and an idyllic family life. Her alliance with Brian is undermined by his self-absorption in his own troubles and his apparent friendship with Harvey. The dramatic conflict inherent in these relationships constitutes a dialectic of power *and resistance*. A narrative remains unstable until the "closure" of the story, which even then does not have to be cloyingly unifying and reconciliatory, but may be highly contingent and provisional. At the end of *Sinakulo*, Harvey is marginalised but defiant, Joi and Chari are trying to set up a highly risky business to replace the financial support no longer coming from Harvey, and Brian's future in the church is by no means assured. Yet there is hope, just as there is hope at the end of the parallel Biblical story of Jesus, as seen through the eyes of Mary Magdalene.

Perhaps conventional narrative structure might be seen as a kind of transcultural, universal but not *universalizing*, infinitely adaptable platform on which specific, local, contemporary intercultural issues and emergent identities can be contested in terms of both content and form. To banish narrative from an intercultural theatre derived from and performed for community audiences — often including the repressed and the marginal — on the basis that all conventional narratives theoretically exlude the repressed and the marginal is patently absurd. In the difficult terrain of intercultural theatremaking, the one area of relatively uncontested common ground among differing cultures

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[4] A more detailed description of *After China* and the issues it raised is given in my article (with Rebecca Scollen) "Of Training, Tokenism and Productive Misinterpretation: Reflections on the After China Project," *Diaspora: Negotiating Asian-Australia* (University of Queensland Press, 2000): 35-43.

Stories From the Body:

BLOOD MEMORY AND ORGANIC TEXTS

by Monique Mojica. Photos courtesy of Monique Mojica

This paper was first given as an address under the title “Stories from the Body: Blood Memory and Organic Texts” to a joint session of the Association for Canadian Theatre Research, the Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Languages, and the Association for the Studies of Canadian and Québec Literatures at the University of Western Ontario on May 30th, 2005.”

I am going to attempt to describe a very important aspect of where my work comes from. Within Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble, Jani Lauzon, Michelle St. John, and I are keenly aware that it is the part of our process we have inherited from Spiderwoman Theater. And it is the most difficult to talk about because of its intangibility and because of its relationship to the spirit world, connection to the land, emotional bonds to place, and link to the healing arts. I am talking about the stories I carry because they have been passed on through my blood, encoded in my DNA.

> “Our bodies are our libraries — fully referenced in memory, an endless resource, a giant database of stories.”

My fellow Turtle Jani Lauzon uses the phrase, “Our bodies are our books.” I would build on that thought to say that our bodies are our libraries — fully referenced in memory, an endless resource, a giant database of stories. Some we lived, some that were passed on, some dreamt, some forgotten, some we are unaware of, dormant, awaiting the key that will release them.

Of course I can’t and won’t attempt to offer any “scientific” proof of this, and I have to assume that if you wanted science you would have invited someone else to speak. However, along with my work as a performer, I am also a certified Pilates instructor and I work with bodies other than my own. During the course of my training, I was struck by the way every person’s body tells a story. Each injury, physical or emotional trauma, muscle imbalance, torsion of the spine, or overstretched ligament tells a story. Our very breath, how it is held or released. Our ability or lack thereof to connect within and be in our bodies. All tell a story. Our bodies house a body of experiences as clear as tattoos on our skins.

Mining my body for these organic texts has become the primary source material for my work and I continue to be fascinated and surprised by it. When we work we use a process of deep improvisations. We stand in an empty room, witnessed by a director or fellow ensemble members. We establish a world or a situation and we enter it with a specific question or task in mind to source information about it: what it looks like, smells like, who was there and what was said. The role of the witness is not only to watch and listen, but to tether the improvisers to the physical world. These improvisations result in raw texts that, because they are organic, often have no linear logic. It is not unusual for us not to know why an image or a character or place appears in our initial improvisations. Given enough time and trust, the reason a persistent image presents itself will eventually be revealed. Here are some examples:

Turtle Gals is in the development phase of a new play called *The Only Good Indian...*, which charts the history of Native performers from the 1880s in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West shows through P.T. Barnum’s side shows, the 1904 St. Louis World’s Fair (and other expositions), the silent film era, vaudeville, burlesque, and Hollywood. Now, although we were aware that Teddy Roosevelt had used General Phillip Sheridan’s proverbial quote “The only good Indian is a dead Indian” (the original quote being “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead”) and that he had been instrumental in convincing J.P. Morgan to finance Edward S. Curtis’s photographic expeditions documenting the “vanishing race,” we were astonished when he relentlessly showed up in our deep investigations. What was Teddy Roosevelt doing in our play?! — a play created by Native women featuring our unsung predecessors from over a century ago? We then made some discoveries through more conventional research: the internet, the library, and research shared with scholars such as Christine Bold of the University of Guelph. We uncovered that it was Teddy Roosevelt who flicked the telegraph key that turned on the lights at the 1904 St Louis World’s Fair, where Geronimo among others was on display. (“Don’t tell me that the lights are shining anywhere but there.”) Roosevelt had to grant special permission for Geronimo to be present because he was a prisoner of war at the time and arrived at the fair in shackles. Roosevelt’s wife, Edith, received one of our central characters, Zitkala Sa (Gertrude Bonin) — a prominent Dakota writer, orator, and concert violinist — in the White House. He was president when another of our central characters, Winnebago actress Red Wing, became North America’s first female silent movie star. And it was Teddy again who, along with members of the elite Boone and Crockett Club (which he founded), was instrumental in bringing Buffalo

Bill's Wild West Show to New York for the first time, where they paraded down Fifth Avenue before they set sail for Europe.

Which brings me to my second example: As we explored the world and time period of some of these early performers, another image recurred. It was the carousel: the old-fashioned kind with big painted horses and barrel organ music. We didn't know why it was there but we followed it down and incorporated carousel music into our piece. I had spent a lot of time on the carousel in New York's Central Park as a very small child and it had been an important special excursion for me. We then found documentation that Buffalo Bill, while waiting to sail out of New York Harbor, had taken his troupe of Wild West Show performers on an outing to Central Park — and those Indians spent hours riding the carousel! At that time it was powered by a horse and an old blind mule walking around in a pit. What an image! All the more poignant when you realize that among the Wild West Show performers were some very famous people: Sitting Bull, Black Elk, Red Shirt, Gall, Gabriel Dumont. All riding wooden horses on the carousel in Central Park.

The Central Park of my childhood was an important place not only because of the carousel but also because of its large rock formations. They had a magnetic draw for me. Every time we passed them I had to run up and sit on those rocks, and a very specific feeling came from them, one I couldn't articulate at two-and-a-half or three years old. This is the raw text from an improv I did earlier this spring in which I explored that feeling. No one's ever heard this before.

Rocks of Central Park

I'm here! I'm here!

My rocks — I'm here— smooth with ruts in them small holes filled with rainwater, moss—one humps up out of the other, out of the other. Somebody's feet walked over these rocks. Somebody else sat where I am. Somebody else looked at the sky upside-down like a big blue bowl — somebody else said, "I'm here".

The faces looking up out of the rocks look like me. I'm here! Where did you go? Were you lonely? Were you lonely sitting on this rock? I see him: skin dark brown and polished with long hair, black and grey to his shoulders. Here he sat dressed in deerskin, cloth, shell and antler. Not much food in the deerskin bag slung across his shoulder — just some dried meat and a horn filled with buckshot.

He is turning and looking towards the West where the tall old New York apartment buildings are now — rising like the battlements of a castle — The Dakota, and to the South, Essex House.

Somebody was lonely here. Someone was sad. Someone knew they were almost the last. Someone couldn't fight anymore. Someone couldn't walk any farther.

Could he hear the music from the carousel? I can almost hear it! Oohm-pah-pah, Boom pah-pah /Oohm-pah-pah, Boom pah-pah. The gold paint on the horses — seals, lions, monkeys. Oohm-pah-pah, Boom pah-pah /Oohm-pah-pah, Boom pah-pah Up and down, up and down, around and around. My horse is white, its nostrils flared, hooves up in the air. I can see the paddle striking the bass drum inside the organ. Around and around so fast that my hair streams out behind me — and I can't see the rocks anymore.

* * *

Another grouping of persistent imagery that may recur in part because New York City was my first view of the world is massive Greco-Roman statuary — not the least of which is the Statue of Liberty herself. Now *that* lady has some big feet! Interestingly, according to Cherokee scholar Dr. Rayna Green, the Statue of Liberty evolved from earlier depictions of the Americas as a Native woman — an Amazon Queen riding the back of an armadillo. Her features gradually became more and more European until we have the toga-clad figure we're all familiar with. She made a brief appearance in *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* when the clown character, Princess Buttered-On Both-Sides, is finally crowned Miss North American Indian.

These colossal statues have always both scared and mesmerized me. So much so that when Turtle Gals was developing *The Scrubbing Project* and looking at angels and embodiments of winged warrior women, who should show up but Winged Victory! "What's she doing here?" I asked. "She's not an Indian." However, I accepted her along with Groucho Marx and others who presented themselves in my Starworld because one of the vital questions we asked ourselves in this play about genocide is, "How do we get from victim to victory?" Whether we are looking up at L'Arc du Triomphe in Paris, the War Memorial in Ottawa, or the Princess Gates at the CNE (complete with majestic Winged Victory atop), these monuments are all about the victors and the vanquished, the triumphant and the conquered. That has a peculiar resonance if you are an Aboriginal person on this land — a people without even one memorial to our war dead.

It was no casual co-incidence that many of the residential schools in Canada and the US had an archway at their entrances, as did the Nazi concentration camps. The immense whiter than white statuary at the 1904 World's Fair was constructed to celebrate the Greco-Roman roots of civilization, read "progress." In my correspondence with the director of a centennial celebration film documentary about the 1904 World's Fair, Bob Miano had this to say about his upcoming documentary project, which focuses on the Gateway Arch at the entrance to the fair: "It will be more than just a story about the building of the Gateway Arch — the "how" of it. We'll really examine the 'why' of the monument — what it symbolizes and what it means to this country and the rest of the world. I believe it will be another important history lesson for many people." I have a feeling there may be a few more statues in Turtle Gals' next show.

I'd like to read an excerpt from that next show, *The Only Good Indian...* First, what you need to know is that I come from a family of show Indians. My Grandpa and Red Wing's son-in-law mixed up snake oil in the bathtub and sold it. They scripted invented ceremonial skits and dances. My mom and her sisters (the future Spiderwoman Theater) rode on floats and ballyhooed to drum customers into the movies houses to see the latest John Wayne western. They posed for tourists in their buckskins and feathers and danced for the Boy Scouts. I did too, once because my Grandpa took me with him without my mother's knowledge. And boy, was she mad! She and her sisters had refused to do this once they could voice an opinion, but we were show biz Indians! Many of these show Indian families from all over converged in New York. They danced at the World's Fair and performed with the rodeo at Madison Square Garden. And when they had no place to go, my family

> "According to Cherokee scholar Dr. Rayna Green, the Statue of Liberty evolved from earlier depictions of the Americas as a Native woman."

took them in. Some stayed and raised their families and created a community in New York City.

This is a story of a sad and magical place of memory — my grandparents' house, 50 First Place, Brooklyn.

House of Mirrors

I can see right through myself! Transparent like "The Invisible Woman" — a cord of veins getting smaller and smaller like the branches of a tree, the tributaries of a river. A net of life — a blue/green map of veins charts a flow of stories that my eyes have never seen but that I know. From behind my eyelids — images projected on the retina from the mirror in grandma's hand.

My Grandma's house had mirrors, mirrors on the walls! A house of mirrors; big mirrors suspended from the ceiling that hung tilted down into the room and reflected the aqua walls. When I looked up into it, I floated under water in a swimming pool. And on the walls, Jesus walks on water.

> "There have been times when mining my body for organic texts and confronting blood memory has been a matter of life and death."

There were gilded framed mirrors with a golden eagle on top, round like a porthole of a ship. Concave, convex, it distorted my face, made my nose long like a dog or a moose.

There was a slanted mirror under the coffee table. I would duck under the table top to see myself reflected in the blue-tinted glass. I slip through the beveled edge of blue mirror and I am inside Aunt Lizzie's china cabinet looking out at my four-year-old self looking in. We touch fingers against the glass.

I'm on the shelf among the salt and pepper shakers shaped like tomatoes, Indian heads and animals; souvenirs from Niagara Falls and Florida, beaded Mohawk pincushions and picture frames. On the bottom shelf is an Indian blanket, a straw man doll from Mexico, and a rag doll Aunt Lizzie made. She's an Indian doll with an embroidered face, moccasins, a fringed leather vest and a beaded daisy chain bracelet

In the mirror at the back of the china cabinet I can see the room reflected behind me over and over again, reaching back to those who came before me and stretching on to those who'll come after. I see myself fractured on and on like on the old box of Uncle Ben's Rice.

On the orange box is a picture of Uncle Ben holding a box of Uncle Ben's Rice, on that box is a picture of Uncle Ben holding a box of Uncle Ben's Rice, and on that box is a picture of Uncle Ben holding a box of Uncle Ben's Rice. On and on, smaller and smaller as far as I can see, until it doesn't look like Uncle Ben anymore.

In the house of mirrors there was a really big table. Around it could fit all our blood relatives and all our extended family, sometimes the neighbours upstairs or whatever Indian family was passing through the house of mirrors, waiting to get back home after being stranded in New York by the outfits they performed with; rodeos, circuses, exhibitions. They brought with them the sounds of Winnebago, Kanawake, Rosebud, Hopi land and they would all tell stories about "Mrs. Mofsie, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Deer, Douglas Grant, Blow Snake, Big Mountain, Red Wing." Stories that my eyes never saw but that I know.

Whatever celebration it was — birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving — Grandpa would preside over the platter — usually a turkey — and there would be big bowls with mounds of mashed potatoes and yams, corn, cornbread, pies. Or fish fried to golden perfection eaten with rice cooked in a diamond-shaped aluminum pot that Grandpa and Uncle Joe would turn red with the amount of chili pepper they shook onto it. Chili so hot it had a devil on the bottle.

And I would be under this big table sipping a 7-Up float from a tall glass that I'd stir with a long-handled spoon. It was a good hiding place. I'd sit balanced on the cross beam in the world under the table in the house of mirrors and listen to the stories. Stories that my eyes never saw but that I know: "Mrs. Mofsie, Mrs. Martin, Mrs. Deer, Douglas Grant, Blow Snake, Big Mountain, Red Wing." Images projected on the retina from the mirror in my mother's hand.

Up north — years far away from the house of mirrors — I meet two brothers from the Deer family. "I know who you are!" one brother says. "When my grandparents died, there were photographs of your grandparents in their things." "I know who you are!" I say. "Your uncle is my godfather!" "My children know who you are!" says the other brother; "I tell them, 'That's your cousin on TV.'"

Backstage, I meet a ventriloquist named Big Mountain, "I know who you are! I remember your sister, your uncle ran the elevator; I remember when he fell off the iron." Once, in a massive demonstration of one hundred thousand people — I met a Mofsie!

Me and my family of Indians and Jews around the table in the house of mirrors (family photo)

"I know—." We knew. We are connected over three, four generations of Indian performers — from way back.

* * *

There have been times when mining my body for organic texts and confronting blood memory has been a matter of life and death. Lest that sound too melodramatic, let me tell you this story: Two days before Christmas 1997, forty-five unarmed Indigenous women, children, and men were slaughtered while they fasted and prayed for peace in Acteal in the municipality of Chenalho, the traditional Mayan village in the highlands of Chiapas, where my husband comes from. In the early weeks of 1998, I had to watch days and days of raw footage from the aftermath of the massacre and the funeral in order to translate it from Spanish to English. I was drowning in sorrow; it was stuck in my body. I felt closer to the world of the dead than to the world of the living. I asked my close friend and colleague director/dramaturge Kate Lushington to meet me in the Nightwood Theatre studio because if I didn't get this story out of my body I was afraid that the dead might take me with them. By plunging into that outrage and grief, I saved my own life. This is the result:

I Am Sad Still

I wake up —
suffocating my mouth and nose filled with dirt.
Was I dreaming again of drowning?
of being crushed against the ceiling of
a room suddenly shrinking?
It's hard to breathe so I breathe as little as possible.
My legs are cramped and I have to pee.
I wake up —
I am in Canada chunks of earth in my nostrils
roots poking into my side
I taste dirt and something else...
I wake up —
I see the man's face — impassive calm
He looks into the camera releases a breath
I wake up —
I am in Canada gasping to breathe against
the dust and smell of blood
“Bueno,” he tells the cameraman,
“I will show you where I hid.”
An arroyo flies still buzzing around the sticky drying blood
buzzing thick
where the bullets swarmed thick around the people of the bees
Las Abejas.
The camera moves to... women's shoes two pairs
carefully set side by side.
There is a small cave in the bank of the arroyo
crumbling earth dark
“ Aquí, señores,” he says, “here, I hid as if I were dead
saved
two of my children.
I am sad still
My wife was killed with another child.
My sister, two brothers in-law, three nephews.”
I wake up —
I am in Canada we lie very still chunks of earth in our
nostrils and mouths
not breathing — not moving
I have to pee.
Ten hours
In this hole three of us lie.
Outside screams
outside hack hack CHUN of the machetes
bullets buzzing swarms of bullets
swarms of flies
Bullets made in Canada
M-16's assembled in Canada
bullets swarm like flies
I wake up —
I am suffocating my mouth and nose filled with dirt.
My legs are cramped and I have to pee.
I wake up —
I am in Canada
I wake up-
on a pile of dead
I wake up —
in the snow at Wounded Knee/ hiding along the riverbank at
Batoche/ being crushed in a boxcar to Treblinka
I wake up —
I am in Acteal
December 22, 1997
and I am sad still.

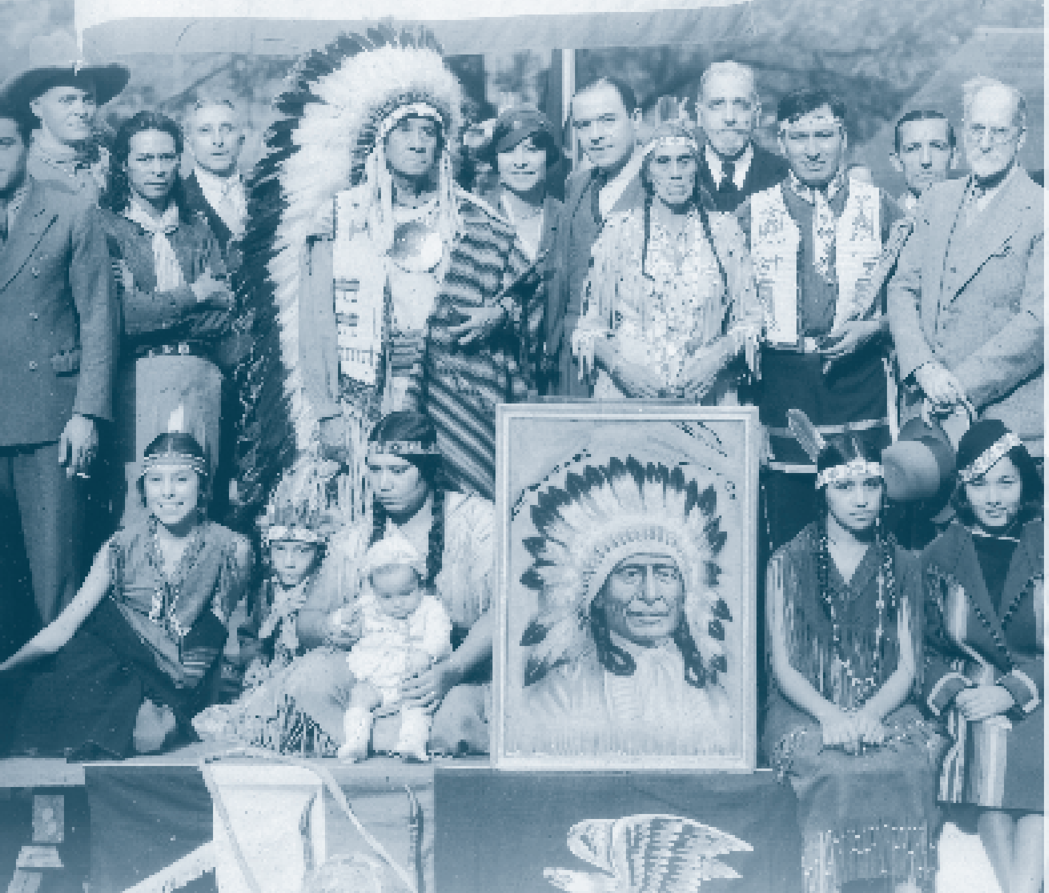
* * *

Creating an organic text from blood memory sometimes occurs when there is something my body is experiencing that I can't quite put my finger on — there's maybe a certain quality of light and I think, “I've been here before” when I know I haven't. As a contemporary Native theatre artist I feel it is crucial that we acknowledge our experience as a valid world-view. Something that has been consistently denied us. We must honour the way in which we navigate, what the late Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldua called “the borderlands.” This is our reality. And that reality is inclusive of worlds that are both seen and unseen. This is an excerpt from *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots.* It was written in 1989 during my first trip to Mexico with the man who was to become my husband. There are several voices in this piece from parallel times that co-exist. It explores those moments when the world tilts and you can suddenly see those other realities. It is also part love story, and I've used a song as a heightened form of storytelling to tell that part.

Stand Me In The Rain Forest

Stand me in the rain forest —
my soul whispers, “home...
home...”
Rise me above the rain forest —
I know every ray of filtered light that ripples
the living green
(singing Cuando canto en Tulum,
en Tulum canta la luna —
cuando canto en Tulum, en Tulum
canta la luna.
slant-eyed and head swinging low to the ground,
my muscles ripple from shoulder to haunch,
now running — now stopping to sniff the air..
(singing) When you tasted of salt and oranges,
and the moon sang her happiest songs to us,
— heart offerings
when we remembered her—
When you tasted of salt and oranges,
and the falling stars took our breath away —
the waves of the sea
mixed with my own salt tears
barefoot and possessionless I
walk resigned, but not broken,
chest thrust forward I memorize
every leaf, every hill, every bird, every plot of mountain corn —
knowing these are the last things I will see.
The bus winds the mountain turns.
It begins to rain, cold drops pelting the window in streaks.
I promise to return.
The light in the doorways,
the hammocks hung in the homes
of the brown mountain-weathered
people looking up from the side of
the road.
I promise to return to carry on the light.
Swell my heart in my chest

(Below) Princess Naomi, last of the Manhattan Indians stands behind frame of indian head



full and warm. I turn and say,
"If I survive this journey, it is only because my heart has decided not to burst."
... and she sounds like this:
(singing)
ah ah ah ah ah ah
ah ah ah
ah ah ah!

I give myself to this land.
My heart pierced my back split open. Impaled.
My blood stains this piece of earth — a landmark for my soul.
I promise to return to love you always.
Call to me in a language I don't
understand,
Curled beside me, you sleep.
Wake up! There's work to be done!
We're here.
slant-eyed and head swinging
low to the ground,
my spine arches from neck to tail.
(singing)
When you tasted of salt and oranges
I howled at the pulling in my womb,
— your own trembling
not quieted by whispers (of no, no, no)
I crouch at the side of the mountain
the guardian —watching
When you tasted of salt and oranges,
I put down my sorrow in
an ancient place,
ahh ahh ahh ahh
wordless, I walk into the sea
and the moon she will sing.
I wait.
ah ah ah ah ah ah
ah ah ah
AH AH AH!

* * *

Sometimes the images I work with come from old photographs. Earlier this spring while researching *The Only Good Indian...* I was showing an old family photograph to the other two Turtle Gals. It was of a gathering of a large group of Indians at American Indian Day in the mid-thirties. Jani pointed to one striking old woman and asked who she was. I didn't know, but her face is so intense that it's impossible not to pick her out of the crowd.

I've just returned from New York City. I went there to attend the opening of an exhibit called New Tribe New York at the Smithsonian - National Museum of the American Indian. It's a retrospective of Spiderwoman Theater's work and of their origins — my origins, the legacy that I am proud to have inherited.

It opened with a tribute to Spiderwoman — my mother and her two sisters. My brother-in-law's drum group drummed, my cousins and my brother and I sang. I read them the "House of Mirrors." On stage my contemporaries and I represented the third and fourth generations of interconnected Indian performing families. And there is a fifth generation of performers coming! Red Wing's family and mine have intermarried and my eleven-year-old niece, Josephine, a descendant of both these families was on stage too. It was an intensely emotional evening.

As I walked into the exhibit itself I saw a photograph of my Grandpa projected onto the wall nine feet high! Sitting next to him in traditional dress was a gaunt elderly woman whom I recognized from old photographs in my possession — but I didn't know who she was. I grabbed my Aunt Elizabeth, the matriarch of our family, and asked her. "That's your Aunt Muriel's godmother," she told me. "She was called Princess Naomi and she was almost one hundred years old back then in 1937. She was the last surviving Manhattan Indian." As she spoke I realized that the faces in the rocks of Central Park were her people — that is her land.

Four days later, I took Turtle Gals' video camera and my videographer's skills — which leave much to be desired — and I went to Central Park with my cousin to shoot some footage of the carousel. I chose a white horse with its hooves in the air and I rode. I wanted to do it in full traditional dress, but I lost my nerve; maybe next time. I also shot footage of those magnificent rock formations, and as I walked over them I remembered Princess Naomi.

As I've told you these stories from my body, Princess Naomi and the Manhattan Indians are remembered again. You've witnessed me naming the names of my predecessors. Now their names and our stories are part of your memory, and as long as they are remembered they live on. This is blood memory. This is where my work comes from.

Monique Mojica is an actor and published playwright from the Kuna and Rappahannock nations. Based in Toronto for the past twenty years, she belongs to the second generation spun directly from the web of New York's Spiderwoman Theater. Her play *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots* was produced by Nightwood Theatre and Theatre Passe Muraille in 1990, on radio by CBC, and published by Women's Press in 1991. In 1999, she co-founded Turtle Gals Performance Ensemble with Jani Lauzon and Michelle St. John.

Banana Boys
by Michael Chao
In Loving Memory of Rick Wong

Banana Boys

at the Magnetic North Festival
A short comment for alt.theatre

by Jaswant Guzder

Photos by Guy Bertrand Photography

Banana Boys, a play directed by Nina Aquino, opened in Toronto in 2004 with the fu-GEN theatre group, and travelled this past June to the Magnetic North festival of contemporary Anglo-Canadian theatre. Here was a theatre version of Timothy Moo's novel of five young Chinese-Canadian men whose coming of age fused the threads of family, self-discovery, ambitions, dreams, and a search for love in a country that viewed them as definite "Other." Teesri Duniya's recently produced *Miss Orient(ed)* — whose three women protagonists shape a meaningful identity as Philippino Canadians — is nicely counterpointed by the dilemmas of these young visible minority men

The "banana" of the title sets the play's context (yellow on the outside and white on the inside) before it opens onto a scene of disorganized banter. The five beer-drinking friends, recovering from university life and entering mainstream life, are exchanging the universal competitive humour of young men in unguarded playful moments. The actors are all of Chinese origin: Rick, ultra ambitious, is striving for the top at any price; Sheldon, the hopelessly romantic engineer, is searching for love; Luke, the club-crawling psychology major, is suppressing his musical talent; Dave, the cynical science student, hates women; and Mike, the frustrated writer, is pressed into a medical career by his conservative parents. Part of the mission of fu-Gen — which promotes the casting of ethnic Canadians for authentic voice and stage presence — is to avoid those jarring moments of seeing ethnics played by mainstream Canadians, as they do in, for example, Lepage's *Dragon Trilogy* or *Zulu Time*. The acting, especially by In-Surp Choi as Luke (who in my opinion steals the show), encompasses musical talent as well as dancing. Rick, in his relentless search for achievement in the white Canadian space, sacrifices his identity, loyalties, and Chinese values completely. The predicament of his tragic self-destruction involves his friends in soul-searching moments of rejection or acceptance. The gaps of the Diaspora identity are implicitly painful as depicted in their surface humour, their occasional hostile conflicts, their familial guilt, and the desire that moves them all to search for authentic voices, visions, options, love, or meaning — all of this with the Chinese family ghosts playing their roles silently in the background. The pressing agenda of assimilation is front and centre. This is the life of the cbc (Chinese born Canadian) seldom acknowledged in the public space.

I sat in a row behind a beautiful young Chinese woman and her white-Canadian boyfriend, distracted by her frantic conversation and cheerful laughter drowning out the painful moments of the play. My Indian-born aunt turned off her hearing aid as the boys on stage bantered about family sacrifices and pressures to go to university, their occasional need to obliterate the pressures with alcohol, or coping with the loneliness of silent cell phones as their Chinese girlfriends abandoned them for "real" Canadian boyfriends. The laughter in the audience echoed the billing of this streamlined *Banana Boys* as a play which "meditated on the restless" with a "wicked humour." I thought it was a tragicomedy, and wondered if it was appetizing fare for mainstream Canadians, my aunt, or the young lady in the front row. Presented on a mainstream Canadian stage in front of us was the dilemma of Asian youth that is marginalized — despite a Governor General of Chinese origin in Rideau Hall.

(Above Left) Derek Kwan (Above) Front: Insurp Choi. Back, left-right: Dale Yim, Richard Lee and David Yee. Gurney: Derek Kwan.

The action of the play was frenetic and the dialogue was hard to decipher at some points, in contrast to *Miss Orient(ed)*'s marked clarity. Nonetheless, the point of the poignant drama —falling off the rails of the mainstream drive to succeed in life and be a Canadian individual — was a bewildering task for all of the characters. The writer is eventually driven to his typewriter, despite his family's insistence that the role of an artist is less meaningful than the stereotypical professional, science- or math-oriented Chinese student. As in *Miss Orient(ed)*, the characters jettison the stereotypes of not only the more general Canadian society, but also the ghetto of their ethnic communities, where sacrifice and saving face are vitally important in the social fabric. Here the young men are torn apart by their idealizations and projections from both sides, at great cost to themselves. Evident in their mannerisms and use of

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Nuancing Diversity:

The Boyokani Company *Hamlet*

by Leanore Lieblein

Photography by Sotira Dhima

Hamlet, like a quasar, emits exceptionally large amounts of energy over time and space. And like a quasar, at its heart is a black hole whose increasing gravity swallows passing stars, which in turn enlarge it. If it is endlessly productive, it is also endlessly produced. Thus it was that I was initially drawn to the African *Hamlet* of the Boyokani Company at the Théâtre de la Tempête in Paris, France in November 2005. A publicity flyer described it as addressing issues central to contemporary Africa, issues like enforced marriage, filial vengeance, and the return of the dead. I expected the production would enlarge my *Hamlet*, as indeed it did. I also was intrigued when I read the listings of actors, director and designers in the flyer, which included their countries of origin: Congo-Brazza, Mali, Ivory Coast, France, Senegal, Togo. I was being told, I felt, that if this was to be an "African" *Hamlet*, it would be of an Africa that was not one but many things; what mattered was not only that these artists were from French-speaking Africa, but that French-speaking Africa consisted of many names and places and this variety had consequence for the *Hamlet* that I was going to see. Indeed, in many ways this production — through its cultural diversity, thematic concerns, and corporeal expressiveness — took possession of the play on its own terms, challenging presuppositions and presumptions about to whom the play belongs. At the same time, it used tragicomedy, to reach out to spectators for whom *Hamlet* is many different things.

Hamlet and cultural diversity

To begin with, cultural diversity is the commitment of the Boyokani Company, whose name in Lingala, a language spoken in central Africa, particularly in Congo-Brazza and Congo-Kinshasa, means "union" or "entente."[1] The company was created by Hugues Serge Limbvani, who describes himself as being from both Congo-Brazza and France, to bring together, train, and promote through theatre the work of artists of different languages, cultures, and media in Africa and elsewhere. Limbvani — who adapted the play from the translation of Jean-Michel Déprats, directed it, and played the role of Hamlet — has studied in Japan, given workshops in Canada, and performed widely in Europe.

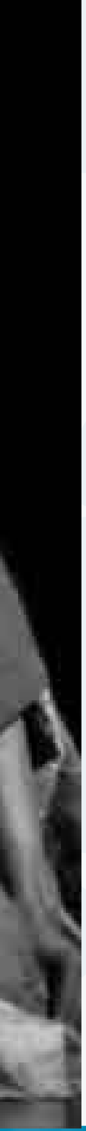
Creating a culturally diverse company, according to Limbvani, is both a challenge and an opportunity: "There are Muslims and non-Muslims. There are Muslim countries and non-Muslim countries. There are some who drink alcohol and others who don't. Some smoke and others don't. Their traditions being different, I asked everyone to remain him (her) self. Like that, there are several communities, each with its culture, its accent" (12). The unabashed juxtaposition of multiple theatrical traditions can bring pleasure to those who recognize them and at the same time create unity in diversity: "On stage everyone tries to give what he has. The goal is to serve the show. It doesn't matter how one does so. Each of them comes with his (her) culture, with their techniques. For example, when Horatio and Marcellus dance, the Senegalese actor dances a Senegalese dance, the Congolese dances a Congolese dance. Polonius sings songs from his country; Hamlet also" (13).

Such issues as female oppression and responsibility to the dead are certainly not confined to a single culture or cultural context. But they take different forms and are experienced differently across cultures. Theatre has the capacity both to root such problems in a specific material context and to enable them to resonate symbolically beyond their material confines.

> **"The unabashed juxtaposition of multiple theatrical traditions can bring pleasure to those who recognize them and at the same time create unity in diversity."**

According to Limbvani, two personal experiences growing specifically out of his African context and relating directly to the question of death lie behind this production. The first took place in 2003 in Senegal, when a young medical student, the sister of a friend, told him in tears that she was contemplating suicide. Her parents had decided to marry her to a wealthy tradesman with four wives already and children older than she. It was then that he began to think about a *Hamlet* that would shift the dramatic focus from Hamlet to Gertrude in order to speak of the abuses of women in his culture and to make audible Gertrude's pain. The second was his experience of hearing the injunctions of his mother a month after her death speaking to him through another woman's body, in spite of

[1] Remarks attributed to Hugues Serge Limbvani come from my translation of an interview conducted on 16 November 2005 and, as indicated, from the company's dossier on their Hamlet. I am grateful to M. Limbvani for his gracious assistance, to Alexis Guiengani for his transcription of the interview, and to Sotira Dhima for a copy of the unpublished script. The translations are my own, though in some cases I have felt it important to give the flavour of the French original as well.



a Catholic upbringing which disdained such phenomena. The result was his desire to create a version of *Hamlet* that from an African perspective took seriously the authority of the revenant and the active intervention of the Ghost.

Alan Sinfield has argued that the Shakespearean text is fissured. It contains “faultlines,” points at which the text may invite other than the received readings. Readings from another context or from another perspective may prove what he calls “dissident.” Queen Gertrude may be as much a victim as a villain; the ghost of Hamlet’s father may be as much an agent of mercy as of vengeance. What Sinfield calls “creative vandalism” allows one to see the Shakespearean text for what it is, what it is not, and what it may be. In addition, the performance of Shakespeare by black actors draws attention to received presuppositions about the Shakespearean body.

The centrality of Gertrude in Limbvani’s version is established in the powerful opening. The play begins not on the battlements but with jazz music, filtered light, and the erotic shadows and ecstatic cries of the Queen and Claudius making love. It is Gertrude’s unhappiness in her enforced marriage that leads to their decision to rid themselves of the King, the impediment to their love: “Oh mes ancêtres, mais pourquoi, pourquoi, les parents doivent-ils impos[er] les femmes et les maris à leurs enfants. Pourquoi les enfants doivent vivre leur bonheur par procuration” (46). [Oh my ancestors, why, why must parents impose husbands and wives on their children ? Why must children live their parents’ happiness by proxy?]

Although the focus shifts after the murder to Hamlet’s obligation to his dead father, Gertrude re-emerges as central in the closet scene. According to Limbvani, “Là est la clé. Et c’est ce que j’ai voulu faire. Amener les gens à un certain moment à détester Hamlet” (5) [That’s where the key is. And that’s what I wanted to do. To bring people at a certain moment to detest Hamlet]. Even the Ghost in the closet scene defends Gertrude, telling Hamlet that his mother was unhappy, that her suffering is “légitime,” and that her fragility should be pardoned (39). When Hamlet exits, the Queen, in a long sexually explicit and eloquent monologue downstage centre, details the miseries of enforced marriage and seeks understanding and compassion from the audience.

The immediacy of the experience of the dead in African culture is similarly foregrounded. It is expressed corporeally in an intense vibration of the entire body, as though the body itself were traversed by an electric current emanating from the spectre. When Horatio urges Marcellus to strike the Ghost if necessary to prevent it from leaving, he is reminded of the respect imposed by the traditional formulation of the interpenetration of the living and the dead: “[L]es vivants qui n’ont pas de morts sont aussi malheureux que les morts qui n’ont pas de vivants’” (5). [The living without the dead are as unhappy as the dead without the living.] And the Ghost addresses Hamlet in the words of the famous poem “Souffles” by the Senegalese poet Birago Diop: “Ecoute plus souvent les choses que les êtres. La voix du feu s’entend. Entends la voix de l’eau. Ecoute dans le vent le buisson en sanglots : c’est le souffle des ancêtres. Ceux qui sont morts ne sont jamais partis” (13). [Listen more often to things than to beings. The voice of the fire can be heard. Hear the voice of the water. Listen in the wind to the sobbing bush: it’s the breath of the ancestors. Those who are dead are never gone.]

Performing diversity

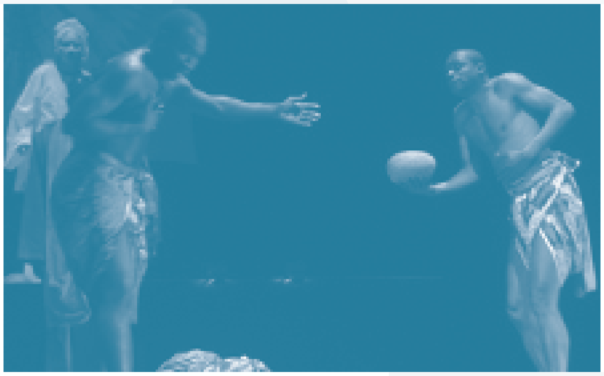
The Boyokani Company made these big themes of love and death accessible by casting them in an intimate mould. Setting the play’s opening indoors in a private room in the castle rather than outdoors on the watch, the production emphasizes the domesticity rather than the political potentiality of the play. The intimacy is reinforced not only by the smallness of the cast, with only eight actors playing all of the roles, but by the informality of their relationships. When Francesca (Francisco in Shakespeare’s text) and Marcellus first see the Ghost, they are not keeping guard against a possible Norwegian invasion but enjoying a tryst, and their friend Horatio teases them by suggesting that the vision they have seen is a result of smoking too much *gandja*, drinking too much alcohol, or an excess of libido. Thus the lyrical sensuality of the sexually aroused body that was present in the opening scene is echoed in the play. Ophelia, too, displays her sexual longing, caressing herself as she reads Hamlet’s letter.

Similarly, the informality of the interpersonal relationships, even in the Court, is reinforced by an acting style which substitutes for the traditional European Shakespearean body a corporeal expressiveness that often speaks more than the text itself. Thus the focus on love and death is achieved not only by modifying the text but by actually embodying the issues. The multiple performative traditions brought to the production implicitly comment on the homogenization of the accumulated Western tradition of acting Shakespeare. Though their songs or dances may come, as we have seen, from different cultures, their music and

“Shakespeare has been and remains part of the ground on which the Boyokani Company invites encounters among diverse cultural traditions.”

movement work together and are at the heart of the corporeality that these actors bring to the production. Its unfamiliarity delights, but may also comment on and challenge the expectations of a European or North American spectator.

To take one example, after the court scene celebrating the marriage of Claudius and Gertrude — which fulfills the customary requirement that the younger brother marry his brother's widow — Hamlet speaks his "O that this too too solid flesh would melt" soliloquy seated downstage left on an otherwise empty stage. Dejection was palpable in his face, his voice, and the slope of his shoulders and tilt of his head in what seemed to me to be a clichéd imitation of a traditional Hamlet. In fact some audience members (rudely, I thought) laughed. Then Horatio, Francesca, and Marcellus arrived upstage, and in their presence Hamlet was transformed. The old friends greeted one another with their hands — and with their feet. They exchanged gestures, dance steps, and songs. Their relationship was defined and expressed through their bodies, and the energy, wit and skill of their movements brought laughter and applause from the audience. It was then that I realized that the earlier laughter had not been at the expense of clichéd acting but in appreciation of the send-up of clichéd acting.



> **"The Ghost was grounded in a specifically "African" sense of the dead, but he was also deliberately and horrifically amusing; it was okay to laugh."**

Hamlet again played against convention in the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, which in interview Limbvani described as the *grand moment*, the speech that everyone waits for and that is always solemn. Strumming a guitar, Hamlet took up position once more on the downstage left corner, and with the guitar as musical accompaniment he recited the lines. Again a send-up? That was the first reaction of the audience members, who repeated their laughter. Limbvani compared his delivery of the lines to that of a "conteur" [storyteller]. The result was a Brechtian distancing in which one heard — heard for the first time, according to some spectators — the words rather than the emotions; and after the initial laughter, the speech was received as a meaningful reflection on the problem of suicide.

At their best in this production the actors drew upon their own highly energized acting traditions to perform themselves performing. Polonius, for example, played the harmonica and revealed his compelling qualities as a traditional storyteller (*griot*) when he recounted the "story" of Hamlet's love for Ophelia. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern also enchanted much of the audience with their over-the-top physicality. However, cultural diversity for the Boyokani Company is not confined to the specific cultural traditions of the actors' countries of origin. While the fight at the end of the play draws upon Senegalese traditions of combat, the oriental otherness and pantomimed movement of the Ghost and the play within the play are strongly influenced by Japanese Noh theatre. And the Senegalese combat is accompanied by the music of Mozart mixed with the percussiveness of Arab instruments. The intercultural is both local and global.

Who is your audience?

In addition to performances across Africa and in France, the Boyokani Company *Hamlet* has been performed or is scheduled to be performed in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Moldavia, Croatia, Cypress, and Macedonia. As a North American spectator watching the Boyokani Company *Hamlet* in a theatre in Paris, France, I felt like a guest at a party that had been planned for someone else. I felt welcome, but I also felt at times that other spectators were seeing things differently than me. I gradually realized that when, as in the case of the overplaying of Hamlet, the production was laughing at its own pretensions and distancing itself from the conventions of a *Hamlet* performance, I was being offered the handle of comedy and invited to share in the joke:

> In making this play tragicomic, I wanted to show the spectator the realities of contemporary Africa confronted with the evolution of our world. A world where love loses its purity, the family its solidarity, and a man his identity. A world where the old and the new, order and disorder, law and anarchy, nature and society, purity and blemish, reason and madness, action and reflection, the religious and animism run alongside each other, sometimes without touching. (Dossier)

Making the play tragicomic (in spite of the fact that it ends with the usual deaths) was a way of embracing contradiction. Thus the Ghost was grounded in a specifically "African" sense of the dead, but he was also deliberately and horrifically amusing; it was okay to laugh.

At other times, however, I was profoundly aware that the impact of the play must vary significantly from audience to audience. The audacity of Gertrude's monologue depended on its context of creation, and it would have been pretentious to think I could respond as intensely as someone closer to the immediate situation. And indeed the production history of the show took this into account. For such practical reasons as the difficulty of obtaining visas and the cost of rehearsal space in France, the show was developed in Senegal. However, before taking the tour to Europe, from Dakar the production toured seventeen countries in Africa, including all of the actors' countries of origin with the exception of the politically unstable Ivory Coast. Also included were English, Spanish, and Portuguese-speaking countries, where, because it was hosted by Francophone

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Iitaohkanao'pi: The Meeting Place:

An Intercultural, Interdisciplinary Performance

by Lisa Doolittle and Troy Emery Twigg

Dancers in rehearsal for Old Man Loses his Medicine Leggings from l to r Afra Foroud, Corey Makoloski, Paulette Fox, Troy Emery Twigg. Photo: Katherine Wasiak.

Myth, meet post-modern dance. Symphony, meet hand drum. Trickster, meet the institution of higher learning. Interdisciplinarity, meet socio-cultural realities . . . .

Iitaohkanao'pi, The Meeting Place was a collaborative venture of the University of Lethbridge Faculties of Fine Arts and Education, the Lethbridge Symphony Orchestra, and individuals from the Blackfoot community. "The underlying concept was the coming together of people from different cultures in a spirit of harmony and mutual respect," according to Artistic Director Ed Wasiak. Hundreds of elementary school children, both on local reserves and off, participated in a music teaching unit and were bussed in to an elaborate public performance at the University of Lethbridge theatre. The show explored four traditional Blackfoot teaching legends about the trickster character Napi. Contemporary composer Ian Crutchley set the stories to music, which was played by an eleven-member professional chamber orchestra, with narration by Kainai/Blood actor Marvin Fox. Two Native and two non-Native dancers performed the stories. The Kainai Grassland Singers sang traditional and contemporary Aboriginal songs, while the university's youth choir sang interludes composed by Crutchley. Artists Janice Rahn and Michael Campbell created video projections.

The project was a resounding success. Yet the show's choreographer, Lisa Doolittle, had remained uneasy about some of the aspects of collaboration and unsure of their impact on cross-cultural relations. Lisa and Kainai collaborator/performer Troy Twigg got together to rehash the creation and production process, and they present the conversation here as a contribution to the ongoing struggle to create equitable and dynamic artistic work that crosses cultural divides. Underlying the discussion is the larger question: How can artistic processes mediate "harmony and mutual respect?"

(Production descriptions and excerpts from Troy's journal are in italics)

Lisa: One of the intentions in *Iitaohkanao'pi* was to make a bridge between two cultures. I want to talk about the ways it ended up making an acceptable bridge and they ways it may not have. Or did it do something else?

Troy: There were so many elements to it, and the response was so mixed. For some people the show was a good way of talking to Aboriginal kids — the thrill of having this choir of non-Aboriginal people singing "Napi" — their words! But there was disappointment. Some people felt more First Nations material could have been included. Still, this opened a lot of doors to start experimenting and exploring, a stepping stone for other things.

Lisa: It was always a strange hybrid to me. I thought that the Lethbridge Symphony's involvement lent institutional weight to the project and the Aboriginal stories — especially in the non-Aboriginal community. That was positive. On the other hand, I was always uncomfortable with the piecemeal approach to it. Olivia and the Grassland Singers would walk on and walk off and then the symphony would start. It wasn't that Aboriginal music was excluded because there was Olivia. But the two styles of music weren't integrated.

> **"Does each new cross-cultural arts experiment demand a messy and time-consuming process of creating a new paradigm?"**

Troy: People had concerns about the whole integration process. If you had incorporated Olivia's music into the music and into the dancing, it might not have seemed like four different shows all at once.

Lisa: There were practical reasons for the separation of the various elements. The professional symphony musicians were expensive, and nobody had much time. I think we only had two or three rehearsals with the whole group together. We did not consciously develop a collaborative process that might have encouraged better integration, and maybe that should have been a goal. Working cross-culturally challenges the categories we often assume are fixed

The Kainai Grassland Singers. Photo: Tone Smith Studios.

Iitaohkanao'pi: The Meeting Place

University of Lethbridge Theatre

October 1 & 2, 2002,

Created for children in grades four to six.

Audiences: 1,251 students (Aboriginal and not), 17 teachers, and 82 supervisors from 17 schools came to the two matinees, and 356 people attended the evening performance, open to the general public.

Sponsors: Lethbridge Community Foundation, Lethbridge Symphony Association, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, and the University of Lethbridge.

— like "amateurs" and "professionals." While this project highlighted indigenous stories for a mixed culture audience, a large portion of the budget had to go to paying professional, non-native musicians' honoraria. Is that fact simply an inevitable exigency? Does each new cross-cultural arts experiment demand a messy and time-consuming process of creating a new paradigm?

Troy: Of course making something like this is going to take a lot of time and understanding. I would say that definitely it was ground breaking in the aspect of introducing people to each other's worlds. I know how theatre works and I understand the cultural aspects of the First Nations world. But it was really hard to see how these different worlds could come together. And at the time when the project was first introduced this was all exciting, right?

Lisa: And then when you got into it?

* * *

It's so frustrating when you understand the dynamics and discipline of theatre the way all these other theatre people do and on the other hand you know where the Indians are coming from! Your people! Your people. My People! Because I come from that place too! They just don't understand each other and I can't help but feel like an idiot every time I try to explain one to the other!

* * *

Troy: I liked the process we got into of studying the animals, transforming humans into animals and vice-versa. We were integrating Blackfoot culture properly, because they were animals related to this land.

Lisa: But I think with regret of not being able to integrate more traditional dancing. I remember asking Paulette, who knew most about it, to show us some steps. She performed some traditional dance with her son, which was so lovely. But it was just stuck in there where the story spoke about that kind of tradition, and did not become an integral part of our movement vocabulary.

Troy: We didn't explore much of the traditional cultural stuff, which was good in some ways. I think we did a really good job of staying away from a lot of sensitive stuff. It's always an issue, at least with my experience of being Aboriginal, what you take from tradition and what you put on the stage.

Lisa: I didn't feel it was my territory. Paulette was especially good about explaining cultural ideas that were embedded in the myths. In one rehearsal she said cryptically, "It's all about chaos." After I went home, that sank in and at the next rehearsal I said "OK we've got to make some chaos here." Even though the movement wasn't traditional, the feelings behind it were linked to traditional ideas. What did your community think about those less traditional aspects in the show?

Troy: Like the ideas of using black raincoats to create images of wind, clouds, chaos.

Lisa: And putting pink spots on the prairie chicken.

Troy: Everybody knew his character was just like that. It was fun. Our saving grace was that we only took what was in the stories and brought the stories to life using raincoats as wings and umbrellas as the eyes of the owl. People were fascinated by the unusual creative decisions we made. Taking the historical part, making it modern, to tell the story to a different kind of audience.

Lisa: And while they watched the mixture of dance and music, and traditional and contemporary — those clown-like gophers getting smothered, accompanied by violins, drums and whistles and the very humorous narration — something came across in ways that the pure tradition or a straight classical musical concert could not communicate. The mixture of art forms enabled the mixing of cultures?

* * *

"Napi Roasts Gophers, or Why the Willow has Red Greasy Bark": a teaching on betrayal. Napi convinces all the gullible gophers to play a game of rolling up in the warm ashes of the fire, promising to let them escape before they burn. He doesn't keep his promise, they get roasted, and he eats them. Our dance used a set of mobile, giant blue gymnastic mats and a movement vocabulary drawing on rodent play behaviour, circus acrobatics and contact improvisation.

* * *

Troy: That gopher story was a little dark for kids of that age but they got it.

Lisa: I thought that was going to be too abstract. We didn't do literal story telling at all. This style and structure of the work evolved out of an inclusive creation process. One dancer, Afra, a PhD student in Neuroscience, studies rodent behaviour and her specialty is how rats play. Paulette, a Master of Science candidate in Environmental Science, knew a lot about the Blackfoot concepts that informed the stories. You are a theatre specialist and Corey was more of a dancer. You get this mixture of cultures and scientists and artists and you put them in a room together, something pretty odd is going to happen.

* * *

We were on the floor, in the air, jumping around, spreading our wings, screaming and gawking at each other. When I stepped outside myself to observe what was going on, I thought "we are going somewhere . . ."

"Old Man Loses His Medicine Leggings": a teaching about why the biggest fool is he who tries to cheat life. Napi as a young foolish man steals some gorgeous leggings from the sun (Old Man), who eventually just gives the leggings to Napi, but commands him to use them only for medicine. Of course Napi can't resist showing off. The sun causes the leggings to catch fire, and the whole community burns. The Napi character did hip hop, while "the community" performed more traditional movement. This section began with performers leaving the stage to play tricks on the narrator and the musicians in the orchestra pit, and to interact with audience members.

* * *

Troy: The work on that first story defined the kind of eclectic style we were doing. The project danced between a number of genres — children's theatre, post-modern dance, new music, and Aboriginal storytelling. When we were all shuffling across the stage together behind that traditional shawl, an image that represented "the community," the whole piece came together. What we were doing here was different and it was good. It's complex but simple enough to understand. And for myself as a performer it was just the beginning of a journey. Yet I was a little concerned at the beginning.

Lisa: Me too. I was terrified! I think some people were surprised by the style that we had chosen to work in. Maybe they expected something that was a little more mythological. We didn't do "myth."

Troy: Actually, the whole idea of "the legend" could have got in the way. We didn't do anything traditional, in terms of native culture.

Lisa: The participation of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal performers together in the creation process helped, because the same kind of questions would not have been asked if we had all been Aboriginal. And certainly they would not have been asked if we'd all been white.

Troy: It's also important to know that we were not involved in the whole process of creating the idea for the show.

Lisa: Others selected the score and the stories. But we had only five weeks, not much money, restricted theatre availability, and busy performers, so having a musical structure to begin with was a good way to make sure we got the job done. I would love to do a project that allowed more time for collaboration, but sometimes those projects just don't get finished.

Troy: If we had had more time, could we have done the job that we did? Basically, after my university homework of doing my tenth Ibsen paper, I just took it on.

Lisa: I was very pleased at the end. I was initially terrified because I care so much for people's first exposure to each other across those cultural borders. If it's not good or if it's not done in a good spirit, it's awful: it's worse than not doing anything at all. The very early meetings set a good foundation. We talked to a lot of people from the Blackfoot community; they were involved right from the beginning.

Troy: That community involvement should be taken on by anyone who wants to do this kind of project.

Lisa: So, what's the long-term result of cross cultural collaboration like this one?

Troy: I think for years we've been trying to find a medium that brings people together. It's not just about a disembodied understanding of the Native culture. When we use theatre as a forum to tackle intercultural issues, we have to make something together, we gradually build an understanding of how things work and happen.

Lisa: It's not only non-Aboriginal people understanding the Aboriginal community, and how things happen there, it's also the Aboriginal community understanding how things happen in my community. How do we work...

Troy: And bridge. How do we work together. The theatre was a perfect place to start this happening.

Lisa: A lot of emotions were there among the cast — especially with some people's lives in such a dramatic stage.

Troy: I never want to go there again. The pace was so fast, and it got more intense the closer we got to the performance.

Lisa: It would have been difficult anyway, but the tension of cultural differences heightened personal crises.

Troy: It's always so tense for the performer, when you are giving everything in that process, just taking all that you have and throwing it out there for the audience . Towards the end, we were at the point where it all could have fallen apart.

Lisa: Yet because of the multidisciplinary, multi-group nature of the project, there was no way we could have imploded. We were part of a greater thing.

Troy: In creation theatre there's more pressure, because you have to put so much of yourself out there both in the content and the performance. When you're working together as an ensemble, it's easy to always assume, and never understand. That goes for those who weren't familiar with native aspects, and for those who were new to theatre and had no background or training.

Lisa: The two cultures met not only in the story, in the material of the theatre, but also -

Troy: On the stage

Lisa: And backstage. I don't want to exaggerate the differences. Still everyone came from different places and dealing with that was certainly a lesson for me.

* * *

> **"You get this mixture of cultures and scientists and artists and you put them in a room together, something pretty odd is going to happen."**

I felt the tension in the air...something was going down...wait and see...one of the Blackfoot performers hadn't shown up a quarter of the way through the dress rehearsal...I was pissed off like anyone else, yet a tiny piece inside of me wasn't... At that point I knew ...my duty had become clear. If we truly wanted to meet at Iitaohkanao'pi...this was the moment... this very moment was like the epitome of everything this project was about. I couldn't interfere and try to smooth things out, try to make things easier for everyone. Both sides needed to see it for themselves and realize where this came from. How weird that we found this out in the theatre, in the middle of the production. We were set to inspire children from all over Southern Alberta to become culturally aware and meet/introduce others in their respective ways of life, yet we almost couldn't do it ourselves.

* * *

Troy: There was talk of restaging the project for the Treaty 7 education conference. In my journal I found myself sounding a lot like Maria Campbell (in conversation with Linda Griffith about their process in The Book of Jessica). Why the hell would

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Challenging Understanding:

Tierno Bokar and the American Perception of Islam

by David Kornhaber. Photography by Pascal Victor/Max ppp

The extensive press surrounding Peter Brook's recent transfer of *Tierno Bokar* from Paris, the inaugural project of Columbia University's new Arts Initiative, repeatedly bills the production as "a theatrical exploration of the power of tolerance." This statement is not surprising given the lofty ambitions of the initiative. Its goal is "to enliven the arts on campus, connect students to the city's vibrant culture, link the arts to other fields of study, and make possible work that might not otherwise be seen," in the words of Columbia's official announcement of the program. That Brook should be the first artist to receive the initiative's semester-long residency makes sense; substitute society for campus and citizens for students in the above mission statement and you have a fairly accurate description of the work he and his dedicated team of actors at the International Centre of Theatre Creation have been tirelessly pursuing for decades.

But *Tierno Bokar* is not the heartfelt "plea for mutual tolerance and understanding" that Judith Shapiro, president of Columbia's sister school Barnard College, describes it as, or at least it is not simply that. Brook's company has focused in one way or another on issues of cultural tolerance since its foundation in 1971. The very structure and focus of the group has helped promote this mission. Drawing on a core ensemble of actors from eight countries, ranging from Belgium to Rwanda, Brook and his team have re-imagined Western classics like *King Lear* and adapted to the stage non-Western epics and sagas like *The Mahbharata*, often presenting the works side by side. The programming at Brook's Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord consistently reads like a primer course in world literature. More to the point, however, they have directly engaged some of the most pressing political issues facing modern Europe. From their theatre situated near the heart of Paris' Muslim quarter, Brook and his company have presented works dealing with Christian dogmatism and Muslim intolerance. In a country where the secular Catholic majority is still grappling with how to relate to a new and rapidly growing population of practicing Muslims, Europeans and North Africans can sit side by side and study both the best and worst of the two cultures. "A theatrical act cannot influence the political world," Brook told the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* when *Tierno Bokar* premiered in November, "but theatre allows us to open up to something beyond the daily horrors."

"It is precisely in this harsh and uncompromising look at Muslim Africa, though, that *Tierno Bokar* succeeds in creating space for understanding."

This is likely not the kind of dialogue that most in the Columbia community were expecting. Amid the flurry of newspaper articles and TV reports examining the links between radical Islam and terrorism in the years since the events of September 11, Americans have also seen an onslaught of attempts to promote a deeper understanding of one of the world's largest religions. Islamic art has begun to receive special exhibitions at places like the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and English translations of the Koran have moved to the front shelves of Barnes and Noble bookstores. Television studios have responded with documentaries like PBS' "Islam: Empire of Faith" or ABC's "The Hajj: One American Pilgrimage to Mecca," while *US News and World Report* featured a special issue entitled "Secrets of Islam" as recently as May 2005. For the most part, these attempts have been of a particularly sanguine nature: exploring the history and beliefs of the religion but offering little in the way of criticism or analysis, either from scholars or from practicing Muslims themselves. Though there's been a flurry of politically charged works dealing with America's war on terrorism, from the recent Broadway production of *Guantanamo* to Tim Robbins' play *Embedded*, the American public has for the most part seen nothing along the lines of Brook's challenging work, the kind of unflinching portrait of Middle Eastern political dysfunction offered in a play like Pentecost by British author David Edgar, or, on a more extreme level, the challenges to Muslim sexism put forth by assassinated Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh. The paradoxical result has been to make Islam seem more remote and foreign—an object to be studied but not a living belief system capable of enriching the minds and souls of millions of individuals and containing the same types of contradictions and shortcomings of any religion.

That is a perception surely challenged by *Tierno Bokar*. 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. It is precisely in this harsh and uncompromising look at Muslim Africa, though, that *Tierno Bokar* succeeds in creating space for understanding. It is a difficult and demanding play, but in its unflinching portrait of an unfamiliar social and religious landscape it ultimately shows how familiar faraway worlds can be.

The story of *Tierno Bokar* is drawn from West African writer Amadou Hampaté Bâ's *Life and Teaching of Tierno Bokar, the Sage of Bandiagara*, adapted for the stage by Marie-Hélène Estienne. It is not quite accurate to call the work a play. Brook terms it a "theatrical research," and this seems apropos. Brook famously started his career as an avowed disciple of Antonin Artaud, but since his sojourn in Africa and his famous international production of *The Mahabarata* he has renounced as untenable much of the master's teachings. Brook has kept with him, however, a disdain for the kind of conflict-centric, psychology-driven bourgeois theatre Artaud so despised. For the past three decades he has based many of his productions on non-Western epics which can seem sprawling and unfocused to the uninitiated. A panoply of archetypal characters appear and disappear with little seeming cause, the loosely linked-together narrative never cohering around a central conflict or rising to a single discernible climax; incidents simply seem to follow one another without much cause or connection.

Tierno Bokar is just such a story. We meet at the beginning the titular sage, a revered leader of Mali's Sufi population masterfully embodied with grace and poise by long-time Brook collaborator Sotigui Kouyaté. For a time we follow life in the master's ashram, though before long the story shifts to chronicling the experiences of a young disciple who enters the French colonial administration. From his adventures, we move on to a detailed history of a violent religious dispute that has divided the West African Muslim community for centuries — whether a prayer entitled "The Pearl of Perfection" should be recited eleven or twelve times in succession. Religious leaders on both sides of the debate appear; the squabbles of their followers — from the petty to the murderous—are presented in detail. Only towards the end of the tale do we return to *Tierno Bokar*, who isolates his own followers and his fellow clerics by switching allegiance from the camp of the twelve to that of the eleven.

"Brook achieves more for the notion of cross-cultural tolerance than any parable about prayer repetitions ever could."

To view this narrative simply as a call for religious tolerance is to simplify its story beyond recognition. Kouyaté's *Tierno Bokar* is a peaceful, tolerant man, but he does not advocate a resolution to the violent conflict between the elevens and the twelves. He knowingly isolates his own followers by switching allegiance on this all-important matter of doctrine and he is persecuted for this switch. Brook's *Tierno Bokar* is not an easy plea for tolerance but a dense and difficult work. 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." The performance, at first blush, consists of a sequence of disconnected vignettes populated by figures arguing vehemently over incomprehensible minutiae.

For a director of a more traditionalist bent, to leave one's audience so wholly in the dark would be unthinkable. A hook, an organizing conflict, an explanation of some sort would be essential. But in Brook's "theatrical research," none of this is provided, and ultimately none is needed. Brook presents to us not a synthesized meditation on a particular religious incident, but the unfiltered raw material of that story itself. The characters converse regularly in tribal dialects that are often left untranslated; they make reference to obscure facets of West African Islam which they do not explain; they adhere to customs of gift-giving and hospitality that seem utterly foreign.

"Brook presents Islam as a system of beliefs too profound to be simplified or interpreted, too important to become overly concerned with politics."

And yet, everything from the smallest interaction to the progression of the story itself seems to occur according to a strict internal logic. Brook's expert cast members navigate the demanding material with skill and aplomb, easily taking on the quiet reserve of religious devotees, the self-effacing obsequiousness of colonial functionaries, or the wild energy of thugs and mercenaries, as necessary. Though we many not be privy to their motives or histories, we have no trouble believing that each of the myriad characters presented throughout the piece has a unique psychology and a specific relationship to society at large. We are given a window into a foreign world, and though no more than a handful of actors appears on stage at any one time, they effortlessly conjure an entire teeming, vibrant society. We in the audience have no trouble imagining that the landscape of *Tierno Bokar* extends far beyond the sand-colored mats and single leafless tree that dominate the stage. We are like tourists deposited suddenly in the middle of some unknown country, and slowly, over time, we begin to discover the rules and customs that govern this strange land.

In this unadulterated presentation, Brook achieves more for the notion of cross-cultural tolerance than any parable about prayer repetitions ever could. Islam, in his depiction, is not made out to be simply a "religion of peace," as is so often the case when the American media seeks to offer a conciliatory picture of this grossly misunderstood practice. Like every religion in the world, it has its true believers and its hypocrites, its violent demagogues and its peaceful seekers. It seems, in this regard, a good deal like the religions we in the West know so well. Brook, Esteinne, and their dedicated cast manage to portray Islam as a complex and multi-layered system of beliefs that gives meaning to an extraordinary number of people. For some the issue of the prayer repetitions is a vehicle for demagoguery; for others, like *Tierno Bokar* himself, it is an opportunity for deep spiritual reflection. Kouyaté portrays Bokar as a man who does not move easily toward any decision, but he shows particular consideration on the issue of the prayers. Wandering slowly across the stage with all the focus and reserve of a Zen monk practicing walking meditation, Kouyaté makes the scenes of Bokar's silent spiritual contemplation some of the most compelling in the entire piece. The actor invokes an unmistakable spiritual authority in his portrait of Bokar, and whatever the nature of dilemma that so occupies Bokar's thoughts, we can easily believe it is of the utmost spiritual importance. Ultimately, that we do not know what is truly at stake in this debate is beside the point; we know it is an issue of great concern to the faithful with little relevance to non-believers. It is something of a marvel to see Islam depicted as a religion that inspires not merely violent martyrdom or fundamentalist politics but deep moments of wholly apolitical, intensely spiritual introspection.

Spirituality is an issue so often lost in today's cross-cultural discussions. Watch the daily American news and you would think the only thing Muslims ever thought about—when their thoughts are covered at all—was politics: elections, insurgencies, their relationship with the West. The fact is, faithful Muslims, like faithful people everywhere, have far greater concerns: namely, God. Brook presents Islam as a system of beliefs too profound to be simplified or interpreted, too important to become overly concerned with politics. It is not a "religion of peace," as it is so often coined. It is a religion: sometimes peaceful, sometimes tolerant, but always deeply meaningful to its believers.

This is something of a controversial message in Brook's adopted Paris home, where debates over France's treatment of its Muslim population rage daily. In Paris, *Tierno Bokar* was presented in repertory with *The Death of Krishna* (an excerpt from the larger *Mahabharata* production) and *The Grand Inquisitor*, taken from Dostoyevsky. The triptych was meant to depict religious intolerance in Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity and to avoid the impression that Brook's company meant to "make propaganda or criticize a religion," as the director told *Le Monde* in November of 2004. In its American premier, however, *Tierno Bokar* stands alone, and this seems fitting. For an American audience, the threat seems less that Brook's production be seen as a criticism of Islam than that it be seen as an exultation of the religion, as Columbia's press releases would have it. It is, in truth, neither. To treat such heated issues as religious devotion and religious intolerance on their own terms, without criticism or praise, is nothing short of a major achievement. It is the ultimate act of understanding and respect.

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may well be stories – both their structure and their fundamental purpose. We should be grateful that we have this platform from which to launch the delicate negotiations and explorations that go with the territory.

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Peter Copeman is currently founding Head of Performing Arts with ANU College at the Australian National University, running Canberra's first fully accredited post-secondary vocational theatre training courses, which received two major awards at the 2004 ACT Training Excellence Awards. He has had more than a dozen stage scripts professionally produced, and won the Playbox/Asialink Playwriting Award in 1996 and an AWGie Award in 2003. He has also written for television and radio, directed theatre (including artistic directorship of two professional companies), produced short films, and published scholarly articles. His research interests include cross-cultural and postcolonial performance, performance for museums and cultural institutions, contemporary Australian theatre, scriptwriting, and dramaturgy.

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we want to go through all of this again? It sounds so easy to do and fabulous to experience it from a spectator's point of view, but for us, it was brutal! But we have to go to that point again. It's worth it.

Lisa: You get so confused, in a community like Lethbridge, there's so much invisible racism, so much to be done. Here we were making this "dumb little show" about Napi that's never going to make any difference. Maybe we should have just helped pull desperate people off the street. But we can use the power of the stage, of the university institution, in a positive way to give weight to ideas from the First Nations tradition, and we can show one way of getting things done together. It's got to do something, I have to believe that.

Thanks to Shelley Scott and Edward Little for their comments on drafts of this article.

Lisa Doolittle is a professor in Theatre Arts at the University of Lethbridge, where her work focuses on intercultural performance, theatre for community, physical theatre, dance and movement in actor training. Her current research investigates ideas about citizenship, human rights and diversity through examining embodied practices like dance and government policies about cultural representation.

Troy is an interdisciplinary artist who explores first nations themes and issues in dance, theatre and visual art. He is a Masters candidate in dance at York University in Toronto, and is currently collaborating with Toronto dancer Terrill Maguire on a new project to be performed at the Pulse Youth Dance Conference and the World Dance Alliance both in Toronto later this year. Troy is Blackfoot from the Kainai Tribe in Southern Alberta, Canada.

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the vernacular is their jettisoning of classical oriental forbearance as an ideal strategy to survive immigrant life in Canada. They search for clarity and long to find their place in the Ontario landscape. In the gap of not being defined as francophone, Anglophone, or First Nations, they are redefining a hybrid identity in the Canadian context. I wonder if this play would have emerged from Montreal or Regina or Vancouver in some other form.

I identified with all these characters: the doctor suppressing unacceptable artistic leanings, the psychology major suppressing his need to make a unique musical statement, the narcissist's ambition to be successful in the white milieu, the anguish of a mixed race Asian-Canadian (half Scottish-half Chinese) child, the Chinese girlfriend seeking a white Canadian partner. I empathized with the longing for love that never comes from a ringing cell phone, the callous rejection of relationships as romantic hogwash, and the loyalty for family whose sacrifice provided a university education in Canada. As the play continued at a frantic and disorganized pace, I wished it could have evolved with a calmer, more coherent dramaturgy.

Perhaps the suicide at the centre of the story was too overriding in its impact for me to experience this play as comedy, despite the bantering, noisy, musical overtones. However, the review the following day in the Ottawa paper found *Banana Boys* to be "fresh and funny." The review was full of praise for a play reduced from two-and-a-half hours to a 90-minute format: it was "refreshing . . . multi-cultural malaise from a guy's point of view ... built on more than a just guzzling booze and chasing tail." Nowhere does the issue of racism make its way into the review, nor questions of visible minorities or immigrants—except for the comment that exotic novels by migrant writers like Woo are now emerging with Canadian voices.

Fu-GEN, like Teesri Duniya, fills a gap that is left by the mainstream consciousness of the founding cultural legacies and the unique, and painful, legacy of the First Nations. The company speaks for the easily marginalized or exoticized minorities. Partly it gives a rendering of the anguish and confusion evident when I speak with young immigrant children, even though this play focuses on young adults leaving the sheltered university enclave. Clearly this is part of a new genre of Canadian theatre, participating in this festival with the mainstream voices of *Cul-de-sac* (David MacIvor) or *Half Life* (John Mighton). Here is a new spin on life in the deep freeze of Canadian winter or the full bloom of humid summers, quite different from the Shaw festival, Stratford, Lepage, or successful contemporary theatre.

Did the audience feel that the anguish of the young immigrant was the real issue, I wondered as the audience thinned at intermission? These are the high stakes of artistic work, and the challenge for sophisticated dramaturgy in keeping the audience engaged. At any rate, an important work has begun as these voices enter mainstream consciousness, and fu-GEN is to be congratulated for pressing forward with this mandate.

Jaswant Guzder is a member of the Teesri Duniya board of directors, head of child psychiatry at the Jewish General Hospital, an associate professor at McGill University, a psychoanalyst, and a painter.

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institutions, the play could be performed in French. "Touring this show in Africa was very important for me, because I wanted to see the reaction of the African audience which can be pretty difficult, and which reacts. When something doesn't please them, they let you know. It's not like in Europe where people don't say anything even when they don't like it and applaud at the end out of respect for the performers. But in Africa there is nothing like that. When it's bad, it's bad. People tell you" (2).

Shakespeare has been and remains part of the ground on which the Boyokani Company invites encounters among diverse cultural traditions, with productions of *Othello* and *Hamlet* completed, a production of *Peines d'amour perdues* [*Love's Labours Lost*] scheduled for Congo-Brazzaville and Congo-Kinshasa for 2006, and a production of *Roméo et Juliette* scheduled for 2008. In the *Othello* of 1999, Othello is a white mercenary embraced by the kingdom of Congo in order to protect its power. His military skill and sophisticated weaponry prevail against the traditional arms of rivals. However, he is insensitive to the cultural norms of his adopted country, marrying a woman without asking permission of her father and ignoring seniority by naming a younger man as his ensign. Iago in turn draws upon racial stereotypes of sexual prowess to arouse the insecurity of Othello. An English version of this script is currently in preparation, and Limbvani has plans for a second *Othello*, the two versions possibly to be presented concurrently. In the second version, Iago is to be a white woman in love with a white Othello. When they arrive in Africa together, Iago finds Othello's abandonment of her for an African woman intolerable. Clearly Limbvani chooses, following the formulation of Alan Sinfield, to exploit the faultlines — in this case racial — he finds in the Shakespearean text. He similarly has plans for a Richard III, since, as he says, leaders who resemble *Richard III* are still to be found in Africa.

For Limbvani Shakespeare is an ally. If Shakespeare offers him themes he wishes to address and a substructure that can resist his tampering, he offers Shakespeare new insights and new audiences: "I wanted to propose to spectators another reading of this great classic masterpiece, to enable them to rediscover this play and to go once again in search of its truth" (Dossier). For Boyokani Company, such "truth" grows out of intercultural collaboration, a product of what both participants and spectators bring to the production.

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Former associate professor and chair of English and current member of the McGill Shakespeare and Performance Research Team, Leanore Lieblein was recently a visiting professor at the Institut d'Etudes Théâtrales (Université de Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle). She has published articles on early modern theatre, theatre archives, theatre criticism, and theatrical translation, and has written extensively on Francophone responses to Shakespeare. She has also directed medieval, Renaissance, and modern plays.

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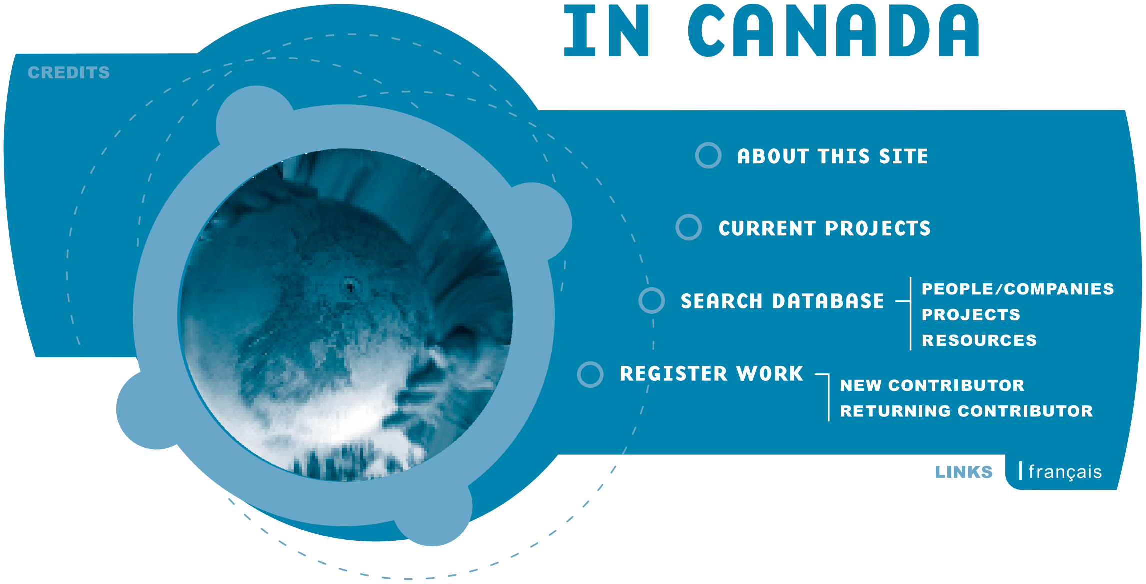
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