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# Editorial:

## Culture and Context: Notes on Performance in South Africa

Ian Steadman

Southern Africa in the 1980's embraces ideologies and material realities which radically affect art and culture. The observer can no longer base assessments upon idealist and humanist notions derived from traditional prescriptions in art: the ideological, political and socio-economic contradictions which affect the lives of all people on the sub-continent must be accommodated. The cultural expressions of under-privileged groups in southern Africa satisfy few prescriptions in the vague terminology of elitist notions of "art", and artistic conventions evolved by such groups cannot adequately be described or evaluated within the critical terminology evolved by, and applicable to, Eurocentric notions of art. While, therefore, the most intelligent use of the word "theatre" will define the concept in terms broad enough to embrace virtually all aspects of performance, the word nevertheless contains connotations of a tradition rooted in a Hellenistic-Renaissance cultural continuum. Critical Arts has already contributed to a re-assessment of such traditional definitions of theatre in its third issue (1), but it is necessary to spread our net more broadly in order to underpin the relevance of performance in a study of southern African culture.

### PERFORMANCE AND THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

The values and aspirations of many groups in southern Africa are projected into cultural and artistic forms which thereby reflect ideological change and continuity amongst such groups. While this process often arrives at documentation (published literature, scored music, etc.), just as often it does not. Many modes of performance remain as yet undocumented. The work activities, dance forms, harmonies and hymns of southern Africa have only recently come under investigation (2) as modes of performance worthy of study and documentation. Yet here lies a wealth of cultural expression, and it is here that the observer finds an important focus for further study of the social structures in southern Africa.

Any attempt at a comprehensive survey of performance in southern Africa will find itself emeshed in the very real problems of race. While, for example, it may be argued that cultural analysis based on separation of the field into racially defined groups is superficial analysis (3), and that the real determinants in southern Africa are ideological rather than ethnic, it is nevertheless true that race provides a groundplan for some distinctions in cultural study. This is both because of apartheid ideology imposed by the dominant group in South Africa, and despite it.

With this awareness that there exist other, sometimes more profound, determinants, we can make careful use of concepts such as "black theatre" and still do justice to an objective cultural study of performance. The naming game is an arbitrary one : is *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* to be labelled "black" theatre because of the circumstances of its creation, its subject matter, or its intentions ? Do we allow for a certain contribution to be made by "non-blacks" who happen to choose the black experience to write about ? Fugard's *Isotisi* is surely about experience before it is about "black" experience, but it nevertheless depicts a psyche formed by the very conditions analysed by such writers as Manaka (5) and Maponya (6) in their works.

Black theatre, then, is more than a genre, a movement or a posture based on ethnicity. The label (for such it is) expresses more important notions of identification with a set of values. These values fall under the rubric of the Black Consciousness movement, and they define an attitude to the nature and function of performance in southern African society. Most Black theatre, as the term is understood by its practitioners in South Africa, is really proletarian theatre which dedicates itself to the depiction of life lived as a black man : and in South Africa, that has to do with politics and ideology.

Whatever our definitional terms, we become aware of the final import of a study of black theatre : it is a theatre which exemplifies how performance in southern Africa can reflect change and continuity in relation to the complexities of the social structure.

#### CRITICAL ATTITUDES TO PERFORMANCE

The need to re-focus critical attitudes when looking at popular performance in Africa cannot be overstated. Much of African performance cannot be evaluated along lines of literariness or aesthetic form : in the first place, it is often presented in a second language mixed with vernacular, and secondly, the work is aimed not at a publishing market but at a cosmopolitan popular audience. The concern is not so much with literariness as with theatricalism - where images speak more than words, and where action is symbolic and evocative (7). Texts in black township theatre convey little of the full impact of the play in performance. The gumboot dance in *The Hungry Earth*, the labour scenes in *Imbumba*, and the mining scene in *Egoli* cannot adequately be conveyed through textual means, but as theatrical performance they communicate dynamically about contemporary realities.

In stressing cultural phenomena as the product of social structures, one may be accused of underplaying intrinsic merit in a work of art in favour of work that is "relevant", however defective. However, a sociological approach of this nature is merely an attempt to explain, not define, cultural artefacts : an attempt to give the works three-dimensionality. We are not, here, trying to define a social structure, but to investigate the relationship between social determinants and the practitioners of a public art : the chemistry operating between authors, directors, actors and audiences; the methods used in performance; the layers of signification - these are our concerns.

These concerns will help us to eliminate provincialism in our studies of performance, and to combat formalist hegemony in the study of drama and theatre at institutions of learning. Too few of our teachers, scholars and critics are able to extract themselves from an approach to literature and drama which looks exclusively at form, style, theme and tradition. They are making scant use of semio-structuralist or materialist critical approaches to complement their traditional methodologies. Reluctance to use such

approaches sometimes springs from a refusal to recognize that culture and context, especially in South Africa, cannot be separated. Black theatre, for example, is accused of being political (8) - as if theatre is forbidden to deal with the political. In fact, what is political in black theatre is the manifestation of the political restrictions under which black theatre is created. No formalist critical approach can do justice to the layers of signification of black theatre in these terms.

### PERFORMANCE STUDIES

One of the intentions of this issue of Critical Arts, then, is to emphasize the need for research into neglected areas of performance in southern Africa. Another intention is to suggest an elaboration of curriculum studies of drama and theatre, where they exist, into a broad concept of "performance" related to the shifting cultural formations in South Africa. The study of performance as a larger cultural discipline can only lend significance to the scholarly endeavours of students and academics who are interested in the applicability of their intellectual pursuits to wider, social, thought.

For it is the relationship of cultural artefacts to the society which produces and receives them, that is the goal of investigation in Critical Arts. In this, the traditional notions of evanescent "principles" in the study of drama and theatre have no place. The existing canon of "masterpieces" of the drama fulfilling certain principles of what is defined as "good drama", is the product of a highly selective (usually class-bound) valuation by experts. Throughout history indigenous modes of performance have been admitted to the canon only where they have been seen to fertilise the existing 'principles' of drama, as in the case of the popular Commedia dell'arte. Raymond Williams (9) effectively attacks the notion of such insular formalist thought. He criticizes a

"...prior assumption of the existence, within the 'body' of literature, of such 'permanent forms' as epic, tragedy, or romance...an a priori and idealist assumption which prevents us from seeing the important history of the generation of such forms..."

Instead of trying to accommodate individual works for the theatre within existing frameworks defined by attitudes such as this, the goal of scholarship should be to explain the generation of these works as unique and individual creations with specific socio-historical co-ordinates, each with a certain relation to the cultural formations which gave them birth.

Changing socio-economic relations in southern Africa have rendered notions of a 'tradition' or 'organic culture' somewhat superfluous. Continuity in cultural expression depends to some extent on the selective valuations of dominant groups, who are thereby instrumental in the creation of a notion of "tradition". Williams (10) puts it thus : -

"...societies and literatures have active histories, which are always inseparable from active values. But...these facts of change can be projected into an apparent totality which has the advantage of containing them and thus of making them at last, like the rocks, stand still. In literature the most common of these false totalities is tradition..."

Tradition, for Williams, is not an object or a "projected reality", but "an active and continuous selection and reselection". To assume that it is a fixed object is to forget that that object is created by the values and selections and omissions of men with ideological bias. The concept of tradition as an objective entity leads to notions of a fixed syllabus where the distortions of "principles" described above are reinforced, and leads thence to the tyranny of received habits of thought and criticism.

It is necessary to re-assess the notion of tradition, because any tradition omits forms which do not meet the self-reinforcing criteria of that tradition. "Alternative theatre" is a convenient label. Used in this context, it refers to performance which does not observe traditional rules of popular or fashionable theatre. Its audience is by comparison very small, and it is to be thought of as equivalent to "hidden" or "underground" theatre. This is a theatre which sets itself up not so much to entertain as to illuminate serious thought. Of course, when this theatre achieves popular success and good box office receipts, it may be defined as a "commercial hit", but its gestation is the starting point for our definition of the concept (11).

We are discussing here a theatre whose subject matter is contemporary realities. It is not escapist, and if "fun" is involved in it, this is in the very best sense of that word as defined by Brecht. Because it is about contemporary realities, it does not feel obliged to heed traditional rules or conventions. Serious theatre has always been avant-garde in this respect. From Euripides to Sam Shepard, theatre has evolved because of avant-garde artists who broke rules. Our alternative theatre artists create new directions by disregarding old rules. It is among the tasks of performance studies, then, to put aside received habits of thought and preconceptions for the sake of analysing contemporary achievements. Chief of these tasks is that of placing "tradition" in proper perspective.

A great sentimentality accrues to the notion of tradition. The primary instance of this is in the idea of supposed "golden ages" in theatrical history, an idea which values the self-reinforcing achievements (ideologically defined) of certain artists while undervaluing other, perhaps more pertinent, artistic statements. The alternative theatre of Georg Büchner, for example, remained long obscured by the mainstream German drama represented by Goethe, Schiller, et al. Similarly, the "golden age" of Greek tragedy is studied from a base of preconceptions about the nature of tragedy, evolved from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle's prescriptions, because he had in mind Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, are illuminating enough, but a leap of faith which tries (in the same terms) to define the work of Aeschylus, for example, must fail. Yet generations of students of the drama study the *Oresteia* in a formalist manner as tragic drama, without ever discovering the sociological facts which provide a context to the plays. A materialist approach, on the other hand, reveals evidence about draft laws before the courts in Athens, an election scandal, law and the areopagus (12) - all of which are indispensable to an understanding of a trilogy which is, before all else, a treatise on the nature of justice.

Following Williams' criticism of "permanent forms", then, we see the importance of debunking fixed categories in drama and theatre. Two thousand years of scholarship attempting to define the nature of tragedy and the tragic hero, and persistent evidence of the stranglehold of such approaches in curriculum studies, is testimony to the need for re-assessment. Notions of a tradition of forms and conventions are superfluous unless, with the towering example of theorists like Lukacs before us, we stress the relationship of those forms and conventions to the contexts which generate them. Performance studies must have a sense of history. The present, too, must be studied as history. Contemporary performance must be seen as crystallizing contemporary history. "Relevance", that tired concept subpoenaed for so many trials, is what makes contemporary performance interesting to future historians. Our studies must therefore be predicated on the relevance of performance to social structures.

## PERFORMANCE AND SOCIETY

Art can never be reduced to ideology or to sociological manifestation. Nevertheless, the relationship will always be present in some degree. As Barthes puts it :

"...no one lives without ideology : the absence of ideology is itself an ideology..." (13)

With contemporary performance in South Africa the relationship is easy to detect. With many genres and forms claiming labels such as "white English theatre", "black English theatre", "Afrikaans theatre" - all victims of the peculiarities of social life in South Africa - it would be wise to exemplify from a play which has a strong claim to being an example of a truly "South African theatre". Cincinatti is the name given to the theatrical work devised from improvisation by a group of actors at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg in 1979. The work consists of a series of vignettes about the lives of characters associated with the banning of multi-racial discotheque clubs in Johannesburg. While the focus of the performance is about relationships, loneliness, and communication, all of these are nevertheless bound by the specific social co-ordinates of South Africa at a particular time. Abraham, the old man who observes the action at the club Cincinatti, exemplifies this :

"...I remember a long time ago when I was a young man, I had to carry a bag of beans to a white man's farm. When I got to the gate, to the kitchen-yard, I was stopped by a dog that barked at me and showed its teeth and would not let me pass. I picked up stones to throw at it, and as I did the farmer came out and said :-

-Wat maak jy kaffir?	(What are you doing, kaffir?)
-Ek bring die boontjies for baas.	I bring beans for you, sir.
-Wat doen jy met die klippe?	What are you doing with stones?
-Die hond wil my byt baas.	The dog wants to bite me sir.
-Gooi een klip en jy's dood.	Throw one stone and you're dead.
-Maar die hond sal byt vir my baas.	But the dog will bite me sir.
-My hond eet nie vrot vleis nie.	My dog doesn't eat rotten meat.)

I put the beans down next to the gate and I walked away. I heard him calling me. I did not turn back. My whole body was shaking. There was a looking-glass outside my hut. I looked at myself in that looking-glass. My face was red from the dust. I looked at my hands. They were the hands of a man who works. I looked at this dirt that covered me. It was not dirt that I was ashamed of and I thought : 'Whose earth is this? Mine or his?', and that was the first time I really understood politics..."

It cannot be claimed that this is a "political play" - because that label has connotations of a specific genre of theatre with didactic intentions. On the other hand, it may be argued that politics is never absent from theatre, because of the very nature of theatre (where a group of people representing a cross-section of the community gather together and experience dynamic communication enacted by others from the community). What cannot be denied, however, is that such a play has a context similar to that revealed in the works of Brecht and Piscator, true exemplars of the genre "Political theatre". That is to say, political matters, in however indirect a manner, are major focal points for serious theatre in South Africa. The form that this takes varies. Some, like early Brechtian theatre, is deliberately didactic. Other theatre, like Cincinatti, expresses itself as in the closing words of the play :-

"What can we do, Ntombazaa? The world is shaking beneath our feet. What can we do, but see what we can, understand what we can and follow the courage that we feel in our hearts."

No didacticism here - but a sense of contemporary realities which mould the performance.

The relationship between politics and performance is important. For international reception of South African performance it often seems indispensable. Fugard, for example, achieves his greatest success on the London stage with Sizwe Bansi is Dead and The Island, while Dimetos sees Fugard's first apparent departure from a realistic depiction of South African conditions, and also the first cool reception from London critics: -

- John Barber, Daily Telegraph 25/5/1976 : "Not even the noble presence and cavernous voice of Paul Scofield could persuade me that Athol Fugard's Dimetos is anything but a disaster...Fugard, a dramatist known for eloquent protests against racial injustice in South Africa..."
- B.A. Young, Financial Times 25/5/1976 : "Mr Fugard's dialogue, deprived of its demotic South African crutch, has become almost colourless, slipping now and then into vapour pseudo-poetry and punctuated with meaningless symbolism...it embarrassed me terribly"
- Michael Billington, Guardian 25/5/1976 : "...In his African plays, Fugard is always rivetingly precise but here..."
- Frank Marcus, Sunday Telegraph, 30/5/76: "Having given us some powerfully compassionate studies of particular facets of life in his unhappy native land, (Fugard) must have felt that the time had come to proceed to a more generalised statement. 'Dimetos' is a dire warning of what happens when writers hear the treacherous siren voices and mistake them for inspiration."

Fugard's earlier successes had all been in part due to the interest value of his depiction of South African societal problems. Without denying Fugard's considerable dramaturgical talents, his international critics have predicated much of their appreciation upon 'local colour' (14) in his works. Fugard's notebooks (15) testify to the acute powers of observation and selection which he brings to his work. His commitment to the art of theatre and to his social context provide the base for the greatest achievements in performance in South Africa.

The relationship between politics and performance in South Africa can perhaps best be summed up by saying that the subject matter is usually so steeped in politics that politics does not require a mention. In the process of broadening the social base of theatre, it is inevitable that, in order to attract people to the theatre, writers, performers and directors will attempt to speak to audiences about matters of relevance - and that will inevitably lead towards political matters.

In black theatre this is exemplified in the subject of mining. Both Maponya and Manaka centre their work upon life in the mining compound. In the dedication to Egoli ( 16 ) Manaka features these words :-

"Yours is not a silent resistance  
in our struggle to survive  
the burden on our shoulders  
without fear you have  
stoked our spirits  
when we were under  
the bowels of the earth"

In the Song from the prologue to The Hungry Earth ( 17 ) Maponya writes :-

"Touched by our non-violent vibrations  
We will rise up  
We will sing while we crawl to the mine  
We will rise up  
Bleeding through the days of poverty  
We will fight hard  
Pulsing in the hot dark ground  
We will rise up  
Dying in the stubborn hungry earth  
We will fight hard  
We will rise up  
And we will sing loud  
Against the hungry earth"

The relationship on both a literal and symbolic level between the day-to-day existence of the worker and his political aspirations is clear.

Mining features prominently in contemporary black theatre because it exemplifies the ways in which urban industrial life dislocates the values and aspirations of the migrant worker and, on a different level, signifies the exploitation of the individual by social structures. Mining is the cog in the wheel of the South African economy, and the migrancy labour system is its life-line. The labour compound provides, therefore, a microcosm of economic and social realities in South Africa. The compound is a method of labour control and mining cost control (18 ). The exploitation of the worker which occurs in such a situation ensures that the mining compound becomes a crucible for the black artist expressing his reaction against the conditions of existence in South Africa. Thus we have a major focus in black performance : the depiction of working class life in the city. This is food for a genuine proletarian theatre where social consciousness is the common denominator of the subject matter in the plays. Playwrights like Manaka and Maponya are not merely attempting to create a drama with traditional resonances, or to use African tradition - they are concerned with the situation of the worker in contemporary social structures. There is no homogeneity between Africans and their 'culture' - in the conglomerate social structure of South Africa, what is important is socio-economic reality.



The attempt to recapture 'roots' is a misleading one : -

"...if we are to revive our forefathers' ways of making plays we must also revive the rules that governed those plays and the people who played in them : I am honestly of the opinion that some of the rules under which township plays are staged today are too rigid, too artificial and that they kill the acting-spirit of the Black actor...I honestly believe that the European-style stage kills an African play and should be avoided wherever possible. I also believe that if we preach something we must also practise it and if young Black actors and actresses preach the greatness of their forebears they must practise that greatness and must behave like people with a great mission and not just like ordinary actors and actresses..." ( 19 )

To attempt to re-create from traditional springs is far removed from the concerns of the proletarian playwright. Ethnic parochialism and anthropological searches for 'roots' give way in black township theatre to urban relations and social consciousness.

Maponya's The Hungry Earth is a play much like the many-headed Hydra. It has been performed in and around Johannesburg numerous times, and each performance presents the viewer with the impression that what lies before him is a new experience. There exists a script, and there exists a structure. But any who know the problems facing the black actor in South Africa will know that to expect a full cast to arrive on schedule is to expect a great deal. This presents no unsurmountable problem to Maponya's Bahumutsi drama group. To switch roles at a moment's notice, to use a stage manager as an impromptu actor, to cut, adapt, reverse and restructure in accordance with circumstances - these are the realities of performance in black theatre in South Africa. We have, therefore, the experience of having seen The Hungry Earth in flux. Substantially the play remains the same, but in fact the text of the play embraces many different performances.

The play was originally created between January and March 1979, receiving its first production in May at the Donaldson Orlando Cultural Club in Soweto. The playwright's earlier experiences, which took him to the Edinburgh Festival of drama and theatre, included an exposure to the work of Brecht, and The Measures Taken by Brecht may be seen to have exerted a powerful influence on Maponya. This influence is more profound than would at first glance appear. Clearly, the structure of The Hungry Earth is close to Brecht's early Lehrstücke, and the play is reminiscent of anything from Brecht's early period. The performance embraces five scenes depicting conditions of working-class life in South Africa, each scene being introduced and commented upon by a narrator. All of the actors remain on stage throughout the performance, each playing several roles and each acting as narrator at different points during the performance. The performances are played out mainly in English, but with a substantial usage of vernacular, mainly in the songs which provide a comment on the action.

The Hungry Earth opens with a prologue in true Brechtian fashion, outlining the situation for the particular performance. There are five scenes in which the four actors play different roles. Scene one is set in the Hostel Room where four workers share experiences and reminiscences, and enact their history, the coming of whites to the shores of Africa, the changes brought about as a result, and the sense of deprivation with which they identify. Scene two, the Sugar Plantation, depicts the conditions of labour on a plantation, where wages are low, working conditions are poor, and children are made to do manual labour to earn poverty wages. Scene three, The Train, presents the picture of rural men travelling to Egoli (20). Johannesburg represents wealth and opportunity. On the train, however, a brutal ticket inspector arrests the men for smoking 'dagga', a scene of police brutality follows, and the scene ends with these words directed at the audience :

"Most of us were requested to produce passes and permits.  
Those who failed to produce them spent two weeks in jail  
and were deported to their respective homes on their release.  
This is the inhuman and unjust procedure to endorse the  
unjust laws that make another a stranger in the land of his  
birth and rob him of his freedom to move wherever he wants.  
Is freedom not the law of nature? Then what? "

Scene four is set in The Mine. Here the working conditions of miners are depicted : the danger, the dissatisfaction with living conditions, the relationship between makhulubaas, nduna and worker. The final scene, the Mining Compound, presents a picture of the living conditions, the loneliness, the poverty. The scene ends with the story of the death of a young husband on the mines, and the whole cast join together in a sung lament to his wife :

*S'Thandwa S'Thandwa	(beloved one, beloved one
S'Thandwa se nhliziyo yam	beloved one of my heart)
Beloved one, dry your tears	
Daughter of Africa.	
Somandla! Somandla!	(Almighty! almighty!
Uphi na qamatha?	where art thou, great one?)
When this hungry earth	
Swallows, swallows	
Thy children.	
Somandla! Somandla!	
Sikelela insapho, ye Africa	(Bless the family of Africa
Nkosi sikelela thina lusapholwayo "	bless us, the family)

This song exemplifies much of the tone of each performance of this play. There is no shrill polemic : merely a political questioning, a reasonable demand for consideration. Above all, there is a social consciousness which attempts to make audiences aware of the disorders and malfunctions in its social institutions.

#### PERFORMANCE RESEARCH

Research into contemporary performance has undergone radical methodological questioning. The articles in this issue share a concern with performance history and sociology : the nature of performance is such that there often remains no text or document for future researchers, and there is therefore a need to document information while it is still accessible.

The work of Stephen Black has been lost to the scholar of performance in South Africa. That Black, a popular Bernard Shaw of his day in Cape Town, could be completely excluded from curriculum study in drama while writers as different as Anouilh and Pinero are entertained, points to a great neglect of performance history in South Africa. In the same way that black theatre has been undervalued, the work of other South African theatre practitioners has been neglected. Stephen Gray has reminded us of our own history. He does not elaborate the sociological implications in his article on Stephen Black, but the reader finds here a vital link in the chain of South African performance history. Elsewhere (21), Gray has said that the failure to unearth our own traditions of performance leads to a situation where

"working theatre men like Pieter-Dirk Uys do not even know that Bosman, Dhlomo, Black and Boniface did it all before them. And, in not knowing, they are condemned to re-enact the great South African literary delusion, the insane feeling that you are always starting from scratch...There have been no professional researchers to tell anybody anything in the field."

Gray has done most to overcome the problem: his research has established paradigms for a history of performance in South Africa.

The artistic and academic paradigms established by the dominant group and its institutional scaffolding are inadequate for evaluating the cultural expressions of other groups. This issue of Critical Arts attempts to bring to performance research a combination of methodological approaches which embrace cultural expression as performance, as art, and as sociology. VeVe A. Clark's research methods are exemplified in her article "The archaeology of black theatre", and although her discussion is not based on South African performance, the model is clearly relevant to our own intentions. Her article makes a claim to undertake research in black theatre in America using

"measures that start and end with Third World experience without excluding the multi-cultural lives the common market makes us lead...On a scale that mixes classical Greece and the Industrial Revolution in one grand, illogical shock, Third World cultures are omitted from the yardstick, labelled 'pre-logical', 'pre-industrial', 'pre-literate' in one breath. This situation will not do for an informed international readership..."

Her approach, which recognizes the importance of embracing Third World developments, could stand as a rationale for this issue of Critical Arts, an issue which attempts to locate structural homologies between the forms of cultural expression and their social context. The task is not that of the archivist or researcher of literary texts, therefore these attempts must also embrace the methods of visual anthropology and semiology.

Such methods become apparent in recent research. Peter Larlham's(22) documentation of indigenous performance in Natal is bolstered by visual anthropological method. He and Margaret Larlham hope to present an article for a future issue of Critical Arts on various forms of folk and popular performance amongst the urban black communities in Durban, specifically Isicathamia choral dance forms. Their research is testimony to the broad spectrum of indigenous performance in South Africa, a field which will yield a likely crop of knowledge about South Africa's peoples and their culture.

The highly respected School of Drama at New York University has recently changed its name to that of a department of "Performance Studies". It is apparent that scholars and practitioners everywhere are becoming dissatisfied with the traditional approaches to the study of drama and theatre, and realise the importance of research into indigenous dance and performance related to the social structures. In a period of volatile change in social and political aspects of life, it becomes clear that Critical Arts must prompt new methodologies and provide a forum for new critical approaches. This is not to deny the usefulness of established methods, but merely to orient the investigator. Theatre Quarterly takes up the gauntlet (23) with Susan Bassnett-McGuire's "An introduction to Theatre Semiotics", and exemplifies an approach which is fast gaining adherents in performance research.

Patrice Pavis' review of Keir Elam's book on semiotics emphasizes the importance of a knowledge of semiotic method in performance research. Pavis closes with :

"Those who still do not understand the fundamental mechanisms of semiotics will be those who really do not want to understand."

Tony Parr's review of John Wain's book on Shakespeare emphasizes performance and theatricalism, while both Jane Bennett and Don McLennan, in their respective reviews, stress the relationship of text to context : Bennett refusing to accept an author's claim to separate his work from its "politico-social influences", and McLennan, discussing poetry which seems to him to be "personal and philosophical", nevertheless finds it necessary to mention its relationship to a South African context.

Tomaselli's article presents a forceful reminder of the politico-economic determinants in South African performance. In some ways, his rejection of the "reductionist" definition of "black theatre" may be seen to contradict the tenets of the earlier part of this editorial, but his concern is one which is increasingly shared by academics and scholars. Tomaselli argues against the "decontextualization" of texts, and underpins the relationship between capital and committed theatre. His description of a performance which was based on industrial conflict in an iron foundry in Boksburg makes a claim for recognition of alternative performance in South Africa.

It is apparent that research into performance now carries upon its back an implied investigation of method used in that research. Criticism of performance in South Africa, that is to say, carries with it the necessary search for a science of performance criticism.

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## REFERENCES

- 1) See, for example, Hilary Blecher, "Goal Oriented Theatre in the Winterveld", Critical Arts, vol. 1, no. 3, 1980.
- 2) See, for example, Jonathan Clegg, "Dance and Society in Africa south of the Sahara", B.A. Honours thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1977; and Jessica Sherman, "Songs of the Chimurenga" and David Coplan, "The Emergence of African Working-Class Culture", both in Africa Perspective, no. 16, 1980.
- 3) Keliwyn Sole, in his editorial comment to Africa Perspective, *op. cit.* says : -

"The separation of South Africans into monolithic cultural, racial or linguistic groups is a lynchpin of apartheid ideology. In the field of cultural studies, then, it must be noted immediately that easy acceptance and use of similar concepts of racially or linguistically defined 'cultures' is inconsistent with any fruitful or systematic critique of the status quo."

It nevertheless remains true that the major determinants of certain cultural phenomena are racial. Sole's warning against "easy" acceptance of racially defined concepts is an indication of his own awareness that the element of racial definition is ultimately inescapable. But the warning is justified : too often, in studies of South African culture, are the underlying ideological determinants ignored or diluted into the superficial prominences of race.
- 4) Nadine Gordimer, The Black Interpreters, Spro-Cas/Ravan, 1973, P.7 :

"...one has perhaps to define one's criteria a little more carefully than usual when considering African writing..."

Earlier (P.5) Ms. Gordimer had defined African writing thus :

"My own definition is that African writing is writing done in any language by Africans themselves and by others of whatever skin colour who share with Africans the experience of having been shaped, mentally and spiritually, by Africa rather than anywhere else..."
- 5) Matsemela Manaka's works have already achieved international recognition, and his play Egoli was published in 1980 by Ravan Press.
- 6) Maishe Maponya, a playwright whose work The Hungry Earth has been performed numerous times in and around Johannesburg and in Britain.
- 7) Stephen Gray (Speak vol. 1 no. 2 1978) in his paper entitled "The Continuity of South African English Drama" comments :

"In the history of Southern African literature one could talk of a pretty unsullied 'English' continuity in the novel, for example, dependent as it is on a mass international reading audience controlled by more or less orthodox publishing houses who discourage language impurity in the interests of broader sales. In the theatre the reverse is true : pure 'English' theatre can only die on its feet in an impure English environment, if it is not to some extent kissed with the kiss of life that makes for theatrical energy - the immediacy of recognizable language."
- 8) My own "Critical Responses to Contemporary South African Theatre" in Critical Arts, *op. cit.* discusses this question.

9) Raymond Williams, "Literature and Sociology : In Memory of Lucien Goldmann", New Left Review, 67, 1971.

10) Williams, loc. cit.

11) Sartre, in Theatre Populaire, 15, 1955 says :

"For a people's audience the first thing you have to do is to produce its own plays - plays written for it and speaking to it ... What we need now is to place human conflicts in historical situations and show that they are determined by them. Our subjects must be social subjects..."

Compare Evelyn Levison, Sunday Express, May 10, 1981:

"THANK YOU JOHN BOULTER, FOR TOP THEATRE.  
What a refreshing change to see a serious play by a South African writer that doesn't have a 'message', social significance or political overtones!  
So thank you, John Boulter, for your dramatisation of the Henry James classic The Turn of the Screw..."

12) See, for example, A. Podlecki's The Political Background of Aeschylean Tragedy, Michigan University Press, 1966.

13) Roland Barthes, Critical Essays, translated R. Howard, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1972.

14) Cf. Studies like that of Woodrow, M. "South African Drama in English" in English Studies in Africa vol 13 part 2 Supl. 1970, pp 391-410.

15) New Classic has run excerpts from Fugard's notebooks.

16) Manaka, M. Egoli, Ravan, Johannesburg, 1980.

17) Maponya's The Hungry Earth is awaiting publication in South Africa.

18) See Webster E. (ed) Essays in Southern African Labour History, University of the Witwatersrand, 1978.

19) Credo Mutwa, S'ketsh, Johannesburg, 1974.

20) Egoli = "City of Gold".

21) Gray, op. cit. P 47.

22) Peter Larlham and Margaret Larlham are senior lecturer and lecturer, respectively, at Natal University in Durban.

23) Theatre Quarterly, no. 38, 1980, pp 47-53.

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