

University of Cape Town  
Faculty of Humanities

Generative Dramaturgy:  
A Strategy for Refocusing Directorial Intent  
in the Translation Phase  
of Play Development

by

**MICHAEL A. KIRCH**

KRCMIC002

Supervisor

**LIZ MILLS**

March 2008

THIS WRITTEN EXPLICATION IS IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE  
(DIRECTING PRACTICE)

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this explication from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

02/06/2008  
Date

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor for her countless consultation hours, her endless patience, her great guidance and her early morning sms-es.

I would also like to thank my mother for her unwavering love and support.

To my friends, thank you for distracting me. I made it in time after all!

To all my colleagues in the field, I look forward to working with you someday.

University of Cape Town

Generative Dramaturgy:  
A Strategy for Refocusing Directorial Intent  
in the Translation Phase  
of Play Development

<u>CONTENTS</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Abstract	1
Introduction	2
<b>CHAPTER 1: Directorial Practice and Dramaturgy</b>	5
Traditional Directing Practice and the Radical Director	6
Dramaturgical Play Development: The Adding of Value to the Process	7
Generative Dramaturgy and the Production Concept	9
The Radical Director with a Radical Text	11
<b>CHAPTER 2: Multicultural Theatre</b>	12
Cross-Cultural Theory	17
The Differential Hybridity of Commedia	21
<b>CHAPTER 3: Politicising the Mise-en-Scène</b>	24
The Plot-Character-Language Combination	26
The Sites of Intervention	27
Conclusion	34
Bibliography	36

## Abstract

This explication focuses on the director working collaboratively in the ensemble towards generating new material inspired by the play text in the staging of the play. The strategy employed to achieve this effect is referred to as generative dramaturgy. The aim is to foster co-ownership in the actors of the ensemble by developing their natural and instinctive responses during the translation phase. I specifically look at the South African theatre context which neither works in a culturally homogenous environment nor performs to a culturally homogenous audience, and where multicultural theatre is a familiar theatre practice.

In chapter one I compare a traditional directing practice as delineated by Robert Benedetti in his book *The Director at Work* (1985) to the notion of generative dramaturgy as outlined by Julian Meyrick in his article *Cut and Paste: The Nature of Dramaturgical Development in the Theatre* (2006) to look at a way to heighten the director's awareness of the subtle possibilities of working in consciously collaborative ways during the translation phase of directing.

In chapter two I discuss aspects of intercultural theory to illuminate the processes that are at work during an encounter between cultures, referring to the work of Gilbert and Lo (2002). I look at two models of cultural exchange to inform the process of multicultural theatre, and by comparing these models I examine the politics of negotiation between cultures, relevant to the nature and purpose of the intended production.

In chapter three I look at Patrice Pavis' (1992) understanding of mise-en-scène as a key notion in assisting the director in a generative dramaturgical role on a multicultural production. I discuss politicizing various theatrical elements to see how these inform a cultural reading of the mise-en-scène, and how this can affect the experiential impact of the process with the actors and of the reception by an audience.

Throughout this explication I relate my findings to my thesis production of Dario Fo's *One Was Nude and One Wore Tails* (N/T) and discuss how I propose to apply them.

## Introduction

In observing the craft of directing for stage as a Stanislavsky-based method, I am frequently struck by the emphasis that is placed on the director as the primary functionary of a stage production who, in a kind of pre-determined puppetry act, works with actors in realizing his vision. Equally, in my own experience of making theatre, actors often depend on the director for guidance to such a degree that their personal input is compromised in favour of clear-cut solutions offered by the director. The effect of this is often evident in the final product, where some productions seem to lack a *joie de vivre*, a spirit of some kind, or simply the full and undivided commitment of the actors involved.

This has led me to search for a working method which liberates the actor from an over-dependency on the director, and promotes and encourages creative ownership in each of the actors within a working ensemble. Traditional directing practice, based on the Stanislavsky method as outlined in Robert Benedetti's book *The Director at Work* (1985), used in conjunction with the notion of generative dramaturgy as delineated by Julian Meyrick in his article *Cut and Paste: The Nature of Dramaturgical Development in the Theatre* (2006), is a way to heighten the director's awareness of the subtle possibilities of working in consciously collaborative ways during the translation phase of directing.

The translation phase refers to the period of play development in which the text is translated into a living event for the stage, in other words the phase of putting it on the floor. During this phase the director can facilitate a process that allows and encourages creative expression and that elicits proposals from the actors, as well as generate new material inspired by the text. Such proposals and material can then be assessed in terms of the usefulness to the play and chosen proposals can be developed in such a way that they can be logically incorporated into the play. Essentially, it is an exploration of how a traditional directing method can be expanded on and supported by dramaturgical play development to enrich the translation phase, and eventually, the production. The research focuses specifically on the director's functioning within a creative ensemble.

A consciously collaborative working process suggests that the translation of a text into a

living event should engage the diversity of the working ensemble, as well as the context in which the production is staged. My line of reasoning is that especially in the South African theatre context a director is likely to work with a culturally diverse ensemble, as well as perform to a culturally diverse audience. The theatre practice that arises through encounters between the linguistic or ethnic groups of a multicultural society is known as multicultural theatre. I regard multicultural theatre as a familiar context for practice in South African theatre, and locate my own intended thesis production within this context. The study of multicultural theatre is located within the larger discourse of intercultural theory. Therefore, I discuss aspects of intercultural theory to illuminate the processes that are at work during an encounter between cultures, referring to Gilbert and Lo's article *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis* (2002). I look at two models of cultural exchange to inform the process of multicultural theatre, and by comparing these models I examine the politics of negotiation between cultures, relevant to the nature and purpose of the intended production.

Patrice Pavis' understanding of *mise-en-scène* in his book *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture* (1992) is a key notion in assisting the director in a generative dramaturgical role on a multicultural production. The *mise-en-scène*, in Pavis' terms, is concerned with the arrangement of the various elements of a stage production in time and space, and also acknowledges the cultural and artistic input of all the participants involved in the play development. The process of play development in the translation phase is enriched by the cultural diversity of the ensemble through recognising individual cultural heritage. I look at politicizing various theatrical elements to see how these inform a cultural reading of the *mise-en-scène*, and how this can affect the experiential impact of the process with the actors and the reception by an audience. The combination of Pavis' notion of *mise-en-scène* in conjunction with generative dramaturgical development, and an acute awareness of the process of cultural exchange that occurs, can heighten the experiential impact of the production.

Some directors may already have realised and adopted this working strategy, and probably consider it an important or perhaps even fundamental part of their directing practice. My aim is not to formulate a new working methodology for stage direction, but rather to find ways in which traditional directing practice, and my own directing practice, can be nuanced towards achieving conscious collaboration and cultural investment from all the participants involved. I

am suggesting a shift in the understanding of traditional directing practice to highlight the possibilities of collaborative participation during the translation phase, especially in a multicultural context. It is a suggestion that a director thinks more weightily about the possibilities of investing in the actor's initial creative expressions, and how these may inform his understanding of the play, his choices about characterisation and ultimately the performance itself. Even if these choices never manifest in the actual performance, they may add a subtle layering to the actor's work which may make him feel more confident in his final choices. This way of working not only affects the experience of the performers but also raises the possibility of a more pertinent conversation with the theatre audience.

Throughout this explication I relate my findings to my thesis production of Dario Fo's *One Was Nude and One Wore Tails* (N/T) and discuss how I propose to apply them.

# CHAPTER 1

## DIRECTORIAL PRACTICE AND DRAMATURGY

## Traditional Directing Practice and The Radical Director

In traditional directing practice the process of discovering the themes and meanings and the harvesting of creative ideas are determined by the director's preferred style of working, and thus his attitude to the text may be located "somewhere between the extremes of arrogant disregard and slavish obedience" (Benedetti 1985:13). To clarify, Benedetti outlines three potential approaches located in a director's attitude towards the text. In a conservative approach, the director adheres to the text as authority in order to faithfully transmit the full impact of the time and place in which it is located. The interest here is in an assumed 'exact re-creation' of the text which is independent of advances in time. In a liberal approach, the director explores the play's relevance to the present moment; this involves creative work around the text but the director is still bound to it by a sense of responsibility to the original, and this approach both "inspires and limits the director's purely personal creative impulses" (1985:15). Lastly, the radical approach suggests that the original inspires new creation altogether when the director goes beyond the interpretive mode and functions as a 'primary creator' (1985:15). This refers to creative or generative work that is done around the play text in the translation phase to suit a contemporary or specifically targeted audience.

Benedetti cites from various sources to support his argument that texts have multiple meanings which escape the author, and that endless variations on original themes can be explored by the director converting the playwright's experience into a parallel experience of his own. As he quotes from director Charles Marowitz,

Reiterating the author's text by faithfully interpreting it through actors and production seems to me merely the equivalent of semaphore. Any play worth its salt must conjure up a parallel play in the director's imagination with which he infects his actors, thereby producing endless variations on the original theme. (Benedetti 1985: 16)

He concludes that each text invites a particular attitude from the director, who as a translator in the process of text translation makes "meaning and style available to a particular audience within particular theatrical circumstances" (1985:17). The approach will also be qualified by whether the dramatic text is being examined before or apart from stage production, or as a constituent part of the production.

Considering my own working approach as closest to that of Benedetti's radical director, my interest in the translation phase is to pick up on the director's functioning as a 'primary creator' and to expand on it in terms of dramaturgical play development as outlined by Julian Meyrick, in the pursuit of more detailed collaborative participation between the director and his actors during play development. While appreciating the function of the radical director, it is important for me to move away from a working method that is only responsive to the director's 'purely personal creative impulses' as a 'primary creator' and, particularly during the translation phase, shift his function to that of a facilitator of the actors' creative impulses during the creation of any new material. The interest is here that it is not only the director's imagination that is affected into creating new material, but that the actors and the director both share and collaborate on ideas and proposals. It is through this dramaturgical approach, specifically generative dramaturgy as an active, collaborative process which focuses on generating new material around the play text, that I see the possibility of enhancing the translation phase of production towards its full potential.

### **Dramaturgical Play Development: The Adding of Value to the Process**

Dramaturgy denotes the "multi-faceted study of a given play: its author, content, style, and interpretive possibilities, together with its historical, theatrical, and intellectual background" (Cardullo 1995:4). There are various approaches that a director with dramaturgical interests might consider during the development of a play text. Adaptive or negotiative dramaturgy deals with questions regarding the authenticity of the stage version of either canonical play texts or stage adaptations of classic prose fiction (e.g. the novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charles Dickens or Jane Austen). This overlaps with Benedetti's notion of the conservative director who ensures a faithful transmission of the text by strict adherence to it. Although valuable in conserving forms that, for instance, have ceased to exist, Benedetti acknowledges the perils of this approach as being that the director "considers [his] responsibility towards the text above [his] responsibility towards the audience" (1985:14), compromising the possible experiential impact that the performance might have. The production may seem outdated to a contemporary audience. Classical dramaturgy, also referred to as production dramaturgy, involves mainly the "literary reshaping of a text to make it suitable for a contemporary

audience” (Meyrick 2006:274). This is in line with Benedetti’s concept of the liberal director who explores the play’s relevance to the present moment through creative work prompted by his “personal creative impulses” (Benedetti 1985:15). However, where the liberal director stands as an authority of creative impulse, production dramaturgy allows for the possibility of creative impulses to be explored by actors during the process.

Generative dramaturgy, the central focus of my research, has to do with “extensively developing essential play text ideas” (Meyrick 2006:274) by imagining sequences of action based on the information from the text, and creating the principles of an imagined stage world which are governed by their own “rules” (Meyrick 2006: 274). Specifically, generative dramaturgy concerns itself with possible conditions for an intervention into a text - meaning anything from text edits, translations, cuts, or additional imagined sequences or scenes (i.e. new material) that may arise from the generative work and improvisations during the translation phase. Similar to the concept of the radical director who goes beyond the interpretive mode and acts as a primary creator, generative dramaturgy in the collaborative work of the ensemble not only concerns itself with the creation of new material, but also with the careful regulation of the inconsistencies of the generated material in relation to the original text, and how these can be resolved during the creation of an imagined stage world.

Anne Bogart and Tina Landau have embraced these very principles in their *Viewpoints* in a search for “creating viscerally dynamic moments of theatre with actors and other collaborators” (2005:5). The *Viewpoints* look to a collaborative way of working on play development that does not “depend on the hierarchical domination of one person” and aims for “discovery rather than staging what has been decided beforehand” (2005:18). The value of the actor is acknowledged as co-creator in a dynamic value-adding process in which “there is no good or bad, right or wrong – there is only possibility and, later in the process, choice” (2005:19). Specifically applicable is the *Viewpoint* of Kinesthetic Response which concerns itself with the actor’s “immediate, uncensored response to an external event” (Bogart 2005:43). My interest in this research is the use of generative dramaturgy to elicit that instinctive reaction from the actor, and to encourage ownership of the part in the actor by allowing him to create new material that is inspired by the text.

## Generative Dramaturgy and The Production Concept

In traditional directing practice, textual analysis is the job of director, who spends many solitary hours gathering information on the play, its history, its context, its author and previous stagings. Based on the director's priorities and values in relation to the play and its "world" he then articulates a production concept. On the one hand, the production concept must be seen as an absolute necessity for the design and production team to guide their efforts in realizing a production, but on the other hand a too solid concept can inhibit the creative expression of the actors, or immediately streamline their responses to suit the production concept at the expense of harvesting possible proposals precipitated by their own natural, inherently cultural responses. The production is likely to carry the "theatrical authorship" (Cardullo 1995:9) of the director in the sense that

...we often see productions of plays that bear the names of authors, but that in fact carry the interpretive definitions of other "authors," namely directors. This other authorship, this meta-creation of the playtext through production, makes the production itself into a singular, sovereign work of theatre art. (Cardullo 1995:9)

Benedetti traces the development of a production concept back to an evolutionary process springing from the director's responses when reading the play and reflecting the director's values regarding the play. While these values are certainly important in terms of the director making the choice to direct the play in the first instance, they speculatively point to the director as sole author of the production concept, which potentially disregards the actors as a source of valuable information. Subsequent generative work that occurs during the translation process in such an instance is in a sense confined to the limits of a unilaterally conceived production concept under the authorship of that director. This suggests that irrespective of the cultural make-up of the ensemble, a dominant director's style is likely to prevail in the production, rendering it more as an identifiable or recognisable trademark of the director, and less as a unique and compelling contribution by the actors and director of that ensemble. I am not by any means saying that a prepared director with a well thought-out plan is a bad one, quite the contrary, the profession is based on continuous problem solving and a good director should always be as prepared as possible. My contention is that the intimate relationship between director and text as a private and exclusive affair runs the risk of restricting the

possibilities for unlooked for nuances during play development.

Undoubtedly, it is important for the director to have a production concept and to provide his actors with a secure sense of that concept, albeit in the form of a central image or piece of music that can be referred to. However, the origin of that concept in Benedetti's practice is too rigid for my liking, and seems not to have been exposed to the possibilities that the cultural plurality in a production might offer. In a generative dramaturgical approach, the production research can be opened up to more possibilities through the collaborative generation of information, which will inevitably be streamlined within the collective conscious of the group by virtue of the fact that each opinion and proposal is taken up and validated within the group. This means actively involving the actors in the search for and the expression of a production concept. Matters that seem more relevant or issues that strike more pertinence can be given priority investment relating to the all important question 'what is this play about?'. The director can become a facilitator of discovery, rather than the author of a preconceived idea. The final production concept thus gains co-ownership in the group and through facilitation by the director is determined either by group consensus or evocation during the generative proceedings. Compared with one another, Benedetti's radical directing approach cultivates an original directorial interpretation, whereas generative dramaturgy as part of the directorial process cultivates an original, collaborative way of staging altogether.

For my thesis production *One Was Nude and One Wore Tails* I have decided on the broad production concept of 'nothing is what it seems'. I have used this concept to sketch out a set, plan a way of approaching rehearsals, and map out a selection of exercises that I deem appropriate and useful to the process and style of the production as I envision it. However, for the most part I also accept that, as many ideas as I have noted and as much planning as I have done with regard to the concept, these ideas might evolve or change when presented to my actors or the set and costume designers. I am prepared to leave it open for discussion during play development, however not without restriction. In my rehearsal plan, I have allocated eight of twenty-eight rehearsal days to generative dramaturgy, which in the case of this production also includes the translation of parts of the text into Afrikaans. During this time, I identify my role during play development as a facilitator, and my relationship with the individual actors is expected to become more intimate. After the allocated time, when

proposals have been discussed and selected for use, I resume my role as director in order to manage the rehearsals towards a coherent run.

### **The Radical Director with a RADICAL TEXT!**

To pursue my interest in the notion of a radical director facilitating generative dramaturgy, I would like to investigate how play development can be enriched by a dramaturgical process by examining Meyrick's positioning of the play text. Apart from a play text having a function "which gives it its identity" (2006:272), Meyrick also sees it as a "device for turning information into experience" (2006:271). He points out that play texts "live at a remove from their ultimate meaning" and that

The space, the gap, the structural silence that surrounds the play text, allows it its infinitely variable place in the world of practical performance, i.e. it allows it to be endlessly reinterpreted under particular performance conditions. (2006:272)

He remarks about the nature of the play text: "the play text not only *is* something, it *does* something. And what it does, to whom and in what fashion, is as much part of the dramaturgical process as the play itself" (2006:272). In response to this, Patrice Pavis' notion of the play text is that it is also a carrier of culture in that it is "much more than a series of words: grafted on to it are ideological, ethnological and cultural dimensions" (1992:155).

We cannot simply translate a linguistic text into another [text]; rather we confront and communicate heterogeneous cultures and situations of enunciation that are separated in space and time". (1992:136)

Pavis is speaking of the possibility of a specific cultural resonance that the text might have for an individual, which may influence or determine the way in which it is translated to a stage image, and eventually how it is received by an audience. This opens up the notion that the diverse cultural backgrounds of the actors are integral factors in facilitating a value-adding process, especially in the multicultural South African context where the theatre neither works in, nor performs to, a culturally homogenous environment. There is high value in seeking out the confrontation of cultures during the dramaturgical development of multicultural theatre, rather than avoiding it. But how does multicultural theatre come about, and how does it locate itself within the discourse of cross-cultural theatre?

## CHAPTER 2

# MULTICULTURAL THEATRE

For the purpose of this discussion I have appropriated the term cross-cultural theatre from Gilbert and Lo's article to denote the study of a theatre practice that "entails a process of encounter and negotiation between different cultural sensibilities" (2002:31). The 'crossing' of cultures can mean either a traversing from one culture to another across historical and geographical features, implying the appropriating of a different culture for performance, or it can refer to a hybridisation that occurs after the encounter of two or more cultures. The term 'culture' is used specifically in the context of theatre practice and refers to sets of national values that include the features of language, vernacular, rituals, behavioural signs and embodied techniques of performance. The study of multicultural theatre and the greater concept of cross-cultural theatre are both located within the umbrella discourse of intercultural theory.

Depending on the degree of 'crossing', cross-cultural theatre takes on many forms of exchange that result in varying forms of theatre practice. Cross-cultural 'exchange' refers to the notion of an encounter of cultures that results in a degree of hybridisation on the part of either culture. The degree of hybridisation is relative to the purpose and intent of the 'exchange' in cross-cultural theatre. Gilbert and Lo suggest three main categories of cross-cultural theatre: intercultural, postcolonial and multicultural theatre (2002:32), each categorised by the degree of hybridisation that occurs. I shall briefly look at these, paying particular attention to multicultural theatre as the subject of interest for my thesis production.

### Intercultural Theatre

The tradition of intercultural theatre produces a hybrid derivative after an "intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions" (2002:36). An immediate association with this kind of theatre is the work of Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine and Eugenio Barba. The performance traditions utilised are usually "traceable to distinct cultural areas" (Pavis 1996:8) but the hybridisation that occurs is often so progressive that the original forms can no longer be distinguished. This kind of theatre tries to "explore and critique alternative forms of citizenship and identity across and beyond national boundaries" (Gilbert & Lo 2002:36) and is experimental by nature. The intent of this kind of theatre is the purposeful amalgamation of

specific cultures to form a non-specific culture. The 'crossing' happens selectively across many cultures to inspire a new performance culture.

### Postcolonial Theatre

Postcolonial theatre embraces "a range of theatre texts and practises that have emerged from cultures that have been subjected to Western imperialism" (Gilbert & Lo 2002:35). The intent of this kind of theatre lies in the assumption of some kind of interpretive encounter between differently empowered cultural groups which takes up a political discourse, whether evident or implied. It takes up elements of the home culture (that of ex- or neo-colonisation) which it employs from an indigenous perspective, thereby giving rise to a mixture of languages, dramaturgies and performance processes.

### Multicultural Theatre

Multicultural theatre arises through cross-cultural encounters between the linguistic or ethnic groups of a multicultural society where multiculturalism is an officially enforced government policy. These performances usually utilise several languages and perform to a bi- or multicultural spectatorship. It is seen as a "grassroots response to the lived reality of cultural pluralism", and is "premised on ideals of citizenship and the management of cultural/ethnic difference" (2002:36). This kind of theatre operates only when multiculturalism is endorsed by the political system and cooperation between cultural or national communities is encouraged and managed officially. References in published research often allude to Canada and Australia as prime examples, although countries like Malaysia and South Africa are undoubtedly new breeding grounds for this form of theatre.

Patrice Pavis significantly notes that countries like Germany and France have been slow in exhibiting trends in multicultural theatre because there is no official enforcement by these countries' public authorities (Pavis 1996:8). Gilbert and Lo point out that in the United States and Britain "multiculturalism remains largely a community-generated consciousness that has come to influence state management" (Gilbert & Lo 2002:33). An assumption one might have is that because these are first-world countries, and because of their power and influence on the

world market, their multicultural policies should be advanced, if not superior, to perhaps less 'sophisticated' countries. This would equally mean that multicultural theatre would be a state sanctioned endeavour in which specifically local theatre can be promoted. This, however, is not always the case.

Gilbert and Lo speak of a key structural difference in the multicultural policies of Australia and the U.S. in that the American politicisation of multiculturalism has been from the bottom up. In other words, it has been generated by minority groups who regard themselves as excluded from mainstream American culture in response to the multicultural policies that are in place and actually affirm that exclusion. In Australia however, as in South Africa, multiculturalism is part of the official government policy, and is thus enforced by a top-down political strategy that aims to improve the relations of ethnic groups within the national culture, as well as manage cultural difference. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa as adopted on 8 May 1996 speaks of the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities whose functions it is

- (a) to promote respect for the rights of cultural, religious and linguistic communities
  - (b) to promote and develop peace, friendship, humanity, tolerance and national unity among cultural, religious and linguistic communities, on the basis of equality, non-discrimination and free association; and
  - (c) to recommend the establishment or recognition, in accordance with national legislation, of a cultural or other council or councils for a community or communities in South Africa.
- (RSA Constitution 1996:101)

Gilbert and Lo further distinguish between small "m" multicultural theatre and big "M" Multicultural theatre. A common feature that distinguishes small "m" multicultural theatre from big "M" is the use of 'blind casting' as a commitment to social pluralism. This kind of theatre deliberately does not draw attention to cultural difference among performers, or to the tension between the play text and the production content, by casting actors irrespective of race. While "such casting opens up employment opportunities for minority-group actors, it is a politically conservative practice that gives the appearance of diversity without necessarily confronting the hegemony of the dominant culture" (2002:33). In support of this notion Benny

Ambush considers that “colour-blind casting does not allow actors to bring what is special about them to their roles but rather whitewashes aesthetically different people, inviting spectators to think that racial and/or cultural specificities do not matter” (Ambush in Gilbert 2002:33). In the pursuit of generative dramaturgical play development as outlined in my study this may be very unbeneficial for the actor who adopts an alien culture, and the performance may seem disjointed and incoherent. It is also an unsuitable way of managing cultural difference in that it may lead to discord amongst the represented cultures. The choice to cast blind must be seen in context of the intention of the production. In the university context, the intention of blind casting may seem an appropriate practice for the purposes of examining the actor, or simply due to a shortage of a specific cultural demographic to fill the part.

Big “M” Multicultural theatre promotes cultural diversity by accessing different cultural expressions and participating in the “symbolic space of the national narrative” (2002:34). This is a familiar practice in South African, as well as Canadian, Australian and Malaysian theatres. Gilbert and Lo distinguish between ghetto- community- and migrant theatre as types of theatre practice that fall under this category. Ghetto theatre e.g. Joe Barber<sup>1</sup>, is defined by a tendency to be monocultural: it is created for and by a specific ethnic community, using mainly the languages of that community. Community theatre is characterised by social engagement and is a form of cultural activism committed to bringing about change in a specific community. It generally incorporates a range of languages, cultural resources and performance traditions drawn from that community. Migrant theatre involves cross-cultural negotiation at production as well as reception level because it performs to a culturally plural audience, and is usually concerned with “narratives of migration and adaptation, often using a combination of ethno-specific languages to denote cultural in-between-ness” (Gilbert & Lo 2002: 34).

My adaptation of N/T locates itself within the big “M” multicultural theatre bracket, specifically in migrant theatre as the chosen form. The use of local languages and the mix of vernacular are purposefully aimed at resisting a monocultural representation, and specific choices have been made relating to race representations to contextualise the production in a

---

<sup>1</sup> “*Joe Barber 4 the People*” ran at the Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, from 4 Dec 2007 – 1 Mar 2008

South African setting. During the process of play development I anticipate encounters between cultural sensibilities of the ensemble, and need to look to manage these as they become apparent. In chapter 3 I address the reading of cultural encounters in the creation of the *mise-en-scène*.

On a larger scale though, there is another aspect of cultural encounter between the source of an originally foreign text, in this case Italian, and its performance and process in a local South African context. This denotes the ‘crossing’ of cultures over historical and geographical factors towards hybridisation. The hybridisation that is anticipated in this production is one that is inspired by the original culture and its performance traditions, but does not aim to appropriate these. Intercultural theory provides a theoretical basis for analysing the process of a cultural exchange, and to what degree or for what purpose hybridisation occurs by means of models of cultural exchange.

### **Cross-Cultural Theory**

Gilbert and Lo have identified that although the western fascination with the non-western performing arts has intensified over the last three decades, and despite its trendiness, “there is not yet an integrated body of theory that sets up the perimeters of the field of cross-cultural theatrical practice” and overall the terrain is a contested one, where “terminologies are woolly, to say the least” (2002:32). Since cross-cultural work of any nature always presumes to be geographically located, the culture in question should be looked at in relation to its geographical position as well as its position in the globalised world. This has a bearing on the ease or difficulty with which one culture might access another. Thus, a general or abstracted theory of interculturalism across borders is understood to be a contentious issue.

There is also a biased “Western universalism” (Pavis 1996:12) that renders established theories of cross-cultural exchange problematic because “what dominates critical and institutional interest in cross-cultural experimentations has been the encounters of the West and ‘the rest’ ” (Gilbert & Lo 2002:32). Gilbert and Lo point out that even Pavis is guilty of this bias, evident in the chaptering of the *Intercultural Performance Reader* (Pavis 1996) where part II is entitled “Intercultural Performance from the Western Point of View” and part

III is entitled “Intercultural Performance from Another Point of View”. This perpetuates the idea that interculturalism has been overdetermined by the West and there is a tendency to compare the West to ‘the rest’.

Patrice Pavis’ metaphorical hourglass model of intercultural exchange is frequently referenced in research to formalise the process. In this model, the upper end of the hourglass represents the foreign or source culture “which is more or less codified and solidified in diverse anthropological, sociocultural or artistic modelizations” (1992:4). In the case of N/T the text has been translated into English, but the names and settings it provides are Italian. Thus, however affected by the translation, the Italian culture and its performance traditions can be seen as the source culture. From the upper end the source culture is filtered through various stages and processes to the target culture, namely the ‘recipients’ of the cultural exchange. The filters, put in place by the target culture, ultimately determine how the “grains of culture” trickle through the filters and are rearranged into a new formation of grains at the bottom end of the hourglass, so as to be understandable and/or recognisable to the target culture. The South Africans that take part in the production process, as well as the audience, are in this case the target culture.

Although this model is very useful in understanding the mechanisms of intercultural transfer, it is problematic for me in two fundamental ways. Firstly, the text of *One Was Nude and One Wore Tails* has already undergone a translation from the original Italian, and leaves the notion of a source culture somewhat removed. Secondly, it speaks of either source or target culture as monocultures, ignoring the challenge presented by the South African context. South African culture comprises a variety of ethnic cultures, each with their own set of cultural values and performance traditions. South Africa also hosts a wider array of African cultures, as it is considered a home to a range of African nationals, the obvious being its immediate neighbours Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and some as far as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hence, the notion of a ‘target culture’ also leaves much room for discussion.

Gilbert and Lo’s assessment of the hourglass is that it deals mainly with the aesthetics of performance. They compare this process to an alimentary one, where the source culture is

taken in as 'food'. This privileges the target culture and presumes that there is mutual understanding and benefit between the source and target. In their critique, the hourglass does not really account for "alternative and more collaborative forms of intercultural exchange" (2002:41), nor for "blockage, collisions and retroaction as either sites of intervention or resistance" (2002:43). The main criticism is that it reduces cultural differences to easily absorbable essences for the target culture, which assumes a level playing field between the source and its target, resulting in an unproblematic exchange of culture. The model does not leave space for the relativity with which the source and target encounter each other based on their location, knowledge of- and access to the other culture.

Gilbert and Lo argue for a "process of political negotiation" (2002:43) that is inherent in a cross-cultural encounter and that must be sought out. Put bluntly, where Pavis' hourglass perceives of intercultural exchange as a process *from* source culture *to* target culture, they suggest quite eloquently that it is a two-way process that happens *between* source cultures A and B, resulting in the target culture in between the two sources as a "hyphenated third space separating and connecting different peoples" (2002:44). The position of the target culture is not fixed, but shifts along a continuum depending on whatever factors influence the exchange process. This model encourages mutuality, and is characterised by gain and loss for both sources. It rests on a notion of "differentiated hybridity" (2002:45) which recognises the relativity with which the cultures encounter one another, based also on their location and the privileging effects of globalisation. In their view the hourglass does not account for the "benefits of globalisation and the permeability of cultures and political systems [that are] accessed differentially for different communities and nations" (2002:42).

In the Gilbert and Lo model, the N/T text (and its Italian values) is considered source culture A, while the South African context is considered source culture B. "Even if the target culture is aligned with one of the source cultures, both partners still undergo a similar process of filtration and hybridisation, however differently experienced" (2002:45). Since in this case, my production of N/T takes place in the domain of source culture B and the aim of my project is to purposefully target that specific culture, the target culture will be located closer to source B's end of the continuum. If, for instance, my interest were a faithful adherence to the text and an authentic reproduction of the time and place through adaptive dramaturgy, or according to

Benedetti's conservative director, the target would be located as close as possible to the Italian source culture A.

The notion of differentiated hybridity locates the target culture closer to either source A or B depending on needs and purpose of the production. Although in this case the target will be located closer to South African source culture B, according to the Gilbert and Lo model it will always be in a dynamic relationship of negotiating the differences and the similarities of the two sources A (Italian) and B (South African). While eloquently formulating the exchange between cultures, this model likewise proves to be somewhat problematic in that the South African context brings with it the unique situation where 'source culture B' is itself an unstable term of reference, since our adaptation of Fo aims to take on multiple cultural levels within the South African context, for instance cultures within the 'coloured', 'white' and 'black' racial groupings. My application of either model of cultural exchange will be mediated, since the notion of source culture/ source culture A refers to a (translated) text, and target culture /source culture B refers to people who will make decisions about the text.

The two models - of either *from source to target culture* as per Gilbert and Lo, or *between source cultures A and B* as per Pavis - vary in practicality, but for every degree of inaccuracy they also present a finer degree of engagement with the politics and possibilities involved in the process, and on the whole they illuminate some vital aspects of the functioning of cross-cultural theatre. The application of these models is dependant on the nature and purpose of the production in question, as well as the context and location of its performance. Either one or the two together may prove to be a useful device for analytical purposes.

To give an example of how Gilbert and Lo's model of cross-cultural transfer may give rise to a "differential hybridisation" on a small scale, I shall discuss how I propose to adapt a trademark of Dario Fo's body of work, the *Commedia dell'Arte*, to my thesis production N/T. As director, the play text invites a particular attitude from me. My research and analysis of the play and knowledge of Dario Fo's body of work locate it strongly within the tradition of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. My intention is to adopt principles of *Commedia style* to heighten the theatrical and textural landscape of my production in its local staging. Thus, I intend to borrow from the tradition of the *Commedia dell'Arte* on the principle of Gilbert and Lo's

called “Lazzi”<sup>2</sup> that could be introduced at any time during the action to “enliven, develop and sometimes save a scene” (Grantham 2000:15). It is a gag of either a physical nature or a word play, and often has nothing to do with the development of the plot (our production is almost certainly likely to have an Eskom gag prepared in the event of ‘load shedding’). In the N/T production, the gags are likely to extend beyond the actual performance space of the theatre (cf. Space p23) with actors appearing in the parking lot or theatre foyer before and/or after the show.

The mask is also a fundamental characteristic of the Commedia dell’Arte, but not a necessity in the Commedia style. More important than the actual mask is the effect it might have on the physical stance and behaviour of the actor. I later discuss how costume can also be a form of ‘masking’ the actor and of activating specific physical behaviour. Grammelot<sup>3</sup> and the notion of the distortion or devaluation of the spoken language is also a feature that N/T is likely to exhibit. The visual language and the physicality of the body are factors that will be heightened to counteract this feature of linguistic communication breakdown.

These features of the Commedia style are expected to be visible and evident to different degrees in the N/T production. Our appropriation of the Commedia dell’Arte takes the form of borrowing from the characteristics, but not necessarily investing in the performance technique. Generative dramaturgy as a process will be used to discover to what extent these characteristics can be developed, and to what extent they are useful in our staging of the play.

Understanding theoretically the implications of ‘crossing’ the Italian culture and its performance traditions with the respective South African cultures, and deciding where to locate its specificity is knowledge that can be gained from the application of the models of cross-cultural exchange. However, equally important to analyzing and planning the action is testing it on the floor. Dramaturgy is not only concerned with the approach to play text analysis, but also with the regulation of dramaturgical problems as the text is “deployed in time and space on the living stage” (Meyrick 2006:275) during the translation phase. Through

---

<sup>2</sup> A piece of comic business of the Commedia dell’Arte; a rehearsed or improvised gag.

<sup>3</sup> An unclear use of language of the Commedia dell’Arte in which the impression is given that communication is expressed through the correct use of intonations; gibberish.

“differential hybridity”, meaning I accept an influence to some greater or lesser degree without the aim of reconstructing the original.

### **The Differential Hybridity of Commedia**

In his book *Playing Commedia* (2000) Barry Grantham makes a distinction between the traditional Italian Commedia dell’Arte, which he now calls a “defunct theatrical form” (2000:5) and its modern descendant simply known as Commedia, a short-hand definition of a performance inspired by the historical Commedia dell’Arte, but not necessarily making use of the traditional characters or scenarios of the Commedia dell’Arte. Essentially, even a canonical play such as a Shakespeare could be done in a Commedia *style*, which is inspired to whatever degree by the original tradition of the Commedia dell’Arte. An important characteristic is that the emotion played, even if through caricature, be as honest and sincere as possible.

The characteristics of the Commedia style are a broad and non-naturalistic way of performing in which the visual element is given as much emphasis as the spoken word. The spoken language is accompanied by exaggerated visual gestures, which is a tactic employed by original Commedia dell’Arte players who performed in sometimes inaudible open-air environments. The Commedia style involves the use of multiple skills and natural talents of the performer, including the ability to play musical instruments. Skills in mime, dance and acrobatics are also useful to the Commedia style of performance. Talents that the performers bring to the floor are utilized and developed for performance. These are ideal conditions for generative dramaturgy.

The Commedia style makes use of direct address to the audience, whether in monologues or short asides. An actor might ask an audience member to indulge in the imaginary creation of a stage setting that does not exist. The actor might also seek empathy or encourage backchat or heckles from the audience during a scene. The style is of an improvisatory nature and keeps audiences engaged in the action by making use of improvised and rehearsed gags. A Commedia dell’Arte performance usually employs a stock of various visual and verbal gags

generative dramaturgical play development the intention is to bring what is culturally specific about the actor to the table, or rather, to the floor. The mise-en-scène provides the director with the possibility of negotiating a satisfactory approach to the two models of cultural transfer, and effectively translating the play text into a performed event.

## CHAPTER 3

# POLITICISING THE MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Stanislavsky pointed out the value of *mise-en-scène* in play development and recognised that if the ideas of the *mise-en-scène* were forced upon the actors by the director, they would struggle to “find their own inner justification for their on-stage actions” (Merlin 2003:15). *Mise-en-scène* allows for exploration that brings what is particular about the actor to the performance, and where the *mise-en-scène* may often be predetermined in a traditional directing approach as described by Benedetti, with generative dramaturgy it may allow for discoveries on the floor prompted by the cultural specificity of the individual actor.

Patrice Pavis explores *mise-en-scène* as a possibility to enunciate the translation of the text on to stage, this “enunciation depend[s] on the way in which the surrounding culture focuses attention and determines the way characters (as carriers of the fiction) and actors (who belong to a theatrical tradition) express themselves” (1992:142). *Mise-en-scène* as a practical process is the “possibility for a stage enunciation, leading to a fresh text; it is always in a state of becoming, since it does no more than point the way, preparing the text for utterance while adopting a wait-and-see attitude” (1992:30). Taking Pavis’ notion that the text is a carrier of culture into consideration, and adopting the collaborative nature of generative dramaturgy, the *mise-en-scène* offers the possibility of creative discovery in the translation phase through a trial-and-error way of working. With an awareness of the cultural exchange processes that are involved, and through dramaturgical regulation of inconsistencies of the text and its deployment on a stage, one can search for a suitable and satisfactory degree of “differentiated hybridity” as suggested by Gilbert and Lo - again, depending on the nature and purpose of the production.

*Mise-en-scène* allows for exploration and testing to see how, as Pavis puts it, the source culture confronts the target culture and allows for several possible interpretations at a “discourse parallel to the text” (Pavis 1992:36). *Mise-en-scène* is not the transformation of a dramatic text into performance, but rather the testing of the text in dramatic action. The director in his function still has to provide a strong sense of action in terms of the character’s objectives, and have a firm understanding of the geography of the set to establish relationships

and action. *Mise-en-scène* conceived of in this way is useful to the director who wants to facilitate a process that allows for unexpected stage arrangements to emerge which capture the action in unanticipated ways. In a sense, the *mise-en-scène* not only makes provisions for action, but also makes provision for cultural activity. The key to the functioning of the *mise-en-scène* in this way lies in the director's regulation of dramaturgical issues as they arise. Meyrick raises some key questions around regulating these dramaturgical concerns:

What is the nature and meaning of the imagined stage world?  
What is the end purpose of the imagined stage world?  
How do the sense elements of the stage world order themselves?  
How does the audience convert what it sees and hears into what it knows?  
(Meyrick 2006:275)

*Mise-en-scène* and dramaturgical development are both processes to conscientiously develop a play text through a value-adding process, and are defined both through the production, as well as through the reception by an audience. *Mise-en-scène* "as a structural system exists only when received and reconstructed by a spectator. The goal is not one of reconstructing the aims of the director, but of understanding, as a spectator, the system elaborated by those responsible for the production" (Pavis 1992:25). Particularly in the multicultural theatre context *mise-en-scène* should not just be concerned with the management of the aesthetics of the performance during the translation phase, but with the politics of how the aesthetic is achieved. Meyrick and Gilbert and Lo respectively offer suggestions for the director to politicise the creation of the *mise-en-scène* by closely analysing the governing structure of the play, and by a detailed scrutiny of the cultural activity inherent in theatrical sign systems.

### **The Plot-Character-Language Combination**

Meyrick cites the three critical Aristotelian categories of plot, character and language that can arguably be found in every play text (2006:278). He defines plot as the sequence of events in a play text, or anything which maintains tension in time, and keeps an audience looking and thinking. Character is seen as the accumulative development of thought or feeling in time that allows a deepening of understanding of what is taking place, and language as the verbal, visual or behavioural medium by which coherence is expressed. The dramaturg's function, and in this case the dramaturgical function of the facilitating director, is to "distinguish how

these features are present in particular play texts and how they are played off against each other to achieve a total tonal effect or sensibility” (Meyrick 2006:278). The relationship between these aspects is particularly important to keep in balance when adapting the text to a new cultural setting or in translating the text into another language, as is the case with N/T.

The balance of a plot, character, and language cannot be determined by formula or prescription. The director has to have an acute sense of the structure and rhythm of the original text, and how these three aspects are brought into balance. *Mise-en-scène* provides practical control to experiment with these possibilities to activate the play as not only a source of information, but as Meyrick puts it, “a device for turning information into experience” (2006:271). The process of dramaturgical development searches for a new and more effective cross-functional management of these aspects that, through experimentation, and taking cultural plurality into account, results in a more vivid stage life for the play text.

### **The Sites of Intervention**

Gilbert and Lo have identified so-called sites of intervention (2002:46) as a means to politicise the *mise-en-scène*, in which theatrical sign systems like language, space, the body, and costume are discussed as sites of cultural activity. Each of these sites presents a detailed way to analyse fundamental choices regarding the staging of the play. More than questions regarding the combination of plot, character and language in the play, these sign systems raise significant issues regarding where the production is staged, how it is staged, by and for whom it is staged, and how these choices impact the reading of the *mise-en-scène*. I relate these sign systems to their potential application in N/T.

#### Language

The issue of language raises the point, for instance, of what language rehearsals are conducted in, in a bi- or multilingual project. What are the implications of one central language of communication in a multicultural ensemble? What are the associations made with that language by individuals of the ensemble? It is of value to note that native speakers can always be secure in their agenda, while second-language speakers might experience difficulty in

either expressing themselves or in following instructions. It raises the question of how to prevent actors from feeling excluded from meaning due to their lack of proficiency in the language of communication. In the case of translating the text into another language it is of equal importance to ask how linguistic translations are conducted, and whose interests they serve.

It is my intention to translate parts of the beginning section of N/T with the two Streetsweepers into Afrikaans, specifically a mild version of *gamtaal*<sup>4</sup>, to represent cultural plurality on the stage. It is here that my intentions concerning generative dramaturgy become evident. Apart from the fact that I do not presume that my Afrikaans is fluent enough to translate parts of the text, my aim is to facilitate an evolutionary process that is specific to the actor. Thus, in my casting process I specifically only consider actors whom I presume to be either Afrikaans mother-tongue or first-language speakers, and possibly proficient in *gamtaal*, for the parts of the Streetsweepers. During the generative dramaturgy phase the actors will be responsible for creating their own text which flows naturally for them, guided by my supervision to keep them in check with the plot/character/language structure (Meyrick). My responsibility during the rehearsals is to set up a convention that endorses and encourages a bilingual environment, especially concerning the rehearsals of these particular scenes. This is to make the actor feel safer in his natural choices, but more importantly *to avoid direct translation* from the English. The actor must activate the fields of his imagination with natural, intuitive Afrikaans or *gamtaal* responses. Generative dramaturgy will also be employed in the translation of names, addresses and currency values, which are given as Italian references in the text. Collaboratively, a consensus will be sought in relocating these aspects to a local South African setting (cf. Space).

A politicised reading of language raises questions regarding the representation of language(s) on the stage, and what value systems we ascribe to these. The production concept of 'nothing is what it seems' is also utilised to create comedy through language in the production. The idea is that the white woman changes her accent, depending on whom she is talking to. When in the company of the coloured Streetsweepers, she seems to be talking with a Cape Coloured

---

<sup>4</sup> Cape Coloured vernacular specifically spoken in the Western Cape province of South Africa.

accent, while when in the company of the white Ambassador, she speaks in a 'refined', white suburban English accent. This is employed to represent cultural plurality by means of satire and comedy. The use of Grammelot and the devaluation of language specifically by the Flowerseller/Minstrel character is aimed at unifying the 'South African culture' in a way that does not exclude any ethnic communities through spoken language, but rather unites them by means of a comic visual language that is understood by all eleven national language speakers.

## Space

Questions of space are concerned with the actual space where the production takes place, as well as the fictional space represented by the *mise-en-scène*. The actual space of performance is the Arena theatre on the University of Cape Town campus. As a university space, it is understood to be an experimental space for theatrical exploration which encourages harmonious as well as conflicting relationships with the content of the performance and with the space. While most productions performed in the Arena theatre are conceptualised with a theatre space in mind, some may include practices that are not necessarily associated with a theatre space, e.g. a traditional cultural ceremony that would usually be performed in a site-specific location. Thus, it is an experimental space that also encourages new forms of theatre practice.

It is important to note, however, that it is a space that has an architectural inscription which speaks of colonisation. The prominent pillars on the stage are my main concern in the creation of a fictional space, and my first priority is to disguise them into a less politically loaded feature.

The original location of the text is an Italian street setting. The characters have Italian names and the references to streets and locations are Italian. My design of the fictional space is of a local South African street setting with a corner shop or café with two municipal bins in front of it. It should be instantly recognisable as a local setting with familiar local features, for example, an Argus newspaper poster on a street lamp. Some of the characters of the play have also been 'relocated' into a more familiar South African context: the Patrol Man in our version is a Car Guard and the Flowerseller is a Minstrel. The aim is to generate an

environment that looks familiar to a local audience to activate their involvement. This includes the use of properties, images, music and sounds that relate specifically to South Africa. It is expected that new features in the design of the fictional space will arise during the generative dramaturgical process, based on proposals from the actors.

The reading of the space also involves details regarding the actual performance space, as well as the seating space of the audience. How does the use of performance space reflect the characters' dreams and wishes, or fears and anxieties? How does the audiences' seating influence how they make meaning of the play? Is the space of the theatre used in a conventional or unconventional way? What does this say? In the N/T production I intend to extend the actual performance space beyond the theatre. This would include having the Patrol Man/Car Guard guarding the cars in the parking lot, the Streetsweepers cleaning up the space outside the foyer, the Woman/Prostitute soliciting clients in the foyer and the Flowerseller making a business with audience members. This is to signify that the struggles and crises that the characters experience extends beyond the performance time, and that these are issues that the characters in a sense will always grapple with. In terms of the universality of the themes of the play, it will hopefully read to an audience that the themes expressed are not particular to the play or the production, but are themes that extend to all people of all places beyond the theatre.

How and where is the audience seated? What is the proximity of the audience seating in relation to the performance area? How can the seating arrangement engage the audience more, or less if necessary, in the performance? The thinking behind the design of the audience's seating space in N/T is to locate them in a small road works construction site next to the corner shop café. The seating of the audience is also unconventional in the sense that there are perhaps not chairs readily available to them, but that they have to 'work' and make choices regarding their seating. This could, for instance, be done through placing crates or other 'street properties' that audience members must themselves position in the allocated space. They are thus responsible for their own placement in the space and encouraged to view the use of space and its content critically. With all the confusion of the farce and the stereotyped representations of characters the aim is to make the audience seating a critical thinking space, where they are invited to consciously construct meaning based on their own personal

resonance with the play. The proximity of the audience seating near to the performance space is intended to set up an intimate relationship between audience and actors.

Then there are questions regarding the characters inhabiting of the fictional space. In N/T, most characters have access to most spaces, except the Ambassador who occupies the bin and the Patrol Man/Car Guard who mainly appears in the peripheral performance space, only occasionally entering the central performance area. This poses the question of what the significance is of the only white male in the production of N/T being confined to a municipal dust bin, encircled by the ever watchful eye of the black Patrol Man? How will it read in performance? Can the audience ignore the racial implications in lieu of the comedy of the situation? Are they supposed to? In the allocation of space it is significant to note what implications the space has on the reading of the *mise-en-scène*, and how the space can be a politically loaded one. These and many others are questions that will undoubtedly arise in the translation phase, and will demand my detailed consideration in choices regarding the characters' use of space.

## Body

There are many questions in the representation of the body on stage. How do the bodies on stage encode difference and specificity? Does the actor's body complement that of the character? Can this be disguised, if necessary, and how? What is the colour of the body? What is the fitness level of the body? What is the size of the body? How does the body behave? Does the body have to acquire a new performance technique for the production?

The stereotyped casting of some of the characters, the black Patrol Man/Car Guard, the coloured Flowerseller/Minstrel and the blonde bimbo Woman/Prostitute are aimed at provoking the audience to examine the racial tensions between the participating cultures. Although our new constitution aims at integrating multiple cultures and promoting cultural management and equality among all cultures in South Africa, the current national discussions on so-called 'transformation' in rugby and cricket S.A. show that the country remains unquestionably divided along the colour lines. There is a choice to either subvert the racial stereotyping or to sustain it for critical purposes. Through the production concept 'nothing is

what it seems' the aim is to initially sustain the notion of a racial stereotyping on the surface level, and later subvert our notions of cultural integration with interventionary frameworks. The interventions include the devaluation of language by the Flowerseller, the use of rehearsed gags and Lazzi, direct address to the audience and the effect of change of costume (cf. Costume) on the character's physical behaviour. The satirical effect is to be created by first setting up clear choices for the stereotype, and then undermining those choices by use of these interventions.

A question to look out for is how specificity is inscribed in the body. Is this inscription useful or unfavourable to the character? How might a director, for example, assist an effeminate, gay actor to play a strong, masculine character? Do the inscriptions of the body stereotype gender roles? In N/T the trickery of the production concept is used to subvert notions of gender stereotyping. The woman, for instance, has two kinds of 'appearances' of a stereotyped woman. As a prostitute in the company of the Streetsweepers she is rough, crass and acts like 'one of the boys'. In the company of the Ambassador she is refined, elegant and lady-like. The aim is to subvert generalised notions of gender stereotyping in favour of an unbiased recognition of the character of the individual who is represented. With the style and the comic nature of the production there is the danger that racial or gender stereotyping are not 'laughed at', but satirised comically. If the use of stereotyping is not clearly set up for a critical purpose it can lead to increased racial tensions. This requires careful considerations by the director regarding the body and its representation on stage.

## Costume

What are the choices regarding costume, and how do they point to specificity? Does the costume match the body in size? What are the implications if they do, or if they don't? What are the textures of the costume, and what do the colours signify? Is the costume used to disguise the body, or enhance the natural features of the body?

In line with the purposeful racial stereotyping, the costumes in N/T all denote a 'uniform' which sets up an expectation of social status and privilege. The Patrol Man/Car Guard is identified by his bright traffic vest; the Streetsweepers by their plain black clothes with

municipal logos; the Flowerseller/Minstrel by his glamorous, shiny carnival suit; the Woman first 'looks like a whore' and later 'looks like a lady'. The naked Man in the bin, it turns out, is wearing female underwear. The aim of the production concept is to undermine the initial associations made with the costume and the body through visual tricks, as well as through the use of properties and stage elements.

The design of the costume is flexible and has double qualities to suit the production concept: The woman's appearance changes literally when she's in the company of the ambassador from a flimsy outfit to a ball gown, by seemingly magical movements with pieces of material. The Flowerseller wears a bright, colourful minstrel's carnival suit that can be inverted to be a plain, dull working suit when worn by the Streetsweeper. Meanwhile, the plain black clothes that the Flowerseller gets from the Streetsweeper acquire a magical glimmer that it did not have before. As the appearance of the costume changes, the effect that it has on the physical behaviour of the character wearing it becomes evident. These gags are constructed to politicise the audience's reading of costume and our notions of stereotyping based on clothes, and to inform the production concept of 'nothing is what it seems'.

The politicisation of the *mise-en-scène* in these ways raises many questions for me as the director. How will I ensure that a second-language speaker understands fully that what my intentions are? How will I communicate instructions to them, and what does that say about me as a director? How can I create or design a fictional space that supports my intentions? How easy or difficult will it be for the characters to inhabit that space? How will the audience read that space, and the characters in it, and will that help or inhibit the performance? The questions seem endless, and the answers are not always clear. Generative dramaturgy is a strategy towards finding the answers to these questions, and many others that will arise in the process. It entails involving the actors in the decision making process and encouraging their proposals to find solutions that strike accord with the actors, and that can be realised in performance. The theatrical interventions that are employed must be carefully considered and dramaturgically tested so that the reading of the *mise-en-scène* is not misleading to an audience.

With the few examples I have given I have merely scratched the surface of the extent to which

these sign systems can be politicised in the creation of the *mise-en-scène*. The language used, the space that is worked and performed in, the body that is represented and the costume that is worn are highly laden theatrical sign systems that require constant and significant vigilance on the behalf of the director. These complex and detailed concerns will always be specific to the production and the audience it performs to. In my production I will have to make sure that my actors understand the nature of my intentions of racial stereotyping, which depends on how successfully I pitch the production concept to them. Naturally I have the concern that my actors may, based on my casting decisions, consider that I am trapped in racial stereotyping. I may be offered strong resistance if I can not convince them that I have a well thought-out plan. The language used in the pitch of the production concept could equally jeopardise my intentions and create unease. Through careful planning and explaining my choices I hope to convince my actors of my theatrical intentions.

## **Conclusion**

In this explication I have highlighted the importance of generative dramaturgy as a means to effectively develop a play text, where the director nurtures the natural resources and instinctive responses of the performers during the translation phase. I have tried to establish the value of working collaboratively as an important way of mediating proposals and encouraging co-ownership within the ensemble. Models of cultural exchange were discussed to illuminate the process of cross-cultural theatre, and to show how an exchange between cultures can be done respectfully for performance without the danger of whitewashing culturally different people. Finally, a politicised reading of the *mise-en-scène* was offered as a way of dramaturgically regulating the translation phase, in which the text becomes alive on the floor. It demands a careful regulation of the language/plot/character balance by the director, especially in the case of adaptation to a new cultural setting. It also demands from the director a careful scrutiny of choices concerning the language that the process is conducted in, the space that it operates and appears in, and the bodies and their costumes that it represents.

The underlying premise is that the play is a device for turning information into an experience, and that it has an experiential impact on both the ensemble involved in the process as well as

the audience it is received by. This kind of impact evidences in a performance where the actors are committed, confident and seem to take pleasure in playing their parts, and where the audience seems to derive pleasure in just watching them play. The strategy towards this requires a search for a way of working that utilises the cultural riches of the individual performer to activate his engagement, and create a sense of ownership in the role. It is also a search for a way to engage a local South African audience with a pleasing aesthetic that looks like a cultural delicacy especially written for them. The reward is in knowing that the production presented is a well thought-out, detailed and collaborative account of an inspired process, managed successfully by the director in charge.

University of Cape Town

## Books

Allen, G. 2000. *Intertextuality*. New York. Routledge

Barker & Hulme. (eds) 1993. *Colonial Discourse/ Postcolonial Theory*.  
Manchester. Manchester University Press

Benedetti, R. 1985. *The Director at Work*. Upper Saddle River. Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York. Routledge

Bly, M. 1996. *The Production Notebooks*. New York. Theatre Communications Group

Bogart, A & Landau, T. 2005. *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to  
Viewpoints and Composition*. New York. Theatre Communications Group

Donnellan, D. 2002. *The Actor and the Target*. London. Nick Hern Books

Esslin, M. 1987. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Peregrine Books

Farrell & Scuderi. (eds) 2000. *Dario Fo: Stage, Text and Tradition*.  
Carbondale. Southern Illinois University Press

Fink & Joseph. (eds) 1999. *Performing Hybridity*. Minneapolis.  
University of Minnesota Press

Fo, D. 1992. 'One was Nude and One Wore Tails' in *Mistero Buffo*. London. Methuen Drama

Jackson, S. 2004. *Professing Performance: Theatre in the Academy from Philology  
to Performativity*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press

- Jacobs & Wasserman. (eds) 2003. *Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*. Cape Town. Kwela Books
- Grantham, B. 2000. *Playing Commedia: A Training Guide to Commedia Techniques*. London. Nick Hern Books Limited
- Kustow, M. 2001. *Theatre @ Risk*. London. Methuen
- Lawson & Tiffin. (eds) 1994. *De-Scribing the Empire*. London. Routledge
- Luckhurst, M. 2006. *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre*. New York. Cambridge University Press
- Lehmann, H. 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre*. New York. Routledge
- Merlin, B. 2003. *Konstantin Stanislavsky*. London. Routledge
- Mitchell, T. 1999. *Dario Fo: People's Court Jester*. London. Methuen
- Mitchell, T. 1989. *File on Dario Fo*. London. Methuen Drama
- Pavis, P. 1996. *Analysing Performance: Theatre, Dance and Film*. Michigan. The University of Michigan Press
- Pavis, P. 1992. *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*. London. Routledge
- Pavis, P. (ed) 1996. *The Intercultural Performance Reader*. New York. Routledge
- Rudlin, J. 1994. *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook*. New York. Routledge
- Travis, M. 1997. *The Director's Journey*. Studio City, CA. Michael Wiese Productions

### Articles

- Borrecia, A. 1995. Dramaturgy in Two Senses: Towards a Theory and Some Working Principles of New-Play Dramaturgy. *What is Dramaturgy?* p157-175. (AN 25003309)
- Brask, P. 2006. Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre. *Modern Drama*. Vol. 49, Issue 4. p533-535. (AN 24253502)
- Brown, L. 2001. Night of the Living Dramaturg. *American Theatre*. Vol. 18, Issue 8. (87503255)
- Brown, R. 1995. Bertold Brecht as Dramaturg. *What is Dramaturgy?* p57-63 (AN 25003299)
- Cardullo, B. 1995. Enter Dramaturgs. *What is Dramaturgy?* p3-11. (AN 25003293)
- Conquergood, D. 2002. Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research. *The Drama Review*. Vol. 46, Issue 2. p145-156. (AN6814585)
- Copelin, D. 1995. Ten Dramaturgical Myths. *What is Dramaturgy?* p17-23 (AN 00386086)
- Esslin, M. 1995. The Role of the Dramaturg in European Theatre. *What is Dramaturgy?* p43-48. (AN 2500 3297)
- Fisher, J. 1992. Minstrel of the Proletariat. *The Drama Review*. Vol. 36, Issue 4. p171-174. (AN 9301290858)
- Ferrell, J. 1998. Variations on a Theme: Respecting Dario Fo. *Modern Drama*. Vol. 41, Issue 1. p19-30. (AN 1048339)

- Frey, H. 2005. Dramaturgy and a Collective Theatre. *Canadian Theatre Review*.  
Issue 123. (AN 18041384)
- Friedman, D. 2002. The Dramaturg Help or Hindrance? *Back Stage*.  
Vol. 43, Issue 39. (00053635)
- Gianakaris, C. 1995. The American View: The Future for Dramaturgs on U.S.  
Campuses. *What is Dramaturgy?* p89-103 (AN 25003301)
- Gilbert & Lo. 2000. Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis.  
*The Drama Review*. p31-53. (AN 7288202)
- Hay, P. 1995. American Dramaturgy: A Critical Re-Appraisal. *What is Dramaturgy?*  
p67-88 (AN 25003300)
- Katz, L. 1995. The Complete Dramaturg. *What is Dramaturgy?* p13-16. (AN 25003294)
- Meyrick, J. 2006. Cut and Paste: The Nature of Dramaturgical Development  
in the Theatre. *Theatre Research International*. Vol. 31, Issue 3. p270-282.
- Norman, M. 2006. The Dramaturg in American Theatre. *Dramatist*. Vol. 9, Issue 1.  
p10-17. (AN 22322184)
- Paran, J. 1995. How to Succeed in Dramaturgy Without Really Trying.  
*American Theatre*. Vol. 12, Issue 8. (87503255)
- Perry, S. 2004. Directors to Dramaturgs: Some Thoughts. *Black Masks*.  
Vol. 16/17 Issue 6/1 p15-16. (AN 15320035)
- Rajendran & Wee. 2007. The Theatre of Krishen Jit: The Politics of Staging  
Difference in Multicultural Malaysia. *The Drama Review*.  
Vol. 52, Issue 2. p11-23. (T194)

Reilly, K. 2005. A Collage Reality (re)Made: The Postmodern Dramaturgy of Charles L. Mee. *American Drama*. Vol. 14, Issue 2. p56-69. (00303906)

Rosen, C. 1995. The Ghost Lights of Our Theatres: The Fate of Contemporary American Dramaturgs. *What is Dramaturgy?* p177-193. (AN 25003310)

Schechter, J. 1995. Lessing, Jugglers, and Dramaturgs. *What is Dramaturgy?* p27-41. (AN 25003296)

Thomson, L. 2001. Where We Are Now: A Report on Literary Managers and Dramaturgs of the Americas. *American Theatre*. Vol. 18, Issue 1. (87503255)

Weiss, A. 2006. Ten Theses to Subvert a Work (A Manifesto). *Theatre Journal* Vol. 58, Issue 3. p393-394. (00386086)

### Websites

Dramaturgy Northwest

<http://www2.ups.edu/professionalorgs/dramaturgy/what.htm>

### Video

*Commedia dell'Arte*. Northwood Institute and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Theatre Arts. Dir. by John D. Mitchell

*Masks of the Commedia dell'Arte*. Exeter University Drama Department.  
Dir. by Antonio Fava