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## THE SHAPING OF SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE: AN OVERVIEW OF MAJOR TRENDS

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### 1. INTRODUCTION: CHANGED CONCEPTS OF HISTORY

The radical changes in political, social and cultural thinking in the world, and in Africa in particular, over the past twenty years have significantly affected concepts of historiography and have caused major re-evaluations of accepted histories across the world. This sense of (re)discovery has had a similar impact on the cultural history of South Africa. It has meant rediscovering lost (or discovering new) facts, redefining principles of historiography, reinterpreting the old, and ultimately seeking to write a new history. The most fundamental issue of course is to discover and learn to deal with fact and (real and potential) influence of the vast treasure-trove of events and artefacts produced before and during the colonised period, but ignored, denied or undervalued by commentators in the past. This situation, the processes involved and the causes for it all, are not unique to, or in any way limited to, South Africa of course, as the history of any former colony will testify. However the political history of Southern Africa the country has so entrenched a specific way of thinking that any wider awareness of tradition and cultural riches encompassing anything more than purely colonial values was virtually impossible till very late in the 20th century, except as a radical, oppositional, esoteric, or possibly even eccentric, area of study and contemplation. The process of reinterpretation has only begun and still has a long way to go, as formerly hidden aspects of the history are unearthed, re-evaluated and integrated into the new thinking. Also the paradigms of our thinking about African and South African history in itself need to be adjusted. (Vide Mudimbe, 1988; Saunders, 1988; Smith, 1988; and others)

The overview provided below is inevitably still very dependent on the traditional histories, for they remain valuable and important sources of data, though an attempt has been made to incorporate as much as possible of the new thinking and recent discoveries and analyses. It is important perhaps to emphasise two perspectives which more than most served to alter the thinking about theatre, and South African theatre in particular, and which inform the discussion to follow.

Firstly there is the need for a much wider and more flexible concept of theatre which would include the products of and oral/kinetic, or “performance” culture, as David Coplan (1985) so aptly termed it. The history of much of South African theatre, even today, is a performance one, rather than a literary one, though colonial thinking has long sought to canonise the printed text. While the discussion to follow will of necessity focus on the “available” texts and their authors, the context of it all must always be seen as a very rich and varied oral/kinetic culture.

Secondly there is the way the concept of colonialism is perceived. The history of Africa is actually one of multiple colonisations (by the San, the Xhosa, the Zulu, the Dutch, the British, the Afrikaner, and so on), but for the purposes of our discussion, the term will be used in the narrower sense, to refer to European colonisation of Africa over the past few centuries. It will be used in that sense in the following attempt at periodisation, where I have identified three basic phases, namely:

Pre-colonial: Before 1652, the period of indigenous expansion down the African continent.

Colonial: The period of European settlement and expansion (1652 – 1960) including the Verwoerdian Republic (1961 – 1990).

Post-Colonial: The period of democratisation and beyond (1990-)

Perhaps the last mentioned is a rather optimistic category, particularly given the recent history of the region, but as will be seen, it has some meaning under current circumstances.

## 2. THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD

Like so much of the early history of mankind, the history of this period in Southern Africa is still extremely tentative, and based on much theorising and speculation. Thus too ideas about the social life of these communities and the function of art within them, which no doubt was as varied as the social, economic and political conditions. There are certain indicators however which do point to a widely spread material culture in the region, notably the San rock-art, and the pottery, beadwork and other artefacts of the Nguni, Sotho and other peoples. Important for our purposes however is that it would appear that creative tendencies were integrated into communal life, and not separate entities with an own aesthetic existence outside of their communal function. Also, following the argument of Mudimbe (1988), one has to bear in mind that none of this history is *static*, it is as changing, as evolutionary, as open to the impact of social, cultural, economic and political pressures as any period to follow, as any period about which we have more information. So, while one may speak of general tendencies, there must have been vast and constantly shifting differences between forms, themes, occasions and the like.

We know less about the performance art in this period than about any other form, quite simply because of the ephemeral nature of the theatre as form and because no demonstrable examples have survived unmediated. Nevertheless, the few fragments we do have, plus the later records provided by incidental travellers and scribes from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries do allow certain deductions concerning the *kind* of performance activities which existed in these societies, if not their origins, their functions and/or their meaning within specific historic societies.

The oldest known performances in the region are the shamanic dances among the San, recorded in certain San rock art paintings – some of them up to 25 000 years old, some dating back to the nineteenth century. Remnants of these dances still occur today in the Kalahari among the descendants of the San. In a similar vein the arrival of that later crystallised out as the Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and other peoples brought a rich heritage of social, religious and military performance and ritual to the region. These performance events, including wedding ceremonies, initiation ceremonies, harvest festivals and the like, informed the daily lives of these peoples and seem to be very formally structured and have a strong mimetic content. Remarkable to us today is the sheer scale on which some of these events took place, involving large groups of dancers and thousands of spectators, and stretching over a period of days, in some cases.

While some of the dances actually have a narrative and historiographical function, it is the oral storytelling tradition in particular which seems to be the most directly related to the Western concept of imitative and narrative theatre. It too is a wide-spread tradition among all the peoples of the region, and takes on a variety of forms, which differ considerably from one community to the next. Among the best documented seems to be the so-called praise-singer or praise-poet (*izibongo* in Nguni, *liboko* in Sotho), who may be both poet laureate and social critic for his particular community, and the narrating and enacting stories from the life of the clan – as African equivalent of the European balladeers and troubadours perhaps. Both these certainly contain definite elements of dramatisation in performance.

A number of these dances and songs are still in use today, and the storytellers and praise-singers still operate, though often in scaled down and/or adapted form. Modern technology and European culture are rapidly whittling away at the core of the traditions, not necessarily destroying them, but unalterably affecting them. Again, in following Mudimbe's thinking, one may ask: is this change bad, or inevitable? Is it in fact the way culture works? Whatever one may think, what is true is that the traditions themselves slowly filtered into the cultural thinking of the later twentieth century, and hence into the theatre region, changing and extending it through a complex process of assimilation, syncretism and imitation. Thus actually becoming part of the new tradition – whatever segregationists, purists and the like make want to believe.

Although the masquerade and various styles of puppetry are found quite widely in the Northern, Eastern and Western parts of Africa, they do not seem to have been a distinctive feature of the Southern regions – certainly not below the Limpopo.

In view of the oral nature of the society, and the attitudes of the first Europeans to meet up with the African peoples, no detailed records of specific performances – i.e. no "texts" in the conventional sense – are extant for this period. There are only the outlines of certain kinds of forms of performance, as detailed above, and the documented stories which have been handed down over the generations by communal poets, and eventually transcribed in their adapted and modernised form, within the limitations of written language. Beyond that there are the extrapolations we seek to make from remnants of past traditions in current performance forms.

### 3. THE COLONIAL PERIOD

#### 3.1 The Dutch outpost (1652 – 1799)

The written history of the early colonial period is primarily dominated by the Dutch settlement of the Cape peninsula, including the influence of the French Huguenot settlers, and the expansion of that settlement in the Cape region. This includes the importation of slave labour and trade with the local inhabitants. Less well documented but equally important of course were the political and economic changes taking place in the other regions of the subcontinent, notably the expansion of the Zulu empire under Chaka.

While most sources rather whimsically refer to a number of instances of Western-style performances along the shores of the South African coast *before* the settlement of the Cape Peninsula as the "first theatre in South Africa", the real performance culture detailed above still existed of course and no doubt continued to thrive. What makes this period significant is that it first brings African and European cultures into longer-term contact and set up the framework for a European-style theatrical system in the developing colony.

As in many parts of the world, the source of this early influence was the military. Although the nature of the theatre brought to the shores of South Africa in the early period is very much a matter for speculation, most of it based on assumptions made from the shipboard traditions of mariners on long ocean voyages, which include singing, dancing, and the enactment of comedies, it is a fact that the first formal performances of European plays were given on board ship or in the barracks in Cape Town. There is a belief, for example, that a version of *Hamlet* was performed in 1608 aboard Captain Keeling's *Dragon*, while in Sierra Leone, and since he later landed in Table Bay, it is assumed that similar performances may have occurred there.

However, this love of theatrical entertainment appears to be severely limited at first, since the outpost – established as a feeding station for Dutch East India Company ships in 1652 by Jan van Riebeeck – was small, pragmatic and very busy building its fortifications, planting its gardens and so on. Entertainment was limited and controlled by the governor. In fact there

appears to have been only one festival day a year, which could be spent in singing, drinking and dancing, though some “mummers” seems to have occurred in later years. Round about 1701- by which time quite an extensive civilian population had arisen as well – matters seemed to relax somewhat, with Governor Van Assenburgh for example allowing his men far more opportunities to entertain themselves, although there seems to be little record of civilian theatre. However, the high points of the first phase of European settlement seem to have come from two unlikely sources. The first was the influence of the French settlers, who seemed to gradually alter concepts of cultural life, and prepared the way for the brief Batavian interregnum of 1797 – 1799, when Cape Town – for a while, under the influence of the French garrison which had taken over Cape Town – became a veritable “little Paris”, and soldier/performers became matinee idols, much to the disgust and chagrin of the husbands of the town. These soldiers also first provided a full-time theatre space within the garrison, one which would become tremendously influential under the British occupation. The other, lesser known influence, come from the slave quarters, where an underground theatre tradition appears to have sprung up. While much of this is highly speculative, based on the purported existence (in a private collection) of a text by a slave called Majiet, this early “protest” theatre, may just have produced the first indigenous text of South African theatre, dealing with the social conditions of the times and performed by the slaves for the edification, amusement and (possibly) the “conscientisation” of their fellow slaves (See Gray, 1979).

### 3.2 IMPERIAL ENTERTAINMENTS (1800 – 1880)

British settlement of the Cape became a finality in 1799, and brought with it numerous changes and turned a temporary settlement into a full fledged British colony. And one of the earliest endeavours seems to have been to obtain a better equipped theatre building for the settlement. The result, designed and built by the governor, Sir George Yonge, was the African Theatre – which opened in 1800 and for close on thirty years became the venue for Amateur theatre (in Dutch, French and English) as well as numerous performances of plays, farces and other entertainments by members of the garrison. In a moral rebellion against the theatre, which closed all theatres in the Cape for four years, the building changed hands in 1835, and was turned into a Dutch Reformed church – which it remains to this day.

Distinctive of the period was the difference between the Dutch approach to theatre and that of the English theatre of the time. The Dutch amateurs of the Rederykerskamers (cultural societies) of the Netherlands, whose primary aim was to play an educative role in the community, tended to have rather moralising names for the various groups (e.g. *Tot Nut en Vermaak*, *Door Yver Door Yver Bloeit de Kunst*, *Thespis*, *Aurora*, and so on). The English-speaking groups on the other hand, and the players of the garrison, while some also sported flamboyant mottoes, tended to prefer light entertainment (a melodrama and a farce) or even something classic. *Othello* was quite a favourite for example, as was *Twelfth Night*, possibly because enough copies of the texts were available. The West End favourites of the time also had their turn, as did a variety of other, less strictly dramatic, entertainments which reached the Cape while travelling around the world, “playing the Empire” as it became known later. This touring tradition was later to form the foundation of the professional theatre in South Africa.

Interestingly enough it is particularly in the field of the circus-style and musical fare that we find some extremely interesting examples of the meeting of the “old” and the “new” worlds of the region. Such as a “Grand Pantomime” called *The Kaffir War*, or *The Burnt Farm*, presented as part of the Equestrian Gymnastics in 1850. According to the poster this presentation contained not only scenes displaying the lives of the brave Dutch farmers, and the magnanimous British army, but also “the character and customs of Chief MACOMO and his people, their Dances and Pleasures”. Or the 1832 presentation of the “new Ballet Dance” entitled *Jack at the Cape, or all alive among the Hottentots*. Conversely, a number of troupes, including the black entertainers such as the Jubilee Singers from America, and Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge, visited the

colony during this period – some even travelling to the Dutch Republics further north. At the same time, visitors to the Cape were entertained with “native dancing” (or versions of it) and certain troupes were even exported to Europe for the edification and pleasure of the inhabitants of the first world, eager for excitement and novelty from the “dark continent”.

As Voortrekker migration, British imperialism and the rapid expansion following on the discovery of gold and diamonds extended the influence of the colonisers throughout the interior of Southern Africa, the entertainers gradually followed, setting up temporary – and later more permanent – theatres in such diverse settlements as the border towns of King Williamstown, Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth and Durban, the Boer Republics (Bloemfontein, Pretoria) and the mining capitals of Kimberley and Johannesburg. In the second half of the century, these places were to become part of a popular theatrical circuit utilised by the numerous companies which visited the harbours of Cape Town and Durban on their way around the foot of Africa (See Bosman 1984, Fletcher, 1994).

In this period playwriting of a dilettante sort slowly took root, particularly in the amateur and military ranks. While the early efforts largely constituted comic prologues and epilogues to the plays put on by the Garrison players (notably the work of a certain Captain Frazer), the first extant text appears to be a slight farcical satire written by and performed in Grahamstown by George Rex and Andrew Bain. Entitled *Kaatje Kekkelbek, or Life Among the Hottentots*. The play was apparently first presented in 1838 and originally published in *Sam Sly's African Journal* (1846), then published in full as an addendum by Bosman in his 1928 history of drama and theatre in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> It is rather remarkable in that the skit was written in a mixture of English and what is considered to be some of the first written examples of “kitchen Dutch” or what come to be known as *Afrikaans*. Furthermore, the text dealt with the multicultural and socially diverse society of the time, and introduced a conspicuous figure in Kaatje, the “coloured girl from the Cape” who was to become a widely used stereotype in South African theatre, culminating perhaps in the tragic figure of Athol Fugard's Lena.

While this is the most famous early play, a whole plethora of similar skits, satires and farces gradually followed, and while few of the texts were published, certainly far more were written and performed than have survived. However the Dutch tradition, which gradually became a far more serious Afrikaans tradition of playwriting, took root now. With writers such as C.E. Boniface, J. Suasso de Lima and ultimately the very popular farceur Melt Brink, we find a strong comic vein being tapped. Boniface wrote in French, Dutch and even English, producing plays such as *De Nieuwe Ridderorde of De Temperantisten*, *Kockincoz, or The Pettifogging Lawyers Plot*, *The Blamed Reputation*, *Het Beleg van Troyen* and *I'Enragé*. The prolific Brink on the other hand wrote 14 Dutch pieces on the growing nationalist movement between 1868 to 1877, before shifting to an early form of Afrikaans in his later farces, for which he is perhaps best remembered. Among them are *Bij de Tande-dokter* (“At the Dentist”, 1905), *Maljan onder die Hoenders* (“Mad John among the Chickens”, 1905) and *O die muizen!* (*Oh the Mice!*, 1908). By 1888 there was quite a range of one-act plays and translations available to amateur companies. Few had any literary merit, but they did create and keep alive a sense of the theatre among the Dutch of the Cape Colony, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.

### 3.3 NATIONALISM AND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM (1880 – 1940)

The discovery of the mineral wealth of the region moved British imperialism into higher gear now, leading to a direct political, military, economic and cultural confrontation with the emerging Afrikaner nationalism as well as with the pre-capitalist African society. The effects on the arts were varied. Through its conscious Anglicisation policies on all fronts, the ill-conceived first Anglo-Boer war, and particularly through the notorious and influential second Anglo-Boer war, divisive attitudes were hardened and the flames of nationalism were fuelled among the Dutch/Afrikaans population, paving the way for the aggressive development of an Afrikaans

literary and theatrical culture. At the same time there were the first stirrings of a black nationalism, as yet very subdued and limited to the educated among them, a mere rumbling which was to lead, *inter alia*, to the founding of the South African National Congress (later the African National Congress) in 1912 and gradually – through the urbanisation brought about by the capitalist push – leading to the evolution of an alternative urban culture. Alongside of these, a distinctive *English* tradition in the arts, based on the home experience of the new immigrants, and the home sentiments of the English-speaking whites, was also developing, well reinforced by the hegemonic hold British culture had on the entire country at the time. This was to remain dominant well into the twentieth century.

This latter development had a particularly distinctive influence on the developing theatre *structure* in the country, and this period was perhaps the most important one in really setting the form which theatre was to take over the course of the next century. It belonged primarily to three groups of performers. Firstly there was the professional English theatre which evolved naturally from the touring companies visiting the continent. Not only did a vast range of performers and companies come here, they also left behind many individuals who not only created a local corps of performers, but who also had the entrepreneurial skills to act as booking agents, form local companies, train other local performers, and eventually even to build new theatres and set up a network of performance venues for their own and visiting companies throughout the region – including such developing centres as Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Bloemfontein, Kimberley, Pretoria, Johannesburg and Durban. Among the memorable names here are Sefton Parry (1857 – 1862), Disney Roebuck (1873 – 1885), the Wheeler brothers (Ben and Frank, 1886 – 1910), Luscombe Searelle (1887 – 1896) and particularly Leonard Rayne (1905 – 1925). And these local companies on occasion even provided a theatre for new playwrights – the notable figure here being the actor / manager Stephen Black, who wrote and produced a whole series of marvellously successful and incisive farces and social satires between 1906 and 1930. These include *Love and the Hyphen* (1908), *Helena's Hope* (1910) and *Van Kalabas does his bit* (1916). (The three plays were eventually published in 1984, in a collection edited by Stephen Gray.)

This was primarily urban theatre, and its success and polish determined the kind of theatre (British-style box-set, realistic, commercial) which would become the norm for the next fifty or more years. Particularly so when the vast Schlesinger financial empire became involved in show-business through its formation – in partnership with the shrewd and experienced entrepreneur Harry Stodel – of the African Theatre Trust Ltd (later African Consolidated Theatres) in 1913. This evolving professional theatre also established the popular acting style in South African English theatre, a style perpetuated and supported by the very lively amateur movement, consisting of numerous Repertory Societies, Gilbert and Sullivan societies and Shakespeare Circles – found in most cities and larger towns. These societies flourished between 1930 and 1955 and often also provided local playwrights with opportunities for production, a notable early example being Berthe Goudvis, whose domestic comedies from the turn of the century are still in circulation to this day. Her one-act comedy, *A Husband for Rachel* for example (O: 1906, P: 1925), is still done on occasion, and has been filmed for television. In 1938 the amateur movement was considerably strengthened when the English societies joined hands with the Afrikaans societies to form a national amateur organisation called the Federation of Amateur Theatrical Societies of South Africa (FATSSA). By 1950 this association had 140 member societies, and ran a whole series of national playwriting and play production competitions.

In contrast to the primarily entertainment objective of the English-language theatre, the growing Afrikaans cultural nationalism made far more rigorous demands of the arts and artists, and asked for the establishment of an own indigenous theatrical tradition which could promote the cause of Afrikaans and Afrikaner nationalism. This came primarily via the wide-spread amateur movement, a direct descendent of the earlier Dutch organisations. More and more farces and

melodramas were being written for performance by schools and societies, during cultural events such as debating competitions, national festivals, and so on. This was particularly true of rural towns. Authors such as D.P. du Toit, J.H.H. de Waal, Melt Brink, and the prolific folk writer C.J. Langenhoven, became household names in the early period, while a more serious literary movement slowly evolved as well, spearheaded – not always effectively – by the heavyweights of the language struggle, such as D.F. Malherbe, Eugene Marais and J. F.E. Celliers, and by a few more talented dramatists such as Harm Oost (*Ou Daniel*). But the real thrust came a little later through the congruence of a number of other cultural factors notably the arrival in South Africa of a number of Dutch and Flemish performers, in particular a superb Dutch actor-manager named Paul de Groot, who brought professionalism to the whole amateur world of indispensably in-serving training, in Afrikaans, to a host of versatile and creative performers and finally, in 1925, De Groot himself went on to found the first professional Afrikaans theatre company. In the same year two energetic amateurs, Hendrik and Mathilde Hanekom, also took to the road with a number of farces they wrote themselves and Afrikaans theatre was on its way.

Another important factor at this time was the emergence of a second generation of playwrights, much more serious individuals who sought to emulate the European theatre and actually set the tone and style of Afrikaans theatre for the next three decades or more. These included the poet C. Louis Leipoldt, whose one-act play *Die Heks* was not only a short but powerful exploration of guilt and expiation, but was also presented by De Groot as the first professionally produced play in Afrikaans (O: 1926, P: 1923). Another important figure was H.A. Fagan whose plays are fine examples of the kind of rural realism which was to dominate so much of Afrikaans writing in the period between the two world wars. (e.g. *Lenie* – P: 1924 – *Die Ouderling* [i.e. *The Elder*] and *Ousus* – both P: 1934). The most exciting figure however is possibly J.F.W. Grosskopff, whose simple yet compelling one-act plays – including the anti-war play *Oorlog is Oorlog* (i.e. "War is War" – P: 1941) and *Opdrifsels* (*Flotsam* – P: 1947) – as well as the longer realistic work such as *As die Tuig Skawe* (i.e. *If the Harness Hurts*), distinguish him significantly from most of his contemporaries, both in his questioning of existing moral attitudes and his sense of the dramatic.

With these developments, and the establishment of Afrikaans as both an official and a literary language in 1925, the second block in the theatrical edifice was in place. While the amateur movement remained a very significant part of the Afrikaans language playwright's world, particularly the more literary organisations such as the Kaapse Amateur Toneelvereniging, Volksteater in Pretoria, and JAATS in Johannesburg, the theatre was really expanding significantly through the missionary work of the professional touring companies. Remarkable individuals appeared and joined the first companies at this time and later took leading roles as producers and directors in the movement. These included the prodigal André Huguenet, discovered as a young man (named Gert Borstlap) by De Groot and destined to become a commanding figure in the growth of South African theatre. He was an idealist, who rapidly acquired a remarkable knowledge of theatre literature and who insisted on bringing the classics – and particularly the naturalists (Ibsen, Chekhov, Shaw and others) – to South African, and especially Afrikaner, audiences. Like his mentor, he demanded the utmost professionalism from his casts and constantly harried the profession and the public about standards and tastes.

Besides Huguenet, other names of note appear at this time: Wena Naudé, Siegfried Mynhardt, Anton Ackerman, the Hanekoms, Berdine Grünwald, and the Pohl family (Jan, Anna and Truida) from Graaff-Reinet – they all became involved in professional theatre in one way or another. In fact the travelling companies were proliferating at such a rate that by the mid 1940's there were something like 40 of them on the road and they were literally crowding each other out of the towns. As they criss-crossed the country to provide for the needs of the culture-starved Afrikaners, being lionised in the small towns, almost ritually failing in the cities, these people helped to establish the Afrikaans theatrical form. This has been typified as "burgerlike

realisme”, i.e. “bourgeois realism”, once more utilising the box set, the realistic conventions and a rather sparse and sombre mood. It is a form which was to be used to great effect by writers of the next three decades, with little essential variation.

The third significant factor in this period was the flowering of a vibrant urban culture, including a musical entertainment industry and the first glimmerings of what Kavanagh calls “some kind of popular dramatic activity” in which “the forms and content of traditional culture were sustained adapted and developed” (1985, p.45). But again, very little of this history is documented, and one of the few fully recorded examples of this was the career of Esau Mthethwe and his Mthethwe Lucky Stars, who performed “a repertoire of original didactic and satirical comedies in Zulu, based on Zulu traditional life, employing much music and dance”. They toured the country and were fêted at the 1936 Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg, after which they disappeared. Another influential personality of the times was Wilfred Sentso, founder and manager of the Synco Fans – who even founded a performance school in the mid 30’s and ran it for more than twenty years. But certainly there must have been far more companies and performances in this style, during the period, since the tradition was picked up alive and well in the late fifties.

Alongside this organic development, there was also a far more conscious attempt to - in some way - promote a more formal theatrical culture among the educated blacks gathering on the periphery of the white-dominated industrial centres. Trained at European-style schools to value the written literature of that tradition, the first glimmerings of what was to become a fixed and profitable part of the literary scene in the country, first evolved in the schools themselves. Thus there are records of dramatised animal satires written by Job Moteame and Azariele M. Sekese in Lesotho in the 1881’s, and sketches improvised by teachers and pupils at Marianhill mission school in the 1920’s (Kavanagh, 1985). This process led on to the first published plays by blacks in an African language, starting with *Imfene ka Debeza* (i.e. *Debeza’s Baboon*) a Xhosa play by Guybon Sinxo (P:1925), and eventually a lucrative but highly controlled and censored literary industry of writing plays to be prescribed for schools – plays in the European manner therefore. The irony here was that many of these plays were actually written by white authors, particularly later, when white educators dominated and controlled the educational, publishing and prescribing apparatus in the country.

The same initial process also led to English plays by black authors, the first published example being H.I.E. Dhlomo’s *Nonquause: The girl who killed to save* (P:1936).

As a number of western concepts of the arts and entertainment filtered into urban life by means of radio, records, films and so on, they obviously also affected many performance forms – absorbing the new to create local jazz bands, dance competitions, night clubs and so on. Similarly, the concept of the performed play and the amateur theatrical society was also taken up, with the help of schools and well-meaning white enthusiasts, such as André van Gyseghem, Bertha Slossberg, Mary Waters, Norah Taylor and others. The most prominent examples in the thirties were the Bantu People’s Players, which put on a version of O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape*, and the Bantu Dramatic society which arose out of the Bantu Men’s Social Centre in Johannesburg, and which started off with *She Stoops to Conquer* in 1933, and went on to do *Lady Windermere’s Fan* and a Xhosa version of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* later.

Certainly the most notable figure of the period was the remarkable H.I.E. (Herbert) Dhlomo, who seriously attempted – along with Ezekiel Mphahlele, and others – to establish some kind of critical debate about South African culture and more specifically to bridge the gap between African performance and “classical” drama as it was being taught in schools and universities. It is perhaps difficult today to trace the link between Dhlomo’s eloquent theoretical writings in a variety of academic and educational journals (or indeed his numerous, though unpublished and unperformed, plays and his involvement in the whole amateur drama movement), with the plays for school use written over the years in the various African languages or the so-called “Black



theatre” in the seventies. Yes Dhlomo’s call for recognition and promotion of an African and South African cultural life and theatre is representative of a far more powerful movement towards cultural mobilisation than has often been acknowledged.

While Dhlomo’s only published play was the first – and for very long the only – published playtext in English by a black writer, it was clearly a rather safe choice for publication, with its espousal of Western colonial “Christian” values. A number of his other plays – such as *Chetswayo* and *The Pass* – were less acquiescent about the social, political and economic conditions of the times – as Couzens (1985) has shown, and as may be seen from Dhlomo’s collected works, which were eventually published in 1985, edited by Nick Visser and Tim Couzens. Not only had they suffered the fate of most writing in English in the first half of the century (i.e. being relegated to some second class limbo by the central canon of British writing subscribed to by the whole literary apparatus), but they would no doubt have run foul of the incipient censorship system, *had* they been published.

### 3.4 TOWARDS A SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT (1940 – 1955)

This phase of remarkable – and in some areas at least exploratory – growth slowed down considerably toward the end of the 1930’s, for a number of obvious reasons which influenced theatre world-wide – the great depression with its massive unemployment and poverty, the war clouds gathering in Europe, and the growing popularity of the radio and film. Certainly the professional theatre virtually died as all the theatres were turned into bioscopes (movie houses) by the African Consolidated Theatres association and other entrepreneurs. The Afrikaans touring companies too found themselves unsupported, and lost heart. So for almost fifteen years theatre became the province of the amateur again – as it still was and was long still to be, in the black community, owing to the Eurocentric and racially exclusionist attitudes of the white society. It was primarily certain powerful societies – such as the Johannesburg Repertory Society, Volksteater, Kaapse Afrikaanse Toneelgroep (KAT), Johannesburgse Afrikaanse Amateur Toneelspelers (JAATS) and the Krugersdorp Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society which now provided opportunities for performers and authors to keep on working. In particular the Federation of Amateur Theatrical Societies of South Africa (FATSSA), did much to encourage new work by organising an annual nation-wide play festival, as well as regular playwriting competitions. Among the winners of the latter are such figures as Uys Krige and Nadine Gordimer, while most of the luminaries of the time wrote one-act plays for the competing societies. (P.W.S. Schumann, H.A. Fagan, J.F.W. Grosskopff, W.A. de Klerk, N.P. van Wyk Louw, Gerhard Beukes, Nadine Gordimer, Lewis Sowden, Percy Baneshik, and many others. (See Phyllis Konya, in *Hauptfleisch*, 1985).

There was however another, often forgotten, factor which was to contribute to the new theatre of the post-war period, namely the Union Defence Force (UDF) Entertainment Unit, set up by a Major Myles Bourke to entertain the troops in the African and European campaigns. The type of theatre taken to the troops was of course strictly vaudeville-style entertainment, but what it did was to give a vast number of individuals their first taste of popular performance, as well as opportunities to be involved in the management of theatre. On their return, the entertainment industry had a host of professionally experienced men of the theatre, who – along with the numerous highly qualified and experienced women who had stayed at home and kept the theatres going (Marda Vanne, Gwen ffrançon-Davies, Margaret Inglis, Muriel Alexander, Anna Neethling-Pohl, Hermien Domisse, and so on), could literally set up the new professional theatre which was to dominate the industry for the next twenty years.

Another remarkable – and even less well known – outflow of this entertainment unit was its impact on black theatre. A number of the best Jazzmen of the time had been hired by the entertainment unit to entertain the black units of the allied troops, and on their return a white

officer, Lieutenant Ike Brooks, formed a variety company which, as Coplan points out, “pioneered black entertainment for mass audiences”. They toured South Africa with a show entitled “Zonk”, which was an enormous hit with both white and black audiences. It became the precursor of a whole range of such variety shows over many years, giving public exposure to many talents and launching numerous show business careers. It also set the tone for a new performance style in South African theatre.

All these developments led to the founding, in 1947, in the last stages of the Smuts war-time government, of the first state supported theatre in the British commonwealth: the National Theatre Organisation (NTO), under the guidance of P.P. B. Breytenbach, a brilliant administrator who had started as chairman of the Krugersdorp Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society, and had been the initiator and chairman of FATSSA for more than twenty years. NTO was a bilingual (Afrikaans and English) organisation, centred in Pretoria, and intended to provide professional theatre for South African citizens, provide work for local performers and to provide an outlet for local writing. In the course of its existence, this organisation was to undertake many tours through the country, perform over a hundred plays, of which a large number were classical works, but also included many by local authors such as W.A. de Klerk, Gerhard Beukes, Uys Krige, Guy Butler, James Ambrose Brown, N.P. van Wyk Louw, Bartho Smit and others, NTO eventually also owned an own theatre (The National Theatre, later called the Breytenbach Theatre, in Pretoria), and in the course of its existence employed and trained a vast number of the performers, technicians and authors who were to make up the theatre of the sixties and seventies. Among them a young stage manager named Athol Fugard. (See Rinie Stead in *Hauptfleisch*, 1985).

The problem, of course, is that this “national” theatre was NOT *national* in any real sense: it was parochial, extremely elitist and colonialistic in its mandate and attitudes. More critically, the thinking in the organisation was based on racist principles, since it was intended to serve the interest of whites only, and was squarely controlled by the governmental apparatus. While there are indications that in later years attempts were made to cater for and even involve black needs in the planning, this was very peripheral, cosmetic and extremely patronising. But when NTO died a natural death in 1961, it was not for this reason of insularity, but for internal squabbles, and the overweening pride which by now possessed everyone in a country which seemed to be flourishing economically. It died to make way for a larger, more ostentatious governmental scheme: the regionally based Performing Arts Councils – which started off with the same segregationist and colonial thinking as fundamental philosophy.

Now, in retrospect this seems strange, but given the fact it was a government theatre, and that the government fell into the hands of the Nationalist Party in 1948, it is perhaps not so surprising. By the end of the fifties the Nationalists had all the formal structures of the Apartheid regime in place, having turned the informal, but thoroughly effective, usage of the British colonial society into a vast set of complicated and unbending laws which would eventually prescribe and proscribe every facet of political, economic, social and cultural life.

Alongside the great experiment of NTO, professional theatre in English also resurrected itself, primarily focussed on commercially viable work from Britain and America. Brian Brook, Taubie Kuschlick, Leon Gluckman, Leonard Schach and others mounted superb productions of the West End and Broadway hits of the season, though some of them (notably Gluckman and Schach) did on occasion also involve themselves in with more risky local plays. Shakespeare and the classics however survived thanks largely to the efforts of the amateurs, the indoctrination of the schools, and the occasional NTO tour.

While all this was occurring, the townships surrounding the cities were gradually strengthening their own cultural style and industry. The artistic explosion that occurred in Sophiatown for example, led by the writers of *Bantu World*, *Drum*, *Zonk* and the leading jazz musicians of the

time, set up a what was to become a vital part of a distinctive urban style of performance in later years. Authors such as Nat Nasaka, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Can Themba and Bloke Modisane, performers such as The Jazz Maniacs, The Manhattan Brothers, Dolly Rathebe, Miriam Makeba. Spokes Mashiyane, and others became cult figures at the time. And it was Mphahlele who in a sense took up Dhlomo's cause and, in the mid-forties, founded the Syndicate of African Artists with the help of Khoti Mngoma, one of a number of attempts to promote and advance the performing arts among blacks who are barred from access to white privilege and theatres. Because they insisted on performing before integrated audiences, the Syndicate never managed to obtain state funding and eventually had to disband in the mid 1950's. (See Coplan, 1985; Orkin, 1991)

Certainly, as the government continued to drive more and more wedges between the peoples of the country and gradually imposed segregation at all levels, cross-cultural contact became rare and even dangerous, and in the case of theatre, artists had to find alternative outlets. During the fifties for example, the growing wave of resistance to the political developments, led to the involvement of a number of writers and performers in attempts to create oppositional work through involvement in a variety of organisations and through the imaginative adaptation of the theatrical form itself. This pressure to be subversive was to increase and continue right through the next four decades of the century, altering the very nature of South African theatre and performance. And nowhere was this more noticeable, than in the townships, where the *style* of the performances were gaining a specific colour and texture, developing the distinctive musical and vaudeville style which later became the core element in the indigenously grown musical comedies known as the "township musical".

### 3.5 A RISING CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE CREATION OF A FORM (1956 – 1975)

Under the foregoing circumstances a number of writers began to write actively against the regime and its policies – and surprisingly, given the attitudes of the state later, actually obtained performances for the work. Between approximately 1956 and 1962, we see the launching of what – to borrow a term from André P. Brink – might be called the "New Drama" in South Africa: the first real break with the received tradition of the British colonial theatre heritage. Also the beginnings of what was to become a long-term rift between the artist and the state. The spectrum is wide-ranging and diverse, the breakaway different in every case, based on sundry premises and each situated in a slightly different context, but the core idea remained the same: the theatre *may* be oppositional, it *can* have an own voice. This is true even of certain "establishment" writers, such as W.A. de Klerk, whose early and still vastly misunderstood drama *Die Jaar van die Vuuros* (*The Year of the Fire Ox*, O:1952, P: [1953?]) asked some awkward questions of the architects of Apartheid, even while apparently supporting the principle of "self-determination" underlying the ideology. It is certainly true of Afrikaans poet/philosopher N.P. van Wyk Louw, whose pseudo-classical exploration of the nature of leadership entitled *Germanicus* (O:1957; p:1956), for example, did much the same, while his later historical pageant *Die pluimsaad waai vêr* ("The plume-seed seed blows far", O: 1966; P:1966), was to lead him into direct confrontation with the "architect of Apartheid", H.F. Verwoerd. Then rapid succession there came the first plays by Bartho Smit (the most banned playwright in Afrikaans), with *Moeder Hanna* produced in 1956 (P:1959) and later the far more radical *Putsonderwater* (*Well-without-water* or *The Virgin and the Vultures* P:1962, first produced in Belgium in 1968, only produced locally in 1968 – for selected audiences only. The first full production occurs in 1981.) Athol Fugard premiered with his own productions of *Nongogo* and *No-good Friday* in 1958 (P:1977), while a number of playwrights now produced so-called "try for white" plays – e.g. Lewis Sowden's *The Kimberley Train* (O:1958, P:1976), Basil Warner's *Try for White* (O:1959), Bartho Smit's *Die Verminktes* (*The Maimed*, P:1960, rewritten in 1976, first produced in English, at the Royal Court in London, in 1960. Only professionally performed in South Africa 1977) and Athol Fugard's *The Blood Knot* (O:1961, P:1963.)

There were also efforts at creative collaboration across racial barriers in order to confront the system and to attempt to integrate traditional African elements into contemporary theatre. Notable examples were Alan Paton and Krishna Shah's production of *Sponono* (O:1961; P:1963) and Eddie Domingo and Berthe Egnos's *Dingaka*. This slowly developed into a whole world of non-institutionalised and serious theatre, revolving around such diverse organisations and individuals as Leonard Schach and his superb *Cockpit Players* in the fifties, Leon Gluckman, the *Serpent Players* in the Eastern Cape, Ian Bernhardt and the Union of Southern African Artists, particularly their school and performance space called *The Rehearsal Room* at Dorkay House, in Johannesburg (run for a while by Fugard), and the *Natal Theatre Council* in Durban.

At the same time, growing white interest in the musical theatre of the townships – as exemplified by *Zonk* – led to further development and exploitation of the form by both white entrepreneurs (such as Alf Herbert, who organised a Zonk-style show called *Jazz and Variety* in 1952) and integrated Union of Southern African Artists who presented a series of extremely successful Township Jazz Concerts later in the decade.

This in turn led to one of the most significant theatrical events of the period. Under the auspices of both Union Artists and Alf Herbert, the indigenous musical entitled *King Kong* was put on in 1959 (P:1961). A collaborative effort by a number of black and white artists (including author Harry Bloom, composer Todd Matshikiza, and director Leon Gluckman), the play itself gave the local story and local performance styles a legitimacy they had previously lacked in the world of fashionable show business. Though there was plenty of criticism about the exploitation of black artists in this and other similar shows, *King Kong* launched the careers of an number of creative individuals who shared a distaste of the government and its policies and saw co-operative role of theatre as one way out.

At the very least the success of the production spurred a new industry: a theatre for the townships. Notable in this has been the commercial success of Sam Manghwane and Gibson Kente, and all their imitators. Kente in particular, utilising the musical comedy style, and the more or less melodramatic format, wrote a number of plays of slightly more than passing interest, including *How Long* (O:1973), *I Believe* (O:1974) and *Too Late* (O:1975; P:1981). (See Kavanagh, 1981, 1985.)

In as sense this success led to a kind of voluntary submission to the Apartheid ideology, since it became a theatre by blacks for blacks, while the NTO was providing theatre by whites for whites. And the group areas and separate amenities acts of 1965 simply confirmed this: From now on no racially mixed casts and no racially mixed audiences were to be allowed. It turned the theatre of the sixties into schizophrenic yet strangely energetic aberration, as South Africa poised itself to enter what promised to be a golden age of theatre.

In many ways the next decade *did* turn out to be a golden age for mainstream indigenous theatre, for the theatre in the country was feeling the pinch of international censure and the theatre community found itself having to rely on its own resources. For example, at Fugard's behest there came an international playwright's boycott (1963) and in 1966 the Equity ban on performers working in South Africa. Thus local writers and performers were forced into making theatre for its times using and developing its won resources- and initially the effect was far more positive than negative. It brought on a surge in creative energy which allowed the PAC's to perform many new indigenous works, using it financial clout to secure some of the best talents in the business – and virtually all the best available (white) professional talent of the country worked for one of the Performing Arts Councils in the decade between 1962 and 1972. At this stage most of the administrative structures of these organisations were still trim, and most of the money was still being channelled towards employing the best talent for the performance of plays. Thus at its height PACT for example had Eghardt van der Hoven, a seasoned actor, as

Director, Mannie Manim a superb lighting designer and administrative talent as its drama organiser, the brilliant actor/director Francois Swart as its artistic director, and a permanent company made up of such talents as Wilna Snyman, Louis van Niekerk, Sandra Prinsloo, Marius Weyers, and the like. CAPAB similarly had a strong and talented permanent group, periodically enhanced by freelance appointments where needed.

At first this renaissance was dominated by the Afrikaans theatre and its exciting new playwrights. Writers such as Bartho Smit (*Bacchus in die Boland*), Chris Barnard (*Pa, maak vir my 'n Vlieër, Pa* – P:1964; English version: *Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow*, P:1970), André P. Brink (*Pavane*) Adam Small (*Kanna hy kô Hystoe* P:1965, O:1971 – *Kanna Comes home*), Pieter Fourie (*Faan se Trein, Die Joiner*) and P.G. du Plessis (*Nag van Legio – The night of Legion* – and *Siener in die Suburbs*, O:1971 – *Seër in the Suburbs*) spearheaded a vibrant theatre tradition along with a number of less prolific writers. The whole make-up of the Arts Councils lent itself to their particular needs, and they provided the kind of work which the public seemed to want. Though less prominent than the foregoing, there were also a number of impressive English playwrights – including Guy Butler (*The Dam*), James Ambrose Brown (*Seven against the sun* O:1959, P:1962), and H.W.D. (Harley) Manson (*The Festival, The Magnolia Tree*). However, the style of this work was largely conventional, rooted in European realism and most of it produced in the early sixties. The only exception was Athol Fugard, whose early work was still very much in that mode, but whose later experimental plays would eventually help to change the face of English playwriting in the country. By the beginning of the eighties, a new generation of playwrights in English would thus also make their appearance in the PAC's, as the Councils gradually managed to “open up” their policies. But, as we shall see, by then events had overtaken them, and the PAC's had lost the pre-eminence they had enjoyed earlier – also among Afrikaans writers.

Clearly a great deal more work was being produced in the sixties, for there were many other professional companies in the field as well. Taubie Kushlick, Brian Brooke, Adam Leslie, Joan Brickhill and Louis Bourke, Des and Dawn Lindbergh, Pieter Toerien and others were all putting on popular plays from abroad, at the time still utilising imported actors and directors from Europe and America alongside local talent. Much of the history of this kind of professional musical and popular (in the box-office sense) type of theatre is ignored – consciously and unconsciously – in writings about theatre appearing today. As if it is not part of South African theatre. In a sense of course this is actually part of the cultural boycott reaction: the boycott created a local playwriting tradition, and all “imported” work is foreign, thus not South African. This again is the *literary* objection of course: the playtext is the thing thus, not the performance, it is implied. The *theatrical* idea that the history of theatre is a history of the performances that took place, is apparently rejected. So too the notion that a local production of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* may actually have more of moment to say about tolerance than any contemporary local play. In fact the exposure brought by these commercial companies is extensive and wide ranging from the farces and drawing room comedies of Brian Brooke and his company and the satirical reviews of Adam Leslie (*Wait a Minim*,) to the musical extravaganzas of the Brickhill-Bourke company (*My Fair Lady*) and Taubie Kushlick (*Irma la Douce*). The latter, along with Pieter Toerien also ensured a steady run of successful new work from the West-End and Broadway well into the seventies (*Jaques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris, Equus, Amadeus*).

At the time there was already a growing internal objection to the imported artists working here. Not simply because they were imported, but because of the decreasing quality of those imports, and the fact that these “second-raters” were taking jobs from local performers and other artists. They were perceived as being failures, has-beens, or would-be's in their own countries, who came out here because they could not find good employment there. In some cases this was true of course, though a number of even those originally objected to remained in the country to

enhance the theatre here. In other cases the imports were of a stature which ensured some very fine productions, and some of them remained as well. (Michael Atkinson, Keith Grenville.)

At the same time there was a growing semi-professional theatre in the various black townships, both popular (the work of Gibson Kente, Mhangwane and others) and more emphatically oppositional. However very little of it ever reached the wider (white) public- neither directly in formal (professional) performance or in print, nor indirectly in the form of reviews and general publicity. If some of these works did reach an audience – somewhere in a hall, warehouse or room – it was seldom reported upon in the daily press. This is particularly true of works created by black South Africans, who did not have the institutional backing provided by the state funded PAC's or by the commercial theatres, whose work was usually seen as crude and amateurish by the critics, and who often fell foul of the censorship system created by the 1963 Publications and Entertainment Act. A well known and public example of the latter is Lewis Nkosi's *The Rhythm of violence* (P: 1964 ) – which was an early victim and remained on the banned list in South Africa for almost twenty five years. But censorship of black literature and theatre was seldom as simple and direct as this. It often took more devious forms, such as administrative impediments (the refusal of permission to use a hall, arrests of actors on charges of vagrancy in terms of the pass laws<sup>2</sup>) or direct physical action (the breaking up of "mass meetings" and summary arrests of performers and audience members on trumped up charges). (See Coplan, 1985; Kavanagh, 1985; Steadman, 1985)

While the professional theatre was flourishing, the amateur theatre – with a few notable exceptions, such as the Shakespeare productions in various centres (Maynardville, the Port Elizabeth Shakespeare Festival, the Bloemfontein Shakespeare Circle), a couple of larger societies (Bellville Amateur Toneelvereniging, The Johannesburg Reps) and some work in black urban townships and on the Cape Flats, to which we shall return – was dying. This cut a vast number of people off from day-to-day exposure to theatre and significantly widened the gulf between theatre (as perceived by the theorists, artists and administrators) and the public (i.e. the man in the street in Brandfort, Krugersdorp, Beaufort West, or wherever). The final blow would come with the introduction of broadcast television in 1976. (See Du Toit, 1988; Smith 1990).

So, while the mainstream public theatre was flourishing and growing immensely in terms of expertise and facilities (this in fact was the time in which all the large modern theatre complexes were being planned and designed for the major cities), and even artistically in a purely aesthetic sense, it was theatre in a mental straight-jacket. It was caught in the mesh of the political thinking of the time: a theatre of Apartheid, unable to address the real issues of the day – directly at least, since it was reliant on the whole governmental apparatus for its own existence. Rightly or wrongly, this was how it was perceived at any rate.

So many believed that the liberating influence on the South African theatre had to come in another way. And the ready models seemed to be provided by the *avant garde* theatre of the USA and Europe at that time. The whole concept of improvisational and experimental performances as way of raising the *political consciousness* of the performers and public, became extremely attractive to those opposing the status quo, and equally unattractive to those intent on maintaining it.

Interestingly enough some of the first essay into this world actually occurred within the PAC's themselves during the mid-to-late sixties, when some excellent experimental and often risqué political theatre was done by certain of the PAC workshop-theatres, notably by PACT's The Arena in Johannesburg, CAPAB's *Theatre Laboratory* in Cape Town and Jannie Gildenhuys's work for the Orange Free State's *Presidensie Teater* in Bloemfontein between 1968-73. For example, among Gildenhuys's more potent productions in that ostensible conservative city were the first productions of Bartho Smit's *Putsonderwater*, Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*

and Adam Small's *Kanna hy kô Hystoe*. However it was really the growing number of "alternative" and independent theatrical producers, which managed to push the limits of the indigenous theatre beyond its European roots. Some of those mentioned above (notably the Rehearsal Room at Dorkay House) became increasingly important, while the evolving township theatre, the founding of Theatre Workshop '71 and the isolated yet important example of Welcome Msomi's *Umabatha*, a Zulu version of *Macbeth* (which toured the country and even obtained state support to play in Britain during 1970), were all signs of a changing theatrical environment.

Then in the period between 1972 and 1974 what had been a tentative movement towards a serious and locally grown theatre of opposition became a virtual revolution. The reasons for this are complex and numerous, and often go back many years, but major factors were the overt and militant growth of the Black Consciousness movement (particularly since 1969), the cumulative effect of the playwrights' boycott (1963) and the Equity ban (1966), the increasing frustration of working along segregated lines, and a growing disillusionment with the state funded Performing Arts Councils (PAC's) as a force for change.

Ironically it was an experiment in improvisation which Athol Fugard undertook for the Cape PAC's *Theatre Laboratory (Orestes, O:1971)*, which led to one of the most influential of these theatres. *The Space*, founded in Cape Town by Brian Astbury and his wife Yvonne Bryceland, was initially run as a "theatre club" to circumvent current restrictions on multi-racial audiences and performances and censorship. It soon became a rallying point for all who found themselves uncomfortable in, or disillusioned with, the PAC's or the commercially owned companies aimed at providing "mere entertainment" for the public. In its nine years of existence (as *The Space* and later as *The People's Space*) this brave experiment produced dozens of new plays, some memorable, other forgotten, and many more submitted – the majority of them in English. A number of influential playwrights premiered there, including Fatima Dike (*The sacrifice of Kreli, The First South African*), Pieter-Dirk Uys (*Faces in the Wall, God's Forgotten, Paradise is Closing Down, Selle Ou Storie*, etc.) and Geraldine Aron (*Bar and Ger, Mickey Kannis Caught My Eye*). *The Space* become something akin to a clearinghouse for all the pent-up frustration and anger in the country, as well as a training ground for some of the most influential performers, directors and later playwrights to participate in the theatre of the post-Soweto period<sup>3</sup>. (See Astbury, 1979; Orkin, 1992).

Concurrent with, and following on, the *Space*, we also find other oppositional and so-called "alternative" theatre groups picking up on the incipient movement of the fifties, and often working specifically in the "disadvantaged" area of black performance. Preceded by Robert Mshengu Kavanagh's important *Theatre Workshop '71* (1971), there followed such varied groups as *MDALI* (1972), *The People's Experimental Theatre (PET)* (1973), *The Company* (1974) and *Junction Avenue Theatre* (1976). They all focussed on this double agenda of opposition and training. This is particularly true of their work with black performers, for whom the University system in the country did not provide, and till late in the 1980's still only provided limited, training opportunities in the acting skills and the performing arts in general.

*The Company*, founded and run by Mannie Manim and Barney Simon, eventually established the very influential *Market Theatre* complex in 1976, thus reinforcing and later continuing the tradition pioneered by Brian Astbury in the Cape. The impact of the Market has been vast, even if controversial at times. (See Fuchs, 1990 and Schwartz, 1988.) Again it has not only trained theatre performers, technicians, managers and playwrights<sup>4</sup>, but has actively helped to broaden the scope and alter the form of South African theatre. For much of the eighties, referring to "South African theatre" really meant talking about what was happening at the *Market Theatre*, at least as far as international interest was concerned.

The third significant theatre, one which was eventually to replace the *Space* (and incidentally make life difficult for CAPAB) in Cape Town, was the University of Cape Town's Baxter Theatre which opened in 1977. In a sense it has been the most commercial of the three major venues, managing somehow to straddle the work of Pieter Toerien, the Performing Arts Councils and the progressive work of the Market Theatre and the townships over the years. And yet somehow it has managed to maintain its "oppositional" stance relatively intact – which says much for the entrepreneurial and publicity skills of its Managing Director, John Slemmon.

Alongside these developments, there was also a significant increase in theatrical activity in the black townships, both at an entertainment level (continuing the various performance traditions, including and expanding on the early work of Gibson Kente and Sam Mhangwane), and later under the influence of the Black Consciousness movement, the serious work of Kente himself (*How Long?*, *Too late* and *I believe*) and the more subversive work of a number of a younger writers such as Solly Mekgoe, Julius Mtsaka, and most notably the early work of Lesotho playwright Zakes Mda.

### 3.6 THEATRE AS WEAPON (1976 – 1989)

By 1976 the political, economic and cultural isolation in the country because of its race policies was gaining momentum and made itself felt in a variety of ways. At the same time four crucial events occurred which were to be of significance to playwriting in the country: the Soweto student uprising and the mobilization of the masses, the beginning of broadcast television by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), the gradual desegregation of theatres in the country and the opening of the *Market Theatre*. Writing for the state funded theatres appeared to remain as rigidly dominated by both external and internal controls and censorship as before, and the result was temporary demise of significant Afrikaans playwriting and a marked swing towards playwriting in English (or at least some polyglot form, dominated by English), as a viable means of public protest and discussion, both in the "formal" theatre of the cities (including the *Market Theatre* and the *Federated Union of Black Arts* – FUBA – in Johannesburg, the *People's Space* and the *Baxter Theatre* in Cape Town, the *Abbey Theatre* in Durban), in certain of the university theatres, and in the much more radical and innovative "alternative" theatre of the townships.

Three major trends occur in this period. Firstly theatre and theatre practitioners finally seemed to discover the power of *performance* as a socio-political weapon. Secondly the first genuine and wide-ranging attempts at transcending the racial, linguistic and other barriers at understanding through the process of theatre were undertaken – both through the workshop format and through the conscious employment of a polyglot linguistic form – notably the urban patois referred to as *Tsotsitaal* (*Gangster Language*). Thirdly there is a significant and noticeable shift in the theatrical paradigm, away from the institutionalised and imported European forms towards the more informal yet pervasive indigenous performance tradition.

As the apparatus of the state clamped down on all "subversive" publication and media presentations, so the spontaneous and public protests, marches, dances and impromptu speeches, poems and presentations became part of an ongoing *spectaculum mundi*, a passing show of mass feeling and resistance. Theatre and performance, utilising many of the techniques of the older indigenous forms such as the dances, songs and narratives, discovered the power of its very ephemerality. So township theatre – and the tarted up "city" versions of it, presented at the "legitimate" venues such as the Market and the Baxter – began to flourish. So too former fringe forms – cabaret, musicals, one-man shows, dance-drama, and so on, became legitimised, becoming part of the theatre of the eighties.

Inadequate as any kind of categorisation must be, the theatre of the post-1976 period seemed to shift from being what could tentatively be termed a *theatre of anger* directly after the first



violent confrontations, to something more akin to a *theatre of reflection* by the latter part of the eighties. The point is that, directly preceding and following the 1976 trauma, the theatre became highly abrasive, propagandistic and confrontational in style, with the major works of the period clearly displaying a far greater commitment to political commentary than to aesthetic considerations. There was a clear feeling, endorsed by the organisations involved in the struggle and even directly stated by a number of speakers and writers (notably for example Steve Biko), that at such times it was necessary to provisionally forget the aesthetic and other aims of literature, and that a writer now has a moral obligation to join the fight against the current evil and help to conscientise and mobilise the people.

This was the time of Workshop '71's *Survival* (O:1976; P:1981), Matsemela Manaka's *Egoli* and *Pula*, Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* (O:1979; P:1984) and *Gangsters*, Zakes Mda's *We shall sing for the Fatherland* (O:1979; P:1980) and *The Hill*. It was also the time of Athol Fugard's great collaborative works, including *The Island* and *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, which introduced John Kani and Winston Ntshona to the world. But perhaps the most important figure here was Barney Simon at the *Market*, who really introduced the improvisational workshop format into South African theatre. His first seminal work of this kind, i.e. *Cincinnati, Scenes from the city life* (credited to him and his cast, O:1979; P:1984), led on to the sensation of *Woza Albert* (O:1981; P:1984), which he did with author/performers Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa, and such other works as *Born in the RSA* and *Black Dog/Nyemjama*. Both these authors were to go on to similar work themselves, Mtwa with *Bopha!*, and Ngema with the stunning *Asinamali* (O:1985; P:1986), later followed by his hit musical *Sarafina!* (O:1987). (See for example Hauptfleisch and Steadman, 1984; Kavanagh, 1985; Coplan, 1985, Orkin, 1992 and Kruger, 1999 on this).

A very specific category of this kind of work and certainly among the most direct and effective on the short-term, is to be found in the socio-drama which evolved mainly within the growing trade of union movement and the so-called "workers' plays" of the eighties, particularly on the Witwatersrand and in Natal, led by groups such as *Junction Avenue Theatre* and individuals like Ari Sitas. The very naivety and directness of these polemical works, made by workers, performed by workers and seen by workers, made them insidious and dangerous to the state, as the bannings and official interference from the state apparatus indicates. Though naturally site and time specific products, a number of these plays (e.g. *The Long Walk*) eventually crossed over into formal theatre, being put on in "accredited" venues later. At the same time, many of the themes and even certain structural qualities of these works actually influenced more formal playwriting in such diverse works as *The Hungry Earth*, *You strike the woman, you strike the rock*, and *Asinamali*. (See Astrid Von Kotze, 1988, Kruger, 1999).

Much of the foregoing links up with the work of the early seventies referred to before, but then, gradually, as we move into the eighties, the style and content of protest theatre broadened, to encompass numerous additional issues, a variety of different performance forms, and a growing awareness – even among critics – of the need for a broader interpretation of what constituted "theatre" in South Africa.<sup>5</sup>

There was also a rapidly expanding body of student work, showcased at such venues as the *Grahamstown Arts Festival*, the *ATKV Kampustoneel* (1982-1989) in Pretoria, and various other festival-type events. The township theatre, less accessible, based on open and changeable texts rarely available and seldom published, still continued on its dual way of entertainment (the ever active Gibson Kente still the key figure) and socio-political sensitisation (Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponya, Don Mattera, Mzwandile Maquna and others), though more of these were crossing over into the city theatres, notably the *Market*, as we have seen in the case of Maponya, Mtwa and Ngema, as well as the workers' plays. And indeed often they were confined to these "approved" venues by the state censorship apparatus, for these were seen as

venues for the "converted" audiences anyway. The plays were more often than not banned in other, non-conventional and public venues where they could incite riotous behaviour.

The festivals in particular did an enormous amount to re-launch Afrikaans writers returning to the theatre, as well as a number of new writers in English, all utilising the apparent opening up of the theatres to all races as the state relaxed its specific censorship on plays in "approved" venues – though the printed word was being suppressed as much as always. While a whole range of new playwrights were now becoming prominent, a specific feature was the emergence of improvisational groups acting as authors. Thus we find such groups as Malcolm Purkey and *Junction Avenue Theatre Co. (Randlords and Rotgut, Sophiatown)*, Phyllis Klotz, Smal Ndaba and the *Vusisizwe Players (You strike the woman, your strike the rock, Sowhereto)*, Nicholas Ellenbogen and Ellis Pearson with *Theatre for Africa (Horn of Sorrow, 1988, Elephant of Africa, 1992)*, Mavis Taylor and *New Afrika Theatre* creating workshopped texts of great power. And of course Barney Simon and *The Company at the Market*. Most noticeable too was the re-emergence and growth of the satirical revue and the cabaret as form, with the work of Robert Kirby, Pieter-Dirk Uys, Ian Fraser and Casper de Vries particularly prominent in the eighties, along with the more literary cabarets of Hennie Aucamp – especially *Met Permissie Gesê (With Your Permission, O:1981; P:1983)* and *Slegs vir Almal (Only for Everyone, O:1984; P:1986)*.

In this period, the dominant playwright was Athol Fugard and the dominant theatre *The Market*. Yet it was a time which turned South African playwriting into something unique, a blend of the many traditions inherited from Africa, Europe and America. As we have seen the significant workshop productions include Workshop '71's *Survival (197\*)* and *Crossroads (197\*)*, Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona's *The Island (1973)* and *Sizwe Banzi is Dead (1972)*, Barney Simon and cast's *Cincinnati (1979)*, *Born in the RSA (1985)*, and *Black Dog (1986)*, Barney Simon, Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa's *Woza Albert (1981)*, Ngema's *Asinamali (1985)* and *Sarafina! (1987)*, Phyllis Klotz and cast's *You strike the woman, your strike the Rock (1986)*, Junction Avenue Theatre's *Sophiatown (1986)*, David Kramer and Taliep Petersen's *District Six – The Musical (1987)* and Theatre for Africa's *Horn of Sorrow (1988)*.

Besides Fugard's major works (from *Dimetos* in 1975) to *Master Harold...and the boys* in 1982 and *The Road to Mecca* in 1984), the more notable published playwrights of the period include Paul Slabolepszy (*Saturday Night at the Palace, 1982*) Pieter-Dirk Uys (*God's Forgotten* T:1975; P:1981, *Paradise is Closing Down, O:1977; P:1978*, *Die Van Aardes van Grootoor, O:1979; P:1979*), Maishe Maponya (*The Hungry Earth, P:1984*), Matsemela Manaka (*Egoli, 1979*), Pieter Fourie (*Ek, Anna van Wyk O:1985; P:1986*, *Die Koggelaar – The Teaser – O:1987; P:1988*), Zakes Mda (*We shall sing for the Fatherland* and other plays, P:1979, 19), Deon Opperman (*Môre is 'n Lang Dag – Tomorrow is a Long Day, O:1984; P:1987*), Reza de Wet (*Diepe Grond – Deep Ground, O:1985; P:1987*), Gcina Mhlope (*Have you seen Zandile? O:1987; P:1988*), and Charles Fourie (*Diesel and Dust, O:1990*).

In 1985 the emphasis was gradually yet clearly moving even further into additional areas of social and personal concern, although still retaining a strong emphasis on socio-political comment. This was partly the result of a broadening of the whole cultural and liberation struggle, and a growing proficiency and independence among performers and writers, and partly a reaction to dwindling audiences disillusioned with and tired of the old, overtly propagandist style of works from the late seventies and early eighties. Gay and feminist issues surfaced as concerns for instance (notably at the *Market*, where a number of women's play festivals were hosted), as well as a variety of environmental matters (Ellenbogen and Pearson being particularly prominent at NAPAC's *Loft Theatre Company*, and later with their own *Theatre for Africa*). It was, as pointed out above, a period of strong but increasing student participation. It is also significant that the *Performing Arts Councils* had begun reasserting themselves in the cultural-political arena by dusting off and updating their own theatre-workshop activity to house the numerous new works. Thus PACT had expanded its activities through the

*Arena* and the *Momentum* theatres in the State Theatre complex, by to the creation of the *Windy Brow* complex auditorium in Johannesburg, NAPAC had formed the *Loft Theatre Company* under Nicholas Ellenbogen, PACOFS had equipped the unique and exciting *Observatory Theatre* and introduced an African theatre company, while CAPAB had created its *Arena* theatre. It was at these venues that such significant productions as Elsa Joubert's *Poppie Nongena* (1984) and Mitzi Booyesen's *The Time of the Hyena*, based on the life of Winnie Mandela (1986), had their first productions. The controversial Afrikaans cabaret *Piekniek by Dingaan (Picnic with Dingaan)* (1988) was originally created for the CAPAB *Arena* as well and opened to astounding applause at the predominantly English Grahamstown Festival.

The latter production - a coarse, vibrant and politically explosive work - was banned in CAPAB's Cape Town venue however, and was moved to the Baxter by the performers themselves. This incident became one of a series of events which actually threatened to rip the Cape *Performing Arts Board* apart, coming as it did at a time of controversy in the embattled Council's life. At the same time economic considerations were causing all the PAC's to re-evaluate their priorities. Unfortunately it appears that most of the decisions made to alleviate the problems really only saw the answers in terms of retrenchment of artists and reduction of the scale and/or number of productions – while the overfed bureaucratic monsters that had been nurtured over the years simply continued growing – setting up more and more administrative structures in an attempt to solve the difficulties posed by dwindling audiences and ideological alienation from the apparent cultural centre of things. It was the time of the fiercest opposition to the perceived complicity of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and the PAC's in the Apartheid machinery.

But it was not only the state run theatre which were beginning to suffer, for the times certainly made it difficult for everyone. The worsening economic recession, the continuing state of emergency in the country and the mounting violence was turning the whole social structure into jeopardy. A debilitating sense of insecurity affected everything, also the theatre, as many performers left the industry, while others fought to democratise the existing structures from within and without. The concepts of "peoples power" translated into art-by-committee and similar simplistic and reductionist principles, eventually hobbled a large number of potentially exciting projects.

It would seem that it really was only the purely commercial theatre – now primarily the domain of Pieter Toerien and his growing number of independent theatres – which seemed to flourish unaffected. His ongoing string of popular faces, Agatha Christie mysteries, and West End and Broadway hits, kept his specific target audiences (white, English-speaking, upper middle-class, professionals) rolling in. As did his occasional more serious essay into award-winning contemporary theatre (*Amadeus*, *M. Butterfly*), which gave the country the occasional much-needed exposure to contemporary international work.

No-where was both the variety of the theatre and the uncertainty more clear than at the annual *Grahamstown Arts Festival*. As the nineties approached, it became increasingly difficult to identify any special focus in the work the presented there, and a vast eclecticism reigned as far as both form and theme was concerned. There was also a widening concern about the falling of standards of performance. Heated, even acrimonious debates on the future of the performing arts became the order of the day, and virtually every theatre company was experiencing some kind of internal revolution. Yet the performances continued, and the bewildered audiences supported what they felt comfortable with.

And then the country obtained a new President in F.W. de Klerk, and on 1 February 1990 he made a series of earth-shattering announcements in parliament.

#### 4. THEATRE FOR HEALING (1990 -2003)

Whatever the future may say about the political the former Nationalist party-leader and his reform initiatives, that very first speech - and the subsequent release of Nelson Mandela - had a phenomenal impact on the arts. Two striking but very general trends may suffice to indicate some parameters of this beginning period of the latest phase of theatre history in the country.

In the first place the opening up of the society which that first speech occasioned, literally sucked the acrimony out much of the cross-cultural debate. At once groups who, for ideological reasons, had been unable to talk to each other for more than ten years, suddenly found themselves planning all kinds of joint ventures. Arts associations found themselves actually able to set up cross-cultural events and make them work. By 1991 this was taking place with the full support of both the government and the ANC's cultural desk. At the same time, this kind of planning entailed a concerned look at theatre in a "new" South Africa, where access for funding would (theoretically) become possible to everyone. If there was to be funds available from a bankrupt state obviously the slicing of the cake was about to put some of the edge back into the debate. And that vision led to a myriad congresses, symposia and debates at various venues and under various guises across the country. While on the surface it appeared as if little of real concrete and contractual value was being achieved by all the talk, it gradually became clear that new alliances were quietly being made, ones that were cutting across old (Apartheid) dividing lines, and that quite remarkable power-shifts and ideological shifts were occurring in the arts establishment(s). A first culminating point of all those debates came in the form of the National Symposium on the Arts which took place in Johannesburg on 6 – 7 December 1992, where the processes were set in motion which would ultimately lead to a new funding system for the arts in the country.

The other striking effect was an almost farcical scramble to find *causes* (in the sense of issues, topic and stories to write about), or to justify theatre in some way, since the removal (at least in theory) of apartheid legislation literally pulled the rug from under an enormous anti-apartheid industry. It had been an arts tradition which had lasted more than forty years, in which reputations had been made, sustained and destroyed in terms of that particular anti-apartheid vision and certainly many writers found themselves without themes, and without an audience. (See article in Burger, 6/11/92. Athol Fugard himself has made this point recently as well, at a talk in Stellenbosch.).

Then three other profound political events took place between 1994-1996. The first elections free and fair were held to the scrutiny of the world, Nelson Mandela became President, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission did its work. And all three became mediated theatrical events of international and epic proportion - displaying the mix and splendour of the crossover culture of the country to the world via CNN and Sky News. They not only altered the nation, but also our view of ourselves and that mythical (perhaps utopian) "rainbow nation" everyone declaimed. The impact of these "performances" (the huge concert for Mandela in the grounds of the Union Buildings, the ongoing televised saga of the commission's inquiries) became the source and form of much of the new theatrical work to follow.

Clearly these events and the rapid changes taking place in the cultural and political landscape afterwards, made the next decade a period of huge uncertainty and turmoil for artists and the theatre industry who had to balance a number of new realities as the country moved into its first democratic election and the astounding miracle of peaceful and negotiated transfer of power after years of civic unrest and resistance. As the "new South Africa" sought a cultural identity, the notion *culture* – including art and theatre – was radically redefined to allow for the full spectrum of cultural endeavour by *all* the citizens. This meant a flexible interpretation which could create new opportunities for crossover and multi-cultural, interdisciplinary work, yet able to take into account the changed political situation.

As has been pointed out, political theatre and theatre of protest – the mainstay of the 1980's – was out as people sought entertainment, celebration and laughter at all costs after three decades of political struggle. Within a year, as the boycotts fell away, theatre became a far more commercial *entertainment* industry again, as it had been a hundred years previously. Audiences flocked to see the musicals, opera, jazz-concerts, drawing room comedies, award-winning West End and Broadway plays now available – or to visit the numerous small venues for intimate revues and cabarets. The “serious” plays of the formal theatres – from the *Market Theatre* to the state funded PAC's were playing to empty houses, and serious playwrights who could not sugar-coat the pill, only had student- and festival audiences prepared to sit through guided guilt-trips.

Of course this was partly an indication of the state of uncertainty in the country at the time, and was seen by many as an interim stage before theatre would embark on a new evolutionary stage to some (mythical) South African theatre. However, this latter vision is still pretty much that, for to date that initial wave of escapist froth and nostalgia has hardly abated, with musicals, musical revues, cabarets, comedies, farces, satires, one-person plays and stand-up comedy (even in Afrikaans) dominating the myriad of new small stages and the more than 30 festivals around the country. Not that there weren't attempts at addressing new and relevant issues. Indeed some of the new plays on offer in 1992 provide interesting examples of two disparate trends in the industry. For example *Poison* by David Kramer and Taliep Petersen offers a modern, Cape Flats version of *Othello*, without the (obvious) politics (*pace* Martin Orkin), but focussing on the drug and gangster scene - themes which, alongside sexism and health issues, were to become dominant issues in community and politically conscious theatre over the next decade. *Playland* by Athol Fugard on the other hand seemed to be a serious attempt to introduce a very conscious move beyond apartheid into South African theatre, by striving for reconciliation and understanding, as a black man and a white man meet and find themselves able to join hand to exorcise the trauma of their own past. (Mavis Taylor coined the term "Theatre for healing" for this kind of work.) Perhaps, the best early example of this must be the immensely popular, unpretentious and yet shrewdly conceived, musical presentation *Fairyland* (David Kramer and Taliep Petersen), which ran for more than two years at the Kramer's own *Dock Road Theatre* in Cape Town. Against the background of developments at the time, this simple, effervescent, cross-cultural and healing musical revue about living in South Africa became the epitome of a new lease of creative life for South African theatre. It was followed later by more serious fare based on the TRC hearings (including Jane Taylor, William Kentridge and the *Handspring Puppet Company's* production *Ubu and the Truth Commission*), works however utilizing the multi-media, crossover style developed in the 1980's. At the same time number of more conventionally scripted works followed in which the same search for understanding was to feature, notable being the works of Athol Fugard (*My Children My Africa*, *Valley Song*, *Sorrows and Rejoicings*), André P. Brink (*Die Jogger* = "The Jogger"), Breyten Breytenbach (*Boklied* = "Goat Song"; *Johnny Cockroach* and *Die Toneelstuk* = "The Play"); Janet Suzman (*Three Sisters*), Deon Opperman (*Donkerland* = "Dark Land"), Reza de Wet (*Drie Sisters Twee* = "Three Sisters Two"), John Kani (*Nothing but the Truth*) and others.

However, finances and the realities of a changing, shifting and to some crumbling industry gradually began to intrude and dictated other realities to authors, directors and artists. Thus for example we see a huge increase in busking, with performers taking over malls, beaches, streets and so on, and at the same time numerous small, intimate, often temporary, new venues began opening in the cities and towns - then closing again. Because of the disintegration of the Performing Arts Boards as employers of performers (their budgets substantially cut with the threatening advent of the new *National Arts Council*), many independent co-ops were being formed in an attempt to beat the economic slump and to democratise the arts. These groups however also had to struggle to get out of the straight-jacket of conformity which the anti-apartheid cultural struggle of the 1970's and 1980's had imposed on artists. And then there was the rise of the arts festivals - at an exponential rate. From about five "national" festivals

(professional, schools and amateur) in 1990, they have grown to well over 30 by 2003, constituting in the words of one reviewer, the theatrical season in South Africa. These developments are all strong indicators of change and dynamism, but also symptoms of a certain amount of predictable insecurity in the volatile pre-millennium times. And they had an enormous impact on the nature of theatremaking, theatre management and theatregoing in the country.

Of course one can be a little cynical here and point to the growing support for imported fare (including the blockbusters *Les Misrables*, *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*), the exporting of trite "South Africana" (such as *Ipi Tombi*, *Footpintes of Africa* and the like); the filming of the rather dated books and plays of the struggle (*Cry, the Beloved Country* - twice, *Dry White Season*, *Sarafina!*, *Bopha!*), and the rapidly expanding South African film and media industry as an indication of the other side of the changing face of the entertainment industry and indeed the internationalisation of art in general. Now that the cultural boycott has petered out, loyalties and ideologies seem to have been shoved into the background in the rush to get in on the act, and share in the potential spoils. Spotting who was suddenly working for (of with) whom in what became a most revealing game.

Crucially, as the last decade progressed the debate surrounding the role and funding of the arts became a critical matter for arts administrators, coming to a head in the dissolution of the PAC's and the formation of the *National Arts Council* as central funding body for all arts practitioners in 1997 – with less funding than before and with the funding spread over a much wider field to include the fine arts, crafts and heritage. Privatisation, rationalisation, equity, down-sizing and job creation became some of the buzzwords in the industry - as it was in all other sectors of public and private life in the new, capitalist South Africa of the newly elected President Thabo Mbeki.

Amid this uncertainty, the theatre and performing arts remained surprisingly dynamic, though the straitened economy and the altered attitudes about the importance of the arts certainly impacted heavily on the industry as a whole, radically affecting the actual form that the performances took and the way they were *presented* and framed. While many people kept announcing the death of theatre in South Africa, the facts seem to paint a different picture. There certainly appear to be *more* performances annually now than ever in the history of the country. The nature, length, focus, seasonal rhythms and success rate of the performances vary greatly, but they actually take place. However the shape and functional processes of the industry are vastly different to those of the foregoing eras. While space prohibits a full analysis of these processes, a brief summary is revealing.

The most obvious of the changes over the past ten years appear to have been:

(1) A shift from serious political playwriting to lighter entertainment, though the last few years (2000-2003) has seen a return of some far more serious work from a rejuvenated Fugard, Reza De Wet, Deon Opperman, Charles Fourie, Jane Taylor, Breyten Breytenbach, John Kani, and others.

(2) A shift to multi-faceted musical-style performance pieces, notably too the return of international theatre because of the suspension of the cultural boycott (from local productions to joint international productions). Also cabarets, revues, and nostalgic musical presentations (celebrating music and musicians from the 1950's, 1960's and 1970's),

(3) The rise of contemporary dance and physical theatre (in the broadest sense), as dynamic and independent forms, with companies like *JazzArt*, *Magnet Theatre*, *The First Physical Theatre Company*, *The Physical Joint* being prominent, and featuring names such as Gary Gordon, Jenny Reznik, Mark Fleischman, Jay Pather, Samantha Pienaar, Andrew Buckland, Bheki Mkwane, and many others.

(4) the increasing popularity of cabaret, revue, stand-up comedy, particularly at the various festivals - names such as Pieter-Dirk Uys, Casper de Vries, Solly Philander, Dowwe Dolla (Margit Meyer-Rödenbeck), Koos Kombuis, Taliep Petersen, Dawid Kramer, Elsabé Zietsman,

Antoinette Pienaar, and numerous others have become synonymous with the new mini-theatre forms,

(5) the replacement of the formal theatre companies by economically sized independent *ad hoc* ensembles. The proliferation (and rate of disappearance or transformation) of these ensembles, within a fluid and constantly shifting landscape, has been astounding.

(6) the exploitation of theatre-skills for commercial purposes (e.g. live advertising and industrial theatre), has become a life-line, and even a source of great wealth, for many practitioners.

(7) the return of the touring company last seen in the 1930's and 1940's (see above), has been brought about by an enormous growth of community theatre and schools theatre activities, as well as the expanded festival circuit (8) the utilisation of self-created work instead of published texts, which started under apartheid conditions as a means of giving a voice to the masses, has become a way of survival in a time when the South African currency fell to dismal depths and made performing rights of international plays impossible to afford. The advantage has been a focus on local issues. The disadvantage has been a reliance on local or very old models, rather than access to new, dynamic European or American playmaking models. (9) the increasingly important role played by restaurant theatres and local, suburban venues, (10) the immensely important role played by the 30 or more annual arts festivals in setting up the calendar, shape and rhythms of the new "theatrical season", as well as the particular forms of theatre emerging after 1990 (see for example Van Graan and Du Plessis, 1998, 2001). A key impact here has been the rise of the one-hour "full-length play" and the "instant theatre" notion (i.e. anyone can submit an idea and be accepted. Then you have to make the play and produce it within a month or two for the festival). The gain is numerous new and creative theatre makers, the loss is (a) cultural memory (no old plays being done) and (b) few slow brewed, gradually developed theatrical works of major substance being written/created and produced.

All in all we are looking at a period in which theatre was in the process of reinventing itself for the new millennium – apparently under funded, under valued and haphazardly structured yes, but dynamic, driven, and creative in the extreme.

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<sup>1</sup> When dealing with history of theatre and drama one is always confront by that awkward matter of the *text* versus the *published text* versus the *performance*. There are cases where the difference between the dates of writing, dates of publication and dates of first performance differ quite sharply, and the difference may be crucial. In the history of the theatre (and even the drama canon) a premiere performance often has more influence on cultural thinking than does the later publication of the text. On the other hand there have been occasions where the published text was the cause of a socio-cultural shift in perception. Both these possibilities arise for example in the crucial period of social, political and cultural change which occurred in South Africa during the second half of the twentieth century. (*Vide Woza Albert!* and *Puts onderwater.*)

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In view of the foregoing, and the many unpublished texts referred to in this overview, I have devised a system of symbols to differentiate the three kinds of texts, to enable me to list all the relevant dates in the cases where this appears to make a difference. Henceforth then a date preceded by a (T) refers to the date when the text was originally written, an (O) to the date of its first (usually professional or at least widely public) performances, and a (P) to the date of publication.

<sup>2</sup> John Kani relates what – in retrospect – is a rather amusing fact about his own “license to perform”. He was at one time apparently employed as *gardener* by Athol Fugard, in order that his pass may be acceptable to the authorities. The profession of “actor” was not a category the officials at the Bantu Administration offices would accept!

<sup>3</sup> Dawie Malan, Paul Slabolepszy, Wilson Dunster, Yvonne Bryceland, Christopher Prophet, Percy Sieff, Bill Flynn, Bill Curry, Maralin Vanrenen, Michele Maxwell, Blaise Koch, Franz Dubrowsky, Limpie Basson, Henry Goodman, Christene Basson, Marthinus Basson, Grethe Fox, Marcel van Heerden, Jacqui Singer, Vincent Ebrahim, Fatima Dike and Nohmle Nkonyeni are only some of the luminaries who passed through *The Space* at one time or another.

<sup>4</sup> The Market’s list of alumni is equally impressive. Besides many of the names already mentioned under the Space, one may find the following among the multitude who have worked for the Market with some regularity: Barney Simon, Bobby Heaney, Janice Honeyman, Vanessa Cooke, John Kani, Winston Ntshona, Matsemela Manaka, Maishe Maponye, Mbongeni Ngema, Percy Mtwa, Reza de Wet, Deon Opperman, Danny Keogh, Aletta Bezuidenhout, Barrie Shah, Benjy Francis, James Mthoba, Fats Dibeko, Neil McCarthy, Nicky Rebelo, Peter Se-Puma, Charles Comyn, Nomsa Nene, Sandra Duncan, Marius Weyers, Sandra Prinsloo, Kate Edwards, Jonathan Rands, Gcina Mhlope and Nicholas Ellenbogen. This besides the many individuals involved in hosted companies performing in the Market’s many venues over the years.

<sup>5</sup> This awareness is strongly reflected in the book length publications which suddenly began to appear from 1984 onwards (e.g. Hauptfleisch and Steadman, 1984; Hauptfleisch, 1985, Larlham 1985; Coplan, 1985; Kavanagh, 1985; Du Toit, 1988), as well as a whole series of journal articles by these and other writers, such as Tim Couzens, Keyan Tomaselli, Stephen Gray, Martin Orkin and Lynn Dalrymple. Interestingly enough, very little of this shift is noticeable from the mainstream pages of *Scenaria* and *Teaterforum*, the two most prominent theatre-oriented journals at the time. *Staffrider*, *Critical Arts* and a variety of literary journals (*Contrast*, *English Academy Review*, *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, *Journal of Literary Studies*, etc. ) though, did provide a balance in this regard, as did certain daily and weekly papers. The coming of the *South African Theatre Journal* (SATJ) in 1987 did much to shift the focus, though *Scenaria* still (quite incorrectly) claims to be “the only journal devoted to all the performing arts”, and as yet hardly reflects the true dynamism of what appears to be happening – although it again is valuable in that it tends to draw attention to that ignored part of the tradition represented by the commercial and traditional European theatre, particularly the various musical forms.

In the earlier period it was particularly S’Ketsh which sought to reflect the “alternative” theatre in its pages. In fact the history of theatre journals in South Africa is a fascination study in its own right.