

Western Theatre in Global Contexts

Directing and Teaching Culturally Inclusive Drama Around the World

Edited by Jillian Campana and Yasmine Marie Jahanmir



Western Theatre in Global Contexts

Western Theatre in Global Contexts explores the junctures, tensions and discoveries that occur when teaching Western theatrical practices or directing English-language plays in countries that do not share Western theatre histories or in which English is the non-dominant language.

This edited volume examines pedagogical discoveries and teaching methods, how to produce specific plays and musicals, and how students who explore Western practices in non-Western places contribute to the art form. Offering on-the-ground perspectives of teaching and working outside of North America and Europe, the book analyzes the importance of paying attention to the local context when developing theatrical practice and education. It also explores how educators and artists who make deep connections in the local culture can facilitate ethical accessibility to Western models of performance for students, practitioners and audiences.

Western Theatre in Global Contexts is an excellent resource for scholars, artists, and teachers that are working abroad or on intercultural projects in theatre, education and the arts.

Jillian Campana is a Professor and Director of the Theatre program at the American University in Cairo, in Egypt. She has taught and devised new work across the United States, Europe and Asia and worked with Augusto Boal in both Brazil and the US. Campana has developed drama programs around the world including ones for military veterans, a Swedish brain injury rehabilitation center, and a shelter for victims of human trafficking in India.

Yasmine Marie Jahanmir is Assistant Professor in Theatre History, Literature, and Theory at the University of Nevada, Reno. She has recently taught and directed at the American University of Kuwait. Her research interests include nationalism in performance, gendered sport, Middle Eastern theatre, and performance pedagogy.



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CONTRIBUTORS

Arnab Banerji is an Assistant Professor of Theatre History and Dramatic Literature at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles. His monograph, *Contemporary Group Theatre in Kolkata, India* was published by Routledge in June 2020. Arnab's essays and reviews have been published in *Studies in Musical Theatre*, *Theatre Topics*, *BOOM California*, *Ecumenica*, *Theatre Journal*, *Asian Theatre Journal*, *TDR*, *Theatre Symposium*, *Sanglap*, *Cerebration*, *SERAS*, and *Virginia Review of Asian Studies*. His current research is on performances by the Indian diaspora, translations of Indian vernacular plays, and contemporary Bengali theatre.

Jillian Campana is a Professor and Director of the Theatre program at the American University in Cairo in Egypt. She has taught and devised new work across the United States, Europe, and Asia and worked with Augusto Boal in both Brazil and the United States. Jillian has developed drama programs around the world including ones for military veterans, a Swedish brain injury rehabilitation center, and a shelter for victims of human trafficking in India.

Marvin Carlson is the Sidney E. Cohn Professor of Theatre, Comparative Literature and Middle Eastern Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. He has received an honorary doctorate from the University of Athens, and is the author of twenty-three books, most recently *10,000 Nights* (Michigan, 2017).

Néka Da Costa is a lecturer in the Theatre and Performance department at the Wits School of Arts in Johannesburg. She is an academic, director, and artistic collaborator interested in the intersections between theatre research and practice. She is interested in the potential for theatre to extend its reach to marginalized and alternative audiences with various access and communication needs and abilities. This is her first publication, co-authored with colleague Dr. Sarah Roberts.

Anne Drouet is the Performing Arts Director at Hong Kong Academy and the founding Director of the International Schools Theatre Association, ISTA Performing Arts Academy—Hong Kong and Shanghai, PR China.

With over 20 years' experience teaching and as a freelance workshop leader and composer, Anne believes in the arts' role to develop empathy and compassion, helping us all to thrive.

Anne García-Romero is an Associate Professor in the Department of Film, Television, and Theatre at the University of Notre Dame. Her monograph, *The Fornes Frame: Contemporary Latina Playwrights and the Legacy of Maria Irene Fornes* (University of Arizona, 2016), explores the work of six award-winning Latina playwrights. www.annegarciaromero.com

Selma Helal is a senior *agrégé* Professor Emeritus of English currently teaching at the University of Gabes, South of Tunisia. She is an IPELSHTian and a graduate of the ENS of Tunis. She received her BA from FSHST and her *agrégation* diploma from FLAHM. Her research interests center on literature and philosophy, and comparative literature.

Yasmine Marie Jahanmir is an Assistant Professor in Theatre History, Literature, and Theory at the University of Nevada, Reno. She has recently taught and directed at the American University of Kuwait. Her research interests include nationalism in performance, gendered sport, Middle Eastern theatre, and performance pedagogy.

Fenella Kelly is a drama and theatre teacher, teacher-trainer, and performer. She has worked with teachers and students in six continents and has been in theatre companies, jazz bands, and contemporary dance companies. She is a Kathakali (Indian dance theatre) specialist who trained at the Kathakali centre, Kerala, and runs workshops, performs, and coordinates events. She is a senior consultant and artist for the International Schools Theatre Association (ISTA). Fenella is also a Latin American dancer and yoga teacher who has published educational material (with the IBO and ISTA) for teachers and students.

Lynne Kent is a theatre director, performer and educator based in Melbourne, Australia. Kent has an established and active practice as theatre director and researcher into intermedial performance practices. Her artistic focus is on puppetry and contemporary visual theatre including new media performance. Lynne is currently acting as Research Assistant on ARC Linkage Creative Convergence Project, University of Melbourne. <https://drlynnkent.wordpress.com/about/>

Haddy Kreie studied African theatre and theatrical representations of memory and trauma at Florida State University and University of California, Santa Barbara. Her methodology and approach are informed by her extensive intercultural exchanges as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Madagascar and in ethnographic research in Benin. She also works as a director, set designer, and costume designer.

Adam Christopher Marple is Senior Associate Professor of Theatre at Universidad de las Américas Puebla in Mexico, an award-winning director, and teacher of The Viewpoints for over twenty years. He lectures and directs across the Americas, Europe, and Asia where his research centers

on the expansion and testing of *The Viewpoints* as an interdisciplinary and transcultural pedagogy.

James P. Mirrione was the playwright-in-residence for the Creative Arts Team (CAT), the resident educational theatre company at New York University (NYU) from 1978 to 2005. He is a director and international theatre specialist who has worked in China, the United Arab Emirates, the Middle East, and the United States.

Sarah Roberts lectures in undergraduate and post-graduate studies. Subject areas include cultural studies, dramatic literature, performance technique, visual literacies, and design. Her PhD focused on developing improvisation skills and the agency of actors as an ensemble. She is a multi-award-winning professional production designer whose portfolio includes significant productions emerging from South Africa since 1985.

Wei Song graduated from The University of Nottingham in Cultural Studies. Her research interests lie in gender studies, cultural studies of sport/e-sport, intercultural communications, IP and film in China, musical education in China, and gender and science. She was the guest lecturer in New York University (Shanghai), The University of Nottingham (Ningbo China), United Arab Emirates University, Qatar University, and Communication University of China. She is now the post-doc researcher of National Academy of Innovation Strategy, CAST (China Association for Science and Technology) and Institutes of Science and Development, CAS (Chinese Academy of Sciences).

Mark Tardi is the author of the books *The Circus of Trust*, *Airport music*, and *Euclid Shudders*, and numerous other publications. A former Fulbright scholar, he earned his MFA from Brown University and is on faculty at the University of Łódź.



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As we go to press, mid-summer 2020, we would like to acknowledge the racial and cultural pandemic of inequality that exists throughout our world. This book, in part, addresses the need to give every participant a voice in learning and artistic processes. For too long, privileged persons and cultures have had more control over what is communicated and thus valued. The dominance of Western approaches and stories in the global theatre scene has contributed to this imbalance. Theatre is ripe and ready to address inequity and to overtly and consistently provide a model of equality and justice. We hope this text adds to the ongoing international conversation around these topics.



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PART 1

GLOBAL FLOWS

Western Theatre in International Contexts



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CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO WESTERN THEATRE IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS

Jillian Campana and Yasmine Marie Jahanmir

Overview: Purpose and Relevance

A university showing of *Twelve Angry Men* in Mumbai heavily promoted as bringing “realism to India,” a standing-room-only professional production of the American musical *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* in Bangkok, and a performance about Namibia’s environment following Frantic Assembly’s devising approach created in a school theatre festival; these are just a few examples of the types of theatre work being undertaken around the world that are rooted in Western techniques and philosophies. A great deal of the educational and artistic processes taking place outside of the West draw upon Western scripts and methodologies, in fact Western theatre is being studied and produced in virtually every location on the map. There are both positive and negative aspects to Western theatre’s global proliferation, and the ubiquity of practice demands a deeper analysis of the successes and challenges of the projects that are being undertaken in this area. Theatre that is associated with the West, whether through language, style, technique or pedagogy, remains the dominant force in theatre training and production worldwide. Inspired by our own experiences working abroad, we came to this book curious about what this type of work looked like in other countries, how to solve some of the intercultural complexities inherent in such approaches, and in spite of those complexities, how this work benefits practitioners, students and audiences. *Western Theatre in Global Contexts: Directing and Teaching Culturally Inclusive Drama Around the World* looks at ways theatre makers, directors and teachers are working with Western theories, pedagogies and English language texts in places that do not necessarily share these theatre histories, practices and cultures. In this text we aim to explore the junctures, tensions and discoveries that occur when teaching Western theatrical practices and performance techniques in locations that, and to participants who, offer different philosophies, ways of working and aesthetics to the art form.

For our purposes, we understand Western Theatre to center around European cultures and to have been promoted and entrenched through historical

teachings that have been popularized globally and as a result, have dominated theatre pedagogy worldwide. The birth of theatre, for example, is still often promulgated as beginning with the ancient Greeks. Though the terms “theatre,” “drama” and “catharsis” do come from this tradition, scholars understand that performances which enacted stories, embodied characters and took place in specific locations for the benefit of the audience have existed since the beginning of humanity (Zarrilli, 2010; Barba, 1991; Rozik, 2002; Schechner 1985 and 2013). The idea that developed play scripts and purpose-built amphitheatres began in ancient Greece took root because of surviving historical documents, including Aristotle’s *Poetics* written around 335 BCE, which detailed a concept and purpose of theatre. This, combined with a cadre of Greek scripts, which influenced the thoughts of philosophers and intellectuals all over the Western world, has become the foundation of the canon that is still dominant today. Yet, the Indian Sanskrit text the *Natya Shastra*, usually attributed to Bharata, a contemporary of Aristotle, may have been finished as early as 500 BCE and likely included writings from a few hundred years earlier (Ghosh, 2016). This text also outlines concepts on performance and dramatic theory but from a different perspective and ultimately with a different set of goals. And theatre performances throughout Africa, the Middle East and China also existed during the heyday of ancient Greek theatre, but these performances, which centered around oral texts and improvisation, have not been disseminated and recorded in the same way in which the Greek plays were, limiting their reproduction and thus their stake in contemporary culture and teachings about said culture. Because of this theatre traditions from the East, Middle East and South have been obscured, and even erased, leaving Western traditions with an outsized influence on the art form.

Skipping ahead to the Elizabethan era we again have a large group of written plays that have been printed, curated and distributed widely. Of course, these texts must be credited for their value and are certainly worthy of the study and production they receive today, but perhaps if we acknowledge the connection between the popularity and promotion of these texts, combined with the history of the British Empire and its subsequent colonization efforts, we can understand how the spread of the English language throughout the world might be connected to the global esteem of the classical and modern British plays. Relatively more recently, we have seen the proliferation of the Stanislavski System and its derivatives as the dominant acting techniques taught in schools and training programs all over the world. Again, it is important to note that this way of actor training offers a concrete and systematic approach to creating dimensional characters and to understanding their psychology. However the premise of the “magic if,” for example, supposes a level of human universality that not all actors and students are comfortable with. These three examples from popular European theatre offer just a sample of how Western philosophy, language and inquiry have influenced theatre and theatre education around the world.

This popularization of the European theatre narrative has most certainly led the West to overlook non-Western performance practices. More often than not, theatre history texts relegate non-European-based practices to a single chapter at the end of the book. Teachers, professors and theatre

companies all over the world often privilege Western texts over local material for a variety of reasons. Perhaps because it is just what they know but sometimes such work is promoted because Western plays and techniques are seen as elite, intellectual, even avant-garde, and frequently more commercially viable. And this dominance of Western theatrical forms in teaching and practice has expanded worldwide. Western theatre and drama techniques and English language scripts have proliferated in amateur, collegiate, high school and professional performance groups and drama organizations outside of the West, beginning with early colonization and growing today because of the social, commercial and economic capital the West represents.

As Western educational institutions and products were thrust on diverse cultures and as local communities themselves desired such programs, academic institutions in particular became eager to cultivate patronage by promoting Western thought. In many places in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, Western philosophies of education and English are seen as languages of commerce, internationalization and power and as a result of the economic, social and professional benefits such power can provide, people in these places continue to seek out training in Western based institutions. Often the more Western the “public face” of an institution, the more treasured and elite it appears. And the more people seek to gain access to the power that a Western education can provide, the more Western institutions expand globally and the more institutions already in existence, both national and private, seek to grow connections in Europe and North America. Western Theatre, as a distinct field of study and art form, is no exception to this phenomenon and because of this, many theatre practices in places outside of the West have been shaped by the Eurocentric eye. For the student or practitioner living and working outside of the West, the dominant Western paradigm and training in Western theories, pedagogies and texts can be a commodity that leads to opportunity. And as a result of such Westernization, regional and local theatre practices and pedagogies have not been promoted equally alongside Western techniques and plays, leaving students and artists less exposure to the rich theatre traditions and pedagogies of their home countries and other world theatre traditions.

Non-Western theatre students, educators and artists often have an interest in the West in part because of what it represents: access. Western theatre offers access to larger audiences, the possibility of making money or gaining notoriety, and having more artistic freedoms including for many, far less censorship. In part because of this, students and artists from across the world view Europe, North America and Australia as the places for higher education and training. Knowledge and expertise in Western theatre provides employment access to artists and artist/educators and numerous institutions and arts programs hire Western trained artists specifically, who in turn promote Western approaches and plays above local ones. The institutions in these places present exceptional economic and cultural capital and so it is no surprise that individuals with exceptional intellectual and artistic gifts often seek to study in the West. A Western education offers a promise of success and the possibility of entry into a world market. As a result of this, the West is the place where most of the training of theatre professors and educators takes place and those considered to hold “expertise” are often Western-trained.

Additionally, K-12 and university international education in countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America cater to this philosophy with the English language becoming the dominant academic language. In addition to institutional dominance, there is a societal perception that American or British styles of education offer greater educational rewards. In looking at Jordanian perceptions on this, educational researchers found that amongst potential and current students: “American education is considered to have higher standards than Arabic education. Arab students are inclined to pursue American education due to its pedagogy and opportunities for career advancement” (Smail and Silvera 2018, 15). In theatre, we see this viewpoint reflected in the students’ stated desire to work on Western forms. This also helps to undergird the institution’s reputation within the community. As theatre is often the public’s entry point into seeing this pedagogical methodology in action, plays and musicals that are seen as quintessentially reflective of the Western style of education offered at these institutions become prized symbols of educational goals by students, faculty, administration and audiences alike. For example, according to internationalschoolsearch.com in 2019 there were over 500 English medium K-12 schools in China, most which follow American and British programs and exams. And the mega-cities of Hong Kong and Cairo have an average of 55 K-12 international schools serving both local and international students but teaching Western philosophies, including Western theatre approaches. Generally speaking, this is not because the artist educators believe their way to be better, it is simply because it is what they know.

This text seeks to share examples of the merits of Western theatre practices outside of the West and to make observations about how such work can be ethically undertaken, but it is equally important to remember that the places in which Western theatre techniques have been privileged over local traditions have incredibly rich performance traditions. Talchum, Korean masked drama/dance, for example offers participants and audience members a study of the region’s social classes and customs and a way to laugh at the difficulties of life resulting from invasions, poverty and political corruption (Kim 1985 and Lee 1982). Nigerian folk operas present the songs and dances, histories and myths of the Yoruba people (Idachaba, 2018) and the Shi’i Islam Ta’ziyeh plays, performed mostly in Iran but also throughout the world in places where Shi’ites reside, mourn the death of the Prophet Muhammed’s grandson Hussein who was martyred after refusing to accept the rule of the caliph Yazid ibn Muawiya (Riggio 1994). These examples of world theatre traditions offer just a small sample of the type of robust performances that exist all over the world, in every geographic and cultural region and throughout history. But often when productions are mounted, when new work is made and when students are trained, rich local performance traditions and pedagogies are relegated to a second class position in favor of a more European approach. There is most certainly great value in examining Western practices outside of the West. Undertaken in context and without negating the experiences and foundations of the culture where the work or study is going on, such explorations and practice offer Western theatre a place in the global canon. We hope to challenge artists and educators to expand the ways in which they teach, direct and facilitate Western theatre, to acknowledge and embrace the challenges and to listen to, learn from and work with the local communities.

Of course European approaches to theatre and Western plays have great value and deserve to be appreciated all over the world. However it is important to understand that the prevalence of Western forms leaves little room to recognize and celebrate the richness and diversity of world theatre approaches. And Eurocentric theatre traditions represent only a fraction of the styles and practices that exist, or have existed, throughout the world. The Western approach and canon is certainly worthy of attention, but attention in the context of the history of world theatre. By paying attention to the local languages, interests, social customs and theatre traditions in classrooms, rehearsals and theatre productions we can perhaps strive to dismantle such hierarchical tenets that place an unbalanced emphasis on Western performance practices in the global public. Western plays and pedagogies will likely continue to be embraced but we argue for a broader focus, attention to the local and consideration of ways non-Western theatre practices can be explored alongside Western practices. This would allow artists, students and audiences to see themselves represented in the stories, characters, themes, designs and exercises. Studying and making theatre in locations outside of the Western world provides educators and practitioners opportunities to learn from and embrace regional and local aesthetics, cultures and methodologies and to adapt their work so that it resonates with, and is accessible to, the participants, amateur or professional.

When co-editor Yasmine Jahanmir arrived in Kuwait, it was a bit like diving into the unknown. Although Jahanmir is Iranian-American, she grew up in the United States and had limited exposure to Arab culture prior to her move to the country to teach at the American University of Kuwait. In her first semester directing at AUK, she discovered a disconnect between the students' depth of knowledge about Western cultural products, such as American films and television shows, and the lack of attention to the historical context of these representations. Additionally, she found it odd that students often expressed negative opinions about their local performance contexts. She was curious about what other practitioners and educators encountered while working abroad and how they were able to balance expectations of teaching Western theatre while accounting for local theatrical traditions and found no academic text that discussed these common situations. She set out to connect with other practitioners/educators in similar situations, among them co-editor Jillian Campana who, at the American University in Cairo, was finding that the students' lack of connection to the material being presented was resulting in a general lack of enthusiasm for the subject matter. She immediately sensed that her curriculum and pedagogy was simply not resonating with the Egyptian actors she was working with. She had been teaching and making theatre outside of the US for more than half of her career, in Brazil, India, China, Hong Kong, Thailand and throughout Europe and had always made adaptations to content and pedagogy to meet the students' needs, but she found that in Cairo for the first several months the particular subjects and approaches she was exploring with her students did not seem to engage them in a meaningful way. Classroom and rehearsal management was also a struggle; in rehearsals for example when students were asked to save their thoughts and opinions for a discussion at the end of the evening, the actors simply continued discussions and sought to direct each other. We were both witnessing a disconnect between our students and

Western approaches to classroom and playmaking and at the same time we also recognized that we had been hired at these particular institutions precisely because of our expertise in Western theatre.

Part of our interest in creating this text has been to discuss this very juxtaposition: institutions hiring experts from the West and students and performers seeking access to Western material because of what it represents and what it holds promise for, paired with a disconnect between the Western philosophies, texts and approaches and the very individuals being trained in these methods. We acknowledge that both of us have undertaken theatre work outside of our home countries and shared our expertise in Western theatre. Jillian found that as she worked in various countries around the world, the initial point of interest for most students, and for administrators who hired her, was that of the Western perspective. In India, for example, she was initially hired at the University of Mumbai to teach the Stanislavski System. Similarly, at Whistling Woods Institute in Film City she was asked to teach “realistic acting” to Bollywood aspirants. And at the American University in Cairo she was brought on to teach and direct English language plays. She recognized early on that the Indian students in Mumbai and the Egyptian students in Cairo were coming to the subject matter from a very different perspective and with a different set of foundations and assumptions than students born and raised in the West. To combat this unequal focus on the West, she studied Sanskrit performance in depth, training extensively in Kathakali in both Kerala and Mumbai. At the American University in Cairo, she has sought to bring Arab drama more fully into the curriculum and to produce more plays in Arabic and to also cover other world theatre traditions such as Sanskrit Drama, Kabuki, Wayang Kulit and Halqa. Yasmine, hired in 2016 at the American University of Kuwait, quickly read all that she could find on the subject of Arabic theatre and became a regular audience member of local Kuwaiti plays. Even though she is often asked, usually by other faculty and never by students, to do a Kuwaiti play, she understands that she was not most qualified to do the job and has instead focused on bringing local theatre practitioners to campus to ensure the students become conversant in their local traditions. Playwright Sulayman Al-Bassam gave a well-attended guest lecture during her first year. Director Abdulaziz Safar selected the theme for the 2019 short play festival. Local legend and lighting designer, Muhanna Fawzi, worked with students to design the lighting for *Grease*, while regaling them with stories of his multiple decades of work on the Kuwaiti stage. Additionally, through the drama club on campus, she has formed a theatre audience group in which students gather to attend local theatre performances. We share these examples because it is important to note that though we both are employed to share our language, culture and expertise in Western theatre, we have consistently sought to engage in the traditions of the places we are working in by listening to and learning from our students and by seeking training from local experts.

Intercultural Theatre in a Globalizing World

If we understand that we are working within a globalized milieu, and that theatre is in some ways inherently global due to its history and practice, then why this insistence on the use of “Western” throughout this book? First, this

book is not always about narrative or aesthetic cultural fusion as in many other examples of academic writing about intercultural theatre that analyze the use of non-Western techniques within traditionally Western spaces. There is no doubt that fusion of performance methodologies is important in developing diverse theatrical practice. However, with this book, we hope to broaden awareness of all types of cultural transmission, including how ideas about the West are promoted and reified through theatrical practice. There is often very little resistance to the idea of theatre practitioners doing canonical work when working abroad, in fact, it is often expected. This book attempts to undo the assumption that Western work is universal and asks delving questions about how and why this type of work continues to dominate in global settings. It is about the proliferation, dominance and understanding of what we consider to be Western theatrical practice and the local reception when produced elsewhere. By continuing to privilege Western plays and methods of teaching, there are some ways in which our work continues to inculcate the dominance of Western theatre. However, by reflecting on what we can learn from producing these works outside of their original contexts, we allow for expanded readings of the original texts and how they function in a global society. Education scholar Binaya Subedi argues that in order to decolonize the curriculum we must move beyond simply filling previous gaps in pedagogy or including diverse perspectives in the classroom, and that a critical decolonizing approach offers a contrapuntal analysis that undertakes anti-essentialist viewpoints of culture, nationality and identity as frameworks of cultural analysis. For Subedi,

the decolonizing approach examines world events and global issues through a critical lens and values the significance of examining how social differences and power relationships influence knowledge production. This approach scrutinizes the politics of how narratives on universalism or a common global culture are articulated... it explores how questions surrounding such issues as race and class cannot be silenced in conversations about the global curriculum.

(Subedi 2013, 638)

In a similar vein, by demonstrating how discussions of race, class, ethnicity and nationality influenced Western work abroad, we hope that this book bolsters the resistance to viewing Western theatrical production as universal.

What is the difference between intercultural theatre and Western theatre that embraces locality? When Patrice Pavis first published *The Intercultural Performance Reader* in 1996 the term hinted at a blending of performance traditions from different cultures, an “exchange or reciprocal influence of theatre practices” (Pavis 1996, 2). Much of the production work in this book falls within the various definitions of interculturalism, cross cultural, syncretic and multicultural theatre. It is virtually impossible, and frankly irresponsible, to attempt to produce theatre that offers a one-way transmission of Western cultural production within a global setting. Even work once touted for its ability to draw on multiple cultures to create an engaging theatrical spectacle, such as Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata*, has since been critiqued for its flattening of culture. As Performance Studies scholar, Soo-Rim Lee, looks

back at Brook's 1985 production, she writes that the play functions in "universalizing the narrative" of the original Indian text and results in a depiction of "the world as an extension of Europe" (Lee 2018, 88). Many attempts at intercultural theatre suffered a similar fate, spuriously reducing culture into a fixed entity, so that a fusion of culture resulted in an outdated binary understanding of the cultures reflected in a show. Additionally, removing a performance tradition from its original context is ripe with the possibility of misuse and misunderstanding. In his well-known critique of intercultural theatre, *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*, Rustom Bharucha contends that production work claiming to celebrate diverse cultures can actually be an abasement of traditional performance practices. In the case of Western practitioners, utilizing traditional Indian forms not only disconnects the tradition from "its aesthetic and social context" but also loses "its links to the lives of the people from whom it is performed. Nothing could be more disrespectful to theatre than to reduce its acts of celebration to a repository of techniques and theories" (Bharucha 1993, 4–5). Bharucha was reacting to a colonialist style of interculturalism, in which subaltern performance practices are unmoored from their original contexts in order to enliven other theatre forms. Yet, even he did not dismiss the potential for intercultural exchange if done responsibly.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in interculturalism as a method of exploring our global world through theatre. Ric Knowles argues for a rhizomatic approach that "rethinks interculturalism as a complex set of negotiations across multiple sites of difference on stage, between the stage and the audience, and within audiences" (Knowles 2017, 2). In *Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?*, theatre scholar Charlotte McIvor argues for the centrality of collaboration in opening intercultural practice's capacity "for both revisionist and future-oriented modes of critical engagement" (McIvor and King 2018, 4). Some scholars, while still promoting the utopian potential in diverse cultural influences, suggest a move away from the term "intercultural" as it presupposes that culture is immutable. As culture is no longer understood as a fixed set of identity markers, but rather as a morphing, intangible social agreement, the notion of an exchange of cultures seems outdated and relies on outmoded binaries, i.e. East/West. In Pavis' 2010 update to her foundational text on intercultural theatre, she suggests that the intercultural theatre of the 1970s and 1980s no longer has the same poignancy in an increasingly globalizing world. Additionally, as access to media and technology expands at ever increasing rates, cultural production is no longer fully containable within national/ethnic boundaries. Much of contemporary cultural production is always already global. Pavis writes:

the effects of globalization on our way of doing and understanding theatre are increasingly evident. Hence the renewal, or the complete mutation of interculturalism; hence our growing consideration for the phenomena of globalization, our will to think of theatre according to the world which produces and receives it, taking into account its socio-economic and ethical dimensions.

(Pavis 2010, 13)

Perhaps it is no longer helpful to think of an intercultural theatre, but rather a theatre that is inherently global. Theatre researcher Erika Fischer-Lichte also steers clear of the term “intercultural” theatre because for her it relies on negative assumptions of nationalistic or regional ownership of theatrical traditions, undermines the performance capabilities of diverse populations, ignores power differentials between types of collaborators and privileges the sanctity of text over embodied performance. For Fischer-Lichte,

by interweaving performance cultures without negating or homogenizing differences but permanently de/stabilizing and thus invalidating their authoritative claims to authenticity, performances, as sites of in-betweenness, are able to constitute fundamentally other, unprecedented realities — realities of the future, where the state of being in-between describes the “normal” experience of the citizens of this world.

(Fischer-Lichte 2014, 12)

As our world becomes increasingly globalized, our daily lives are enriched with the diversity of people, cultures and experiences. Whether you call it intercultural, global, or interwoven, theatre has a unique capacity to reflect this abundant diversity.

While this book is not explicitly about theories of interculturalism, the chapters provide detailed accounts of how multiple participants (directors, educators, students, actors, devisers, writers and audiences) form multiple nodes from which to understand how cultural practice is translated, translocated and transmuted. We offer new perspectives on how and why Western theatre practice occurs in global settings, as well as its effects on students, practitioners and audiences. Through our framing of Western theatre within a global setting, we show how our understanding of what is “Western,” or deemed canonical, continues to adapt in an increasingly global environment. This helps us to think through the myriad ways global theatrical production has been continuously shaped by Western forms, as well as how the various global forms continue to shape our understanding of what is considered “Western.” While we don’t posit a singular solution to this problem, each case requires its own particular consideration and process to account for the specific texts, styles and contexts at play in the room. Broadly, we promote the idea that any theatrical activity should account for the cultural specificities of the voices in the room and the intended audience. Theatre is not an auteur activity, but rather a collaboration that is shaped by multiple perspectives. Instead, we hope that the subsequent chapters offer a multiplicity of examples that address and negotiate the successes and pitfalls of working within a culture that is foreign to one’s own training, culture, language and/or nationality.

Overview of Chapters: Making Connections

At the 2019 Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) conference in Orlando, Florida in a panel on Western Theatre work being undertaken globally, the editors, along with contributors Anne García-Romero and Arnab Banerji, discussed the multitude of ways English language plays and Western approaches play out in a variety of contexts. Banerji shared a Bengali

approach to directing he has commonly witnessed: “a director might go right up to the actors and show them exactly how to stand and move. A director might sculpt and shape actors and measure the exact distance between performers on stage in order to capture the precise image that has the right emotional connotation.” While this technique, in the West today, could be seen as an outdated way of working or as actor micromanaging, when viewed from the perspective of Sanskrit drama we can understand the importance *mudras* play in both telling the story and shaping the emotional content. Jillian Campana discussed the Egyptian censor board under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, and the difficulty of adapting scripts to remain intact and accurate but simultaneously pass the board’s review. She noted that this censorship has curbed playwriting in the country and led to relatively fewer contemporary plays being written and performed in Egypt in Arabic. Anne García-Romero discussed her experience co-teaching with a Notre Dame colleague, Dr. Anton Juan, at Pontifical Catholic University School of Theatre in Santiago, Chile. Not only were they sharing devising techniques that originated in the US with the students, they also worked with one of Dr. Juan’s plays, *Tukoo, Tukoo or the Princess of the Lizard Moon*, which is set in Japan and includes Bunraku puppetry and Butoh dance. Students had previously not had much exposure to Eastern Theatre traditions and had the opportunity to look at several different traditions side by side. Finally, co-editor Yasmine Jahanmir spoke about how her students continually encourage her to push theatrical boundaries in Kuwait and how her choice of material to study and direct is a result of their requests. When directing Chekhov’s *The Seagull* last spring, she followed the students’ lead when they wanted to stage romance. She worked to remain attuned to their various comfort levels in blocking the romantic scenes and trusted their understanding of cultural norms when it came to depicting Masha drinking vodka (played by a woman in hijab). These examples, along with the stories presented in the following chapters, highlight the need to approach each circumstance individually and to make choices based on the knowledge, interests and needs of the community in which the work is being created for or explored with.

This book is divided into four parts which: (1) provide an overall framework of the types of work being undertaken in this area, (2) discuss plays in performance, (3) speak to Western theatre and drama pedagogies and techniques outside of the English speaking and European world and (4) explore how theories are acknowledged and subsequent practice is played out. The chapters within each part offer concrete examples of the work specific practitioners have undertaken and share both successes and challenges that have arisen as a result of exploring plays and traditions steeped in Western philosophies outside of the English speaking world. To offer a wide sample of the type of work that is occurring globally, this text discusses teaching and performance projects that have taken place in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America and while we acknowledge that this is in no sense exhaustive, it does represent a cross section of work and will hopefully stimulate more conversation and perhaps subsequent writings.

The contributors come from a variety of different backgrounds. Some authors are working in their home country, while others are working outside of their culture. Some have been educated in the country in which they are

working, while others have formally studied in the West but have sought out apprenticeships, workshops and informal education in the sites in which they work or have worked. Part of our interest in producing this volume was to acknowledge the necessity of widening one's exposure to global theatre and to place an emphasis on the need for all theatre practitioners to understand and learn from the places in which they are teaching and making work. As we selected the following chapters we sought to share a range of practitioners and educators who make and teach Western theatre outside of Europe and North America.

Studying and making theatre in locations outside of the Western world provides educators and practitioners opportunities to learn from and embrace regional and local aesthetics, cultures and methodologies and to adapt their work so that it resonates with, and is accessible to, the participants, amateur or professional. Our chapters share such experiences and also provide examples of how theatre artists explore themes, stories and characters that performance teams and audiences can identify with. In this book we see how practitioners can use and reference popular culture including music, movement, images and characters, to bridge a gap that might exist between the text and the cultures of the participants developing and/or viewing the work. We highlight other theatre artists who make use of movement, theme and sensory experiences to engage participants and spectators. Some of the chapters discuss how collective and participatory decision making (viewing the performance and production teams as the experts) can be the starting point for engagement of the subject matter while other chapters address cultural iconography, literacy and spirituality. Finally some contributors share how traditional storytelling techniques and rehearsal processes can be embedded in Western performances.

Marvin Carlson's chapter, "Similarities and Differences in Teaching Western Based Theatre in China and the Arab World," offers us a glimpse into his lifetime of experience teaching Western-based theatre in these places. Carlson, the Distinguished Professor of Comparative Theatre at CUNY, tells us how he came to begin his theatre work in the Arab world and explains that as he continued working in this area, he came to learn Arabic and continue to educate himself in the Arabo-Islamic theatre tradition by engaging with scholars in the region and continually seeing and reading plays from the region. Carlson's considerations of theatre production and pedagogy, cultural difference, and the dominance of Western practice weave throughout the remainder of the book. The second part of the book, entitled "International Stages: Western Theatre in Performance," concentrates on the rehearsal, staging, and reception of canonical shows in order to explore the nuances of relocating Western theatre shows in global environments. Chapter 3, "Lysistrata in Cairo: Maintaining Values While Extending the Limit," looks at how an outsider might draw upon the knowledge and expertise of the cast when touching upon topics that uncover and question social taboos. Author Jillian Campana writes about developing an awareness of audience perception and avoiding cultural projection. Arnab Banerji, an assistant professor at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, reflects upon his time studying Western English language plays in his home country while he was a student at the Jadavpur University Department of English in his chapter: "Laxmi Bai

got Drunk at Malini's Dinner and Venturewell Became an Underwear Baron: JUDE Productions of Western Classics in Kolkata, India." Banerji explores how iconic characters and characterizations can connect audiences to seemingly foreign subjects. Yasmine Marie Jahanmir's chapter, "West Side Stories: The Racial Politics and Aesthetic Considerations of Staging Hell's Kitchen Globally," considers race in both the US and Kuwait and looks at how stereotyping plays out differently in these locations. In Chapter 6, "Across a Cloudy Room: The Cultural Appropriation of American Musicals by Chinese Students at the Expense of their own National Identity; A Case Study," James P. Mirrione of NYU Shanghai and Wei Song of the University of Nottingham in Ningbo look at the Chinese interest in American theatre, particularly musical theatre and Mark Tardi, who now teaches in Poland, discusses how using source material that was relevant to students in Oman and endowing them with confidence in their production skills gave attention to the usually quiet voices in Chapter 7: "How to Swim in the Desert: On Developing a Theatre Department in Oman."

The chapters in the third part of the book, entitled "Pedagogy Abroad: Western Theatre in Education," move from the stage to the classroom to continue in identifying strategies to mediate between Western-based practices and the international theatrical participants. In Chapter 8, artist Adam Christopher Marple analyses The Viewpoints as taught across several Asian countries. "The Viewpoints as Transcultural Pedagogy" discusses the linguistic disconnect between words and meanings in different places. Anne Drouet, a British born Chinese music and theatre practitioner and Jillian Campana, who both serve on the board of the international non-profit charity, International Schools Theatre Association, discuss how a devising process in Hong Kong draws upon the collective knowledge of young people from around the world in Chapter 9: "The ISTA Performing Arts Academies in Shanghai and Hong Kong." In Chapter 10, "Reaching the Audience." Freelance artist and educator Fenella Kelly walks us through directorial concepts and methods undertaken when working in an international school in Mumbai. Anne García-Romero of the University of Notre Dame explains how a study abroad experience drew upon the expertise of both US and Chilean artists in Chapter 11, "Creative Collaborations: Devising in Chile" and Selma Helal, English Professor at the Higher Institute of Languages of Gabes (Tunisia) demonstrates how theatrical literature can offer unique imaginative possibilities for the classroom, promoting increased linguistic and cultural understanding, in Chapter 12: "The Ethical Demands of Experiencing Imaginative Literature in Teaching Sophocles' *Antigone* to Students of Applied English."

While each chapter in the book delves into the global intersections of practicing Western theatre abroad, the final part of the book, "Intercultural Exchanges: Theory and Practice," addresses instances of deliberate theatrical hybridization and how these amalgamations duly transform our understandings of Western theory and practice. In Chapter 13, "Post/Colonial Theatre in Madagascar: Hybridity and Controversy in Jean-Luc Raharimanana's *Le Prophète et le Président*" Haddy Kreie of Drury University looks at how a scripted intermingling of Western theatre and Malagasy ritual and philosophy can reshape ideas about postcolonialism. Chapter 14 comes

from the University of Witwatersrand. In “Towards ‘Relevance’ and Collective Action in a South African School’s Touring production of Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*: Discovering the Operations of Imperial Rome, Cleopatra’s Power and the Meaning of a Crocodile,” authors Sarah Roberts and Néka De Costa theorize about ways a Shakespearean production aimed at youth can subvert the hierarchical colonial model in post-Apartheid South Africa. Finally, theatre director, performer and educator Lynne Kent highlights the uniqueness of puppet theatre in forming coequal collaborative performance networks in Chapter 15: “Intersections and Encounters: The Meshwork of an International Australian/Jordanian Puppet Theatre Collaboration.”

Looking at the Work: How to Embrace Diversity Ethically

One of the most important lessons that we have gleaned from the multiple case studies is the necessity for the teacher or director to learn from and about the host culture. A director or instructor must be attentive to actors’ and students’ needs, interests and viewpoints. They should understand that ideas of culture are not essentialist or fixed, but rather constituted in the moment of exchange. Through a deepened awareness of the host culture, Western theatre is able to be reexamined from alternate viewpoints as well as acting as a springboard for discussions around local concerns. We find the concept of “cultural humility,” borrowed from the Counseling Psychology field to be instructive in how to best put this awareness into action. Within Counseling Psychology, the definition of “cultural humility involves the ability to maintain an interpersonal stance that is other-oriented (or open to the other) in relation to aspects of cultural identity that are most important to the client” (Hook et al. 2013, 354). Thus, not only is it important for an educator or director to be aware of cultural difference, it is best to allow the students or actors to determine the pieces of their culture they value, that affect them the most, and that they want to bring into the room.

One way to do this is perhaps to tailor exercises that privilege the students’ voice even when working within Western theatrical modalities. Devising work is one way in which students can gain a personal and particular stake in a production that still falls under the Western theatre style expected of many educators and directors working abroad. The American University of Sharjah hosts a devised theatre festival every other year, in which they invite universities from the US and the Gulf region to share their devised work. In 2019, Professor Anthony Tassa worked with his own students at AUS to devise a piece entitled *Circus*. The production elements were steeped in Western circus tradition, yet the stories were adapted from students’ own experiences in pursuing theatre arts in a society that doesn’t always look favorably on the activity. It was very clear that the student actors felt a deep connection to the material, as well as being educated in a Western style of theatrical production. At the American University of Kuwait, Yasmine used *commedia dell’arte* to open an avenue for student input as well as paying homage to local tradition after learning that much of Kuwaiti theatre is improvised. In *The Love For Three Oranges* students were tasked to write their own jokes, include their own context, and improvise as they

saw fit. They included jokes that were university-specific, country-specific, and some Arabic language humor. Another option is to create an avenue for student-written and produced work. At the American University in Cairo, Jillian facilitated the development of a documentary theatre play with students that sought to understand the hopes of Cairenes post 2011 revolution. Students studied documentary and verbatim theatre plays and processes, then chose a topic to explore via this form. They devised questions around the topic, conducted interviews then combed through the data and looked for common themes. The result, *Dream Hope Wish Desire* was first translated and performed in English but the following semester the students requested it be translated back and performed at the Falaki Theatre at Tahrir Square in Arabic. Though the university mandates that most plays be performed in English, the students reasoned that not only was it more appropriate to perform the piece in the language of the interviews, but that the target audience for the play was Arabic-speaking and thus the play would have more impact in the language. While we understand that time is often a limitation, even a small-scale 24-hour play festival can offer students a chance to express themselves and their perspectives.

In addition to creating an inclusive production environment that promotes students' voices, needs and desires as it relates to their theatre education, we also challenge the dominance of Western understanding of acting techniques and pedagogy. While much of contemporary Western acting education is derived from Stanislavski's system, the understanding and implementation of this system is not neutral but already is infused with Western thought patterns and understanding, as the editors write in their introduction to *Stanislavsky in the World*, a book that expands the understanding of how the acting system was circulated globally, rather than relying on narratives that center the technique in the USSR and the US. This remapping of pedagogical transmission not only allows us to challenge the narrative of how Stanislavski's system was disseminated in acting studios around the globe, but also, and more importantly, broadens our understanding of the system itself: "the object of transmission becomes pluralized in itself, becoming 'objects' and 'practices' rather than one definite and invariable system" (Aquilina 2017, 5). Not only do these systems vary based on cultural understandings of actors and their beliefs, but they can also be influenced by political understandings. For example, many outside the West do not agree with the concept of the "magic if" and the universality it presupposes. In her work teaching acting abroad, Lissa Tyler Renaud cautions that acting pedagogy should be understood within its respective political context. She writes that: "while America was transforming Stanislavsky's theories to 'shore up' U.S. nationalism, China was doing the opposite — using Stanislavsky's own work to corroborate communist ideals" (Renaud 2010, 104). This varied understanding of the same system, both politically and culturally, leads her to conclude that "In our time, choosing an approach to acting — whether at home or abroad — is not a matter of preference, but of cultural politics" (116). Thus, when teaching the Stanislavski system in the global classroom, it is important to not only understand the cultural specificity of the system, but also that it has the potential to be transformed within the site of transmission. Western

acting pedagogy is not a neutral, original set of performance tools that only have one origin, but rather it is a system that has already been transformed by cultural and political context and can continue to adapt as it is taught. We've hoped to capture some of these moments in the subsequent chapters. In addition to challenging the authenticity of the systems that we already teach, we also believe it is important to continually expand and diversify our acting pedagogies. *Black Acting Methods*, a groundbreaking text in the field of acting pedagogy, argues for a more diverse understanding of theatrical production and practice through the incorporation of the titular black acting methods, which the authors define as: "rituals, processes, and techniques rooted in an Afrocentric centripetal paradigm where Black theory and Black modes of expression are the nucleus that informs how one interacts with various texts, literary and embodied, and how one interprets and (re)presents imaginary circumstances" (Luckett and Shaffer 2017, 2). We encourage practitioners across the globe to incorporate the lesson from this text, that different traditions of acting promote diverse textual interpretations and performance styles, as well as literally integrating some of the techniques into the classroom. We are also hopeful for future texts that address the wide variety of global acting traditions and styles.

We believe that this book is relevant not only to those working in global settings, but also to any theatre or educational setting that has diversity (which we would argue is just about every theatre setting). As you will see in the following case studies, theatre rehearsal rooms and classrooms have become places of inclusion, transformation and connection, and offer spaces to develop an appreciation for how other world traditions, pedagogies and stories may work differently. For example, the goal of a Sanskrit drama is emotional harmony versus Aristotle's understanding that catharsis or purgation is the fundamental element of drama. In spite of some of the difficulties of working in unfamiliar environments, theatrical education continues to prevail as a site of empathy. Theatre is a space where students, faculty, actors and directors come together to create new worlds and new ideas of community. We hope that the following chapters prove helpful in the creation of an inclusive theatre practice that acknowledges diversity in classrooms all over the globe. We hope that the varied perspectives within this book help us reconsider genre, as what is considered as realistic shifts from culture to culture. As Theatre and Performance Studies scholar, Omi Osun Joni L. Jones put so eloquently:

Let's not use diversity to mask our fears, but instead let's confront them. We are the radicals of society—theatre technicians, artists, activists, community organizers, scholars, designers—we imagine and make new worlds. We can model for our colleagues across campus how "diversity" works. Let's use our prodigious imaginations in the service of beauty, love, and power to craft the worlds we want to inhabit.

(quoted in: Howe 2017, 8)

We hope that the following chapters give insight into the celebrations and challenges of ethically creating new imagined global worlds.

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CHAPTER 2

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN TEACHING WESTERN BASED THEATRE IN CHINA AND THE ARAB WORLD

Marvin Carlson

I have been involved with the teaching of Western theatre to students from the Arab world from the beginning of my academic career. My very first doctoral student, at Cornell University in the early 1960s, was an Egyptian student, Abdul-Aziz Hammouda, who pursued his doctoral study on the subject of Tennessee Williams. After completing his degree Dr. Hammouda returned to Egypt and became a leading literary critic there, serving for a time as the Rector of Cairo University.

During the following years, Professor Hammouda regularly sent students from Egypt to study with me, and since then I have typically supervised at least one such student annually, supplemented from time to time by other students from the Arab world, from Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco. From time to time I would visit Egypt, and during the 1980s I studied Arabic and began devoting some of my own studies to Arabic theatre. Since then I have visited Cairo regularly, presented many talks and seminars, and conducted sessions with students at all four of the major Cairo universities: Cairo University, the American University in Cairo, Ain Shams and Helwan. Although I have also delivered lectures and conducted seminars in Morocco, Lebanon and Jordan, my observations on teaching Western theatre in the Arab world are drawn primarily from my long experience with Egyptian students.

My work with Chinese students has been briefer but more concentrated. In 2013 I was contacted by a representative of the Shanghai Theatre Academy with a proposal to establish at that institution a center in my name which would be devoted to the study in English of Western drama. Since that time I have been involved in the development of that center and its mission. The center officially opened in 2017 and I was named a visiting member of the Academy faculty. My work with the center has involved regular interaction with Chinese students during recent years. Since 2014 two or more students from the Academy have been in residence at my university in New York; they have attended my courses and participated in individual seminar studies with me while in residence here. Each year since 2015 one of my CUNY students has spent a term teaching in Shanghai under my direction, and I have myself visited Shanghai three times, speaking to classes, giving public lectures, and

presenting seminars. My observations on teaching Western theatre in China are based on this variety of experiences.

Although there are significant differences in the cultural attitudes regarding Western theatre in China and in the Arab world (and a great deal of difference in fact within each of those very large and very diverse cultural configurations), one must begin with an appreciation that an awareness of Western based theatre is a relatively recent phenomenon in both cultures, and is still largely confined to a rather small selection of the population, mostly the educated and European-oriented dwellers in the larger cities. With the steadily growing economic, political and cultural global dominance of the West during the past two centuries, there has been a corresponding pressure upon upwardly mobile young people in both the Arab world and China to learn Western languages and familiarize themselves with Western technology and business practices. Study in a Western university is often the most dependable gateway to a successful career in these home countries.

The study of theatre itself is much more highly respected in China than in the Arab world, where theatre remains somewhat in the shadows due to a combination of suspicion of the art by religious conservatives and also by some nationalists because of the close association of theatre with colonialism. Nevertheless, I have found the students from both parts of the world highly motivated both because of a love for theatre they share with my Usonian students, and also because even when theatre may be viewed with suspicion by some elements at home, the economic and cultural advantages of studying an element of Western culture still normally well outweigh any cultural disadvantages.

Although the students with whom I worked in both the Arab world and China come to me already with a strong interest, and in most cases some knowledge of Western theatre, their different cultural background has prepared them to view theatre in general, and Western theatre in particular, from a very different perspective. Although the Chinese theatre differs in many fundamental ways from theatre in the West, it is a significant and multifaceted element in Chinese culture and has been for centuries. In most of the Arab world, especially in the countries where I have taught, such a native tradition does not exist. The major performative narrative traditions are those of storytelling and on a less sophisticated level, the popular puppet theatre. When theatre in the Western style was introduced to the Arab world in the nineteenth century, it was very much a part of the global colonialist project, created by Arabic artists who were consciously importing an alien form that they had encountered traveling or studying in Europe. Their cultural community at home was largely made up of European-oriented people like themselves, and they were attracted to this new artistic expression as much because it represented European culture as out of any aesthetic motivation.

To a certain extent this is still true, and whether students in the Arab world approve of or disapprove of the theatre, they agree in regarding it essentially as a European form grafted onto Arabic culture. Not surprisingly, in the era of postcolonial expression, many theatre practitioners in the Arab world sought, through various experiments in verbal expression and physical staging, to create a theatre that was less "European" and more reflective of indigenous expression. In China, with a long-established theatre tradition of

its own, Western theatre came not as a new artistic form, but as a radical new alternative to an already familiar form. "Western" theatre was introduced to China in the very early twentieth century as "spoken drama"—*huaaju*—at a time of enormous turmoil. As a part of the rejection of feudal society and the overthrow of the long-established Qing dynasty there was a general backlash against traditional forms. The revolutionary youth movement saw Western drama as contributing to this new order, a means of creating a robust new literature for the Chinese stage.

Thus many of my Chinese students are in fact centrally interested in Chinese theatre, but are curious about Western theatre as an alternative artistic expression, in very much the way that Western theatre students are curious about Noh, Kathakali or Kunqu while not developing a central interest in any of these. With no indigenous theatre tradition to draw upon, an Arab student of theatre necessarily must focus upon the Western theatre as the primary or indeed only model of the form. When teaching Western theatre to students in the Arab world, one must at a rather fundamental level deal with the ghosts of colonialism. To the extent that colonialism is still viewed as a negative force, theatre shares in that negativity, and this causes reactions ranging from an outright suspicion of the form as a colonialist enterprise, to a desire to replace the form with developments of more authentic native performance traditions such as storytelling or the *halqa*—a largely improvised performance created in a circle in many parts of the Arab world. A certain part of the challenge of teaching theatre in the Arab world is in confronting the social, religious and political biases against it and developing an openness to postcolonial attempted hybridizations. A different sort of challenge is more common, and that arises from what might seem a more positive view. Most Arab students with an interest in theatre are very Western-oriented in general. Many have studied in Europe or the United States, and almost all dream of doing so. They are familiar with Western films, music and cultural fads, and look to the West (as students, scholars and artists of theatre in the Arab world have for a long time) for inspiration and models.

Such an attitude is flattering for the Western instructor, who is seen as an informed representative of an advanced theatre culture, but it requires a constant effort to encourage Arab students to approach Western theatre more critically, to free themselves from the assumption that any theatre from Europe or the US will be superior to anything from their own culture, and that their goal in studying Western theatre is to be able at last to produce satisfactory imitations of it. One of the very first questions I was asked after one of my first major lectures in Cairo, decades ago, was "Could Egypt ever produce an Arthur Miller?" My reply was something like: "I do not think so, since Miller, like almost any significant playwright, very much reflects his own culture. Each culture must develop its own approach to theatre." Still today, the question remains with me as emblematic of the deferential attitude with which one must deal.

It is of course a part of the colonialist project to assume a position of Western cultural superiority and many students in the former colonized world, raised in that tradition, naturally expect a Western teacher to accept and promulgate that position. It is important and necessary to resist these assumptions in order to pursue a much more significant and contemporary task,

which is that of opening the students' eyes to the almost infinite varieties of theatre when considered from a global rather than a colonial perspective. Even if my emphasis and my background is in Western theatre, and even if that is what the situation calls upon me to teach, I have become more and more convinced over the years that teaching Western theatre effectively means not only to stress the wide variety of performance in which it is embedded in its own culture, but even more important, to contextualize it within theatre as a global activity. An important step in challenging the common Arabic notion of Western theatre as the highest form this art has achieved is to make non-Western students aware of Western theatre's special, but by no means pre-eminent position among world theatre traditions.

Most students from the Arab world naturally have a far better acquaintance with Arabic theatre than Western students do, even when they consider it as necessarily inferior to Western theatre. Even regarding their own theatre tradition, they are generally much less informed than one might expect. Egypt has dominated the Arabic theatre almost from the beginning, with the result that Egyptian students are often unaware of even quite significant dramatists elsewhere in the Arab world. Conversely while students from Morocco, Syria or Iraq will probably know at least the major Egyptian playwrights, they are unlikely to know dramatists working in other Arab countries, especially distant ones. There are also significant linguistic and cultural barriers within the Arab world. There is still no generally accepted standard Arabic for the stage, and plays written in the various national dialects do not travel well. Moreover, the theatre also continues to feel the effects of the linguistic and cultural residue of colonialism. Students in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia are not surprisingly far better acquainted with the French theatre than the Anglo-Saxon oriented students of Egypt. Indeed, when working with students in these countries, I have often found that I can communicate with them far better in French than in English.

The view of theatre as an essentially Western art form, almost universal in the Arab world, is rarely encountered in China, with its own long tradition of theatrical expression, and this different view profoundly affects the teaching of theatre in these two situations. Chinese students do not begin with the view of theatre in general as an alien, culturally imposed form, but as a major variation upon an art with which they are already familiar. To most Chinese students, the study of theatre is a comparative study, not, as in the Arab world, the study of a foreign art form rooted in an alien culture. Practically speaking, Chinese students interested in Western theatre will almost always be well grounded in the theatrical traditions of China before they begin, and so an important part of their learning is by comparison with that tradition, a kind of comparison almost totally unavailable to students from the Arab world.

The background one finds among students in the two situations is thus quite different, and clearly has profound effects upon the strategies of teaching. While most of the Chinese students I have taught come with a strong background in Chinese theatre, most of the Arab students I have taught have come to Western drama through an interest in Western, usually English literature. This means that the Arab students are on the whole most comfortable with literary and narrative analysis of the drama; with discussing political,

social and psychological elements. They have a particular interest in the development of characters and the socio-political aspects of the plays. The latter I have found especially striking because one of the key differences between the Western-inspired modern theatre in the Arab world and the actual Western theatre, especially in the United States, is that throughout the Arab world the overwhelming majority of the theatre has a political orientation, while the majority of serious drama of the United States, although much admired in the Arab world, does not deal directly with political matters, but with interpersonal and family relationships.

Although my Chinese students have a certain interest in the characters and subject matter of Western drama, they are on the whole much more interested (and much less informed) on the technical matters of theatrical creation and production. The workings of a capitalist system, whatever their opinions of capitalism itself may be, hold a great fascination for many Chinese students and this gives them a considerably greater interest than my Arab students in the financial and organizational side of the Western theatre: the role of the producer, how productions are assembled, mounted, and financed, the creation and maintenance of audiences, the operations of publicity and the role of the critic in this, as well as the differences between profit and non-profit houses. These and related topics almost inevitably come up in my discussion of theatre with Chinese students, whatever the initiating topic.

Somewhat related to this is a greater interest among my Chinese students than in my Arab ones in the visual aspects and technology of the theatre, especially of the modern theatre. I suspect that this is in part because visual display plays such a central role in the traditional Chinese theatre itself, but it may well be that even aside from this cultural difference there is an economic one. Generally speaking, theatres in the Arab world have very little funding, and even the state theatres in major countries like Egypt mount productions on a very modest scale, far from what would be seen in major theatres in Europe or the United States. This is particularly clear when the same play, for example something by Arthur Miller, is presented in Cairo or in Beijing. Recent productions (both 2015) of *The Crucible* in these two cities suggest the difference. Both were thoughtful and highly professional, and both utilized minimalist setting, essentially scaffolding and steps, but the Cairo setting was a very basic, if effective one, while that in Beijing was far more visually and technically elaborate. Thus both cultural tradition and contemporary performance experiences encourage Chinese students to see scenic and costume design, and other production elements as a more significant part of the total theatre experience than do students from the Arab world.

These different perspectives in turn call for different teaching emphases. While it is important in any teaching to begin if possible within the area of the student's knowledge and interest, a key part of the educational process is to expand and deepen that interest and knowledge. So in teaching Western theatre in the Arab world I have found it important to be sure that the non-literary aspects of that tradition are given equal weight, while in China the literary aspects, particularly as they relate to the Anglo-Saxon interest in realistic social and psychological drama, usually require special attention. The economic aspects of the Western theatre, especially of the United States theatre, are a puzzle and a challenge to students in both cultures, not only



Image 2.1 Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in Cairo.

Photo by Ahmed Tarek Hassan. 2015. Malak Gabr Theatre.

because of their cultural unfamiliarity but because they result in a theatre far different from the model of state supported theatre so common elsewhere in the world. I feel therefore that my teaching about American theatre must include some information about the effects of a purely commercial system, quite unlike that of either Egypt or China, on theatre organization, practice and repertoire

There are other aspects of the Western theatre about which Arab students and Chinese students share what might be considered a common unfamiliarity or misconception, but even when this kind of convergence takes place, the difference in cultural background causes it to operate in different ways. First, in terms of the familiarity with Western theatre that the students bring to classes and lectures, this does not differ a great deal from what one might expect from a moderately well-educated Westerner without a special interest in the art. To begin with, the “West” is basically composed of Western Europe, Russia and the United States. The extensive theatre culture of Latin America and of Eastern Europe is virtually unknown. Within those parts of the Arab world that were part of the French colonial project, there is naturally a considerably greater knowledge of French drama and French theatre history. French is widely spoken and read and so there is direct access to historical and contemporary work in that language. This is true to a lesser but significant extent with English, especially in Egypt, but even students with a strong interest in theatre in China are unlikely to understand any Western language, even English or French. This means that the knowledge of Western theatre that they bring to lectures or classes is normally based entirely upon

Chinese sources. Thus they will have some familiarity, even if indirect, with the major names and works of the traditional canon: Shakespeare and the Greeks, major international playwrights like Ibsen and Chekhov, and iconic twentieth-century figures like Williams, Miller and Brecht. More recent figures will not be known from Chinese texts on theatre but from the work of a handful of important translators who introduce new works to the Chinese stage. These translators, primarily trained in English, almost entirely specialize in the Anglo-Saxon theatre, and favor those authors who win major awards like the Pulitzer Prizes or the Olivier Awards. There is thus a distinctly conservative bias in knowledge of the current Anglo-Saxon theatre, and very little knowledge about other traditions, even in the Western world.

There is however a very strong interest in recent experimental work and in recent developments in theory, even though both the Chinese and the Arab intellectual communities find it very difficult to obtain the publications necessary to keep up with the rapidly evolving critical discourse in the West. Most theatre students in the Arab world are quite capable of reading plays in French or English, but getting access to texts, even of major works, is often difficult. This problem is far greater in China, where many more texts are published, but few of them in Western languages. Moreover, most theatre students in China would be unable to read Western texts even if they could obtain them. Although the best known contemporary Anglo-Saxon plays are normally translated into Chinese, there are virtually no translations of even the most important historical or theoretical writings on theatre or performance. Recently I was involved in teaching a group of theatre students in Shanghai who had a few months before attended a lecture by visiting German theorist Hans-Thies Lehmann on his concept of post-dramatic theatre. The students were fascinated, in part by his striking videos of the recent major experimental work *Mount Olympus* by Jan Fabre, and in part by his argument that the embrace of the post-dramatic was the best way to move into twenty-first-century theatre. I found that my major teaching responsibility in this situation was to try to contextualize both Lehmann and Fabre, to deepen their knowledge of a production and of a critical tradition about which the students knew virtually nothing. The temptation, much greater in China than in the Arab world, to seize upon the latest critical or performance fad in the West as a way of suddenly moving to the cutting edge, without any sort of background or context, is often strong among non-Western students. Responding to this temptation in a productive way is among the major challenges facing an instructor.

Because of their more consistent close ties to Western theatre ever since the development of the modern Arab theatre a century ago, most Arab students have a general idea of the development of the Western avant-garde and experimental theatre tradition, its major dramatists, groups and theorists. Within the Arab dramatic tradition itself plays and productions can usually be found to illustrate major innovative trends like the theatre of the absurd or in-yer-face theatre. This is much less true in China, where contact with, and translations from, the Western theatre has been much more erratic, and many students have no clear idea of different experimental movements in the Western theatre during the past century, perhaps especially since 1960. Brecht and Beckett are fairly familiar figures in both China and the Arab world but the

dramatic, literary and cultural surroundings of both are virtually unknown: the familiarity is in both cases only with a few major works of each author.

Different Western staging techniques are more familiar in the Arab world than in China, although in both cultures, for different reasons, there is some familiarity with both modern Western realism and with Brechtian techniques. In both places there have now been several generations of productions of dramatists like Williams and Miller, and local dramatists have imitated them, both in literary style and staging. Brecht's appeal in the Arab world has been largely political, but Brechtian staging techniques have been widely used, particularly in combination with non-realistic staging techniques derived from Arabic performance traditions. Since these techniques have become fairly familiar, they provide a good starting point for a teacher to discuss how Brecht's innovations in acting and staging have impacted Western theatre, and the various attitudes toward politically oriented theatre in the West. In China, central to the understanding of Brecht is his relationship with Mei Lang-Fang, a major cultural hero and a great actor in Peking Opera, and although the students are well aware that Brecht did not understand the aesthetics of Chinese opera, his use of Chinese opera devices provides an excellent way into talking about his theatre. I have found the contrast between Brecht's view of traditional Chinese stage practices as "alienating" and the unexamined acceptance of these practices in China, where they are seen as a "natural" part of theatre, an excellent starting point for a wide range of examinations of theatrical conventions, realism, illusion, and the strategies of political theatre in the different cultures.

Although it is more difficult to use videos and similar material in China for both technical and political reasons, the general availability of visual records of recent and current performance is a tremendous aid to a teacher attempting to facilitate understanding of theatre from another culture. Still, this does not remove the more basic and more challenging responsibility of decoding these visual records, of training the students in what to look for in them and demonstrating why they exist in the form that they do. In this highly mediatized world, students respond very favorably to such material, but that makes the explanation of it even more critical.

Although the subject of this chapter was a consideration of the challenges and responsibilities of teaching Western-based theatre to students from non-Western cultures, I am well aware that my observations as well as my experience have tended to focus to a great extent upon a very small part of the Western tradition, and that is the English language tradition. Aside from my own background, there are strong reasons for this, headed by the global reach of US culture during the past century and of British before that. In China as in the Arab world, the single dramatist with whom I can assume some acquaintance is Shakespeare, and among modern dramatists most likely Ibsen and Williams (even before Ibsen and Chekhov). A major exception to this, as I have already mentioned, is the former French colonies, where naturally the iconic theatre figures of that country are known. In recent times, in both China and the Arab World, the significant global commitment of the Goethe Institut has provided at least some exposure to German theatre, but on the whole I have found that Western-based theatre in both China and most of the Arab world essentially means English language theatre. Since I

am personally and professionally committed to a much more global awareness of this art, I have found that one of my greatest challenges has been to encourage non-Western students to become more aware of the richness and variety of Western theatre.

This particular concern is part of a more general one, which underlies the whole project of seeking to introduce at least a partial understanding of one culture's theatre to members of another, a project particularly important as modern media and ease of travel brings these cultures more and more into contact. The negotiations of this introduction provide a challenge and a stimulating opportunity for both instructor and students, both of whom must seek to better understand the assumptions of the other as they attempt to come to terms with the complexities of theatre as it operates in different cultures. Certainly no part of my academic career has presented me with more challenges, more inspiration or more satisfaction, than my work with students from other theatre cultures around the globe.



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PART 2

INTERNATIONAL STAGES

Western Theatre in Performance



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CHAPTER 3

LYSISTRATA IN CAIRO

Maintaining Values While Extending the Limit

Jillian Campana

The Background

After graduating with a BFA in Acting from California Institute of the Arts in the early 1990s and trying my hand at the business in Los Angeles, I found myself exhausted and demoralized by the film, television and theatre industries. The field that I loved, and had devoted myself to from a very young age, felt oppressive. Agents and casting directors essentially dictated my appearance, my whereabouts and my habits and this lack of freedom felt stifling. I decided to take a break from the industry and to do that it felt like I had to get as far away as possible from the place that harbored my childhood dream. I had family in Egypt and I secured a position teaching English to refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea. That experience was a catalyst that helped me to discover the power of drama to teach discrete subjects, build communities and instigate change. Since those early years in Cairo, Applied Theatre and Theatre for Social Justice have been the focus of my study and work.

When the opportunity to teach in the Theatre program at the American University in Cairo appeared 25 years later, I leapt at it. Previously I lived and taught for long periods of time outside of my home culture at institutions in Brazil, Sweden and India and after heading a BFA and MFA program in the US I again longed for the pedagogical challenge of working with students and actors whose knowledge base was different from my own and I wanted to be exposed to non-Eurocentric theories and texts. I arrived in Egypt in August of 2016 and in many ways, my theatre students at AUC reminded me of myself at their age. They were curious and creative and they wanted, and hoped for, an exciting future full of possibilities. But they were children of a different culture and time, living in a heavily censored country rife with formal and informal rules about one's place in society. I realized quickly that I could make no assumptions about their lives based on my own experiences. Even though I had an interest in Egypt and the larger world, my foundation was steeped in a different culture and philosophy.

I had been on the faculty at the American University in Cairo for just over a year when I chose to direct Ellen McLaughlin's *Lysistrata*, a contemporary

adaptation of Aristophanes' ancient play of the same title. The imbalance of opportunities offered to men and to women and the gender inequality I was witnessing on a daily basis in Cairo, and on the AUC campus, motivated me to choose a show that promoted women's voices and perspectives. Subtle and not so subtle discrimination based on gender exists in many places; I had certainly seen my share of it worldwide, but in Cairo it felt to be a very different form than I had experienced elsewhere. Gender is, to a large extent, segregated in Egypt. Men and women play very specific roles which have been woven into daily life, acceptable and even necessary to keep things running. It is important to recognize that while much of the world can now see gender as a more fluid construct, Egypt, and much of the Middle East, still view gender as binary. And this perception of duality serves, here, to highlight the power of the male and the male gaze. As I began to work and live more fully in the country I saw the segregation, inequality and discrimination as a way to hide behind a cloak of tradition and the idea that women should be protected from the ills of the world. The inequality in Egypt can be seen in the lack of agency women hold in the workplace and politics and also in dominant views of female sexuality. Discussions of sex are essentially prohibited in Egypt, but in particular women's experiences of, and interest in, sex are *haram* to speak openly about. Egyptians do not talk about sex and sexuality publicly and the media does not promote the discussion but when it comes to female sexuality the topic is beyond taboo, it is moot. In AUC classes and productions when the subject of sex arises, particularly if a play or scene deals with female sexuality, it is often met with disdain followed by peals of uncomfortable laughter. Such reactions to any mention of female sexual activity combined with a proclivity against making way for female thought and action led me to choose a production to direct that could potentially shift the gender power dynamic in terms of content and student opportunity. Essentially I wanted a play that would get people talking and thinking and maybe even reacting and responding to the obvious imbalance. With *Lysistrata*, I wanted to challenge ideas about gender; to gently prod students into discussions about power and equality and to offer them alternative perspectives of the ways women can function in all areas of society, from the boardroom to the bedroom.

When the theatre program announced *Lysistrata* as one of the plays in our season, students in the department were enthusiastic about the provocative subject matter and the number of female roles available. Because of the recognized imbalance of roles, according to character gender, it is often difficult for programs to have a gender balance when casting. Fortunately, more and more high school teachers, university programs and theatre communities now look to produce plays that feature female characters or roles for women to play and that promote stories that resonate with women. And the number of talented contemporary female playwrights is helping this cause, but because of the historical and systematic male dominance in literature, there is an imbalance in the number of male and female characters in most plays. AUC, like many theatre programs, was failing its female students by producing plays that featured far more roles for male actors. In fact, in the preceding two years, the female to male role ratio at AUC was 2:10. In addition to the excitement about roles, the students were curious about the plot of the play. Though references to sex and discussions of sexual relationships have been a

part of other plays produced at AUC, this one featured sex front and center and students were curious about how we would stage this topic in Egypt.

The play tells the story of the women of Greece who band together and withhold sex from the men as a stratagem to force the latter to stop fighting the Peloponnesian War. "Lay down your swords and lay down with your wives," Lysistrata implores them (31). *Lysistrata* is about power and gender. It offers an opportunity for women to speak about their needs and to speak out about their ideas. It turns the tables on the typical structure where men have the stronger voice and call the shots. Admittedly this power structure is changing in many places, but in Egypt this progress is moving at a snail's pace. In *Lysistrata*, and in Egypt, men want to hang onto the power they have. In the play the women want to increase their power. They do this through a somewhat comical means, withholding sex, but the play is not really about sex, it is about women doing what they need to in order to have a voice and to end the violence. The women in the play yearn for peace and unity, while the men want to continue trying to solve problems through fighting. We see this dynamic play out all over the world today; women using sexuality as a means to gain advantage, voice and power. But in Egypt this is not acknowledged in part because female sexuality is not considered or recognized in any real way.

Casting

When students heard the general conceit of the play and saw the breakdown of roles according to gender, they were excited. Then, they read the script and things changed. The enthusiasm and interest in the story and the number of female characters remained, but because of the play's acknowledgement of female sexuality and the dialogue that supports female sex positivism, many women did not audition for the play. Whether it was a familial or self-imposed decision, several students told me they just were not comfortable embodying the characters. When I asked female students about their reactions, they revealed that much of their discomfort was not the central idea that the women withhold sex from the men as a strategy to get them to stop fighting, but the companion concept that the withholding of sex was a sacrifice for the characters because the women engage in, and enjoy, their sexual encounters. Lines like, "Sex is what makes life worth living," and "I'm not giving up the only pleasure I've got left" (13), were stumbling blocks many students could not get over and although I was disappointed, I was not surprised. I was glad to have the information and I was appreciative of the students' candor. Armed with this information I felt I could help the actors who were cast feel more comfortable with the characters and dialogue. If a potential message of the production was the promotion of women's voices and the advancement of gender equality, it would do no good to have a female cast uncomfortable with the script and the behavior of their characters.

AUC is likely the most westernized college campus in Egypt. The faculty are 40–50 percent international and it is governed by US accreditation process and board. Many of the students are extremely well traveled and have been exposed at first hand to philosophies and traditions outside of Egypt and its dominant Islamic culture. However, the university is still located in Egypt, almost every undergraduate student is Egyptian, though a minority

are from other Middle Eastern countries, and most students live at home with their parents and extended family. By and large students need to abide by their family's rules and by extension, the rules of the larger society and because Egypt does not afford women's voices equal footing with men's and because overt female sexuality here is viewed as a dangerous threat to the culture and family unit, the bubble of AUC is illusory.

A typical audition form seeks to gather information about actors' availability and performance experience and sometimes comfort level as well. At AUC, it is standard to ask actors if they are allowed to touch members of the opposite gender and so we did this with the *Lysistrata* audition form. Almost all female actors responded similarly, "A little, but not very much," or "Nothing intense," were standard answers but many replied with a simple, "No." The male actors on the other hand all responded, "Yes," many with an exclamation point. One young woman who initially replied, "Yes" to the question found me at callbacks and told me she had gone home and discussed it with her parents and could now tell me that though limited physical contact could be made, she was not allowed to overtly refer to sex in the play. Of course many might argue that actors must be able to play a variety of roles, but the preservation of female honor and the need for women to remain virtuous is so strong in Egypt that to say such lines in character is often tantamount to saying them in real life. Here the actor is seen as complicit because she has chosen to perform the role. Rather than struggle against this concept, I listened to the students' concerns, aware that whatever their feelings were, the audience perception was likely to be even more conservative.

Every actor who was cast in *Lysistrata* chose to audition after reading McLaughlin's play and most discussed the text with their family. A few of the women cast came to talk to me before the first rehearsal. They were excited about the play but nervous about the topic and overt sexual references. They wanted reassurance that we wouldn't be pushing their sexuality merely for provocation. I asked them how they felt about the play and why they chose to audition and accept the role. "I think it's a good idea to expose AUC to this play and idea," one young woman told me. Another confirmed this interest in the message, "We're really not advanced about sexuality here," she said. "This idea that women can lead is good and even though it's sad they have to use sex to get what they want, it's the truth." Another early conversation with female cast members suggested a fear about what the audience would think of them because of their roles. I assured them that we would endeavor to always include their instincts about impropriety in the staging of the play. From those early conversations came a weekly check-in with the cast about the blocking, subtext, characters and intent. This took place at the end of rehearsals each week and students were encouraged to name and question choices they felt would alienate audiences in Cairo and in this way the women in the production were given a voice, not unlike their characters. From my perspective as a director their knowledge and instincts was invaluable and helped us to take into consideration how the location of the production played a huge part in the overall context.

When we teach, direct, devise or help to facilitate others as they explore and create art work, we must take into consideration the culture(s) in which we are working. Theatre makers and audience members experience rehearsals

and performances through the lens of their background: their understanding of the language (both verbal and non-verbal), their socio-economic experience, their knowledge, their values, and their belief systems and cultural aesthetics. This had been at the forefront of my pedagogical and artistic approach since those early days in Cairo and through years of teaching, directing and leading professional development workshops in many places. But this principle never felt more important, and necessary for academic and creative survival, than when promoting feminism in contemporary Egypt.

Women in Egypt

According to “Understanding Masculinities: results from the international men and gender equality survey – Middle East and North Africa,” a 2017 survey published by UN Women and Promundo (El Feki, Heilman and Barker [eds]), the vast majority (over 90 percent) of Egyptian men want to know where their wives are at all times. “Men are resistant to women working outside the home, and to their participation in aspects of political and public life” (43). This status is confirmed by the 2018 Global Gender Gap Index report which ranks Egypt 135 out of 149 countries in terms of the disparity of rights afforded to men and women in four areas: political empowerment, health and survival, educational attainment, and economic participation and opportunity and Egypt is ranked as one of four of the worst performing countries in terms of political and economic leadership (Zahidi, Geiger and Crotti 2018).

This power dynamic follows men and women in Egypt everywhere and is woven into the dynamics of intimate life. The UN Women and Promundo report, which offers individual statistics from four countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine, found that 96 percent of Egyptian men believe a husband can expect his wife to agree to sex with him whenever he wants it (74). And this right has been backed up by the Egyptian Penal Code since the November 22, 1928 ruling of case number 45/1193. The National Sexual Rights Law and Policy Database notes the ruling, “a wife cannot withhold sex from her husband without a valid reason according to sharia” (Sexual Rights Initiative, 2016) and points to its effect on the decriminalization of marital rape. And while sexual relations are typically controlled by men, female virginity before marriage is prized in Egypt. “The god of virginity is popular in the Arab world,” writes journalist Mona Eltahawy. “It doesn’t matter if you’re a person of faith or an atheist, Muslim or Christian – everybody worships the god of virginity. Everything possible is done to keep the hymen – that most fragile foundation upon which the god of virginity sits – intact” (Eltahawy 2015, 114). Virginity is so important that female sexuality in young women is often viewed as something that needs to be curbed. In a recent article from CairoScene, a somewhat progressive magazine launched in 2010 but currently blocked in Egypt for violating a new media law, semi-anonymous author Hana K acknowledges the Egyptian woman’s natural sexual desires as “female guilt” and Shereen El Feki in her book, *Sex and the Citadel* explains the region’s predilection for this requisite, “female virginity became yet another tool to keep women in line, all the easier to enforce through its intimate connection to the family honor, making

it a matter of collective concern rather than a private affair” (El Feki 2013, 112). El Feki, a former *Economist* health care correspondent, describes how many Egyptians still believe that a hymen “must be cut in order to curb women’s sexual desire” (107). She continues to explain the common misconception, “If the clitoris is not tamed, then girls, like boys, will seek sex before marriage” (107). Though genital cutting of girls was banned in 2008 and criminalized in 2016, the practice is still very common among the majority of households and recently an Egyptian lawmaker, MP Elhamy Agina, spoke out in parliament in favor of female genital mutilation saying women should “stand by their men” and undergo FGM to “reduce (their) sexual appetite” (Raghaven 2016).

In my classes and in the main plaza gathering area at AUC I witnessed subtler forms of gender discrimination play out. For example, female students often deferred to their male counterparts when it came to class discussions and opinions and censored themselves to a much greater degree when it came to expressive behaviors. Of course this is a generalization and certainly not true of all female AUCians but it is something that struck me. For example, I have talked to many female students who have wanted to major or minor in Theatre but were unable to do so because of family rules regarding performing in public; one student recently told me she wanted to take more classes but her father told her he would no longer pay tuition if she continued to study Acting. Just before casting *Lysistrata* a group of female students came to me to ask for advice for their friend who had been raped at a party who was certain she was not going to report the crime for fear of her family’s reaction and subsequent familial and community repercussions. It is important to keep in mind the political and cultural climate these young women are living in and responding to. In May 2018, just after *Lysistrata* closed at AUC, activist Amal Fathy was jailed after posting a video describing how she was sexually harassed at a bank and criticizing the government for not protecting women against harassment. The video was circulated online, picked up by the media and days later Fathy was arrested by Egyptian police, “over charges she spread false news” and sentenced to two years in prison (O’Grady 2018). And lawyer and founder of the Center for Egyptian Women’s Legal Assistance, Azza Soliman, who fights to defend harassment and rape was detained last year and has subsequently had her assets frozen (Soliman 2018). She is currently under a travel ban for charges that have yet to be disclosed. According to Human Rights Watch (the website cannot be visited from Egypt) in the years since President El Sisi came to power more than 60,000 people have been arrested and detained for crimes related to breaking the country’s strict laws which govern most of the social order (Hall 2019). So while AUC women are insulated to a certain extent, the fear of retaliation for speaking about equality and sex as well as the freedoms granted to them and the view of their gender in their own country most definitely impacts their choices and actions.

I offer this limited background to help the reader understand why producing this play on a university campus in Egypt pushed the limits of both comfort and protocol. Egyptian women are growing more progressive and vocal. In June 2018 two more women were appointed to the cabinet by new prime minister Mostafa Madbouly, taking the number of female ministers from six to eight, the highest number yet, and the UN Women and Promundo survey

mentioned earlier shows that two thirds of men surveyed in Egypt, “support educational equality for boys and girls and equal pay for equal work, and reported that they would be willing to work with female colleagues should women gain access to the workplace” (42). But for almost every step toward equality there is a leap back, a reminder that gender equality and a shared power dynamic among men and women in Egypt, is still a very long way away.

Adaptation

In an effort to discuss the connections between the sex strike in *Lysistrata* and gender equality in Egypt I considered working with students to adapt the play ourselves, but whenever we began treatments, the humor of the original story fell away, most likely because the reality of oppression in Egypt is impossible to ignore. Additionally, Egyptian students and colleagues I consulted reminded me that setting the play in Egypt might alienate audiences, taking away from a potential message. Finally, it felt impossible to re-write the play in Cairo without responding to the political landscape and the reality of war in the region and that is not something I could hope to understand, let alone capture, as a foreigner. McLaughlin’s adaptation, which premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music as part of the 2003 *Lysistrata* Project readings, appealed to me for many reasons. It has a contemporary feel and is able to subvert the comedy of the original text. Her version makes the concept funny, not because of its implausibility, but because the female heroines acknowledge how ridiculous it is that the male characters do not take them seriously. After all, in one character’s words, “This is a brilliant plan!” McLaughlin’s script also makes use of contemporary slang and cultural references while nodding to the historical references in the original text. Almost all of our students are working in their second language and McLaughlin’s adaptation was accessible to them, in terms of language but in context as well. And though her text is certainly bawdy, in comparison to Aristophanes’ play and subsequent modern and contemporary translations of the text, it contains less shocking language that Egyptian audiences might find vulgar. Ian Johnston’s version for a production at Vancouver Island University in Canada offers us a good example of another contemporary university script. In Johnston’s text when *Lysistrata* reveals her plan to the women of Greece, she says:

Lysistrata: All right then. We have to give up all male penises (14).

And in McLaughlin’s play:

Lysistrata: I would even give up sex (13).

The first to agree to *Lysistrata*’s plan is the Spartan Lampito. Again Johnston’s script offers this as Lampito’s agreement:

Lampito: By the twin gods, it’s hard for women to sleep all by themselves without a throbbing cock. But we must try. We’ve got to have a peace (15).

Alternatively, McLaughlin’s version provides us:

Lampito: I’ll right, I’ll do it (14).



Figure 3.1 The women dream of nights alone with their lovers.

Photo by Ahmed Tarek Hassan. 2018. American University in Cairo, Department of Arts.

Johnson's script stays truer to the original text, but McLaughlin's play allows for clarity of language as well as the use of subtext to underscore meaning. And her version subverts the traditional power dynamic between men and women by showing women using their sexuality to achieve a collective moral goal. This is, of course, the premise, but Aristophanes' text and many subsequent translations and adaptations cannot quite bridge the gap between female agency in ancient Greece and women's rights now.

***Lysistrata* in the Middle East**

Lysistrata is not completely unfamiliar to Middle Eastern audiences. The 2003 *Lysistrata* Project, mentioned earlier, was a coordinated worldwide theatrical event started by Kathryn Blume and Sharron Bower after the World Trade Center bombing in New York as a way to ask women to stand against war. The project saw the staged readings of over one thousand versions of the play on or around March 3, 2003 across the US and in 52 different countries. A handful of the readings came from the Middle East including several in Israel, one in Syria, another in Lebanon and one in Erbil, Iraq performed by a group of anonymous international journalists (Greene 2011). San Francisco's Golden Thread Productions, the first American theatre company devoted to plays about the Middle East and/or by Middle Eastern playwrights and founded by Torange Yeghiazaria, produced *Operation No Penetration*, *Lysistrata* 97 as their first show in 1996. This adaptation, set in the Middle East, depicts Palestinian and Israeli women working together to get the men to sign a treaty for peace. The 2011 film, *Where Do We Go Now*, by Lebanese filmmaker Nadine Labaky which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival has

been compared to Aristophanes' play. In the film the Muslim and Christian women of a remote village in Lebanon band together to "keep the peace by any means necessary" (*New York Times*, May 10, 2012).

Still, comparatively, there have been few productions in the Middle East. Greek scholar Marina Kotzamani was curious about the Arabic speaking response to the *Lysistrata* Project call for readings of the play and the following year asked Middle Eastern theatre practitioners to envision adaptations in their home countries. In a 2006 *PAJ: Journal of Performance and Art* article, "Lysistrata on the Arabic Stage," Kotzamani describes the conceptions that emerged from the call, citing a noted "disillusionment with the potential of popular activism to end war in the global era" (2006, 15) from those who responded with potential productions. One of the outcomes of the Arabic response to this call was Egyptian playwright Lenin El Ramly's adaptation, *Peace of Women*, which was staged at the Cairo Opera House in 2002. This version, set in Iraq during the reign of Saddam Hussein, offers an unstable partnership between Iraqi and Western women which "unleashes powerlessness rather than the life affirming instinct" (Kotzamani 2006, 17). The late theatre scholar Nehad Selaiha who sought to "introduce the political, social-political and economic contexts into the art" (Metwaly 2017) turned down Kotzamani's call but later reviewed *Peace of Women* and found El Ramly's conflict between the Muslim Arab world and the Western Christian one, "ruthlessly bared and made to destroy the solidarity of women" (Selaiha 2005). Whether this production was a success or not is unclear, however what is clear is that there have been few productions of the play in the region. The modern and contemporary productions that have occurred have focused more on aspects of violence and war and less on the gender forces potentially at work. In fact, in reading Kotzamani's article and the proposals that resulted in her call we see that in "contemporary Arabic versions the withholding of sex does not lead to lighthearted jesting and glee but rather to dark satire about oppression or painful stories of manipulation and abuse" (Kotzamani 2006, 17).

Rehearsals

When I directed *Lysistrata* in Cairo in 2018 I taught what I knew: humanity, believability, professionalism, vocal and physical integration, comic timing, blocking, stage picturization and composition, character relationships and objective work. I did not teach what I was unfamiliar with and could never, as an outsider, completely understand. So while a deep desire to expose the performers and audience members to a message of gender equality was present, I knew I had no jurisdiction over their perceptions and understanding of the text. I knew how I understood the text and what the story meant to me, but I was unsure as to what their interpretation would be. As a director, of course I was responsible for the concept and overall message and for guiding the cast and crew toward that message, but I also knew I could not foist an opinion or interpretation onto the students. They needed to understand the play and the concept in the context of today's Egypt, the mega-city Cairo and their own lives. I shared my overall concept with the cast but I asked them to consider

their own feelings about how power could ideally be gained and maintained. As rehearsals progressed the participants did experience some changes in their ways of thinking and in their behaviors, but I tried not to mandate that they respond to the text as I did. I continually asked the student actors questions like, “How might this line or action be understood here in Cairo? Will it alienate our audience or will get them to laugh and think?” and “What does this moment or line mean to you? What do you think it will mean to audience members?”

Theatre in Egypt has a rich tradition dating back to the theatrical temple rituals which took place around 2000 BCE, well before the ancient Greeks popularized the art form. And Egyptian theatre has long had an interest in comedy and social and symbolic dramas so McLaughlin’s *Lysistrata*, which was both humorous and symbolic, resonated with the actors. However, today’s live performances, which still make use of “symbolism to avoid a direct clash with authority” (Fahim 2014a), are few. And when productions are staged there is less room for provocation and experimentation. With the current economic crisis, independent artists cannot make enough to warrant the time away from other work and this has resulted in an inconsistency, with theatre companies disbanding as quickly as they form. Ahmed El Attar, founder of Studio Emad Eddin, one of Egypt’s rare independent theatre groups, discusses another issue at play that contributes to the limited growth of the art form: “In Egypt theatremakers don’t see anything except their colleagues’ work. This is why for instance, the dominant style in independent theatre for more than a decade now is minimal performances, where actors sit around in circles, tell stories and sing” (Fahim 2014b). And artist and critic Dalia Basiouny explains another take on the lack of development in contemporary Egyptian theatre, “Many of those independent theatre groups (do) not have proper training, and nearly all actors are attuned to the acting style of bad Egyptian soap operas. Yet there (is) a deep desire to share stories, to express oneself” (Fahim 2014b). The love of storytelling combined with a lack of foundational knowledge and experience was certainly reflected in the *Lysistrata* cast.

From the beginning of the rehearsal process, there was a curiosity and desire to communicate the humanity of the story, but this was impacted by the students’ limited experience. Some had taken theatre courses at AUC but for many this was their first rehearsal and performance experience. And very few had seen quality professional productions because of the lack of work being shown in Cairo post-2013. Finally, the students in the play had a proclivity toward discussing the characters and the play rather than getting on the boards to experiment and play. They wanted to know how to perform and who their characters were before they began to embody their characters. They found this cerebral approach to creating theatre comforting, especially with this provocative text. As a result, we began the rehearsal process with a number of table readings and discussions to provide a dramaturgical context to the historical and cultural framework of the play. In the US I might have opted for two read-throughs but in Cairo as a way to mitigate discomfort, we began with a week of table work and continually came back to discussions about the story, McLaughlin’s version, the *Lysistrata* Project and how certain lines might be received in Egypt.

McLaughlin’s text is a one-act which has the two chorus members (Athenian Chorus Leader 1 and 2, both female) provide background information in a direct address to the audience at the top of the show. Their opening

narrative also frames messages of gender equality, female empowerment and non-violence and places the setting and tone, "...It's 411 and it totally sucks to be an Athenian" Athenian Chorus Leader 1 tells the audience (7). Though McLaughlin's version relies less on the history of the Peloponnesian War, preferring to focus on the women's desire to be heard, it was still important to provide the cast with information about war in ancient Greece to provide a framework for the argument against the women's withholding of sex. Students conducted their own research and we invited Associate Professor of Philosophy and *Lysistrata* scholar Marina Marren to work with the cast to help them understand the background of the war, ancient Greek philosophy and gender dynamics during the time Aristophanes wrote the play.

The students' understanding of violence as a way to solve problems is complex. These are young people who grew up during tumultuous times. They were young and came of age during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution which saw the removal of Hosni Mubarak and the subsequent 2013 ousting of Mohammed Morsi which resulted in a police crackdown, riots, killings and mass imprisonments. The country has not had stability since and in addition to the severe economic crisis the culture crackdown that heavily censors everything from social media to film and literature had led authorities to use "torture and other ill-treatment" (Amnesty International 2019) to control the speech and actions of the people. The Syrian War and worldwide Islamophobia have also contributed to the students' identities and their understanding of violence and war. So the play's opening conflict: that the men needed to keep fighting to maintain their power and that the women were grieving over the loss of their fathers, husbands and sons was very relatable to the students. The inciting incident: when the women withhold sex as the way to get the men to stop fighting, was funny but less relatable to the students and the women's initial reaction to *Lysistrata*'s plan was incendiary and confusing for some because the recognition that a woman can hold the reins of a sexual relationship, and enjoy that relationship, and power, is quite foreign.

The message of equality and empowerment needed to be agreed upon and driven by the performers. And so in addition to asking for their input regarding the way the show might be perceived, I also posed questions about the theme and message. "What would our world be like if we gave women an equal voice in politics and decision making?" "How far have we come since 411 BCE?" and "What might be the connection between sex and power?" Their answers to these questions were not unlike most progressive young people. They agreed that there is a need for more equality and that the female voice is under-represented in Egypt, and both males and females recognized the cynicism in McLaughlin's humor. For example, a rehearsal for the Magistrate's speech (when he arrives at the Acropolis and finds *Lysistrata* in charge) led to discussions about the difference between patriarchal systems then and now. They came to the conclusion that McLaughlin was seeking to demonstrate the non-seismic shift that has taken place since 411 BCE and that *Lysistrata*'s response to him acknowledges this lack of progress and demands to be heard:

Magistrate: I can't believe I'm even bothering to discuss this with you. You know nothing of politics. You have all the sanctimony of the ignorant. You dare stand on your hind legs and scold *me* about

how I conduct affairs of state? It's preposterous. This is a national emergency. There is more at stake than your maudlin little soap opera. I need the money for battleships. We are under siege here, or perhaps you've forgotten. We are in the middle of a war, woman, stand aside and behave yourself.

Lysistrata: Yeah, see that's your favorite tune. I've heard it all my life. Shut up and don't ask questions, we're trying to win a war here. Every woman has had to bite her tongue a thousand times when men come home from a long day of gassing about when but not whether to attack some hapless new enemy or other. When we ask if such unchecked aggression is wise we are told, "Now is not the time." It's never the time to listen to any voice other than your own. Until now (21–22).

Initially the students struggled physically with this scene. They were unsure as how to explore their movement and the blocking I suggested seemed forced. But when we found the cynicism and began to explore some fantastical ideas to deal with the Magistrate we discovered a physical response that saw the women slowly closing in on the Magistrate as he spoke. The more absurd his lines, the more they advanced toward him. During his last lines the Magistrate was stripped of his accoutrements: heeled shoes, sash, and pocket square and tied up with the women's hair ties and scarves. This ended up being one of the most powerful scenes in our production because of the strong physical choices. Though the women, except *Lysistrata*, are mostly silent in the scene, they were able to effectively gain power. Much like women in Egypt today who must follow the rules set by their fathers, husbands or brothers, the characters had to resort to subversive techniques to get their point across.

Another question I posed at the top of the rehearsal process and throughout was: Why do the women choose to achieve power through sexuality? This question led to more contentious and heated discussions. Many actors were saddened that women were using their sexuality as a means to accomplish their goal while others felt the denial of sex was a novel and clever idea. One male actor told the group, "the truth behind the fact that sex is the only way to convince men to listen to women shows the nature of most Egyptian men." A female actor countered with, "I think it just shows women don't need men to get what they want." When we began work on the scene between Myrhinne and Cinesias, in which Myrhinne relentlessly sexually teases her husband to get him to surrender to the women's demand to end the war, the students agreed that the humor overcompensated for the taboo scene. "The fun way we did it allowed the scene to be acceptable both socially and artistically" a student told me after getting feedback from his family and friends. Cinesias is willing to do almost anything, except stop fighting to get laid, and so Myrhinne leaves him with, "Gee you know, I just can't get in the mood when there's a war going on" (28). When the actors found the timing and the punchline it evolved into a strong scene showcasing both the reality of gender clout and the power of female collectivity. One of the performers pointed out that the scene subverted the traditional relationship and interaction between men and women in Egypt. "It works," she said, because "it's more common



Figure 3.2 Myrhinne (Yasmine Haggag) gets what she wants from Cinesias (Ezzat Abdelnour).

Photo by Ahmed Tarek Hassan. 2018. American University in Cairo, Department of Arts.

to see women's sexual agency being stripped away on stage or sexual women being portrayed as immoral." Ultimately the cast agreed.

Getting the female actors to commit to the language and the sensuality of the play was difficult. While male actors enjoyed using their voices and bodies to capture the angst of the men, female performers' voices were, at the outset, muted, especially when it came to lines that acknowledged the female enjoyment of sex, like Dipsas' response to Lysistrata's request to withhold sex: "It's a lot to ask. Particularly now that I've finally taught him all the best tricks I know to make me happy" (13) is an example of a typical line the female actors struggled to voice. Additionally, many of the women cast struggled to incorporate their bodies into the characters. Some had never taken an acting class but others were merely self-conscious and the lines and characters were a hurdle that was difficult to leap over.

One of the things we tried in an attempt to help the women feel more at ease was to employ the use of music and dance as a way to help the performers connect to their bodies and voices, but with little to no dance training, recalling the choreography and making it work for their individual characters ended up making many of the women feel even more self-conscious. Women around the world are often viewed as sexual objects and though sexuality is not discussed openly in Egypt, this is present and intimidating. Women learn to subvert this objectification through a variety of strategies and many of the female actors had learned to suppress their own bodies and movement in an effort to be seen as intelligent and talented individuals. How we use our bodies on stage usually has some carry-over, and is typically a reflection of its use in everyday life and so sensual, brazen and confident movement was initially difficult for many performers. The actor playing Lysistrata, for

example, struggled with the dance sequences so much so that it got in the way of the meaning of the play and the strength of her character and so we chose to have Lysistrata watch the women dance rather than partake in the movement. At one rehearsal however I asked the women to make their initial entrance from the house, dancing individually. The men were not present and their task was to simply enjoy their beauty and power. This moment was a breakthrough for many. They did not have to match a sequence or synchronize any movement, they could respond to the sound, express their sensuality and harness the power of their character without recalling lines. We chose to keep this moment as the entrance for the women of Greece not only because it provided a powerful introduction to the female characters, but because it bolstered the actors' confidences throughout the show.

Another difficult issue to contend with was the phallus. The male erection is referred to several times in the play and the image provides a representation of male authority which in turn makes the men look ridiculous, highlighting the foolishness of their behavior. In our production this could not resemble realistic male genitalia, not just because of the image itself might be offensive but because of the suggestion it insinuates. The cast agreed upon this from the first reading and so I introduced the students to the *commedia dell'arte* character of Pantalone and to his rising dagger *lazzi*. The lecherous Pantalone often carries a small dagger on his right or left side. This is raised to indicate moments of his desire, whether for another character or for an idea or thing. Instantly the group felt at ease. We agreed that we could still capture the humor of the male erection and agony through swords, rather than a more realistic image. The males were outfitted with dagger type blades about a half meter in length. Small enough to be concealed at their sides but large enough to make an insinuation when lifted. That the sword was not part of the natural body and not even on their person but instead carried, was important to all actors and we spent a great deal of time dealing with proximity, height and timing to capture the comedy without crossing the line. Again, I let the actors take the lead on this. The women watched from various points in the house and both performers and viewers offered feedback.

About three weeks into rehearsals we received a request from the state censorship board of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture to make some edits in order to produce the play in front of an audience. All performances, literature and media in Egypt are censored. All non-Arabic scripts must be translated and delivered to the board and we had done this after obtaining the rights, but we had not heard back. At times the censorship board does not respond to scripts, but often they request a production cut material deemed "offensive" and many times they will go so far as to attend a rehearsal or performance to make sure the text promotes "the positive values of society" (Arab Republic Ministry of Culture 2018). The previous year I co-wrote and directed an original documentary theatre piece about the hopes of Cairenes post Arab Spring. At the second performance of *Dream Hope Wish Desire* at the Falaki Theatre, a representative of the censor board arrived right at the 7:00 curtain time, accompanied by a list of words in the script we could not say. We were forced to make on the spot changes to the text to avoid being shut down. The request to edit the *Lysistrata* script came late in the process and was difficult, but it was obvious we needed to make the edits in order to produce the play. I did

what I could to keep faithful to McLaughlin's text by not adding anything but only deleting the necessary language required by the board. Lines like: "It's a bunch of ancient Greek dick jokes" became, "It's a bunch of ancient Greek jokes" (27). The students were as disappointed as I was, but we all knew the reality. It should be noted here that the playwright herself was quite understanding about the need to edit out specific words and lines of text.

The Performance and Feedback

Gearing up for the performance, the cast created a logo for the show, featuring a raised fist inside the symbol for women. On their own they made t-shirts, stickers and an ink imprint to stamp on students' hands as a way to promote the show. Men and women proudly wore the stamp and shirt and there seemed to be a buzz on campus about the show precisely because of the subject matter. On the other hand several female performers intimated that they would only invite their families to closing night so as to mitigate any issues with their involvement in the show; they worried their families might not want them to continue performing the play after seeing it. We talked about this as a group. We had taken great care to consider the audience's perspective with every staging choice, we had chosen a strong adaptation that made use of considerably less language that might alienate or offend the patrons, and we had made edits according to the censor's requests. The students had worked hard and I wanted them to feel good about inviting their families to opening night, but that was a decision they had to make for themselves. Tensions were high.

Our show opened with a physical comedy sequence: a single Spartan soldier stood on stage and was greeted gruffly by an Athenian soldier. A clash ensued and slowly more soldiers entered and picked small group fights until the apron was full of combat. The two female chorus members entered and watched the mayhem, easily ducking punches when they were attacked and maneuvering so that the men hit each other instead of them. When the last man had fallen, Chorus Leader 1 and 2 dragged him off stage, gave each other a high five, fist pump and celebratory hug and began the dialogue, "Okay, so we're like the chorus..." (7). The physical comedy went over big with the audience and set the tone for the rest of the show. The audience's early laughter gave the actors the encouragement they needed and the permission to carry out the performance we had created. Usually I caution actors not to pay attention to the audience reactions, this is in fact a central tenet of performance, but in Egypt especially now there is a real need to do things right and to please. Some of the performers had struggled to convince their families to be a part of this show and thus the laughter showed the audience approval and paved the way for the performers to fully commit to the show we had created.

It appeared to be well received by most. I watched from the back row and saw hijabi clad mothers next to young sons, tears rolling down their faces as the boys looked at them as if they were crazy. I also saw men of all ages squirm uncomfortably. A few got up and walked out and one night as the audience exited after the curtain call a man yelled at a woman for kicking his seat during the show. A male colleague chastised me for choosing the show, remarking that the script was poor, but several female colleagues told me it

was one of the best shows they had seen on campus. Later some of my male students who had not been involved admitted they felt the play made “men look stupid and weak.” Of course this had not been our intention and I found it interesting that some of the reception appeared to be along gender lines. The most contentious part for most males was the play’s ending when the soldiers abandoned their weapons and vowed peace while the women claimed victory for “*Lysistrata*’s brilliant plan”:

Spartan Delegate: We’ll do anything.
Spartan Envoy: Please, just put us out of our misery.
Lysistrata: What about you, big boy?
Magistrate: I must say it rankles to be forced to submit to this female conspiracy.
Lysistrata: But don’t you see, it’s women who have given you everything you’ve ever had that worth having. Sex. Love. Children. And of course your very existence (31).

Perhaps these lines were too much for some, or perhaps it was the images of men on their knees in front of the women or maybe it was the female characters’ frank discussion of their enjoyment of sex that seemed to put some male audience members off. When asked, the male actors in the production did not feel uncomfortable with their portrayal of men, but they had been part of the process and had had time to grow comfortable with the jokes and the female-led power dynamic. During rehearsals when I felt that the male actors were frustrated being the target of the jokes, we took a moment to talk about it and I asked what we could do to preserve some of their dignity. Male actors told me the opening fight sequence in which we overtly made fun of typical male problem solving techniques helped them to understand the satirical humor. And while for the women, the mention of female sexuality and enjoyment had been a stumbling block during the audition and rehearsal process, during the show it became an acknowledgement and celebration. Women in the cast and in the audience expressed joy when performing and viewing. “Besides the initial shock the play emphasized how strong women can be when they believe in a cause” one of the female actors told me after we closed.

While *Lysistrata* was a huge success for the students involved and was celebrated by most on campus, there were of course difficulties in mounting this production in Egypt. From young women who chose not to audition because of the subject matter and dialogue of the play, to the government mandated censorship, producing *Lysistrata* in Cairo was not an easy endeavor. But it was a worthwhile one. In a questionnaire posed to the actors several months after the production closed, students cited their involvement as an opportunity to celebrate and acknowledge female thought, action and desire. In her response to my questions a female actor wrote,

The idea of female sexuality is sort of a taboo topic in Egypt...you could say Egyptians try to overlook female sexuality and this play forced them not to. *Lysistrata* really focused on empowering women. Every female character had her own style and it emphasized that every woman (character and actor) matters.

And her male colleague responded, “With Egypt’s recent history I’m sure it was refreshing to see such a movement carried out by women, even if it was only on stage.” But trying out strategies and behaviors on stage and learning from them before enacting them in real life is a technique older than ancient Greek theatre. Embodying possibilities fictionally ultimately promotes possibilities and subsequent change. By performing equality in *Lysistrata*, we could say students were taking a small step toward embracing and promoting it in their own lives. As one of the actors who played an Athenian Chorus Leader pointed out, “*Lysistrata* was the first production (at AUC) that had a feminist message by having a female adaptor, a mostly female cast, crew and creative team. It was important for the whole university, not just the department, because the audience was able to finally see women represented on stage and those women had power.”

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LAXMI BAI GOT DRUNK AT MALINI'S DINNER AND VENTUREWELL BECAME AN UNDERWEAR BARON

JUDE Productions of Western Classics in Kolkata, India

Arnab Banerji

Since joining Jadavpur University in 1993, and until his retirement in 2015, Ananda Lal, one of India's most eminent theatre researchers and critics and the recently retired Professor of English, staged an annual theatre production. The annual Jadavpur University Department of English (JUDE) production was the only regular University Theatre production outside of a theatre department in India. Over the two decades that Lal spent in JUDE he staged plays from the global theatre canon including those by Euripides, Kalidasa, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Congreve, Shaw, Wilde, Brecht, Pirandello, Wilder, Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter, Shange, and Churchill, among others. I attended JUDE between 2004 and 2009 for my undergraduate and Master's degrees in English Literature. During the five years that I attended JUDE, I was fortunate enough to attend one and be a part of four JUDE productions. In this chapter, I discuss two of these productions, Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* and Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* staged in 2006 and 2008 respectively. I served as the lighting designer for the former and played Venturewell, the tyrant father in the latter. The JUDE plays were an important part of my time at the department and are perhaps what prompted me to pursue a life and career in theatre studies. But beside their personal value to my own development as a theatre professional, the productions also served the important role of integrating a creative endeavor into the academic journeys of students and introducing not-so-well-known names from the world (English-language) theatrical canon to the theatre going public in Kolkata. I will primarily assess the latter of these two functions that the productions served in the Kolkata theatre landscape. I will demonstrate how subtle adaptive twists, introduced cleverly into the plays, both contemporized and localized *Top Girls* and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, leading to a unique brand of educational theatre.

Ananda Lal retired from the Jadavpur University Department of English in 2015 after spending 22 years on the faculty, three of which (2007–2009) were spent as the Head of the Department. Lal, or ALal, as he was popularly

referred to around the department is one of India's most revered theatre scholars. He continues to review plays in Kolkata for the city's leading English daily, *The Telegraph*. Lal's eminence in theatre research and scholarship was shaped by his training in theatre at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign between 1981 and 1986. Upon his return to India, Lal taught first at the Presidency College, Calcutta University (now Presidency University, Kolkata), followed by a brief stint with the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, before joining Jadavpur University's celebrated Department of English in 1993. Over the last several decades, Lal has built up a vast body of theatre scholarship including the encyclopedic *Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre* (2004), the monumental *Theatres of India* (2009) and the critically important *Shakespeare on the Calcutta Stage: A Checklist* (co-edited with Sukanta Chaudhuri, 2001). He is one of the very few theatre scholars in India who has argued fervently to recognize Rabindranath Tagore as one of India's most original, and yet oft neglected playwrights. His translations of Tagore, *Three Plays* (2001), continue to be an important foundational text to begin explorations of the Indian poet's dramatic oeuvre.

Beyond his academic accomplishments however, Lal was also instrumental in creating India's only University Theatre program outside of a theatre department. Lal introduced the Drama in Practice course in the Jadavpur University curriculum which students could take as one of their electives. The course, open to all students in the department, irrespective of their theatrical acumen, revolved around rehearsing for and then performing a play in front of a public audience. Over the two decades that this program ran under Lal's guidance, students at JUDE performed world theatre classics, mostly from the Western canon. One such production was the department's 2006 offering of British playwright Caryl Churchill's 1982 play *Top Girls*.

Caryl Churchill is not a popular name in the Kolkata theatre world and her work, in spite of its postcolonial significance, has seldom been found outside literature classrooms in Kolkata. Lal's production of the play in JUDE was possibly the first production of the celebrated *Top Girls* in Kolkata. Responding to a question about his choice of Churchill for the 2006 departmental production, Lal comments, "The play remains relevant; Churchill was a pioneer of British feminist theatre" (*The Telegraph* 2006). The importance of the Churchill play in a society like India's is undeniable. Women's participation in the Indian workforce has been steadily rising since Indian independence in 1947 (Datt and Sundharam 1999) but the presence of women in top management roles in India, which ranges between 3 percent and 5.8 percent, does not correspond with the already dismal global average of ten percent (Chadha 2002; Kulkarani 2002; Mehra 2002; Singh 2003). A 2015 study by Jonathan Woetzel et al. found that a 10 percent increase in women's participation in the Indian labor force could add nearly 1.4 percent to the nation's GDP by 2025 (Woetzel et al. 2015). But the goal remains a far cry from the reality for many women. Women in India bear the emotional labor of trying to break through glass ceiling and social barriers, in addition to living up to socio-cultural expectations that the workplace forces upon women (Moran 2018). So, Churchill's play with its emphasis on not only celebrating its protagonist, Marlene, who wins a top position at her employment firm over a

male colleague, but also examining the social and emotional toll of being a successful woman, was an ideal choice. Additionally the JUDE department has historically seen a higher enrollment of women being trained for and achieving success across a vast spectrum of professions.

Lal did not intend to bridge any linguistic distance that separates Churchill from the theatre milieu in Kolkata, where a vast majority of theatre is produced in Bengali. He produced the play in English but added South Asian elements to the play. Thus Marlene became Malini and Joyce became Jaya. However, the most significant change to the play was perhaps the most intriguing feature of this production, the dinner party scene with which the play opens. In *Top Girls*, Churchill creates the ultimate pastiche by bringing together historical and fictitious women in a restaurant to share a meal together. The mood is celebratory, and we find later that the party is in celebration of Marlene's recent promotion to the post of managing director of the employment agency Top Girls and she has won the position over a male colleague. In the original text, Marlene dines with Pope Joan (supposed papacy 855–857), Dull Gret (the subject of a Renaissance painting), Lady Nijo (1258–c. 1307), Patient Griselda (from medieval folklore), and Isabella Bird (1831–1904) the nineteenth-century naturalist and writer. In Lal's JUDE production, Dull Gret was substituted by Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi (1828–1858) while Taramati, the pious wife of the legendary king Harishchandra was substituted for Patient Griselda. And finally, in what might seem like a trivial change, Lal replaced the silent female wait staff with a mute male waiter, thereby carrying out a potentially serious symbolic implication by enacting a significant symbolic reversal.

Churchill's heroines all share remarkable stories about their lives. In her article, "Feminist Vision and Audience Response," author Sharon Ammen tells us how the play gets underway with a "seemingly utopian beginning, [which] is soon thwarted" (Ammen 1996, 86). The dinner guests celebrate themselves and their phenomenal achievements but also realize that history, both in their immediate context and in the way that they have been remembered, has dealt them a rather difficult hand. A common refrain of misfortune runs through each of their stories which leads Marlene to ask, "Oh God, why are we all so miserable?" (Churchill 2008). The utopic dinner party turns into a dystopic reality when the guests gradually narrate the ways in which they have internalized patriarchy and perpetuated the hegemony (Ammen 1996, 87–88). In Churchill's original, the unraveling feminist utopia has a symbolic parallel in the figure of the mute waitress who everyone orders around: "the disempowered, however, sulkily, keeps her place" subverting the utopic outlook of being the "expression of the disempowered" (Ammen 1996, 87). The waitress's silence and her passive acceptance of everything that she is asked to do serves as a reminder that simply rising through the ranks or occupying a position of significance is not enough to challenge patriarchy. Churchill is, in fact, reminding us that Marlene, not unlike her historical and mythical counterparts, represents patriarchy, thus thwarting the expectations of a feminist utopic space. Lal's seemingly innocuous choice to replace the mute waitress of the original with the mute waiter of the JUDE production therefore had significant symbolic ramifications. It is unclear whether this substitution was simply a practical casting choice to accommodate the men who

had auditioned for the play, or whether there was a directorial intent of suggesting the inherent social patriarchy: patriarchy in the form of hegemonic power relations which go beyond gender and are implicit in a social structure that reifies hierarchy. Perhaps Lal was suggesting that despite the treatment Malini and her dinner guests recall having received in a patriarchal system that is rigged against them, they are themselves a part of that system after all. And it is a system that is hegemonic and which justifies demanding service from those beneath them in social standing while simultaneously recounting the horrors of an unjust social structure. It is unclear whether the audience picked up on this change or if it registered with them. It is probable that given the lack of familiarity with Churchill and her work in Kolkata, the audience did not notice the difference but certainly having a male waiter, rather than a female, would have also appeared more “natural” to an audience not used to seeing women servers in restaurants in Kolkata.

Lal’s substitution of Dull Gret with Rani Laxmi Bai, one of the leading figures of the 1857 Indian rebellion against the British East Indian company and a symbol of resistance, was also a way to connect audiences to the production. The Rani, listed in 2011 by *Time* magazine as one of the “Top 10 Bad-Ass Wives,” was the queen of Jhansi, a state in North India who “lives on in statues and Indian school books to this day” (Tharoor 2011). In her article, “The Rani of Jhansi: a study of female heroism in India” Joyce Lebra-Chapman writes, “myth and fact intertwine closely in the story of the early life of the Rani of Jhansi. It is difficult, if not impossible, to extricate the one from the other” (1986, 15). Sunil Khilnani, who along with Lebra-Chapman writes about the Rani, tells us that most of the Rani’s biographical details are debated including her date of birth. Laxmi Bai, or Manikarnika as she was named at birth, was born either in 1828 or 1835 in Varanasi (Lebra-Chapman 1986 and Khilnani 2016). She was married to Gangadhar Rao, the aging king of the principality of Jhansi, when she was eight. From a very early age, the future queen of Jhansi spent time with boys. It was in their company that she learned to read and write, and significantly, she learned to ride horses, use swords and other weapons including the possible use of guns. These were unusual skills for a young girl to acquire. Lebra-Chapman writes, “while these were the proper skills for boys growing up in high-born court families, they had no place in the traditional socialization of a Brahmin’s daughter” (1986, 16). After her marriage, Laxmi Bai was forced to spend some time in seclusion in the women’s quarter. Her indomitable spirit, however, found ways to convince her husband to not only allow her to spend time outdoors, but also to train a women’s regiment in Jhansi (ibid., 19). The queen gave birth to a son and heir to the throne but when the child died in infancy and the aging king died soon after, Rani Laxmi Bai was left the charge of the principality. The British, willing to take advantage of a potential power vacuum, proposed that the principality lapse into British control and refused to recognize the Rani, the chosen heir, as the legitimate ruler of Jhansi. Rani Laxmi Bai then mounted an armed rebellion against the British authority. The events occurred simultaneously with the Great Rebellion of 1857 across several parts of India which challenged the legitimacy of British rule and forced the British East India Company to turn over Indian administration directly to the British crown in 1858.

Lal's choice seems to have been motivated by a desire to replace the quasi-mythical but obscure European figure of Dull Gret in the Churchill play with an equivalent figure from India. Laxmi Bai, however, is an interesting choice as a substitute for Dull Gret. Gret remains silent for the majority of the play's first act. She says a word here and there to complement something that another guest says but it seems like Churchill is holding back on her story because Brueghel's painting froze her narrative down to a single moment of a frenzied attack on what looks like a hellmouth. It is only when the guests are all very drunk, and the utopic celebratory nature of the party has formally dissolved that Gret tells us her story. A story that goes beyond the painting and tells us about the village that she's from, about the miseries that befell her life, the killing of her children, and finally her rising up in revolt to punish the devil and its crew in hell itself. In the JUDE production of *Top Girls*, the legendary outspoken Rani of Jhansi, who is believed to have shouted a command to a temple priest on her wedding day, as reported by Lebra-Chapman (1986, 18), remains uncharacteristically quiet mirroring the plot structure of the play. In the JUDE production (as with Gret in the original) Laxmi Bai finally speaks towards the end of the first act. In the JUDE version she narrated her final battle against the British, outside the city of Gwalior.

The Rani succumbed to her injuries sustained in battle in 1858. And although the exact circumstances surrounding her death are not certain, Hugh Rose, the British officer who led the Company forces, has left us a description: "The Rani of Jhansi, the Indian Joan of Arc, was killed in this charge, dressed in a red jacket, red trousers, and white puggery; she wore the celebrated pearl necklace of Scindia [...] and heavy gold anklets" (Smyth 1966, 169). Rose went on to celebrate the fallen leader as the "best and bravest of the rebel leaders" (ibid.). The closing speech for the Rani was re-created for the JUDE production using elements from this description and fusing it with the popular culture legends that imagine the Rani heading into this final battle with her adopted son strapped to her back. Interestingly enough, by relegating this story to the very end of the first act, the spirit of the Rani's valorous exploits seemed dampened. In hindsight, I am left wondering if Lal was cleverly hinting at the futility of her military exploits in thwarting British rule by having her speak when the party has descended into liberal drinking.

The second character replaced by Lal from the original Churchill play is the figure of Patient Griselda. The Early Modern European tale, Madeline Rüegg rightly observes, would appear cruel to our modern sensibilities but seemed to have found considerable favor in Early Modern Europe. Rüegg demonstrates the prevalence of the narrative and the various translations and adaptations of the story as a case in point (Rüegg 2018, 107–108). Rüegg's succinct summary of the Griselda story merits reproduction here:

The Patient Griselda myth tells the story of a marquis who is reluctant to get married, but under pressure from his subjects, agrees to take a wife and chooses a poor young country girl for her virtues. Once married, he doubts his wife's perfection and therefore tests her for more than ten years by taking away her children, pretending to have them killed, and by repudiating her. Finally, the marquis asks her to prepare his second wedding with a young noble lady. This second wedding never

occurs, since the marquis finally reveals that the bride and her brother are Griselda's children; what is actually celebrated is the family reunion and Griselda's patience.

(Rüegg 2018, 107)

In Churchill's *Top Girls*, Griselda arrives late to the party toward the end of Pope Joan's story of being discovered as a woman. She arrives unnoticed until Marlene observes her just before the party orders dessert. She is introduced as being "in Boccaccio and Petrarch and Chaucer because of her extraordinary marriage" (Churchill 2008). Marlene seems quite smitten by Griselda's story comparing it to a fairy tale which starts with her marrying a prince. Griselda describes her story of being married, suspected, separated from her children, and then reuniting with her husband. Everyone in the party is intrigued and asks her how she is able to forgive the marquis's cruelty. Griselda wonders if things would have been different if her husband was nicer before resuming her silence. For the JUDE production, Griselda is substituted by another faithful wife figure but this time from Hindu mythology —Taramati. Taramati or Shaivya is the wife of the legendary king Harishchandra. Harishchandra is described as, the "ruler of the earth [who] was virtuous, renowned for good deeds and of handsome person" and his story is found in several ancient Indian scriptures, most notably in the Markandeya Purana (Dutt 1896, 14).

The Puranic text suggests that the king's reign was prosperous and that his subjects were very content. The King invited the ire of the sage Vishwamitra, when the former was duped into disturbing the sage's penance. Vishwamitra, in a fit of rage, demanded that the king should donate everything except for himself, his wife, and child to the sage. The king readily accepted and was reduced to penury. Not satisfied, the sage demanded a further donation. The penniless king promised that he would put together a second donation in a month. When he fails to put the money together, Shaivya or Taramati suggested that she be sold to a rich Brahmin so that the king could pay the sage off. Harishchandra ends up selling both his wife and son but the amount of money fails to satisfy the insatiable Vishwamitra. The king finally volunteers to enter the sage's servitude. The sage immediately sells Vishwamitra to a low caste funeral manager who employs the deposed king to work in the local crematorium in exchange for a small remuneration. The king's son dies from a snake bite but the king refuses Taramati to arrange a funeral unless she pays the fees. The gods and the sage Vishwamitra, who had been testing the king all along, finally take pity on him, and allow him to ascend heaven with his wife and son (Dutt 1896, 14–26). Interestingly, although perhaps not surprisingly, Taramati or Shaivya remains peripheral to the story of Harishchandra. And this in spite of the fact that she has to suffer poverty, slavery, child loss, and public humiliation without ever having any agency or choice in the matter. She represents, not unlike Griselda, the ideal wife, who remains steadfastly loyal to her husband even at great costs to her person.

For the JUDE production, the character of Taramati narrates her marital misfortune like Griselda. And not unlike her Early Modern European counterpart, she appears to be very forgiving of the actions of her husband, only wondering at the end, if things would have been different, had Harishchandra, consulted with her, or simply thought about her and their infant child before

taking decisions that affected their lives directly. The obvious parallels between the Griselda and Taramati legends seem to have dictated Lal's decision to use this figure in the JUDE play. And even though Taramati, or Harishchandra for that matter, would not be as familiar to a contemporary Indian audience as Laxmi Bai, the audience likely related to Taramati more than Griselda who may not have struck any chords in the audience. Lal's choice to retain many of the historical figures in the narrative and not substituting all characters with South Asian parallels is also an interesting directorial choice. It suggests perhaps his intention of mapping women's stories from a wider historiographical landscape than what Churchill's original with its Anglo-European biases would have allowed onto the pastiche of the opening act of the play.

Barring the longer, and perhaps the more dramaturgically significant opening act of the play, the rest of the JUDE production follows the Churchill script. Certain character names are substituted with South Asian names to make the play seem topical and local because the play's universality and especially its significance to the Indian context of 2006 are easy to convey without any major revisions to the text. In their December 2017 study "Women and Work in India," Erin Fletcher et al. observe the puzzling pattern of a decrease in women's participation in the Indian labor force in recent years (Fletcher et al. 2017). Praveen Rai also observes the stark disparity between women's representation in electoral politics while celebrating the significant strides made in reducing the gender gap in voter turnout (Rai 2017, 59–60) in recent years. These observations corroborate the social image of powerful women as "one of those ballbreakers" (Churchill 2008). A sentiment that is rooted in the 1980s British disenchantment with Margaret Thatcher and Thatcherism. Lal seems to be warning his audience as well as his actors of the pitfalls of simply elevating women to positions of power as the solution to the problems of gender inequality in our society. Not unlike Churchill, Lal suggests that dismantling patriarchy would require embracing the kinder, caregiving and forgiving side of our respective characters. He takes Churchill's cue in warning his audience about taking the route that Marlene or Malini takes in *Top Girls* of pursuing her professional goals over her humanity. The play was reviewed positively by audiences who marveled at individual performances like that of Sahana Bhose as Angie, and Rohini Chaki as Malini. It was, however, not clear whether the message of the all-consuming nature of patriarchy and the need to dismantle it was evident to the audience. The deceptive symbolism of the play (besides some weak performances) can be blamed for the play not resonating as well with the Kolkata urban audience who often prefer a more direct delivery system. However, Lal seemed to have accommodated this directness very well into his 2008 production of Beaumont and Fletcher's 1607 play *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* had a rather unfortunate debut in 1607 (or as Moorman claims 1610–11) when audiences seemed to have summarily rejected the play for its "elitist satire and genial contempt of citizens" (Moorman cited in Whitted 2012, 112). The play uses satire on multiple levels to reflect on the changing artistic tastes of its milieu. The play within the play, *The London Merchant*, lampoons the emerging merchant class and its demands for middle class stories in the theatre, while the grocer George, his wife Nell, and their

apprentice Ralph represent the pretentious preference of the middle class for the exotic chivalry of the immediate feudal past. The play starts with a prologue where a company herald announcing a performance is interrupted by the grocer George. George complains that the company has been producing plays to deliberately “abuse your betters” (*KBP Induction*). He insists that the company should instead direct its efforts toward “presenting something notably in honour [sic] of the commons of the city” (*KBP Induction*). The speaker of the prologue tries to reason with him that this is not possible under the circumstances since the company is already ready to present *The London Merchant*. Nell, the grocer’s wife chimes in from the audience signing up their apprentice Ralph to play the part of a valiant grocer: the Knight of the Burning Pestle. The obvious sexual reference to a phallus and syphilis are somehow lost on the grocer and his wife with the latter exclaiming “that’s as good a name as can be” (*KBP Induction*). The play continues with the company playing their scheduled performance of *The London Merchant* even as Ralph gets ready to portray the knight in shining armor.

The plot of *The London Merchant* is about a London merchant named Venturewell whose daughter Luce is in love with Jasper, Venturewell’s apprentice. Venturewell does not approve of this match, especially since Jasper does not have any inheritance. He has promised his daughter in marriage to Humphrey, a wealthy young fop. Luce and Jasper hatch an elaborate plan to elope in order to convince Venturewell that they are meant for each other. In the meantime, Mrs. Merrythought, mother of Jasper, prepares to leave her husband Merrythought who spends his days drinking and singing. She is fond of Michael, her younger son, and despises Jasper, more so since he lost the apprenticeship that had made her hopeful about pulling her family out of poverty. Ralph, as the Knight of Burning Pestle, steps right into the middle of this melodramatic love triangle to force the narrative of his chivalrous tasks into the structure of the play. The grocer George and his wife Nell offer a running, often annoying, commentary on the play, from their seats on stage, thwarting plot intrigues and talking directly to the actors much to their chagrin. Most of the play takes place in England, but upon the insistence of the Grocer and Nell that more scenes of chivalry be added to the play for Ralph, the company stages an impromptu scene in the court of the prince of Moldavia. The king’s daughter Pompiona offers her love to Ralph who thwarts the princess’s advances by declaring that he has a:

lady of my own
In merry England, for whose virtuous sake
I took these arms; and Susan is her name,
A cobbler’s maid in Milk Street; whom I vow
Ne’er to forsake whilst life and Pestle last.

(*KBP Act IV, Sc. II*).

The scene ends as pointlessly as it had begun as a completely disjointed intervention in service of the absurd chivalric plot line that George and Nell had been insisting on inserting into the play.

The play ends with Jasper and Luce receiving Venturewell's blessing for their union. Mrs. Merrythought reconciles with her husband. And the foppish Humphrey beats a hasty retreat. The grocer George is not happy with the ending, "I do not like this. Peace, boys! Hear me one of you: every body's part is come to an end but Ralph's, and he's left out" (KBP Act V, Sc. III). The company refuses to give Ralph's character an ending because, "'Tis long of yourself, sir: we have nothing to do with his part" (KBP). Nell comes up with the winning solution that Ralph must, "come out and die" (KBP). The company protests that a death would be an unfit ending for a comedy, but the grocer ignores the protestation and Ralph comes out "with a forked Arrow through his Head" to die (KBP). Ralph performs an elaborate over-the-top elegiac death routine while the company assembles to take their final bow. *The London Merchant* ends with the company belting out a joyous celebratory number. George and Nell, refusing to be upstaged by the company, however, address the audience, thanking them for being patient with Ralph.

In a 2000 report in *Newsweek International* Carla Power writes how, "for hundreds of millions of fans around the world, it is Bollywood – [...] – not Hollywood, that spins their screen fantasies" (Power 2000). Lal's production of the four-hundred-year-old Jacobean drama, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, leaned on Bollywood and its over the top kitschy aesthetic to connect to its audience in twenty-first-century Kolkata. The ill-fated love triangle, the overbearing mother juxtaposed with the annoyingly chirpy alcoholic father, and the ultimate magical resolution to all confusion is not too unfamiliar from most run-of-the-mill Bollywood 'Rom-Com' films. And therefore, in his reimagination of the seventeenth-century play, Lal decided to embrace the popular culture of Bollywood and the tropes that accompany the form. Luce, played admirably by Prakriti Dutta Mukherjee is imagined as the typical Bollywood-esque damsel in distress, while Jasper, played by Inam Hussein Malik, is reimagined as the charming ruffian. Venturewell, Luce's father and the roadblock in Luce and Jasper's romantic relationship, was imagined as a *paan* chewing white haired, goatee sporting, narcissistic businessman. Humphrey, played by Parjanya Sen, was imagined as a foppish, well-dressed dandy always ready with a song. All of Humphrey's dialogue was set to the tune of popular Bollywood numbers. This made his courtship of Luce seem ridiculous especially when seen side by side with that of Jasper's passionate appeal to win her love and affection. On the other hand, the Merrythoughts and their son Michael, played by Soumik Dutta, Mirna Guha, and Vinayak Das Gupta respectively, were reimagined as comic reliefs. This portrayal was not unlike Bollywood films from the 1990s, where the comedians were made to stand out in their ridiculous over the top clothing, their exaggerated mannerisms, and plotlines such as domestic feuds resulting from the man's inability to provide for the household were popular. The musical choice for this production relied on Dutta, Guha, and Das Gupta's knowledge and expertise on Western popular and rock music and the songs of Merrythought were set to the tune of popular Western pop and rock classics, in and of itself a tip of the hat to Bollywood movies where musical asides are often completely baffling and irrelevant to the film's plot. Similarly, George and Nell, the citizen interrupters to the play are presented as the *nouveau riche* who hastily acquire material comforts but are often unaware of how to make

use of them. Lastly, Ralph, the grocer's apprentice turned valiant knight, is dressed in a superhero's cape complete with a spandex suit and brightly colored exposed underwear. In his hand he bears a pestle made out of aluminum foil with a very bright red tip driving home the burning phallus metaphor a little too clearly. A live band in pastoral clothing (continuing with the theme of Bollywood-esque discordance) and the princess Pompiona dressed as an *Arabian Nights* princess completed the visual aesthetic of the play.

Apart from reproducing the kitschy Bollywood aesthetic that fit this play, Lal also made some deliberate attempts to allude to current events that had recently taken place in Kolkata. A year before the 2008 production of the play, the city of Kolkata was abuzz with the news of the tragic death of the 29-year-old graphic design teacher Rizwanur Rahman. Rahman was found with his head mangled beyond recognition on September 21, 2007, a "Friday in September" in the railroad tracks near his home (*The Times of India* Oct. 29, 2008). Rahman, a young striving Muslim man, representative of "a generation of young Indians eager to find their place in the new economy," had defied his family to study English Literature in college and found a job teaching graphic design in a private academy. He met Priyanka Todi, the 23-year-old daughter of men's underwear baron and prominent Kolkata businessman Ashok Todi. Rahman and Todi started a relationship that was opposed by Todi's family. The couple married secretly and started living together in Rahman's modest home in one of Kolkata's many working-class neighborhoods. Allegedly, Todi senior used his political clout and social connections to pressure the couple to split up. Priyanka Todi was finally convinced to leave her newlywed husband and return to her father's home with the understanding that she would join Rahman in a week. When that didn't happen, Rahman was distraught and ran from pillar to post trying to be united with his wife. Nearly two weeks after Priyanka Todi had been convinced to leave her husband, Rizwanur Rahman was found with his head smashed on September 21, 2007. Protests erupted all over the city of Kolkata in response. Rahman's family believed that he had been murdered and the incident was made to look like a suicide, which was indeed what the local police claimed. The civic protests that engulfed the city in the aftermath of this tragedy prompted the investigation of the case to be transferred to a federal agency from the local police. The federal agency determined that Rahman's death was a suicide but "charged Priyanka's father Ashok Todi, uncle Pradip, maternal uncle Anil Saraogi, three police officers, former deputy commissioner Ajoy Kumar, ACP Sukanti Chakraborty, sub-inspector Krishnendu Das and Mohiuddin alias Pappu, who acted as a conduit between cops and the Todis, with abetment to suicide" (*Times of India* Feb. 28, 2008). In the JUDE version of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* subtle references to the overbearing Ashok Todi and his ill-fated intervention in the romantic life of his adult daughter were presented through the character of Venturewell.

The London Merchant Venturewell was portrayed as a narcissistic caricature, far too confident and arrogant in his demeanor, wearing the typical Kolkata upper class business attire of a safari suit. His hair was colored with white paint which let off small clouds of dust every time he shook his head or barked an order. A distinctive feature of the portrayal was of course the triple takes at the end of particularly forceful lines as a deliberate nod to

the television soap triple take melodramatic effect. If Venturewell represented the business elite in Kolkata, then George and Nell represented the *nouveau riche*. In his 2007 report on the new capitalist India, Mark Sappenfield observed, “As India’s middle class grows and becomes more acquainted with the outside world, it is increasingly seeking to emulate the perceived buying habits of wealthy Westerners” (Sappenfield 2007). Although Sappenfield’s report reads more like a western man complaining about losing his exclusivity in the face of globalization, especially with his unobjective and almost classist observations on Indian consumer behavior, his comments regarding the uncompromised consumerism of the Indian *nouveau riche* are accurate. It must also be noted here, that the form of uncompromised consumerism that Sappenfield discusses and can be seen to be represented by George and Nell in Lal’s *Burning Pestle*, is particular to India. Although emerging middle classes everywhere correspond to an uptick in consumption (see the example of China), the uncompromising demand to bespoke content, be it material or immaterial, is specific to the Indian context. In India, it is not enough to own the latest or the trendiest item or to be up to date with the latest musical trend, but it is equally if not more important to distinguish one’s consumption of the same product from one’s neighbor, or friend, or cousin. George and Nell represented this new consumerist Indian middle class who like to indulge in material things and experiences that have previously been kept from them but who also want to tailor those experiences to what they imagine the experiences should entail. It is their newfound economic freedom and confidence that prompts them to demand “every available feature, no matter what its purpose” (Sappenfield 2017). This can be seen in the disruptive couple’s frequent demands to tailor the story of the Knight of the Burning Pestle to what they consider is chivalrous. Irrespective of whether that “feature” goes with either the play that they were initially going to watch or the one that they make the company fashion for them – it is important that George and Nell get what they want because they have paid for it. George and Nell’s insistence on getting what “they” want over what has been prepared for them seems like a perfect segue for Lal to comment on his own social involvement and perspective. Bill Angus has written that the intrusive presence of the citizen scrutinizers on stage in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* could be an “apt mirror for the widely felt sense of continuous scrutiny by potential intelligencers in early modern society” (Angus 2019, 92). An interesting parallel can also perhaps be drawn with the overscrutiny that characterizes the contemporary world. Perhaps unknowingly, Beaumont and Fletcher and Lal were predicting the outrage and troll cultures of today in their unflattering portrayals of the citizenry in the original play and its Kolkata edition respectively.

Incidentally, the criticism directed at the play on its debut four centuries ago proved to be the reason for its success in Kolkata in 2008. Whitted writes that purchasing a ticket for a performance at the Blackfriars, where *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* premiered, gave the audience the entitlement to use the plays they were watching “as vehicles for exhibiting and competing for superiority through critical judgment” (Whitted 2012, 125). By making this entitlement a part of his play, Beaumont refused the audience at the Blackfriars the luxury of distance to allow such social commentary to continue. In its revival in twenty-first-century Kolkata, however, it is the

supposed proximity between the audience and action on stage that heralds its success. The proximity is signaled by the presence of the onstage commentators who walk to the stage from amongst the audience. At the same time however the unbridgeable distance of a language that is clearly Jacobean allows Lal's audience to poke fun at themselves and the cultural excesses around them. In its revival therefore, Beaumont and Fletcher's work achieves the success that might have eluded the play's premiere. *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* becomes the tool for social commentary and criticism that it was meant to be. Rohini Chaki, writing for the Kolkata daily *The Telegraph* comments, "Mind-boggling, no doubt, but though this be madness, yet there is method in't" (Chaki 2008). The method seems to have taken the form of an effective blending of popular culture elements from disparate times into a cohesively discordant whole which is a lot of fun but never loses sight of its purpose of offering scathing social commentary.

Top Girls and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* are representative examples from the vast repertoire of plays produced under the banner and aegis of JUDE. Both plays originate in social circumstances that are vastly different from those of Kolkata, West Bengal, and India. And yet under Ananda Lal's efficient directorial supervision the texts found a welcome home in the unlikeliest of locales. The effortless localization that Lal introduced in both of these texts betrays his astute and thorough understanding of the play's original themes as well as his own socio-cultural circumstances. And this understanding enabled him to find segues that made his productions fiercely relevant to his audiences. Being aware of the pitfalls of Thatcherism and the emotional toll of fighting patriarchy allowed Lal to transform a play meant to be a criticism of Thatcherism, by a playwright little known in India, into a brilliant commentary on the sacrifices made by upwardly mobile urban Indian women. In the case of the Beaumont and Fletcher play, Lal shows his command over his subject as well as his craft when he is able to effortlessly fit a 400-year-old-play into a completely dissonant and distant cultural milieu "like a tailored Burberry glove" (Sappenfield 2007). The Jacobean drama transitions into a melodramatic Bollywood farce with all of the attendant foibles from both traditions to become a fun and yet critical commentary on the time. The University Theatre program at JUDE was the only one of its kind in the country outside of a theatre department and Lal's retirement has put a temporary halt to the program. One can, however, hope that this glorious tradition of introducing students to dramas in their performative forms would be eventually revived and continue to serve as the Kolkata home for both little known and celebrated theatre classics.

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WEST SIDE STORIES

The Racial Politics and Aesthetic Considerations of Staging Hell's Kitchen Globally

Yasmine Marie Jahanmir

The opening bars of the *West Side Story* prologue gently thud as the curtain opens onto a darkened stage. Lights come up on a lone figure seated on some crates next to a ratty gray trashcan, crudely spray-painted with the word *Jets*, announcing a territorial claim. The tense music swells as more of the cast appears on stage, forming two rival groupings that begin to challenge and provoke each other in a highly choreographed way. This opening scene is familiar to musical theatre fans and has had countless variations throughout *West Side Story*'s professional and amateur production history. However, unlike the traditional casting that pits "white" immigrants (typically understood as Irish and Italian) against the Puerto Ricans, a casting intended to represent tensions among the immigrant communities of New York in the 1940s and 50s, the 2017 production at the American University of Kuwait perhaps was unique as it featured a variety of ethnicities on either side of this urban turf war. The Jets comprised Kuwaiti, Pakistani, Palestinian (with a Jordanian passport), and Egyptian actors.¹ The Sharks contained Iraqi and Kuwaiti actors. Even the police that broke up the fight were diverse, played by Iranian and Kuwaiti actors. While, perhaps, these casting choices muddled audience understanding that much of the underlying social unease of the original script was based in racial difference, I felt strongly that it would be a more ethical choice to cast without regard to phenotype appearance to avoid yet another inauthentic representation of Puerto Ricans onstage in *West Side Story*.

I made this initial decision only weeks after my arrival to Kuwait when I held auditions for the fall musical production, *West Side Story* that had essentially been chosen before I had arrived. There were a few different reasons for this choice, but the main one was that faculty members felt that *West Side Story*'s retelling of the timeless story of forbidden love between two warring factions would be relatable in a society in which marriage between two people of differing Islamic sects is frowned upon. As a reimagining of *Romeo and Juliet*, the musical does offer some universal and progressive themes, such as the toll of clan rivalries on human relations and the pitfalls of territorialism. In fact, it is hard to find fault with the show's iconic refrain, suggesting that beyond a world marred by racial division exists "a new way of living."

Yet, despite its utopian themes and its immense popularity all over the world, the long history of regressive and stereotypical casting makes putting up a production of *West Side Story* a difficult task. It requires communicating the particular racial context in which the musical was written and trying to combat the racist casting histories of the musical while at the same time paying homage to the recognizable choreography of the filmed version. The context in Kuwait posed additional challenges in that there is essentially no Latino population, men and women touching on stage is tolerated only in the most liberal settings, and for many, dancing is considered *haram*.²

By juxtaposing the intimate details of the rehearsal room of this production with the complicated global production history of *West Side Story*, this chapter aims to provide on-the-ground insight into the limits and possibilities of teaching about and representing specific US racial histories within a global setting, in this case in the Middle East, especially important as *West Side Story* continues to be performed around the world. Through casting practices, extensive tablework on race and history, and continued discussion of comfort level in regard to dancing and touching members of the opposite sex, I attempted to make a production that would be relevant and meaningful to the students while trying to avoid the racism of many earlier productions. The results were mixed. Some AUK students found resonances to the story of tension between white immigrants and Puerto Rican immigrants in 1950s New York City, particularly the non-Arab and non-Kuwaiti Arab students, while others chose to bypass their own connection to the material and willfully ignore my direction in favor of copycatting the iconic 1961 film version. While initially frustrated by the students' rejection of my vision, I've come to understand that for many students, who have spent lifetimes accessing and appreciating American popular culture through film, television and music, mimicking the movie becomes a way of personalizing their connection to their media environment. The student actors have a deep familiarity with Western popular culture and want to deepen their connection to the material by performing the characters they know so well. Thus, this chapter also addresses more broadly what it means for these students to perform in the style of Western musical theatre in Kuwait. In these ways, the AUK production of *West Side Story* encompassed both of what theatre historian Brian Eugenio Herrera calls "two distinct though parallel interpretive traditions that had guided understanding of the musical's significance since its 1957 premiere... *West Side Story*'s influence as the singular collaboration of some of the twentieth century's most influential musical theatre-makers" and "the musical's impact as a famously fallacious fiction of Puerto Rican-ness in US popular performance" (Herrera 2012, 232). As evidence of the former, in its 60 years of existence, *West Side Story* has been produced over 40,000 times worldwide, has an average of 250 productions each year in the US alone, and has been translated into 26 languages, including Hebrew, Swedish, Hungarian, German, Czech, Korean, Polish, Italian and Japanese (*All Things Considered* 2007) (Library of Congress). This production history suggests that the musical's status as an iconic American musical mostly overshadows the racial (un)realities of the play at the global scale. In sharing my experience producing

the musical in Kuwait, I hope to promote discussion of these two parallel interpretations and how they come into play when doing *West Side Story* in a global context.

Racist Stereotypes and Colorblind Casting

West Side Story premiered in 1957. Originally conceived to represent the tensions between the Jewish and the Catholic immigrants in New York City, the creators updated the story inspired by news reports of Mexican-American gang violence in early 1950s Los Angeles (Herrera 2012, 235). In spite of the creators resisting claims that they were presenting a realistic depiction of society, “reviewers and audiences alike lauded *West Side Story*’s presumed sociological accuracy” (ibid., 237). This reading of *West Side Story* as a realistic, theatrical documentation of social relationships between Puerto Ricans and other, whiter, immigrant groups endured and has since affected the general understanding of the musical and its role in broader US history. Due to this misconception that *West Side Story* is representative of a particular historical moment, and also because of its incredible popularity, *West Side Story* has become an important site for discussions of Puerto Rican identity as represented in popular media. Furthermore, musical theatre is routinely critiqued for its lack of diversity and, in a way, *West Side Story* was created to be a salve to this problem. The creators intended to send a message of social equality, emphasized by an early annotation by composer Leonard Bernstein on a page of dialogue, noting the show was “an out and out plea for racial tolerance” (Bernstein quoted in Hoffman 2014, 86). In spite of these good intentions, nuances of cultural representation were lacking at the time. Thus, throughout its production history, *West Side Story*, intended as a “plea for racial tolerance,” has inadvertently reinscribed some of the very same racist underpinnings that the creators were trying to dismantle. As Puerto Rican scholar Frances Negrón-Muntaner writes, “one of the ironies of the film’s centrality in Puerto Rican identity discourses, however, is the universal consensus by both critics and creators of *West Side Story* that the film is not in any way ‘about’ Puerto Rican culture, migration, or community life” (2000, 84). Negrón-Muntaner goes on to discuss how the musical style and dance choreography were not representative of Puerto Rican culture and most of the actors in both the Broadway production and the film were not Puerto Rican. In preparing for *West Side Story*, a director must contend with both the Puerto Rican-ness of the show as well as its failure to accurately represent Puerto Rican culture.

In order to dispel any notion that I would be staging an authentic representation of Puerto Rican identity, I decided to do colorblind casting. I made this decision for two reasons. In spite of it being common practice to cast actors with darker skin and hair tones as the Sharks and actors with lighter skin and hair tones in the Jets, Puerto Ricans do not have a singular skin tone or hair color due to their violent history of colonization. Furthermore, this also applies to the Irish and Italian immigrants who presumably make up the Jets. The turf war between these two groups as imagined in the show is a cultural one, not necessarily one dictated by skin tone. However, traditional

casting of this musical often deploys skin tone as a useful shorthand for the different cultural and ethnic markers leading to a reduction of these cultures to stereotypes presumed legible by the color of their skin. In fact, theatre historian Warren Hoffman contends that skin color became a point of emphasis for the original creators of *West Side Story* when transforming the script from the original religious animosity to ethnic bigotry. Hoffman writes that “*West Side Story* works hard to play up the issue of color,” using as evidence a letter from the book writer Arthur Laurents suggesting that changing the lead character from Italian to Polish, from “Tonio” to “Tony,” would heighten the “contrast between light and dark” (Hoffman 2014, 97). The most atrocious example can be found in the 1961 film version of *West Side Story*, where almost every actor playing a Puerto Rican appeared in brownface, wearing darker makeup to make them seem more authentic. It recently came to light that even Rita Moreno, who was one of the only Puerto Ricans in the cast, was made to wear makeup darker than her skin tone (Associated Press 2019). While most high-profile productions of *West Side Story* no longer utilize such overtly racist casting techniques and some broader progress in regard to ethnicity and casting has been made in theatre and film, continued discussion of these issues is fundamental to a more equitable and diverse theatrical future. Thus, by eschewing skin tone as an identifying feature of ethnic identity, I hoped that my production would avoid some of the stereotypical and racist pitfalls of the show. Second, because of the typical conflation of skin tone and ethnic identity discussed above, colorblind casting helped me avoid the notion that I was staging an authentic representation of Puerto-Ricanness. While obviously the script makes both benign and incendiary references to the Sharks’ ethnic and national identity, by calling them “Puerto Ricans,” “PRs,” and “spics,” I had hoped that casting diverse ethnicities on either side of this gang rivalry would downplay its ethnic nature. I also rejected any accent work to make the Sharks sound more Puerto Rican and encouraged everyone to speak with the accents that were their own. By making the Sharks less theatrically (and stereotypically) Puerto Rican, I had hoped to focus on the general notions of how insularism of a host country and marginalization of immigrants could be detrimental to a healthy functioning society. These issues are particularly relevant in Kuwait where the current population is about 75 percent non-Kuwaiti and has a complicated history of immigration. Kuwaiti urban historian, Farah Al-Nakib, highlights the role of immigration in the post-oil expansion of Kuwait’s economy as a formative feature in Kuwaiti national identity. By the mid-1960s, Kuwaitis were outnumbered by immigrants. She credits Kuwait’s stringent citizenship laws to:

the realization that Kuwaitis were rapidly being outnumbered by foreigners who possessed the skills necessary to build and operate their country—skills that the indigenous community still lacked—had significant psychological ramifications. Although Kuwait’s pre-oil population had always been culturally diverse, the rapid arrival of so many new people from so many places substantially impacted Kuwaitis’ ability and willingness to accommodate, accept, and coexist with strangers.

(2016, 177)

The themes of immigration and insularism were thus relevant to the Kuwait context of the production, in spite of limited awareness of the particular American history of Latino immigration. My choice to downplay the particular ethnic categories in the musical was only possible in this context because the story could maintain its overarching relevance in spite of Kuwait not sharing the particular racial histories of the US.

There is a danger in colorblind casting in that it can be a superficial fix to theatre's diversity problem. Rather than implement institutional policies that make meaningful steps towards increasing the diversity of theatrical production, colorblind casting can be a method of nodding toward inclusion without making any meaningful change to the dominance of the Western theatrical canon. Yet, in an educational institution geared toward giving students an American-style liberal arts education in English in the Arabian Peninsula, almost any play choice that I could make would require colorblind casting—whether it be *West Side Story*, *Grease*, or Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Even though some professors have suggested that I do a play in Arabic or a Kuwaiti play, the students have emphatically rejected these ideas when I have brought these ideas to them. They continually express interest in Western theatre, film and media and want to work on plays that reflect these interests. In addition to listening to the students' educational needs and personal interests, my Arabic is very limited and thus, my access to Kuwaiti theatre is limited. Additionally, Kuwait is home to the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts, a theatre school well known in the Arabic-speaking world, geared toward students who want to study Kuwaiti and Arabic theatre. However, many students choose to attend AUK to do theatre for the reasons below. While the government-run Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts was once a thriving learning environment to study theatre, conversations with students revealed that currently the institute is neglected and understaffed. Even with a degree from the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts, it proves difficult to find a steady job due to the seasonal nature of Kuwaiti theatre, the bulk of the productions occurring during Eid Al-Fitr, the holiday that marks the end of Ramadan. According to one student, most graduates end up in "a random office in the ministry of communication," in a job unrelated to their studies. Thus, attending AUK allows students to study more career-oriented subjects, such as Engineering, English or Business Administration, while still getting the chance to hone their acting skills. Choosing to attend AUK also reflects an interest in Western education platforms. There are many types of governmental scholarships for which the Kuwaiti students are eligible. One type of scholarship allows the students to study abroad, and many do, studying in the US or the UK. For those who have scholarships that require them to continue their studies in Kuwait, AUK offers the closest alternative to that study abroad experience. The AUK website advertises this connection to Western liberal arts education stating that, "the administrative structure, methods and standards of AUK are based on the American model of higher learning." One of the theatre students affirms AUK's vision saying that he feels as though he gets a Western educational experience at AUK because "the society on campus is way different from the culture on the outside... once I leave the campus, I'm back in Kuwait, it [the AUK Campus] feels like I'm in a different country." Therefore, my best offering to AUK students as a director, teacher and scholar

is a historical and practical knowledge of Western theatre, however fraught that is. Yet as a feminist, I also try to balance the dominance of the canon by incorporating diverse voices into my practice and teaching. These two factors influenced my decision to go forward with colorblind casting in spite of its flaws. In writing about colorblind casting in reference to black actors, theatre and performance studies scholar Brandi Wilkins Catanese suggests that if colorblind casting is adopted effectively it can expand notions of blackness beyond singular representations and allow for interplay between theatrical text and contemporary black culture. She states that “this dialogue between the culture of the play and the culture of the contemporary world in which audiences are situated underscores color-blind casting’s function as one vehicle among many for expanding how we understand blackness and its value” (Catanese 2011, 68). Even though colorblind casting is less of a choice when producing Western theatre abroad, I aim to underscore the productive possibilities of the casting in its ability to create a dialogue between the culture of the play and the world in which the students are living. In *West Side Story*, I hoped that this casting would encourage students to think their own identity formation, whether Kuwaiti, Arab or non-Arab, and understand how their positionality affected and was affected their own social relations.

To incite this dialogue with the cast, I began early rehearsals with discussion about the historical context of *West Side Story*. We discussed the particular context of Puerto Rican, Italian and Irish immigration to New York in the first half of the twentieth century and then broadened the discussion to general issues that arise from immigration, insular communities, groupthink and gang violence.³ In addition to working with the particular history of the play, I also worked with the students to develop connections to the play’s material through thought-provoking prompts, such as, “Share what *West Side Story* means to you” and “Have you ever felt like an outsider in your own community?” Actors were at first hesitant in sharing their experiences, as the group was of mixed ethnicity and nationality and there were various levels of friendship within it. However, eventually, the student actors began to open up about specific experiences, such as how they felt their limited knowledge of Arabic, despite growing up in Kuwait, hindered them in certain settings or how they felt like they were stereotyped based on their nationality.

The goal of this tablework was never to imagine that they were Puerto Ricans, but rather for them to understand the fierce territorial and cultural divides of the Jets and Sharks by using their own experiences. The aim was to create an “as if” scenario for the actors, so they could understand the emotional intensity of this turf war. And to some degree, it worked. In an online anonymous survey, conducted shortly after the play, I asked the actors a few questions about the rehearsal process. In their responses, some shared that the personal connection to the play helped them to discover their characters and helped them to better embody the play’s tensions based on their own experiences. In the survey, I asked the students to reflect on their personal connections to the play. One student wrote that they did have personal connection to the material, but wrote that “if I explain more I will no longer be anonymous.” Another mentioned finding their personal meaning throughout the process: “I didn’t [have any personal connections] at first but I began to connect with it and felt that a lot of people can relate to it and I started

to love the choice.” In addition to asking the students about the personal relevance of *West Side Story*, I also wanted to know how effective our discussions were in helping the students understand the context of the play. I asked: “Was talking about the themes of the play helpful in rehearsal?” One student said that the discussions about history, race and immigration helped them to better understand the play, stating: “knowing who the Jets are and the Sharks and both their backgrounds helped a lot because we knew why we hate each other so much.” Another student used these discussions to develop their character’s background, commenting, “knowing the atmosphere of the play and the living conditions... helps the play and helps getting into character.” Through the continued dialogue during the rehearsal process, consisting of me sharing history and context and the students contemplating their own connection to the material, students were able to deepen their understanding of the play’s themes through examining their own lived experience.

For some of the actors, the discussions that we held during the early rehearsals helped them to better contextualize the play and find personal meaning in the story without generalizing the conversations around identity; however, the discourse surrounding race, ethnicity and immigration did not fully resonate with all actors. At one point during the rehearsal process, a few actors came into the room with inauthentic and somewhat comical Puerto Rican accents. I reiterated that we would not be using Puerto Rican accents and that we would just let the words of the script reiterate the difference between the two groups. So badly wanting to mimic the movie, they asked me why. I responded with my thoughts on how since there were no Puerto Ricans in the cast, I did not want the actors to pretend they were Puerto Rican, but rather I wanted our version of the play to focus on the two rival immigrant groups more generally. Insistent, I was asked again, “Why?” I said something along the lines of: “If you use those accents, which are not all that realistic, we will just be presenting a stereotype of Puerto Rican people, and since we do not have any Latinos in the cast, it would be irresponsible for us to pretend that we do.” One actor responded with, “Well, we are all brown, so what does it matter?” In this moment, I was crestfallen. I felt that all of our discussions about the specificity of the historical situation and cultural difference had had no effect on the actors whatsoever, but rather had led to an universalist understanding of the play. I was faced with the inherent impossibility of the task that I had set out to do, downplaying the albeit superficial Puerto Rican-ness of *West Side Story* in order to make it relatable to the Kuwaiti students led to a non-specific understanding of the play. The complicated racial dynamics of the musical cannot be minimized lest they lose some of their specificity. On one hand, some actors found kinship and empathy in understanding the plight of the characters. On the other hand, some came away with an understanding that all racial oppression can be conflated.

In spite of the mixed results of the tablework on race, stereotype and belonging, I did see a strong coalescence of the cast as a result of these discussions. While this type of ensemble building can and does happen in all genres of theatre, I felt that the personal sharing that the cast was asked to do in early rehearsals deepened this particular group connection. When asked in the online survey what they liked “best about the process of working on *West Side Story*,” many answers reflected a strong and collaborative

kinship among the actors. For example, many responded with “the cast,” “the group work,” “the atmosphere,” and “hanging out with new people.” In addition to enjoying the feelings of togetherness, some students noted how that belonging translated to the performance by stating that they liked “our chemistry and the fact that we didn’t have any complications between one another on stage.” One of the students even explicitly referenced the role of the tablework in creating feelings of togetherness: “I loved the fact that we were all comfortable with each other and we were allowed to share our opinions without any fear.” These responses signal that the dialogue on personal identity and social difference through the lens of the play helped to deepen the students’ sense of connection to both the material and each other. This is an example of what theater scholar Katherine Hennessey, who writes about Shakespeare productions in the Arabian Gulf, calls the “new local.” Hennessey’s research on Shakespeare in the Arabian Gulf identifies the particular effects of theatre in creating more egalitarian communities that she names the “new local.” Hennessey writes that:

the practice of theatre in the region creates and stages micro-communities defined by inclusivity, openness, and egalitarian treatment of their members, regardless of gender, ethnicity, creed or nationality, and [that] as such these micro-communities stand in stark contrast to the insular sub-communities established in and by other strata of Gulf society... their [the theater companies’] work challenges extant hierarchies of inclusion and patterns of segregation and marginalization, by uniting practitioners of vastly disparate identities in the collective aim and collaborative process of performance.

(Hennessey 2018, 181)

Similar to the examples in Hennessey’s book, the communal staging of *West Side Story* challenged some of the extant social boundaries by celebrating the collaboration of student actors from various genders, classes, and nationalities. Furthermore, the explicit discourse on these traversed boundaries deepened, as one student put it, “the sense of unity between the cast members.”

Western Media and Theatrical Performance

It is hardly possible to present an amateur production of *West Side Story* without attending to the global legacy of the 1961 film version. Not only did it win 11 Academy Awards, including Best Picture, it also serves as a conspicuous record of the original Broadway production. Jerome Robbins directed and choreographed both the original 1957 Broadway show and the 1961 film. The film also included many of the original Broadway cast members. The accolades and the continued global circulation of the film have helped to cement the status of *West Side Story* as iconic American musical. Not only were many of the students familiar with the movie, one saying “I used to watch it with my best friend since childhood,” many audience members would be looking for the recognizable choreography and characters. However much I wanted to create our own version of *West Side Story* that was relevant to the student actors and audiences in the particular context of Kuwait, I would also need to encounter the ghosts of film.



Figure 5.1 The Sharks defend their turf at the gym dance during “Mambo.”

Photo by Lisa Urkevich. © 2017. Photo courtesy of the Office of PR & Marketing (American University of Kuwait).

As mentioned above, the filmed version presents hurtful stereotypes of Puerto Ricans, with non-Latino actors in brownface playing the roles. For a director, it became a balancing act to acknowledge the iconicity of the film while also creating a show that is relevant to the non-US production context while doing my best to mitigate the racist past of the musical. As mentioned above, AUK advertises itself as an American-style institution, so I also needed to take into account local interest in Western culture as the Music and Drama Department offers a unique glimpse for local audiences into Western cultural products and often is seen as a representative window into American culture, evidenced by the fact that the US Ambassador to Kuwait, Lawrence Silverman, and his wife attended the production.

In the case of the 2017 AUK production, I wished to reference the recognizable choreography while banishing the racist performance history of the film. Yet, many of the students wished to copycat the film exactly. At rehearsal, they would deviate from the script by copying the movie adding in phrases, accents and line readings. They would come to me having watched the film’s choreography again and again; asking me to change our choreography so that it would better match the film. In order to support the students’ passionate interest in the material as well as cater to anticipated audience expectation, the musical director and I decided to make some changes to the script so that it was closer to the film. A prime example was our decision to recast “America” to mimic the film’s gender composition, with men and women singing against each other, rather than having “America” as an all-female song as it is in the original musical score. This change was made due to our ensemble composition, in which we had vocally stronger male ensemble than we did a women ensemble. With the exception of the accents, I let

some of the other film additions slide because I was invested in maintaining the cast's enthusiasm and passion. Even when I rejected certain film additions, they would sneak back in. For example, the accents disappeared during rehearsals and then, much to my chagrin, reappeared during show time. This resistance to my directing was frustrating, particularly because it pushed the show in directions I was actively trying to avoid. As time has passed and I have had more production experience with these students, I have begun to realize that the students are not intentionally trying to resist direction, but rather are taking the opportunity to embody their relationship to Western media through live performance in order to nurture feelings of connectedness within an increasingly mediatized world.

Many of the students who participate in theatre at AUK become interested in acting and storytelling through film. In my teaching and directing, I have encountered many students who have a vast knowledge of American films, and in some cases, even surpassing my own familiarity. I am often asked if we can do staged versions of films instead of plays. So when we do a production that has a filmed version, such as *West Side Story* or *Grease*, the students show an intense dedication to reproducing the film as faithfully as possible. I now see this as a way for the students to deepen their relationship with their media consumption. They use embodied performance to feel more connected to cultural products that are not made in their geographical location, yet still feel very much their own. As theatre scholar Amy Cook writes about The Wooster Group's performance of *Hamlet*, which put live actors in front of a filmed version of the play: "the production was not an attempt to look backward historically at theatre or at a play. It was a *manifestation* of theatre's ability to constitute us by, in, through, and in between performances" (Cook 2009, 113). In this way, the students are producing themselves as artists through theatrically embodying a relationship with their cultural products. Additionally, live performance holds a particular place in a global media marketplace that is increasingly digital and fragmented. In her book on K-pop,⁴ performance studies scholar Suk-Young Kim writes about the notion of liveness and the value of live performance in K-pop. Kim expands the definition of "live" in order to probe the varied facets of the multimedia experience that increasingly defines the Korean popular music industry. She writes:

the foundational condition of live performance is the temporal-spatial coincidence of performer and spectator. But a more ontological definition of "live" in a live performance would reference a feeling of "aliveness." That feeling of rapport emerges among community members who occupy the same space with a shared purpose.

(2018, 175)

For Kim, feelings of liveness are cultivated for fans to feel closer to the performer than they are used to seeing on their screens. In a similar way, this need for intimate connection to digital mediascapes is what drives the students' desire to recreate these video performances in a live setting. Through making the digital videos feel alive in their own live embodiment onstage, students develop a visceral connection to their increasingly mediatized surroundings.

Of course, the theatrical ghosts of shows and films past are not unique to *West Side Story* and can even serve as a method of developing theatre artists and audiences. Stacy Wolf discusses this in her article about musical theatre in Jewish summer camps. She writes that the campers' shows

allude to Broadway, ghosted by the professional productions or film musicals with which the campers are familiar. The girls' participation in theatre as both performers and audiences shapes them as engaged and knowledgeable spectators and fans (and possibly artists) who often go on to attend and support professional theatre.

(Wolf 2017, 49)

For Wolf, it does not matter whether these ghosts of past productions or films detract from the originality of the production because the inspiration from previous versions of the musicals allows for a performative dialogue in which the campers develop artistic expertise that will transform them into lifelong theatre-makers and fans. In the case of the AUK production, it was the first musical that many students had performed in or had seen. This embodied connection to one of the most iconic musicals of all time, in spite of its problems, helped the students to create meaning in their roles as artists. The audience was also seemingly transformed. I had one student come to me after the show asking if there was a copy he could take home and show his parents. He had never seen a theatre show before and was so impressed he wanted to share it with his family. Through developing an aesthetic relationship to the original productions of musicals, it helps to encourage future artists and theatregoers.

Gender, Dance and Resistance

As a feminist scholar and director, it would remiss of me not to mention some of the unique gender dynamics of producing musical theatre in Kuwait. While much of what I am about to describe is not particular to *West Side Story* as I encountered similar occurrences in the straight plays I directed here as well as when we produced *Grease* the following year, I will share some anecdotes from the production of *West Side Story* that I believe speak more widely to the gendered dynamics of theater here in Kuwait.

In my first draft of the audition notice, I included all the practical information about the auditions, and since *West Side Story* is a dance heavy musical, I added: "Please be prepared to do a short dance number." I was advised to not include the word "dance" on the poster because there are some factions of the community here that believe dancing, particularly in public, is sinful. Being half-Iranian, the idea that dancing in public was not seen as an appropriate activity was not a complete shock to me. However, as a director, I was very confused about how we would do *West Side Story* without dance. After discussions with faculty, I understood that the students auditioning would likely be allowed to dance and that many would be very comfortable with dancing. Colleagues told me that theatre participants and the audiences who would attend the show would tend to have more socially liberal views. Thus, we chose not to use the word "dance" on the posters that would be circulated

through various methods around campus, as the campus community at large reflected the broader Kuwaiti society, containing Islamic conservatives, the politically liberal, and everything in between. We ended up eliminating the language around dance and movement completely, allowing the classic *West Side Story* logo featuring illustrations of two dancing figures on a fire escape, to imply the movement needs of the show. Then, on the audition form given only to those who were entering, I asked specifically about dance experience and comfort with dancing.

All of the men said that they felt comfortable dancing and were comfortable touching members of the opposite gender on stage. For the women, there were various levels of discomfort when it came to dance and touching. In my casting and staging, I did my best to showcase the performing talents of the women while taking their requests into consideration. Some women said that they would be unable to dance on stage. In this case, I cast them in roles that would not require choreography. For example, we had a woman play the role of Lieutenant Schrank. Some women said they were comfortable with movement on stage, but not opposite a man, even if the choreography did not require touching. In the gym scene, I had these women dance with other women. In the "America" scene, I blocked some women so that they were a part of the stage picture, without requiring them to dance. I worked with the students throughout the rehearsal process to continuously gauge their varying levels of comfort in regard to the choreography. Each woman who had expressed discomfort seemed to be satisfied with the final result. As a director, particularly in a country and culture that is not my own, I have found it crucial to continue these conversations throughout the entire rehearsal process. There have been cases where a student has felt comfortable with dancing or touching a member of the opposite gender one night in rehearsal, but then after discussions with their parents they have come back the next night deciding that they will no longer be able to do so. I have also had experiences in which a student avoided telling me their discomfort so that they would not ruin the blocking. In this case, I sensed the student was uncomfortable with a certain dance scene and after a private conversation where I directly asked her about the movement, she admitted her unease and we quickly re-blocked the scene. Theatre is a fluid practice in which movement, emotions and stage pictures are always changing. The conversations around actors' boundaries should continue to occur throughout the process to ensure that the students' needs are acknowledged. This is particularly important in cases where the content and rehearsal methods are not inherently relatable to the host culture.

The personal comforts and discomforts in regard to dancing onstage did not necessarily translate into social sanctioning of these choices. This came to light when KTV2, the government-run English television, came to film our dress rehearsal as a part of a feature they were doing on the play. We selected what we felt were our best scenes for the television program: "Jet Song," "Maria," and "America." They filmed the first two musical numbers without any issue. About midway through our presentation of "America," I turned to look at the cameraman and noticed that he had taken the focus off the stage and turned it onto the live faculty orchestra. When I inquired about this, they

said that the issue was the women dancing. While I did not get a straight answer on whether dancing was the sole issue or if it was the fact that the women were dancing on the same stage as men (even though they were not touching), or what the women were wearing, it was clear that the crew would not film “America” as we were presenting it. Since we felt that this was our strongest number in terms of choreography, we asked if they would be open to filming a male-only version of the number. The television crew agreed to this compromise. However, at first, many of the male actors resisted this idea. They refused to participate because they did not see it as fair because the women had put in as much work as them and were integral to the scene. As a director, I was torn because I fully supported this resistance. However, I also needed to ensure that we had the best marketing and promotion for our show. We sat and discussed pros and cons of the choices, discussing issues of gender equality, social change and resistance, for about ten minutes behind a closed curtain while the cameraman waited on the other side. We finally came to a decision that although filming “America” without the women was not the best-case scenario, we could have more of an impact and reach more people if we could attract a bigger audience for our play. I do not intend to take credit for the feminism of these resistant young men advocates; yet, I can’t help but hope that some of our discussions might have strengthened their resolve to standup for more egalitarian ideals.

Conclusion

Looking at the ways in which AUK’s 2017 production of *West Side Story* balanced the needs of the narrative, the global production history, and the local context offers some insight into the broader effects of producing Western theatre in global settings. Even though I felt some responsibility in offering the students and the audiences an “American” experience, I saw it as necessary to include connections to personal experience and the local culture, history and politics. This allowed students to bring their own experiences and culture into the process and encouraged them to feel deeper affinity with the characters in the show. As mentioned above, this was uneven in its success, sometimes allowing for a conflation of one culture with another. However, as live theatre is inherently based in its local context, bridging these connections is crucial so that the Western play or musical does not remain divorced from the production location. In addition to the play itself, the rehearsal process should be attuned to the cultural and religious norms within a society. As a director in Kuwait, I am continually having conversations, both group and private, to ensure that the students feel comfortable during rehearsals. I also enter these conversations as a learner, humbly acknowledging the cultural differences and doing my best to respect each student’s boundaries through the process. Finally, I have come to understand that Western cultural production is no longer firmly situated in the Western world. While a musical like *West Side Story* was produced in and is representative of American musical theatre, the students’ access to various film clips and various filmed amateur productions of *West Side Story* demonstrate that the audience for Western media is now global. It is no longer possible to clearly delineate culture as

belonging to one location, especially for the younger generations. In spite of these insights, I would probably not direct this musical again in a place that did not have a significant Puerto Rican population. While I think that my production offered mixed results in terms of localizing the musical, it is important that we continue to talk about the benefits and challenges of producing *West Side Story* in diverse global settings, as it is a musical that will continue to be revisited, evidenced by the forthcoming 2020 film version directed by Steven Spielberg.

Notes

- 1 It is important to note that Kuwait predominantly grants citizenship through paternal descent. It is very difficult to obtain Kuwaiti citizenship in most other situations. Therefore, many of the students, although born and raised in Kuwait, identify themselves by the passports they hold. I will come back to this when discussing how racial politics played out in the rehearsal room.
- 2 *Haram* is the Arabic word for forbidden or sinful within the Islamic religion.
- 3 I was not purposely eschewing the Jewish history of *West Side Story* in our table-work because I feared that it would be a contentious topic, but rather, for expediency's sake, chose to focus our discussions on the characters explicitly in this version of the musical. While Kuwait, like many Arab countries who support a Palestinian state, does not have a diplomatic relationship with Israel, I have found that most of the students I have spoken with in casual settings have more open-minded and nuanced views on Judaism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than governmental policy would suggest.
- 4 K-pop is the popular abbreviation for Korean popular music.

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CHAPTER 6

ACROSS A CLOUDY ROOM

The Cultural Appropriation of Western Musicals by Chinese Students at the Expense of their Own National Identity; A Case Study

James P. Mirrione and Wei Song

Prologue

2008: A small, cold rehearsal room at Beijing Dance Academy (BDA). In the semi-darkness, male and female Chinese students can be seen hurriedly preparing for their final scenes and songs that are part of their exam evaluations. Seated in rows are the instructors and guest artists who have been invited to comment on the work. A piano, off to the side of the audience, begins and various familiar American and British musical show tunes are heard. As part of a pattern, a student will sing, dance or act a small bit of monologue that accompanies each number. After a few of these offerings, a male Chinese student steps forward as the opening bars of “Some Enchanted Evening” from *South Pacific* are heard. The student sings:

Some enchanted evening, you may see a stranger
You may see a stranger, across a cloudy room
And somehow you know, you’ll know even then
That somewhere you’ll see her, again and again

Something is not quite right; perhaps it is a problem with diction or accent, but then comes the second verse:

Some enchanted evening, someone may be laughin’
You may hear her laughin’, across a cloudy room
And night after night, as strange as it seems
The sound of her laughter, will sing in your dreams

At this point, I¹ am not quite sure if I heard the word correctly: was that “crowded” or did I really hear “cloudy”? Perhaps that was the cryptic word inserted by Rodgers and Hammerstein in their classic 1949 musical about interracial love, the stain of segregation that persisted in the US Armed Forces even during combat; and the complications that ensue when highly differing classes and races collide on a small island in the South Pacific, which might

very well serve as a universal metaphor for any audience anywhere. However, as the song nears its conclusion, the mystery word is repeated:

Some enchanted evening, when you find your true love
When you feel her call you, across a cloudy room
Then fly to her side, and make her your own
Or all through your life you, may dream all alone
Who can explain it? Who can tell you why?
Fools give you reasons, wise men never try

Indeed. At this point in the proceedings the Dean of the Musical Theatre Program at BDA asks me to critique the progress of the students' work so far. It is an opportunity to give a reaction that is a familiar refrain whenever a Western theatre practitioner encounters students, audiences, artists and academics who, while engaging in these representational art forms, are not from the locales that first created these original works, as, in this case, from American or British musical theatre. Because this is not the first time this issue has arisen in theatre workshops or in lectures, I have rehearsed my part well whenever I have asked students certain essential questions such as: do you fully comprehend the context which the lyrics, script or music have emanated from to become an integrated artistic entity; what is the subtext that gives a grounding to the song; where do these characters come from; what are their pasts that conflict with their present circumstances; and, why do they sing the lyrics, dance to the music and say the lines as characters in an ever evolving plot that is supposed to resonate to some degree our own human existence?

It was these questions that led to a workshop that explored all the above concerns. The design was to stage a series of improvisations, character walks, gestures and dramatic prompts around the words "cloudy" and "crowded," in order to demonstrate significantly their differences. The outcomes were then applied to a short group scenario which allowed actors to gain a fuller understanding of the particular song in question; one that is an essential element, among many, in the musical *South Pacific*. While the workshop was a technical success, and it was greeted by approval from the Dean, faculty and students alike, I was still not convinced that the existential problem had been solved; or, like that haunting word that first set forth my investigation, the matter was still rather overcast in my own mind. The next day confirmed to me that there was something more amiss in that "cloudy" room.

Unknowingly, this workshop highlighted some of the issues that would continuously reoccur throughout my tenure in China a decade later. Thus, this chapter will explore how a cultural export, such as Western musicals, translates in China in dimensions that eschew critical analysis in favor of pure replication; how these duplications gloss over the inherent conflicts between characters that point to greater social concerns; how the velocity of Chinese consumerism gives rise to the pursuit of symbolic capital which, in turn, promotes the desire to reject all things Chinese in favor of symbols Western; how the reflections of both Chinese and Western theatre practitioners and Chinese undergraduate musical theatre students can elucidate some of the underlying reasons for the mechanism of cultural appropriation; and, how a recent musical theatre course, conducted by the authors, demonstrated all the above

tensions and currents which can be illustrative of the state of China today. As will be shown in the following descriptions, the answers as to why and how non-Western performers confront a Western musical theatre product proved to be an elusive quest; and any one demonstration still did not fully answer the question as to why these artists chose to engage exclusively with foreign material instead of their own cultural experiences.

As a general observation, gleaned from ten years of traveling back and forth to China to conduct master classes/workshops, to teach American musical theatre, to guest lecture on the subject and, to collaborate with Dr. Wei Song, we have both observed the almost complete saturation of Western symbolic capital that permeates throughout modern Chinese society. A recent examination of this phenomena noted that

with increasing disposable income, a rapidly growing middle class and an increasing number of millionaires and billionaires, China is now flooded with luxury foreign products ... Products and services produced in the United States and other Western countries, in particular, are often fetishized in China as symbols of modernity.

(Li 2016, ii)

The 40-year Chinese experiment with opening to the West has brought with it not only an inexorable rise in living standards, but also a blurring of what it means to be Chinese in a globalized world. Globalization implies a heterogeneous interaction amongst many differing sets of peoples, which runs counter to the very homogeneous nature of the population of China. Yet, given the history of conquest, imperialism and technological superiority as aspects of Western dominance, and the imprint of its culture upon those who came under its sway, it might be just old wine in new wine skins when it comes to globalization. Yet, the goal is to influence other nations. As Michael Anton (2019), a foreign policy expert, describes it: “globalization has taken its place as the imperialism of our time. Globalization represents an attempt to do [influence] through peaceful means – the creation of transnational institutions, the erosion of borders and the homogenization of intellectual, cultural and economic products.” While Coke and KFC are ubiquitous from Bangladesh to Beijing to Boston, the underpinnings of this phenomenon are what Anton describes as “centralization.” He states: “Globalization also has the same stifling impact on ideas ... Globalization reduces differences in thought in any number of ways: through media consolidation ... or through the homogenization of the elite” (Anton 2019). It is these factors that drive taste and the assumption that the predominant power automatically has corresponding superior cultural currency. This dynamic extends to all facets of entertainment especially in the arena of musical theatre. The calculus works roughly in this manner: if the twenty-four-hour all-encompassing panorama of daily images are predominately of a non-Chinese derivation, then the average citizen can become conditioned to see a bifurcated world where one is Chinese, but life is comprised of cultural artifacts and preferences that are foreign, and mostly Western.

A salient theatrical example of the modern tension of this emerging non-Chinese world and how it affects its citizens would be the play *Bus Stop* by Gao Xingjian, written in 1983. In this minimalistic drama, eight diverse characters assemble at a bus stop where time stops, continues and finally

becomes irrelevant, as the characters are unable to get to their “destination.” It is this dramatic impasse that becomes the existential dilemma, which exposes a fissure in the society. Two of the characters raise the question and ask if any are indeed happy and satisfied with their lives: one is the “Brash Young Man” who personifies the rebellion against his elders to whom he exhibits contempt. This is contrasted with the character of “The Carpenter” who bemoans the fact that his traditional expertise, in crafting a national product, is no longer acceptable or desired thus rendering his brand as irrelevant. As it applies to the issue at hand, we can extrapolate that these two characters are both archetypes; ones that epitomize the dichotomy felt by a younger generation who desire non-Chinese musical theatre fare, versus an older generation who still cling to the meaningful vestiges of a traditional China.

Modern China has a multitude of advertised “utopias” by virtue of those symbols and clarion calls to always strive for happiness and to find satisfaction in the attainment of wealth and status. However, these signifiers are now increasingly non-Chinese; and, while indeed wealth and status are still social drivers for the society, the exemplification of those attainments is usually seen in the form of Gucci, Chevrolet and Starbucks along with many other products from the West. Dong and Tian (2009), in an article published in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, trace the history of Chinese consumerism from the early years of the twentieth century to 2009 in order to uncover how society transitioned away from “the valuation of domestic-made goods and devaluation of things foreign, as a way to articulate Chinese nationalism.” The arrival of American and British musicals to China roughly began during the hosting of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Therefore, it is instructive to see if there is an intersection where present day Chinese students and performers, who have grown up with a plethora of foreign consumer goods, also display a preference for only non-Chinese musical theatre “brands.” The theory being, that an affinity for a foreign consumer product is also related to choosing an artistic creation of a non-national pedigree, especially if both carry significant cultural capital and status markers.

Finally, on a purely empirical level, it is unmistakable that Western branding is ubiquitous in terms of taste, cuisine, costume, clothing, cosmetics, language and culture; which are the default choices for any contemporary young person in China today. The chance to wear a backwards turned Chicago Bulls baseball hat, would now be the desired fashion accessory by most Chinese youth; an acquired preference that supersedes any fashion that represents a bygone era or symbolic of older generations. Do university students’ affinities, then, for Western styles cross-over to the importance of affixing exclusively Western models to their musical training regimes? To use the consumerist model to examine choices Chinese citizens make as to what brands they buy and what those purchases signify; and then to extrapolate that action to the aesthetic choices Chinese students and performers make when considering the origins of those musical theatre forms they want to work with, is to see the two phenomenon as driven by what value both possess for the creators of the eventual outcomes and the consumers of those brands (*wai-guo-pin-pai*). An example of the synthesis between these two forms of consumerism is to see how Dong and Tian describe what aspects a foreign product should contain for a Chinese costumer: “international popularity (status as a

‘world famous brand’), technological superiority to domestic brands, expensive price, and foreignness as conveyed through Western brand translations into Chinese” (Dong and Tian 2009, 508). If we jettison the purchasing of disposable products by Chinese consumers, the criteria cited above, as being the essentials for the attractiveness of a foreign (Western) product, could still be applied to Chinese students and performers as to their rationales for preferring Western musical theatre forms to national Chinese ones.

As documented above and expanded upon later in this chapter, the lack of understanding that Chinese students have as to the Western roles they inhabit or sing about reveals that both the quotidian Chinese consumer and the Chinese musical student myopically accept the West in ways of artifactual and artistic acquisition; ones that are largely unexamined. This results in the unintended consequence of casting the whole of China into a sort of costume drama directed by outside forces, in this case the West. The discursive overlap of the compliant Chinese consumer and the already converted Chinese musical theatre student, can be seen in this recounting of one of the responses Dong and Tian received to a set of questions posed to Chinese consumers as to the “dream” that is evoked when they choose Western products. The following fantasy is by a 21-year-old female living in Beijing:

When I get married, I am wearing Chanel wedding gown, Christian Dior shoes, Debeer (sic) diamonds, riding in an extended model of Cadillac, going to Europe for my honeymoon – to Paris, Italy, Milan, New York, and London. I go shopping and buy LV (Louis Vuitton) handbag, Prada bag/purse, CK (Calvin Klein) clothes, Poison perfume. And I also go to the long-for Disneyland, European theme parks, and global movie city (Hollywood) in Los Angeles ... Such a beautiful dream’

(Dong and Tian 2009, 511)

While the analysis by Dong and Tian also points to many responses that are ambivalent about Western consumerism or blatantly hostile to foreign influences as a testament to patriotic nationalism, a significant portion of Chinese society is still wedded to the West in regard to attitude, acceptance and acquisition; and the effect on Chinese musical theatre students and performers still produces “dreamers” readily convinced of the superiority of a musical such as *Chicago* over anything coming out of Beijing. In the end, Western musicals are a *brand* and in the competition between what is perceived as high quality (Broadway) versus the antiquated (Peking Opera), the consumers (students and performers) have cast their lot with Roxie Hart and not Huadan.

ACT 1. The Setting. Enter the Foreigner. Stage West.

The same rehearsal room as cited previously in the Prologue. This time the stage is prepared for a full rendering of several scenes from American and British musicals. Costumes, while rudimentary, are still evocative of the various works and the accompanist, on piano, skillfully delivers seminal scores to well-known musical numbers that are now fully acted out for the audience. This time, however, the Dean at BDA alerts me that the pivotal scene



Figure 6.1 Students singing the song “Company” for the show *Company*.
Photo by Wei Song. 2018. Communication University of China.

between Tony and Maria from *West Side Story* needs my attention. At first, I am amazed at the technical proficiency of these young Chinese university performers. Here they are singing in a foreign language, which is English, while replicating the original choreography and songs from the work to an almost perfect technical degree. Yet, the acting seems to show where simulacrum and sincerity clash. The young Chinese Maria and Tony conform physically, as young lovers, but when they are acting there seems to only be a marking out of the emotional high points of their relationship, and not the deeper complexities that embroil them within the prejudicial context represented by the warring gangs of the Sharks and the Jets.

As with the previous day, questions abound: has anyone explained to them how Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* reflects and also differs from the Laurents, Sondheim and Bernstein adaptation; how does the cast understand the social conflicts that are reflected in a musical that presents New York City (Verona) as a contentious and often violent melting pot of non-homogenous ethnic groups; what are central prejudices that consume the Sharks (Capulets) and the Jets (Montagues) which in turn, place Tony and Maria at the vortex of conflicts between their ethnic allegiances and their love that does not recognize such boundaries; and, how does one present the rejection of that initial revulsion for another based solely on identity and turn that into a love, for the other, that transcends representational group enmity? While these thoughts were swirling about in my mind, the Dean stopped the scene and asked me for an impromptu analysis of the scene at hand.

Initially caught off-guard, I asked, at first, only generalizations of my Chinese Tony and Maria; who looked as bewildered as actors attempting to get to the core of their roles, as I did in trying to understand what was motivating them to be these characters.

It was at this juncture that a bit of on-the-spot analysis came into play, which unknowingly became the genesis for this future reflection. In talking to the principal actors and the cast that day, I came to the realization that, throughout the entire process of rehearsing *West Side Story*, it seemed not much background or investigation had been given to the students as to the context of the musical; the inherent sociological conflicts, the issues of racism and prejudice; the parallels and departures from the source material of *Romeo and Juliet*; or, the attempts by law enforcement to deal with the then 1950s dilemma of “juvenile delinquency.” Instead, the prime motivating factor for the students to engage in this work was its cultural significance as a benchmark example of excellence in American musical theatre; a classic that was to be revered by the highest degree of imitation. This was no doubt reinforced by the school’s understandable desire to showcase the highest standards of physical and artistic dexterity in all its presentations. Yet, mimicry is not mastery even when the contours of the vehicle appear, from a distance, to be in superb running order. Upon closer inspection, the requirement to “kick the tires” and to “look under the hood,” so to speak, was paramount if any emotional truth was to be wrung from the performances.

The most obvious key to this challenge was to get to the heart of the inherited biases that surround Tony and Maria; which might have been far more palpable to American audiences, in the era of the musical’s creation, than the historical setting of Shakespeare’s original play. However, the Upper West Side of Manhattan in 1957 was a long way from the Haidian District of Beijing in 2010. Therefore, cultural contextuality had to be addressed immediately since none of the performers were of the differing ethnicities, languages and personalities that comprised the worlds of the Sharks and the Jets. Yet, it is the plot twist essential to the musical’s emotional compass, as it was with the play, that is at the core of its creation. It is when the “other” or “the enemy” is introduced as a viable and overpowering love and not as an objectified label to be reviled. Fortunately, and what seems now like a prescient event, the day before I purchased from a Beijing street bookseller a copy of *The Rape of Nanking*. What follows then, from memory, was a series of questions I asked of both Tony and Maria and of the cast with the aid of an interpreter, although many of the students were also bilingual:

“Who are you?”; “Who is Tony for Maria and who is Maria for Tony?”; “What is it about both of your backgrounds that is so challenging to your previously held beliefs about the other?”; “Can love conquer hate, can it surpass parental obligations (a cogent element in Chinese society), the law, censure from friends and society and is it impossible to surpass societal restraints?”; “Why do the Sharks and the Jets despise each other, what identity, tribe, religion, nationality, government or color does each represent to the other, which is met with such mutual and instantaneous abhorrence?”; and; finally, “Who would the other have to be in order to present for each of you first the feeling of hatred and then the challenge to love?”

While deference by Chinese pupils to a professor, teacher or guest artist is appealing, especially after enduring years of solipsistic meanderings from Western students, critical analysis is not an aspect that is traditionally supported in Chinese training academies or universities. Martin Schoenhals, Assistant Professor at Dowling College, noted that this teacher—student

imbalance dynamic is rooted in the historical and cultural history of Chinese society:

In the traditional Chinese classroom student participation was essentially limited to memorized recitation of classical Confucian texts. Once this was accomplished teachers would tell students what the texts meant. The Chinese coined the phrase 'stuff-the-duck' method (*tian ya shi*) to describe this teaching practice, emphasizing the student's role as a passive and silent receptor of the teacher's knowledge.

(Schoenhals 1994, 401).

Therefore, my list of interrogatives was met with silence, as if to proffer an answer or opinion was tantamount to disrespect, even as I offered assurances that I welcomed differing points of view, or any for the sake of continuing with the ad hoc workshop. When it became clear that none was forthcoming, I gave this direction: "You, Maria, are Chinese and from the city of Nan-king. You discover that your love, Tony, is Japanese; the same nationality that murdered your grandparents during the occupation in 1937. Tony: you have been brought up to see Chinese as inferior and that their claims of brutality, that your nation did to them, are exaggerated and overlook the Chinese army's own aggression against the Japanese. To both gangs of the Sharks and Jets: you are not Puerto Rican and White, but Chinese and Japanese. As armed groups, you are intent on avenging the crimes you perceive the other is responsible for in the past and most likely will perpetrate in the present. As teenage criminals, despising the other is your motivating force, just as the pain of overcoming mutual prejudices is the overwhelming and driving power of Tony and Maria's emerging love."²

After suggesting this approach to the students, a new energy did come onto that stage when the cast repeated their previous scenes. Raw anger emanated from the gangs; words to the songs were spit out with a razor-sharp intensity; the rumble looked as if would spill real blood; and, the previous mannequin-like posturing and maudlin romantic antics of Tony and Maria were transcended by a passion that was equal parts attraction and repulsion that ended with a dynamic kiss.³ While having the students fully explore the subtext of the musical and not just have a surface knowledge of the play, may have solved a temporal problem, during only one rehearsal session, there was no way to know if this approach would be instituted by BDA in future training modules. However, this initial observation of non-Western performers preferring to engage in material instead of their own cultural experiences would be one that would be repeated at different junctures while conducting musical theatre workshops in China.

Characters

At this stage in the proceedings, it would be instructive to hear from a sampling of some of the protagonists in order to better explain the reasons for these occurrences of Western theatrical accretion as have been previously discussed. These interviews were gathered from student participants who were and are still involved in studying and performing Western musicals, as

well as those practitioners who are directing and producing Western musicals for non-Westerners in foreign locales. All names are pseudonyms⁴ and the student interviews were conducted by the authors shortly after their final performance in June 2018, at the institution cited in the Act 2. The practitioners were interviewed at various times between September and December of 2018, all of which took place in Shanghai.

Derek⁵

Derek is a Chinese national, male, age 19, and he is a first-year musical theatre student. What he reveals, in the following statements is ambivalence about investing his time and energy in Chinese subject matter as the source material for a musical:

American musicals can reflect many things. They are quite informative. Although there are a lot of differences between China and the States, I still think there are a lot of similar themes regarding human beings. American musicals can reflect these common themes in a very good and subtle way. China also has those themes, but we didn't make them into musicals to reflect them.

He also indicates the lack of introspection that Chinese students experience educationally which affects their abilities to “make observations,” a crucial component for any creative endeavor:

Therefore, I do think we lack the ability to make observations, to research and to use our imaginations. We don't put our heart into really creating musicals [write the good content of musicals]. Our scripts are not as informative as American musicals, so they cannot output enough information to an audience.

It is enlightening that the words “imagination” and “information” are also cited as elements that are missing in any Chinese musical that attempts to emulate the Western structural model. Derek then returns to the fallback position of comparing the higher emotive quality of American musicals as opposed to the stagnant feel of Chinese musical counterparts:

However, American musicals have this ability to constantly give information to audiences and make us feel excited throughout the show. Plus, their music and songs are very exciting. Sometimes, I feel Chinese musicals are drama-like (story-like), which can't combine all the factors in a right way. When you see American musicals, you can remember at least one song. However, Chinese musicals make you feel that when the musical finished, it is just finished. Nothing can be remembered.

Derek's technical points about how memorable music can be in Western musicals as opposed to Chinese musicals can be explained in greater detail by the next interviewee.

Yang⁶

Yang is a Chinese national, male, age 25, and he is a professional musician and composer in Shanghai. His expertise with musicals is reflected in the following comments:

In American musicals, the language is attractive. Even in a Western musical when they are singing about mundane things the conversation still sounds good, but this is not the case in Chinese. This is because in English singing is more rhythmic because the language has more syllables, but Chinese words are usually made up of not more than two syllables.

Because Yang, as a composer, is intimately involved in how music and words interact, his insights are instructive as to why the diversity of sounds in Western musicals can be more acceptable for students such as Derek and others studying and performing in the field. While I do not believe that what Yang says should be viewed as an indication of internalized cultural inferiority, I do think that it indicates a desire to step outside the contours of musical mastery that many accomplished musicians such as Yang already possess. Experimentation often falls victim then to the societal penchant for the familiar.

Another factor in Peking Opera theatre is that the role categories are divided among four main groups: the Sheng (male), the Dan (female), the Jing (male) and the Chou (male). While characters emerge from these groups, Western musicals have a more diversified field and varied numbers of individuals, both male and female, who comprise many more occupations and roles within a given society. Also, what Derek and Yang seem to be alluding to, in comparing Western and Chinese musicals, are the inherited limitations of characterizations that have been passed down from the nineteenth-century Qing dynasty. These would be the stories that are derived from antiquated source materials and not reflective of the diverse character types that are expansive in the catalogues of Western musicals. This stands in stark contrast to the evolution of theatre and Peking Opera, as the theatre practitioner, Martin Amitin explains:

Prior to the revolution in 1911 roles in the theatre were portrayed by men. The traditional was derived from what the Chinese call '*yangko*'; the original yangko were planting and harvesting songs and dances. In north and central China, the local form was known as '*pingchu*'. In the south it was known as '*yuehchu*', this being a much less rigid form than in the other regions. These melded into what was to become a type of opera, not in the Western sense, but a fusion of costumes, dance, and storytelling in song. Under the dynasties of the emperors these operas usually told the stories of the court or were based on myths.

(Amitin 1980, 10)

Derek and Yang also make mention that young people are not brought up with the same familiarity with Peking Opera that their grandparents or even parents would have had. This would result, instead, in an indoctrination of the tenets of Western style musicals that are delivered with rapidity through

the internet, media and by musical theatre imports; which are then replicated in training academies and universities. When I asked Yang about any recent examples of modern Chinese musicals, he was generally dismissive from a first-hand perspective:

I am involved in the creation of an original Chinese musical set in Shanghai, on the Bund in the 1930s, and it is a mess. The director and the script writer/adaptor have different ideas from each other. Andrew Lloyd Webber writes the story and the music, but one person in China can't do it all. Therefore, there is a concentration on high-tech effects, the set, the stage, etc. Also, Chinese audiences do not have a strong background in musicals so they will not go back and see a musical a second time, unlike Western musicals where audiences return for a second or third time. Chinese musicals also are not like Western musicals, because their songs are not composed as the connective tissue (to the story) as they are in American musicals. The songs seem to be sung like separate entities.

The comments by Yang are echoed by Derek, being a typical young person whose introduction to Western musicals is stronger than any native knowledge of his own country's forms:

I think we have a lack of national confidence. We are not very familiar with our own culture. To learn musicals always starts from foreign mature musicals, especially American musicals. When a teacher asked us to do Chinese musicals, due to our insecurity and unfamiliarity of Chinese cultures, we are not confident to do Chinese musicals.

Yet, Derek admits that there is a limit to how much knowledge can be gleaned purely from a second-hand introduction to non-Chinese material that is inherently foreign, no matter how ubiquitous it is within the society:

I don't think the students understand these musicals' holistic background. They only know the song. However, no matter how familiar we are with the song, if we don't know the background, we can't say we understand the songs.

However, the results remain in the realm of only acquisition and replication and not appreciation and creation. As Derek goes on to explain: "China has the world's largest middle class as well as the world's largest population of billionaires. These facts suggest that Chinese consumers (*students, performers, audiences*) should be the world's new tastemakers. But their current tastes in entertainment and fashion (*musical theatre*) are largely sourced from outside the country" (*Italics mine*) (Gao 2017).

Cathy⁷

Cathy is a Chinese national, age 19, and she a first-year musical theatre student in Beijing. She was also one of the students we both depended upon

to be an objective eye, as to how the rest of the students were assessing the dynamics of the sessions. Given her high proficiency in English and previous international education, she proved to be most insightful.

I like American musicals a lot. It is my favorite musical genre. While British musicals are close to my heart, I still prefer American musicals. First, they are free and open-minded. They bring people relaxed and happy feelings. *Chicago* is popular because, on the one hand, it is known almost by everyone. On the other hand, the whole show is cool. This is what local Chinese musicals can't reach.

Cathy then expands on the differences in both Chinese and American societies; ones that hinder presentations of societal problems by the former as opposed to the ever-evolving dynamics of creative interpretation of life, in all its dimensions in a musical form, which is evident in the latter:

Chicago is about crimes. For me, when I see *Chicago*, I think the story that happens in the States is very normal. America gives the impression of openness to the people. I think this story fits the general settings. If this story happened in China, people would think it is impossible. The audience would feel that the story can never happen or has happened in China.

Reluctance then to present society as it is, as opposed to only how it is imagined, may explain one of the cornerstones as to why Chinese students feel hesitant to move beyond their comfort zones; ones that they will readily transgress if it is not about their own society. However, where does this reflexivity to reject an introspection of Chinese society and then to present any of the myriad issues that are of contemporary concern on the stage in the shape of a musical come from? Cathy provides some of the answers:

American musicals are bold. For example, the American musical *Company*, that we learnt in the first year, does not tell a complete story at all. It just tells the relationship between a man and his family and his friends. The form is very fresh. It doesn't care if the audience would think if a musical should have a complete story or not. It is very creative. However, the Chinese musical is more like a TV series that is performed on the stage. It tries to make the story complete. *Butterfly* (蝶) and *Jinsha* (金沙) are both based on the stories in ancient times, so the actors wear past costumes. The style is very Chinese. The story is very traditional, and it is like a fairy tale. It fits the taste of most Chinese audiences, so it won't jump outside the normal circle: lovers and family members, because that can ensure the box office.

The last line about love between "lovers and family members" is no accidental construction. Despite China appearing to be a fast-developing society, it is still anchored in ancient Confucianism (Song 2018, 204). Those acquired and habitual ways of thinking, especially when it concerns the expected social

roles of men and women, are embedded pre-conceived attitudes which are then passed down consciously or otherwise by succeeding generations.

Cathy then points to the effects of shying away from engaging in a critical approach of investigating Chinese society, and the consequence it has in developing the musical theatre genre in China:

I think the Chinese musical is only at a developing stage. This is because the musical, as an art form, is not very popular in here as it is in the States, UK and even South Korea. Broadway musicals, such as *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*, *Cats*, *Miss Saigon*, etc., are good examples to learn, but at the same time, they also limit the development of Chinese musicals, because we think American musicals are already good enough, so there is no need for Chinese to do their own musicals. I hope Chinese musicals could learn to be creative, bold and show more unique factors (of our society) that other countries do not have.

The authors' own empirical observations, coupled with years of attempting to break through the resistance toward critical thinking, especially demonstrated by Chinese university students, are also echoed by what Derek, Yang and Cathy think. Boldness, creativity and individualism seem to be the missing linked essentials; ones that foster the ability to create introspective material for the stage that deals honestly with the myriad of societal concerns that are endemic to Chinese society. These are the same problems that occur in teaching as well, primarily the resistance to analysis, coupled with an emphasis on only acquiring the formula to serve as a shortcut to the learning (production) of original material, which hobbles both the Chinese education system as well as the artistic quality of Chinese musicals. When simulacrum is substituted for synthetization and replication is valued more than creation, the results are less than satisfying because the formulaic trappings of these works are obvious and at times embarrassing. Returning to the issue of Western musicals performed by non-Western performers in foreign settings, this lack of training in the art of creating the musical theatre form was cited by two theatre professionals, one American-English and one Chinese national, who are working in the fields of translating and directing Western musicals in China.

Patrick⁸

Patrick is a Chinese national, age 40, and he is a translator and director. He reveals in greater detail why Chinese originated musicals have inherent and systemic limitations whenever they attempt to adopt the form of Western-style musical theatre.

Butterflies is considered the first original Chinese modern musical. While it draws upon an ancient Chinese fable, it is really a veiled metaphor about homosexuality that masks the transformation of an individual's sexuality to that of a butterfly. This is because, in China, the straightforward depiction of a gay theme is not possible. In the production the composer could not write the script, so they turned to a French team

(Canadian). The results were that while the music was good the story was crap. This is in keeping with Chinese audiences' preferences where music is everything and not the story. Costumes and sets are emphasized as well. The problem in China is that there is no tradition of collaboration, therefore no one is powerful enough to decide alone. This is because we have no true professional producers in China, only company managers. The example would be if Pavarotti was the actor, director and producer of all his operas.

Patrick's experience of watching Chinese musicals develop, as opposed to Western ones, is informative about the systemic problems that students bring with them when they approach a musical, especially ones that are part of the American and British canon. He also provides a clue to why the previously cited students at BDA might have been flummoxed by my questions as to their understanding of the plot line and characters of *West Side Story*:

Students think that if the musical has a Chinese topic then it is lowbrow. The approach is that everyone who studies musicals wants to be a big star. We have no extensive departments that focus on the humanities; therefore, the issue of knowing who Romeo and Juliet are (and by extension Tony and Maria) is not possible. This is complicated by the training academies in China who refuse to encourage new work.

Patrick's assessment of the state of Chinese-themed musicals that are influenced by Western musical theatre composition but still are recognizable as unique, ends on a hopeful note albeit tempered by a realistic experience of still waiting for that to happen: "we still need one successful production."

Perhaps the connection between education in general and musical theatre education is this nexus of attempting to find the "successful" production coupled with the constant striving to find the "successful" teaching regime. Both strategies are focused exclusively on producing results rather than in taking risks; and, if both institutions are driven by the profit motive it is no wonder that regimentation sets in which, in turn, stifles both learning processes.

Gary⁹

Gary is an American-English actor and director in China, age 64. Taking a lead from Patrick's note above about the lack of humanities education in China, Gary expands on the problems that occur when commerce and lack of expertise or educational training collide on the stage in China, especially in the case of the staging and creation of musicals. Gary also has the benefit of being a foreigner who is still successful on the Western stage and in cinema. He is also one of the few non-national directors who works exclusively on the staging of Western musicals performed by Chinese actors and actresses in China, which gives him a unique perspective. He says:

A lot people in China have no idea what theatre even is. So, until there are performing art departments in universities all over China, so the young

college students are exposed to theatre and see the value of it, the theatre won't grow. There will be big shows that will make a lot of money very quickly, but in terms of being a continuing part of culture, there really needs to be a concerted effort to educate everyone in China. There is a need to have students in China engage in textual analysis, education and to see and know the past. Even in China, the background of the Peking Opera is not widely known by students. Lastly, there are no large-scale programs in Chinese universities that specialize in dramaturgy and train individuals who can gain expertise in that field. This results in Chinese students saying something akin to "I want to be perfect in the better model (US musicals) and not the inferior one (China)."

It is Cathy then who presents an actual validation of the academic urgencies articulated by Gary when she concludes her interview with an analysis of the teaching process at her academy; one that points to some of the deficiencies that have been cited previously and may provide more clues as to why Chinese musical theatre students prefer non-national subject matter over any Chinese topic:

To know the background of a musical is a must in the preparation work to perform the musical. A person should know what role he performs, why he sings this song and what kind of emotions he should have. All these construct an actor's emotional tone and his or her performance during his singing of the song. Each behavior has a reason. These behaviors are based on what the actor is thinking at that moment. Many people (students) don't do this research at all. There is embarrassment. Some people (students) don't think about how to sing a song as a musical actor, but only as a beautiful girl on a stage, or as a singer on a stage. The education is here, but it still all depends if the students understand it or really work on it. However, what they want is a teacher who can give them techniques directly. This is not a good method to learn musicals.

From the verbatim reflections above, some insights can be gleaned as to why the Western musical is still the predominant choice for Chinese students and performers. It seems that to "understand" a set of educational rubrics in China is consequently associated with the regimentation that afflicts the national education system. Thus, because the requirements to learn the iconic forms of Peking Opera are highly controlled and stratified, it immediately relegates that art form to a geriatric status. This is primarily the consequence of the highly stringent nature of Chinese teaching methods, which often clash with modern students' preferences for more imaginative exposure and investigations into theatre. For young people in China, now fully immersed in the trappings of Western culture, consumerism and capital, the disciplines necessary for mastering Peking Opera seem to be a waste of time; especially when compared to the multitudinous characters, settings and story lines that are afforded by the catalogue of Western musicals. As has been noted by the interviewees, there are many factors hampering the creation of indigenous dramatic material that contains content reflective of Chinese society today, even while it utilizes the Western structure of the musical. Some of the major

obstacles are the surface attention to an investigation of characters, unfamiliarity with critical thinking, the desire to “look” the part as opposed to “be” the part; and, the lack of highly trained national theatre and musical theatre teachers. Finally, a dearth in the implementation of more theatre schools and programs on all levels of the educational system, beyond the elite few, also contributes to this perplexing environment.

ACT 2 The Setting. Enter the Foreigner and the National. Stage East.

A rundown and barely ventilated rehearsal room in one of the major training universities in Beijing for musical theatre. We have been hired to teach a special course in the craft and history of American musicals. The sponsor of this initiative is a theatre producing company that has brought various musicals to China, all of them either road tours from abroad or productions with Chinese actors and actresses. At my interview, we were presented with a glossy brochure that listed the names and expounded upon the credentials of its national staff. However, there was a curious omission of the name of company’s chief investor, who was anonymous and described only as “a Chinese tycoon.” Obviously, that noun did not carry the same connotation in China as it does in the West. The rest of the photographs contained the requisite number of foreign faces and names that were *de rigueur* for these types of promotional materials; all designed to lend credibility. As the questions about what would be taught continued, we began to understand that this partnership between a corporate entity and a university was to provide for a steady supply of performers for the company’s Western musical shows, once the students had graduated. While the objective of a job opportunity for students was laudable, the pulling back of the curtains during my 16-week commitment soon uncovered the paucity of the substance behind all the bells and whistles. This new workshop also confirmed the experiences with other ventures in China of this nature, such as the one cited previously at the Beijing Dance Academy, which all seem to stress the need to adhere to a formula for what constitutes as a viable example of a musical theatre product. This priority was paramount and it superseded any attempt to explore how the structure of Western musicals can be applied to contemporary Chinese issues.

This point was raised with the phalanx of the interviewers; and, as expected, there was the usual polite silence and smiles that we have learned to interpret as negative. This anecdote to dramatically convey the point was offered; one that we were sure would win them over:

Imagine, if we can, that the United States of America, since its founding in 1776, had only been exposed to Peking Opera. Americans became fascinated by its costumes, characters, plot lines, acting and music. Thus, the absorption of this foreign theatrical form becomes the dominant musical theatre genre for the next two hundred and forty-two years. During the expansion and growth of the USA, the country and its citizens develop in diverse ways and encounter a myriad of issues; ones that do not always relate directly to the plot lines of Peking Opera. Understandingly,

the artistic community and the general public begin to ask: “Well, we have topics that reflect more directly our culture; and, they could be appreciated by Americans just as much as those stories we perform now within the structures of Peking Opera. So, let’s explore how we can do new subject material; those concerns that reflect our contemporary social concerns while still delivering them through the forms of Peking Opera; ones that we have mastered.”

Even with the excellent translation by my collaborator, Dr. Song, the story was met with as much appreciation as what a late-night comic receives when he comes on at closing time. Or, a character in a drawing room comedy might say: “You could cut the silence with a knife. Unfortunately, all I had was a letter opener.” The premise was retracted, hoping that we could live to fight another day once the work began with the students. Confident that if we gave the students a solid grounding in the structures of some of the stalwarts of the American musical theatre canon, the proposal would be met with more receptivity by these young and competent professionals. We were not disappointed. The class of 19 was almost evenly divided between males and females, all first-year students between the ages of 18 and 21. Enthusiasm abounded as we were introduced by their female teacher, who was a very accomplished choreographer in her own right. The technical proficiency each student possessed was assessed regarding their abilities in singing, acting and dancing. This was to be the core experimental group, and we began to teach my required lessons about the history and structures of American musicals. This approach was markedly different as it required some degree of research and analysis, which was not the approach most of the other courses at the institution favored.



Figure 6.2 Students receiving feedback from the teacher.

Photo by Wang Yuming. 2018. Communication University of China.

These first classes were very successful. However, because we were only on campus for two days, and we both needed to return to our teaching positions at a Sino-Western university in Shanghai on each Monday night, we were unaware that our efforts were not being reinforced by what the students were studying after we both departed. Those other courses were designed to fully immerse the students in the various singing, dancing and acting components from only the American and British musical theatre repertoire. The aim was a showcase at the end of the semester; an event that would demonstrate these students' abilities in replicating in perfect pitch, movement and style the scenes, songs and dances from foreign sources. It was a revelation for both authors that the rest of the students' curriculum was not revealed to us during the timespan of our own course. Upon reflection, this was another example of what plagues universities and training academies, especially when foreign instructors are involved. It centers on not integrating different disciplines or allowing time for instructors to share information, strategies of insights into student abilities. Chinese education approaches the transfer of knowledge within individual silos, maintained by one expert who exists in his or her own domain and who is not subject to observation by or sharing with other academic peers. This model reflects the same consequences alluded to by Yang when describing the state of the musical he was working on; where the creative team was all working as separate entities and not as collaborators.

Because both authors lived in Shanghai, we observed the preponderance of senior citizens who seem to be increasing exponentially daily. One result is that a great number of retirees engage in an evening aerobic pastime dubbed "square dancing." However, this is not the same as the famous version seen in American Western states. Instead, older men and women march in precision-like order to martial music or a specialty type of syncopation that accompanies robotic movements as they follow one leader at the head of the line. Subsequent trips about the city were also made to People's Square, where Chinese seniors conducted an informal matchmaking bazaar. During the day they advertise the educational, monetary and physical attributes of their respective male or female grandchildren in order to create a respectable marriage scenario. Usually these attributes are printed on a piece of paper and then pasted onto an open umbrella. The seniors then sit and converse with each other and hope that there will be takers for their advertisements. These observations were some of the same ones noted in a 2011 issue of *The Economist* which explored the topic of changing dating practices of the younger generation in China (*The Economist*, August 20, 2011).

When the idea occurred of creating an original musical theatre project that dealt with a uniquely Chinese subject matter, these two observations came to mind. Because the students in Beijing were already heavily involved in the techniques of performing the rubrics of a Western musical, we surmised that they would be enthusiastic about applying these building blocks to an original Chinese social issue. The eventual piece devised by the students, inspired by content provided by the instructors, followed these initial contours which originated from our observations: a group of elderly Chinese men and women gather in a park and sing about their disenchantment with how their grandchildren conduct their modern lives, especially regarding

marriage and careers. The song is a comic amalgamation of Confucian analects and aphorisms from the past; ones that once provided stability to their own lives. When the ensemble departs two pensioners, Peter and Lily, meet on a park bench and strike up a conversation. They soon learn that both have recently lost their respective partners; and, while they agree to try and match up their respective grandchildren a spark of attraction occurs between them. As a counterpoint to the elder ensemble, a similar group of young men and women perform their own musical number that expresses their dissatisfactions with each other as they pertain to role expectations. It is this conflict between the elder and young ensemble that creates a framework for examining how the issues of family, children, career choices and the rising independence of young women pose challenges for modern Chinese society. In a final ironic twist, it is Peter and Lily who matchmake each other and fall in love, while their grandchildren run from the forced arrangement set up for them.

The first response, however, from the class was less than enthusiastic. We have now realized that many of the reasons for their lukewarm reactions were the same ones that have been articulated herein; factors that have been reinforced by the interviewees and by my previous teaching involvements in China. Although we did persevere in attempting to provide original dramatic material and music for the project, the students became increasingly resistant to performing the final project as part of their evaluation portfolio. At a critical juncture their regular teacher, and the choreographer for the class, intervened and melded the original vision with what the students felt comfortable in performing; a compromise that would not jeopardize their desire to be judged according to only Western musical theatre standards instead of through the prism of any Chinese subject matter. Thus, the original scenario for the musical was never performed. We were soon to understand, as well, that in their other classes the students were heavily pressured to perform Western musical theatre songs, dances and scenes according to a strict level of replication. Thus, the devised piece was clearly an anomaly; one that was judged not to be a comparable or worthwhile endeavor. We watched their final performances and sat through many reincarnations of *Chicago*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods*, *Rent* and others, as well as our own nascent offering that had been transmogrified into a hodgepodge of all those Western versions. The result was more of a gloss regarding the conflicts between the older generation and the younger one regarding marriage, as originally envisioned by authors, and instead it relied more on the problems young men and women in China face in their romantic encounters.

When we left the performance, which signaled the end of the course, we thanked the students and their teacher for their performances and for their openness to do their version of our proposal. Yet, the quixotic quest for creating a receptive atmosphere, whereby a musical is created that adheres to the best tenets of Western dramaturgy, while containing a particularly modern Chinese subject matter, was still out of reach.

Returning to Derek and Cathy's comments, they can provide some explanations of how these dynamics occurred in class. In their interviews they were forthcoming about the limitations of their fellow students which clashed with

the assumptions made by the teachers. This would specifically relate to the role of one of the two teachers (Mirrione) who as a foreigner, no matter how well intentioned, just did not have enough inside information to gauge the reactions of Chinese students. Derek speaks to this point directly:

One of the teachers is an American. He understood Chinese cultures according to his own observations and hoped we can do our own musicals (maybe they don't think an American knows Chinese cultures deeply), but we didn't give him too much feedback. As we discussed, we kind of don't believe in Chinese culture and musicals, so we retreat. I think the conflicts are on both sides.

The intention of the teacher was very good. He encouraged us to do our own musicals, and this is what we want to do too. However, we didn't make an agreement and we didn't cooperate with each other, so it finally turned out to be many conflicting ideas between the teacher and the students. In addition, some factors might make some students feel humiliated. The students are not very good at constructing a character at all, so they are not confident enough to handle the performance. They may think the theme is too close to real life, so they kind of feel embarrassed.

Cathy expands upon the nature of the resistance that she observed from the other students. I can only extrapolate that her observations are also borne out from what may have transpired in the other classes. As a rule, students in training academies and university programs that specialize in the performing arts are consumed by a schedule of courses that is overwhelming and which occupies their entire days and nights. The infamous exam system that is endemic in Chinese education is as intense as any other non-art related curriculum. Thus, the pressure to succeed might be one of the contributing factors to how Cathy characterizes her colleagues:

I have thought about the tension between the teacher and the students many times, and finally it turned out to be that the students are "frogs in the well." The teacher wanted to bring some special and non-traditional forms of musicals to the students. He doesn't want the students to show a completely set down story. Instead, he wanted the students to have some discussions on a realistic issue. It is quite like the musical *Company* that I mentioned. *Company* discusses the issue of love and marriage and its different possibilities. However, for the students, most people don't know this type of musicals. For them, a musical is a story from the beginning to the end. They think it should be like a drama, inserted by songs and dances, which is the most traditional and classic form of a musical. Suddenly, we have a teacher who tells them that two groups of people can also discuss an issue in the form of recitation on the stage. The students can't accept this form at all. This is a new thing for them, and they fear taking on something new. In order to pursue the impression of a perfect musical in their own minds, they refused to do something they don't think is right, even if what the teacher brought us was worthwhile to learn.

Finally, Cathy points to the preconceived notions that her fellow students carried with them about what kinds of lives are appropriate to be the subject of a musical. It harkens back to what is considered “cool” by contemporary Chinese youth. She states in a more direct way the nature of this prejudice:

The topic about old people and young people might also be a reason to refuse. As the beginners, students are very naïve, like kids. They don't like to play the role of an old man, old woman or that of an ordinary citizen. The further the roles are away from real lives, the cooler the roles are. However, the roles in the script that the teacher proposed were only those types from real life in China. So, the students thought these types of characters shouldn't be on the stage.

Curtain

While the complete story of why Chinese students engage disproportionately with the Western musical oeuvre as opposed to presenting their own national issues is still an ongoing debate, a few understandings can be ascertained. It is only when one steps outside their own culture that a clearer understanding can be had of how globalization and the homogenization of cultural, capital and symbolic talismans can be all encompassing for another culture that is not familiar with its dynamics. The modern technological world moves at a breakneck pace and it can sweep away traditions and institutional memory in both subtle and overt ways. That the students cited above, both past and present, have been able to navigate this confusing dynamic, while still dedicating themselves to what is essentially a foreign import of the Western musical model, speaks volumes to the strengths of the Chinese attitude toward hard work, discipline and sacrifice in the pursuit of excellence in their presentations. It is a common assessment by many foreign theatre practitioners, that their own students could not match the many hours of rehearsal, study and stamina that the sample of Chinese students mentioned herein, as well as those not documented, have demonstrated to the authors over ten years of observation. Thus, it might seem quixotic to complain that Chinese students' mastery of Western musicals might be eclipsing their own national dramatic heritage or, worse, might deter them from examining their own societal or historical issues through the musical theatre idiom. However, it is the role of theatre professionals and academics to be aware of both the advancement of the craft and the possible erosion of a national voice, especially when it has to compete with the overwhelming number of foreign octaves that are heard on the musical theatre stage in China today. Therefore, the challenges of teaching Western musical theatre in a non-Western setting as in China, are still an evolving investigation that has so far eluded a complete understanding of what is being said and what is being heard.

Finally, it may be that Chinese students are engaged in a critical analysis of Chinese society by placing a *Chicago*, *Sweeney Todd* or *West Side Story* on their national stages. Perhaps the very staging of these and other Western musicals are an implementation of discourse that is salubrious to both performers and audiences alike; and these young students and emerging artists are agents of their own craft and not always passive passengers. Therefore,

it is hoped that some of the experiences the American and Chinese authors have cited herein, while very much within the context of appreciating the myriad range of talents Chinese musical theatre students possess, will also serve as a guide for future investigators of the problems and possibilities that are inherent in the issues presented in this chapter.

Notes

- 1 This “I” refers to James Mirrione who was first involved in 2008, Wei Song joined in a later session.
- 2 The authors’ experience with the above analogy developed at different intersections for both a foreigner and a national, whenever the topic of Japan came up in discussions within academic and artistic communities. For the former, this usually centered upon continuous television shows, beamed into millions of Chinese homes, that constantly portray the Japanese as invaders which the underdog Chinese army valiantly and continuously vanquishes. The latter author could attest to the historical enmity that still festers within Chinese society against the Japanese, complicated by her own family roots that include both Chinese and Japanese relatives.
- 3 It should be noted that *West Side Story* has always aroused controversy from its inception to the present day. Written against the backdrop of the emerging civil rights movement in the United States, in the 1950s, the authors clearly felt that the *Romeo and Juliet* template mirrored the emerging clashes of a heterogeneous American society which still resisted change, integration and tolerance. Yet, even that inaugural production was plagued by charges of “tokenism,” when it required some of its non-Latino actors and actresses to darken up their skin with makeup in order to appear more Puerto Rican. As such, and while still an important example of Western musical theatre, *West Side Story* has now also become an exploration on the need for more diverse and authentic casting as well as a call to vigilance as to how minorities are presented; aspects which would result in an aesthetic that rises above stereotyping and which allows musical theatre ways to confront that condition (Oja 2017).
- 4 Most Chinese students and the general younger population opt for Westernized versions of their names, so we followed suit with the pseudonyms.
- 5 Interview with the researcher. Personal interview. Beijing, February 4, 2019.
- 6 Interview with the researcher. Personal interview. Shanghai, February 14, 2019.
- 7 Interview with the researcher. Personal interview. Beijing, February 5, 2019.
- 8 Interview with the researcher. Personal interview. Shanghai, February 16, 2019.
- 9 Interview with the researcher. Personal interview. Beijing, February 6, 2019.

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CHAPTER 7

HOW TO SWIM IN THE DESERT

On Developing Theatre in Oman

Mark Tardi

Backstage

In his 1994 film *Pulp Fiction*, Quentin Tarantino deleted various scenes from the final cut presented in cinemas the world over. Several of those deleted scenes made it onto the VHS letter-box edition I received as a gift when I was a student, and one in particular has stayed with me in the intervening two and a half decades. The scene in question involves a kind of mock-interview between two characters, Mia Wallace (played by Uma Thurman) and Vincent Vega (played by John Travolta). Vincent Vega is tasked with taking his boss's wife out to dinner, a potential personal and professional minefield, and in the deleted scene, his first encounter with Mrs. Wallace is through the lens of a video camera being thrust into his face as he endures a gonzo-style interview with questions reminiscent of Bernard Pivot. Wallace (Thurman) asks Vega (Travolta) his preferences on such things as his favorite way to say "Thank you" in a foreign language or whether he favors the Beatles or Elvis Presley. (Clearly, Vega is an "Elvis man" as Wallace wryly observes.) But the most poignant exchange in the scene, to my mind, is the following:

Mia: In conversation, do you listen or wait to talk?

Vincent: I have to admit I wait to talk, but I'm trying harder to listen.

The framing of this dialectic—listening vs. waiting to talk—has proved ethically and professionally invaluable to me in the intervening years since I first encountered it, and nowhere more so than in my time teaching theatre in Oman.

In the fall of 2014, while on faculty at the University of Nizwa's Department of Foreign Languages in central Oman, I was assigned to teach a course simply called "One-Act Plays." Although the course had had official approval within the university for several years, no one had ever undertaken to actually teach it. The reasons for this were myriad. For starters, nobody on faculty specialized in theatre. Moreover, in Oman there is very little in the way of theatrical performance as understood within the Western tradition. For Omanis, folk music and folk dances would be the most obvious reference point.

(For instance, several traditional Omani dance forms are part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage as noted on its website.) However, as Richard Schechner has argued, theatre is "a very small slice of the performance pie," along with "rock concerts, discos, electioneering, wrestling, con games, and demonstrations, and a panoply of religious rituals" (Jackson 2004, 80). In this way, Omani folk dance could be seen as a link to various modes of performance, along with the Islamic drama *Ta'ziyeh*, marriage rites, funeral rituals, and other modes of expression. For the course to have had any kind of success, it was necessary to establish additional context for theatre and performance for the students so they could find access points and interest.

That said, obtaining or creating materials relevant to the students was challenging, particularly since works involving politics, religion or sex were culturally sensitive. (By way of context, many other courses had unified materials or textbooks and an established track record with the faculty and students, so the additional effort this course required might partly explain why it had not been offered in the years prior.) On top of this, the course was technically an elective, so if it had failed to draw enough registered students, it would have been canceled, and the efforts would have been for naught. (This alone could have acted as a pedagogical deterrent for taking on the course.) And lastly, because the course had not been done before, especially in its first iteration (as will be explained more later), it would necessitate encouraging students who are often extremely reluctant to *speak* in public and also to *perform*.

Thus, I listened rather than waited to talk. I listened to my students from earlier literature, language, and writing courses. I listened when they told me about Omani folk tales. I listened when many of them confessed to not knowing how to swim—despite living in a country with an enormous coastline and beautiful beaches. And I listened when in a previous British literature course they asked me why Hamlet was so upset that his uncle—his father's brother—married his mother. (The students tended to view Hamlet the character as melodramatic, and Claudius marrying Gertrude as the obviously right thing to do considering the circumstances.) *Waiting to talk* implies a kind of impatience from the speaker and risks imposing a frame on a situation rather than engaging with a range of perspectives and experiences; rather than "containing multitudes," as Walt Whitman suggested, waiting to talk could be an act of domination and could shut down dialogue.

Although there were some potential obstacles to the "One-Act Play" course, it was vitally important to encourage the students to conceptualize performance, broadly construed: designing sets and costumes; making props; helping their classmates with lines; and even writing plays themselves. So I listened to Edward Said when he observed:

No one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are not more than starting-points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or Black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting

continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about.

(Said 1994, 336)

It was impossible to ignore that this theatre course was going to be conducted by a heteronormative white male who grew up in a decidedly blue collar neighborhood in the city of Chicago; and that the students in Oman come from different parts of the country—from the relatively affluent and cosmopolitan capital city Muscat, to assorted villages in the interior of the country, to the lush southern port city of Salalah—with differing traditions and customs, along with the fact that a significant number of students are from other countries, such as Brunei, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Pakistan, Tunisia and Zanzibar. Said served as an instructive guide, continually reminding me that “No one today is purely one thing,” just as a play is not reduced to a single line of dialogue. As E. Gordon Craig wrote in “The Art of Theatre”:

[T]he Art of the Theatre is neither the acting nor the play, it is not scene nor dance, but it consists of all the elements of which these things are composed: action, which is the very spirit of acting; words, which are the body of the play; line and color, which are the very heart of the scene; rhythm, which is the very essence of dance. (Bentley 2008)

My guiding position and assumption was that it is important to be mindful of a diverse range of experiences and perspectives, and to encourage the constellation of voices to form a new whole.

Although *Plays in One Act* edited by Daniel Halpern was the approved book for the course, nothing prevented supplemental materials from being incorporated into the class and performances. Thus, some initial decisions proved invaluable. While the students would read and perform scenes and plays from established playwrights, they would also write their own plays and perform them unencumbered by anything other than the time constraints of the class meetings, the logistics of the space, and their imaginations. An awareness of the cultural traditions and varying comfort levels the students had regarding public speaking or performing established clear parameters for the plays and the course: students who were willing and interested in performing in speaking roles could do so; students who were not able or willing to do so would never be forced to. They could contribute in other ways and would certainly go on to do just that. What is more, the students themselves would be the primary drivers of these decisions.

Front and Center

Casting

In the first iteration of the course called “One-Act Plays,” the expected enrollment was between 18 and 24 students. (If there were fewer than 18, the course might be permitted to continue but that would be at the discretion of

the dean.) Working with limited materials, the semester-length course was designed with the idea that there would be approximately 20 students, a small enough group that could receive individualized attention and, hopefully, establish lines of communication, trust, and mutual respect between all parties. The aims of the course were:

1. To acquaint the students with a historical context for theatre from antiquity to the present, including forms of performance in their region, such as *Ta'ziyeh* and shadow plays.
2. To familiarize students with fundamental theatrical concepts, such as monologue, dialogue, character, set design, blocking, rehearsals, and live performance in front of an audience.
3. To facilitate, when possible, opportunities for the students to attend professional performances of operas, ballets, music, or plays.
4. To direct an annual performance of short plays by the students for the University community during the week-long celebration of arts, culture, learning and science called "Culture Week."

A selection of plays from Halpern's anthology was chosen to address some of the aforementioned concepts, along with some plays from an anthology of Arab-American theatre called *Salaam* (Hill and Amin 2010), plus a book on Omani folk tales entitled *Halimah and the Snake* (Todino-Gonguet 2008), and exercises developed for the students to create their own one-acts. The basic tenets of the course were set. Although the background of the course was based on Western theatre by virtue of the fact that the course was part of the English section in the Department of Foreign Languages, it was clear from other classes and experiences that students responded more favorably when regional traditions, elements or perspectives were included in or connected with course materials. Thus, I never viewed the course as an opportunity to impose or import any particular form of Western theatre to Oman, but rather to create a space where different forms of theatre and performance could (hopefully) flourish.

On the first day of class for the first iteration of the course, 48 students had registered.

Pre-Production

Suffice it to say, there was far more interest in the course than anybody anticipated and the course as designed began with necessary improvisations. (This level of interest was also the first inkling I had that I might be able to teach the course again in the future.) Student-written plays and other plays performed were initially conceived to involve small groups of three or four students; instead, the groups were expanded to include eight or nine students each so that there would be five group performances in total. (Without this adjustment, the bulk of the semester would be consumed by one exercise and performance.) While possible drawbacks to larger groups could have been complexity and inefficiency, the benefit was the opportunity for students who mostly had not known each other beforehand to get the chance to collaborate, a common occurrence in theatre.

The second challenge with the larger enrollment was the classroom itself. Given that the classroom assigned could comfortably accommodate approximately 35 people, adding another dozen or so into the equation made for tight quarters. The added benefit, however, was the sense that the students were performing in front of a “packed house” and the presence of attentive and enthusiastic classmates established a supportive environment. In addition, many of the classrooms in Oman are tiered—essentially built for audiences—and the front of the rooms have small raised sections, similar to stages. The flooring is typically marble because it is both plentiful in the region, remains cool in the hotter months, and is easy to clean, although it can be slippery, so it was important to be careful with any swift actions like running onstage or standing on a chair, for example.

The class began with an introductory lecture offering a broad overview of the history of theatre from ancient Greece to Shakespeare to *commedia dell'arte* to theatrical realism on to more modern forms of experimental theatre. Moreover, a discussion of *Ta'ziyeh*, “which dramatized the tragic events of the Karbala plain and the death of Iman Hussein, [and] came into existence only in the mid-eighteenth century” (Malekpour 2004, 32) was included to contextualize theatrical performances in the region. This overview, coupled with considerations of Omani folk tales and folk dances, which the students knew well, provided a general framework and access point for performances. When discussing various theatrical time periods, it is helpful—whenever possible—to find corollaries or analogous narratives from the region. For instance, when discussing Shakespeare, one might offer the names of some of his well known plays. Many of the students may be familiar with *Romeo and Juliet*, and they could be asked if there are any similar stories from the region, for instance. The most common comparison might be the story “Layla and Majnun,” a famous narrative poem widely retold, although other folk tales could share similarities such as “the Invisible Woman” (Todino-Gonguet 2008, 32).

Although Lawrence Venuti (1995) in his book *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* argues rather forcefully for the foreignization of texts rather than their domestication, the latter approach was necessary for plays to be comprehensible or performances to happen at all. Moreover, this approach was consistent with the view that the course would serve as a kind of matrix rather than one overriding (Western) perspective being imposed on the students/performers. A case in point would be perhaps the most successful student performance at the university, an adaptation loosely based on Miranda July's short story “The Swim Team.” The scenario for July's original story involved a young woman who teaches three octogenarians how to swim in her apartment because there is neither a pool nor a body of water anywhere in their vicinity. What is more, the young woman protagonist is in her early twenties (like the students), however the three octogenarians are two women and a man. To have adhered to those details would have been both impossible for performance reasons (the majority of female students would not feel comfortable performing with a male student) and believability (it is virtually impossible to imagine a situation where a young Omani woman would entertain people significantly older than herself if one of them were male). The solution, simply enough, was to adjust the scenario so that all the

characters were women. Apart from removing the obstacle to performance, it created a warm trans-generational connection with the notion of the elderly women characters and the young woman teaching them. Although the imaginary version of swimming might be unusual for the students, the idea that they would spend time with women like their grandmothers was not.

Rehearsals

Following an initial lecture offering a historical overview of theatre, the remainder of the semester was devoted to discussions of one-act plays, and a range of short exercises that would build towards creating a couple of short—sometimes improvised—plays. At the end of the semester, each group would put on a play that was entirely written, directed and performed by the students. As a child in the 1980s, an oft-repeated comment attributed to then Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill was "All politics is local." And as Sarah Ruhl has written, "The play is an occasion to exercise and celebrate social bonds Play itself is a primary process, not a luxury, not a hobby, but something all children must do to survive into adulthood" (Ruhl 2004).

Having been in Oman for more than a year at the time the "One-Act Plays" course began, I had observed two important facts: first, that social bonds were extraordinarily strong at the familial and community levels; and secondly, trust—or distrust—was developed on a person-to-person basis where reputations grew (or diminished) via word of mouth. A spirit of cooperation pervaded most endeavors, so much so that at times it could be frustrating: for instance, rather than allow a classmate to fail an exam, assignment, or quiz, many Omanis would rather share their answers with them. While the terms that might come to mind in such situations could be *cheating* or *plagiarism*, the word the students consistently used was *help*. In the context of a standardized language exam designed to assess student language proficiency, such "help" was obviously problematic; in the context of organizing performances for live audiences, it was just about ideal.

It was clear that the inherent collaborative spirit present in Oman was an enormous benefit, provided that it encouraged at least some students to be willing to perform in front of a live audience. However, the reputation of the individual organizing the performance is also critical. The students need to feel both respected and encouraged to take some risks. Few people actively seek to be embarrassed or humiliated, and being sensitive to such feelings only aided one's reputation and made the students more likely to trust a person (and thus, take that person's classes or be involved in other university activities). Americans abroad can often be perceived as being more casual than their colleagues from a range of other countries. In Oman, my department chair, who had lived and worked in the Arabian Gulf for more than two decades and had observed my teaching, told me that demeanor clearly made the students feel at ease. By extension, I assumed that was pedagogically productive.

A pivotal moment came for me discussing Miranda July's short story "The Swim Team" (which later would be adapted into a performance). In the story, the narrator, who is attempting to teach three octogenarians via using bowls of water on the floor of her apartment and instructing them on

the various swim strokes all on the ground remarks that “it actually takes a huge amount of upper-body strength to swim on land” (July, 2007). (Having already known that many Omani women do not know how to swim, the story struck me as one that might resonate with the students both for its content as well as the inviting first-person style of the narration.) In a different setting, I probably would have asked a brave student to demonstrate this line of July’s, but I knew it would be inappropriate to ask young Omani women dressed in elegant abayas to writhe around on the floor. Instead, I opted to simply demonstrate it myself. As I did so, the room became enveloped in laughter; and it became immediately clear to me that by being willing to “get my hands dirty,” literally and metaphorically, I had earned the students’ trust. They instantly knew they would never be mocked and they would never have to do something in a performance that their instructor would not have been willing to do himself.

Indeed, it does take a fair amount of upper body strength to swim on land.

Table Readings

With an eye toward the live performances several months down the road, the key elements of the plays were pared down and the performative scaffolding put up week by week, plank by intellectual and emotional plank. With *Plays in One Act* as a primary text (Halpern, 1991), Andrew Vachss’s monologue *Placebo* about a janitor who seeks justice on behalf of an abused child served as a moving entry into both extended speech acts and psychology of character. *The Man Who Turned into a Stick* by the Japanese writer Kobo Abe, which is in a surrealist vein, involves a deceased father who after death finds himself to be a stick and the bureaucratic functionaries who are tasked with filing the stick’s number for their records. The mix of the absurd and the magical and the sheer fact that a prop stick was carried around campus for a couple of class meetings made for humorous and enjoyable practice with how to block scenes. It was also after the first couple of plays that the students would be assigned a character study: they would choose any character from one of the plays from the course thus far and write a detailed background on what brought the character to the moment of the play. As one student, Suad Taeed al-Maskari, mentioned in her email to me on March 29, 2019, the character study encouraged their creativity as well as facilitated a kind of self-discovery:

[W]hat we learnt from the plays: morals, values, ideas, creativity and even self-confidence which help us to face our lives. The course’s assignments were difficult and the most creative. Mr. Mark was always introducing us to ourselves through his assignments’ styles. I have enjoyed most the “character study” and answering the question “imagine yourself as one of the characters you admire in the play, tell us about the character life before the story!”

In keeping with the view that the students engage more energetically with materials that acknowledge and reflect their own lives and backgrounds

coupled with experience gained while teaching other classes, there was never any doubt that Nathalie Handal's poignant one-act *Between Our Lips* was going to be included in the course (Hill and Amin, 2010). The play centers on two Palestinian characters—Homer, a journalist and Ayah, a photographer and teacher—who are meeting in a holding cell and have approximately 15 minutes. Ostensibly, Homer is there in his capacity as a journalist to interview Ayah, but in that quarter of an hour 20 years of personal history and the profound consequences of details and choices are made painfully apparent.

After some practice with table readings, blocking, and developing a character, a short improvisational exercise was devised. A bag of objects was brought to class along with slips of paper with two instructions: first, that the object could not be used the way it was typically intended for use; and second, the paper would contain a theatrical prompt around which to construct a play. For instance, the bag might contain a toothbrush, a mineral rock, a spoon and an action figure, while prompts might be "A big secret is revealed," "And then an alien appeared," or "Scorpions are good mothers." The students were given 15 minutes to brainstorm, conceive of a play, sort out roles, and utilize the room as best they saw fit—and then perform their play. After three or four weeks of dipping their toes in the water, so to speak, many of the students were energized by the opportunity to put all these different elements into practice. And with the short turnaround time, they could not overthink the results.

Set Design

In addition to developing the skills necessary to stage a live performance, such as conceptualizing a character or gaining comfort delivering lines while acting, the physical space of the performance was significant. To that end, another exercise the students had to take part in was devising dioramas to demonstrate how they would visualize the set(s) and stage for a given play from our course readings. (Because many students were particularly attached to Nathalie Handal's *Between Our Lips*, I had to limit the slots for each play so that just about all the plays could be represented at least once, even if, in fact, most had multiple set-design dioramas.) This exercise allowed students with a visual arts background an opportunity to showcase their talents; and more generally, provided a vehicle for the students to explore a different side of theatre and performance. The final results in the initial course (and the subsequent ones) were exhibited and students and faculty were invited to see the set designs in a festive atmosphere. Apart from the obvious goal of encouraging the students to see different creative solutions to theatrical worlds, it was also a kind of "soft opening": the students could get accustomed to people not in the course seeing and celebrating their accomplishments, and enjoy a measure of pride in talking about their visions for the plays they chose, since those visiting the exhibits often asked the students questions about their projects.

Previews

After creating set designs, the class proceeded with readings and workshops on a couple of short plays, and then worked on writing, casting and performing their own entirely original plays. The only parameters they had were

that each member of their group—five groups of nine students each in the first class—had to contribute and that the performance could not be longer than 15 minutes (so that all the performances could be managed within one week of classes). The range of plays and performances was truly varied: one play centered on a father who abandoned his wife and children, but returned after many years to beg forgiveness; another was a shadow play based on an Omani folk tale; a third was a kind of meta-narrative, where the students made a play about me doing an exercise on acoustics and blocking (they even had a scale-model mask of my visage made for the performance!). At the conclusion of each performance, the class would then have a short round-table discussion where classmates would offer feedback on parts of the performance that made a strong impression on them; and the performers would discuss some of the challenges they faced in mounting their play.

What is more, around this same time, a visit to see a live performance of Antonin Dvořák's opera *Rusalka* at the beautiful Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) was organized by me. This was in keeping with one of the aims of the course: to attend professional performances when possible. Thankfully, the ROHM generously discounted tickets for our group, which allowed 25 students to attend. (Due to the success of the first trip and increased interest and demand from the students, trips to the ROHM became a regular part of each semester thereafter.) Basic logistics for the trips, however, were demanding and the visits themselves all-day affairs. Because Nizwa is about 150 kilometers from Muscat, a bus was needed (and provided) by the university. To be on time for the performance meant leaving approximately two hours beforehand; and returning added an extra two hours. The aggregate time commitment was thus six hours. With that in mind, it seemed wise to also build in a stop for some food on the return leg, which was both practical and a memorable experience for the students.

At that point in the semester, about three-fourths of the course had elapsed, so the students were quite familiar with their groups and had gained about a dozen weeks of practice performing small scenes, sketches, or workshopping a particular play or task. Students acting in the plays were expected to be off-book and because they were performing parts which they created (as a group), this fact may have made knowing their lines easier. Surprisingly, one of the biggest challenges the students expressed with that task was coordinating rehearsals. Due to the fact that the groups were assigned randomly, the majority of students in any given group did not know each other beforehand, and they came from different parts of the country. It was typical that the students would return to their respective villages and families on the weekends, so those non-school days were unavailable to meet. In some cases, the groups would have to conduct rehearsals in smaller "groups within the group," and then collate their efforts shortly before the performance. As it would turn out, that knowledge was invaluable when the university-wide performance was staged.

Opening Night (Day)

The decision to include student performances in the Culture Week program in 2014 had to be made several months in advance—and was something of a blind leap. There was no way to guarantee that the students would be either

interested in the prospect or inclined to perform for the university community at large. But just as the students put their trust in me when taking part in the theatre course, I trusted that at least some of the students would want to put their newly acquired skills into practice. Doubtless I was determined to do everything I could to help them succeed. First, students in the class were informed about the proposed Culture Week program, and invited to either perform or help behind the scenes. All told, 13 students volunteered.

Next, it was determined that there would be one live-action play and one shadow play. This would allow those comfortable speaking in front an audience to do so, and those who wished to perform but still maintain their privacy to also be included. After the response to Miranda July's story "The Swim Team" in class, I suggested this as the live action performance, and the students enthusiastically agreed. Besides the subject matter, which the students connected with, the story had many comedic elements, which could create an energizing and inviting atmosphere. For the shadow play, several folk tales were discussed and the tale of the "Rebellious Rat" was chosen. After this, some students who did not wish to perform divided up responsibilities for the technical crew: making puppets for the shadow play, finding suitable props, designing costumes, handling lights. Meanwhile, the performers auditioned for parts in the live action performance, which involved a lead character (the swim coach and narrator), and the three swimmers.

Because of both scheduling and various other demands, there were about two weeks of rehearsals before the opening performances. Much like the student groups encountered when rehearsing for their group plays in class, finding time to bring everybody together was virtually impossible. Certainly the students were aware of this, as Suad Taaed al-Maskari remarked in her email on March 29, 2019: "I considered team-work was the most challenging situation. It was a bit difficult to gather all the team players. . . . Second was the idea of acting in plays because we never got the chance to act at the theatre hall at the university [before]." The simplest solution was for me to arrive at the university a couple hours before my classes to rehearse with some of the students; and then to stay a couple of hours after my teaching responsibilities were completed to meet with the others available at that time. This made for long and tiring days at my end, but the students' enthusiasm was unwavering and vitally important. In point of fact, there were three rehearsals where everybody was available before the opening. It was not difficult to recognize that some of the performers felt more acutely stressed at the prospect of being in front of a potentially large audience instead of the comparatively cozy circumstances of the class. I had watched *Saturday Night Live* since I was a young child, and I knew that the performers there often relied on cue cards owing to the challenges of live television.

Borrowing from that example, and thanks to the generous time and help of my wife, cue cards were made for "The Swim Team." (This would not be necessary for the shadow play since they could have scripts invisible to the audience while they spoke their parts into a microphone.) In an email to me on March 26, 2019, Aisha Al Mugheiry, who played the lead in "The Swim Team" wrote that "[a]cting wasn't easy for me at first since it was my first time, I remember being so beat up and discouraged whenever a line slips my head, but with the support, guidance and encouragement of Mr. Tardi I got to

overcome my challenges and anxiety and I got the opportunity to try acting for the first time which I really enjoyed eventually.” Although the cue cards were scarcely used, they provided a necessary and useful safety net.

In terms of technical issues, the students took the initiative. For the shadow play, a translucent screen would be necessary, and the students somehow convinced a university technician to build a simple but elegant linen and wood screen in a single day. The lighting in the performance hall was perfectly fine for a live performance, but for the shadow play, smaller more portable lights were needed, and again the students resolved these issues on their own. Costumes and puppets were completed by full dress rehearsal. In the adaptation of “The Swim Team,” one challenge was how to stage the idea of “swimming on dry land”—particularly since it was not possible to ask the students to follow this instruction literally. Color-coordinated swim goggles and bowls were purchased as props, and the solution to “swimming” was to put confetti into the bowls, which the swimmers could then splash or disperse in the air, signaling a sort of magical transition. Following that transition, the performers would pantomime the various choreographed swimming strokes until they each took turns “diving” off the stage as the script indicated.

Given that this theatrical performance would be a university first, it was unclear how it might be received. Invitations were extended to the Head of the Department of Foreign Languages as well as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, and posters were put up with the details on the performance. The hall where the plays were performed could hold approximately 100 people, and though I had attended numerous panels and guest lectures there, I had never seen the room at capacity. Everybody involved arrived about two hours before the performance to set the stage, stow away props, perform a tech run, and make sure that all the details rehearsed previously would work in this space. (It is worth mentioning that the students did not have access to the actual performance space until the day of the performance because it was a mixed-use space almost constantly reserved. Thus, all rehearsals were done in other rooms and the set was constructed with general estimates of where objects would be and how the final performance space would be organized.)

As the time neared to open the doors, the actors could hear a boisterous crowd gathering outside. Both the Dean and the Department Head arrived along with several other university dignitaries, and the room was filled beyond capacity in mere minutes. Not only were all the seats occupied, but students lined up along stairs. Before the performance began, we had to station a large, imposing student to guard the door so as to avoid a fire hazard as well as to prevent additional students from sneaking in and distracting the actors.

The live performance was first, followed by the shadow play after a short intermission (to change sets). Cue cards were prepared for the actors, although they might have only been used as a reference point once or twice in the performance. One significant difference that could be detected from the actors was that they were clearly affected by the audience’s enthusiastic response. When a humorous line was delivered, the laughter of more than one hundred people landed differently than a rehearsal with a handful of students. Judging from the responses of my supervisors, those in the audience, and the students themselves, I believe the shows were an incredible success

and all those who took part gained confidence. Another direct result was that student performance was built into subsequent Culture Week programs.

Curtain Call

Reviews

The overwhelming response to the performances was positive. Faculty members and colleagues congratulated the students and me for the performances, photos were exchanged, and the Dean and Department head thanked all who took part. In addition, the students shared some reflections on their experiences. Suad Taeed al-Maskari observed in her email of March 29, 2019 that

when I acted as one of old ladies at the swim pool play at the Culture Week events, I was famous ... and most of the teachers greeted me mentioning the character I acted and my colleagues did so. The Department had not held any theatre event before this play. It was Mr. Mark's idea to step forward, let the students act in plays and build in one more level of the students' self-confidence.

Lead actor Aisha Al Mugheiry on March 26, 2019 wrote that the “show was a success and it received a lot of positive feedback and was praised by students and Professors who attended the play. Every time I look back to those moments, I'm glad that I got the opportunity to try something that I would have never even remotely think of doing if it wasn't for my friends' suggestion and Mr. Mark's belief in me. To that I'm thankful.” Another student, Aisha Abdulsalam Ali Ahmed connected the university performances with the visits to the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) in her March 28, 2019 email: “Mr. Mark encouraged his students to be creative in literature classes like participating in [the Culture Week] to perform [a] play in his supervision. Also we have visited plays in Opera House that really make the students to enjoy and live the play.”

The students' reflections and feedback along with those of my peers and supervisors suggest the performances were an unambiguous success. The experience was both challenging and uplifting, and confirmed for me that the unique collaborative dynamics inherent in theatre require mutual respect and trust—a mutual respect and trust able to overcome differences of socioeconomic class, culture, language, or locale.

Director's Notes

In 2008, I was fortunate to be selected as a Fulbright scholar to Poland. As part of the preparations, the Fulbright Commission conducted several workshops on cultural issues, history, and practicalities of living outside one's native country. It was in those workshops that I became acquainted with the *contact hypothesis* most commonly associated with Gordon Allport and his book *The Nature of Prejudice* (Allport 1954). The basic idea of Allport's hypothesis stipulates that under appropriate conditions interpersonal contact

could be one of the most effective ways to reduce prejudice between different group members. As a result, properly managed contact could reduce issues of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination that commonly occur between groups and lead to more positive or constructive interactions. Coupled with the previously mentioned ideas of Edward Said, Allport's concept was a guiding principle for me. My experience as an undergraduate at a Catholic university with a significant Muslim student population, and as a Fulbright scholar, had already suggested to me that people are far more complicated than dogma or stereotypes, and my goal as an educator with the theatre course was to provide a pathway for the students to explore their creativity and performative potential.

For anybody attempting to build a theatre dynamic or department from the ground up, the importance of person to person dynamics cannot be overstated. One's reputation is critical. Word is bond and cannot be squandered with strict adherence to any one particular ideology. The trust of students and their families, and the university, supported trips to the ROHM each semester, and allowed previously shy students to perform to a packed house. As Sarah Ruhl argues both passionately and eloquently:

[Theatre] reminds me of the primary human hope that identity might in fact be fluid, that we are simultaneously ourselves and the beasts in the field, a donkey, a queen, a starlet, a lover — and that identity might be nothing more than dipping our Heraclitean feet in the river, moment to moment. And if identity is fluid, we might actually be free. And furthermore, if identity is fluid, then we might actually be connected — in Whitman's sense — if we can be the leaves of grass and also the masses on the Brooklyn Bridge, then we can leave the ego behind and *be world* for a moment. And this is one reason we go to the theater, either to identify with others, or to *be* others, for the moment.

(Ruhl, 2004)

Epilogue

On October 22, 2015, as the director of the Theatre Department at the University of Nizwa in Oman, I had the distinct privilege of taking a group of 25 students and faculty to attend the Globe Theatre's touring production of *Hamlet*, which was performed in the capital city of Muscat under the support of the Ministry of Higher Education. (This was the very same production which earlier that year had been seen by the Prince of Wales and then American President Barack Obama.) Our group was invited as guests of the British Council and our complimentary tickets to such a distinguished production were in the third row of the auditorium. Certainly this was one of the more memorable events during my time involved with theatre in Nizwa—all the more so given that less than two years earlier, theatre at the university did not exist. Several of the students who took part in the first Culture Week performance a year before were special guests of that *Hamlet* performance and have continued to attend performances at the ROHM.

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PART 3

PEDAGOGY ABROAD

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CHAPTER 8

THE VIEWPOINTS AS TRANSCULTURAL PEDAGOGY

Adam Christopher Marple

When I was growing up, my mother was offered the opportunity to learn American Sign Language for her work as a postal worker. I remember the books she brought home from her classes and at a young age I was fascinated by the different hand movements and symbols that created a language. I was not exposed to foreign languages as a child but this exposure to sign was amazing because I thought the deaf community could talk to each other no matter where they lived. While this did not turn out to be true, as American Sign Language is mutually unintelligible to even British Sign Language, the possibility of a shared language became an intriguing concept. This thought has remained in my mind as I have continued to explore directing and teaching outside of my home culture. This chapter focuses on the introduction of The Viewpoints to students and performers from non-Western and/or non-English speaking backgrounds and looks at the application of The Viewpoints as a performance pedagogy that can overcome different genres, disciplines, trainings and languages. The argument for this draws from my experience as a performance teacher working across several Asian countries where genre, discipline, training and language vary greatly from place to place. I propose that the malleability of The Viewpoints contributes a transcultural complementarity in directing and pedagogy.

History of the Development of The Viewpoints

The Viewpoints is a system of investigation and improvisation around performance related applications of time and space. First developed by Mary Overlie in the 1970s the system was created to investigate the performers' relation to creation and embodiment. Taking a postmodern approach to the research into the performer's craft, Overlie investigated the atoms of performance individually as equal units, identifying six particles of investigation: *Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement, and Story* (SSTEMS). Lkening the experience to turning one's head and looking out a window to a new viewpoint, each individual perspective exists on its own and also in relation to

the others. The Six Viewpoints training is therefore a training in sensing, observing and responding and The Six Viewpoints' descriptions intend to offer conversations for experiencing the present moment more fully. Despite the potential universality in the simplicity of its approach, The Six Viewpoints have been described as uniquely North American. For example, Wendell Beavers, long-time collaborator with Overlie and teacher of The Viewpoints argues that "Mary Overlie's Viewpoints, a distinctly American creation by an artist deeply under the influence of both SOHO and the Montana landscape, sought to distil and transmit the 20th century Euro-American avant-garde lineages of Cage, Cunningham, Yvonne Rainer and *The Judson Dance Theater* leading to post-modern performance."

I argue that to consider the genealogy of The Viewpoints in this fashion is mistaken. The components that Overlie identified have always been around and in use by every culture throughout time. These are concepts that are not uniquely American as they are not time or place specific. What makes Overlie's discovery unique is the investigation into the process and the realization of the six as atoms of performance. And while that *is* uniquely time and place specific, it is not, by any means, nationalistic. The Six Viewpoints could have arisen out of any culture. But the unique time and place of Overlie's experience fast-tracked the creation of The Six Viewpoints. This specific place was the expansive mountains and vast plains of Montana where she was inundated with a sense of space and perspective. The specific time was the late 60s and early 70s in New York's post-modern dance scene. This move from Montana to New York further led her into researching, testing and refining the applications of the non-hierarchical nuclei of performance that she was already working on. These two unique factors (perspective and non-hierarchy) underpin everything in The Six Viewpoints training. When Overlie began teaching at NYU's Experimental Theatre Wing (ETW) in 1977, she refined The Six Viewpoints and started influencing teachers, directors and students with this radical new approach to choreography and performance making. For actors, a Stanislavski-based system at its worst can become too psychologically focused and unconnected to the body, and is often viewed as hierarchical in its structure. When performers from any tradition are introduced to The Six Viewpoints they are asked to lay aside hierarchy and work horizontally with an equal focus on each Viewpoint. In other words, one Viewpoint does not dominate or have less value to the act of creation. Working with and alongside directors such as Lee Breuer and Joanne Akalaitis, it was the collaboration between Overlie and Anne Bogart that shifted The Six Viewpoints into a new direction.

Anne Bogart is a director known for her site-specific downtown works which involved performers and non-performers alike. Bogart began working with Overlie and The Six Viewpoints to investigate their creative purposes, acting as an editor and director of the work being created in rehearsals. The time Bogart spent working with Overlie proved to be a crucible that led Bogart to undertake new investigations into The Six Viewpoints. While Overlie's work on The Six Viewpoints continued (SSTEMS), Bogart began to adapt them to become more Actor focused. The change in The Six Viewpoints came when Anne noticed that the Stanislavski tradition so totally dominated a Western actor's perspective and as a result sought to adapt and change The

Six Viewpoints (SSTEMS) to allow for co-equal adoption of the Stanislavski System and a Viewpoints understanding. Finding that American actors steeped in the Stanislavski tradition could become too focused on *Emotion* or *Story*, Bogart condensed some areas and expanded others to create The Nine Viewpoints, under the headings of *Time* and *Space*. (*Time: Tempo, Duration, Repetition* and *Kinaesthetic Response*. *Space: Spatial Relationship, Topography, Shape, Gesture* and *Architecture*). Bogart's Nine Viewpoints are now recognized as a major actor training method, taught in most Western academies and universities and used by professional theatre companies. Bogart's SITI company (Saratoga International Theatre Institute), founded with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki, serves as the major site for Viewpoints training alongside the Suzuki Method.

We should differentiate between The Six Viewpoints developed by Mary Overlie and The Nine Viewpoints practiced by Anne Bogart a little further. They both seem deceptively simple yet can be incredibly complex in understanding. The Six Viewpoints of Mary Overlie herein referred to as SSTEMS are The Viewpoints of *Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement*, and *Story*. The first of the Six Viewpoints (SSTEMS), *Space*, not only involves the negative space but can also be seen as the positive space that encompasses that negative space: architectural elements, flows of energy, two and three-dimensional placements are all part of space. *Space* can be a performer in itself, it can be a partner to a performer, or it can be a place where a performer can perform. A thorough and playful understanding of *Space* allows for the performer to develop unparalleled presence where they do not have to do anything because being in *Space* is enough. The magnetic performer whom we cannot take our eyes off, captures our attention; embodying *Space*, it feels appropriate that they are there and we are glued to every movement.

The Nine Viewpoints treat *Space* as an overarching category that contains further particularization. These further particles include, *Spatial Relationship*: how close or far away a performer is to someone or something; *Topography*: the two-dimensional movement on the floor and the three-dimensional movement in the volume of space (what we in theatre typically think of as staging or blocking and in dance is called choreography); and *Architecture*: using the materiality of the world around us for information (akin to reading a room like sheet music), using color, weight, texture, light, shadow, temperature and more.

The second of the Six Viewpoints in the SSTEMS is *Shape*, which incorporates the performer's body, articulations and creation with the body. *Shape* can exist on its own or in relation to other shapes but never becomes a combined shape (similar to how performers can work alone or together but will never become a third person). *Shape* explores symmetry and asymmetry, angularity and curve and any and all combinations of these. *Shape* does not have to have meaning to be meaningful but *Shape* can have meaning and intention.

The Nine Viewpoints break down *Shape* into further areas. In The Nine Viewpoints there are *Shape*: the positive space that a body takes up and the negative space around that body as well as the creations of *Shape* in positive and negative space; *Gesture*: when *Shape* has meaning or intention behind it and can be further broken down into *Expressive Gestures* (that have

emotional, philosophical or striking concepts behind them such as sadness, joy, war, justice), and every day *Quotidian Gestures* that tell us about the weather, health, culture and characters of people.

The third Viewpoint of the SSTEMS is that of *Time*, which incorporates temporal elements like speed, duration and repetition. Beyond a numerical or linear understanding, *Time* becomes an element that can be atomized or expanded, stretched or broken. One can be in *Time* but one can also do *Time*. A performer can become sensitized to *Time* and play with it as patterning or unusual configurations.

The Nine Viewpoints sees *Time* as an overarching category breaking down this Viewpoint into *Tempo*: how fast or how slow something is; *Duration*: how long or how short that something is; *Repetition*: repeating or recycling an idea; and *Kinaesthetic Response*: responding to some external stimuli.

The fourth of the Six Viewpoint in SSTEMS is *Emotion*, conceived as presence, openness and vulnerability. The ability to be aware and give while also receiving. *Emotion* here means being cognizant of oneself and one's place in the space, with an awareness of others and of how the dialogue is happening.

The Nine Viewpoints does not contain this language. Bogart did not want actors to reach for and play emotions and so the word *Emotion* was removed from The Nine Viewpoints, though the ideas of presence and awareness were embedded throughout. The Nine Viewpoints are not devoid of emotion and it is not discouraged, but focus was put on creating circumstances where emotions may arise, rather than be played. Anyone who has acted or taught acting knows that grasping for and trying to repeat an emotion will often cause it to slip out of the actor's hands. Emotions have to be coaxed out and parameters have to be created to approximate, create or recreate emotions.

The fifth of the Six Viewpoint in SSTEMS is *Movement*, referring to experiencing kinetic sensation. Gravity, balance, pendulum, motion and arrest are elements that can be played with and used as resource material in creation.

In The Nine Viewpoints the concept of *Movement* is expressed in granular ways across the other Viewpoints of *Repetition*, *Kinaesthetic Response*, *Topography* and *Shape*.

The last of the Six Viewpoints in SSTEMS is *Story* and refers to logic that functions as an organization of a sequence of information. A shape can have *Story*, a movement can have *Story*, a scene can have *Story* because they all have a structure and underlying logic beneath them.

The word *Story* does not exist in The Nine Viewpoints. Like *Emotion*, this term has been removed from the original Viewpoints because of a belief that the word is too charged for performers to play with. An actor, for example, who focuses on *Story* often forgets other aspects. *Story* always exists, but as with *Emotion*, in The Nine Viewpoints we try to create circumstances where *Story* may arise and where it can also die.

The Nine Viewpoints are probably the most practical understanding of these concepts. They are likely what performers and creators will use in the classroom, in the rehearsal room, or in a devising process. But The Six Viewpoints force performers and creators to further explore and to deepen their practice not only in the work but also on themselves. It is not an either/or situation regarding the two processes, as both exist in each other, but rather the level of time and practice one can commit to the exploration.

Overlie had no intention of spreading the work widely because she saw The Six Viewpoints as an investigation in progress. Overlie continued to develop the SSTEMS at NYU's Experimental Theatre Wing influencing performers and directors alike but it did not spread as vastly as The Nine Viewpoints. Bogart went on to found the Saratoga International Theatre Institute (SITI) with the Japanese theatre artist and theorist Tadashi Suzuki and together they worked with The Nine Viewpoints and Suzuki's Method of Actor Training to create and tour work under the auspices of the SITI Company. The proliferation of The Viewpoints training is typically that of The Nine Viewpoints variety as SITI Company, a touring company, has exposed their working methods to audiences and performers all over America and the world. While The Nine Viewpoints have laid the groundwork for an exposure to these concepts to become more readily known and adopted, The Six Viewpoints can lead to deeper investigation into form, content, and structure. For the purposes of this chapter when referring to The Viewpoints it will be with this understanding that both a deep (Six Viewpoints, SSTEMS) and wide (The Nine Viewpoints) reference are being used.

The Viewpoints Elements

The Viewpoints has three specific purposes:

- First, it is an ensemble building tool. As everyone shares the same terminology yet experiences the environment through their own eyes, there is an understanding that the other participants living in that environment have the same reference points but possible different interpretations. Quick building of community happens.
- The second thing The Viewpoints facilitates is a total warm-up for the performer. Like a pianist who warms-up with scales and a ballerina with barre work, the theatre artist needs to build-up their body, their voice and their imagination. The Viewpoints offers the performer a playground and is also a litmus test to identify performance skills.
- Additionally, The Viewpoints allow for creation of work: whether through a devising process or to further investigate a dramaturgical process of an existing script. Performers who are trained in The Viewpoints can be side-coached by a director to remain aware of their use of temporal and spatial elements.

Another benefit of introducing The Viewpoints to performers is for them to better appreciate the environment they are inhabiting. For example, when asked to think of *Shape*, students may gravitate to simple geometric patterns such as square, triangle and circle. After playing with The Viewpoints, these shapes explode into never before seen forms; shapes than can only exist in their imagination. When talking about *Time*, a student may only refer to fast or slow initially. After playing with The Viewpoints, unheard of time signatures begin to permeate the space such as cloud time (how slowly a cloud moves in the sky), bee time (referring to the frenetic movement of a bee), ripping time (how almost instantaneous the act of ripping apart an object needs to be).

In a production of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* at LASALLE College of the Arts in 2014, the student playing the role of Roy Cohn was having a particularly troubling time understanding and embodying the power of this character. Toward the end of Act 1 Cohn is in his doctor's office after being diagnosed with AIDS. The character has to re-exert his control over the scene and convince the doctor that "AIDS is what homosexuals have. I have liver cancer." The character, while temporarily knocked back on his heels with this diagnosis, has to remain a dominating presence in the scene in order to achieve his objective. Cohn's character is based on the actual historical figure of the man with the same name, an incredibly powerful and charismatic man, 30 years older than our actor performing the role. The student embodying the character in our production never quite owned the space until he was asked to put The Viewpoints into practice. When asked how he viewed the way Roy Cohn operated in the world, the student instinctually delved into his research of the character: he talked about his age, the suits that he wore, the people that he knew, and the places he went to. As a lawyer, Cohn's signature could make or break people and governments and to the actor it felt like, "he owns everything even if he hasn't gotten it yet." The actor's instincts and training were correct, but he could not quite bridge the gap between his instincts and his training. While he had focused diligently on who, what, when, where, and why he had never considered *how* as an option.

In this instance I took the ideas the actor was working with and connected them to The Viewpoints. I listened to the words the actor was already using, words that dealt with *Space* ("...he owns everything...") and *Topography* ("...he pushes his way into rooms like a bull..."). We enlisted *Topography* for its two-dimensional application of movement on the floor (staging/blocking). The actor was asked to use *Topography* to write the character's name, *Roy Cohn*, across the floor of the doctor's office. The outcome of this action, while not being openly revealed to the audience, transformed the scene and unlocked the actor's access to the character. This restaging helped the actor to allow the character to take control of the scene. As the play progressed and Roy's sickness took over, he becomes bedridden. The challenge for the actor remained to continue using *Topography* to own and control the space. We explored how he could take control over the stage while being confined to such a small location. What had been two-dimensional movements on the floor, now became three-dimensional movements through space: the hands, the head, or the toes. To the very last moment, the character kept on signaling his name via *Topography*.

The Viewpoints Overseas

Since 2010 I have taught The Viewpoints to the BA (Hons) Acting program at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore. Like Singapore itself, the Acting program sits on the East/West divide where the acting training has a Stanislavski foundation with inclusion of traditional Asian performance techniques including but not limited to Kathakali, Noh, Chinese Xiqu, and Wayang Kulit.

Singapore is made up of four officially recognized races and languages. Despite English being the lingua franca of the land, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil are equally recognized and all signage displays the four languages. With 64



Figure 8.1 Roy Cohn (Crenshaw Yeo) using *Topography* to write his name in the snow with his toes.

Photo by Jon Cancio. 2014. LASALLE College of the Arts.

percent of the overall population being foreign (non-resident and permanent resident), Singapore is an incredibly diverse country with dozens of different languages and cultures. This large foreign population has always been a trend in Singapore which has been a port of call for over 200 years and a regional trade center for at least 700 years. This intermingling of languages and cultures has made Singapore the vibrant city-state that it is today. Even though students speak English, their backgrounds and cultures are richly diverse and multi-varied. Classes can typically be made up of Singapore Chinese, Malay and Indian students as well as students from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, The Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Korea, China, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Sweden, Norway, France or Brazil. As the society is non-homogenous, there are different points of views on everything. Working with The Viewpoints there is not a Singaporean *Tempo* as the culture is so diverse that the particularization of the people leads to a vast interpretation of what *Tempo* is. Diversity is the national characteristic.

When teaching students in Singapore, one is confronted with a myriad of languages, interpretations, cultural understandings, performance traditions and historical narratives that must be taken into consideration before introducing new material. This presents its own challenge obviously but it also presents unique opportunities to experiment with and explore pedagogy. Because of this distinctive opportunity, I have embedded and bridged The Viewpoints to become a fundamental part not only of the Acting program at LASALLE but also at other faculties through interdisciplinary work.

Due to the highly collaborative culture of LASALLE and the proximity of the differing programs, The Viewpoints began to be taught and shared with the Musical Theatre, Dance, Theatre Design & Production Management, and

Music programs in the Faculty of Performing Arts. The Musical Theatre program and the Acting program at LASALLE had similar structures based in physical theatre training and so the adoption of The Viewpoints was natural, while the adoption into the Design and Music programs was surprising because it meant that The Viewpoints were not bound to the body. It meant that The Viewpoints existed beyond embodiment. They existed as a trans-disciplinary language. But could they be a trans-cultural language?

The School's focus tends to put more emphasis on the Stanislavski techniques for performance making but the strong improvisational culture of the school and the inclusion of the traditional Asian art forms such as Kathakali and Noh creates an ongoing conflict in the students. Until the adoption of The Viewpoints students were able to perform well in a traditional art form and to perform well in a Western realistic play, but the different trainings did not permeate each other. The discovery of the bridge of the language of The Viewpoints helped to create a dialogue between the two approaches, instead of an argument. With The Viewpoints training, the student can start to bring in recognizable elements of one form to the other. *Time*, for example, does not belong to any culture, *Space* is not just a Western or an Eastern concept. Because they exist in both places at the same time, the students start to understand the similarities of the different performance styles and techniques while still recognizing the differences. The Viewpoints are a neutral language both Western and Eastern performers can adopt.

The types of dance and theatre in Asia shift almost every 100 miles. The terms, dance and theatre, are almost interchangeable or indistinguishable and vary greatly by location, language and cultural heritage. With every shift of language comes a shift of understanding of the definition of certain topics. There is an old joke that in Vietnam they grow rice, in Cambodia they watch the rice grow, and in Laos they listen to wind blow through the rice. This points up differences in each country's view of time and tempo. If one has traveled to Vietnam one notices the pace of life is a higher tempo, not just in the urban centers but also in the rural areas. When one travels to Cambodia, one sees a remarkable shift in the pace of life and tempo and in Laos the pace is even slower. Though it can be argued this has much to do with industrialism these differences can be seen throughout the history and culture of each place. These differences can be noticed in the traditional performance forms as well, so when working with students from different cultures across language barriers and cultural performance traditions, it is often a challenge to bring everybody together in the same performance and to celebrate the diversity of opinion and understanding. It is my assertion that The Viewpoints acts as a transcultural bridge, and does not negate the student's background, cultural performance tradition, body, or psychosomatic understanding of performance. Instead with The Viewpoint terms we are able to come to an agreement together, to build a foundation of reference.

An example of the impact of this transcultural pedagogy is a 2015 production of *Macbeth* at LASALLE College of the Arts with a cast made up of several nationalities. Having been trained for two years in The Viewpoints, students were asked to rehearse the play one day in their mother-tongue. Since we had begun the rehearsal process, they knew what the other characters were saying though they did not understand the language being used. Because

of the intense amount of listening and intuition that they had developed through their Viewpoints training they could keep the ensemble intact. Using their mother tongue, their bodies became alive, their connection to the poetry deepened and their voices soared when using the rhythm, pitches and dynamics associated with their native language. While classes in The Viewpoints had been taught in English, this rehearsal was being conducted in multiple languages and the introduction of English did not seem appropriate. As the students had already translated The Viewpoints terminology for me they were able to be side-coached in a language that they were currently experimenting with. Instead of suggesting a change of *Spatial Relationship* in English to the Indian actress playing Lady Macbeth, the Tamil word இடம் சார்ந்த உறவு (Idam Saarntha Uravu) was used which helped her directly experience that concept. The change that she incorporated was not an English definition of *Space* but a Tamil understanding of *Space*, authentic to her experience and her body. The character, and the choices that the actress made as the character, became more embodied. No longer passing through a filter or a mask of English, the actress tapped into something that she had been denying herself in her work thus far. When rehearsals resumed in English the actors were able to maintain these discoveries by continually applying The Viewpoints, and the students came to understand The Viewpoints vocabulary and process as the bridge between each other's cultures and the work.

Of course these successes grew out of experimentation with The Viewpoints; in Vietnam and Japan, for example, there were challenges that shifted my thinking dramatically. When I visited Vietnam in 2011 to give a workshop it was the first time that anyone had attempted to translate The Viewpoints and teach them in Vietnamese. It did not go too well. What would normally be an introductory three-hour workshop where the concept of The Viewpoints



Figure 8.2 Lady Macbeth (Rebekah Sangeetha Dorai) uses *Spatial Relationship* as she sleepwalks.

Photo by Crispian Chan. 2015. LASALLE College of the Arts.

would be touched on and performers would then be able to dive deeper at another date was hamstrung through the slow process of translation. Adept, talented performers were not able to get into a flow and settle into the work as there was constant defining, redefining and questioning of the terms being presented. Exercises were seen as rules that needed to be followed instead of elements to be experienced. The Viewpoints concepts that existed in Vietnamese culture through translation became foreign entities seen as uniquely Western or American via the person they were coming from. These foreign concepts had nothing to do in their mind with existing training they had and must be a dance form that was being asked of them. While teaching I kept trying to minimize my words, refine my vocabulary, and simplify concepts. It was the first time I was met with the limitation of vocabulary and translation into a foreign language. Concepts that I had taught a week before to English speaking students from various cultures and backgrounds, were completely lost on these students. The Viewpoints' concepts exist in their culture but because they were being translated from English into Vietnamese, something was lost. The students tried their best to meet with the demands of the work, but the constant disconnect of the translation left them more confused about the exercises than anything else. I left Vietnam convinced that I failed as a teacher and went back to my students in Singapore and decided that I needed to rethink everything about the way I teach The Viewpoints.

The next opportunity to teach The Viewpoints where English was not the host language was in 2015 at the Kyoto University of Art and Design in Japan. The failure in Vietnam did not lead to any answer that I could take to Japan but at least I was aware of what the problem was going to be. As before, a translator was provided and a copious amount of time was spent in translating concept, philosophy and terms which should only have been a cursory introduction. Again, terms that belonged in their very own culture but through translation became foreign to them. When asked to work with *Tempo*, varying the speed of their own actions, the filter between English and Japanese left the students confused as to what kind of *Tempo* to produce: was it a *Tempo* that they understood or a *Tempo* that they thought I would understand? A great deal of time was spent on the translation of *Spatial Relationship*. There seemed to be no word that could be used to describe the distance between two people and the story that it may tell. Try as we might, we could never find anything that approximated a translation. The translator and I started to have philosophical discussions about the meaning of space: did I mean *x* or did I mean *y* or both? Could both of these concepts exist at the same time and space? While these discussions were happening about every translated word, the students would stop working and watch and wait for us. Just as in Vietnam, we could never get to a place of understanding and internalization of the work. Instead, it was a "costume," it was an exterior American device that they were putting on for the visiting professor.

Explorations in Language

These challenging experiences left me determined to figure out how to teach beyond translation and how to surpass limitations of language. I remembered my mother's Sign Language books and started to look at non-verbal

ways of communication and around this time, I was also introduced to the work of Walter Thompson and his creation of Sound Painting. Sound Painting is a multi-disciplinary, live composing and conducting technique used to create an on the spot performance with musicians, actors, singers, dancers and fine-artists regardless of their linguistic background. It is a form of sign language with over 1200 hand signals that invite performers to offer their interpretation of the composer and conductors' request. For example, one such hand signal, the fingers of the right hand making a V symbol and sliding up or down the left forearm that is raised vertically, is the symbol for *Dynamic*. For musicians and singers this sign could trigger an increase/decrease of volume while simultaneously inviting the dancers to increase/decrease the amplitude of their movement. I noticed the remarkable similarities between The Viewpoints and Sound Painting and started to use some of the hand signals in Viewpoints sessions. While one to one translation of the terms of The Viewpoints into Sound Painting was not exact, the wide usage of hand signals allowed for a multiplicity of interpretation: *Tempo*, *Repetition* and *Shape* already had specific hand signals in Sound Painting. Other terms had to be found inside and amongst other hand signals. At this point I thought that I could use the techniques of Sound Painting in The Viewpoints to bridge language differences or barriers.

When Sound Painting was brought into The Viewpoints open session explorations at LASALLE, and in other places including Hong Kong and Japan, where English is not necessarily the first language of the performers it opened up new avenues of communicating with the participants. Instead of side-coaching with the terminology in English, hand signals could be used to convey messages. It felt like I had finally found the shared language I had been searching for since childhood, but we were soon confronted with the limitations of this device. Sound Painting is performative by nature, and needed an outside eye or conductor to create, while The Viewpoints is investigative at its core and dependent upon the performer to interpret and expand the concepts. It wasn't that spoken language needed to be replaced and it wasn't that we needed to share one language, we had to exist in the space as equals despite our language barriers and share concepts.

The next opportunity to explore working with The Viewpoints as a transcultural pedagogy, came at the 8th annual Asia Pacific Bond of Theatre Schools conference held in Singapore. The conference invited 23 different schools from across the Asia Pacific region: from Mongolia in the North to Australia in the South, from Iran in the West to Japan in the East and everywhere in between. Here students from various cultures and languages take workshops in areas of their choice: the perfect opportunity to explore The Viewpoints and language barriers again. With the help of my LASALLE students, I translated The Viewpoints into Mandarin, Bahasa, Korean, Hindi, Cantonese and Tagalog so that I could teach the workshop participants in their own language via the translated terms.

When we translated the terms into Vietnamese and Japanese in the earlier workshops, the English terms and understanding of the terms dominated the conversation. English was where the information was coming from. English seemed to be the place that had the specialized knowledge. In the performers' minds any translation into Vietnamese or Japanese was instantly

relegated to second tier status and these concepts must be foreign to that culture. Relegated because no matter how reasonable the fidelity of what was being said it was still being translated and was creating distance, further enforcing the foreignness of the technique. Having the terms translated ahead of time and not using English at all it leveled the playing field and said to the students that their language, their understanding, their cultural embodiment of these terms was equal to another student's language, understanding and cultural embodiment. I was not introducing a foreign concept created out of the United States, imposing a Western training on them but inviting them to look at their own language and assemble these elements to investigate Time and Space. With English out of the way, the student could focus on their own understanding and drill deep into the work while also remaining open to the contribution of the other participants. What had eluded me in the earlier workshops in Vietnam and Japan suddenly came to look like the work that I was doing with my English speaking students. This was the catalyst for all investigation going forward. When invited to teach *The Viewpoints* abroad I would need to research, pre-investigate, and find the most applicable term in the foreign language to teach *The Viewpoints* that way. So the performers could launch into the work without the hindrance or baggage of a perceived foreign acting technique.

Viewpoints as Transcultural Pedagogy

When I was invited to teach *The Viewpoints* for the second time at Kyoto University of Art and Design, I arrived with *The Viewpoints* already translated into Japanese. I had asked if it might be possible to do the entire workshop with little use of English as I wanted to investigate how a non-English language approach could help facilitate communication. The host school was hesitant and there was a concern about a loss of information as I am not fluent in Japanese and the students wanted to work on their English. Yet, the translator, Professor Aiko Hirai, was also the head of their theatre program and she thought it best that she first offered context around the terminology and sought to apply it to work they had already done. This was a completely reasonable request, however it ensured that English would still be dominating the conversation. However, Professor Hirai had been present during my earlier trip to the university and thus was familiar with the concepts and terms. This streamlined the process tremendously in comparison to my first attempts to teach *The Viewpoints* in the language of the workshop participants. We were able to begin applying *The Viewpoints* work beyond introductory exercises and to engage with scene work that the students were already doing in their classes. I did not have translations of their scenes so I was working from a purely physical response to the work, offering suggestions and asking for different interpretations to the use of the different Viewpoints. One young actress who was soon to be auditioning for *The New National Theatre* asked if I could work with her on her *Summer and Smoke* monologue this way. While I was familiar with Williams's play and roughly knew the monologue, it was in Japanese so my response was limited to her physical, visual and tonal choices. I let the actress know that this exploration was likely not going to be useful for her audition but would

likely open her up to different possibilities that she had perhaps shut herself off from. Could she for example find a *Gesture* for the character? Something that was behavioral but displayed the character's inner intent. How might the piece change if it were explored at the fastest *Tempo* that she could maintain? Were there words in the piece that she wanted to elongate, stretch, slide, fold, fracture or trip over? Many times performers limit themselves to a very small palette and it is exactly this wider palette of colors for character choices that we are looking to expand, as in the aforementioned actor playing Roy Cohn in *Angels in America*. He had all the right instincts but could not quite translate them into actionable playable choices. If she could open herself to the idea that she had more options in her toolbox, then she might leave a stronger impression and certainly be more authentic to her imagination before formulating pre-conceived ideas of how it should be performed. The Viewpoints offered her multiple interpretations to choose from, to play with, and to begin to stretch her choices.

When I returned to Kyoto for the third time, this methodology had begun to make sense to the students. Not only was I coming in with the terms and definitions in Japanese but the foundational information about The Viewpoints had been laid out by Professor Hirai before I arrived. This time when I said the terms in Japanese the students knew what I meant because they had already experienced the terms and understood them as concepts that existed in their society. The workshop progressed very fast, to the point where we could begin working on scenes that they had been looking at in other classes. The scenes they were working on were from Chekhov's *The Seagull* and they had already done their Stanislavski homework. They knew Who, What, When, Where and Why but they had not thought of How, as in: How the information could be communicated. How we as humans, through our physical behavior, convey the un-told, un-spoken things. In the final workshopped scene between Konstantine and Nina, some lovely nuanced work occurred but it was also lost as it did not leave the stage and reach the audience. I could see the tumult in the actors' eyes but it was not being expressed externally. They were not leveraging their bodies nor the environment to share the textual and the sub-textual story with the audience. I asked the actor playing Konstantine to focus on the *Architecture* of his room. Did he want to be in contact with his personal objects? How did it feel to move away from the desk and chair that helped him feel like a writer? Could he play with the *Spatial Relationship* between himself, his objects, and Nina? I asked Nina, on the other hand, if she could just focus on *Shape*. I typically do not prescribe any way of interpreting The Viewpoints but I leave it to the actor to interpret. The next rehearsal was of course timid, as these actors were experimenting with this new approach, but slowly they began to open up the scene to find a palpable longing and aching feeling between them. Once they began to realize that *Space*, *Shape* and *Architecture* could also be a text, a communication, a deeper and fuller interpretation of the scene began to take place. As Konstantine naturally wanted to be close to Nina, he began to change his *Spatial Relationship* to be closer to her. This in turn made her *Kinaesthetic Response* change her *Spatial Relationship* to be further away from him. This led him back to the comfort of where his power lay: his table, his typewriter, his chair and all the elements that defined the respected writer he had always

wanted to be. When the actor felt in charge of his faculties again, he was able to explore the *Architecture* elements of grasping the table, of running his hand across the keys of the typewriter. Meanwhile, Nina explored trying to keep up the façade of composure and she began to play with an upright and tight bodily *Shape* that eventually melted into curves and contractions. The constant switching between angularity and roundness helped the actress find more physical justification for her troubled mind.

This communication was in Japanese with an American who spoke no more than 15 words of the language. But we shared an understanding of the concepts in spite of our language. Just as The Viewpoints are used to build ensembles, the same terminology through the lens of one's particular culture helped everyone have the same reference points but different possible interpretations. Such interpretations are authentic to the practitioners' cultural understanding but still follow the same methodology. I had always been looking for a universal language trying to smooth out the misconceptions instead of celebrating the multiplicity and authenticity of the differing interpretations. While I am an outsider teaching and directing far from my home culture I may never be able to fully take language and culture into consideration when working with students whose foundational knowledge and training is in some way contradictory or just very different. But, I believe I have found some shared ground in which we can move toward each other.

By finding the commonalities of Time and Space, without reinventing the wheel, The Viewpoints offers a possible way forward as a complementary bridge that does not contradict traditional performance training or traditions, doesn't negate embodied knowledge, and doesn't relegate the mother tongue to second class citizenship. By allowing The Viewpoints to act as the bond between cultures, languages and trainings it invites the performer to enter the arena with their full history. By allowing the embodied knowledge they contain not only to be valid but to be valued, The Viewpoints opens up new and exciting possibilities for interpretations and performance.

THE ISTA PERFORMING ARTS ACADEMIES IN SHANGHAI AND HONG KONG

Anne Drouet and Jillian Campana

ISTA, a brief introduction

The International Schools Theatre Association, hereon referred to as ISTA, is a non-profit international arts organization that provides theatre and drama experiences for elementary and secondary age students around the world. ISTA began in the early 1970s when a small group of teachers at different English language international schools in Europe and the Middle East met to discuss possibilities for connections and collaborations amongst themselves and their students. The first official ISTA event was a 1978 high school theatre festival for a small group of schools. Since then the organization has grown to offer over 60 events annually, support hundreds of schools and thousands of students in six different continents, and serve as the global workshop provider for the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program Theatre course. One example of the type of event ISTA offers is a three day theatre festival for secondary school students and their teachers. These festivals occur in roving locations around the globe and offer the student participants the opportunity to work in small groups to create original performance pieces while simultaneously providing professional development workshops for the teachers. The sites for the festivals vary from year to year in an effort to reach out to as diverse a group as possible. As an example, in 2019 a few of the numerous festival locations included Izmir, Bali, Chang Mai, Terezin, Tashkent, and Windhoek, Namibia. English language schools anywhere can attend these festivals resulting in a single festival participant population of approximately 150 students from a multitude of nationalities and a variety of different schools. Students are integrated in small ensemble groups of between 15 and 20 students which are individually led by freelance ISTA artists who are theatre directors, composers, producers, mimes, comics, puppeteers, dancers, physical theatre practitioners and theatre teachers at international schools. In the festival ensembles students are exposed to world theatre traditions, devising strategies and collaborative artistic processes. Festivals generally have a theme or a question to guide and focus the work and the ISTA artists facilitate the students' dramatic exploration of the theme. The intensive process

of play, exploration, inquiry and collaborative devising that happens in the festival ensembles, and with the whole group, often culminates in a sharing or public performance at the end. In addition to stimulating an appreciation for, and a skill set in, theatre the festivals are designed to help young people inquire about the world they live in while developing compassion, creativity and meaningful connections with peers from different backgrounds.

Two Local Academies

Because of the popularity of the ISTA secondary school festivals, one of us, Anne Drouet, a British born Chinese educator and musician, worked with ISTA to set up two local Performing Arts Academies following the ISTA model and mission. The ISTA Performing Arts Academy in Shanghai in residence at the Western International School of Shanghai was opened in 2014, followed by the ISTA Performing Arts Academy in Hong Kong in 2017 which is located on the premises of the Hong Kong Academy. These two sister academies run continuous after school and weekend programming throughout the year including two—three day festivals, eight-week after school courses and evening and weekend masterclasses all focusing on collaborative devising using the ISTA model. These Academies offer scholarships and an audition free application process and are open to young people aged 11–18 from local schools as well as international schools from across Shanghai and Hong Kong. The Academies' mission, in line with the larger ISTA organization, is to provide an independent playground for young people from different backgrounds and cultures so that they can come together to create their own work and to connect their cultures and their talents. The Shanghai and Hong Kong Academies strive to develop expressive confidence in the self, the English language and in the Performing Arts by teaching and weaving together Drama, Physical Theatre/Dance, Music and Theatre Technology. The multi-disciplinary approach is foreign and discomfiting to many students at the beginning and because the work demands that students feel comfortable with the collaborative, inquiry-based process, curiosity and inquiry-based dialogue are modeled from the start. There is never one answer or one solution and students are encouraged to solve their own theatre making problems. When students ask, "*Can we...?*" We respond with, "*What could happen if you did?*" and "*What would happen if we.....?*"

In their review of innovative pedagogies taking place in both Asia and the West researchers Anne Harris and Leon De Bruin explain that, "creative attitudes modeled by teachers influenced students' own attitudes to creativity" (Harris and De Bruin 2018, 2). Their article, "An international study of creative pedagogies in practice in secondary schools" in the *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* (2018), discusses how developing creativity in students has never been more important because "what creativity research is making clear is, the socio-cultural perspective for conceptualizing processes of development, teaching and learning" (ibid., 3). We knew that staffing the Academies would play a key role in facilitating the development of creativity and the connection of cross-cultural students and so we set out to recruit a team of teacher artists for each discipline: Drama, Physical Theatre/Dance,

Music and Theatre Technology. The teaching artists we hired are both local and international and in addition to having experience working with, and integrating students from, a variety of cultures and backgrounds, the faculty share three beliefs: that all young people desire to learn and participate in dynamic, creative environments; that the best discipline comes from a commitment toward common goals; and, that the Arts encourage each individual to work in a creative, supportive and collaborative way. The teaching artists pay attention to the students' socio-cultural perspectives and development and follow the philosophy that collaboratively working and learning with people from different places and with different sensibilities sets up a model for global connection and responsibility.

The mix of local Chinese students and expatriate children from vastly different social and economic backgrounds both provides opportunity and presents challenges. The student bodies at the Shanghai and Hong Kong Academies are incredibly diverse and comprise approximately 40 different nationalities. Many are third culture kids who are living in a country outside of their home culture and working in a language that is not their first, while others are from local Chinese and Hong Kong schools and have not been exposed to a diverse working environment. The combined cultural experiences of the students, and their different ways of thinking, offer a rich and diverse way of approaching the performing arts. As a result, the Performing Arts Academy students are authentically exposed to Chinese music and theatre as well as many other Asian, African and European performance traditions through their peers and the multi-national group of teaching artists. Additionally, the scheduling, enrollment structure and cost of each Academy program is planned to welcome students from the widest transnational and socio-economic backgrounds possible, precisely to promote exposure to diverse techniques and styles. And the Academies work with a wide age range to provide the more mature students the opportunity to model responsible practices and behavior, develop leadership skills and learn from the unfiltered, open, creative minds of the younger students. In this way, these older students also serve as peer educators. The diversity of the structure is designed not only to promote the development of skills and knowledge but also to challenge the students to work outside the comfort zone of their cultural norms and to work toward feeling a connectedness to the global community.

The Academy Ensemble Process

The Performing Arts Academies in Shanghai and Hong Kong follow devising methodologies, making use of processes whereby a creative team, or ensemble, work together to create an original piece of theatre rather than working with material that has already been scripted. At the Academies, small groups of student artists collaborate together, with the help of a facilitator, to create an original piece of performing art. The devised pieces they collaboratively develop might be for performance or they may be undertaken as a way to generate ideas or explore a topic or theme. Devising has been used throughout history, and in many different geographic locations, to create new works, but the modern emergence of devising as a popular way to create began in



Figure 9.1 An ensemble at the ISTA Performing Arts Hong Kong Academy warming up.

Photo by Mariella Amitai. 2018. Hong Kong Academy.

Europe at the beginning of the last century and is also referred to as “collective creation” (Syssoyeva and Proudfit 2013). Scholar Alan Filewod writes about how the devising process lends itself to a, “synthesis of several different perspectives and experiences” (Filewod 1987, 2) and it is precisely this notion that the ISTA Performing Arts Academies want to draw upon. The Academies believe educating students about how to use devised techniques promotes a collective way to create and is inherently democratic in its philosophy precisely because the devising process offers all participants an equal voice. At the Academies, each member of the ensemble contributes to the conversation, development and invention of an artistic piece. This leads to a blending of ideas and a respect for the different ways of approaching and exploring ideas.

Academy teaching seeks to create a dynamic learning environment that differentiates between learning styles, embraces diverse cultures and provides for a greater variety of student strengths and needs. There is a balance of verbal and non-verbal communication for the transnational learners and the communication methods shift depending on student comfort. When students feel unclear about the work, whether it is why they are undertaking it or what they are to do, they often second guess the process of their ideas and subsequently their creativity is censored. So staff are in continual dialogue with the learners because working with culturally diverse students involves building relationships with individual students in order to clarify the work, stretch understanding and help mitigate confusion. The Shanghai and Hong Kong Academies strive not to mandate a right way to work and instead use open-ended questions to respond to student inquiries regarding how to proceed. Of course, some students struggle with the idea that there is no right answer or perfect approach and so the teaching artists continually clarify that

the theatre work undertaken is process based and rooted in the belief that the exploration and discoveries are more important than any product that might ultimately be shared with an audience. The teaching team also works to create a sense of playfulness in warm-ups and continually places emphasis on exploration rather than product to help the students feel safe to access their natural creative selves. The focus on process is often new to students, especially ones who have been entrenched in schools that focus on grades and test scores. At first, process based inquiry work can be unsettling for students and so the two Academies model experimentation and inquiry where multiple ideas, responses and solutions can be explored. This approach to the work is consistent and takes time, but Academy students quickly discover that they can collaboratively respond to a task with variety, speed, and originality because the focus throughout has been on both on developing and letting go of ideas. And although most Performing Arts Academy events culminate in a public sharing, only the last quarter or fifth of the time is allocated to selecting, refining and shaping performance ideas. The ISTA Shanghai and Hong Kong Academy process, in broad strokes, as developed by Anne Drouet is as follows:

Warming: the warming up of the physical, mental and interpersonal dynamics with a high dependency on the teacher practitioner

Introduction of a stimulus: the presentation of an object, sound(s), image, theme, question, story or event that provides a starting point for the students

Playing: the letting go of inhibitions by reconnecting with the students' playful creativity in the context of games, which may be connected to the creative stimulus/inquiry at hand

Exploring: promoting divergent thinking by inquiring into different and contrasting ways to respond to a stimulus, thus developing creativity and a sense that there is not one correct answer

Forming: the creating of ideas, motifs and/or structures out of exploration, with all participants offering ideas about possibilities

Refining: the development, shaping and letting go of ideas as the collaborative idea begins to take a shape

Rehearsing: the further development, exploration of ideas and structuring in connection to how an audience might perceive the work

Playing (again): the letting go of inhibitions by reconnecting with the students' playful creativity in the context of games, this time connected to the creative stimulus/inquiry at hand

Reflecting: takes place at each and every step of the process and is voiced by all participants, through a summary account of the process, a discussion of the ideas explored thus far

Sharing: a sharing with a public audience or for other ensembles

The Academies encourage a return to the "playing" stage before any public "sharing" to search for alternative ideas and processes and to promote culturally divergent thinking. Early on in this process value is placed on the consideration of other ways of working as well as the ability to respond to different ideas. Every member of the group is given an opportunity to share their ideas and because groups have seen the importance of ensemble work,

they are more open to listening and considering other approaches. This process has created an exhilarating environment where student ensembles work toward the common goal of creating an original piece of theatrical work by making use of the individuals' new knowledge and skills while also giving voice to the students' cultural values and beliefs. At this time students often see how their new knowledge and different backgrounds often lead to common attitudes.

The Structure of the Performing Arts Academies

Academy experiences range from eight-week courses which meet after school, to weekend festivals, to evening masterclasses. Masterclasses have included workshops on simple puppetry techniques, marketing the arts, musical composition for performance and developing a musical signature. Weekend festivals sometimes draw upon the masterclasses and have included collaborative devising beginning with inquiries into themes such as *Rhythm of Shape*, which combined live music and movement improvisation based on principles of Laban Movement Analysis. *I Dream*, another weekend festival theme, offered an interdisciplinary approach to creating a performance about the hopes, worries and dreams of young people and their identities. Whatever length, Academy experiences are balanced with whole group ensemble sessions and smaller workshops in specific disciplines and traditions. Both types of sessions focus on an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach. The interdisciplinary approach incorporates a blend of drama, movement/dance, music and technology into both process and "sharings." The intercultural approach asks participants to bring their own aesthetics, processes and knowledge to the work. The Academy structure does not seek to imitate specific cultural performances, but rather to acknowledge and bring in the cultures of those making the work. The focus is on developing an inclusive community and striving to offer every participant the opportunity to excel by improving their skills and knowledge and expanding their conceptual understandings. Students continually comment that working with ensembles of peers from around the world and investigating multiple disciplines is often initially challenging. At first students are sometimes frustrated by an inability to communicate quickly due to language barriers, but they learn that these barriers force them to listen. Similarly, students often struggle when their peers seek to approach consensus and collaboration in ways that are foreign to them, but participants have explained to us that in the end the collective insights and ideas generated through multiple exposures become much more meaningful than any communication challenges.

Students explore a variety of performance disciplines in the courses, festivals and masterclasses. Drama exercises and texts are used to cultivate language skills. Students explore characters that are different and distinct from themselves and often write their own scripts. Writing and speaking from a character's perspective can free up students to let go of a need to be perfectly fluent with the English language. Because they are privileging character emotions and needs there is a lack of pressure to be accurate in writing and speech and this often allows students to write and speak more, eventually leading to stronger language skills. Physical Theatre skills help students learn what

it is like for their body to move in space with focus and purpose. Developing movement, dance and choreographic skills allows students to appreciate technique and rigor and also develop a willingness to experience the joy of physical expression. To allow for a more diverse range of participants, previous movement or dance experience is not required so movement work often starts with simple gestures that can be shaped into motifs or ideas and then developed and structured to form a larger movement composition. Students also work with the language of Music to convey different moods and feelings when exploring a stimulus. They learn to compose and to improvise together, exploring motif, harmony and thematic development. And all students are required to sing as a whole ensemble as part of a way to develop unity with the diverse student population. Finally students work with Theatre Technology (light, sound, video, properties, color, texture and shape) to learn to communicate emotion and symbolize concepts through color, light and shade, lines and shapes. They learn that technology is not just a functional production element, but that it helps to tell and shape the story and elevate a performance.

Learning about the Performing Arts

The Performing Arts Academy process begins with a blank page and no scripts. True to the ISTA process, the initial stage of all our work is largely based on play and exploration. Each session begins with a whole group warm-up in the form of a new drama exercise or even a childhood game. The aims of these exercises are many, but the goals include sparking laughter, calming nerves, mobilizing the ensemble, raising awareness of each other and the space around the ensemble, and strengthening listening skills. But perhaps most importantly the goal of the group warm-ups is to build a collaborative ensemble comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds. The warm-ups and physical games we play not only heighten awareness of the ensemble but they purposefully create physical exhaustion thereby lowering resistance to the ideas of others. The Academy draws upon games and exercises from the likes of Augusto Boal and Viola Spolin, professional Physical Theatre companies like Frantic Assembly and Complicité, and the teaching artists' own experiences and training. After the students are warmed-up, relaxed and comfortable with one another they are usually more sharply focused and the first stimulus or provocation of the session is introduced. Stimuli take many forms and include musical extracts, artwork, questions, as well as extracts from plays, poems or other published texts. Sometimes a stimulus might emerge out of the creative conversations or debates that occur, amongst the students or teaching artists during warm-up activities.

An example of how this process works can be seen in a piece developed recently, and in one evening, at the Hong Kong Academy which began with a debate about the power of music to shape an audience's emotional response. This conversation, with the help of some framing by the teaching artists, led to an inquiry question: "Does music have the power to turn the tragic to comic, dangerous to romantic, dark to light?" This question formed the central inquiry for a subsequent workshop session in which the students were asked to brainstorm their initial reaction to the question before selecting a main discipline (Drama, Movement, Music or Theatre Technology) to

explore the question through. The stimulus was then revealed: the opening three witches' scene from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Finally the goal was set: to work with the stimulus to address the question with 45 minutes to devise a short piece of new work.

Once they had experienced the stimulus and been given the task, students chose their own working groups from the four main disciplines. Those in the Drama group chose to explore Shakespeare's text and ended up extracting keywords and using those to write a contemporary scene inspired by the ideas from the plot. Their result was a graveyard scene in which an opportunistic grave robber helped himself to the valuables of dead soldiers, strewn across the battlefield in the early hours of the morning. In the Physical Theatre ensemble, the students extracted keywords from the text and devised gestures to communicate the meanings of the words. These gestures were then abstracted with steps, leaps, twists and turns as well as scale (exaggerated and subtle) to create movements that were then repeated, extended and overlaid to developed short pieces of movement inspired by the question and stimulus. In the Music group, the students decided to compose extracts that would work in contradiction to the stimulus and to improvise music that would create two contrasting feelings using different musical styles. By the end of this session the Music group had composed a theme, set to lyrics with a melody that harmonized with sorrowful sounding minor and chromatic sustained chords, set to an adagio tempo. The Theatre Technology group decided to support the text and to enhance all sense of suspense and magical mystery. They explored ways to create a mysterious setting and settled upon: midnight in dark woods, around a campfire. Using red and orange lights shining through fabric pieces, blown upwards by a fan, together with dry ice they created an eerie effect. They also explored backlighting actors to make use of the enlarged shadows. At this point in the process the four groups did not know what the other three were exploring. We did this in an effort to play with the juxtaposition of the question posed at the top of the work.

Following this initial hour of exploration in discrete disciplines, the individual ensemble groups came back together to share their work and make links between the different areas. The students explored different combinations of the four discrete disciplines, playing with order, layering, mixing and adapting. The students soon learned that music had the power to influence the suggested meaning of work devised in the other ensembles. When, for example, a jazzy "Pink Panther" groove was juxtaposed with the graveyard dramatic scene, the students commented that the impact on the audience was such that one was invited into the mind of the gleeful and lucky robber himself. When the sorrowful, haunting chords were paired with the same scene, the students described a feeling of the devastation of war and a great sense of pathos. When the same musical pieces were intentionally paired with the physical theatre pieces, the combined effect was an interpretation of struggle and hopelessness. Also noted during this experimentation was that theatre technology had the power to magnify meaning, but also to create confusion when not balanced carefully with the work created in the other disciplines.

In conclusion, in response to the central question of inquiry posed at the top of the process, "Does music have the power to turn the tragic to comic, dangerous to romantic, dark to light?" the students agreed that music really



Figure 9.2 One of the few rehearsals for the full Hong Kong group before sharing their work with an audience.

Photo by Mariella Amitai. 2018. Hong Kong Academy.

did have the power to affect mood and meaning for an audience. They also found that the more abstract the combination, the stronger its impact. This exploration took place in one short evening at the Hong Kong Academy and is an example of how participants learn about the Performing Arts by collaboratively creating their own original work and experimenting in order to develop some findings. The central inquiry led them to understand aesthetic value and to look at how and what meaning can be conveyed when different elements are brought together. Here we see the Academy's mission being realized: bringing diverse students together to create new artistic work and to forge connections.

Learning Through the Performing Arts

Culture and experience influence the way we understand and interact with our world. The background of Academy students, including their knowledge of and experience with their home theatre traditions, influences their responses to the stimuli presented and their artistic conceptions. This variety expands students' thinking by exposing them to different perspectives, ideas and approaches. For example, we have seen that Academy students tend to think more innovatively after spending time and collaborating in ensembles with their peers from different backgrounds. The idea that groups of individuals who are exposed to diverse thoughts experience an enhanced level of creative thinking is nothing new. A *Forbes* study that surveyed over 300 executives at multinational corporations in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, the

Asian Pacific and the Americas points to the value of an inclusive and diverse workforce. “Diversity,” the research found, “is a key driver of innovation and is a critical component of being successful on a global scale” (Forbes Insights 2011). Research also shows that racial and socio-economic diversity offers students cognitive benefits and can be linked to higher test scores and stronger critical thinking skills (Palardy 2008 and 2013; Mickelson 2008) and in her article for *Scientific American*, academician and researcher Katherine Phillips writes about how groups of people with different backgrounds and cultures produce more varied ideas leading to deeper thinking (2014). While Academy students are gaining skills in the Performing Arts they are also developing many other skills and learning about other subjects as a result of their exploration and creation of theatre.

And the skills and attitudes developed transfer across disciplines and experiences. Students repeatedly tell us that they often come to study the arts but walk away with much more. “I have learned so much more than Drama. I have learned to collaborate, listen, explore ideas, let go of ideas and to engage with the world” one of our South Korean students explained. And another student, who commutes an hour each way to join our programs, added, “The Academy helps you to develop skills that you can apply to life in general, from developing an open mind, to collaborating with a wide age range of people. It’s always the highlight of my week.”

In a 2019 ISTA research report, author and researcher Dinos Aristidou shares recent findings from his study about the ISTA process:

The combination of authenticity and autonomy in a theatrical learning context is very powerful. Making theatre relies on live action and a human interaction. It is concerned with the creation of an alternate world and in the ISTA context the creator/performer is invested with agency to design, determine and construct the nature of that world which is presented in the final sharing.

(Aristidou 2019, 5)

This process of imagining, embodying and sharing together builds strong bonds between the participants which is why according to a 2018–19 quantitative study undertaken as part of Aristidou’s research into ISTA’s efficacy, students ranked “working together with different people,” and “learn(ing) how to interact with different people” as one of the most effective aspects of the process (Aristidou 2019, 50).

Academy programing values both learning *about* the Performing Arts as well as learning *through* the Performing Arts. Students and parents have named some of the learning outcomes they can see they have derived through participation in our programs. Creativity and innovation; communication and collaboration; research and information fluency; critical thinking; problem solving and decision making are some of the skills participants have told us they have witnessed develop as a result of Academy work. In their chapter, “Whose arts education? International and intercultural dialogue” in *The Routledge International Handbook of the Arts and Education*, Emily Akuno, Leopold Klepacki, Mei-Chun Lin, John O’Toole, Tia Reihana, Ernst Wagner and Gloria Zapata Restrepo discuss the concept of *bildung* within the context

of Kenyan arts education. The authors find that “lifelong, context-specific arts education embeds a holistic and communal approach to the development of the individual, so paradoxically, it both embodies and renders unnecessary the concept of *bildung* as a distinct philosophy of learning built on the notion of a distinct individual” (p. 94). Building a community and learning with the united group is at the heart of our process and we see that this way of working contributes to our students’ individual development. We believe that the collaborative nature of the work inspires young people to engage more responsibly with the world, including with people from very different socio-economic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Because Academy students have been successful practicing problem solving, communicating, sharing, and creating with others on a micro level they may be inclined to adapt this collaborative model in everyday life.

An example of how the Academy process facilitates learning through the performing arts can be seen in a recent eight-week course, which inquired into how one might respond if the world around them suddenly changed or “tilted” forever. After the initial stages of ensemble and trust building exercises, the stimulus was introduced which began with an immersive theatre style provocation by the teaching team. An emergency evacuation was simulated with dry ice, blackouts, on-screen text projections, and instructions that were delivered via phone calls and messages. The students had already chosen their working groups and each ensemble was challenged to respond artistically, and in the moment, to the dilemma of being faced with the possibility that everything they knew was about to change forever. After the provocation and initial student discussion of the stimulus, the teaching team brought up a soft glow of theatre lighting and played Max Richter’s bleak 2003 instrumental composition *On the Nature of Daylight* and students were given one minute to write down a list of no more than five things they wished to retrieve from home under these circumstances. Their second instruction was to write a note to an individual of their choice. The third instruction was to split themselves into two groups, A and B (with no further clarification). They were then told that only group A would be able to leave. The students were given five minutes to discuss the “departure.” What followed was a fascinating outcome of self-sacrifice where some of the older students gave up their places in group A for the sibling of another so that families could be together. Another student gave up their place for a younger child, saying that they had already lived a longer life and that the younger child should have the opportunity to continue. This was all without any clarification of the situation; only a stimulus that the world as they knew it was about to change forever. After a series of more playful exercises designed to stir creativity, students brainstormed ideas in a whole group session and came up with striking images and ideas for possible text or lyrics and from there melodies and harmonies emerged. Several students began to develop coherent song lyrics which went on to inspire a dramatic story. Choreographic and design aspects were also discussed at the end of the first day and students decided to call the piece they were developing *Tilt*.

For the next four weeks, the Academy artistic process, as outlined above, continued and the students discovered more about how much they valued their family members and friends through working to develop a piece about

loss and change. Many told us they discovered what their dreams were and how they felt they could contribute to society. Students expressed an understanding of the lack of need for material items and finally, they came to understand the interconnectedness of each other's lives and their roles and responsibilities within their local and global community. They learned these things through studying Drama, Movement, Music and Theatre Technology. *All of my Memories* was a song composed by the whole company in response to the initial inquiry question: "If the world as you knew it was about to change forever, what/who would you miss or value the most?"

*All of my memories shining in the light,
All of my memories, all of my fights
I remember all the clouds above my head
Stop dreaming, start living instead...*

Having pieced together what was important to them as individuals and as an ensemble, the teaching artists took students through an artistic inquiry into the seven stages of grief to use as the framework for devising their culminating sharing. Students explored possible textual, physical, musical and design responses to: shock and disbelief; denial; guilt; anger and bargaining; depression, loneliness and reflection; reconstruction and working through; and finally, acceptance. The different ensembles each brought their ideas to the full group and in the last week of the eight-week program a piece was developed to share with a public audience. The Hong Kong Academy stimulus for *Tilt* was greatly anticipated by the students. Students knew from the beginning that the "emergency evacuation" and subsequent provocations were not real, but they chose to "buy in" so that they could get the most out of the process. Their "buy in" or ability to invest in the imaginary circumstances helped them to learn more about their selves and others through the artistic process.

Final Thoughts

With five years of excellence and with the ISTA pedagogy at its heart, the two sister Academies remain the only Performing Arts Academies for young people in Shanghai and Hong Kong that focus on collaborative devising across the art forms. Additionally, the programs embrace the cultural diversity that exists in these two locations, bringing students representing cultures from around the world together to share and learn from one another. We have seen transformations in our transnational students that include the development of confidence and self-expression, the development of skills in English language and the Performing Arts, an awareness of identity and place in the world, an appreciation of and trust in others, an increase in empathy and finally the development of collaborative skills. Students' journeys at the ISTA Performing Arts Academies have helped them to connect to, and learn from, peers who are different from them.

Perhaps the greatest takeaway from this chapter is to remember that students from any location or nationality can be transnational, that is to say they can transcend the borders of both their countries and their thinking.

They are interconnected through their experiences and their emotions with the arts acting as a bridge to unite. This is what scholar Josephine Machon and others have called, “evolvment through involvement” (Machon 2013, 73). According to *The Power of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact*, by Chip and Dan Heath (2017), there are four elements that dominate our most positive memorable moments: elevation, insight, pride and connection. The Academy programs provide these by developing and elevating interpersonal and communication skills, offering new insights across the art forms, stretching students in terms of personal and world values, encouraging individual and common goals, and fostering a deep connection with others. This is accomplished by working toward an artistic and conceptual goal across cultures, traditions and socio-economic backgrounds. These young people create shared meanings, find new friendships and deepen ties to their selves and their families and cultures along the way. The ISTA Performing Arts Academies in Shanghai and Hong Kong seek to cultivate an “awareness to engage with and change the world responsibly” (ISTA Academy Hong Kong, 2017). “The real voyage of discovery,” Marcel Proust tells us in *In Search of Lost Time*, “consists not in seeking new landscapes but in seeing with new eyes.” Participants in our program gain much from seeing and working with the perspectives of others and this in turn impacts the way they will navigate their world as young people and hopefully as they mature into adulthood.

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REACHING THE AUDIENCE

Fenella Kelly

Place and international-mindedness

For over 20 years I have worked as a drama teacher, theatre director and head of Performing Arts in British, American and International schools around the world that follow the International Baccalaureate (IB) Curriculum. As a teacher my career has taken me to Turkey, Egypt, Brazil, Portugal, India and Hong Kong. Teachers working in IB schools need to embrace the philosophy of the International Baccalaureate, nurture the IB profile in their content and pedagogy, and embrace international-mindedness inside and outside the classroom while also sharing in the vision and mission of the school itself.

The IB program “aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more respectful world through inter-cultural understanding and respect” (IBO 2014). Drama classes fit the IB mission well. In drama classes students inquire by learning together and alone, they find out about theatre history, and how to communicate through the medium of performance and production. Throughout their study students develop their knowledge of themselves and the world around them. Drama encourages creativity and requires collaboration, and through this process students learn how to work as an ensemble. They learn to foster respect, care and understanding, overcome obstacles and understand the world from a range of perspectives and cultural points of view.

I also work as an artist, examiner and an IB Theatre teacher trainer for the International Schools Theatre Association (ISTA), which has taken me to primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions around the world. The ISTA philosophically understands “that the future of our world depends on confident, internationally-minded, collaborative and culturally literate young people who are empowered to engage with and change the world responsibly” (ista.co.uk). In this work it has been my duty to try to cultivate empowered, culturally rich, caring, responsible and internationally-minded young people by exposing them to theatre teaching, theatre-making and performance.

The IB Theatre curriculum requires students to: learn about different world theatre traditions and the cultural context surrounding these traditions; engage practically with the work (experience the tradition in some practical way); explore how theatre companies across the globe create original theatre and look at what inspires them to do so; study a range of plays, and understand what inspired and informed the playwrights to write the plays; and be exposed to a wide range of theatre theorists across time, who have developed their own methods and understandings of how to communicate through theatre. Throughout the IB Theatre course students reflect on how the work has enriched them as learners, what has impacted them and how they can effectively communicate with audiences so that their intended messages are heard.

The tricky work of the IB Theatre teacher is not necessarily administering the curriculum, but enabling the students to develop an understanding of the point of theatre: how these stories and messages can be effectively communicated; how they can use ideas and techniques in their work; how they can empathize and appreciate what they are doing and seeing; how they can ultimately create meaningful theatre themselves; and, how they understand themselves and the relevance of what they are learning. In fact, the course seeks to create responsible, internationally minded and informed theatre makers.

The *IB Theatre Guide* published in 2014 and updated in 2017 explains more about international-mindedness:

International-mindedness represents an openness and curiosity about the world and its people. It begins with students understanding themselves in order to effectively connect and collaborate with others ... recognise the dynamic cultural influences around them and the significance of diversity in the making of theatre... Through creating, investigating, critically analysing and appreciating different forms and styles of theatre, students deepen their understanding of theatre, as well as their knowledge, understanding and experience of the arts within the global community.

(IBO, *Theatre Guide* 2014, p. 8)

One of the goals of the IB with regard to international-mindedness is that once students have understood who they are they can learn to “effectively connect and collaborate with others.” At the start of the new course we work on developing the ensemble, realizing what we as individuals bring to the group and what others bring to us. Through work and reflection, we recognize our own weaknesses and what we can develop, how we work effectively and ineffectively, and how we can contribute to the bigger whole. As teachers and students, we learn to “appreciate our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others” (IBO, *Theatre Guide*) by engaging with theatre from around the world. Through a rich diversity of texts, theorists, starting points and ideas in class students can experience dynamic cultural influences around them and the significance of diversity in the making of theatre and for ISTA it is to make “collaborative and culturally literate young people” (ista.co.uk).

One school that I have worked at that whole-heartedly embraces this internationally minded approach, and is itself a global community, is American School of Bombay (ASB) in Mumbai, India. When I started teaching at ASB

they had a desire to increase the profile of theatre and performing arts because the school greatly valued creativity and collaboration. Not only were they encouraging students to study drama as a subject but were about to build a new black box theatre that would provide a purpose-built space for students to learn about performance and production and allow for larger audiences. The school also hosted many events and was keen to bring other schools from the city to the space for workshops and performances, and also hosted international theatre festivals and other school arts events.

The school's mission statement, "We inspire all of our students to continuous inquiry, empowering them with the skills, courage, optimism, and integrity to pursue their dreams and enhance the lives of others" (asbindia.org) is rooted in international-mindedness, embraces cultural diversity and strives to enable students to integrate the 10 attributes of the IB Learner Profile, which include being open-minded, risk-takers and reflective, into their daily existence. These ideals and attributes drove my teaching pedagogy and approach as a director.

Cultural Context, Understanding and Possible Misunderstanding

At ASB I directed two large shows a year, usually a musical and a play. For each of these my goal was, through the process and performance, to teach the participants and audiences something new about a theatre form, style, culture and/or history. I wanted to expose both groups to the unfamiliar and to develop new ways of communicating and exploring issues across time and place, while also increasing their knowledge and fostering a curiosity about the playwright, style, place and/or time period. My play choices were based on student interest and knowledge, the current community, and areas of development as a requirement of their courses (in theatre and other subjects) and were linked to stories that inspired my students.

Previously at ASB I had worked to make Shakespeare accessible by directing *Return to the Forbidden Planet*, by Bob Carlton, a Rock version of *The Tempest* which felt perfect for an audience in India that was accustomed to Bollywood films and loved a good musical. I later directed *The Arabian Nights*, put on *The Canterbury Tales* (in medieval and modern style) and directed and choreographed *Oliver*. Short student directed plays included work on 'in yer face' theatre and a variety of work with physical and metaphorical masks that included mime, ancient Greek theatre, issues-based work and *commedia dell'arte*. By including such a broad range of topics, contents and styles of theatre I hoped to stimulate among the students, staff and families an "openness and curiosity about the world and its people" (IBO, *Theatre Guide*) through theatre. This wide range of work not only deepened student understanding of the diversity of theatre styles but also helped to develop culturally literate young people while meeting the needs of the curriculum.

For each production, I prepared students to be performers and informed audience members by teaching the different theatre traditions the play arose out of and discussing the characters, and looking at events in history that informed the playwright's work. For example, with *Oliver*, we looked at the lives of children in London workhouses. For 'in yer face' theatre, I referred to the work of Antonin Artaud and Alfred Jarry in the early twentieth century

and then to the work of Sarah Kane and other playwrights in the 1990s who explored similar themes. With *The Canterbury Tales* we looked at moral stories and the staging of medieval and street theatre. It was a course requirement that students in my classes attended all the live performances at the school and I asked them to write reviews that demonstrated their understanding of the play in performance and production. In these reviews they needed to refer to directorial choices, character portrayal, choices of sound and music and the general *mise-en-scène* and to be able to do this they needed to be an informed audience. To help them break down the needs of their reviews they referred to Kowzan's Sign System, which looks at aspects of the performance of the actor and outside the actor. Using the 13 signs in the system, students learned how to focus initially on one aspect of performance (for example the portrayal of spoken text through use of words and tone) or production (such as the use of music and sound effects), while in the role of an audience member (Kowzan 1968). Once they were used to focusing on key aspects they learned how to focus on many performance and production aspects at once, to analyze the impact of the performance as a whole. Here again, my goal was to enable them to be perceptive theatre-makers and audience members.

To teach them how to use Kowzan's Sign System, students watched sections of live performance to get used to analyzing what they saw. Initially they were divided into groups so each group could focus on one area, for example, the word and spoken word for one group and props, décor and lighting for another group to enable them to pay close attention to detail. By doing this students developed their awareness of the different elements of performance and production, and the importance of directorial and design choices. They were learning how to focus on key areas, and how these areas contributed to the whole audience experience.

When choosing a play for my third year in the school I needed to look at the bigger picture. I had worked with many of the students for a few years and they had a repertoire that spanned a range of theorists (including Meisner, Brecht, Brook and Boal) and world theatre traditions (including *commedia dell'arte*, Butoh, Kabuki and Kathakali). They had also been to ISTA festivals where they were learning a range of devising skills and being exposed to professional theatre performances. During these experiences they had taken on the roles of actor, director, designer, creator and spectator. But other students were completely new to theatre, and in part because of the influx of Koreans to Mumbai, many had limited English. This meant that I had a diverse range of students to teach and prepare to be informed audience members, and, as a director I had to be mindful that I needed to make the play accessible to everyone who might attend.

At that time, I had a large cohort of students who were studying the IB Theatre Diploma and full classes of grade 9 and 10 students that loved drama. My IB class was made up of Indian, British, Korean, Japanese, French and German students and my younger classes represented more nationalities including South African, Latin American, American and Canadian students. The ways they communicated through language, facial expression, energy and body language had an enormous range and one thing I wanted to celebrate, and include in my directing, was how the actors communicate beyond the spoken word. Many of these students were third culture kids who spoke

a range of languages and were infused with a range of cultural norms. This variety of experiences, races and outlooks needed to be nurtured somehow through class, and ultimately, through the staging of the play.

I wanted a play that would stretch the students, allow them to experiment with new forms of theatrical expression, and enable them to apply what they had previously learned. They also needed to learn how to see connections between their work, theorists and traditions as part of the requirements for the IB Theatre program. I chose *Macbeth* as our play that year for many reasons. It was being studied by the grade 9 and 10 students in English class (an English teacher would be working with me to help the students fully understand the text) and I felt I could enable the implementation of a range of theatre styles. It would also demand research into Elizabethan theatre. There were multiple possible interpretations of the witches, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and there was unlimited potential when it came to set design, use of projection and inclusion of technology (a goal of the school). Additionally, the black box space lent itself to showcasing the spoken word and the unspoken language of communication could be revealed and become accessible to a truly international audience of diverse tongues. I believed the play would transcend cultural and language barriers to create a universal experience. The language and themes of the play were universal and resonated with this international community who very much identified with Socrates' famous saying "I am not an Athenian or a Greek, I am a citizen of the world" (Plutarch 1878).

Laying the Foundations in Class

Once I had decided to produce *Macbeth* it was time to start laying the foundations in theatre classes to make the play accessible to the performers and the audience. There were three things I wanted to achieve with this production: embracing international-mindedness whilst learning about and rehearsing the play; finding a universal language of communication that could be used to communicate meaning to the audience in performance, and finally, to experiment with production techniques to add another layer of meaning for the audience. We planned to reflect on our work in class and gather feedback from audiences to determine whether messages were communicated effectively and if the intended impact was achieved on the audience.

With my grade 9 and 10 classes I created a theatre laboratory (a safe place of exploration and learning) for the first semester to help them embrace who they were and what they knew, and I taught them skills they needed to be able to communicate their ideas. For example, one unit of work focused on how to show a day in the life of a person from their experience and culture. For the purpose of this exercise culture was defined as daily habits, ways of dressing and behaving, typical interactions, common rituals and understandings, food distinctive to the place and any other elements that enabled that place or group of people to be instantly recognizable. Students decided who the character was (through guided backstory questions and hot-seating, a technique in which the actor, in character, answers questions put to them by others) then decided how to show the character's journey through their day. They could use any language, as much or as little as they needed, and I ran

exercises where they could explore how to communicate through movement, gestures and facial expressions. Being students from a range of backgrounds they chose a variety of ways to tell their stories, thus embracing diversity of expression and enabling them to feel confident being themselves. Having carried out these initial exercises to nurture risk-taking and open-mindedness, I had a better understanding of the group and their inspirations.

I also led them through a project I call *Through the Door* to help enable students to analyze performance as an audience and structure it as a performer. The goal of this project was to prepare students to analyze the play as a whole as well as to focus on the actions, movements and motives of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, when they were in the role of spectators in the audience. *Through the Door* is based on Stanislavski's theories and Uta Hagen's Nine Questions and her Three Entrances exercise from *Respect for Acting* (1973) and Merlin's *The Complete Stanislavsky Toolkit* (2007). Students chose a location for their door (given circumstance) and then answered the following questions:

Who is my character?
Where is my character?
When does the action take place?
Why is the character here?
For what reason is this important?
How is the character performed?

Around this same time the 9/10 class explored improvisation, the 'magic if', emotions, and Stanislavski's Method of Physical Action (MPA) and worked on creating master gestures, backstories and emotional memories for the characters. The IB Theatre students also created their own class performance using *Macbeth* as a stimulus and drew much more on theatre theories than the younger 9/10 class which focused more on process. For example, an Indian student in grade 9 performed a scene where he entered the stage with a rose, confident and with a clear objective of striding straight up to the front door and knocking. He stopped before he reached the door, doubted himself, turned back and visibly lost his confidence. Puffing himself up again, he sighed, checked his hair and then continued toward the door with vigor. He raised his hand and knocked, waiting. There was no reply and he wilted and slowly walked away with his head bowed. This student audience explained that the performance communicated the emotional journey of the character, the intent, motives and super-objective. They realized that the story was universal and could be communicated beyond the spoken word.

Another student, a Korean young woman in IB Theatre, created a performance in which parents were arguing behind the door. Her character heard raised voices and tried to ignore them by distracting herself with work and by covering her ears. The voices got louder and more irate. She showed this by starting to move about her room, looking wildly at the door and frowning. A sound behind the door provoked a moment of stillness followed by the realization that something awful had happened. The actor showed this by changing her pace and energy, moving from worried to helpless and ending in an embryonic pose next to the door. Her performance was moving for the

audience and they empathized with her and were captivated by her complete immersion in the role. She had embraced emotional recall, given us a window into the horror of her life and culture, taken huge risks on stage and made us think about and reflect upon our own lives. This moment in class illustrated for those present that theatre can communicate with all, no matter what language is spoken.

As part of the IB Theatre course students need to be exposed to a range of theorists and know how to use different performing spaces, all with the objective of understanding the best way to communicate their intentions to an audience. We embraced ASB's mission of continuous enquiry and empowerment, and the IB's mission of "creating, investigating, critically analysing and appreciating different forms and styles of theatre" (IBO 2014, 8), in class when we started to look at sections of *Macbeth* through the lens of a range of theatre theorists. By working in groups, students researched different theorists' approaches to theatre namely: Joseph Chaikin, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba. Once they had explained their theorist's context they were to apply aspects of theory to a scene from *Macbeth*.

It was important to conduct such exercises in class before approaching the full play *Macbeth* so that I could understand the students, how they worked, how they communicated with each other, what they connected with and were inspired by, and how I could take this information into the play experience. The earlier work with movement, gesture, energy, character portrayal, internal versus external and the use of space and sound were all forms of communication or "language" in theatre that crosses cultures and transmits story and message and equips performers and audiences with the same language. Additionally, by working with theorists from around the world and exploring a range of theatre styles students were ready to start working on the play and to explore the best way to reach our diverse community audience.

Theatre-making Process

My key goals as the director of *Macbeth* were to: make the many layers of meaning in the text as clear as possible through a fusion of spoken word and visual communication (movement, gesture and facial expression); communicate location and reinforce the mood and meaning through set, lights, sound and projection, and depict the inner and outer thoughts and feelings of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to show the private and public selves and conflicts present in both these characters.

One main choice I made early on was to double cast Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. This would enable one actor to speak the lines and show the public face of the character, while the other actor was able to show the inner conflicts, thoughts, feelings and motivations through movement, gesture, proxemics and facial expression. At times when there was utter clarity in thought and spoken word the two actors performing the character would move and speak simultaneously. At moments of contrast or conflict between the two sides of the character, the movement, posture and gestures contrasted to reflect this. We looked to François Delsarte, the French musician and teacher who created a language of gestural communication adopted by actors in the nineteenth century. In his book *Gestures and Attitudes* (1892) Edward B. Warman

explains, "The Delsarte system is founded on the great principle of the law of correspondence; that is, every expression of the face, every gesture, every posture of the body corresponds to, or is but the outward expression of, an inner emotion or condition of the mind, be it one of beauty or one of ugliness" (p. 23). In a culturally diverse international school context, Delsarte's system seemed to lend itself to communicating layers of meaning to our audience.

This idea of a character being portrayed with outer expression and inner emotions can be developed further; as Delsarte said in the *Delsarte System of Oratory*, "Gesture corresponds to the soul, to the heart; language to the life, to the thought, to the mind. The life and the mind being subordinate to the heart, to the soul, gesture to the chief organic agent." (Delsarte 1893, 465) My students had already learned that movement and emotions speak louder than words, so they could relate to this concept. The tryptich of body, mind and soul was what Delsarte termed the "Law of Correspondence." He saw it as the relationship between what was tangible and intangible, inner and outer, movement and meaning (Ruyter 1999, 76). Our goal was to try and make what was intangible understood by our audience.

The roles of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were cast with actors of different nationalities (French, German, Korean and Indian) and with contrasting appearances. We sought to discover our commonalities as human beings, moving beyond nationality, race and culture to focus on the actions, intentions and moods of the characters to, as one audience member put it, "open up discussion of different interpretations and cultural ethnic contribution." By double casting we wanted to communicate the external/internal character, and to contrast thought with complementing action to demonstrate the public and private self. In rehearsals motives and objectives were discussed with all four actors and the pairs experimented with the portrayal of the multiple layers of their characters. The objective was to embrace Delsarte's ideas so that the audience could not only hear what was said and understand the emotion behind it, but also see the inner thoughts and feelings of the character on stage. If the audience did not understand the words, they would hopefully pick up on the emotional meaning presented. Oscar Lecuyer, the actor who played Macbeth 2 noted that the play showed "an accessible physicalized version of the text, without falling into abstraction." As actors he said they aimed to communicate "meaning readable across a multi-cultural audience enabling them to have a deeper understanding of the text and open up discussion of different interpretations and cultural ethnic contribution."

The Play in Performance

In the first moments of the play our objectives were to: establish the double casting of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth; set the context of the play with Macbeth going off to war; communicate the strength of love and connection between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and create an atmosphere of intimacy, security and secrecy in the location. In this first scene, no text was spoken and everything was conveyed through movement and music. As a song played the following action took place on stage with the following intentions:

Action 1: Macbeth 1 and Lady Macbeth 1 slowly and formally approach each other from opposite wings, locked in eye contact. They slowly sit on the two chairs facing each other centre stage. Macbeth 2 and Lady Macbeth 2 enter from the same wings but as soon as they make eye contact they rush toward each other meeting center stage in a tight embrace. Our intention here was to establish the two actors for each role and show couple 1 as powerful, controlled and formal in juxtaposition to couple 2 who were passionate and demonstrative, and free to express themselves in their private room. The space was bare apart from the two white chairs which contrasted with the black and white that the characters were wearing. The pairs of character were dressed identically to communicate they were two sides of the same person.

Action 2: Simultaneously the four actors walked downstage. Their pace was the same. Macbeth 1 and Lady Macbeth 1 moved down stage left and down stage right as Macbeth 2 and Lady Macbeth 2 sat. The couples looked at each other at exactly the same time then reached their upstage hand toward their partner, as far as they could without touching. Our intention here was to show the unity of the two actors for each character, where some moments the characters are complete, and have conviction, without any inner and outer conflict, hence the harmony/simultaneous movement. We also wanted to foreshadow that they desire to be together, but cannot, and their eventual broken connection.

Action 3: Macbeth 1 and Lady Macbeth 1 moved toward each other in an embrace as Macbeth 2 and Lady Macbeth 2 separated and turned away from each other. Simultaneously the Macbeths took out a small dagger and approached their Lady Macbeth, took her hand and placed the dagger in her hand, closing it around the blade. Both Lady Macbeths then stared for a short while at their husbands and then confidently and calmly exited. The Macbeths watched them leave then bowed their heads thoughtfully before they slowly exited. In this action our aim was to show Macbeth's love, desire to protect her, despite knowing she is strong and can protect herself, and guilt at leaving her alone. We wanted to demonstrate Lady Macbeth's strength, love, independence, and willingness to fight to protect herself, and Macbeth's reluctance to leave and concern for her safety.

The set was a white box made of fabric screens on three sides. On the back wall there was a floor to ceiling projection of white curtains swaying in the breeze. There was a pale blue wash to create a cool evening hue and there was a warmer yellow front light to create warmth on the actors' faces. The actors were dressed in black and white to contrast with the blue and blend in with the white set.

Another example of how we utilized the double casting to demonstrate multiple feelings and motivations was Act 2, scene 2, which depicts the murder of Duncan. Here our objectives were to show the two sides of Lady Macbeth including her doubts and strengths punctuated by moments of clarity. One Lady M as the potential murderer and the other as a nervous wife, already feeling guilty at what Macbeth has done. This was shown through contrasting reactions, body language, facial expression and vocal delivery. We wanted to portray her as two very different selves, divergent aspects of a fractured self. We wanted to show the presence of blood washing over both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, and we wanted to communicate the inner



Figure 10.1 Opening scene, from left to right: Lady Macbeth (Alexia Koenig and Sa Hee Hong) reaches out to Macbeth (Aishwary Thackeray and Oscar Lecuyer).

Photo by Matthew Ruffle. 2014. American School of Bombay.

thoughts and feelings of Macbeth in contrast to his outer words and persona. Finally we wanted to use space, gesture and facial expressions to communicate subtext for both characters

Action 1: Both actors playing Lady Macbeth reacted simultaneously to the hooting owl, one with a sharp intake of breath and the other calmly looking up. The lines at the opening of the scene were divided between them, with movement and reaction in italics:

Lady Macbeth 1: Hark! (physically jumps and contracts in fear)

Lady Macbeth 2: Peace! (turns to Lady Macbeth 1 to reassure her)

Lady Macbeth 1: It was the owl that shrieked. (sigh of relief and visibly relaxes)

Lady Macbeth 2: He is about it. The doors are open, (matter of fact, business-like delivery)

Lady Macbeth 1: And the surfeited grooms do mock their charge with snores. I have drugged their possets. (starting to calm. Small smile of accomplishment at having drugged the guards)

Lady Macbeth 2: Had he not resembled my father as he slept. (disappointment in her voice)

Both: I had done it (Lady Macbeth 1 clasps her hands and wonders if she could have done it, Lady Macbeth 2 stands strong to show she is capable of murder. Vocal delivery reflects the contrasting moods)

(Shakespeare, 1982. Act II Scene ii lines 2–13)

Action 2: Macbeth 1 walked slowly onto stage holding the dagger at arm's length. As he did so, Lady Macbeth 1 slowly approached him with relief. Macbeth 2 came on stage moments after and when Lady Macbeth 1 asked Macbeth "Did you not speak?" (line 16), he put his head in his hands, clearly riddled with guilt and slowly crumpled into a ball onstage. Simultaneously both actors performing Macbeth delivered the next line "This is a sorry sight" (line 20). Macbeth 1 delivered the line out to the audience with conviction and regret, while Macbeth 2 said the line to himself with sadness and despair. Lady Macbeth 2 approached her Macbeth 2 as if scolding a child as she snapped the line, "A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight" (line 21). With this action we wanted to use proxemics, levels, vocal contrasts, changes of pace, closed and open body language and the contrasting tension and power between the two couples to communicate the shifting hierarchy between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth. We wanted to get the audience to question who was in charge now, who really wanted the power and who was to blame for Duncan's murder.

The projection was crucial for this scene. One droplet of blood appeared on the white backdrop as Macbeth entered stage and as he moved further onstage more blood dripped onto the fabric and spread to slowly drench it in red. This showed the growing guilt and the blood literally covering both characters. As the blood spread, the breath of Lady Macbeth 1 quickened and the breath of Macbeth 1 became louder and more anxious. At the same time as the backdrop became completely drenched with blood, Lady Macbeth 1 realized that Macbeth was showing a moment of weakness. She grabbed the daggers and exited to put them back at the scene of the crime. With her exit the backdrop of curtains returned to indicate they were again alone in their private room.



Figure 10.2 Act II, scene ii. Lady Macbeth (Sa Hee Hong) takes the dagger from Macbeth (Aishwary Thackeray).

Photo by Matthew Ruffle. 2014. American School of Bombay.

For this scene I worked closely with the technical team to film the blood and find the best paper to drip it onto to get the drenching/soaking effect. This process of filming and editing was explored in class so students could learn this technical side of theatre and how to use color as another layer of communication in performance.

These examples offer a glimpse into the way we approached the play to reach an audience that was not necessarily familiar with the play or the language of Shakespeare. By working closely with my international cast we tried to communicate the rich multiple levels of meaning present in Shakespeare's writing to communicate not only text but also subtext, backstory, character motivations and the public and private selves of the characters and to use multiple theatre methods to cross cultural boundaries.

The Larger Context

I wanted to understand if my teaching and directing goals were met and so I sought out feedback from actors and audience members to understand the effectiveness of the Delsarte system in the double casting of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth and to know if meaning was communicated through production techniques and movement. Upon reflection after closing, one of the actors playing Macbeth explained the double casting and Delsarte technique, "the opening of the show where one pair run into each other's arms whilst the other is sitting coolly on the chairs ...visualizes the subtext of Shakespeare's writing and adds an emotional depth to the characters that might be lost in the language." This comment demonstrates the success he felt when it came to communicating the story to an audience. An audience member referred to the visuals that replaced and complemented the text, saying, "the dual casting could almost be said to replace the words for those struggling with the language, whereas for me it enhanced the words. However I think this is a win-win, because it encompasses the entire audience ... the production as a whole gave access to the text which may not have happened with language alone." And the actor playing Banquo said of the technique, that the "double casting allows us to visually show the juxtaposition between the character's actions and their intention." This same actor went on to say the work "allows the audience to view these characters in a multifaceted manner, and makes clear the mental anguish that exists within both these characters." A second audience member told us that we achieved our goal in performance when she said the play "creates complex characters with sometimes conflicting motives and doubts" and "makes nuances of feeling and complexity of characterization more visible." She also referred to one of my educational goals in the process, stating that these techniques "teach students about contrast and character traits ... about what the actor contributes separately to their role." Another audience member commented on the synchronicity of movement saying, "the choral physical work combined with the identical costumes clearly registered the characters as the same. One particularly strong moment here was the sleepwalking scene, in which the division between the two was almost indistinguishable to represent complete mental breakdown." This same audience member went on to refer to how the choice of double casting helped to show inner thoughts, motives and contrasts and helped those who were familiar

with or new to the play. It “gave a richer access to the text, to consider both characters in terms of their isolation first from society, then from each other but ultimately from themselves” she told me.

We worked hard to create a language of communication and meaning that went beyond words. We used sound, images, movement, projection and other production aspects to help the audience interpret our intentions. One of the ways we did this was to have multiple layers to communicate meaning. In Act 1, scene 7, where Macbeth has doubts about killing Duncan and Lady Macbeth persuades him, saying he must prove to her that he is a man, the actor playing Macbeth explained that the “multiple movement sequences ... and the chasing of Macbeth across the stage with the letter ripping visual” (in the background) helped him to understand the significance of the scene. “The torn letter, the broken dreams/promises of Lady Macbeth, but also the dissonance with Macbeth’s words” helped him to understand that Macbeth’s letter did not change Lady Macbeth’s mind, “it was a sense of the physicalizing of Lady Macbeth’s objective and Macbeth’s objective/response in one movement/action. The chase” that provided him with clarity.

One actor remarked that the movement in the opening scene was “essential to understanding the characters’ relationships. The mirrored movement reflects the symbiotic nature of their relationship.” And an audience member commented on the same scene calling it, “the ballet of the unconscious mind [is] shown through movement.” A local drama teacher brought his high school Indian students to see the play and one student who was studying *Macbeth* for IB English told us that our play helped her to “understand the nuance of the relationship, and the ambiguity present in the text which makes Shakespeare new every time it is performed.”

In response to the blood that was used on the back wall during Duncan’s murder and at the end of the play with Macbeth’s death, one audience member called it, “excellent reinforcement” when the two Macbeth faces merged on film with the blood dripping down. He continued, it “speaks volumes visually, reinforcing the previous elements, harmonizing the whole and drawing together the momentum of inevitability and finality. From the first use of the blood stain to this ... foreshadowing, building expectation are now fully realized.” And another audience member referred to the effectiveness of the last image to communicate meaning, saying, “the two faces blending together at the end of the show really crystallized the dual casting but also the public/private elements of Macbeth’s relationship ... this was perhaps one of the most helpful elements in making this text accessible to an audience and a cast that was very international.” Lastly another audience member discussed the role of music in communicating meaning, saying the “musical score conjured an interplay between innocence and corruption” and noted that the Waltz in the banquet scene “gave the audience time to register the gluttony and Macbeth’s contrasting awkward stillness.”

Through my pedagogy, curriculum content and the process of directing I intended to embrace international-mindedness, but I was not sure how evident this was until the production opened. I wondered if we had achieved our objective of making the play accessible to speakers of other languages until one audience member remarked, “the physicality gave an insight to the

character's psychology... this was beneficial to all the audience but definitely in an EAL context." And the actor playing Macbeth 2 said,

from the personal experience of playing Macbeth in a second language, I think the work in pairs engages other ways of learning and communication than if one were to act alone. The act of physicalizing the words brings the student in a different engagement with the text ... processing in such a way that engages their own language and culture.

And another actor said, "I think the heavy emphasis on non-verbal and expressive movements ... reflects the international-mindedness of the school, as it allows the performance to appeal to a wider audience."

One of the cast commented on the use of projection to assist the audience (the curtains to represent the palace, the broken glass to show the battle field) explaining it as a "form of signposting" that communicated location and mood. He also saw the double movement and gestures as an "emotional subtitle to the production." The feedback from performers and audience members reflects our achievement in communicating the story, the multiple layers of meaning and the inner and outer aspects of the characters.

Of course, the production aimed to serve a range of audience members. One audience member saw our spectators as two different groups, noting

there are two types of Shakespeare audience, those who know the play already, and those who don't, and I feel the techniques here appealed to both groups. There was plenty of visual support for the text, which enhanced the atmosphere and gave much context for those audience members who may have been struggling with the language.

From this feedback we learned that we had achieved creating meaningful theatre that communicated meaning across cultures through movement, gesture and design techniques.

One of our actors did identify a possible problem with the double casting and the amount of music and movement citing these as potentially misleading. "I think," the student said "that a hindering, a non-understanding of the double casting in response to the text is only applicable to an English audience who already knows the story." This thought is similar to an audience member's response who thought that spectators might see the two Macbeths or Lady Macbeths as separate entities, and that the double casting could have been a "gray area" but alternatively guessed that the way it was done "dissolved the boundaries" between the two actors, making them one and was also reinforced by the final image of the two Macbeths merging. While the multiple ways of staging our production and communicating meaning could have been confusing for some, it appears to have brought clarity for others.

The feedback we received illustrates that through this process the students learned how to create meaningful theatre, became more culturally literate, discovered how to analyze performance, understood how theory could be presented and saw the range of ways, as theatre makers and spectators, they could communicate meaning to audiences of different backgrounds and languages. The responses also point to how the performers understood how to

enable understanding in their unique international context. “I felt the technique was a very strong choice for those who knew the text already, as it offered a new way into the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth” remarked an audience member. This last observation reflects the goal we had to embrace, international-mindedness, with a play that was explored in process and presented in performance and sought to enable accessibility to those familiar with or new to the play. During this theatrical journey we deepened our understanding of how to communicate beyond language, how to tailor a play to a unique community, and we grew as internationally minded artists.

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COLLABORATIVE CREATIONS

Teaching Devised Performance in Santiago, Chile

Anne García-Romero

Course

Collaboration implies an ability for individuals to draw upon their strengths and differences and work toward creating a collective experience whose power lies in a creation that reflects, celebrates and can exceed the individual's abilities and talents. I began collaborating and co-teaching with Dr. Anton Juan in 2014, where we are members of the faculty in the Department of Film, Television and Theatre at the University of Notre Dame, USA. Dr. Juan is an international, award winning playwright, director, filmmaker and actor from the Philippines whose work has been presented across the globe including Greece, Japan, England, Taiwan and France, where he has been knighted twice by the French government. I am a Spanish-American playwright, screenwriter, translator and theatre studies scholar, whose work has been produced primarily in the US. While we have divergent career paths and distinct aesthetic interests, we share a common pedagogical philosophy in which we aim to empower our students to collaborate, to hone their unique voices and to create compelling new works of theatre which document and explore social concerns. Each of our courses begins with teaching methodologies that lead to the creation of original work. We also include analysis of works that reflect the theme of the courses we teach. Our courses culminate with a workshop presentation of the original short works, which are written, directed, acted and designed by the students. The final presentation is defined by the word "workshop" as the course emphasizes "process" over "product." The aim is not to finish the course with a polished product but to share with an audience a presentation that provides an idea of the artistic exploration and progress achieved in the course.

After co-teaching two Documentary Theatre courses and a Devised Performance course at Notre Dame, Dr. Juan and I sought to expand our pedagogical practice and share our work with the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC), Escuela de Teatro (Theatre School), through a semester-long residency in Santiago, Chile. Our residency in Chile was funded by Notre Dame International, through a Luksic Family Collaboration grant, "to

encourage the Notre Dame community to find new ways to collaborate with colleagues from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC) on research, exchanges, and conferences, and in particular to increase the flow of Notre Dame faculty and staff going to Santiago” (Notre Dame International). We chose to pursue this collaboration in Chile for several reasons. First, Chile has an extraordinary theatre tradition which has historically created artistic spaces for raising and exploring social concerns. During the 17-year Pinochet regime (1973–1990), Chilean theatre remained a largely uncensored civic space where theatre artists and audiences could congregate and express ideas, narratives and histories, which were censored in many other arenas. Chilean theatre scholars Grass, Kalawsky and Nicholls state, “Despite the harsh control exerted over the artistic field, theatre performances played a fundamental role in denouncing the ongoing violations of human rights” (Grass et al. 2015, 303). Second, since the reestablishment of democracy, Chilean theatre has maintained a vital space to explore memory, trauma and justice. Third, many theatre artists active during and after the dictatorship taught or were trained at the PUC Theatre School. Therefore, Dr. Juan and I desired to collaborate with the PUC Theatre School to share our methodologies, to work with PUC students and faculty and to learn from the rich Chilean theatre tradition, so clearly rooted in issues of justice and social concerns.

We arrived at PUC in August 2018 to co-teach a Devised Performance course entitled *Creación Colaborativa: Memoria, Archivo y Teatro Documental* (Creative Collaboration: Memory, Archive and Documentary Theatre). The course, which we taught in Spanish, engaged 14 students: nine Chilean PUC acting students, two US University of Notre Dame students (American Studies and Economics majors) and three foreign exchange students (a theatre major from the Sorbonne-Nouvelle University in France, a Fine Arts student from Greece and an Environmental Engineering major from the Technical University of Denmark.). Our class met once a week for three hours over a 16-week semester. We also worked with a teaching assistant, Alexandra Joyce, a bilingual Notre Dame theatre alumna, living in Chile. Our semester began with the teaching of various methodologies aimed at providing the students with tools to devise their own work. We also analyzed works of theatre that employed elements of these methodologies. The class then divided into two groups. Each group chose their own theme reflecting social concerns and created a new one-act devised piece through collaborative writing, ensemble acting, directing and minimal design. The course culminated in a presentation of these works-in-progress for an invited audience.

Methodologies

Our course title in Spanish was *Creación Colaborativa* (Creative Collaboration), a paired term that the administrators at the Theatre School decided best described our curriculum. Thus, our course employed elements of traditional playwriting, with collaboration projects and opportunities for devising new materials. Our students engaged in the model of devised performance where an ensemble begins with an idea and then, through playwriting and rehearsal, arrives at character and narrative. We wanted to share with the students our

areas of expertise with the hope that these processes could empower them to create new play materials both individually and collectively. Dr. Juan and I began our course teaching methodologies using the Maria Irene Fornés playwriting method and the Anton Juan semiotic method. Each method, from our respective work as theater practitioners and scholars, aimed to provide the students with tools to create their devised works. These methods arise from theatre traditions with connections to Cuban, Philippine and US cultures, among others. However, this course provided the first introduction of these methods to the PUC theater school.

Maria Irene Fornés (1930–2018), an award winning Cuban-American playwright, created an innovative playwriting method. She trained as a painter with Abstract Expressionist Hans Hoffman and studied at the Actors Studio with Lee Strasberg before she began writing plays, and so her playwriting process was inspired by visual arts and acting training techniques. Fornés taught playwriting across the US at leading universities and theatres as well as internationally in Mexico, England, Scotland and India. Her most influential pedagogical intervention resided in the Hispanic Playwrights in Residence Lab at the INTAR theatre in New York City, where she trained a generation of Latinx playwrights whose award winning careers have subsequently shaped US Latinx theater. I studied with Fornés at the Padua Hills Playwrights Festival in Los Angeles, and at the Yale School of Drama. Additionally, I founded and coordinated the Fornés Playwriting Workshop, through the University of Notre Dame, taught by Migdalia Cruz, a Fornés protégée. I've taught the Fornés Playwriting Method in my US university classrooms for the past 15 years and have found it an extraordinarily useful method to help playwrights access their inner, creative landscape to generate compelling new play material. Fornés never wrote a book about her methodology, thus her pedagogical work continues on through her former students. However, there have been essays and articles written about her teaching published in various journals and books.

The Fornés playwriting method begins with a yoga-like physical warm-up followed by writing exercises utilizing elements such as visualization, sense memory, drawing and found materials (text fragments, images, and verbal prompts). This method focuses on character creation as the genesis for a new play. I began our Devised Theatre course at PUC by leading the students in exercises to visualize and draw characters before launching into writing dialogue. I spurred them onward by offering verbal prompts, as well as circulating images to inspire their writing. For example, in one exercise, I began with a sense memory prompt. I asked the students to close their eyes and visualize a memory from their childhood when they were standing next to a body of water (a sea, a river, a lake, etc.). I guided them through visualizing all aspects of the location. I then instructed them to open their eyes, draw a picture of the location and write a brief summary of the memory. Then, I asked the students to close their eyes a second time and recall the same memory. However, this time, I guided them to observe themselves leaving this location while a character enters and takes their place. The character could be based on someone they knew or could be totally fictional. I asked them to visualize all aspects of this character, then open their eyes and draw a picture of the character, and briefly describe the character responding to the following prompts:

Name, Age, Where they Live, Occupation, Desires Most, Fears Most, Most Important Being (human or animal). I then led them through the creation of a second character and had them begin writing a scene between these two characters in this location by the water. As they wrote, I offered verbal prompts every few minutes to help them flesh out the dialogue or stage directions. The Fornés prompts fall into three categories: A line of dialogue (e.g. "I'm afraid to tell you"), an object (e.g. a stone), or an action (e.g. "looking in a mirror"). Additionally, I circulated some photographic images from my postcard collection. Each prompt introduced provided a source of inspiration and also demonstrated the importance of being open to the unexpected during the writing process.

After the exercise, I led a check-in, where each student shared an insight they gained or a challenge they experienced with the exercise. We concluded the class session with some students volunteering to read their scenes aloud. In this portion of the workshop, a student read their writing in order to hear their work aloud, and to provide the rest of the students with an example of what is possible given the prompts in the exercise. The students engaged in this process deeply and found that it also helped them access their unique narratives and histories as source for new play material. This start to the course allowed the students to begin to create characters as an entry point to devising new work. For the first three class sessions, we devoted time to Fornés Playwriting Method exercises, as well as discussions of play texts that utilized elements of documentary theatre.

The course included discussions of plays inspired by documents and oral histories. First, we discussed a Spanish translation of my play, *Paloma*. My play explores the theme of religious co-existence (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) and is inspired by *The Ring of the Dove*, an eleventh-century treatise on love written by Ibn Hazm (994–1064), a Spanish-Muslim poet and philosopher. My play is also inspired by documents chronicling the aftermath of the March 11, 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid, Spain. I shared how my process in writing the play also included interviewing Islamic studies scholars, a lawyer, a doctor, as well as traveling to New York City, and Spain, to engage with site-specific research. We next discussed *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez, the 1978 seminal play inspired by the Sleepy Lagoon Murder Trial in Los Angeles. We discussed the work of Valdez's El Teatro Campesino and examined how Valdez utilized elements of the actual case, aspects of Aztec mythology, and period music to inspire the character creation and narrative of his play. We ended our discussions by reading aloud scenes from each play. Overall, I emphasized the importance of utilizing archival materials as well as contemporary events to inspire the playwriting process.

Once our students had learned the Fornés Playwriting Method to create characters, we introduced another path toward generating narratives through the Anton Juan Semiotic Method. Dr. Juan developed this method during his doctoral research at the University of Athens in Greece. His semiotics scholarship arises from his formation as a theatre artist in The Philippines, creating works that serve as a source of exploration and contestation of social injustice in his country. For example, Dr. Juan directed a production of *Marat/Sade* by Peter Weiss not long after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Weiss's 1963 play explores the death

of French revolutionary Jean-Paul Marat. After the Philippine military government shut down the production following one performance, Dr. Juan began to create new material inspired by Catholic liturgy where Christ would signify the Philippine people. More recently, Dr. Juan's 2018 production of *RD3RD*, a deconstruction of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and a commentary on current Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, was the first theatre production critiquing extra-judicial killings and the rise of authoritarianism. Dr. Juan reflects,

How far does a sign travel in a country of historical ruptures and schisms? I begin with the sign and it crosses memories and histories, gives birth to issues and conflicts between histories from the view of the colonizer, or histories written or unwritten from the view of the eye, the myth perhaps, the stories of the people.

(Juan 2019)

Dr. Juan's method includes considering the relationship between sign and signifier through five levels of analysis: *phoneme*, *lexeme*, *sememe*, *pragmeme* and *ideologeme*: According to Dr. Juan, the *phoneme* is the "articulation of sound markings" (Juan 1990, 49) that give meaning to words, leading us to ask, "What sounds does this word elicit?" The *lexeme* is the word created by the sounds of the *phoneme*, considering the velocity, direction and dynamics of the sound. The *sememe* is a "unity of polarized concepts" (47) which leads us to ask, "What is the opposite of this word?" The *pragmeme* considers subjective, multiple meanings which may be connected to this word. Finally, the *ideologeme* looks at a "formal/rhetorical concretization of a world view" (49) that arises from this word. Once Dr. Juan taught these concepts, we applied them to the use of objects as inspiration for narrative and character.

Objects can often inspire possibilities for new play material. We began to apply the Anton Juan Semiotic Method to objects by analyzing Dr. Juan's award-winning play, *Tukoo! Tukoo! Or the Princess of the Lizard Moon*. Dr. Juan's play explores the life of a Filipino theatre director who travels to Japan to study with a Butoh-master, only to experience the memory of World War Two comfort women and a contemporary sex slave, who were murdered. These memories, often linked to objects, lead the theatre director to avenge the deaths of these Filipina women. Inspired by true stories, Dr. Juan's play also employs Butoh dance and Bunraku puppetry to document these narratives. We discussed the objects in the play and how these objects (live or inanimate) were integrally woven into the fabric of the play. For example, the object of a lizard is mentioned throughout the text. The lizard makes a sound "Tukoo, Tukoo" (*phoneme*) which connects the object to the word Princess (*lexeme*), when a story is told about a lizard princess who avenges the death of her lover. To some in the play, the lizard princess is a demon (*sememe*) yet she also signifies a level of security (*pragmeme*) for the theatre director who retells her story. Ultimately, the lizard princess fights against sexual violence (*ideologeme*). Thus, by employing the Anton Juan Semiotic Method to this one object, we demonstrated how multiple characters and narratives can arise to construct the new play material while employing this methodology.

After sharing tools to create characters and develop narratives, we introduced the method of the Performance and Social Action Grid. This grid worksheet was developed by Dr. Juan and members of Performance Studies International and provides a method for brainstorming new play material based on a theme. In the summer term of 2018, Dr. Juan was a Distinguished Visiting Professor at De La Salle University in Manila, Philippines, where he met with Dr. Ella Parry-Davies, a teaching fellow at the University of Warwick, UK, researching questions of place and memory in migratory settings; Dr. Matt Yoxall, an Affiliate Researcher at Chiang Mai University, Thailand, and a theatre practitioner working on forced migration in Southeast Asia; and Dr. Jazz Llana, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts of De LaSalle University. The three are co-conveners of the After Dwight Conquergood: Performance and Critical Social Praxis research working group of Performance Studies International. Dr. Juan explains, "Our discussions revolved around the contexts and to use my favorite words, 'vectors' of power and 'trajectories' of encounter. Encounter here will mean meeting with the issues and searching for action to bring the issues to light in search of solutions." Dr. Juan and this working group developed this Performance and Social Action Grid as method to analyze and create performance works that address issues of social concerns.

	<i>HISTORIES OF THE PRESENT</i>	<i>VECTORS OF POWER</i>	<i>TRAJECTORIES OF ENCOUNTER</i>
CONTEXT	What do people think theatre is and why? Tagalog versus English theatre	Political rules and censorship Who owns the theatres and why? Marketing? Envelopment journalism	Comparative approaches Commonalities between marginalized people Worldliness and connection to global issues
EXPRESSIONS	Responses to historical schisms Introductions to European theatre "Hypnotism" and escapist performances (musicals and movies) Anti-escapism "Committed" theatre of reality	Popular music, concerts and entertainment	Linguistic hybridity Code switching
SOCIAL ACTIONS	Localized committed theatre Education/workshops on what theatre is and can be	Counter commercial theatres EJK (Extra-judicial killings)-related theatre	Specific local acts that speak of broader issues (the yin micro to the yang macro)

Dr. Juan and I expanded the Performance and Social Action grid worksheet for our course, to five columns, and four rows, creating 20 empty boxes to fill with analysis and inspiration based on a theme. We also embedded the Anton Juan Semiotic method within this worksheet to offer additional opportunities to generate new play material.

Next, we divided the class into two groups (maintaining balance in the areas of gender, nationality and educational institutions) to begin to brainstorm their one-act pieces. We asked each group to utilize the grid worksheet to develop a self-selected theme. During class, each group discussed various thematic possibilities. Ultimately, one group decided to explore sexism and the other group chose to delve into emigration. With their selected themes, the groups then began to answer a series of questions to brainstorm ideas. The columns in the grid included the following questions: What theme is the performance exploring? Who are the actors/agents in the performance? What are the present histories and narratives in the performance? What are the vectors of power in the performance? What are the relationships or encounters in the performance? What is the performance doing here and now? Is there a call to action in this performance? The rows in the grid included the following questions: What is the context of this piece (setting and desired performance space)? What are the aesthetic forms in the piece? What are the social issues explored? The questions in the columns were applied to the elements in the rows (context, aesthetics and issues) to create a landscape of inspiration for the pieces.

To help the students understand the potential of the grid, we supplied them with an analysis of *Paloma*, which they had recently read and discussed. See summary below:

Performance and Social Action Grid

Developed by Performance Studies International and Anton Juan, 2018

Immerse, Engage, Emerge

Phoneme: Ph (Sound), Lexeme: L (Language), Sememe: S (Opposition),

Pragmeme: Pr (Meaning), Ideologeme: I (Ideas)

Paloma by Anne García-Romero

Utilizing the grid worksheet, each group began to generate ideas which could lead to characters, setting, narratives and structure. In the emigration group, their responses to the context yielded the seeds for their play as they replied to the following: What are the relationships in this performance? Conflicts in a family (characters); What is the context? Where is this taking place? In a fictional country based on the countries in Latin America (setting); What are the relationships in this context? A family: father, daughter and best friend (characters); What are the vectors of power in this context? The death of the protagonist's best friend, The grave illness of the daughter (narratives). In the group exploring sexism, their responses created the foundation for their play as they considered the following: What are the vectors of power in this performance? Feminine, Masculine and Non-binary, Language versus meaning, Cultures: US, French, Chilean, Danish (narratives); What are the aesthetic forms? Nonlinear theater and music (the sound of language and song) (structure); What present histories are connected to these forms? Our distinct languages (characters), What is performance doing here and now in these social

WHAT IS THE THEME IN THIS PERFORMANCE?	WHAT ARE THE PRESENT HISTORIES IN THIS PERFORMANCE?	WHAT ARE THE VECTORS OF POWER IN THIS PERFORMANCE?	WHAT ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS OR ENCOUNTERS IN THIS PERFORMANCE?	WHAT ARE THE WRITTEN AND EMBODIED TEXTS ARTICULATING HERE AND NOW IN THIS PERFORMANCE?
<p>I: Confronting religious intolerance</p> <p>WHO ARE THE ACTORS/AGENTS?</p> <p>3 actors: 1W, 2M</p> <p>7 roles:</p> <p>Ibrahim, Paloma, Jared, Mrs. Flores, Mr. Ahmed, Doctor, Nurse</p>	<p>I: Islamophobia</p>	<p>Three religions: Islam/Christianity/Judaism</p> <p>Five cultures, USA, Morocco, Puerto Rico, Spain, Eastern Europe</p> <p>S: Past/Present</p> <p>S: Faith/Fear</p> <p>S: Understanding/Ignorance</p>	<p>The lovers: Ibrahim and Paloma</p> <p>S: Father against Son</p> <p>S: Mother against Lover</p> <p>The friends: Ibrahim and Jared</p> <p>S: Friend against friend</p>	<p>Illuminate religious differences in the face of the tragedy of religious extremism and terrorism.</p> <p>IS THERE A CALL TO ACTION IN THIS PERFORMANCE?</p> <p>I: Tolerance</p>
<p>WHAT IS THE CONTEXT? WHERE IS THIS TAKING PLACE?</p> <p>Setting:</p> <p>In US</p> <p>(New York City)</p> <p>And in Spain (Madrid, Toledo, Granada)</p> <p>Performance Space:</p> <p>Black Box Theatre</p>	<p>WHAT ARE THE PRESENT HISTORIES OF THIS CONTEXT?</p> <p>US 2001 to 2005</p> <p>9/11</p> <p>Spain 2004</p> <p>11/M</p>	<p>WHAT ARE THE VECTORS OF POWER IN THIS CONTEXT?</p> <p>Muslim Spain of the 11th century</p> <p>Ibrahim, Paloma and Jared: Post 9/11 US</p> <p>Jared: His grandfather died in the Holocaust</p> <p>Mr. Ahmed: He immigrated from Morocco</p> <p>Mrs. Flores: She is from Puerto Rico, and her mother is from Spain</p>	<p>WHAT ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS OR ENCOUNTERS IN THIS CONTEXT?</p> <p>NYU Master's students Ibrahim and Paloma fall in love</p> <p>NYU grad student Ibrahim and law graduate Jared work together</p>	<p>WHAT IS THE PERFORMANCE DOING HERE AND NOW IN THIS CONTEXT?</p> <p>Families of different faiths</p> <p>Interfaith relationships</p>

(Continues)

WHAT ARE THE AESTHETIC FORMS?	WHAT ARE THE PRESENT HISTORIES CONNECTED TO THESE FORMS?	WHAT ARE THE VECTORS OF POWER CONNECTED TO THESE FORMS?	WHAT ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS OR ENCOUNTERS CONNECTED IN THESE FORMS?	WHAT IS THE PERFORMANCE DOING HERE AND NOW IN THESE FORMS?
<p>Realism</p> <p>Non-linear narrative</p>	<p>L: Legal terminology A lawsuit for false imprisonment and wrongful death</p> <p>L: Medical terminology The physical, mental and emotional effects of surviving a terrorist attack.</p>	<p>Muslim Treatise on Love: <i>Ring of the Dove</i> by Ibn Hazm</p> <p>Pr: Book of love for Ibrahim and Paloma</p> <p>Pr: Book of memory for Ibrahim</p> <p>Pr: Book of pain for Mrs. Flores</p>	<p>Muslim Spain: <i>Ring of the Dove</i> Islamic Civilization: The Alhambra, Toledo</p> <p>The legal system: Lawsuit Interrogatories Trial Appeal</p>	<p>Intersection with the Muslim literature of the 11th century.</p> <p>Oral histories of survivors of 9/11 and 11M</p> <p>Documentation of 9/11, 11/M and the Holocaust: newspapers, videos, film, memoir</p> <p>Religious rituals in a mosque, a church and a synagogue or temple</p> <p>WHAT IS THE PERFORMANCE DOING HERE AND NOW IN THESE SOCIAL ISSUES?</p> <p>Religious understanding Economic and relational justice</p>
<p>WHAT ARE THE SOCIAL ISSUES?</p> <p>Co-existence</p> <p>Interfaith</p> <p>Justice</p> <p>Mental health</p>	<p>WHAT ARE THE PRESENT HISTORIES CONNECTED TO THESE SOCIAL ISSUES?</p> <p>Religious extremism</p> <p>PTSD</p> <p>Suicide prevention</p>	<p>WHAT THE VECTORS OF POWER IN CONNECTED TO SOCIAL ISSUES?</p> <p>Ecumenical Understanding</p> <p>Mental Health Awareness</p>	<p>WHAT ARE THE RELATIONSHIPS OR ENCOUNTERS CONNECTED TO THESE SOCIAL ISSUES?</p> <p>Imams Priests Rabbis Doctors Lawyers</p>	

issues? Create a society where each person can express their identity (gender, sexual orientation, etc.) without fear of discrimination or suffering any violence (narratives). While the grid worksheet proved fruitful, the students had differing evaluations of the process. The acting students often preferred a more intuitive process where they could devise work physically, with less written preparation, thus at times they found this grid worksheet onerous. The non-acting students more accustomed to an analytical approach seemed to enjoy this written preparation and found more challenges when they began the acting process. Dr. Juan's teaching and my own emphasize an intuitive/analytic process through an artist/scholar discipline, thus we expected these challenges to arise before we moved from theoretical to practical.

After utilizing the grid to brainstorm ideas for characters, narratives and structures arising from a theme, the development of the students' projects continued with an object exercise. Related to the Fornés method that incorporates found materials into the writing process, each group member was assigned to bring an object to class related to the theme of their project. The group exploring emigration brought in the following objects: a small wooden cross; a fossilized animal bone; a stuffed toy chicken; a lock of hair; and a pill box. The other group delving into gender in Chile, the US, France and Denmark considered the following objects: a dictionary; a sweater; a lipstick; a razor; a necklace; and a postcard drawing of a nude woman. The groups spent a class session discussing the semiotics of each object, how each object might relate to one another, and what characters and narratives might arise from these objects. For example, in the emigration group students asked: How might an animal bone relate to the wooden cross? What narratives might arise from the toy chicken? How does the lock of hair relate to the pill box? In the gender and sexism group they asked: How might the lipstick relate to the dictionary? How might the sweater relate to the postcard? What narratives might arise from the lipstick? By considering such questions the students were led to begin to create their pieces.

Devised Works

Each group developed their pieces through collective writing and rehearsal. The playwriting phase included character creation, semiotic consideration of sound, language, opposition and ideas, use of objects as inspiration, and exploration of a list of questions to examine the social, aesthetic and relationship potentialities of each project. With these tools, each group collaboratively created their scripts, which were developed during our class sessions through workshops on the transfer of devised and polyvocal dramatic text into space as well as through theatrical and production rehearsals.

One group developed a play titled *Sacorria*, a dystopic family drama exploring the theme of emigration during revolution. The title is a fictional word which includes echoes of the Spanish word "Socorro" which translates as "Help!" Set in a futuristic, fictional country, *Sacorria* explores the journey of Octavio, a 30-year-old freedom fighter and rebel who cares for Amparo, the 10-year-old daughter of his deceased friend Richard. Octavio and Richard had been members of the resistance, fighting against an authoritarian regime led by the president Antonia, and her right hand woman,

Regina. After Richard's death, Octavio takes care of an ailing Amparo with the help of his mother, Petra, as they try to survive in a country where access to medication is becoming impossible. Haunted by a specter of death, Octavio must soon decide whether to emigrate in order to seek the medical attention Amparo needs to stay alive or to remain and fight against the regime that continues to oppress them. Told in 11 scenes, this realistic narrative considers the dynamics of survival in a family torn apart by dictatorship. The objects that inspired the play are interspersed throughout with the Woman in Black (specter of death) carrying the animal bone as a talisman, Amparo clutching her stuffed animal, Octavio taking the empty pill box to find more medicine for Amparo, and Antonia and Regina coopting the cross as the symbol of their religious and authoritarian rule.

The other group created *Uniques en su Genero*, (Unique in their Gender), a collage of scenes investigating gender in Chile, the US, France and Denmark. This non-linear narrative integrates objects as it presents a series of scenes exploring characters in all four countries as they navigate gender discrimination, sexism, and classism. The US present-day narrative follows Matthew Harris as he embraces his transgender identity from experimentation with lipstick through transitioning to female, much to the dismay of his parents, Judith and Johnny. In 1951 Denmark, Gerda tries to live her life as a single, career woman in Copenhagen. While accessing memory through a knit sweater her mother Eva made her, Eva appears to urge her daughter to return to the countryside to live a more conservative life. In present day France, Louise, a college student, walks down a city street and endures an array of catcalls and insults, when she breaks into a defiant song, "Why can't I walk down a street free of suggestion? Is my body the only trait in the eyes of men?" (Belen et al. 2018, 11). In present day Santiago, Chile, Eduarda, a homeless woman, observes a women's rights march, and rails against a society that considers her invisible due to her poverty. As Matthew transitions to his transgender identity, he participates in a modeling photo shoot for a lipstick, Rouge 24. In the end, the US and Chilean worlds collide when Matthew and Eduarda meet, as she paints her face with his lipstick, and she tells the world to leave her alone. Throughout the piece, dictionary definitions of words relating to the themes of the scenes (identity, gender, toxic masculinity, beauty, pronoun, transgender, transsexual and gender fluid) are projected on the back wall, contrasting or highlighting the meaning of each scene.

Presentations

After 16 weeks of creative collaboration, we witnessed our students' devised performances. The spacious, white-walled theatre classroom, warmed by the early days of Santiago summer, filled with invited guests and the class prepared to present their work. A few students scurried up the ladder in the back of the room to the tech table to run the lights and sound. Dark blue lights rose as three students entered the stage: a short, blonde haired female student playing a young daughter, a tall, bearded male student with long brown hair playing her father, and a female student wearing a hooded black robe,

carrying an animal bone, playing a specter of death. The father stands upstage next to the hooded woman as she sings a Greek lullaby, while the young daughter, downstage, stares in anguish at a ghost made of sheets, dangling from a noose-like rope. And thus began the student presentations.

In *Sacorra*, the students presented a series of realistic scenes with minimal design elements. The aforementioned opening scene incorporated some surreal elements such as the Woman in Black, holding the bone, next to Amparo who embraces an effigy of someone who had been hanged. In this presentation, the students were on-book, which added to the workshop atmosphere. They utilized video projections to capture the dystopic nature of the setting. They also projected videos. One particular sequence was quite effective in a scene between Antonia, the dictator, and her assistant, Regina. A video close-up of the actor playing Antonia's mouth saying the lines from the scene was projected on the back wall, while the actor menacingly barks out her orders to capture and kill Octavio, "But we must be careful because if the population finds out, believe me that he will not be the only dead. Did you hear me? And we have a bigger problem on our hands than Octavio. We have to figure out how to do it" (Atanda et al. 2018, 12). This intersection between the menacing image of the authoritarian voice and the threatening dialogue captured the intention of this dystopic world in the midst of a rebellion.

In *Uniques en su Genero*, the presentation demonstrated an intersection of language, culture and social constructs through a mixture of presentational and realistic styles. The students were off-book in this group, which raised the level of performance and helped with the seamless transitions between each scene in this fragmented narrative. The aforementioned projections of definitions during the scenes provided a compelling juxtaposition between character and narrative, placing the meaning of each scene into a broader context. For example, when Matthew first experiments with putting on lipstick, in front of the definition of toxic masculinity, we see more palpably the inner conflict Matthew faces when challenging his identity. Additionally, in another scene, we see a video of women's marches in Santiago projected on the back wall. Against images of seemingly middle-class women marching through the streets, homeless Eduarda, dressed in ragged clothing, rails against the women who are walking through her living space, thus highlighting the class divide between women trying to survive and thrive in Santiago.

Reflections

The collaborative process in the course proved to be both challenging and rewarding for all our students. For our Chilean students, this was their first time collaborating with foreign exchange students in the classroom. For our US students, this was their first time taking a theatre course, made more challenging by the fact that they were studying in their second language. For our French, Greek and Danish students, this was their first time collaborating in Spanish, with students from across the globe. For the entire class, this course gave them their first exposure to these methodologies. As part of their final portfolio, each student contributed an essay reflecting on their collaborative



Figure 11.1 Eduarda (Camila Cifuentes) a homeless woman in Santiago, rails against injustice as a women's march passes through her neighborhood.

Photo by Carlos Martínez. 2018. PUC Escuela de Teatro.

experience in the course. A Chilean student commented on the Fornés Playwriting Method,

Writing with this method produces in the end a larger source of work to revise. All the diverse inspiration that I enjoy later needs to be structured and revised so that the images, songs, thoughts, texts, and photographs, that have been employed are not just citations, but a process that continues inside the play.

Regarding the Anton Juan Semiotic Method, a US student shared,

Learning the Ideologeme (semiotic) methodology created by [Dr. Juan] is an experience I will not forget, because it taught me to see beyond what is on the surface. For instance, when we first brought in our objects, it felt as if each one of us became the object as we spoke. The bone seemed to come to life: It smelled like the earth, it sounded like a penetrating silence that had to be appreciated, it felt rough, giving me goosebumps, it represented the life and death that is always coming and going. Because of this method, I learned that an object is not just an object which really translates to anything in life. There is always more than meets the eye, and it's our job to search for that "more."

For the Chilean acting student, the Fornés Playwriting Method expanded his creative process and for the US American Studies major, the Anton Juan Semiotic Method provided a new, artistic lens through which to view the relationship between sign and signifier. Thus, learning these methodologies

offered these students tools to apply to their ongoing work as artists and scholars.

Regarding the devising process, a student from France expressed, "From a collaborative point of view, this course gave me permission to develop my listening skills and accept the ideas of other members of the group, to advance the ensemble work during the process of creating our play, from first idea to the presentation." Another Chilean student revealed,

In terms of the final project, I think that our play was dynamic and interesting, that it reflected our initial inclinations. It reflects the nonlinear structure we proposed, combined with the theme of sexism that we wanted to explore through the gender nonconformity of characters and performers, scenes with contradictory characters relating to sexism and how this is also seen in language ... I'm proud of the work, I feel it is relevant, interesting and raises problematics that cannot go unnoticed in a world whose rules are changing, where we all have the duty to create rules with conscience.

For the French theatre major, this collaboration allowed her to bridge linguistic and cultural divides through listening to her peers in order to create a work incorporating global diversity. For the Chilean acting student, the course offered an opportunity to create a work that expresses social concerns in a global perspective. Thus, through these reflections, our students expressed that their collaborative learning experience in our course gave them the ability to collaborate and create devised works that expand past national identities to embrace more nuanced, complex international and universal realities.

Evaluation

As co-instructors, this course provided a remarkable pedagogical experience that included challenges as well as successes. The challenges revolved around our differences in language and culture (distinct academic institutional models and varying levels of artistic training). I am bilingual. English is my first language. Spanish is my second language. I also have some degree of proficiency in French. Dr. Juan is multilingual. Tagalog is his first language. His second language is English. He also speaks Spanish, Greek, French and Italian. While we taught the course in Spanish, we would occasionally include phrases in English, French and Greek to more clearly define a concept. This multilingual approach aided in the learning process by providing multiple access points for our students. However, in performance, our non-Spanish-speaking students, who were mostly non-theatre majors, experienced some trepidation in performing in their non-native language. Those students tended to therefore be drawn to parts with less dialogue so they could focus their attention on performing and not be as concerned with a high volume of dialogue. For our Spanish-speaking acting students, the presentation gave them an opportunity to shine in their native language, with text they generated, as well as to share their acting craft with their classmates, for whom this was their first performance experience.

The two educational institutions involved in this collaboration maintain distinct pedagogical traditions. The PUC Theatre School utilizes a conservatory model in which undergraduate students train in acting over four years, and additionally take electives in playwriting, directing and other areas. The University of Notre Dame employs a liberal arts approach where our theatre majors take a series of ten courses, over three years, but often double major and also complete a series of additional courses, in a wide range of subjects, as part of their graduation requirements. Our course was an elective for the PUC acting students, who also maintained a heavy conservatory course load. For our Notre Dame students, our course also satisfied the Notre Dame fine arts requirement, so our non-theatre students also maintained a rigorous course load in the humanities.

These distinct traditions and diverse student groups created opportunities for growth but also presented challenges. Our Chilean students were in the second and third year of an acting conservatory program, with intensive courses in acting, voice, movement, dance and many hours of outside rehearsals, emphasizing a deep engagement with the craft of acting over four years. Our US and foreign exchange students were studying in a university liberal arts model. Our course included many components: theory, writing and performance. Our liberal arts students had more experience in the theoretical areas, whereas our conservatory students had a greater depth of training in writing and performance. The imbalances within the different models led to friction in the collaborative groups at times. To deal with the friction, we established open space at the top of class and allowed students to discuss the challenges they were facing. Dr. Juan and I could then respond to some of these issues and offer feedback. For example, one challenge that arose was the difficulty in prioritizing rehearsal over other activities, with a student population who lived across the city of Santiago, and not in one centralized location. We therefore adjusted our course plan to include more in-class rehearsal time.

As Dr. Juan and I witnessed the final presentations, we shared in the success of the course experience. The presentations were works-in-progress including unpolished performances, under-rehearsed sequences, divergent acting styles, overwritten scenes and technical limitations. Thus, the overall value of the artistic and educational process was perhaps not as visible to the visitor who only saw the one-hour presentation. However, we could see in each student some element of artistic growth that day. We viewed the Danish engineering student open up physically and gesturally as she danced to a big band jazz song during her 1950s scene. We witnessed a Chilean student blossom as she stood on a table top, with images of marching women projected across her face, while she defiantly embodied the homeless woman railing against society. We watched as the US economics student freely put on lipstick while facing the audience as he demonstrated complex issues of gender identity. We observed groups of international students collaborating together, through many languages, exploring global narratives, in an attempt to communicate their passionate responses to social injustice. If we were to teach the course again, we would now be able to more accurately communicate the degree of time, dedication and effort required. We would have the students begin to collaborate sooner so they would have more time to fully develop and theatrically realize their ideas.

Our Devised Performance course allowed the students to experience a collaborative process that navigated diverse languages and cultures. We taught the Fornés Playwriting Method to help each student intuitively access their individual, creative world in order to create characters and dialogue. We utilized the Anton Juan Semiotic Method to give the students analytical tools to consider the complexity of language as a means to amplify character, dialogue and theme. We shared the Performance and Social Action Grid to build upon these intuitive and analytic skills and allow the students to collaborate and develop their themes into material for their plays. Through applying these methodologies, this diverse student group collaborated, explored their differences and generated theatrical works with impressive aesthetic, linguistic and cultural complexity that speak to shared social concerns in our current, global reality.

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PART 4

INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGES

Theory and Practice



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THE ETHICAL DEMANDS OF EXPERIENCING IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE IN TEACHING SOPHOCLES' *ANTIGONE* TO STUDENTS OF APPLIED ENGLISH

Selma Helal

The Impasse of Motivation: A Reality of Forsakenness and Adversity

I was in my mid-twenties when I first started teaching at university. A novice *Professeur agrégé* with two years of teaching in the northwest of the country and an IPELSHT-ENS background of academic commitment, I had high hopes of making a difference and inspiring majors who shared my passion for the English language, literature and civilization at the Higher Institute of Languages of Gabes (HILG), in the south of Tunisia. Early on, my dreamy vision started to adjust to the social reality and divergent work ethic of my new workplace: in dramatic terms, it felt as though my youthful students were children who had not grown up yet, because of a tacitly normalized culture of absenteeism and lack of discipline underlying their learning environment.

The studious ones developed a sense of alienation in a place where learning is not valued any more than marks are, whereas the greater majority tended to have little self-confidence. This was visible in the students' attempts to avoid challenge at all costs, even if it meant signing petitions against professors who do not fit their idea of what a course should be. Perhaps more alarming than the *dégagé* syndrome¹ among these petitioners is the manifest lack of a sense of purpose: a generation of youth who do not seem to know what they are good at and whether they have the stamina to go the extra mile for it. While this may be somewhat understandable at the beginning of a student's university life as they are still groping toward a self-fulfilling future, this apathy was much more pervasive. Their only concern, it seems, is to study for grades with the naïve assumption that university degrees will guarantee future employment (or a respectable marriage) in a marginalized region that has few socio-economic opportunities and the second highest rate of unemployment in the country (INS 2017).²

As he examines the paradox of the Tunisian Revolution, Yadh Ben-Achour (2017, 25) writes:

if political liberty came out victorious in the revolutionary test, the demand for social and economic justice, the second fundamental cause of the Tunisian Revolution, will continue to collide with failure as long as radical reforms of structure and wealth distribution do not see the light of day ... Tunisia will remain in a revolutionary state' (my translation)

More importantly, he insists that stopping at this level is to misjudge the revolution by denying the change that has occurred. For Ben-Achour, liberty is a fundamental gain and it has produced "authentic revolutionaries" from the bourgeois world of those who love liberty for themselves and justice for themselves and for others (165–166). It is from this perspective that I see potential authentic revolutionaries in the youth who, in Zghal's socio-economic terminology, are a country's human capital. I see prospective "actors of change" in my youthful students, who with the virtue of learning, can value the liberty to take action necessary for the ongoing revolutionary state. As they learn to "circulat[e]" between the "ontological levels" of truth and navigate its fictional borders in a drama course that invites them to appreciate the "exemplary value attached to" a Sophoclean tragedy (Pavel 1983, 86–87), however sporadic their presence in the classroom is, they learn with "the ear ... [and] its acuity" (85) to develop "the faculty of discerning the sound of truth" (87) and sense "the value of the words" in "the depth of the region in [their] being" (Simon Weil in Pavel 1985, 90). Perhaps this vision is as far removed from actual reality as the classical world of Thebes, but the dignified human liberty of making a choice is worth the risk: whereas in Greek tragedy misfortune strikes as irreversible adversity, in *Antigone*, we witness an atypical example of a tragedy where the protagonist has a choice (Pavel 2005a). I aimed for these parallel choices to resonate with the students.

In post-revolution Tunisia, the process of educational reform is still underway. At the HILG, the teaching atmosphere is marked by unsound, oligarchic power-clusters and tainted with a latent complex of regionalism³ self-betrayed in overweening undertones. A good number of professors seem to have settled on the idea that there is little good in "raising the bar," though it would be more realistic to speak of restoring the bar. In the couple of departmental meetings expected in "normal" circumstances at the start of every semester or at the close of the academic year, one can see a minimal effort to introduce new ideas. This apathy underscores the underlying assumption that change is a risk to avoid lest it cause mass insurgences among students who have taken to the *dégagé* practice in defiance of "unyielding" authority. Somewhere along this assumption is the undercurrent that students are the mob and cannot be reasoned with, and the logic that slackness is tolerated when teaching marginalized youth with low university entry scores: knowingly or not, these students should content themselves with *les spécialités poubelles* (the leftover fields). Perhaps parallel to this socio-economic reality

of a politicized “university for all,” is another reality where professors tend to lack conviction in the students’ capacity to achieve and seem to be more invested in their *own* academic advancement, as is tacitly acknowledged in casual conversation among colleagues.

As my sense of the dramatic aspects of professional life started to grow, it was hard not to hear the ring of truth in Shakespeare’s world-stage metaphor. The moment to teach drama came after two years of patiently waiting to expand my teaching in literature. At the start of the spring semester of 2016, I was assigned a classic drama course on Sophocles’ *Antigone* to first year students of Applied English. Naturally, Language and Arts students in the first year should have an upper-intermediate level to qualify for their major, but that is just in theory. Before long, I came to realize that it is common for the few “good” ones to have an intermediate level. But the challenge was more than to introduce a class of non-native English freshmen to Greek tragedy in Drama: the students believed the literature module in the program was of no use to them because their major is business-oriented. This view finds an echo in the general assumption among professors maintained even by the Head of the Department that Business English students are not expected to develop the same skills or interest in theatrical literature, nor could they because of the extra analytical challenge in literary language. I was given to understand that I should not invest in a substantial drama course nor have high hopes of any kind: those who take the Applied English program are generally those who could not find a space in the Fundamental Program. The fact remains that the first year in both majors is Common Core: nothing is sealed for those with good hopes to switch programs by the end of the year; additionally, the research vs. business distinction means very little in a higher institution offering only professional masters.⁴

With absenteeism a normalized behavior, student attendance, rather than course content, has become the main indicator of professors’ competence. Among students, attention is granted if the course conforms to their idea of fun, i.e. (over)simplified content and generous marks. Among professors, it is convenient to only have self-disciplined, motivated students in the classroom when the generally low level of enrolled students interferes with their ability to keep up. Over the course of two years, the 50 percent of the student body of first year Applied English who made it to third year took a survey on their drama class, designed in part to juxtapose their learning experience with their school attendance. Although not one student was reconsidering their major, the 43 percent who replied they attended classes “regularly” would still specify modules they attended less. Some of their reasons were: “it has less coefficient than [*sic*] other modules”; or “because I want to get a good marks,” “attendance is very important to succeed.” Over 36 percent stated that the literature module was the least attended, if at all, because in their words, it is “difficult,” “too difficult,” “hidden/deep”; one respondent even specified that “I attended regularly just poetry ... Drama and fiction is so bored [*sic*] and a little bit complicated,” whereas 56 percent did not attend regularly regardless of module or class considerations. When provided, reasons for lack of attendance were: “I was not aware that attendancy is very important”; “I felt like what an I doing here? where an-I!!”; “indifference”; “some of them was boring” [*sic*].

Naturally, the drama class did not fare any better: In the fall semester (SI), 50 percent attended regularly for the usual reasons of “funny, easy” content; “nice, good” teacher; or “I was Trying To get great marks”; among these, only four students stated they “love” the subject, “believe it is fun and interesting,” or “have to attend to understand.” They are the very same students who continued to attend regularly in the spring semester (SII), the fifth is a student who “thought it had no importance” in SI, but “knewed then [by SII] it is important to attend it.” In SII therefore, only 17 percent maintained regular attendance and some of those who stopped gave reasons, such as “bad markets” [marks] or “I don’t attend because I can understand drama myself.” However, *regular attendance* does not mean that students attended enough class sessions for the course to achieve its outcomes. The phrase was meant to elicit truthful responses from students about their lack of commitment to classes. Because poor attendance damaged the course’s sense of continuity, the ultimate challenge for me in whatever time interval to salvage during the semester was how to impact the few present students, however sporadic or uncertain their attendance was.

The issue remains, however, that along the growing distance between professor-student, professor-professor, student-student, be it moral, intellectual, or social, the alarming degradation of the quality of learning, sociologist Zghal (2016, 18–22) points to in *Enseignement supérieur en Tunisie: quelle université pour quel développement*, runs a greater risk of degradation in the value of learning as a virtue. The very concept of “université populaire” advocates the principle of knowledge for all, but in no way is this principle a substitute for the *mental effort* that knowledge-seeking requires. The idea that this concept, politically instrumentalized as the illusion of a promise for better social standing, could lead to the degradation of academic culture among those given access to university in their pursuit of learning, or *social success*, has become a real and insidious danger. This concern with *immediate academic success* seen as the materialization of one’s right to better living conditions and self-realization is counter to the principle of meritocracy: Success should be earned, not given, or else there comes the day we witness in full display the syndrome, so to speak, of those who wish to be rewarded without making an effort. That is when the concept of “university for all” becomes the university of those who think that every effort (however small) should go rewarded – not for its *intrinsic* worth, but for its *expected* worth. It then ensues that the very basis for reward, the *quality* of the effort, is superseded by mere effort, and mere effort, by simply being present in the classroom. What then do we make of an empty classroom: A metaphor of hope forsaken? This excessive concern for grades and diplomas among students seems to be none other than the urgent desire for immediate success (be it academic, social, personal) which in turn seems to reflect a state of emergency⁵ in a Post-Revolution society whose youth cannot afford to hope.⁶

In this reality of an ineffective, administrative authority nearly as absent as the students, if a literary class on classic drama has to collide with the study culture of a generation of youth who crave diplomas because quality education is more than they can afford, the pressing question for me was how to build the course in a way that would bypass the empty utilitarian logic

among Applied English students that there is no value in a theatrical literature class. More importantly, my aim was to restore in their *youthful* eyes/ I's, the human virtue of learning in an academic environment lapsed in a state of forsakenness at a time in their country's history where the revolutionary process has lain bare the face of a social reality highly marked with adversity. The objective is to bypass the limitations of students' sporadic presence in class via temporal reiteration toward engaging with Sophocles' *Antigone* beyond the limits of the Aristotelian three unities of time, place and action. As they actively listen to the characters' dramatic lives orally staged before them from episode to episode, students learn to grasp the values that motivate their actions and experience self-extension in the perfectly human world of a classic blood-curse myth that extends itself in the span of a trilogy. To put it in Ben-Achour's words (2017, 11): "In truth, it is not a matter of taking sides, but of enlarging one's vision" (« En vérité, il ne s'agit pas de parti pris, mais d'un approfondissement du regard »).⁷

"One Pair of Eyes":⁸ The "I" that listens and the "I" that plays

When "blind Tiresias" makes his first entrance in Sophocles' *The Theban Plays*, "led by an attendant," we see him through the words of King Oedipus who beseeches the aid of prophetic wisdom to deliver the polis from the "pol-lut[ion]/ plague" that lies therein and strikes with death:

OEDIPUS: Tiresias ... nothing beyond your *ken*; ... all heavenly and earthly *knowledge* are in your *grasp*. In your *heart*, if not with the eye, you *see* our city's condition: we look to you ... Of prophecy you profess. It is for yourself, it is for Thebes, it is for me ... We look to you. To help his fellow-men with all his power is man's most noble work.

(1974, 34)

Ever condemned to the eye/I's ⁹ black night, the wise man, true to his noble but humanly forgetful, nature,¹⁰ chooses to "bear [the] burden" in the secret of his heart. Knowing the suffering of wisdom, he withholds the answer from the King:

"Wise words; but O, *when wisdom brings no profit*, to be wise is to suffer. And *why* did I *forget* this, who *knew it well*? I never *should* have come ... I *see* your words, sir, tending to no *good end*; therefore I guard my own ... You are *all deluded*. I refuse to utter the *heavy secrets* of my soul – and yours." (35)

His prophetic presence is reminiscent of the poet/artist who lends his ear to the voice of fiction and makes an offering of truth with his/her story to those who listen for its wisdom with their hearts.¹¹ In his philosophical project, the literary theorist and comparatist Thomas Pavel focuses on the ethical dynamics of imaginative literature. He explains the rapport of the literary artist with fiction in words similar to Tiresias': Tale-composers¹² speak and listen to Lady Adventure. They do not simply tell their tales to talk about what they saw or pretend to have seen. They "narrate" (2016c, 174) (« rapporte »)

(2016d, 14) what they have heard with their ears and received with their heart from fiction, and ask the same of their audience if they are to witness what they have witnessed, hence the frequent calls of oral literature: “Let your heart and ears be mine. Words, though heard, are lost unless understood within the heart ... for I am not going to speak of a dream, an idle tale, or lie, with which many another has regaled you, but rather shall I speak of what I saw” (Pavel 2016c, 172).

To further elucidate this rapport of resonance with fictional tales, Pavel makes a significant analogy between human hearing (the ear, the inner ear, and the cochlea) and moral hearing: “Our inner moral ear, our inner resonance space—our heart...—[he explains] are not merely responsive to emotions, they also have a silent access to the world of ideals and values” (2016c, 181). In his metaphor of moral hearing, the inner ear represents the channel that captures the sound of truth into our inner space; the intelligent heart, the empathetic capacity to reflect on and grasp the reverberations of the sound; and the larger metaphor of the inner space, the space of moral resonance within every human, responsible for their moral equilibrium. It functions like a scale of balance that weighs the good in us and the righteousness of our choices, and it reflects the moral effect of our actions on us. This inner moral space within every individual is what connects us to the higher universe of ideals and values. In a way that recalls the Socratic anamnesis, the dramatic representation as a form of literary art appeals to us as it evokes that higher universe (Pavel 2015a, 337).

This connection calls for *trust* in the manner of befriending a work of art that presents itself to our I/eyes. Once the listeners open their hearts and ears, they are transfigured into a fictional I/eye witness (« moi fictif à titre de témoin ») and start to experience through “silen[t]” (Pavel 2003, 6) “vicarious participation” (2016c, 171) the dramatic action of the play. They can make deeply meaningful inferences about the motives and principles that govern the characters’ choices and grasp the moral tenor of their actions, regardless of the story’s unfamiliarity. They “reach significant conclusions [and gain] revelatory inferences” (« tirer des conclusions significatives ... des inférences révélatrices ») (2003, 4–6): The truth in fiction, be it dramatic or narrative in form, is of a different kind that is not limited to cognitive understanding.

A profound truth the collected answers of the survey revealed over time is that however limited their attendance was, most students conveyed the scenes I covered during their class time: they were so moved by the play’s orally transmitted episodes that they entrusted their memories with those oral tales they would remember the most from the *Antigone*: “scenes of burying her brother and the authority of her uncle.” Some of them went on to stress that they may not remember exact scenes but would name what they symbolize: “strength,” “brave[ry],” and “sacrifice.” Their connection to the retold scenes has outlived memory’s limitation. Trust is at the heart of our act of reception (« l’acueil ») of the spiritual elements or moral truths that fiction conveys: “When we dive deep into those secret corners to bring to light those thousand little nothings that make the Truth, it is no longer a question of skillfully arranging a sentence” (Proust quoted in 2006b, 43).

Distanciation and Recognition: Let-Go, the Attitude of Those Who Study Less

In the "Introduction" to his translation of Sophocles' *Theban Plays*, E. F. Watling (1974, 9–12) points out that the genius of the classic poet is to re-tell a mythic tale to an audience "already in possession of the main facts of the story," but who would come to an "open-air theater ... to witness a cycle of dramatic performances presented amid high civic splendor and religious ritual ... [looking] for *originality in the ordering of the incidents*, [which] would *invite not a passing curiosity but profound contemplation of eternal truths*," (italics added) hence the "solemn responsibility [of the dramatist]." Watling adds that dramatic art in ancient Greece also functioned in "keep[ing] alive the old stories" for the younger audience. His translation has much the same noble function considering Sheppard's claim that "Sophoclean language at its best [is] hard to analyze, impossible to translate" (16). To explain why I chose his translation for my class, I borrow Watling's words:

I have taken as my first aim ... a readable,actable, dramatic text, not a line for line, word-for-word transcription of the original ... Considering the problem with special reference to drama ... the reader of the printed page may take his own time to consider the implications of this or that expression, and may in due course accustom himself to an unfamiliar terminology. *But the listener cannot so pause, and his understanding and emotion must respond at the instant*" (17) (italics added).

Notwithstanding the perfectly "readable,actable, dramatic" qualities of the modernized English translation of the classical play, the language barrier in the context of my drama course is three times as problematic: my students are (1) non-native English (2) freshmen challenged by the poetic language of the play, especially when (3) they tend to have a (very) low level of language competence, as their curt and broken English statements show when they manage to break the classroom silence. The poetic language becomes more daunting when the majority tend not to possess the cognitive skill to develop their inferences in meaningful English. They are generally unconfident about their English and make few attempts to voice their thoughts in class about what they hear and witness from what they read.

In *Comment écouter la littérature?*, Pavel (2006b, 39–40) explains that there are two ways of approaching literature: one is through cognitive study which requires an analytical distance from the text; the other is through self-immersion which requires entering in a personal relation with the work of art. But perhaps the true pleasure of engaging with literature is in the balance of reading both ways. He goes on to note that "it is quite possible to listen when studying less, although listening is nourished by study. Listening is a habit, a virtue, a good habit, and is nourished by study, but at the same time, I think it is impossible to study without listening" (2005b). It is the latter way that takes precedence if the purpose is to have an intimate connection with the literary work and afford the self an imaginary escapade (« *évasion imaginaire* ») (2006b, 28) from the mind-narrowing grip of the I/eye's immediate reality into the fictional world of the dramatic representation.

This self-immersion nurtures our human capacity for empathy and awakens the intellect, hence Pavel's notion of the intelligent heart: "The intelligence of the heart does not exclude that of the intellect, but rather invites it" (ibid., 38). It is the faculty of empathy that develops our moral perspicacity and sharpens the mind of the discerning I/eye, and that faculty resides in having a human heart capable of perceiving the virtues (qualities) and vices (flaws) in people when reading their actions, and going past what they are to recognize who they are.

Pavel's metaphor of listening with the heart rests on two good learning habits: distanciation (« éloignement ») and recognition (« reconnaissance »), the latter habit being inherent to the Aristotelian concept¹³ of the complex tragic plot (2006a). During class, Teiresias' one pair of eyes becomes a reflection of the parallel between the "I" that listens (the students) and the "I" that plays (the characters). In the same way characters of the *Theban Plays* experience moments of recognition and reversal, the eye/I that listens undergoes a parallel process of recognition: By an attentive, sympathetic connection to the people of the play, the student "I" bears witness to the characters' trials and tribulations and empathetically recognizes their qualities and (tragic) flaws, their motives and the principles that govern their actions. What facilitates this recognition is the moral tenor of the characters' actions and the higher degree to which the protagonists honor those moral values and principles.

As they listened to the oral tale of the selected play excerpt in class, students started to develop a personal, intimate relationship with the characters and their dramatic world. They unwittingly got carried away with the progression of the dramatic action and felt touched by the interplay of the moral values that govern it. However rudimentary their command of the language is, the reverberations captured by their hearts awakened their curiosity about what they could see and hear with their imagination. During the seminar session on the *Antigone* epilogue, as their "I"s listened, I could see in my students' glittering eyes the impact of the ultimatum Antigone lays before Ismene: "Now is the time to show whether or not you are worthy of your high blood." They would struggle to side with one sister or the other – struggle to choose between "right" or "prudent." This time, their inarticulate selves were not so shy as to speak for lack of words: they were at a loss for words, deeply moved by the question of what to do if they were to trade places with any of the sisters. They could admire the selfless "bravery" of Antigone and still admit that, like Ismene, they lack the strength of heart to take such a great risk. They could acknowledge Ismene's prudence, and, in her words, the "folly" of the act Antigone is so adamant to carry out she does not care if her secret is out. They admire the love Antigone shows for Polynices: "I shall never desert him, never," but understand the love Ismene shows, selflessly fearing for Antigone's safety as much as she fears for her own, and her words become their own: "I fear for you, Antigone ... At least be secret, do not breathe a word, I'll not betray your secret." The students could see how Antigone is quick to judge her sister, refusing her help if she's ever to change her mind: "No; then I will not ask for your help. Nor would I thank you for it, if you gave it" (a line that foreshadows the nature of Ismene's moment of recognition later in the play, as one that produces hate instead of love, in the

Aristotelian terminology). These human concerns are not so strange to them, even if the dramatic situation of a house with cursed blood is not akin to their world: they recognize the trying situation of making a choice.

The meaning in literary artworks that entices students into making such inferences, Pavel notes repeatedly (2016c, 175; 2015a, 336; 2003, 6), does not lie in the immediate meaning of sentences and words joined together in grammatical structures, but in the succession of episodes or chapters, in the ensemble of the artwork; not the faithful representation of the outside world, but in the capacity to evoke or build moral ideals. This is quite true of human artistic creations whose meaning is not reduced to the spirit of the epoch in which they were produced as the history of art shows, especially with the revivals of certain artworks and traditions. Pavel (2005c) advocates for a larger view of literary artifacts as procedures (« *procédure littéraire* ») with a purpose that can be re-discovered in its impact on us as we learn to have “a certain rapport of larger historical tradition” (« *un certain type de rapport de tradition historique plus longue, de longue durée* ») with literary artworks that goes beyond the logic of limiting their scope to the ideals of their time.

Students could recognize Antigone’s high sense of duty toward her brother: “I know my duty, where true duty lies ... When I have *tried* and failed, I shall have failed ... There is no punishment that can rob me of my honorable death.” The truth of the ultimatum is revealed to them: honor comes before life. Duty to family and to the gods is above Creon’s dishonorable law. In their words, Antigone is “a loyal person [who] save[d] the honor of her family.” But the contradiction of principle in the sisters’ choices is a question that puzzles them still: as they could not break the silence of their vicarious presence in the episode, they borrowed Ismene’s words to ask: Why “[Antigone’s] heart burns. [Ismene’s] is frozen at the thought”? (Sophocles 128–129). Their perplexity calls for a larger view of the past leading to that dramatic decision.

Listening to the Play: A Personal Activity of Mental Staging

In *Comment écouter la littérature*, Pavel writes:

Neither the literary work, nor the characters hear me. If it is correct to say that I mentally interrogate the literary work that I listen to, in no way is this a real *conversation*. When a conversation about a literary work kicks off, it does not take place between the reader and the work, but between the various readers who reflect together on the work’s meaning. This conversation *presupposes* listening, and although sometimes it assists in correcting the listening, it cannot replace it. Therefore, listening takes precedence.

(2006b, 34, my translation)

The cornerstone of the drama class is, therefore, to bring the play alive as an oral form of literature while using narrative iteration, a temporal device with effects Pavel (2015c, 6) identifies as similar to the work of spotlights in modern theatrical performance, holding and manipulating human attention: “these movements back and forth, these order, duration, and frequency games guide our gaze towards what happens, who acts, why and how, a bit

like the light projectors, which in modern theatrical performances, bring out actors and their movements.”

By teaching *Antigone* as the last part of the Theban trilogy, the purpose of the temporal technique in my class is to bring out the mental images of the sequence of dramatic moments that the *Theban Plays* weave as a whole. This would also give the advantage of juxtaposing for students the Aristotelian unity and complexity of *Antigone* with a Shakespearean sense of plot complexity in the episodic frame of all three classic tragedies. Via the technique of back-shadowing and foreshadowing, the course aims to heighten the dramatic action in *Antigone*: the selected episodes for study per class session hinge on moments in the trilogy that shape *Antigone*’s dramatic scenes and have a bearing on the characters’ choices. In the context of my class, the method mimics cinematic flashbacks and flash-forwards and relies on the larger dramatic context of Sophocles’ *Theban Plays* in enhancing students’ capacity to listen for and mentally picture the lead dramatic moments of the House of Oedipus. Students would gain a larger visual of the characters’ motives and occasionally anticipate the protagonists’ and antagonists’ actions in *Antigone*.

The seminar class is transfigured into an imaginative space where Lady Adventure speaks. I play the part of listener/storyteller, conveying what I hear from the classic voice of the tragic trilogy, and I let the audience in on my mental interrogations as I reiterate what my fictitious “I” witnessed. As they grow into the habit of listening with their ears and hearts, the students may see through my part: I am a channeler¹⁴ who sees for them so that they may see for others; as listeners their mental interrogations are essentially part of the recognition game. How does the mental staging take place? To activate the first level of recognition, or to use Pavel’s words, to read *in* the words, I listen to catch the purport of Creon’s speech: Why does the King convene with his councilors? As a student taking my distance from the speech, I understand that the first episode of the play is about the promulgation of the royal decree after the failed Argive attack on the city of Thebes: the proclaimed order, as previously narrated in the context of the play (and witnessed in the dialogue between *Antigone* and *Ismene*) is one of reward and punishment. The focus of my analysis is to inspect, therefore, the King’s motives.

I read the first episode and find myself hearing the order from the King himself. I listen to see for myself if there was indeed something amiss about his motives: in *Antigone*’s eyes, “It is against you and me that he has made this order” (127). A question in my head: Why would you, noble king, grant the burial honors to one brother, and so cruelly forbid it to the other? They both died at war by one another’s hands. Is death not punishment enough for the brother who led the attack against Thebes: traitor in the eyes of the city, but a dear brother still to *Antigone* and *Ismene*?

A flashback comes to my eyes when *Ismene*’s words to *Antigone* in the epilogue ring in my head. I am reminded of the curse of their house: a prophesy of a son killing his father and wedding his mother. The blood curse now taints his sons; *Ismene* fears for herself and her sister lest they be now tainted with *madness*, “of your high blood” (127–128), self-incurred if the King’s defiance is her choice. She reminds *Antigone* of the duty to stay safe for each other now that they have suffered the death of their closest kin — father,

mother, and brothers — and I find myself asking the same question she asks: “How could you dare, when Creon has expressly forbidden it?” Antigone’s answer sounds unfulfilling to me: “He has no right to keep me from my own” (128). Does not duty to a living sister prevail over the right to honor the dead body of her brother?

For Antigone, it is a question of defiance either way; better defy the State’s law than Heaven’s law: a choice hard to make, hence the courage made noble. But to judge Ismene for not showing the strength of her sister’s determination is just as hard! Why is Ismene’s heart frozen at the thought of burying her brother? Did she not hear and witness, like Antigone, in Colonus the last will of an elder brother, blinded by pride, vengeance, and power (“I am an exile because I claimed my birthright ... of ... sovereignty ... my younger brother expelled me” 111) but dear to her still for the blood tie that makes him as much her brother as Antigone’s: “Is he not my brother, and yours, whether you like or not?” (128) says Antigone in dignity, say we in perplexity, to an Ismene who hears our question in her sister’s words.

The students and I jump to *Oedipus in Colonus*: the sisters’ disparate lives place them on opposed sides of the duty to the dead, a placement that is *textually* signaled by Ismene’s spy-like, ambiguous presence, when Polynices bids his last entreating words to both sisters. The stage direction after the sisters’ rescue from Creon’s grip, announces (105) the entrance of Ismene, Antigone, and their rescuer, Theseus, King of Athens, but the stage exit (108) that follows the rescue tale does not make it clear who exited as previously done with Theseus and Creon’s exit (103). During the confrontational moment of father and son, leading to Oedipus’ prophesy of his sons’ double-death, not a word is heard from Ismene: is she still there? And if she is, does her silence double score Oedipus’ when he first abstains from hearing and then from responding to his son’s quest for vengeance and blessing? Her silent presence, just like the students’, in that dramatic moment, seems to them to backshadow Oedipus’ words early on (82) of where the sisters stand, as much as foreshadow the opposition of their loving, dutiful hearts.

We jump back again to hear Creon’s speech in the *Antigone*’s first episode. The same *news* but we hear his last words with discomfort: here is a king who just seized the throne for himself and claims to be noble (for the inherited throne should go to Ismene and Antigone, Oedipus and the brothers’ closest next of kin?), but what counsel does he seek when he has already given the order? What then is the meaning of this promulgation if not to legitimize his succession to power? The note of fear in Ismene’s words that “It is not for us to fight against men,” echoes in Antigone’s the cruelty of both order and punishment decreed for the transgressor who would bury a transgressor: “The punishment for disobedience is death by stoning ... the noble Creon!” (127).

Marvelous Return:¹⁵ Let-go as Retreat and Higher Ground of the Engaged Spectator

Back in *King Oedipus* (42–43), Creon could see the true test of power because of the distance his position affords him as the King’s councilor and trusted friend. He could see the obstinacy and anger, which, as king, are now his ills,

of an Oedipus suspecting plotters against his throne when challenged by the mystery of the plague destroying Thebes and Teiresias' enigmatic message. With words of wisdom, he would seek clearance for his name of the "ill-considered" charge of treason, which he now denies to Antigone. The distancing effect of the Theban trilogy with its aesthetic qualities has a similar impact. The poetic force of Watling's translation preserves to some degree the poetic quality of the Greek version and lifts students up to meet the mimetic illusion of the drama. On the other hand, the chronological jumps that I make in class prompt students to make the mental effort of leaping back and forth within the larger dramatic space of *The Theban Plays*, thus transcending the three unities of place, time and action in the *Antigone*. Both Pavel and C. S. Lewis stress the transcendental effect of vicarious participation on listeners-readers of literature. Lewis describes the experience as "see 'with' other eyes ... feel 'with' other hearts ... demand windows" that a literary person desires for "self-aggrandizement," hence his notion of the literary as a true reader who reads wholeheartedly: "My own eyes are not enough for me ... literary experience heals the wound without undermining the privilege of individuality ... I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do" (1965, 140–141).

Pavel elaborates this transcendental effect by showing the affinity between distancing and exemplarity¹⁶ in classic tragedy. The moral grandeur we sense in the protagonists' acts—such as courage made extreme, "to the outermost limit of daring ... against Law enthroned" (Sophocles 149) in Antigone's honorable act of burying a traitor brother at the cost of her life—does not make those acts examples for imitation; but rather examples for *contemplation*: "transcendence ... consist[s] in the astonishing capacity to contemplate oneself and consider one's human environment from a polestar previously inaccessible[:]. In contemplating the sky of heroes from down-below, the individual ... is led to simultaneously contemplate himself from the sky of heroes" (Pavel 1996, 376). *Antigone's* world of myth and prophecy is far removed from ours, hence the mental effort to cross over to that fictional realm by an act of let-go, that is, by self-immersion. As students grow closely connected to the protagonists and empathetically relate to them in their most dramatic moments of the plot, they learn to recognize them as allegorical beings whose acts call for admiration, rather than imitation: The mental effort of a double contemplation of Antigone's act lifts us up to the sky of heroic bravery, to contemplate in us from up there the morally commendable idea of honoring duty, rather than the act of defiance itself. This double contemplation of allegorical others in the drama brings about a change of position from below to above: safely listening to these dramatic beings, we imaginatively experience the adversity of their world with them; we vicariously grow close to their fictional otherness, away from our immediate reality and into the play's dramatic action. We find our way back from above by contemplating ourselves and our reality through the striking story of "heroes who are neither perfectly good nor entirely evil" (Pavel, 2015c, 10).

English Drama courses in Tunisian colleges of Arts and Languages are still not designed to take into consideration the class performative aspect. Clubs are practically nonexistent in a place where learning is becoming more of a commodity marketable by marks. The culture of investing oneself in

unaccredited activities is nearly as absent as the students in their classes. The phenomenon of absenteeism in turn becomes quite revealing of the self-betraying attitude of those who fear engaging in long-term endeavors. Contrary to short-term pursuits, these do not offer the assurances or apparent advantage of making less effort and obtaining immediate results. From this perspective, transfiguring the class into an imaginative space where students listen to themselves as they listen to Lady Adventure was an effort to encourage students to willingly let go of the narrowness of their immediate social reality and assist them in experiencing the distanciation effect of noble, ancient literature through (1) self-immersion in the mimetic illusion of *Antigone* as a dramatic representation¹⁷ and (2) cultivation of empathetic, revelatory ties with its characters. These ties would empower them to transcend the intimidating language barrier and observe how perfectly *readable* the classical characters' souls are: "In ancient literature, souls are readable and the result of this reading is in principle accessible to all" (« Dans la littérature ancienne, les âmes sont lisibles et le résultat de cette lecture est, en principe, accessible à tous ») (Pavel 2003, 13) and develop "the *agility* ... of *leaping* toward the sky of heroes to [consequently] observe themselves from above" (Pavel 1996, 377).

The question, therefore, is to what extent did the course succeed in creating a lasting impact on the very few students who attended it? Did the seeds of learning as a virtue start to grow, and are they alive still? Perhaps answers can be found in a survey shared nearly two years later with the students who made it to the senior year of the Applied English Program in the fall semester of 2017. Out of 30 Applied English students who took the survey, only three students stated that they attended all their courses regularly for the obvious reasons that: "I wanted to learn;" "to learn more and engage with my peers;" "we have to attend;" "I was afraid to not succeed." One of them even specified, "I did attend all the civilization and literature [sic.] courses because it is the important ones." One fourth admitted that "it is essential to attend all courses" and still did not commit to the civilization module: "not too important for a business English student and the teachers don't explain well this complicated subject," and another missed the optional class for the naïve thought that attendance was optional.

Given the high absenteeism and the absence of any administrative authority to ensure students' commitment to their classes, it is important to examine the students' experience of *Antigone* and see to what extent they achieved recognition of the play's impact despite their limited attendance. The survey was designed in part to gauge the students' major class difficulties and gains in their own words, but mainly to profile their experience of the tragedy both as students and persons and examine *in retrospect* their reception of *Antigone*. Three major points should be advanced upon examination of their charted feedback:

- (1) Despite the language/vocabulary barrier that ranked as their top major difficulty, students reading the play achieved high rates of first-level recognition, connecting to the characters, understanding their choices, and applying this understanding to their own lives (Figure 12.1). They were able to grasp the meaning of the moral principles that govern the

	Honor	Loyalty	Power	Self-will	Prudence	Lamentation	Mistrust
Antigone	3.70	3.83	3.27	2.90	1.83	1.53	1.00
Ismene	1.37	1.43	1.03	1.07	1.20	1.10	2.20
Creon	0.97	1.23	1.73	1.97	0.67	0.70	1.27
Haemon	1.47	1.63	1.90	1.73	0.93	0.63	1.20
Eurydice	0.90	1.10	1.10	0.83	0.47	0.63	0.63
Polynices	0.93	0.67	1.47	0.83	0.93	0.53	0.80
Eteocles	0.90	0.80	1.40	0.97	0.63	0.63	0.50
Oedipus	2.93	2.73	3.63	2.53	1.93	1.23	1.77

	Honor	Loyalty	Power	Self-will	Prudence	Lamentation	Mistrust	Recognition
Antigone	0.17	0.13	0.07	0.13	0.07	0.10	0.03	0.03
Ismene	0.07	0.07	0.10	0.03	0.03	0.10	0.10	0.03
Creon	0.03	0.07	0.10	0.13	0.03	0.03	0.10	0.07
Haemon	0.07	0.10	0.03	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.10	0.00
Eurydice	0.00	0.07	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.10	0.03
Polynices	0.00	0.03	0.10	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.10	0.13
Eteocles	0.00	0.03	0.07	0.03	0.07	0.03	0.10	0.10
Oedipus	0.10	0.17	0.17	0.10	0.13	0.07	0.03	0.13

Figure 12.1 Student categorization of character traits (left) and how those traits relate to each character's downfall (right).

characters' actions, appreciate the aesthetic qualities of the tragedy, and experience its mimetic effect, and in their own words, they could remember (though not always accurately describe) the dramatic moment(s) in the play that moved them the most. Some of them specified that if no particular "scene" comes to them, they would still remember "morals," "values," and "principles," such as "do what is right even if other people think it's not" or "sacrifice for the people we love," and how these values "enlarge my knowledge" and "may help me in my life" and be "useful for our life and way of thinking."

When asked about the in-class reading process, about 30 percent experienced gratitude (Pavel's Level 3 of recognition of a literary art work) for being seduced by the good (spiritual truth) that the play carries within. This means that 12 out of 30 surveyed students reached recognition level 3 and would constantly reflect on what they have witnessed and was captured in the words of Antigone and Tiresias as destiny ("the curse of our blood") vs. duty and liberty of action ("it follows from necessity from what [what one has] done"). Still, misrecognition of the play's meaning scored nearly as much, with 13 percent of surveyed students scoring both options as their top choice, and twice as many scoring them as their second or third choice.

Still, it is important to consider students' achievement of all three levels of recognition of the play as a movement. Students' responses show that they have progressed in their perception of the exemplarity of the characters' moral actions and principles, but the higher the allegorical exemplarity and aesthetic qualities as the plot progresses and the reading advances, the fewer the students who could keep up with the ascending aesthetic and spiritual meaning of the play, at parallel dropping and rising rates of about 50 percent. If an explanation could be ventured, it matters to point out that 38 percent reported that they read it all (including 7 percent who read it more than once and 10 percent who read it and reread parts of it) as opposed to 51 percent of the surveyed students who only read small parts of it (including 10 percent who only read the class excerpts). The class chronological jumps (flashbacks and flash-forwards) may have enlarged their vision of the characters and the dramatic background that shaped the choices they had to face in the last part of the trilogy, but they cannot replace the holistic vision of *Antigone's* dramatic action: It is the experience of plenitude that comes from reading the

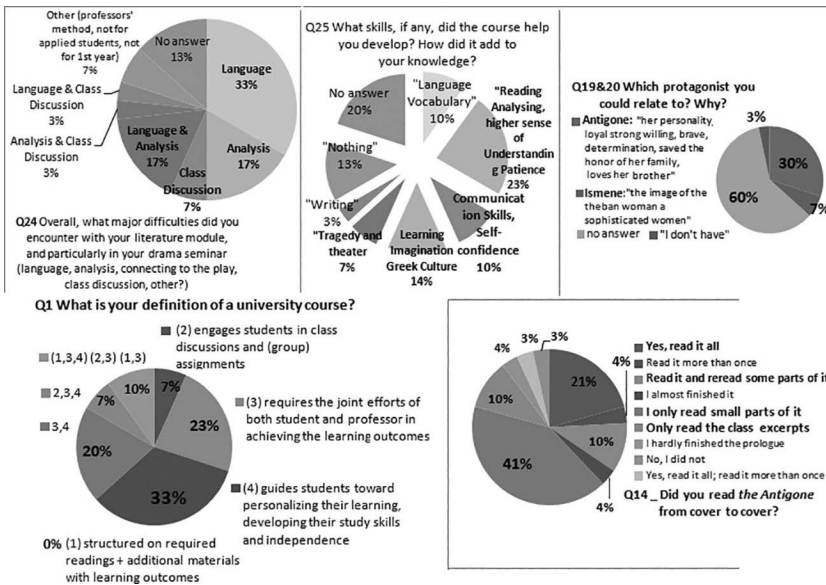


Figure 12.2 Student reflection on class efficacy and value.

entire play that seduces us into reflecting on what we witnessed from start to finish. At this point the reader is referred back to chart Q1 (Figure 12.2). An astonishing discovery needs to be made in passing: when asked about their idea of a university course, even at their senior year, only 10 percent of the 30 surveyed students ticked the first option (as a joint answer): "structured on required readings" (let alone, additional reading materials).

- (2) Students were able to connect to the characters as their average scoring of their traits shows (see Figure 12.1) particularly with Antigone, Ismene, Creon and Oedipus: scoring is to be read horizontally, line by line, to witness how on average students rated characters per trait and which traits every character scored high on. Even though a great many of them left the second table without an answer, on average, they still pinned down the traits that brought the characters' downfall particularly with Antigone, Creon and Haemon. When asked which character they could relate to most, their first choice was Antigone, for her "determination" to "save the honor of her family" and for her "brave[ry]", and "strong", "loyal" personality. However, the average scoring is on a scale of 1–8 (1=low; 8=high) for Q17, and of 0–1 (0=nothing or no answer; 1= the quality that caused the character's tragic fall) for Q18. The scores in both tables, particularly in Q17, remain quite low. This means that even though the students' average scoring identified the characteristic qualities of the characters, they still did not rate them well enough on these qualities nor did they manage to consistently or accurately identify their tragic trait.

- (3) In contrast with their drama class of SI (analyzing separate dramatic excerpts pertaining to various theatre traditions and subgenres using drama concepts), students made positive reviews of a class based on studying a whole play, which in my class came with the benefit of a comparative approach that places *Antigone* as part of a trilogy, allowing them to discover the dramatic action of three plays instead of one. In terms of skill and knowledge, students understand the benefit of the course, and their positive appreciation of what they gained reflects that best: “extend my imagination” and “enrichis [sic.] my culture” through “tragedy theater” or “[learn] how to read ... the untelled things” and “face problems,” but they also understand that the literariness of the subject has been challenging, and so the problem remains that their attitude toward their studies is shaped by the logic of minimum effort and pursuit of immediate results.

Students recognize the virtue of “learning and imagination” in enlarging their vision and enriching their cultural perspective, which, they admit, has helped them build up “their communication skills,” their “patience,” and their “self-confidence,” by developing the capacity for a “higher sense of understanding.” However, they still hold on to the logic that “as student[s] of Applied English ... that can be a source of our fail.” Like the image of a heartbeat, the chart shows that hope is alive in the very few students who said yes to the suggestion of a drama class in the 2nd and 3rd year of the program: “I believe it is a very useful as a subject,” or better yet, “I can never get enough of drama classes.” This recalls Pavel’s pertinent notion of “the axiological paradox” to comprehend students’ paradoxical attitude toward what they have come to recognize as undeniably “useful for our life and way of thinking” but would still reject as “not necessary for us as Business English students”: “I have called axiological paradox the incomprehensible divorce between the ideal force of the moral norm,” represented here as the moral values and spiritual truth of the play, “and the notorious weakness of its reign,” represented here as the impact of the play (Pavel 2003, 11). It is equally pertinent to recall Pavel’s point that recognition levels 1 and 2 of a literary artwork do not require us to like or adhere to what we recognize (Pavel 2005a): students do not necessarily need to like what they study to understand it, but perhaps they can come to like what they understand; it is gratitude (level 3) that pushes us to seek further the true meaning of a literary artwork, as the juxtaposed student quotes reveal.

It is, however, remarkable that students should remember the dramatic choices and moments of *Antigone*, rate its larger cast of characters, and be able to share the principles they inferred from it, after nearly two years of the course, considering how sporadic their attendance was and how little they read of the play. Perhaps the change sought lies somewhere in there: the connection they made to the play as they listened to it in class impacted them enough for its moral values to be imprinted on them. One of the students even suggested to “act [enact] the extract” when the survey invited them to share their preferences/suggestions for the drama class.

These students are human minds whose education should prepare them to be informed citizens (Booth 1963) in a country trying to rebuild itself

toward a democracy. It is with such values as empathy and reflection through distanciation that they can learn to mentally witness what goes on around them and consider the views of others, so as to develop their own informed opinions and decide for themselves where to position themselves and how to act in accordance with what they have come to understand as their duty. Ben-Achour (2017) points out that the Tunisian Revolution started as a movement of protests that culminated in « faire tomber des têtes » [making heads fall] (21). It may have achieved political liberty at the expense of social justice (161–166), but « elle introduit une dynamique nouvelle » [it has initiated a new dynamic] (17): a constant revolutionary state that recalls the necessity to have “des têtes à penser” [thinking heads] (21), for it would be unrealistic to assume that, however urgent, social justice can be immediately obtained. I believe it is the responsibility of *all*, particularly the country’s youth, to see this dynamic through so that the three concepts of liberty, dignity and justice that define the Revolution could materialize in Post-Revolution Tunisia, and this responsibility of all would require, in Mestiri’s (2015) words, “breaking with such traditional oppositions as people versus elite” (69). What the country needs in terms of citizen investment, Mestiri argues, is embodied in the stance of being “engaged between good and right.” Mestiri exemplifies this sort of engagement in the figure of a spectator in retreat with an independent mind that knows how to position itself without having to take sides; a spectator with a sense of judgment animated by empathy and the willingness to understand and gauge the righteousness of the action that goes on around them and which they gather and witness as their own (57–61).

The ethical change that I hoped to infuse into my literary course on Western drama from this perspective is that of a learning space with an imaginative retreat that brings into play this dynamic of values and steers away from the indifference of a state of forsakenness. The cornerstone of this dynamic is the skill of listening, necessary in making the leap toward the imaginative world of a classic tragedy where one pair of eyes (the student’s I and the character’s I) experiences recognition (on multiple levels and to varying degrees) of the duty to personalize one’s learning as a form of “travail sur soi” (work on oneself) (Pavel 2006d) by developing the human capacity to listen/see from within, that is, with the heart. In “De la sérénité,” Pavel (1996, 361) notes that “the very first requirements of an ethical life” is to “know oneself” and to learn “to see through people” for that is when the purpose of law becomes clear: not to maintain order, but rather virtue.

Notes

- 1 In reference to the uncontrollable process of protests that came about since the historical *déflagration* of January 14, 2011.
- 2 See Tunisian Sociologist, Riadh Zghal’s pertinent study, *Enseignement Supérieur en Tunisie* (Tunis: Sud Editions, 2016). The author examines the political decision of implementing the concept of “l’université pour tous” (university for the people) in Tunisia: “The uninterrupted choices by the Tunisian state have favored quantity without any guarantee of quality or fairness. The policy based on the principle that every high school graduate should have access to university has led to the multiplicity of higher education institutions. Except for some relatively old university

campuses, higher institutions have been established here and there in all the governorates without any guarantee of qualified instructors or of an economic structure that can receive and later on recruit student interns. The long-term effects of such ill-measured populist and dangerous choices have paved the way for a vicious circle: ... higher education without quality control, inflation of higher diploma holders and a dramatic increase of unemployment amongst them ... Confronted with international competition diplomas are little adequate to the needs of the market, and instead of favoring youth employability, they supply unemployment with holders of higher diplomas as frustrated as the families investing in them" (18–22).

- 3 In "La révolution et la justice sociale," Ben-Achour captures the background for the antagonistic complex among regions or social categories within the same region: "Such imbalances as between living standards, customs, mentalities, are not alien to the development of feelings of frustration and injustice. Between housing estates and popular neighborhoods in big cities, between coastal regions of the Sahel and regions of the North-west, of the Central-west, of the South ... the antagonism not only creates opposition between a society and the political system, but also between one part and another of a society" (2017, 162).
- 4 In 2019, English studies have been amended thus ending the Applied vs. Fundamental distinction. English majors now take a new program that fuses the key requirements of both programs: another political decision to close such *redundant* classifications as research-oriented vs. business-oriented in language and arts programs of popular universities.
- 5 In "La qualité et l'équité," Zghal points out the paradoxical conditions of Tunisian University: "The paradox lies in the fact that every country needs an erudite elite capable of functioning in a new globalized economy and responding to its demands. In parallel, every country needs to provide access to university learning to the less favored social categories. Serving both objectives by ensuring an elite for the country while attending to the principles of social fairness by offering equal opportunities for all is a hard balance to maintain. *The risk for universities, if the principle of higher education for all prevails, is to get bogged down into an uncontrollable degradation of the quality of learning* ... Those who lack the means to finance a good-quality education can be considered as wasted human capital, unless some exceptional opportunities come their way. In such conditions, speaking of fairness becomes less pertinent, for the contrary has taken place: *egalitarianism has eliminated opportunities that could have benefited the more talented*" (22–23).
- 6 Ben-Achour (2017, 10–11) questions the theoretical, analytical view that the Tunisian revolution is "the flame of straw fire burnt out as soon as ignited."
- 7 Unless otherwise noted, all translations and italics are my own.
- 8 Teiresias' words (*Antigone*, episode 5): "my companion and I, who share one pair of eyes on our journeys together – for the blind man goes where his leader tells him" (152). Teiresias' line echoes Jean-Michel Pottier's (2016, 60) notion of « lecteur-auditeur » (reader-listener): the blind foreseer, led by "my young acolyte, who sees for me, that I may see for others" (153). As the one sees for the other, it is the listener who leads the reading I. Whereas Teiresias' signs are (the voice of) nature, the reader-listener's are (the voice in) words. On the subject of loud reading and its effects, Pottier states: "The reader-listener is thus in command and goes as far as to transform the text" (60). He uses the example of blind Borges in a passage by Manguel. Listening to an artwork thus becomes a travel to a faraway wonderland; the un-seeing man, a lead reader-listener; the actual reader, a mere channeler: "Reading to this old blind man was for me a curious experience, for even when I felt, not without some effort, master of the tone and pace of reading, it was Borges the listener though, who was becoming the master of the text. I was the guide, but the landscape, the unfolding of the space belonged to the one who was being guided, for whom there was no other responsibility but to grasp the land seen from the windows. Borges [...] would stop me or beg me to continue;

- Borges would interrupt to make comments; Borges would let the words reach him. I remained invisible.”
- 9 See Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* on the mythic figure Teiresias: “condemned ... to live in the black night of blindness ... For his lost sight gave him the gift to see/ What things should come” (Book III 326-56, 6).
 - 10 The truth in Teiresias’ words “And *why* did I *forget* this, who *knew it well*?” echoes Socrates’ anamnesis.
 - 11 “Words, though heard, are lost unless understood within the heart. Some men there are who give consent to what they hear but do not understand: these men have the hearing alone. For the moment the heart fails to understand, the word falls upon the ears simply as the wind that blows, without stopping to tarry there ... The ears are the ... channel by which the voice can reach the heart, while the heart receives within the bosom the voice ... I am not going to speak of a dream, an idle tale, or lie, with which many another has regaled you, but rather shall I speak of what I saw.” (Chrétien de Troyes, quoted in Pavel 2016, 172).
 - 12 In “Vérité et resonance,” Pavel uses the personal noun, *raconteur* (2016d, 14), from the verb *raconter*; in “Truth & Resonance,” he uses a combination of “narrate” and “tell” (2016c, 174), hence my tale-composer for *raconteur*, combining poet/narrator and literature, oral/written. Note how the rapport with Fiction is described: in French, Pavel uses *converser*; in English, a pair of “speak and listen” that unlocks the meaning of conversing. Note the emphasis on listening as what gives meaning to talking; talking becomes a reflection of inner listening: tale-composers catch the depth of “non-factual,” “enchanting” truth with an acuity in marvelous agreement (1985, 90) with the voice of Lady Adventure.
 - 13 See Butcher’s translation (1971, 429–430) of *Poetics* for Aristotle’s definition of recognition.
 - 14 See endnote 8.
 - 15 *Comment écouter la littérature* 38.
 - 16 See more on distanciation and exemplarity in Pavel (2018, 2013, 1983).
 - 17 See more on the aesthetic effect of the mimetic illusion in Pavel (2003, 6).

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POST/COLONIAL THEATRE IN MADAGASCAR

Hybridity and Controversy in Jean-Luc Raharimanana's *Le Prophète et le Président*

Haddy Kreie

In 1989, up-and-coming Malagasy playwright Jean-Luc Raharimanana wrote an award-winning, biting satire of political and religious leaders who lead their people through lunacy and to destruction. A sharp critique of post/colonial power structures, the play was recognized internationally by Inter-African cultural initiatives, and in conjunction with Raharimanana's other poetry, it earned him a prize and scholarship from Radio France International. Despite widespread international support, within the borders of his home country, a combination of French and Malagasy authorities immediately censored the production of *Le Prophète et le Président*. Through a mixture of indigenous storytelling, allusions, and characters with influences of French philosophical style, representations of Western-influenced post/colonial authorities and identities, Raharimanana created a representation of hybrid post/coloniality that threatened the status quo in Madagascar from the perspective of Malagasy authorities and French diplomats. While the French ultimately welcomed the play within the borders of France, it has never been performed in Madagascar. The story of this play's development and censorship illuminates the complications of integrating Western-influenced theatre in non-Western communities; the hybridity that Raharimanana delivers asks theatre makers and audiences to question the West–rest binary and to think with deeper complexity on the post/colonial identities that emerge on the African continent.

Since gaining independence from Europe in the 1950s and 60s under the guidance of the UN Special Committee on Decolonization, many African nations have struggled to negotiate new cultural, institutional and national hybridities that emerged from their interactions with the European colonial powers. In the same span of time, throughout Africa, theatre and performance served as sites for exploring and contesting new national identities, and for intervening in dominant ideologies that had left the newly sovereign nations in various states of subjugation and subalternity. The work of Jean-Luc Raharimanana, a contemporary Malagasy¹ playwright, demonstrates a complex perspective on, and negotiation of, the formation of national identity in Madagascar prior to, during, and after colonization. Raharimanana's

plays intervene in the remnants of colonial atrocities and in contemporary forces of cultural imperial exports such as the Christianity and capitalism of Western Europe and the United States. The colliding representations of France and Madagascar and French and Malagasy performance practices in his work provide a space for young theatre makers, and prospective audiences, in Madagascar to potentially mediate the persistent material effects of colonialism by allowing student creators and spectators an opportunity to re-articulate notions of self and place in their post/colonial relationship. The complexities of hybridity within the play and the controversial political landscape in which Raharimanana developed the work serve as a case study for theatre makers and teachers who impart Western theatre practices on non-Western students and audiences. In its resistance to the West—rest binary, it challenges us to address the complexities within the characters and precarity of its political subjects. The broader political landscape that at once engendered and denied this critical voice reminds us of the power of theatre and storytelling to shape the culture and security of the subjects that it represents. Together, these elements demonstrate the high stakes of breaking down the West—rest binary and our responsibility as theatre artists to breathe life into those complexities.

Raharimanana's style of theatre presents a particularly nuanced response to the colonial enterprise, thus offering a rich and divergent opportunity for theatre makers and teachers to delve into and disrupt traditional frameworks for understanding and teaching post/colonial theatre and the post/colonial condition. As a post/colonial form,² Raharimanana's work deploys a simultaneous, multi-layered and self-reflexive framework of the residual colonial conditions that mark post/colonial societies as always already hybrid, "an inescapable consequence of a fully global(izing) modernity" (Bongie 1998, 13–14). The characters and form of *Le Prophète et le Président* draw on the inevitable multifacetedness of their subjects and of the relationships between the former colonies and former colonial powers beyond pure subjugation and resistance, in a self-reflexive way. Neither the former colonies nor the former colonial powers exist in their current state without some influence from the other. Through this post/colonial framework, the playtext explores a simultaneity of time and of multiple identities that incorporates a variety of strategies: it empowers the former colonies to speak back to the former colonial powers, recognizing the dialectical relationship between the two; it acknowledges the various modes of interaction through which opposition, interference, corroboration or alliances may emerge; it encompasses current trends of globalization, cultural and corporate imperialistic implications, and resistances to those trends by both the former colonies and the former colonial powers; and it blurs the binary between colonized and colonizer. Unlike much of Raharimanana's later work, *Le Prophète et le Président* follows a standard Western dramatic script format and very quickly recalls Sartrean style language, making it, at first glance, appear thoroughly accessible to non-Malagasy audiences and readers. However, for students who may study this playtext or attempt to produce it, *Le Prophète et le Président* actively works to intercede in the Malagasy national imaginary after independence by deploying and addressing post/colonial strategies or storytelling and staging. These themes facilitate processes of re-articulating

notions of the post/colonial self and place by: recognizing the continued colonizing forces and the resistances that persist in the hybrid subjects that emerged from the colonial period; identifying a less *otherizing* attitude and mindset than the nationalism of early *post-colonial* resistance movements that relied on the colonizer-colonized binary; emphasizing a transnational sense of nationhood – a nationhood decentered from the state and which encompasses the diaspora as well as those who live in both urban and rural, privileged and underprivileged areas of the nation; and locating the post/colonial subject in the present rather than demarcating *postcolonialism* as an historical period. Where the West–rest binary typically identifies African theatre as purely of ritual and storytelling, and African post-colonial identities as strictly anti-colonial, Raharimanana’s hybrid theatrical form and characters escape essentialist West–rest binaries and provide a deeper and more nuanced arsenal to emerging theatre makers in Madagascar.

Hybrid Theatrical Form

Jean-Luc Raharimanana emerged as a vibrant playwright in the 1980s. His biting political voice and unflinching imagery challenged theatrical themes and styles in Madagascar that had nurtured their deep colonial roots. The earliest contacts between the Malagasy and the Europeans who would colonize a vast majority of Africa occurred as early as the 1810s. For the next hundred years, colonial record keeping largely limited its scope to forms of performance imported by colonial voyagers, though ultimately the Malagasy managed to establish an indigenously sculptured hybrid form of the theatre that would prove to be an important political tool. Britain established a treaty with Madagascar in 1817 to prevent France from claiming new territory, and the first agents to the island included missionaries (Mutibwa 1974, 21–22). The British missionaries soon began introducing a tradition of “Western” style theatre, which they used as an educational component of their missions (Rubin 1994, 177). In 1895, the French, who had competed for decades with Britain to gain control of Madagascar, finally gained control of the island. Under the influence of the French, between 1897 and 1921 most known “theatre” continued to employ “Western” conventions and dramaturgy, adapting French stories and plays by simply relocating the action to a Malagasy setting. The resultant performances then played for primarily French audiences. Beginning in 1921, a period known as *Mitady ny Very* (Search for Identity) emerged, through which the Malagasy turned against Western traditions. The few Malagasy performance traditions that have persisted and gained recognition by anthropologists and scholars of literature and theatre include forms of poetry (*hainteny*), oratory (*kabary*), folk-tale (*añgano*), and song (*hiragasy*). These forms tend to invoke themes of love, use circular patterns of logic, and tell pedagogical stories of morality and culture (Gérard 1973, 363).

Western style dramaturgy re-emerged, however, in the 1950s and since then the Malagasy have incorporated both French and Malagasy traditions in their theatre (Gérard and Graham-White 1973, 363). The Malagasy have adopted a dramatic form that emerges out of the Western tradition, and which speaks directly to the issues of Malagasy-European contact (although most of these dramatic texts were never published). In the 20 years after decolonization

(1961–1981), only two known plays reached publication (Bourgeacq and Ramarosoa 2002, xvii–xix). Other literature of the period closely followed the style of the French, except for one known poet, L.-X.M., whose “rhythm and fervor share in the spirit of Négritude” (xix). But a strong, very different dramatic potential emerged in the 1980s. Jacques Bourgeacq, a scholar of Malagasy culture and literature, describes what francophone scholar Jacques Chevrier coined as the “*pleurer-rire*” (weep-laugh) period:

[A] new generation of writers describes in a tragi-comic vein the disillusionment that followed the euphoria of independence for African countries. This new generation drew a dreary picture of the newly independent states of the 1960s, Madagascar among them: politics marked by corruption and abuse of power; socio-economic situations marked by acute misery and flagrant injustice; and the near impossibility of reconciling traditional values with the needs of emerging modern societies. (xx–xxi)

Jean-Luc Raharimanana emerged as a vital contributor to the *pleurer-rire* style in the 1980s and continues to push the limits of tragi-comic exploration and representation today. His plays deploy a vitriolic language and caustic imagery and, through the compelling style of his writing, Raharimanana engages with the current situation of the Malagasy nation and its post/colonial relationship to France. His plays tread a line between the past and the present; they invoke Malagasy notions of memory and ancestral communion; they search for the Malagasy subject in the rubble of colonial abjection; they confront the pain of devastation and the transmission of that pain through the generations; they struggle to define the Malagasy national identity in an ever-globalizing world.

Scrutinizing the existentialist themes of post/coloniality, with an urgency toward articulating the experience for Malagasy and international audiences, Raharimanana’s work demanded stylistic experimentation beyond that offered by indigenous historico-cultural methods of Malagasy poetry and song and the normative usages of formal and informal Malagasy language that value indirect and circular ways of approaching issues³ (Keenan 1973, 226). In stylistic and contextual ways, Raharimanana’s *Le Prophète et le Président* reflects Sartre’s dramatic texts, and Raharimanana himself has noted Sartre among his early influences. Like early Sartrean theatre such as *The Flies*, Raharimanana’s internationally acclaimed play centers on the impacts of tyranny and the urgency to revolutionize. Stylistically, *Le Prophète et le Président* deploys Sartrean choices such as “swift and at times vulgar” language that “[heightens] the appalling situation of the story” (Leavitt 1948, 103). The use of allegorical characters also bears resemblance to the Sartrean, absurdist genre of the “thesis play,” setting forth a theoretical exploration of the meta-issues of colonial-imported religion and government that have wrought havoc for Malagasy welfare. While Raharimanana does not go so far as to evade plot altogether, as Sartre does in *No Exit*, *Le Prophète et le Président* certainly focuses on the *situation* as the primary motivation of the characters, where the characters’ internal motivations become “the mirror of the actions and thoughts of each other” (ibid., 104). As the allegorical figures

recognize corruption in one another, they reflexively double down on their own mismanaged policies, exacerbating the disrepair and ambiguity of post/coloniality. While Sartre struggled with existentialist themes post World War I, Raharimanana draws concrete parallels to the national existential crisis of the post/colonial condition in Madagascar. These conditions lend themselves to stylistically similar needs.

Nevertheless, Raharimanana's hybrid style provides a particular and local perspective to what contemporary postcolonial theorists have seen as a universalization of the postcolonial condition. Recent critiques of postcolonial theory have claimed that earlier theorizations have

frame[ed] [postcolonial narratives] as instances of a singular universal process, and explain[ed] them with reference to an overarching master narrative. In so doing, it sabotag[ed] its capacity to render legible the trajectory of territorial dispossessions and acquisitions, resistances and counter insurgencies that might in reality be unique, particular and specific.

(Boyle and Kobayashi 2011, 409)

Sartre, an anticolonial advocate, has served as a significant Western influence to anticolonial artists and thinkers. While he fell into the occasional trap of universalizing the postcolonial experience and the colonial project, many of the tenets he set forth in his advocacy within colonized communities inspired thinking in the vein that Raharimanana works. While Sartre's pressure to universalize the postcolonial experience may sometimes be seen as metrocentric, it also helped to create a commonality that provided a platform to formerly colonized voices. Boyle and Kobayashi have put forth Sartre's theories of colonialism as a foundation for understanding the contingency and particularity of the variety of colonial dispossession around the world. Through the absurdity and the existential crisis that is apparent in *Le Prophète et le Président*, Sartre's philosophical influences are clear. And even if Sartre's political enterprises failed to offer colonial subjects a comprehensive strategy for change, his attitude and linguistic style shaped the way anticolonial artists like Raharimanana confronted the colonial experience, allowing them to use Western influences to reject Western policies. Where Sartre has claimed that the colonial system is "predicated on a Manichean dependency between colonizer and colonized that alienates both; [and] that colonialism creates conditions in which anti-colonial violence is inevitable and legitimate" (2011, 413), Raharimanana presents a particular hybridity within the play that experiments with post/colonial possibilities of transformation through localized forms of destruction. In a context where pre-contact artforms have focused on themes of love and religious celebration (Gérard and Graham-White 1973, 362) Raharimanana found inspiration in the direct and vitriolic style of Sartrean theatre. For Sartre, "newness enters the world, not only in conditions it did not choose, but precisely *because* of conditions it did not choose" (Boyle and Kobayashi 2011, 417). For Raharimanana, these conditions have resulted in a particular kind of post/colonial madness, the essences of the *pleure-rire* style.

*The Prophet and The President*⁴ opens on the cell of a madhouse. The Prophet establishes himself as a conniving prophet, preaching the manipulated

words of a foreign religion. During his first encounter with The President, The Prophet proclaims that he will achieve paradise through the only means possible: death and destruction. The Prophet establishes his claim to authority in the madhouse cell by welcoming the spectators and filling the space with his erratic presence. Soon, however, the guards—Rapaoly and Rapiera—introduce the primary source of conflict for the play by dragging on the haggard President who must share the cell with The Prophet. Thrown together in a space that truly belongs to neither, both The Prophet and The President presume to hold positions of power in the madhouse, including power over one another. Without delay, The Prophet and the President clash. The guards leap to restrain The Prophet and, in the scuffle, The President escapes their surveillance.

The second act opens on the medical storeroom in the cellar of the madhouse where The President has taken refuge. More than simply a hideout, the cellar storeroom provides The President a space to occupy as “Mr. Dictator General,” a space outside of the original realm of The Prophet. In the cellar storeroom, a skeleton hangs from the ceiling, foreshadowing the destruction to come and identifying The President’s new territory as a place imbued with history. The Prophet, supported by The Lunatics, “like a pack of wild animals,” (Raharimanana 1991, 76) barrels into the cellar to launch his initial siege against The President and the guards. One of the guards, Rapiera, gets caught in the struggle, and The Prophet’s momentum hurls him off stage. The Lunatics then proceed to mutilate and kill Rapiera (off stage). On stage, The President clamors to protect his “Nation”—himself and the space he has claimed in the cellar storeroom. He looks to the skeleton for advice, re-evaluates his identity in the image of the skeleton, and finally, sacrifices—in the name of Money—those who actually comprise the “Nation”: he kills Rapaoly, for example, by smashing a crate over his head. The President justifies his actions by saying that “more victims [equals] more international relief” (84). In an attempt to cover up his corrupt plan to get international aid, The President shifts the blame of Rapaoly’s death to the skeleton, slamming it to the floor.

Finally, reacting to this act of “killing death,” The Prophet and his Lunatics spill on stage and attack The President. The Prophet “triumphs” after The Lunatics kill The President. Only The Prophet and a single Madwoman cradling her baby (a doll mutilated in the siege) survive the struggle. In a final attempt to complete his mission, The Prophet tries to “reason” with The Madwoman by explaining that her place on earth offers nothing but suffering while death brings peace and happiness. The Madwoman, however, lamenting the death of her baby, chooses to forge a different future, attempting to reassemble the doll that represented her baby and promising to protect it with her love.

The two processes of destruction that the characters of The Prophet and The President pursue, especially because Malagasy figures have embodied and distorted the foreign ideologies, ultimately culminate in a form of destruction that neither anticipated and that demands a re-evaluation of the hybrid allegorical institutions that have overrun this madhouse. The particular space that The Prophet and The President occupy in Act II and the imagery that emerges in that space play significant roles in the way that the play shapes a post/colonial sense of self. The acts of destruction that occur

shift the constructs of identity that emerge from that space, particularly due to the implications of the tomb-like space of the cellar that shifts multiple times for the characters in the play: first, the space functions as a site of destroying the contemporary moment and contemporary people, then as a site of destroying history, and finally as a place to reconfigure the social strata of men and women in society—as a location of resisting oppressive forms of both indigenous, foreign, and hybrid structures of power. Finally, after disrupting historical meanings of the space that have created hierarchical structures of power, the tomb reclaims its function as a source of continuity for national belonging. Through the unanticipated conclusion of destroying and re-creating history, the play intervenes in the complicated system of reproducing colonial power structures and insists on persevering through an alternative mode – through the woman, who confronts both indigenous and colonial structures of power and who nevertheless acknowledges that those systems of power will never completely disappear. Through the figure of a (mad) woman, Raharimanana proposes a revolutionary method of thinking through what and who constitutes the nation – a possibility only made possible through widespread destruction but very particular to the Malagasy experience. This nuanced rendering of character and the allusions to imported Western political structures and indigenous cultural practices demands a nuanced exploration by Western theatre makers and teachers. While it invites Western theatre makers to engage with the text, it makes a strictly Western approach to production and critique difficult if not completely inadequate; yet it asks Malagasy theatre makers to incorporate Western inspired production techniques as well.

Raharimanana therefore turns to influences from Western theatrical form to engage politically with post/colonial condition of the Malagasy people. By reaching away from indigenous forms and styles that shy away from accusation and directness, Raharimanana finds the freedom to make a strong commentary on the ways in which colonial contact has traumatized a Malagasy identity. Nevertheless, *Le Prophète et le Président* does not reside purely in Western form. Through the depiction of the titular characters, the play presents hybrid notions of religious and governmental leaders and ultimately proposes a way through the colonial destruction by examining the role of women and the role of death in a post/colonial Malagasy nation that is both and neither the historical Madagascar and the French colonial sublimation. The Western influences on style, therefore, become starkly noticeable, especially in light of the fact that the play was never produced in Madagascar, having been shut down by the French Embassy. The conclusion will circle back to this controversy once I've discussed the implication of the play itself.

Religious and Political Collisions

Throughout the play's text, the allegorical representations of the post/colonial state and religion revel in destruction. Through these forces, Raharimanana recalls the fraught political negotiations of religious and governmental forms from the colonial period. From the earliest points of colonial contact, Malagasy leaders grappled with the importation of European religious and governmental institutions. In both instances, the Malagasy ultimately

settled on syncretic forms of worship and governance that, while in some instances providing a conciliatory façade, also lend themselves to crises of identity and drawn out ideological battles. Raharimanana's representation of these authorities, however, invites critique of both indigenous and colonial religion and government. Rather than posing as strictly anti-colonial or upholding a narrow vision of *Négritude*, Raharimanana develops a complex and self-reflexive post/colonial identity that is driven by notions of both/and and neither/nor.

By 1869, Queen Ranavalona II publicly proclaimed Protestantism and denounced the Malagasy practices of ancestor worship, destroying many physical representations of those idols around the island (Mutibwa 1974, 159). Along with other political leaders, Queen Ranavalona II recalled the associations between Christianity and the wealth and educational and technological advancements perpetuated by the missionaries and came to regard the acceptance of Christianity as a step toward solving the material and economic hardships of Madagascar. While Queen Ranavalona II's immediate predecessors (King Radama II from 1861–1863 and Queen Rasoherina 1863–1868) had negotiated ways of allowing both Christianity and ancestral Malagasy spirituality to co-exist, under her reign Protestant Christianity for the first time became the official position of the state (*ibid.*, 162–163).

Despite Ranavalona II's claim to Protestantism, both Catholic and Protestant proselytizing continued around the island. And even though she ordered the destruction of hundreds of Malagasy idols, Ranavalona II failed at completely eradicating indigenous Malagasy belief systems. In the following years, indigenous practices of Malagasy ancestor worship became increasingly intertwined with the various denominations of Christianity that arrived from Europe. The similarity between this Malagasy *Andriamanitra* and the Christian God made it possible for the Malagasy to lend the name of their supreme being to that of the Christian God in Malagasy translations of the Bible (Allen 1995, 23). And so *Andriamanitra* became synonymous with the Christian God despite historical disparities. A similar situation occurred in regard to the Christian concept of the soul, which adopted the already established Malagasy concept of *fanahy* (Bloch 1971, 27).

Malagasy Christianity has also integrated a number of elements of indigenous ancestral worship without the same pretense of assimilation as concepts such as *Andriamanitra*. Malagasy Christians have “incorporated spirit possession, visions and dreams, and other manifestations of a sacred, mystical life into their testimonies of faith and conversion” (Allen 1995, 135), as well as witchcraft, astrology, and some aspects of the cult of the dead. “Most Merina consider these things as so obviously real and valuable that it is difficult for them to imagine anybody not believing in them” (Bloch 1971, 28). The Christianity that exists in Madagascar today reflects values inherent in both indigenous and “Western” religious practices. However: “It is not even a simple mixture of these two elements [“Western” and Malagasy religions]. It is something new created by the actors having both systems of value in mind” (*ibid.*, 33). The hybrid system of religion created by the Malagasy navigates multiple forces of control and demonstrates complicated negotiations of simultaneous perspectives that intersect in multiple ways around the island. Nevertheless, the hybrid religion present in Raharimanana's work

demonstrates the persistent instability and upheaval that continues to threaten the security of Malagasy identity and place in an ever-globalizing world.

After the Malagasy gained independence from France in 1961, the intersection of religion and politics continued to be a point of contention between the state and the people. State leaders used religion as a rhetorical tool to influence policies and establish credibility in the eyes of the nation's subjects. Instead of exacerbating the tensions between "Christian" practices and "indigenous" practices, however, politicians began to associate the various hybrid forms of Christianity that emerged around the island with specific political parties or policies. For example, Didier Ratsiraka⁵ established the Second Republic of Madagascar after independence and ruled for nearly 20 years. During that time, he used religion to maintain power and any religious leaders who attacked his policies were "ambushed, some assassinated" (Cole and Middleton 2001, 98). After serving only five or six years of what would amount to his nearly 20-year presidency, "the years 1981 and 1982 were marked by riots, mutinies, and protests in all corners of the island. In part as a response to misery, violent factions began menacing the public peace from left and right ..." and the state's "dependence on terror to retain ostensible legitimacy" grew more and more apparent (ibid., 96). These are the events that directly precede Raharimanana's development of *Le Prophète et le Président*, and the destruction we see carried out by those characters easily harks back to this political climate.

In the first two scenes, the play establishes that The Prophet represents the foreign influence of a Christianity imposed upon the Malagasy which has nearly overridden any indigenous religion. The Prophet immediately identifies himself as an appendage of European Christianity when he asserts his loyalty to the "Way of the Cross," and associates himself with Catholicism by proclaiming: "I won't even be excommunicated by our dear Pope" (Raharimanana 1991, 55, 56). As the first act continues, however, it also reveals complicated intersections between his newfound Christianity and indigenous ancestral practices. The Prophet recites an incantation that derives from traditional Malagasy religion: "(*He takes some pebbles from his pocket, spits on them, then places them about the stage.*) Saint Saint are thou Radada, red cock, night bird's child ... I give, I give not, monster half-human half-animal ... (*He kisses the ground several times*)" (65).⁶ According to the footnote provided by Raharimanana in the French translation of the play: "The *Sikidy* is a practice of divination and incantation that consists of interpreting the position of pebbles or grains in geometric figures. 'Masina ianao Radada' [Holy are you Father] is the formula for consecrating the seeds, the latter incantation comes from the imagination of The Prophet."⁷ (Raharimanana 2007, 30). The continuous references to Christianity, however, quickly overpower this single direct reference to indigenous religious practices. Nevertheless, the brief reference to a Malagasy religious ritual in the midst of Christian rhetoric indicates a hybrid system of religion that both Malagasy and French categorize as simply Christianity. As a hybrid system, however, Malagasy Christianity resists strict laws handed down through either indigenous or European traditions. As a new religion, The Prophet's power challenges constructions of each religion's identity and the validity of syncretic Christianity within broader Malagasy culture.

These early scenes also establish that the guards view The Prophet's religious occupation as "loony," or dangerous. The guards repeatedly express their fear and distrust of The Prophet as well as their general disinterest in his project. Initially, The Prophet's rhetoric alone incurs discomfort among the guards. After his first outburst debating the pros and cons of achieving paradise—"a life without vices, misfortunes, shrieks, and sufferings," but where "greedy lips, firm breasts, slithering hips, furtive flesh, burning crotch, love-sweat, [are] all phfff! Out the window,"—the guards administer his first sedative (Raharimanana 1991, 58). Later, when The Prophet violently attacks The President, the guards contemplate subduing him again. Hesitant after The Prophet's display of violence, they nevertheless choose to administer another sedative despite the fact that by "dop[ing] him [they're] playing with fire" (67). By sedating him, Rapaoly and Rapiera hope that he will sleep off the "loony" business of proselytizing and everything will go back to "normal" (67). Through their actions, Rapaoly and Rapiera diagnose The Prophet's ineffectual attempt at wielding the power of religion as unwanted and unwarranted. By hoping that everything will soon return to "normal" the guards reject The Prophet's erratic behavior, but it is unclear which elements of his religion they find disconcerting. Having identified him specifically and primarily with Christianity, the text suggests that the guards fear the embodiment of foreign influence in The Prophet, but the integration of the indigenous Malagasy incantation complicates that fear. The Prophet's hybrid religion, neither and both like and unlike two forms of religion familiar to the guards, threatens them. When the guards identify The Prophet as an erratic, violent, uncontrollable, lunatic, they also identify Malagasy Christianity with those same characteristics. As a result, the play illustrates the menace and threat inherent in the hybrid form of religion that threatens indigenous and foreign systems of power and oppression. This ambivalence in the text thrusts the choosing back onto the prospective audiences. As the nation and the people continue to negotiate residual and renewed foreign imports, the play suggests that the institutional authorities may not have the best interests of the population in mind as they define and articulate the composition of globalized forms of religion.

Through the process of re-locating the destructive forces of power learned through the colonial process, the play illustrates how Malagasy articulations of power have incorporated the values and hierarchies of the former colonizers and continue to enforce and encode those values and structures in the Malagasy imaginary. When a member of the Malagasy nation leads his community to destruction by way of indoctrinating the people with foreign values, the play complicates the post-colonial resistances that emerged in early anti-colonial rhetoric. Placing the representation of those colonial power systems into the bodies of the Malagasy, thus blurring the lines between colonial and indigenous belief systems and colonizer—colonized binaries, allows the play to simultaneously subvert oppressive forms of colonial and indigenous systems of power. Through this chaos of this hybridity Raharimanana turns back to deeper local roots that nevertheless have been corrupted by desires for power.

Indigenous Malagasy ritual practices are also fraught with power struggles in the everyday lives of the Malagasy. Malagasy struggle against the

will of the ancestors for control of their material lives. Under circumstances of political turmoil, where governmental powers seem to play with the lives of the people, we can examine the indigenous practice of *famadihana* as a portal into the ways that the Malagasy wrestle control from ancestors, since the play evokes similar themes of manipulating the power of the dead. By positioning two acts of destruction against one another—the destruction of the people and the destruction of local history—the play asks the spectators to maintain a healthy cynicism toward colonial influences and also toward indigenous practices with long histories of abused power that may be further corrupted by new syncretic forms.

As the play nears its end, The Lunatics, The President, Rapaoly and Rapiera, and the skeleton have all met their destruction. Allegorically, the system of independent yet corrupt government perished at the hands of the people; the guards and the skeleton, representing history, the ancestors, and death, perished at the hands of hybrid religion and government; The Lunatics, representing the people, perished at their own hands, having fulfilled the prophecy of the corrupt Malagasy Christian prophet. The Prophet flees. Yet life remains: The Madwoman alone occupies the tomb in the final scene of the play. By destroying the skeleton and thus a multitude of other forces, the play depends on The Madwoman to reconstitute the space and re-define the nation.

The Madwoman stands among the dead bodies littered about the tomb after The Lunatics have carried out the final destruction. Significantly, as the only female-identified character in the play, The Madwoman's actions pose interesting propositions for coping with the menacing powers of hybrid religion, hybrid government, and their collision. The imagery of The Madwoman easily recalls the indigenous Malagasy practice of the *famadihana*, the ritual "turning of the ancestral bones." This reference to indigenous cultural practice complicates the political message that The Madwoman carries. Her perseverance results from a series of resistant decisions that subvert oppressive systems perpetuated by *both* foreign and indigenous value structures. In his research on the *famadihana* and on circumcision rituals among the Merina, for example, Maurice Bloch identifies women as a divisive force in Malagasy society. Through The Madwoman, Raharimanana's text resists the social structures of gender that Bloch identifies among the Merina: The Madwoman, resists indigenous religious rituals that subjugate women while the broader implications of her actions within the text also deflect foreign religion and forms of government that suppress women and that eradicate indigenous histories. Through her acts of subversion, the play proposes a reconstruction of national identity that re-defines roles of men and women, re-locates the power of ancestral relations by reclaiming the space of the ancestors, and resists oppressive intersections between religion and the state.

In Bloch's examination of Merina society, he distinctly analyzes the inequalities engendered by indigenous religious rituals:

Among the Merina, individual lines of filiation are often represented as being in opposition to the undivided, undifferentiated descent of the deme as a whole. The stress on individuating divisive lines is often represented in Madagascar as characteristic of women as mothers, as

opposed to fathers, who are represented as being more concerned with the common good. Similarly, as wives, women are often associated with division in that their tie to their husband leads to division within the sibling group of their partner. This view of women as dividers of the deme is expressed in ritual where the individual house stands for the domestic group isolated from, and in opposition to, the undivided deme. In such rituals the house is represented as women's territory, as the place of individual and individuating birth and death.

(Bloch and Parry 1982, 2014)

Through this analysis of filial ties and the functions of houses versus tombs, Bloch and Parry identify a hierarchical social structure within which women occupy a disparaged and devalued position. Nevertheless, they identify a source of power in women that the rituals of the *famadihana* and circumcision, according to Bloch and Parry, seek to squelch. These two rituals specifically function to overcome the antagonistic and schismatic power of women in the community. For example, in their analysis of the procession to the tomb before the *famadihana*, they describe how the men violently "drive" the women like pack horses as they, reluctantly, carry the bodies of the dead (216). But they also illustrates that even in daily life, the women must atone for their divisive nature. He identifies mourning as the duty of Merina women and as a process of repenting their divisive actions. According to Bloch and Parry:

For the Merina, the outward manifestation of sorrow is mourning. Mourning consists in an attack on oneself. This takes a variety of forms ranging from expression on the part of the mourners wanting to die, to attempts at mild self-mutilation. Mourning consists in voluntarily making oneself look unattractive. Women mourners do not plait their hair but leave it tousled, they wear old clothes, they sit on dung heaps to receive visits of condolence. Mourning is therefore self-punishment implying that the death is to a certain extent the mourner's fault for which a woman atones by these self-deprecating practices.

(Block and Parry 1982, 214–215).

His description of women's mourning suggests that women have consented to their role of dividing the deme and, through mourning, demonstrate their regrets for such actions. Therefore, mourning constitutes not only sorrow for loss, but also atonement for dividing the community and for dividing the living from the eternal dead ancestors. Images of The Madwoman in *The Prophet* and *The President*, which at first seem to uphold this analysis, ultimately subvert the very systems of power from which Bloch and Parry draw that analysis. The Madwoman's presence in the play works against Bloch and Parry's analysis of the spaces that women occupy and against his description of the function of mourning.

The Madwoman finally appears on stage in the second to last scene of the play, just after The President kills Death, when The Prophet and The Lunatics spill onstage. As The Prophet cradles the dead skeleton and The Lunatics charge The President, The Madwoman stands off to one side cradling a

doll. "Quiet! you'll wake my baby," she yells at The Lunatics who rage about the stage in pursuit of The President (Raharimanana 1991, 86). From this initial moment, Bloch's analysis begins to resonate as The Madwoman appears to choose to connect only with her baby and not with her cohort of Lunatics. But almost immediately destruction takes its grip. The President, trying to escape The Lunatics, collides with The Madwoman, knocking the doll out of her arms. In mass confusion and chaos, The Lunatics trample the doll as they finally corner The President. Absolving The Lunatics of any blame, however, The Madwoman violently accuses The President of killing – in fact cannibalizing – her baby: "Oh, my tiny child, he's dead. (*She holds up the doll, which now has only one leg.*) He ate my baby's leg. (*She rushes at The President.*) Child-snatcher! Ogre!" (87). In her anger, she lunges at The President who topples from his position of relative safety, atop a stack of medicine crates. The Lunatics immediately descend upon him, killing him. Through this act, The Madwoman shifts the divisive blame away from herself and onto the institution of a hybrid government. Thereafter, The Madwoman plays a critical role in The Lunatics' uprising against The President as a direct result of her filial connection.

After killing The President, The Lunatics carry out their own destruction, gulping down bottles of acid they have found among the "medicine." One-by-one, the dead bodies litter the stage. Only The Prophet and The Madwoman, cradling her dead baby, remain alive. As The Prophet rejoices in the mass death, The Madwoman laments the death of her baby. Cradling the mutilated doll, "*wander[ing] around the stage, stepping over bodies,*" (89), she invokes the image that Bloch describes of the sullied, unattractive, female mourner. Finally, The Prophet grabs her and attempts to drag her off with him – off stage, to death, to "finality" (83). But as she stumbles through the graveyard of bodies she trips over the doll's severed leg, which invigorates her sense of resistance. Once again recalling her baby, she breaks free from The Prophet's grasp. Struggling to reattach the severed appendage, she vows to protect her baby: "Oh, my darling baby. You're alive, aren't you? You're alive! (*She bumps into a body.*) No! Don't look. The world is full of bad men, full of suffering, but I love you, I love you. My love will protect you" (91). Again, she invokes the power of her filial ties to the baby while her cohort of Lunatics has perished around her and The Prophet looms, threateningly.

In contrast to the images in Bloch and Parry's analysis, Raharimanana's play positions The Madwoman as a force for unity between the living and the dead and among the community. Read within the allegorical function of the play, the baby signifies more than just filial bonds—it represents the future of the nation, the next generation. Amidst The Prophet's riot, The Madwoman resists The Lunatics' erratic behavior as they spill on stage and wage an attack on The President in a desperate attempt to squelch his otherwise unrestrained and destructive power. While the image of a single woman on stage mourning her only child may read as an act of individualism, by cradling and protecting her doll she attempts to protect the future from imminent destruction. Once they have trampled her baby and she wanders among the multitude of bodies mourning her loss, she mourns more than just the filial loss of a mother and child; she mourns for the next generation. In her final choice to reassemble her dead baby rather than follow The Prophet into death, she

resists the force of foreign, destructive religions, and again turns her eyes to the future as she struggles to reattach the severed limb. Rather than acting as a force of division, she acts for continuity, a project that enables cohesion and unity rather than idly allowing the nation to end abruptly with the destruction of an entire history.

The Madwoman further complicates the perception of unity and division by occupying the cellar storeroom. Through the interactions between The Prophet and The President and the skeleton, the storeroom has served to function in multiple ways regarding death; most prominently here it has functioned as a kind of tomb where history, the ancestors, and people die. The Madwoman's occupation of the storeroom "tomb" in the final scene challenges Bloch's analysis of the places that women occupy. The fact that she alone occupies the space of the tomb at the end of the play, along with the baby she attempts to resuscitate, subverts the oppressive power structures created by indigenous religious rituals that disallow women from entering the tombs. According to Bloch and Parry, men and women play very distinct roles during the ritual of the *famadihana*:

What is being acted out in the *famadihana* is that blessing in unity is achieved through victory over individuals, women, and death itself (in its polluting and sad aspects) so that these negative elements can be replaced by something else: the life giving entry into the tomb. This is achieved by breaking through, vanquishing this world of women, of sorrow, of death and division.

The different role of men and women in the *famadihana* shows well how this victory is dramatised. It is only men who enter the tomb, who stand on it, and speak from it on behalf of the community.

(Bloch and Parry 1982, 217–218)

In The Madwoman's scene, she in some ways represents the individual and certainly represents women. When she breaks into the space with her fellow Lunatics, she brings with her individuality, woman-ness, and sorrow, but she brings them into a space already transformed by the earlier projects of The Prophet and The President—a space that can no longer boast in and of itself to create unity between the living and the dead, but rather has become a place vanquished of both community and history. According to Bloch, only men enter the tomb; but by occupying the space with her baby after The President and The Lunatics have died, after history, the ancestors and death have died, and after The Prophet has gone, she establishes the tomb, once again, as a place that cultivates relationships between generations. At the same time, however, she relocates the source of that unity in her own body and in her bond with her child. In this sense her filial connection once again illustrates a bond that defies the individuating structures of Bloch's analysis. In this way, through The Madwoman, Raharimanana proposes Sartrean, post/colonial newness, a pathway that "enters the world, not only in conditions it did not choose, but precisely *because* of conditions it did not choose" (Boyle and Kobayashi 2011, 417). Moreover, this transformation opens a space wherein spectators can reimagine the post/colonial sense of self in the present and the future rather than demarcating it as purely historical. By re-locating the idea

of national unity in the body of the Madwoman, in the space of the tomb, Raharimanana decenters the force of nationhood, making it accessible to those who live in both urban and rural, privileged and underprivileged areas of the nation.

In the end, by resisting The Prophet's final plea, The Madwoman also deflects the patriarchal system of values of the hybrid forms of religion and government in the play. In his final attempt to take her with him, The Prophet outlines those oppressive structures:

THE PROPHET Bitch! What hope do you think there is for you in loving life? You'll be subject to the power of men in life. You'll be subject to the power of the State and tyrants, and dictators. You'll be a slave to your stomach, to your womb. Your fate will be whatever a God throws your way. You'll give birth in pain and your man will sweat his life away. You'll be subject to unyielding standards of Society. You won't be living in life. You'll give in. (*For a moment they stand, motionless.*) Come! Come with me into the kingdom of Death. There you can truly live. Live, because there is neither God, nor law, nor master, nor tyrant, nor need, nor necessity. Come! (*They stare at each other. The Prophet holds out his hand. The Madwoman approaches him. She steps on the lost leg of the doll. Then she realizes what it is.*)

(Raharimanana 1991, 90)

In this moment, The Prophet names all of the gender inequalities and suffering she will face under the power structures of the State and of Society, and also links these inequalities with Christianity and with foreign sources of power which have helped to destroy Malagasy history. By resisting The Prophet in favor of the future, The Madwoman begs the audience to redefine what constitutes the new national identity and to make intentional and conscious choices regarding the evolving post/colonial condition. By expelling The Prophet shortly after this last speech, she expels all of these negative gender inequalities and replaces them with an ideology of inclusion and empowerment: "love" (Raharimanana 1991, 91). She has chosen the future of her baby over the forces of both The Prophet and The President. She expels both the foreign ideology of The Prophet that brought with him patriarchal Christian values and the corrupt power of The President who succumbed to foreign values of monetary wealth. By expelling The Prophet from the tomb, she restores it as a place where the process of identity construction can begin again.

While The Madwoman expresses love as a way to protect the future, she, and the play, leave no impression that the new beginnings will be free from foreign influence. In fact, as The Prophet leaves he vows to return (*ibid.*, 91), continuing to haunt the process of recovery. And even if the mutilated baby manages to survive, it carries with it the damages conceived in the battles between religion and the State, specifically between hybrid configurations of religion and state. The new generation that will emerge will represent a new hybrid subject whose identity remains uncertain. Whatever process of

identity construction occurs thereafter will forever negotiate the implications of the violent history remembered by those who experienced the struggle and by their descendants, perhaps resisting the menacing activity of the hybridity that has gone before it.

Interestingly, the final image of the play (The Madwoman cradling her mutilated baby) poses a series of questions concerning the future. How will the future generations remember the struggle that nearly decimated their future? How will those who survived not only remember the battle, but work to rebuild a society? In a place where elements of indigenous history and foreign history have collided, and where various elements have each persevered or disintegrated, what new configurations of cultural and political identity emerge? Raharimanana's adept negotiations of the hybrid state of post/coloniality demand that theatre makers and audiences of this play raise these question throughout the process and long afterward.

Conclusion

When Raharimanana first developed this piece in 1989, it was set to play at the Alliance Française in Antananarivo, the capital of Madagascar. Authorities quickly saw the mockery that Raharimanana made of the continued French efforts to export particular forms of democracy to African nations and took measures to censor the production and the playwright. Raharimanana himself has admitted that The President's words resemble those of French president François Mitterrand, painting imported politics and religion as unstable and damaging, especially when passed into the hands of leaders to whom those values are not autochthonous. During the production process, the troupe, led by Malagasy director Christiane Ramantsoa, suffered pressure from Malagasy authorities regarding the content of the play. A troupe of 30 was reduced to 5 as members retreated from the political censure. Eventually, the troupe lost their invitation to L'Alliance Française and moved to the Albert-Camus Cultural Center. L'Alliance Française aims to promote French language and culture throughout the world and is part of a network of over 850 centers worldwide. The ACCC (now known as L'Institut Français) however, is primarily an arts organization that partners with local groups to support diverse arts to the community and makes directed efforts to support Malagasy artists. While both are French based organizations established abroad, the ACCC had more freedom at the time to support Malagasy artists. Nevertheless, shortly after the production moved to the ACCC, the French Embassy interceded and canceled the production (Steinmetz 2018). Raharimanana's style and content choices challenged both the burgeoning independent government and the contemporaneous relationship with France, which continued to be a significant benefactor and ventriloquist for the government. Despite the promise of the ACCC to support local culture, the form and the content of the play resonated with French authorities as revolutionary and threatening in ways that other forms of Malagasy arts and culture were not. The hybrid form of the play and the representation of hybrid religion and politics as destructive threatened to incite the otherwise peaceful Malagasy population. Despite the censorship within Madagascar, it played widely internationally. It was produced in Benin, Togo, Senegal, Ivory Coast and France

in 1989, Radio France International broadcast a reading of the play in 1993, le Théâtre International de Langue Française (TILF) produced the play in Avignon in 1995, and Raharimanana re-mounted the play in Paris at the Théâtre des Déchargeurs in Paris in 2005. Furthermore, Ubu Repertory Theatre, a US theatre dedicated to presenting French-language plays both in English and in French published an English language version of the play in 1991. This international coverage is a testament to the power and impact of his work, and also a harrowing reminder of the power that the West continues to assert in its former colonies; former colonial powers demonstrate their patronage of African arts, while restricting their power within the former colonies. Raharimanana's powerful and caustic critique has reached production only where Malagasy audiences would be limited and therefore so would the impact of its controversial message. The play is no longer forbidden in Madagascar, but Jean-Luc told me in a personal communication that it has still never played on the island, mostly due to a lack of players. The mere history of its censorship provides one more critical prompt for potential players and audiences to consider identity and place in a post/colonial world.

Notes

- 1 *Malagasy* both refers to the indigenous populations that inhabit the island of Madagascar as well as identifying their language and other elements of their culture. Ethnically speaking, there are 18 primary tribes of Malagasy around the island, each with a unique dialect and culture, but for the most part the 18 tribes are able to communicate with one another. The official languages of Madagascar are *Malagasy Official*, which primarily consists of the *Merina* dialect, located in the high plateau region of Madagascar that surrounds the capital, Antananarivo, and French, which has been the primary language of the education system for much of the period after decolonization.
- 2 The field of "postcolonial studies" has conjured a variety of configurations for the title term. Each variant—postcolonial, post-colonial, and post/colonial—shifts the focus of the field but may continue to interact with the other variants. Many scholars, including Bill Ashcroft, depend upon the hyphen as an indispensable differential in methodology. According to Ashcroft, the hyphen materializes the "fact" of postcoloniality and clears space for the specificity of various colonial experiences and their respective postcolonial discourses (Ashcroft 2001). In other words, *postcolonialism* can refer to marginalized peoples that do not belong to nations that formerly existed as colonies but who have experienced systematic violence perpetrated against them by a group whose identity differs from their own. However, *post-colonialism* identifies a methodology of confronting colonial systems and neocolonial practice. *Post/colonial* suggests a simultaneous, multi-layered and self-reflexive definition that I find more congruent with the dynamic that Jean-Luc Raharimanana exploits in his plays
- 3 The Malagasy value a linguistic style of *manoloka ny teniny*, or "winding the words." This entails drawing circles around an idea, speaking indirectly and in roundabout ways, and using proverbs, metaphors and illustrative examples. This is formalized and demanded in the tradition of *kabary* or formal speech making, and it is preferred in everyday speech.
- 4 For the most part, I'm using an English translation of the play for this textual analysis. In reference to the text itself I will use the English title. When discussing the idea of the play and its impacts more broadly I switch to the French title.
- 5 Didier Ratsiraka was the second President of the independent Madagascar, rising to power in the fall out of an attempted coup in 1975. Through his changes to

the constitution after coming to power he established the Democratic Republic of Madagascar, which Allen refers to as the Second Socialist Republic of Madagascar. He served as the only President of that republic until 1991, when he was ousted. He again served as president under the Third Republic of Madagascar from 1996 until 2002.

- 6 In the French translation of the play, the language of the original script, Raharimanana leaves this incantation in Malagasy: "Mazimazi! Masina ianao Radada, akoholahimena, zanam-borondolo, omeko tsy omeko, lalamasinina, bibiolona, sakelimihoajoro." I would translate this as "Blessed are thou Respected Father, red rooster, child of the night owl, knowing machine, I give, I don't give, human-like animal, all-knowing" as opposed to the English translation of the play that I have access to, quoted above. The French translation that I have acquired was published 16 years after the English translation that I have. I have yet to determine which best resembles the original 1989 script, whether the English translation has taken liberties with the translation, or whether the author made changes for the 2007 publication, and if so, if those changes reflect the 2005 revival in Paris. Raharimanana, Jean-Luc. *Le Prophète et le Président*. (Paris: NDZÉ, 2007), 30.
- 7 "Le *Sikidy* est une pratique divinatoire et incantatoire qui consiste à interpréter la position de cailloux ou de graines sur des figures géométriques. 'Masina ianao Radada' est la formule de sacralisation des graines, les autres incantations sortent de l'imagination du Prophète."

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TOWARDS “RELEVANCE” AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL’S TOURING PRODUCTION OF SHAKESPEARE’S *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

Discovering the Operations of Imperial Rome, Cleopatra’s Power and the Meaning of a Crocodile

Sarah Roberts and Néka Da Costa

As director and designer, we were mandated to create a 90-minute version of *Antony and Cleopatra* for the National Children’s Theatre in Johannesburg which would tour to secondary schools throughout the country. We share some productive discoveries of that process in an action-based, practice-led approach to decolonization in arts education. The theatre-in-education production had the task of making Shakespeare’s text accessible, intelligible and relevant for a constituency of Independent Examination Board (IEB) scholars with access to private education. It would be a mistake to assume that IEB scholars are all first language English speakers. The creative process, in this instance, was obliged to grapple with issues emerging directly from a context that is highly charged. Our aim is to demonstrate that addressing these issues can be generative rather than imposing a set of constraints.

The Context

The Inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the president of a liberated, democratic South Africa after free and fair elections was in 1994. On March 9, 2015, barely 21 years later, the Rhodes Must Fall movement re-inscribed the continued struggle against the well-entrenched legacy of imperialism through protest action. The continued presence of the statue of arch-jingoist Cecil John Rhodes on the University of Cape Town campus became the focus of discontent. Then, in October 2015, the so-called “born-free” generation of students escalated demands for greater inclusivity and decolonization in tertiary institutions, in terms of their structure, funding mechanisms and

curricula. Nationwide, we experienced violent disruptions of academic routine in the form of intensified calls for transformation and decolonization. These features, along with the principles of our socially inclusive Constitution, ratified in 1997, define the field of arts, culture, education and specifically theatre-making as a live encounter and exchange in South Africa today. In his inaugural address on May 10, 1994, President Mandela acknowledged that the struggle would need to continue against the “bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering ...[and] discrimination” (www.mandela.gov.za). Political emancipation and nation building have stressed promoting strategies of inclusivity and respect for diversity: the recognition of 11 official languages, of which English is only one, is an index of the complex issues bound up in the question of inclusive redress and “participatory citizenship” (Ramphela, 2013). The constant need to recognize and acknowledge one’s own position with its inherent and even unconscious cultural assumptions—along with how these are bound up in a network of various emerging viewpoints—asks storytellers, writers and theatre-makers to grapple with re-interpreting and re-imagining received texts and the values that they promote by challenging orthodox iterations and received traditions or practices. Models of borrowing, adaptation and even appropriation, hybridity and syncretism abound in all spheres of everyday life as in cultural production.

Across diverse campuses, student protests have called for an overhaul of a Eurocentric curriculum taught in English as a primary language of instruction. During the years of Apartheid governance, English and Afrikaans were the sole official languages. As early as 1925, Afrikaans had been declared an official language. Its hegemony was actively promoted under Nationalist Party rule (1948–1994). One of the core aspects of the June 16 uprising, widely known as the “Soweto Riots,” was the protest against Afrikaans as the medium of instruction for all subjects, including English. As Mamphela Ramphela argues: “Monolingualism impoverishes societies that practice it” (2013, 39). Shakespeare, as a core symbol of that colonial legacy, clashes directly with the decolonization imperative, so his body of work is at the center of English and Performance Studies curricula debates at both secondary and tertiary institutions. In emergent theatre, tensions proliferate between oral narratives and printed texts; dialogue saturated texts, other than spoken word/poetry, vie with physical or dance-based performances in which images, both kinetic and static, are the prime movers of narratives and sources of aesthetic meaning and pleasure. Increasingly, experiments in participatory aesthetics abound. No practice and no artistic choice is deemed ideologically or politically neutral.

This chapter identifies selected aspects of the contested and intertwined issues of language and cultural politics embedded in the project of staging a Shakespearean text as a commissioned theatre-in-education project.

The Politics of Language, Culture and Caliban

Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo’s scholarship focuses on the reciprocal interdependence of language, political and economic power, cultural identity and value systems. Drawing on extracts from his collection of essays published in *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedom* (1993), specifically

"The Imperialism of Language: English, a Language for the World?" and "Cultural Dialogue for a New World" the author outlines the weighty problems regarding the hegemonic status of English, colonial cultural expressions and their legacy in Africa. This material provides a conceptual and critical framework for embedding principles of decolonization within cultural production. Ngũgĩ's analysis of Shakespeare's Caliban is contained in "Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom: the Wealth of a Common Global Culture." Ngũgĩ makes the distinction between learning to speak English as a Scandinavian might, for example, as an elective option, and its imposition as an integral aspect of subjugation. He writes: "the encounter between English and most so-called Third World countries did not occur under conditions of independence and equality" (1993, 31). The imposition of the colonizer's language has a dual function: it promotes the discourse of the colonizer while simultaneously "suppress(ing) the languages of the captive nations" (31). Under Apartheid legislation (1948–1994), English and Afrikaans were, to apply Ngũgĩ's analysis quite literally, "the official languages of instruction, of administration, of commerce, trade, justice and foreign communications" (37). Indigenous languages were systematically displaced and marginalized. The impact of silencing mother-tongue communication and expression had a concomitant effect of undermining indigenous cultural forms among them *ntsomi* (storytelling performances) and *izibongi* ("praise poetry") as entrenched popular African performance practices.

As Ngũgĩ puts it, "culture is a product of a people's history. But it also reflects that history and embodies a whole set of values by which people can view themselves and their place in time and space" (42). Similarly, Edward Said writes:

cultures are humanly made structures of both authority and participation, benevolent in what they include, incorporate, and validate, less benevolent in what they exclude and demote. [...] Far from being unitary or monolithic or autonomous things, cultures actually assume more "foreign" elements, alterities, differences, than they consciously exclude.

(Said 1994,15)

This maneuver orders and maps political and cultural relations in both temporal-historical and spatial-geographical terms with insidious effect. As Ngũgĩ unequivocally puts it: "Europe and its languages would be the center of the universe" (1993, 32). From the marginal territories of South Africa (1652–1994), the invincible epicenter of power has been Western in orientation. The spatial terrain of *Antony and Cleopatra* represents Rome as this authoritative pivot even if much of the action is dispersed beyond its limits. Although the play is launched in Egypt, the powerful influence of Roman values and controls is a constant motif. Shakespeare's 1623 treatment of what might be termed a great apocryphal love story is inseparable from the imperial conquest being launched in that Elizabethan context.

Despite Ngũgĩ's insistence on the need to challenge the hegemony of English, he concedes that Shakespeare's seventeenth-century Caliban, forced to

learn Prospero's language, nonetheless has the power to resist and turn that language against itself. *The Tempest*, he writes,

is interesting in that it has all the images that are later to be reworked into a racist tradition particularly in popular European literature about the colonised peoples: the savage as a rapist, lazy, a lover of whisky, stupid, cannibalistic. But the main thing is that Shakespeare does give to Caliban the capacity or the voice to say "no". Caliban is invested with energy. And remember that at the time, Europe has occupied only a little corner of the globe.

(Ngũgĩ, 15)

Ngũgĩ also observes: "it does not really matter how much Caliban is able to curse in European languages. He can also do very remarkable things with it as we see (...) in that great poetic evocation of Caliban's love of the island and his total identification with its landscape" (19). Unlike Caliban, an archetypal figure of dispossession, the protagonists of *Antony and Cleopatra* occupy positions at the apex of power in their respective worlds and the Egyptian queen outlives her Roman lover and outmanoeuvres Octavius Caesar's ambitions to parade her as evidence of conquest. At the level of plot and story, the play consistently subverts the power dynamics of the all-knowing colonizer and the subservient colonized, pointing us toward a cogent contemporary interrogation of imperialism, the processes of resistance and decolonization.

Towards Definitions of Decolonization

As a concept and as a process, "decolonization" is a contested term. In *As by Fire* (2017), Professor Jonathan Jansen works through a range of definitions of decolonization, suggesting a continuum from "soft" to "harder," more extreme notions of the concept. In literal terms, decolonization refers to the physical exit of colonial powers making way for sovereign rule and self-determination. In 1945 South Africa became a republic, ruled by resident colonizers who, Jansen suggests, have subsequently become natives. It was only after Apartheid was dismantled in 1994, however, that the legal end to systemic oppression and discrimination launched a democratic and egalitarian future, marking the real start of decolonization. Despite the formal celebration of what is recognized as one of the most socially just constitutions in the world, inequities persist both within and between races as a legacy of the systemic embeddedness of Apartheid engineering, hence the escalated call for decolonization.

From the "soft" option of decentering European knowledges to the "harder" option of *replacing* these Western with African knowledges, the most extreme form of decolonization is the "repatriation of occupied knowledge (and society)" (Jansen 2017,163). This radical position advocates the active dismantling of all forms of imperialist knowledge and socio-cultural practices. Less radical notions of decolonization accommodate "additive-inclusive knowledge" (160) which advocates keeping all existing content in the curriculum, paralleled with "critical engagement" (161). This position

favors interrogating power dynamics and the origins of knowledge. Jansen’s own bias tends towards:

Decolonization as encounters with entangled knowledges [which recognizes that] knowledge is not separated into the neat binaries of “them” and “us,” “colonizer” and “colonized.” Instead, our knowledges, like our human existences, are intertwined in the course of our daily living, learning and loving.

(Jansen 2017, 162)

Jansen seems to draw on Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) in grappling with what Said has termed “the tangled, many-sided legacy of imperialism” (18) in a discourse that the latter describes as “overlapping territories [and] intertwined histories” (1) Said posits that a “contrapuntal perspective is required ... to think through and interpret *together* experiences that are discrepant” (35–38). Understanding this proposition offers a perspective of postcolonial pluralism and also suggests a working method that actively promotes collective and equal participation. What this means in practical terms is that collaborative work offers a means of promoting dialogic exchanges that seek to accommodate multiple views rather than continuing to privilege the Eurocentric perspective. The polyphonic process animates and mobilizes the generative capacity of multiple voices articulating “discrepant experiences” and values. Engaging with “entangled knowledges” becomes a tool for activating diverse perspectives by serving as a critical lens for reading the play and also functions as a departure point for rehearsing and staging that play.

The Project

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address all the issues regarding the inclusion of Shakespeare in English curricula at secondary school level. It suffices to say that following the success of *Coriolanus* (2017), the National Children’s Theatre committed to a follow up project retaining the service of the designer but appointing a different director. The treatment given to the arguably more challenging and perhaps inaccessible text, *Coriolanus*, had adopted an ensemble-based physically orientated collective storytelling style. It had proved highly successful as responses on record at the theatre attest. It seemed appropriate to pursue a similar production style and work ethos.

One departure point common to both productions was to interrogate the tendency to regard the dramatic text as embedded within literary studies in which any agency or choice on the part of the reader is eliminated. As Italo Calvino suggests in his essay *Why Read the Classics?* in *The Uses of Literature* (1986) most of these school goers are only reading classical texts because they have to, not because they have chosen to. Understandably, as he observes: “reading in youth can be rather unfruitful, due to impatience, distraction, inexperience with the product’s ‘instructions for use’ and the inexperience in life itself” (1986, 127). Adopting this premise, the idea was to make *Antony and Cleopatra* enjoyable as theatre, rather than reinforcing its

distance as unfamiliar literature. In other words, the play and the rewards or pleasures of the text as a document are not only questionable for first language English speakers; its accessibility and value are compounded for second-language speakers.

The overarching goal of the production was to provide access to the complex language of Shakespeare and stage the story with recognizable South African identities, so that learners could assimilate the material and address examination questions on the themes and characters in the play. Acknowledging a point of departure that might be defined as being partially anchored in an adaptation of the modernist Western perspective, the visionary propositions of Artaud, we redirect the issue of linguistic expression to ask: what is the language of theatre and performance? What languages does theatre mobilize? And, more crucially, in what ways does the use of image and *mise-en-scène* generate a capacity for relaying messages and ideas that operate either independently of or in conjunction with the spoken word? It seemed appropriate to exploit the already well-established South African theatre idiom of heightened physical presence and activity in which the animated body, rather than the spoken word, is privileged. This style of performance has advanced well beyond an emergent phase into an entrenched custom for the obvious reason that it is a strategy for addressing the issues of accessibility in terms of linguistic choices.

Notwithstanding the African tradition that privileges oral storytelling and spoken word poetry, our choice was to mobilize the *mise-en-scène* in order to clarify core plot elements in the text and make it intelligible to young audiences. Shakespeare's off-stage activity is described in rich images that require attentive listening from the audience to imagine an event or situation. In principle, when the language of description is inaccessible, we deemed ourselves obliged to supplement poetic expression with visual rather than verbal staging strategies which appeal to the senses rather than a rational, cognitive interpretation of words. Artaud writes:

Snakes do not react to music because of the mental ideas it produces in them, but because they are long, they lie coiled on the ground and their entire bodies are in contact with the ground along almost their entire length. And the musical vibrations communicated to the ground affect them as a very subtle, very long massage. Well, I propose to treat the audience just like those charmed snakes and to bring them back to the subtlest ideas through their anatomies.

(Artaud 1989, 61)

Malaika Mutere identifies the element of "kinetic orality" (1997, 15), a fusion of motion and sound, breath and rhythm, as a core component of African aesthetics. Mobilizing physical dynamism through the integration of music, dance, song and drumming throughout the piece was an inevitable product of the performer's inclinations and strengths. Mutere writes:

It has been said that a person who "hears" African music "understands" it in dance or some form of physical movement. Movement in the African musical context is not simply about the dance, because in its existential

sense movement expresses the generative power that constitutes life, that is transported into rhythmic sound, and then is transformed into the visual motion patterns of the flesh, a "kinetic orality" that is essential to understanding the interaction of music and dance in the African oral-aesthetic.

(Mutere 1997, 15)

At the risk of seeming to diminish the value of the play as a literary document, we sought to promote image, movement and aural appeal.

Casting and Cultural Frames of Reference

The production had a small budget, a rehearsal period of four weeks, and a school-to-school tour that ran for three consecutive months, averaging seven performances per week. Given the limited resources and necessary mobility of transporting cast and all their resources to a ready audience, the production was essentially theatre without a set, lights or sound equipment, and could only rely on costumes and a small repertoire of prop elements. Through various configurations, prop elements such as square upholstered ottomans and cushions indicated different settings, and carpets anchored specific locations. The color palette of the costumes highlighted the significance of bodies and what they wear, pointing to an ostended, rather than narrated, mode of collective storytelling. In other words, the actors and their bodies became the primary source of communication and expression. The collective storytelling mode presupposed an ensemble that would be onstage throughout (with few exceptions) as both embodied figures within the story or as attentive auditors and witnesses of unfolding action.

The choice to cast nine aspiring professional performers rather than age-appropriate experienced actors, and specifically a black Cleopatra, served a dual purpose: first, most crucially, to share a distinctly African take on the piece in terms of identity and vocal register, and second, to stage the production through a youthful lens. In addition to reflecting the heterogeneous and multi-cultural identities of the youthful audience, the proximity between audience and players was pronounced through minimizing the age gap between them. Generational affinity, despite the relative inexperience of the performers in playing Shakespeare, announced a shared departure point of a joint discovery of both the medium of theatre and this particular play. The performers' relative inexperience with a Eurocentrically based classical acting technique augmented their heterogeneous and multi-cultural identities, which reflected the audience demographics reasonably accurately. A core quality required of all cast members was that they present themselves with assured self-confidence: the aim was for the cast members to relay a quality of being equally bold, autonomous and not only in command of the material, but positively enjoying playing Shakespeare, regardless of the designation of the roles that they played. Shakespeare's Cleopatra is a commanding and powerful figure whose strategic resistance to Imperialism and a patriarchal order is inscribed at the core of the text without her being a strident feminist role model. In her relationship with Antony, our young Cleopatra was intended to trigger associations with potent and familiar political icons such

as the youthful Winnie Mandela or Mamphela Ramphele. The complex representation of political and cultural identities inscribed within the play itself required that the casting of both the Egyptians and the Romans needed to reflect these qualities. It would be both naïve and reductive to portray Rome and the Romans as the homogenous “civilized West” and Egypt simply as the “decadent East.”

Other casting choices were informed by the ability of the actors to play multiple roles. The most important example of an actor doubling roles was Sibusiso Mkhize who played the roles of Enobarbus and the Clown. Both roles demanded presence, finesse and gravitas. In line with dynamic productions of Shakespeare in any context, our interpretation was committed to celebrating local identities, cadences and resonances wherever possible. We activated a South African cultural frame of reference in choosing to interpret the soothsayer as a traditional African healer or *sangoma*, and embraced the diversity of idiolects within the ensemble. Consequently, the audience was presented with recognizably varied local accents in preference to voices that contrived a form of Standard English or Received Pronunciation, or even aimed towards regional or standardized South African accents, which are ideologically loaded. The reaction to Standard English in South Africa is that it is, in the words of Cicely Berry, “formal and probably eccentric and effete” (1975, 28) and more explicitly, redolent with colonial overtones. Traditional songs, sung a cappella, and African *jembe* drums underscored some of the action and events: these textures included isiZulu funeral songs and a contemporary take on the song the characters sing at the party on Pompey’s barge.

The rehearsal process aimed to dismantle the traditional Western hierarchy of the director – actor relationship through inviting improvised staging and collective decision-making. This strategy invested the project with an inclusive, egalitarian and communal ownership of the emerging production. Both the process and the outcome thus stressed what might be termed traditional African values, ways of being and reciprocal accountability. The majority of the cast were proficient and confident in outwardly focused inter-personal Keith Johnstone-based improvisation skills and well-attuned to the demands of ensemble storytelling rather than classical “acting.” The majority had participated in one or more actor-centric ensemble renderings of a Western classic (*Julius Caesar*, *Oedipus Tyrannos*, *The Flies*, *Antigone*, *Coriolanus*). Already familiar with the notion of the actor’s agency and autonomy, they came to the project with diverse skills in teamwork, reciprocal focus and being accountable to one another as tools for offsetting the lack of the training in technical line delivery and stage craft that might advantage more experienced actors.

Staging Strategies

Shakespeare’s full play is structured in some 41 scenes, mobilizing locations in Rome (“the West”) and Egypt (“the East”) but also, significant scenes occur in the spaces between. Both Athens and Pompey’s barge at sea feature as prominent and distinctive locations. Emphasizing the way in which the neat split between Rome and Egypt is a reduction of the complex design of Shakespeare’s play, urged us to pay close attention to staging the scenes

taking place in these domains. The action not only traverses spatial territories rather than setting up binaries, but the fluidity of sea and water is the site of the Roman barge-party as much the site of the final critical battle in which Antony is defeated. The contrast between occupying the seemingly stable, or fixed, territory of land in comparison with the fluid domains of the Nile and sea was a motif expressed through the colour palette of the costumes.

The play circulates continuously around motives and intentions largely via mediated accounts of crucial decisions which compel action and the consequences of that action on the part of the two protagonists. This opens up the space to show the gap between intention and outcome. So too, the battles matter less than the consequences of those battles, just as the events in Rome matter less than their impact on the lives of Antony and Cleopatra. Effectively, unseen action is consistently relayed to and about the protagonists by numerous messengers and sometimes even named characters. Reportage and reactions to the messages that have been communicated are the political core of the drama.

In Enobarbus' description of the first meeting of Antony and Cleopatra we find an instance of a theatrical spectacle that defies staging:

Enobarbus: I will tell you.

The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne
Burned upon the water [...]
The city cast out its people upon her, and Antony
Enthroned i'th' market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to the air, which but for vacancy
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
And made a gap in nature [...]
Vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish.

(II ii. 223–276)

A spectacle such as this cannot be enacted, it must be told in order to give free rein to an imagined understanding of its sensuality and opulence. Speech transposes an event into something much more erotic and lavish because words trigger the imagination and defy corporeal and spatial limits: the potency and richness of the spoken word accomplishes what the image cannot. As theatre critic and playwright Bert O. States suggests:

that a certain tension between seeing and hearing is a distinguishing feature of Shakespeare's theatre ... the very thickness of Shakespeare's world is derived from the way in which poetry triumphs over neutral space ... it doesn't matter where the scene takes place [which] suggests how free the language is of the gravity of a palpable visual world ... [A] character creates a verbal world that bathes what we see before us in its quality... any attempt to imitate this imitation, or to supplement it with a more literal image ... will deprive the line of at least some of its unique sensory autonomy.

(States 1987, 56)

At the risk of appearing to disagree with States by reproducing images of off-stage actions or significant plot events, Enobarbus' monologue of magnificence was under-played as reportage. While Enobarbus spoke (in Rome), simultaneously, two scenes were set up embodying what he described but appeared like a photograph frozen in his memory. In this way, the actors were not competing with his words, but visually supplemented and anchored his recollection of Cleopatra's arrival. The point to emphasize is that the actors, in what we will term a "tableau," did not act out Enobarbus' description. No attempt was made to stage Cleopatra on the barge. Rather, this extraordinary spectacle was suggested by its absence through the reaction of the crowd watching her. When this crowd dispersed, they revealed Antony as the sole spectator of the performance she had set up for him: the spectacle of Cleopatra on her barge was deemed less dramatically meaningful than staging the proposition that it is the spectator, Antony, who constructs meaning and value from the *mise-en-scène*.

Users of contemporary technology have sophisticated capacities in decoding and interpreting screen and film conventions of "double presentations." The staging could productively exploit this familiar spectatorial convention through the use of this "split-screen" to reinforce word and image in relation to each other, to enhance the dramatic significance of the scene. It is Antony's reaction to the spectacle that so transports him rather than Cleopatra's magnificence that required emphasis: the audience as much as Agrippa might be moved to say: "O, rare for Antony!" (II, ii, 213).

States' problematization of issues bound up in the reproduction of Shakespeare on film stresses the disjunction between iconicity and the heightened register of Shakespeare's poetry. Theatrical minimalism and image theatre are consistent, rather than competing, with the condensation and charge of heightened speech. Minimalism in the theatre can mobilize States' concept of "neutral space" to sustain the tension between listening and seeing. The recourse to actor-centered minimalist staging was both expedient and productive, following Jameson's incisive analysis of Brecht's method of turning a problem into a solution. The actor's bodies within the tableaux filled the stage and directed the attention of the audience toward the speakers even as they themselves constituted a visual supplement to what was being said. This aesthetic strategy of using bodies to demonstrate what words relayed called for a particular kind of spectatorship that asks for active assimilation of both self-contained units along their juxtaposition and relationship with one another.

Ezra Pound defines the image as "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (www.poetryfoundation.org). A crucial element of image theatre as observed by Bonnie Marranca is the tableau:

The stillness of tableau sequences suspends time, causing the eye to focus on an image, and slows down the process of input. This increases the critical activity of the mind. [...] It also regulates the dialectical interplay of word and image.

(Marranca 1984, 81)

The constructedness of the configuration of still bodies in space draws attention to its own artifice, as does the rhythm and meter in poetry. In both cases, we are aware of medium as well as content. Tableau is a visual equivalent of

heightened vocal register, rather than oversignifying the meaning of words in emphasizing aspects of the plot that might otherwise escape notice.

The off-stage action in *Antony and Cleopatra* is partly structured around characters we never meet. In Act I, Scene ii, we hear news of Fulvia’s death delivered to Antony by a messenger in Egypt. His wife’s funeral acts as the inciting incident which draws Antony to return to his duties in Rome, reluctantly parting from Cleopatra in Egypt. The tableau of Fulvia’s funeral in Rome launched the production. We chose to underscore this through drumming and an isiZulu funeral song; this image was juxtaposed with Antony and Cleopatra embracing each other in Egypt. The body of the actress who played Fulvia was introduced as a visible, if inert and inanimate, prop. Staging the tableau made her actively present in the mind of the audience, even as a corpse, for it is her death that precipitates the action that unfolds in the rest of the play. To prove his loyalty to Rome in the wake of Fulvia’s death, Antony must marry Caesar’s sister Octavia; and he must negotiate a peace treaty with Pompey at the forefront of the triumvirate. In terms of storyboarding then staging off-stage action, the image of Pompey’s rise to power also suggested an important image to be staged as a tableau. Later in the scene, Antony’s loyalties are tested when he receives the news that Pompey has “given dare to Caesar and commands the empire of the sea” (I, ii).

The ripple effect of this political move became apparent through a tableau of Pompey at the bow of a ship, being praised by a faithful retainer. Both crucial sets of information are revealed by messengers to Antony in Egypt, and



Figure 14.1 Fulvia’s funeral (left to right: Campbell Meas, Sibusiso Mkhize, Carlos Williams, Cassius Davids, Kevin Koopman, Neo Sibiyi and Megan Van Wky).

Photo by Rebecca Hearfield. 2018. National Children’s Theatre, Johannesburg.



Figure 14.2 Pompey's rise to power (Sibusiso Mkhize and Carlos Williams). Photo by Rebecca Hearfield. 2018. National Children's Theatre, Johannesburg.

resurface as action points throughout. To prove his loyalty to Rome in the wake of Fulvia's death, Antony must marry Caesar's sister Octavia; and he must negotiate a peace treaty with Pompey at the forefront of the triumvirate. In contrast, the Romans later discover what has been happening in Egypt through Enobarbus' famous monologue, when he accompanies Antony back to Rome.

The Crocodile

Enobarbus' famous monologue of the first meeting between Antony and Cleopatra seemingly sets up the "exotics" of the East for the Roman ear. In

direct contrast, Shakespeare inserts a display of Roman power as a different kind of spectacle at the party on Pompey's barge (II, vii). It is on board the barge, rather than in Egypt, that the true spectacle of excess is played out, by Romans and their allies, in a brief exchange between Antony and Lepidus:

LEPIDUS: You've strange serpents there?

ANTONY: Aye, Lepidus.

LEPIDUS: Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your
Mud by the operation of your sun. So is your
Crocodile.

ANTONY: They are so [...]

LEPIDUS: What manner of thing is your crocodile?

ANTONY: It is shaped, sir, like itself. And it is broad as
It hath breadth. It is just so high as it is, and
Moves with its own organs. It lives by that
Which nourisheth it, and its elements once
Out if it, it transmigrates.

LEPIDUS: What colour is it of?

ANTONY: Of its own colour too.

LEPIDUS: Tis a strange serpent.

ANTONY: Tis so. And the tears of it are wet.

(II vii 33–41)

This exchange was crucial to our approach in staging the play and is perhaps the best way to conclude. The discussion about the crocodile in which Antony and Lepidus occupy such clearly contrasted positions, insider and outsider respectively, operates on two levels: first, it gives us the naïve incredulity of the uninformed Roman, and second, as a species at home in the element of water rather than land, the "serpent" becomes a motif for Cleopatra herself. All that Antony says about the crocodile asserts the scope for bridging difference between him and Cleopatra and his celebration of a world and culture other than Rome. Antony actively challenges the Romans' imperial and exoticized view of the "Other" by making the crocodile an ordinary taken-for-granted phenomenon and not a monster. He values both Crocodile and Cleopatra for being what and who they are rather than seeking to impose a Roman/Western explanation or way of seeing on either.

We could reasonably assume that every South African scholar in the audience was familiar with the appearance of the crocodile and able, on a literal level, to understand its identity more readily than Lepidus. Accessing this privileged form of cultural capital inverted the authority of the all-powerful colonizer, rendering Lepidus stupid and uninformed, compared to the audience. For Lepidus, crocodiles are unfamiliar, as unfamiliar as Shakespeare's play is for students and scholars. Perhaps this short section, originally excised from the rehearsal script by a commissioned editor but reinstated by us, offers a dense meditation on communicating across the asymmetries of cultural differences. Like Lepidus, students and scholars are entitled to be curious about what they do not know, and like Antony, they have every right to a straightforward and confident expression of that with which they are familiar. Although, in the words of Calvino, "reading the classics appears to

clash with our rhythm of life, which no longer affords long periods of time or the spaciousness of humanistic leisure” (1986, 132), the staging of a classic allows for promoting that which is unfamiliar and relevant simultaneously.

The power of theatre lies in its ability to stage the gap between personal and public presentation of self. Roman codes of public conduct of influential political figures do not display the kind of consistency between the private and the public self that the social and cultural discourse appears to value. Antony is celebrated for his generosity and capacity for feeling rather than conducting himself according to principles of restraint and reason as one of the “triple pillars of the world.” Perhaps the pervasive impact of “celebrity culture” and social media in contemporary life makes the sumptuous excesses of the private lives of the two superstar lovers reasonably familiar even if they occupy a plane that no ordinary person might. Images and sound bites from today’s superwomen and heroes, be they politicians and statesmen, public intellectuals, Olympians or artists, via technology, makes the private experience in the life of a famous Other an increasingly known quantity. We might ask whether the iconic presence of celebrities recasts classical heroes in modern idiom. And if so, how does the heightened visibility of celebrity figures so readily accessible via the multiple platforms of social media mesh with egalitarian ideals and addressing continued radical socio-economic disparities? The pertinence of this question in South Africa today is clear.

Dr. Mamphela Ramphele (academic, activist and public intellectual) in *Conversations: with My Sons and Daughters* (2013), addresses the question of nation-building in terms of participatory citizenship, agency, governance and accountability. She stresses the need for a proactive and engaged sense of trans-generational community dialogue as the title of her publication implies. Her emphasis is on the interplay of social relationships with moral and ethical conduct as citizens of a multi-cultural society (61). These are the imperatives integral to “Negotiating culture, tradition and customs in a democracy.” She develops these ideas in the next chapter by asking the question “What system of values are we to live by?” As she puts it:

Values create communities out of individuals. Values enable transactions to take place and bridge the inter-generational divide. Values are what make human society worthy of the designation ‘human’ (59).

A template for advancing social cohesion, conversations and debates about values are also compelling for a company of young performers forging a cohesive ensemble in which all participants are co-equals committed to reciprocal interaction with each other using the text as a vehicle to shape and structure their exchanges. Ramphele’s explanation of *Ubuntu* offers a nuanced way of both understanding and implementing the concept that is so central to African notions of what Patrick Chabal succinctly sums up as “being and belonging.” Ramphele writes:

South Africans pride themselves as a people who live by the precepts of *Ubuntu* which we love to claim as unique cultural attributes that set Africans apart from people of other cultures. Interconnectedness is at the centre of our being and consciousness as people and *Ubuntu* is an

affirmation of that interconnectedness which acknowledges our human dignity by fellow human beings. It is an essential source of meaning and energy to engage life as individuals and communities (61).

Significantly, however, Ramphele points out that these notions are by no means unique to African culture but rather find equivalence in Japanese “*amuru*” (62), the philosophy of American First Nations and even within “white” Afrikaaner settler communities committed to the sense of “*volk*” (63), kinship relations and community ties. She challenges a new generation to address the issue of “how to close the gap between the value system we committed ourselves to (in the human-rights-based national constitution) and our actual day to day practices in our social, political and economic relationships” (63). The theatre-making project is well suited to addressing this challenge.

Describing one of her projects, Ramphele writes:

The Letsema Healing Circle approach starts with an understanding that before you can walk together as a people you need to sit down and talk. [...] Dialogues start with acknowledgement of the presence of others. The isiZulu greeting captures it best: ‘*Sawubona*’, literally, ‘we are seeing you’. Being seen and acknowledged is an affirmation of being connected with those around one and thereby being affirmed as part of the human family. *Ubuntu* is captured as that moment of recognition and being seen (183).

Affirming the different identities, physical bodies and expressive accents of the performers *as* performers, throughout the rehearsal process and in performances, as much as the characters that they embodied created a production style and tone. The lively confidence of the performers speaking English with the distinctive and recognizable variations that mark ethnic and cultural difference provided a touchstone of integrity to what was presented. Additionally, fully acknowledging the centrality of the audience presence was a collective commitment to the medium of theatre as a tool geared towards rendering a classic text contemporary and relevant.

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INTERSECTIONS AND ENCOUNTERS

The Meshwork of an International Australian/ Jordanian Puppet Theatre Collaboration

Lynne Kent

The shadow image is the very first image used in performance. Ephemeral, elusive, present on screen yet defined by the absence of light, the shadow image is the most primitive of images. Pertinent to Western thinking of the shadow image as primeval, is the oft used reference to the shadows of Plato's allegorical cave. Here the shadows seek the light in order to obtain knowledge and truth. Yet despite the darkness, in reality the shadow image knows no cultural boundaries and does not need a visa to travel from one place to another. As a special kind of theatre that uses the shadow to create meaning rather than relying solely on spoken text, the shadow theatre is both traditional and contemporary in its mediation between screen and audience, projected image and player. When the use of very primitive tools such as light, shadow and object is done well, a performance becomes a rich interplay of ideas. In 2018, Terrapin Puppet Theatre from Tasmania, Australia visited the Haya Cultural Centre, Jordan to collaborate in creating the children's theatre production *Now and Tomorrow*.¹ The purpose of the visit was to strengthen and promote Arab/Australian relations. As a shadow artist and researcher, I was fortunate to be part of this inaugural co-production and visit Amman along with Artistic Director of Terrapin Puppet Theatre, Sam Routledge and filmmaker/lighting designer, Nicholas Higgins. I was asked to lead a series of shadow puppetry workshops with creative staff at the Haya Cultural Centre in Amman. Australia has a solid history of international puppet theatre collaborations as exemplified by companies such as Terrapin, Polyglot Theatre and Snuff Puppets. Cross-cultural theatre practices of the past, however, have been predominantly characterized by Western imperial appropriation and dominance, or, "encounters between the West and 'the rest'" (Gilbert and Lo 2002, 32). Critics of intercultural theatre collaboration such as John Russell Brown have argued that the import of costumes, masks and other dramatic forms from far off lands is tantamount to yet another form of Western pillage (1998, 9–19). Gilbert and Lo argue that critiques such as Brown's "risk instigating a kind of paralysis" insofar as they suggest that "virtually no form of theatrical exchange can be ethical" (Gilbert and Lo 2002, 41). Mediating between these two divergent views, Richard Schechner argues for

an interculturalism that can both embrace experimentation as well as “a return to traditional, even ancient values” (1989, 157). One of the theoretical challenges of working in this interweaving of cultural theatrical exchange could be in defining cross-cultural exchange itself. As Gilbert and Lo point out, to “cross” or to “make a crossing” can imply a type of deception or an unwelcome transgression into other territories such as an invasion (2002, 32). Gilbert and Lo offer a taxonomy of various forms of cross-cultural theatre practice to arrive at a definition of intercultural theatre that sits on a continuum between collaborative and imperialistic practice. Although they acknowledge that definitions of intercultural theatre are problematic, Gilbert and Lo describe this kind of theatre as “a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions” (2002, 36). This is a tough theoretical minefield to navigate when about to embark on such a project. Key to a more ethical approach to theatrical exchange may be the term “intentional encounter” where there is an active willingness to learn and create together. Is there a kind of intercultural theatre, whereby cultural differences can be explored and even celebrated? Recent scholarship on Arab Theatre (see, e.g., Buturovic 2003; Amine and Carlson 2012; and Moreh 1987), has detailed the rich heritage of Arabic *khayal*, or shadow play, as an example of a well-established and sophisticated form of theatre with deep roots in Arab/Islamic³² cultures. This chapter describes a contemporary Australian/Jordanian shadow theatre performance and posits the shadow theatre as a distinct form of theatre that can intersect performance practices—opening up a meshwork of transnational theatre collaboration. The chapter begins by exploring representations of the Middle East as encountered in Australia. After considering some of the histories and remediations of shadow theatre, this chapter will then conclude with some observations about the affordances of shadow theatre as a cross-cultural artform.

Dedicated to producing high quality arts programs for children and their families, the Haya Cultural Centre in Amman actively seeks collaborations with artists and companies from other parts of the world with an annual international theatre festival at the centre. General Manager of the centre, Diala Khamra is quoted in *The Jordan Times* newspaper as stating that the festival “offers local artists a chance to work alongside international artists and exchange experience” (2018). Theatrical exchanges across cultures and traditions are exciting and can lead to a reinvigoration of an artform such as shadow puppetry. I came to this project as an Australian who received training from Italy’s *Teatro Gioco Vita* company. The artists at *Teatro Gioco Vita*⁴³ have developed a sophisticated language of working with the shadow. No form of digital imagery is used in their work; the artists prefer instead to strengthen the already existing form, language and meaning of the shadow in their work. I had performed previously with Yogyakarta-based artist Heri Dono using his *Wayang* shadow imagery combined with digital imagery in *Transmisi*—a collaboration with Elision new music ensemble for the Asia Pacific Triennial, 1999.⁵⁴ I had also done some master classes with Bali based *dalang* I Made Sidia. Both Dono and I Made Sidia experiment with what *dalang* and leading scholar in the field, Matthew Isaac Cohen define as “traditional and post-traditional” forms of shadow puppetry (Cohen 2010). A children’s theatre production, *Now and Tomorrow* could be defined

as post-traditional shadow theatre. The performance tells the story of two very different people whose paths cross in darkness only to come together to play in a world of objects and color and contemporary shadow theatre play. The performance uses a combination of physical comedy, object theatre and shadow play. There are two ladders on stage that eventually get covered with fabric that turns into a screen on which the shadows of various objects are used to tell a story. Behind the screen, and unseen by the audience, a lighting track with movable torches lights an array of objects in shadow creating a world of strange and colourful shapes for the performers to interact with. The story of *Now and Tomorrow* follows two characters on stage as they make various discoveries in a textural way through the objects on stage. As an audience we learn about who these characters are by the way they interact with the objects they have close at hand and eventually through the interactions they have with each other. One character is very orderly and makes patterns with the found objects he has collected, carefully measuring the distance between a cup and a bowl for example. The other character, with her large piece of fabric, engages her imagination to make shapes and create playmates. When their separate worlds intersect, there is conflict, tension, discovery and eventually there is play. This project represented a cross-cultural collaboration that would bring together puppeteers from Australia with puppeteers/actors/designers from Jordan. Both groups have expertise in theatre making and design for children's theatre productions. An important starting point in any successful collaboration is to recognize and value the contribution of the other. The cultural contribution of the Arabic *khayal* or shadow play however, may be overshadowed by negative associations and misrepresentations of Arabic cultures in other parts of the world.

Misconceptions and Appropriations

Australian attitudes toward Middle Eastern, Arab and Islamic cultures are very often restricted and/or tainted by negative representation in the media and elsewhere. As historian Regina Ganter (2008), points out, while it is problematic to describe an "Australian sense of thinking" about other cultures, it is safe to argue that media coverage of Muslims in Australia has continued to focus on the negative and the sensational (Ganter 2008, 489). A study by Nahid Kabir (2006) argues that media attitudes toward Muslim Australians, particularly since September 2001, demonise this group of people as "barbaric." Theatre scholar John Bell suggests that Middle Eastern, Arab and Islamic cultures are subjects for the American gaze, that, for the most part, "looks intently but superficially at certain aspects of those cultures, for the most part ignoring depth, context, and history; and disliking, or at least not understanding, what it sees" (Bell 2005, 5). This lack of understanding that scholars such as Bell and Ganter describe and stereotypical representations of Muslims in the media as outlined by Kabir (2006), can hinder the process of theatre collaborations specifically between the West and Arab and Islamic worlds.

Past references to either Arabs performing in Australia, Arabian plays and stories performed, or Arabian characters portrayed in performance, are peppered with suggestions of cultural mis-appropriation, exotic fetishism and/

or fear of the “uncivilized other.” English actors working in Australia in the nineteenth century for example, commonly appropriated Arab attire in order to play the part of a Moorish sultan in plays such as in the romantic comedy *Arabian Nights* (*Lyric Theatre* 1925, 3). American actress Miss Amy Stone appeared on stage for the first time in Melbourne in 1875 in a military drama titled *Cigarette*. According to one newspaper, Stone played five different characters over four scenes on stage where she brandished a sword and slayed a wild Arab only to reappear in another scene as the character, Abdullah the Arab boy (The Theatre Royal 1875, 3). Morality tales involving inter-marriage between Arab and Western cultures were often performed on stage and screen. Film productions such as *The Sheik’s Wife*, shown at the Empire Theatre, Queensland in 1923, for instance, described as a dramatic story “a romantic young English girl who married a son of the desert, a follower of the prophet Mohammed. Circumstances forced her to make a fight for her happiness” (*The Sheik’s Wife* 1923, 13). A Rex Ingram production of *The Arab*, performed at The Lyric Theatre Newcastle, in 1925, featured the portrayal of a “full blooded Arab” described by one reviewer as having “a limitless rapacity for telling lies that makes the character somewhat laughable” (*Lyric Theatre* 1925, 6). At best, Arab performers were brought to Australia on restricted immigrant visas paid for by theatrical producers such as Mr. Harry Rickards. In the shows Rickards produced, such as *Abdullah’s Arabs*, a troop of 12 performers, said to have come from Morocco, impressed audiences by performing spectacular feats of acrobatic tumbling and balancing in theatres right around Australia (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1908, 3). Often placed in desert settings, these shows fetishized the Arab world as both exotic and uncivilized and in stark opposition to the superiority of theatre in the Western canon of dramatic texts. As Moroccan scholar Khalid Amine writes, “at the outset the dissimilarity and difference between Arabic and Western performance traditions were blinded by the ‘miasma’ of the shock of the encounter with the ‘superior’ Western Other” (Amine 2006, 151).

Accompanying misconceptions of Arab cultures in the West is the selective use of gruesome and violent historical information shared in the West about Arab/Islamic shadow theatre specifically, that has focused on the Muslim “prohibition of images of living things” and sensational stories such as the decapitation of puppeteers for performing so-called “forbidden” scenes that enraged Arab nobility (Jurkowski 2003). These past incidences of violent censorship are rare and when resurfaced, serve to reinforce already existing cultural stereotypes of Arab and Islamic cultures seen in the West. It has taken recent Arab scholarship to view the rich heritage of Arabic *khayal*, or shadow play (see, e.g., Buturovic, 2003; Amine and Carlson, 2012; Moreh, 1987), as an example of a well-established and sophisticated form of theatre with deep roots in Arab/Islamic cultures. Moreh, for example, offers detailed accounts of the full array of *khayal* as subversive performances that satirized actual political events played in coffee houses, which, in the Middle East and North African region are often frequented as central locations to disseminate information and for entertainment. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the *khayal* were also performed as plays of a high moral standard performed for the royal courts of Egypt, Syria and elsewhere (Moreh 1987, 50–58). Jacob Landau’s now dated *Studies in Arab Theater and Cinema*, first published in

1958, concludes that although there were varying levels of morality, the common denominator in the Arabic shadow plays was “their essential humour” (Landau 1958, 46). In the brief chapter on the “shadowy roots” of shadow theatre in the more recent Routledge *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*, Jurkowski does acknowledge the depth of cultural and technical knowledge of the shadow theatre. Jurkowski states that the “Arab masters long knew the many visual principles which lie behind the development of the shadow art” (Jurkowski, as quoted in Rubin (ed.), 2003, 39). Arab poetry, the dominant artform of the region, is sprinkled with references to the screen, shadows and players of the *khayal*. Both Jurkowski and Moreh describe Arab poets of the past as particularly inspired by the visual metaphors inherent in this theatre tradition (Jurkowski 2003; Moreh 1987).

The history of the shadow puppet theatre tradition elsewhere is included in Jurkowski’s (1996) detailed account of the history of European puppetry and in Eileen Blumenthal’s extensive world survey of puppetry (2005). Blumenthal provides interesting accounts of shadow puppet theatre traditions, drawn from countries as diverse as Cambodia, Greece and Mexico. Shadow puppet theatre historian Fan Pen Chen (2003) has investigated the origins of the shadow theatre and concludes that the shadow theatre may have come from India or Central Asia. According to Chen, “the history of the shadow theatre is replete with myths, hypotheses, and controversies” (2003, 26). The shadow theatre was popular in the West during the eighteenth century and was known as the “Chinese Shadows” or “Ombres Chinoises.” However, as Chen points out, many of these shows were in fact operated by Italian showmen, who were capitalizing on the fascination at the time for all things “Oriental” (2003, 46). Renowned scholar and *dalang*, Matthew Isaac Cohen details the history of Wayang puppetry and states it “was viewed in Europe as an archaic, ‘Oriental’ art form – known as ‘Chinese shadows’ from its earliest mention in Spain in 1619” (Cohen 2010, 37). Historian Kenneth Gross’s beautiful book, *Puppet: An Essay on Uncanny Life*, 2011, features a chapter on the shadow puppet. An extensive historical study of the use of the shadow image throughout fine art practice can be found in Victor Stoichita’s, *A Short History of the Shadow* (1997), while others (Arnoff 2005; Peck and Virkler 2006) focus on the pedagogical use of shadow puppetry, and puppetry in general, both in the classroom and for therapy. Some other studies that have included shadow puppetry position it solely as an example of a forerunner to more developed multimedia projection software such as kinect—a motion sensor software used in gaming (Dulic 2006; Lewis et al. 2012; Ozcan 2002). These sources and understandings of the shadow theatre are very often limited to studies of traditional forms found in Asia. Puppeteer and scholar John Bell (2005) makes an important point by stating that the sophistication found in the Arabic *khayal al zill*, or shadow play offers a counterinterview to traditional Western thinking of Arabic/Islamic performance traditions as lacking in a central canon of dramatic text. Yet despite the understanding of Arabic *khayal al zill* by Western scholars such as Bell, the contribution of Arabic shadow play is still overlooked as a significant dramatic form. The IFTR Arabic Theatre Working Group explains, “the Greek model and western teleology have been automatically taken as the standards against which any cultural products are measured”

(Amine, Hazem and Carlson 2010, 264). Theatre forms that do not adhere to the Aristotelian model, such as the Arabic shadow play, are ignored or belittled as a diminutive form of theatre.

The structure of the Arabic shadow play, with its non-Aristotelian model may be reason enough for its lowered status in the Western theatrical canon, but this also may be due to the nature of the shadow image itself. The shadow image takes its place in a rich history of Western thinking in art, film and philosophy, as something evil, dark, elusive, sneaky or negative. Kenneth Gross for example, describes the shadow puppet as a “life close to that of something not alive” and as “a creepy thing, secretive, inanimate while also full of spirit” (Gross 2011, 34). Gross elaborates, “the shadows on the screen are the shadows of the dead, images of ancestors who remain very much alive” (ibid., 128). Using the light to give the shadow puppet life, the shadow image can seem dark and menacing. Depending on the angle of the light and the surface upon which it is projected, the shadow puppet/image can appear to be a false representation of the material object from which it comes. The shadow image for example, can appear to be much larger in scale on the screen than the actual puppet or thing itself. The metaphorical power of the shadow image on the stage came to emerge in the West however, as a marginalized theatrical form. For example, renowned Italian shadow theatre company, *Teatro Gioco Vita* experiments with contemporary shadow theatre and has developed a vast vocabulary of working with the form. Suggested reasons for such marginalization are given in their promotional material:

To practice Shadow Theatre in Western countries nowadays is to accept to live in a solitary and unrelated dimension regarding the existing theatre languages as a whole. The Shadow Theatre represents an artistic and cultural experience restricted to this theatre itself: nothing is more alien to Western culture than the culture of the Shadow.

(*Teatro Gioco Vita*)

The marginalization of the shadow theatre, as *Teatro Gioco Vita* suggests, may at a deeper level be associated with generally held Western notions of the shadow as primitive, specifically in art theory and more broadly within theories of knowledge. Flat figures and hidden players behind a screen belie a depth to the shadow theatre found in the triangular and complex mesh of relationships between audience, images and players (Buturovic 2003).

Lack of translation of dramatic texts from Arabic to English, specifically in performance tradition histories from the Arab world, exacerbates negative notions of the value of, as John Bell describes, theatre that is non-Aristotelian, other than actor based or text driven (Bell 2005, 8). Revitalizing pure and traditional shadow theatre practices may preserve them for generations to come, but they may only be performed in museums as Stephen Kaplin argues, as “evidence of entertainment long gone” (Kaplin 1994, 39). In 2018, UNESCO listed Syrian shadow play on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. With only one active shadow puppeteer left to pass on traditions of Syrian shadow puppetry, this is an important step in recognizing the value of preserving such traditions in the region (UNESCO, 2018). As the UNESCO website states, digital technologies and conflict in the

region resulting in the displacement of many Syrians have meant that shadow puppet theatre traditions are in decline.

Digital remediations, translations and adaptations of shadow theatre plays are occurring across the globe and our production of *Now and Tomorrow* for example, is the product of a renewed energy for creating hybrid forms of theatre that blur tradition with technology. In other parts of the world, shadow theatre traditions are currently being revitalized by creating adaptations of popular western films such as George Lucas' *Star Wars* as seen, for example in *wayang kulit* shadow puppets of Malaysia (Mayberry, 2014). With shadow puppet characters such as "*Perantau Langit*," a name that literally means "one who walks in the clouds" and is a literal translation of the name Luke Skywalker, one would think that Western films concerned with big themes, such as the conflict between good and evil, would suit adaptations into other cultures and other genres (Gerdsen 2016). On the one hand, adaptations bring new audiences to an ancient artform and build capacity to sustain the existence of shadow theatre into the future and on the other, *wayang kulit* versions of *Star Wars* for example, privilege Western culture as a way of validating its continuation and, at the same time, dilute traditional texts. Richard Schechner's "intercultural" theatre is a call to embrace cultural diversity as inevitable, with attempts to preserve a "pure" culture, as futile (Schechner 1989, 151). Is there room for multiple approaches to the continuation of shadow theatre traditions into the next century? With its deep traditions in Arabic and Islamic cultures and the capacity to travel and stretch across time and space and into new territories in the West, the shadow theatre would seem like the ideal form to begin a contemporary cross-cultural collaboration between Jordan and Australia. Both these nations have a history of immigration so that, even when under threat from governmental policy changes and economic instability, one would hope there is room to share new artistic ideas.

Now and Tomorrow

The process of creating *Now and Tomorrow* occurred over a two-week development period in February 2018 and a later rehearsal and production period in September 2018 leading up to performances at the Haya Cultural Centre Theatre Festival in Amman, October 2018.⁵ The cast consisted of two Jordanian actors and the creative team included a mix of Australian and Jordanian artists. In *Now and Tomorrow*, there was a very deliberate decision not to use spoken text, or to use very little Arabic in the performance, in the hope that the images, objects and performers would create enough significant meaning(s) enough for a young audience to understand the narrative. We worked with the forward-thinking approach that this production would eventually tour the region and then come to Australia. While working, directions and ideas were translated from Arabic into English and vice versa, and after a period of time became a more fluid exchange across languages both spoken and visual. Getting to know each other took time however, as I came to know the actors and their style of working. One of the actors liked to sit and talk about the concepts for example, the other did not. In rehearsal, I would set up a series of exercises for the two actors to explore the variations

in meaning they created when moving the light or keeping the light still and moving the object, or with one actor holding the light while the other interacted with the shadow and object on the screen. We would sit and discuss the explorations and discoveries and what that meant for the two characters the actors were developing simultaneously in rehearsal. For example, the choices we made as to whether we moved the torch to create an enlarged image or moved the object closer to the torch to create a larger shadow image can change the meaning for an audience. The first choice can signify the performer controlling the image to make it bigger, the second choice almost looks like it is the will of the object moving on its own to become bigger. Sometimes we talked about what the broader concept of working with the screen meant and what it felt like to work behind the screen concealed from the audience or to work in full view of an audience. The actors made observations of their own and each other's shadow play. Each exercise demanded interrogation and translation and so took time. I was interested in what the actors thought they had discovered about the shadow and how this informed the development of each of their characters. For example, the shadow image can be playful, it can be sneaky or sinister, it can disappear and reappear in another place as if by magic, so it can also be magical.

I asked the actors to think about what kind of shadow image they were working with and how it made them feel. In the performance, one of the characters—the one who collects pink objects and orders them in patterns on the ladders, was afraid of the dark. Then both characters accidentally discover the beauty of a pink object in shadow. They explore the changes in its shadow—as they move the torch, the pink shadow grows larger and stretches across the screen. This leads them to explore other objects in shadow until they build a structure from plastic bottles, containers and other everyday objects. Because they play together, they create a kind of magic where the objects seem to move of their own accord. In reality, the structure is set up and remotely operated to rotate and be lit in front of the screen. The first character becomes more familiar and less afraid of the dark and it is clear that this is because he has made beautiful shadows to play with.

At the end of the play, each character in turn goes behind the screen. As they move from in front of to behind the screen, they magically transform into miniatures of themselves flying above a moving landscape of colourful objects. This last scene was informed by workshops with children that took place in Amman prior to the rehearsal period, on their vision of the future. Buthaina Abul Bandora, Dramaturge and Designer of *Now and Tomorrow* conducted the workshops with children at the Haya.⁶ She did a series of visual arts workshops exploring the concept of the future. The children who participated in the workshops predominantly saw themselves and others as capable of flying in the future. So, at the end of the performance, miniature figures of the two characters can be seen flying in shadow over objects behind the screen. The collaboration that took place between Terrapin Puppet Theatre and The Haya Cultural Centre stemmed from a need for shadow puppetry training for creative staff at the Haya. Buthaina Abul Bandora is quoted as stating that for her, the process was a “very interesting experience” and that the “shadow theatre exploration and gathering information by experimenting was something new” (Bandora, 2018). In practice, experimenting with



Figure 15.1 *Now and Tomorrow* in production.

Photo by Lynne Kent. 2018. Haya Cultural Centre.

non-traditional and cross-cultural forms of theatre can be a very positive exchange. This exchange can produce hybrid forms of theatre. *Now and Tomorrow* is a hopeful vision of the future informed by workshops with children in Amman. The process of making this production was not all smooth sailing. As stated earlier, it takes time to get to know the process of another artist or group of artists. Even simple daily routines need to be negotiated. In Australia we tend to work 9 AM till 5 PM with a break for lunch and shorter breaks in between. We usually start with a physical warm-up. In Amman, the staff sometimes started later in the day and finished later with Fridays as the day off. We worked with composer Ma'en Hijazeen to create a sound score for the production, something that he had not done before. Initially there was some confusion as to the process of creating a sound score for the production. It is a very specific requirement as it accompanies the action on stage and, in a non-verbal show, the actors often take their cues from the sound. When creating the whole show, there can be, as in our case, some tension between what comes first, the music or the choreography. In practice, it takes time to translate from one language to another and for each element to shift in relation to the other to create a hybrid performance. In theory, as Erika Fischer-Lichte points out, theatrical hybridity results in a cultural interweaving and poses questions, implications and challenges for theatre research (Fischer-Lichte 2010, 294).

Interweavings and Intentional Encounters

Now and Tomorrow is an example of a hybrid form of performance with a process of production that found commonalities between Jordanian and

Australian cultures that led to a fruitful exchange. A few important factors contributed to the success of this collaboration. Although the Western creative team of *Now and Tomorrow* —myself included, made the crossing to Jordan to develop the work, the process of creating the show was not the one-way phenomenon as is often a criticism of cross-cultural collaborations (Latrell 2000, 44). It was an intentional encounter between Haya Cultural Centre and Terrapin Puppet Theatre. The production was initiated in Jordan and the Australian team responded to the invitation. Economic support for the project was provided by both the Jordanian and the Australian companies. Importantly, the production is not an adaptation of an existing Western theatre text into Arabic but an original work. John Russell Brown's criticism of cross-cultural theatre exchange is that it is not equitable (1998, 12). A more equitable cultural and artistic exchange of creative production can be made possible when the performance is original and when both parties have made economic investment in the product. Brown's other concern for the relevance of modifying performances to serve local audiences could be softened when it comes to contemporary shadow theatre collaborations that use little or no spoken text. With the focus on the physicality of the performers and the use of everyday objects and shadow images to create a narrative, the production *Now and Tomorrow* offers multiple interpretations for young audiences. It would be interesting to compare audience interpretations of the performance across cultures in both Jordan and Australia. Buthaina Abul Bandora elaborates her thinking on the production in this regard. She states,

every human no matter from what culture or what age or what geographical place he comes from, no matter what background he comes from, has some kind of a relationship with shadow theatre, and shadow theatre as an image type of communication can overcome language and other communication barriers to cross over. So any audience can form a special relationship with the scene of the shadow. Adding to that, shadow theatre with its form of (existing and non-existing) at the same time, can provoke the dreamy creative side of any of us, and takes us to a place where imagination is tangible.

(Bandora 2018)

In *Now and Tomorrow* the team of artists were continually interrogating the significance of the choices made on stage for an audience. The cultural barriers of spoken language on stage were reduced, but without rigorous discussion among the creative team in this production, the use of shadow images, objects and non-verbal performance could have an adverse effect of creating a meaningless mess of “stuff” on stage for an audience. Activating the life of the image in performance involves a sophisticated mesh of interrelated things. Acknowledging the multiplicity of what an image is, and how the meaning of the image changes in relation to its surroundings—as can be seen in the shadow puppet theatre—is one step forward to begin to work with the image in performance. As John Bell comments, “it must be possible to develop a Western sense of Arab and Middle Eastern performance aesthetics, especially if that sense could connect to performance

traditions (such as solo performance, shadow theatre, and puppet theatre) that are pervasive and persistent features of Middle Eastern cultures” (2005, 9). Shadow theatre may be the form through which a better understanding in the West of Middle Eastern, Arabic/Islamic cultures can occur and in turn, make a foundation for successful cross-cultural theatre collaboration between the two worlds.

Intersections and Encounters

The establishment in 2006 of the IFTR Arabic Theatre Working Group has been crucial in informing contemporary understandings of what constitutes contemporary Arab/Islamic theatre. Recent scholarly thinking has characterized Arab theatre as defined by its hybridity. Khalid Amine (2006) describes Arab theatre as “located at the crossroads and a continuum of intersections, encounters, and negotiations” (145). These intersections provide a rich site of exchange and collaboration. In particular, the hybrid nature of Arabic theatre today, as Amine describes it, as “spaced between East and West” (159) allows for new forms of theatre to emerge. The intersections, encounters and negotiations Amine details form an emergent mesh theatre that actively interconnects all elements on stage. The divisions across language, spoken and visual, and the understandings of shadows and objects between cultures intersect and continually shift in relation to one another. The boundaries in this theatre between human and nonhuman performers are blurred and inextricably linked at the same time, creating a mesh of intersecting facets. Space and screen, light and image in the shadow theatre interact to change what is seen on stage at any one moment. Performer and light and space and shadow all work together to sometimes confuse and confound the viewer into an uncanny questioning of who or what is leading the action. Mesh theatre, as I define it, is informed by stage practices of traditional shadow theatre and early trick film and stage illusion techniques that blurred the boundaries between image and performer, between the live and mediated image and, at the same time, it is distinct from these practices in the way that it deliberately uses these past practices to breathe life into the image in performance. I argue that this “mesh” as Timothy Morton uses the term (Morton 2011, 2013), or Timothy Ingold’s “meshwork” of relationships (Ingold 2011), may be a more useful term for the kind of performance that links the elaborate play seen and unseen on stage, between all things human and nonhuman. The intricate connections, actions and their ramifications for the placement of a shadow puppet, torch, screen, audience, puppeteer and space in shadow theatre, for example, provide almost endless combinations of creative output. In the performance *Now and Tomorrow* for example, simple shadow play with torch and object on a screen is done in front of the audience while two computer automated pulley systems with moving torches are set up behind the screen to reveal a moving panorama of objects in shadow seemingly animated by magic. What is distinct is that none of the elements in this theatre are fixed—they can all shift in relation to each other. It is this shifting hybridity inherent in the intersections between all elements of the shadow theatre that creates a mesh theatre. An image shifts in relation to light and space. Bodies shift in relation to each other.

Working styles shift across culture and time in order to create something that is neither one thing or another. This kind of performance is a mesh of elements that actively converge at a particular time and then shift again on stage with each new audience.

Shifting Hybridity

A theory of mesh theatre is applicable to the shifting hybridity of intercultural collaborative performance. In the performance *Now and Tomorrow* the two performers watch each other, adjust objects on stage and eventually make a story together in shadow on a screen placed between two ladders. The narrative arc of *Now and Tomorrow* is an apt metaphor for the description of the intersections and negotiations of intercultural theatre exchange. The two characters the Jordanian actors play are very different. One has lots of pink coloured objects that he arranges in orderly patterns. The other has a large piece of fabric and a torch and lives in a rich world of the imagination. When they first encounter each other on stage, they are curious and at times, cautious about each other. The audience sees two distinct personalities shift and adjust in relation to what the other character is doing until they create a unique and wonderful story in shadow together.

Working in a space between moving lights, flexible screens and shifting scenes in front of and behind screens, allows for a fresh hybrid form of theatre to emerge. This is exciting because audience and players alike can explore it together. Understanding the image in performance as existing in a mesh of aesthetic, cultural and historical performance elements is an important step in the process of understanding cultures who have worked with the intricacies of shadow play for centuries. Further research on audience receptions of productions such as *Now and Tomorrow* is needed to determine if, in the pursuit of an ethical and intentional theatrical exchange, the intention of the performance has succeeded.

Notes

- 1 Established in 2003, The Council for Australian-Arab Relations (CAAR) seeks "to strengthen Australian-Arab relations by advancing areas of shared political, economic and social interest and building a greater awareness and appreciation of each other's cultures and values" (<http://dfat.gov.au/people-to-people/foundations-councils-institutes/caar/Pages/council-for-australia-arab-relations-caar.aspx>).
- 2 Terrapin Puppet Theatre received project funding through the Australian Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and The Council for Australian-Arab Relations (CAAR) that seeks "to strengthen Australian-Arab relations by advancing areas of shared political, economic and social interest and building a greater awareness and appreciation of each other's cultures and values."
- 3 The complexities of defining the geographical, historical and cultural boundaries of what makes up the Middle East, Arab and Islamic worlds and the theatrical forms that have evolved in the region is discussed in *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre Volume 4: The Arab World*. Routledge, 2003. As Khalid Amine points out (2006), Arab/Islamic theatre is defined by a post-colonial tradition of hybridity bought about as a result of cultural negotiations.

- 4 *Teatro Gioco Vita* of Piacenza, Italy established circa 1978 with designer Lele Luzzati. *Gioco Vita* under the direction of Fabrizio Montecchi have collaborated on a number of productions and continually investigate the meaning of the shadow image in performance.
- 5 The Asia Pacific Triennial held in Brisbane, Queensland brings together a range of contemporary and traditional artworks, music and performances from artists and companies across the region. This particular theatrical collaboration between artist Heri Dono and Elision featured huge 2–3-metre-high shadow puppets hung in a disused power station.
- 6 Now and Tomorrow, (2018). Haya Cultural Centre and Terrapin Puppet Theatre. A short video of the production *Now and Tomorrow* can be seen here; <https://www.terrapin.org.au/project/nowtomorrow/>

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CONCLUSION

Provocations for Educators and Practitioners

Jillian Campana and Yasmine Marie Jahanmir

Reflecting upon the myriad of topics presented in this text, we can see that there is no “one size fits all” approach to directing productions, teaching traditions and techniques or developing pedagogies anywhere in the world. In the cases we present here, theatre artists and teaching artists are engaging in work with communities of practitioners and learners that is not necessarily familiar to, or rooted in, the cultures and philosophies of the people studying or making the work. When not acknowledged, discrepancies in ways of working, understanding processes and collaborating artistically can lead to massive disconnects and appropriations. Yet, when we are able to recognize and appreciate the diverse ways in which theatre makers understand and connect to the art form we have the possibility of a theatre that reflects a range and depth and responds to the richness of the global theatre society. Perhaps this is the big take-away. Artists, theatre students and audiences anywhere are individuals with different needs, aesthetics and sensibilities. What works in one place is almost certain not to produce the same result in another place and with another group.

In Marvin Carlson’s chapter, *Similarities and Differences in Teaching Western Based Theatre in China and the Arab World*, we see an example of his different experiences working with Chinese and Egyptian student artists. This is in part because of the disparate theatre traditions in China and Egypt, as well as the histories of theatre development in those two countries. Carlson reminds us this differentiation is also due to the cultural aesthetics, norms and needs in these distinct places as well as the students’ access to materials and exposure to the art form both regionally and internationally. Finally the chapter urges readers to be aware of the differences in attitudes and understandings of Western theatre and how these must be considered when choosing material and adapting pedagogy.

We also see from the examples presented in this book, that small adaptations and attentions can offer profound results. In Chapter 8, *The Viewpoints as Transcultural Pedagogy*, Adam Christopher Marple discusses the attention he paid to the pace of life in different South Asian communities he was teaching in. Looking at how the understanding of Anne Bogart’s Viewpoint of *Time*

changes geographically, Marple is able to adjust his pedagogy and language to provide more clarity to students in different locations, and he acknowledges that these locations may in fact be only a village away.

Consideration of the local context, in terms of thinking about what students, actors and audiences desire, is also a crucial throughline that runs through many of the chapters. In Chapter 7, Mark Tardi describes how he used a multi-pronged approach to developing a new theater program that fulfilled the specific needs of his university in Oman. Through incorporating Arabic texts into his theatre history courses, encouraging students to attend live performances, and awareness and discussion of his students' comfort levels, Tardi was able to produce a theatrical show that was written, designed and performed by students. This show provided a meaningful platform for the students' creative expression at the university, which has since become an integral part of the university's cultural impact.

We began work on this book because we saw early on that the topics and traditions we are teaching and the work we are making outside of the West was, and is, still heavily influenced by our development as Western raised and/or educated artists. We reasoned that if we were experiencing this pull then likely others were as well. Jillian, for example, has taught and created new theatre works outside of the Western world for over 15 years, yet when she moved to Cairo for the second time in 2016 she noticed that her students did not immediately connect to the exercises and techniques she was offering them. And they responded very differently to physical work than actors she had worked with in North America, Europe, Southeast Asia and India, preferring to conduct table reads for much longer and to intellectualize the material rather than embody the characters and their emotions and needs physically. Rather than forcing an approach and material on the students, she took a step back and looked at her own education and theatre training. Though she had studied a great deal outside of the West and even lived in Cairo previously, she had not studied Arabic theatre and she was, by and large, unfamiliar with the culture. She sought to study Egyptian plays, research Arabo-Islamic theatre traditions and understand how the recent revolution had affected the art form in the country. She asked students about their comfort levels and held candid conversations outside of class to learn about her students' perspectives and to understand why they were interested in theatre. From this she learned quickly that part of her students' instincts to intellectualize the material was a result of state censorship and even familial and educational suppression. The students did not want to get anything wrong and so they were waiting, to make sure they understood everything before they physicalized characters, emotions and needs. Accordingly Campana began directorial work with actors by taking a lot of time to discuss the histories, stories, theories, production concepts and the characters' complexities. While this information is typically unpacked at any initial table read, she found that her students appreciate a solid week to wrap their minds around the play and the people who populate the play before diving into physical explorations of character. The point here is that whatever the reason, the experiences, background and comfort levels of the students and artists have to be taken into consideration.

Simultaneously, while it is extremely important to recognize diverse cultural practices and attitudes, it is also important to acknowledge that we

are operating within a global media landscape. As shown by Yasmine's experiences working on *West Side Story* in Kuwait and James Mirrione and Wei Song's experiences leading musical theatre workshops in China, many practitioners and students have deep and personal connections to material that has Western origins. Thus, an important part of any theatrical work being done abroad is to observe just how porous the boundaries are (and have always been) between diverse forms of cultural production. Negotiating this exchange involves a simultaneous historicization of the text and personalization of the story's impact in order to highlight the global nature of theatre practice.

We, therefore, reiterate a call for change, one that has already been made by many others in recent years but one for which we as educators working outside of the West see an immediate need. Western-educated theatre practitioners and teachers working outside of their home country, particularly in places in which the students, artists and audiences do not necessarily have foundations in Western philosophy, culture and theatre, must understand that their approach and aesthetic is but one of many. Furthermore, this approach may not resonate at all with the community in which they are working or creating art for. Based on the challenges we have experienced and seen and the successes we have heard about and been witness to, we offer some general guidelines when teaching, directing or making work with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Privilege the voices of the participants: The most important facet of working within a diverse environment is ensuring that everyone involved in the production has the space to discuss their needs, comfort levels, and understandings in regard to the theatrical material. Take time each day to gather feedback from the community with which you are working. In production, schedule consistent meetings, both individually and as a group, to discuss the content, aesthetics, and practices used within the production. In an acting class, ask students to fill out a brief survey to share their interests, needs, and preferences when working on a scene. In literary or theoretical courses, develop student-centered projects that allow students to bring their own related interests into the classroom. By situating the voices of the participants as equal in importance to the theatrical material, more equitable and nuanced understandings of global theatre histories and practices will unfold.

Learn from the context: Each place and place-in-time has its own personality, aesthetics and culture. Setting affects the way students receive and understand directions, information and issues and subsequently how they study and create theatre, including what subjects are explored via the work. Location and time also impact the audience. Events connected to the region and milieu that have occurred or are occurring provide a frame through which the audience views the work. Teachers, facilitators and artists need to educate themselves about the place and the time in which they are working. As a result of such knowledge, they can more effectively seek to embed an understanding of, and appreciation for, the location and time into the theatre work that is undertaken and presented.

Incorporate the local: Every location has its own rich and storied performance practice. Theatre, even productions stemming from Western tradition, has the capacity to bring awareness to these local traditions. Collaborate

with local practitioners. Fuse elements from these practices into the play (without obscuring their original context, of course). Organize a guest lecture or performance workshop. Acknowledge the local performance history in the curriculum. Create spaces in which the local community can develop their own theatrical voices. There are a multitude of ways to celebrate local performance traditions and doing so will develop an appreciation for the diversity of theater practices across the globe.

Adapt the material: Artists, students and audiences need to see themselves reflected in the work; theatre is, after all, about learning to understand ourselves and the society in which we live. Whenever possible, choose material that can be relatable to local collaborators. We acknowledge that many practitioners working abroad are expected to do Western work, but we encourage you whenever possible, and barring copyright infringement, to adapt that work. Change the setting, alter characterization to fit regional norms, or provide local counterpoints as examples when teaching canonical Western texts. Not only will collaborators establish personalized connections to the material, an adaptation practice will also shed new insights into the original texts.

Listen to the audience: Candid and in-depth conversations with those who are likely to participate in and view the work can offer the theatre practitioner insight into the ways in which the work will be received. Identifying audience practices in each locale also will help in furthering connection with the community. Attending local productions broadens the practitioner's conception of who the theatre audience is, how they behave, and to what they are accustomed. Familiarizing oneself, or better yet communicating with the audience before undertaking any work helps us to understand participants' and audience members' previous experiences, comfort levels and expertise.

Acknowledge biases and assumptions: Finally, recognize that the practitioner is bringing their own background into the work. Western-style practice, aesthetics and pedagogies are not neutral and stem from the particular environments in which they were developed and transmitted. Interrogating one's own training and education for cultural specificities will help to dismantle the biases and assumptions of Western-trained practitioners when working abroad. We believe that this kind of self-reflection will encourage us all to become better artists, better teachers, better scholars and better humans.

As the borders of our world shift and people continue to move around either more easily or with more difficulty, we must develop new ways to bridge meaningful connections across divergent populations. The theatre, whether a stage, a rehearsal room, or a classroom, remains a generative space for insightful collaboration; a collaboration that we feel has the capacity to increase empathy, encourage equitable discourse and bolster humanity in a world that does not always value these elements. During the initial phases of working on this book, we were very concerned with how Western theatre abroad runs the risk of upholding the monolithic status of Western theatrical tradition. While that concern still has validity, we have been dazzled by the various ways our contributors have worked diligently and ethically within their local contexts to bring a global theatre to life. Their awareness, insight,

and efforts have helped connect the theatre material to local communities and in turn, have transformed understandings of Western theatrical practice. Going forward, we urge all practitioners to consider their theatre traditions as existing within the global context. Our hope is that this type of thoughtful, informed and nuanced practice will make an enriched theatre and a kinder world.

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