

UNIVERSAL THEATRE/UNIVERSAL CULTURE? BROOK, GROTOWSKI, BARBA

The Sociology of Stage Productions: Science and Art

The sociology of the theatre is still beleaguered by problems of status, even though an increasing number of scholars are working in the field or in closely related areas not claiming the title as such.

The standing of the discipline depends on how it is assessed from within the social sciences where it properly belongs. It must belong to this vast domain, in which sociology on its own is vast enough, because the sociology *of* the theatre targets all aspects of theatre in society. It therefore understands theatre to be a specific collective activity involved in a network of economic, political and other activities, all designated differently, that are brought about by social agents.

The discipline is also based on the premise that theatre is permeated through and through with social meaning. Meaning may be generalized, that is, recognized as being appropriate for the whole of a historically bounded and geographically delimited society. Or it may be precise, that is, confined to discernible social groups, what it communicates extending little, or not at all, beyond them. However, when meaning is localized and narrowed down in this way, it can nevertheless be situated back in, and be seen to be part of, the given whole described as *m* society in *n* place at *s* time.

Thus collective action and societal meaning are two fundamental principles of the sociology of the theatre which this discipline shares with the social sciences in general. On the other hand, its standing as a discipline also depends on how it is related to the broad field of theatre studies (or even to performance studies, arguably a different area from the

former) in which it also belongs. The fact that the sociology of the theatre has not yet become an integral part of theatre studies has as much to do with its hitherto limited scope (a paradox, seeing that its terrain of *society* is virtually inexhaustible) as with how "theatre studies" has been traditionally defined. The history of the theatre, for example, has been an incontestable component of theatre studies, as have directors' writings on method or biographies of directors and actors. A good deal of information concerning a given society informs any theatre history or biography worthy of the name. Yet this information is usually considered to be of subsidiary importance, like the *basso continuo* of a piece highlighting soloists. Leaving this musical metaphor behind, we could say that the societal material used in these sorts of works is not sociologized: it is neither foregrounded nor treated through the concepts and categories, as well as methods - both theoretical and practical - pertinent to sociology.

In addition, when theatre studies takes on board structuralism and semiotics or encounters anthropology (this meeting being decisive for performance studies), it generally does so by adapting familiar features and leaving unfamiliar ones alone. The great caution with which it first greeted structuralism and semiotics is revealing in this respect because both deal with dramatic texts and/or productions. They deal, in other words, with material acknowledged to be central to theatre studies. The resistance towards them expressed by conservative theatre specialists was not caused by their objects of study but by their supposedly scientific methods. "Structure", "system" and "sign", among a whole gamut of terms and techniques whose goal was absolute "scientific" objectivity, threatened the concepts of art, creation and individual imagination which distinguished a theatrical work as an "art" work. Furthermore, the same methods, with their predilection for anonymous - scientific and objective rather than personalized and subjective - "things" without authors, called into question the very notion of *artists*, whether playwright, actor, director or any other individuated participant in the making of theatre.¹

Structuralism and semiotics put together have given rise to theatre semiotics. Whether the latter actually succeeds in analyzing textual and performance compositions or, on the contrary, establishes models which are parallel to them and function autonomously as models per se is not the issue being addressed here. I have broached this issue elsewhere and now refer to it merely in a sub-textual manner.² My principal point is that theatre semiotics, whatever opposition it has received because of its methods, has been incorporated into theatre studies without great difficulty. Assimilation was possible because its purported objects of study

did not question the subject matter considered to be fundamental to theatre.

The spectre of science conjured up by theatre semiotics may be compared to the negative impact made by the notion of "society" on theatre studies. "Society", when invoked, was usually separated from theatre "art" for all analytical purposes. At best it provided a descriptive background for "art". At worst it was extraneous, simply extra-artistic, since dramatic texts and stage productions were presumed to have intrinsic formal value. These premises continued to reinforce the division between aesthetics and sociology.

In the light of such habits, for which there are sociological-historical explanations, it is not surprising that theatre studies has been slow to validate the sociology of the theatre in general and the sociology of theatre works, written or performed, in particular. This recalcitrance is evidenced by the discipline's absence from the programmes of theatre schools, departments of theatre studies in tertiary institutions, and so on.

What we have is a contradictory situation, for "theatre" goes hand in glove with the sociology of the theatre. However, the contradiction has not been generated solely by theatre studies. Here we must return to the point noted earlier, namely, the restricted range of the sociology of the theatre until now. The discipline has acquired some theoretical bases. It has produced empirical studies of audience composition, the rate of attendance by audiences at certain theatres, elements of what is known as "spectator response" and issues to do with cultural policy. Many of these studies have amalgamated theatre with all the other arts.³ But the discipline has been singularly remiss in dealing with performed works conceived simultaneously as performance art and social process. Numerous problems are involved in this curious state of affairs and help to explain the neglect regarding performed works. Let us take several of the fundamental problems which have general rather than particular significance.

First of all, there is the old problem of just how scientific any sociology - and, therefore, the sociology of the theatre - is or can be. Whether, how and why sociology is a science has been debated on a theoretical level so often (leading all too frequently to a dead end) that there is little sense in going over the issues again. Suffice it to note that Lucien Goldmann in *Sciences humaines et philosophie* has indicated how the whole question of science in the social sciences should be reformulated.⁴ We should note, by the same token, that the theoretical debate has had important consequences for sociological practice. It has spawned methodologies that have privileged facts, figures, graphs and case studies - in short, techniques and

material belonging to a rampant empiricism which has heavily influenced the sociology of the theatre itself and perhaps even blocked its growth.

None of this is to say that empirical investigation is unnecessary for the study of social life, theatre included. What these remarks do suggest (apart from the difference between empiricism and empirically-based research) is that sociology's preoccupation with scientific principles has led to its insecurity (and also insensitivity) vis-à-vis art. Our second problem, then, is related to the ambiguous view of art - and ipso facto of theatre works - held by sociology, a reputed science. The sociology of the theatre thus replicates the dilemma besetting theatre studies, this time by inverting it: in other words, by placing science and society above art (instead of art above science and society) in the hierarchy of priorities established. When faced with the conditions generic to sociology, how indeed does the sociology of stage productions, the area at issue here, deal with the creativity, fictitiousness and subjectivity involved in theatre art?

This question overlaps with a third problem, that of finding a methodological solution to the question posed. Stage productions may be quantified for specific reasons - for instance, how frequently, when, where and why productions are performed. Even so, the question "Why are they performed?" draws on matters to do with sociocultural values. It no longer assumes a purely quantitative approach but introduces a qualitative dimension into the discussion. However, just because values have entered the fray does not mean that analyses of the stage processes constituting productions will automatically follow. This step, although logical, has not been taken, if only because the very idea that a production is made up of different components (movement, colour, light, and so on) has been relegated historically to aesthetics.

And yet the sociology of the theatre cannot avoid referring to aesthetic concepts. Even the most seemingly anodyne of them (take the concept of form, for example) leads us to a fourth problem among the general problems raised here, namely, that of expanding the discipline's horizons beyond the confines of sociometric studies. The sociology of the theatre has two explicit frames of reference: the study of society and the study of theatre. These, as was indicated earlier, are not in a dualistic relation to each other, but are contained in each other. Therefore, what is necessary for the one is also necessary for the other. This means that the resources customarily reserved for theatre studies need to be used by the sociology of the theatre.

The fact that the sociology of the theatre must go beyond the boundaries hitherto drawn for it by sociology as such has enormous consequences. What this means, where the sociology of stage productions is concerned,

is learning to handle the tools used by theatre studies for studying performed works so as to show that works-in-performance are also works-in-society. Aesthetics is one of the main pieces of equipment held by theatre studies. Theatre semiotics, though recently acquired, is another. Caution, however, is required. Useful machinery cannot be transported to a sociological field without undergoing modification. For instance, its voltage (keeping my trope) might require adjustment. Such is the case of the concept of sign which is crucial to theatre semiotics, but where it is conceived and exercised in a strictly formal and profoundly asocial way. Consequently, this particular view of signs is not appropriate for sociological analyses of stage productions. Yet its inadequacy does not rule out the usefulness of an alternative, sociologically adequate, concept of sign.

The alternative at issue is the concept of *social* sign. Since this redefinition is radical, more than adaptation and adjustment is at stake. The result, from our perspective, may be letting go altogether of theatre semiotics as it exists today.

It is not my intention to repeat here the theoretical foundations of a redefined concept of sign as social sign. The briefest of outlines will remind my reader of the nodal points to be kept in mind, as follows. Social signs are brought into existence by social agents interacting and communicating with each other in specific sociocultural circumstances. These agents are not spread out indiscriminately, even though they cannot always be precisely identified sociologically. Signs mean and change according to their makers. As such, they are not things. Nor are stage works predetermined, fixed objects, "aesthetic" or "scientific". They are social actions made for spectators who are themselves social actors.⁵

It is now time to record a fifth problem of importance for sociological analyses of stage productions. It concerns the contribution of theatre companies and directors which, precisely because productions require producers, is at the core of our subject.

The contribution referred to is multiple. There is the performed work, which is an ensemble of stage processes presented and communicated to audiences by actors, director, stage designer, costume designer and related participants. Movement, gesture, voice, light and colour are just some of the processes integral to any work.

Then there is a whole host of preparations behind the scenes. Several will have been clearly structured into the public presentation. Others will have left traces not necessarily visible to spectators. For instance, certain movements originating from exercises during rehearsals may have survived

in a residual way in the production. Audiences will not realize that they are looking at imprints left behind by something else.⁶ Or economic imperatives will have left either bold or barely discernible marks, as happens, say, when costumes envisaged for the sense of a work in its entirety are replaced by a less expensive, perhaps less elaborate, version of the original idea. Concessions of this kind are usually made within acceptable limits so as not to betray the artistic objectives set for the work. Spectators, however, will not be aware that the costumes in front of them are not exactly what was desired. They have to go on what they see. In other words, the production's meaning is prescribed by what is actually performed, and is communicated and interpreted accordingly.

The third contribution of relevance to this discussion concerns the intentions of the director. The question of intentions is complex. For our purposes, "intentions" refers to the ideas and feelings guiding a director's work with her/his collaborators. Thus it refers to the director's vision of theatre-making with others, the results of which bear her/his creative stamp and distinguish them as the work of b rather than c director. A director's vision is not hermetically sealed off from all the social forces affecting her/him daily. Vision is neither isolated nor asocial just because it is individual. Furthermore, its individuality depends on the input of the socioprofessional groups - actors, dramatists, dramaturges, managers, and so on - with whom the director interchanges experience. Vision emerges from, and shapes, shared practice.

As well as the intentions-vision incarnated in a production, the term "intentions" includes the director's words, oral or written, about her/his work. This body of statements (credo, method, testimony, theory, or what you will) is part and parcel of the thought processes involved in the vision that is materialized in performance. Spectators may not worry about whether the stage work corresponds with its director's pronouncements, especially not when they are watching a performance. For them, "intentions" are what the production is doing to them - how it affects them emotionally and how and why they react as they do. The director, on the other hand, may well be wondering whether what is happening is how she/he had conceived it; and may develop, from these reflections, new ideas to be tested in practice and written down for public distribution.

Preparatory periods and theoretical underpinnings are relevant to sociological analyses of stage productions, even though the performed work is their focus. Analysis is inseparable from interpretation, which continues after the performance event. Sociological analyses are derived from heterogeneous factors: what a network of social signs was communicating at the time of viewing; what it suggests later on when

layer upon layer of sign processes have been sifted out by the analyst and put together again, memory of the performance also playing a role in how the analysis is done; how the sign processes project given social perspectives as well as evaluate them; for which social groups and classes these perspectives have the most significance; why these groups and classes rather than some others are the production's explicitly or implicitly targeted audiences. All these points, and more not listed, are crucial for understanding that a production is an identifiable, penetrable and dynamic entity having collective resonance and impact.

Although the entity is a completed work, it is not self-explanatory. Whatever clarifies an interpretation or puts it to the test cannot be cast aside on the grounds that it is extrinsic to the production. Sociologists, when interpreting, ask sociological questions. If they argue that a director's oral or written point of view is connected to theatre theory but not to sociological research, they are making a sociological error. Where else, if not in a society, does a director formulate her/his ideas? What generates these ideas, if not society in some sense of the word? Theatre practitioners, not least directors, construct the social practice of theatre. What they say may be as telling from a sociological point of view as what they do. To deny this is tantamount to sending selected aspects of the theatre back to theatre studies, thereby reaffirming the dualism - theatre art in opposition to society - discussed earlier.

All in all, then, sociological analyses of productions should be capable of drawing on the stated intentions (or theory) of theatre workers. A sociologist's procedures for a particular production may not depend on this or that director's conceptual framework. However, when these procedures are not checked against the frames of reference developed by the theatre (and which change continually through practice), the sociologist runs the risk of losing touch with reality. Or else sociologists would have no alternative but to be confined to itemizing, tabulating, classifying and fragmenting productions. The energy of stage works, that momentum which comes from the powerhouse of change and renewal in theatre and society simultaneously, would be lost to inadaptable, sterile methods.

Brook, Grotowski, Barba

It should be clear from the preceding paragraphs that the sociology of productions, a fundamental component of the sociology of the theatre as a whole, must rely on principles that bring out what is particular to productions in a delimited time, place and culture - in short, in a living, active and finite space for which we use the term "society". A society cannot exist without the people who make it, any more than can the theatre. And the people at issue are to be differentiated according to the world they make, whether on a large scale (as is implied when "nation" is synonymous with "society") or on a micro-level (as is implied by such adjectives as, for example, "local", "village" or "neighbourhood" when added to "society" or "culture"). The thrust, then, of the preceding pages, is that productions for and in performance are specific, unique and even idiosyncratic in respect of the specific, unique and even idiosyncratic world where they are made.

This view runs counter to the thesis that, since human beings everywhere belong to the same species, what they make in the theatre springs from a universal fount of meaning. In other words, when theatre is performed it comes from, and speaks to, universally shared and universally understood signs, the signs of our common humanity. In the context of what might be termed a debate between the particular and universal conceptions of the theatre, each of which is underpinned by a corresponding conception of society and culture, I have chosen to look briefly at Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba, each of whom enriches this debate, but none of whom succeeds in resolving its difficulties.

These three directors are to be placed closer to the universal side of the argument insofar as they share, to varying degrees, what may be broadly termed an anthropological conception of theatre. Barba's "theatre anthropology" is probably its most succinct expression. "Theatre anthropology", when understood to be referring principally to an innate humanness binding human beings together, is probably the antithesis of the sociology of the theatre. Taken generally, this anthropological conception poses a number of problems for the concept of social sign which, as I indicated earlier, is indispensable for analyzing stage productions sociologically.

Words, tones, cadences, postures, bearing, and so forth, are social signs. They are made, used and exchanged by groups of individuals who are

linked by gender, affectivity, profession or family - to name only a few of the ties that bind people together, allowing sociologists, after the event, to differentiate between groups. Groups may be very closely knit, shutting off their idiosyncratic signs from the outside world (as occurs, for example, in certain religious sects). Or they may grow outwards and proliferate, giving rise to class fractions or whole classes as they do so. Where socioprofessional groups are concerned, lawyers, for example, do not communicate through exactly the same signs as doctors. Where class distinctions are concerned, lawyers do not speak, dress or gesticulate in the same way as plumbers. The differences in sign production have to do, though not exclusively, with the social values attached to signs by those bringing them about.

Signs are also culturally specific. Culture may be designated according to countries. Hence we speak of French, Italian, Chinese culture, and so forth. It is also differentiated by activities. Thus we speak of political culture or theatre culture. And it is differentiated by the behaviours, attitudes and customs of specific groups, which means that culture in this sense is related to class. From here comes the category of class culture on which various sociologists depend. Or else, when the concept of class is considered outmoded, a whole host of terms is invented to mark out the hierarchical differences between groups and the particular character of their way of life ("culture" in the most flexible sense of the word as anthropologists might use it). Social signs are therefore always cultural signs in some sense of the word "culture".

Now, the major problem posed by the anthropological conception of theatre that I have alluded to is its presupposition that human beings have signs in common due to their species. Signs are neither culture-specific nor culture-bounded but diffused throughout the world. This is possible because of underlying psychobiological characteristics making human kind one.

Here we should distinguish between an older, early twentieth-century anthropology which has been absorbed both by theatre studies and the sociology of the theatre, and the assumptions connecting Brook, Grotowski and Barba; and these three directors are linked despite the special anthropological hallmark of each one of them.

Let us start with the older variety. Its stress is on ceremonies, rites and rituals, all aspects of the religious life studied by Durkheim, Frazer (notably in *The Golden Bough*) and others inspired by them. It has been fertile ground for theses on the theatre as a quasi-sacred phenomenon galvanizing communities, a mass spectacle celebrating the life-force of

societies and a symbolic representation of the social order, as well as a means of maintaining the status quo. There is no doubt about the central importance of this kind of anthropology to Jean Duvignaud's theory of the theatre.⁷ Since Duvignaud owes a great deal to Durkheim, it is understandable how Durkheimian sociology and Durkheimian anthropology - the one almost a shadow of the other - merged to provide the foundations for Duvignaud's sociology of the theatre.

Residues of ritual-oriented anthropology survive in the historically more recent view which is of principal interest to our discussion. Brook's notion of "holy theatre" invokes the idea of sacredness cherished by early anthropology,⁸ and the hushed ceremonial opening and close of his tremendous epic production *The Mahabharata* (also "epic" in its duration of nine hours) could not illustrate more clearly the awesome heights on which theatre as sacred rite can be placed. However, Brook does not stay on a single line of thought. He glides from an indeterminately "religious" viewpoint (that is, not tied to a particular dogma) to a humanistic one devoted to the search for universal signs that have been freed from cultural constraints. If we are to judge by interviews with Brook in the late 1980s as well as by *The Shifting Point*, his most recent publication, cultural frames of reference, when explicit (or over-explicit), are obstacles to the purity which the theatre endeavours to create. What must be added here is that Brook's wariness of cultural signs, especially in their strongest manifestations, is closely bound up with his aim of *blending* cultural signs so that the synthesis emerging from them is extremely finely textured. This fine synthesis is a prerequisite for a theatre that, in superseding this or that cultural sign system, comes closer to being a veritable universal theatre which also projects an image of a universal rather than a particular culture.⁹

Brook's ideal of a "holy theatre", to which, through its aspirations to purity, his "universal" theatre also belongs, has some features in common with Grotowski's far more single-minded quest for a similar goal. Grotowski's trajectory appears to be fraught with unexpected turns. Yet his steps from "poor theatre" to paratheatre and then to "objective theatre" are sustained by an overriding conviction that multiple expressive capabilities are secreted by the human body and that these are not dependent upon social and cultural parameters. The body is its own source of inspiration. Heartbeat, breathing patterns, certain sounds and pitches, rhythms and movements - among a wide range of physical actions - constitute a universal psychophysiological system from which can spring a universal performative system. We could call it a transcultural system.

Consequently, the actor's craft renders in a superlatively concrete way all that is elemental and archetypal in human behaviour. Put differently, this means that the actor's technique is neither learned nor taught. It wells up out of innate organic and psychic resources and, so to speak, taps them at the fountainhead. Culture does not intervene in the displays of Grotowski's "holy" actor.

The religious or, better still, mystical dimension of Grotowski's work with actors is derived from a vocation no longer conceived primarily in professional terms. The vocation is for a way of life. Paradoxically, the actor's journey inwards towards a heightened inner state is repeated publicly in performance. Productions like *Apocalypsis Cum Figuris* might accurately be described as internal apocalypse figured externally. Although theatre, in that it is publicly performed, the production could just as easily have stayed in the paratheatrical temple where actors work day and night without the obligation to perform in front of and for audiences.

Not for nothing, moreover, did Grotowski choose the title of "laboratory" for the arduous labour carried out behind closed doors and which, when opened, showed actors whose aura of privacy was so intense that spectators might as well have been intruders. Stanislavsky's "fourth wall" is nothing when compared to this barrier. By the same token - we are once again in the realm of paradoxes - it could be that intense intrapsychic fusion occurs between performers and spectators because of the deeply contained, inward-bound strength momentarily made public by the performers. In which case, Grotowski and his company will have realized Artaud's dream of non-cognitive, non-rationalized and non-rational communion through performance. Artaud, it is worth remembering, looked to oriental civilization, principally Balinese dance and trance-in-performance, for models for western civilization. The anthropology of the first decades of the century nourished his discovery of the East.

Brook, when viewed beside the Polish director, proves to be committed to an open and down-to-earth communication between performers and spectators. In Brook, the great discoveries made in the theatre are intended to further the ordinary, everyday communication presumed to have been lost in everyday life. More differences between Brook and Grotowski emerge. Where Grotowski seeks universal principles which are stored in the innermost recesses of the actor's body, Brook seeks a universal means of communication. For Brook, unlike Grotowski, universality does not reside within. It is to be found in the social world and achieved through merging aspects of that world. It can be reached through theatre because

it exists outside theatre. Performance processes have the power to communicate with spectators whoever and wherever they are for this very reason. The sense and meaning of productions transcend different cultures for the same reason.

In short, Brook explores performative skills, though not for the ends of a universal performative system. Skills are developed by his actors in relation to anticipated audiences. Whatever actors find within themselves is ipso facto oriented towards the universal dialogue envisaged and which, as appears from his productions and writings, Brook believes is the primary role of the theatre. His idea of universal dialogue is predicated on the assumption that a world community exists whose powers of unification and harmony are far greater than any that may be attributed to a particular society.

Barba, in this respect, is closer to Brook than to Grotowski. In fact, he surpasses Brook on ideas to do with how the theatre encapsulates a world community. Barba's relation to Brook on this point only highlights, strangely enough, his kinship with Grotowski with whom, after all, he had spent a number of years. Like Grotowski, Barba seeks to uncover the inner mystery of human kind. In Barba's view, divisions between civilizations (for Barba principally between "eastern" and "western" civilizations) have obscured this discoverable mystery. Consequently, his work with performers from a variety of western and eastern cultures is an attempt to distil, drop by drop, the essence of humanity. The performance situation is the most favourable site for this extraction in which the principles of human behaviour and those of the theatre are inseparable. Herein lies the full meaning of Barba's "theatre anthropology". In his words:

Theatre anthropology does not seek principles which are universally *true*, but rather directions which are useful. . . . Originally, the term anthropology was understood as the study of man's behaviours not only on the socio-cultural level, but also on the physiological level. Theatre anthropology consequently studies the socio-cultural and physiological behaviour of man in a performance situation.¹⁰

It is quite clear, especially from Barba's last sentence, that the "behaviour of man" (my "essence of humanity") is to further the cause of *theatre*, not that of anthropology. Yet what are we to make of Barba's reference to the "socio-cultural level"? Barba's argument suggests that the purpose of sounding the depths of sociocultural behaviour (or what could be called its manifestation through sociocultural signs) across different cultures is to devise something of universal significance from this behaviour. The aim, in Barba's words, is to find "the basic principles

which [one theatre] has in common with other theatres. . . . Theatre anthropology seeks to study these principles: not the profound and hypothetical reasons which might explain why they resemble each other, but their possible uses”.

We should note, in passing, that seeking “reasons which might explain why” would indeed bring a sociocultural dimension to bear on the enterprise. However, the main point to be underlined is that Barba’s emphasis on “uses” indicates that the “basic principles” are to be used for theatre, indeed for a performative science not unlike Grotowski’s proposed “objective theatre”. Is it possible that, for this particular part of his quest, Grotowski was inspired by Barba?

Barba’s statement of intention could hardly be clearer: sociocultural differences are to be assembled and crystallized in order to form what might be called an Ur-theatre. Given this objective, the name of *Odin Teatret* for Barba’s celebrated group - one theatre rather than many theatres - is extremely eloquent. It is also significant that Barba should have set up an organization for international research in ISTA (International School for Theatre Anthropology). An Ur-theatre transcends, by definition, the culture-specific components which it appropriates, and must appropriate deeply, for its very existence.

Barba does not reject the idea of cultural identity. Nor does he deny that there are performative styles specific to cultures. Kathakali is Indian. Noh is Japanese (besides being aristocratic, as distinct from middle-class Kabuki). However, it is not his purpose to seek either the societal impetus behind them or their precise sociocultural meaning within a defined culture - national culture, caste culture, sub-culture, or what have you. Doing so would involve working with sociological principles (starting with the principle of explaining *why* p is different from q), rather than relying on an anthropological notion of “humanness” or human “essence”. Furthermore, if an anthropological framework were indeed to be the main point of reference, then it would at least have to be of the kind used by many contemporary anthropologists whose methods are permeated through and through with sociological principles. The close relationship today between sociology and social and cultural anthropology cannot be denied; and has resulted, in fact, in overlapping areas of study and methodological approach (for example, in studies by anthropologists of the composition and behaviour of urban communities - city “apaches”, ethnic groups, groups defined by gender and/or sexuality, groups of youths, and so on).

In Barba’s case, the kinds of sociological principles alluded to here are probably out of the picture altogether insofar as he can be said to be

striving for an *archaeology* of theatre knowledge. An *archaeology* of knowledge cannot be confused with sociology, as Michel Foucault demonstrated possibly unintentionally but quite brilliantly. Nor, therefore, can it be confused with the societally explainable knowledge produced by sociology. The main task of archaeology, as Foucault understands it, is to trace a given phenomenon diachronically, marking its patterns of sameness and repetition across time and space. The phenomenon can be madness, the penal system, or the structure of discourse itself.¹¹ But what is important is its manifestations as such - how it is, and not where it comes from or why. Barba's search for resemblances rather than particularity and difference, combined with his negation of "hypothetical reasons which might explain why they resemble each other" (see the second quotation from Barba above), certainly suggests his intellectual kinship with Foucault; and suggests that, in his view, sociological principles, at whose core is the principle of explaining why, cannot be brought into play in any truly significant manner in understanding the processes of performance.

Perhaps, in fact, it is not so much understanding the processes of performance "in a performance situation" as *observing* them that interests Barba most. And his interest in the performer, which is at the heart of his theatre anthropology, has led Barba to make a fascinating distinction between an "*incultured* body", then "*incultured* performers", and "*accultured* performers". Thus:

Each one of us is an *incultured* body. We use a daily body technique which derives from the culture in which we have been born, from our family environments, from our work. This inculturation, which is organically absorbed from the first hours of life and continues to develop through one's personal history, constitutes our "spontaneity" - that is, a net of conditioned reflexes or of unconscious automatisms.

Some performers develop this "spontaneity", exploiting the potential richness of their own inculturation. Others move away from it: they pass through a process of physical *acculturation* which introduces them to an extra-daily body technique.

One can also speak of *incultured* performers or of *accultured* performers. This distinction has been reinforced for a long time in the West, with the very strange hallucination that "dance" is different from "theatre".¹²

Further on in the same text, Barba speaks of the performer who passes from "an *incultured* spontaneity to an *accultured* spontaneity", thereby acquiring a "second nature" and becoming a "body-in-life". In this situation, the performer's "technique" or her/his "body-instrument" are irrelevant concepts. So too, it seems, is the culture in which the performer was born, physical *acculturation*, as Barba understands it, transcending

(and effacing?) what had initially been organically absorbed from that culture. Does this mean that theatre art, when at its summit, has a life of its own, surpassing social life? And must we now speak of the *performer's* culture per se, which not only cuts across national-geographical boundaries but also the frontiers between theatrical genres? Barba suggests that the answer would be in the affirmative when, in giving examples of the "accultured performer", he cites "Balinese or ballet dancer, Kathakali actor or mime, opera singer, *loruri* or *dalang*", all in one breath.¹³

There can be no doubt that the impact of Brook, Grotowski and Barba on theatre throughout the world has been tremendous, whether on companies with established reputations and luminaries of their own or on amateur groups. Workshops held in numerous countries and, as in the case of Barba's ISTA, at regular intervals, have guided and inspired theatre practitioners of one kind and another. Extensive touring, particularly in the case of Brook's CICT (Centre International de Créations Théâtrales), has meant that thousands upon thousands of spectators in Europe, the Anglo-American countries and parts of Asia, notably India and Japan, have had access to a way of conceiving and performing productions that has surely had a profound effect on their perception, affective as well as cognitive, of the theatre. The question to be asked is whether, and to what extent, internationalization actually helps establish the phenomenon propagated by each company in its own way (say, Barba's transcendental performance or Brook's transcultural theatre, each being a different facet of the idea of universal culture at its base).

The respective visions of our directors can be studied sociologically - why and how each one of them has been shaped by the time and place and, therefore, by the social and artistic-cultural conditions and expectations of their immediate working environment: Poland in the 1960s for Grotowski, for example, and France in the 1970s for Brook. Whatever else may have been decisive, there is a sociological basis to why Brook's work had found a "captive" audience in Paris in the seventies, which audience has continued to expand up to the present day. His work gave replies to some of the main sociocultural questions - and dreams - of the time (for instance, how to democratize the arts and make them more accessible to more people; how to simplify their trappings in the process of making them less elitist; the dream of recovering personal and collective freedom, which the events of May '68 had promised but which subsequent events had disappointed; the desire for escape into another, even "exotic", world). Then there is the role played by the French Ministry of Culture in helping to finance the CICT. The Ministry's support

is interconnected with the French Government's sociocultural and political programs in which notions of State patronage, national prestige and international clout go hand in glove with what might be termed faith in art.

Other sociological considerations are relevant. Why, for instance, is Brook's enterprise backed by important international organizations? Why, as his productions travel, do they generate such enthusiasm in places where the cultural touchstones are not the same as those pertinent to Parisian audiences? Also relevant is the question of how international touring creates audiences, who are perhaps increasingly similar in kind. (For a start, they are increasingly exposed to the same works.) Just as important is the issue of international political and economic currents, how they criss-cross and create turbulences, and how they flow from institutions in one society to another, thereby affecting the changes already taking place in the direction of that flow.

Changes, whether evident or hidden, are not to the advantage of all social groups and classes at the same time. The effects of international relations on local conditions shift the balance of interests locally. Theatregoers, not least spectators of imported performances, are hardly immune to this complex play of forces. They are influenced or simply attracted by foreign theatre companies when the conditions in their society facilitate this influence or appeal or whatever other interaction occurs between visitor and visited. And even if we assume that the audiences for foreign companies are predominantly drawn from the educated and/or cultivated sectors of the middle class, their receptivity is connected in some way with the sociocultural circumstances affecting them in their daily lives. If this were not so, we would never see a certain company's failure to please one year and then meet with resounding success several years later. Nor would we have the phenomenon known as "fashion".

Influence cannot be exercised when it is met with silence, confusion or downright opposition. It is mitigated when it encounters resistance. What is true for individuals is just as true for social groups, which are groupings of specific kinds of individuals. The same holds for theatre practitioners. Grotowski's influence on Brook and Barba and then, later, Barba's on Grotowski was not merely a matter of personal taste. It occurred when a number of very important social transformations converged, opening and channelling the receptivity necessary for that influence to be felt. Grotowski's impact on the theatre, first of all in America from where the impact radiated globally, is inseparable from the counter-cultural and grass-roots movements of the sixties in the United States and the libertarian and radical politics that went with them (anti-Vietnam and civil

rights demonstrations rubbing shoulders with spiritualism, flower power, drop-out culture, drug culture, and so on). This was Grotowski as high priest, master and guru all in one. His *artistic* influence takes its full sense from the historical context in which it flourished. Brook's wish or need as an *artist* to participate in Grotowski's workshops occurred at this time. The European version of America's great period of iconoclasm, known aphoristically as May '68, nurtured artistic and other drives, needs as well as tastes that went far beyond any individual's expression of them. We should probably consider seriously the hypothesis that the three variants of "universal" culture at issue here were well and truly the children of the sixties. Maybe only the sixties could have spawned such transcendental and/or mystical notions, the sky being the limit. Similarly, maybe only the sixties could have propagated with such fervour and in such a widespread manner the "sacred" East, which was appropriated ruthlessly, albeit in "soft" guise, in the West (for example, in the insignia and rites of hippies). Barba's ideal of merging "eastern" and "western" performance is sure to be bound up with the sociohistorical momentum outlined.

These various considerations complicate, on the one hand, Brook's goal of universal communication and, on the other, the issue of Grotowski and Barba's universal performative "laboratory" (Grotowski) or "body" (Barba). They also oblige us to return once again to the problems posed for the notion of social-cultural sign by ideas claiming that the sign processes constituting productions are beyond cultural constraints - that is, universal.

Now, studies of the practice of directors cannot ignore their own views of their intentions, which intentions are (ideally) made concrete in performance. Do our directors, by their very rejection of cultural and historical specificity, compel us to review the whole notion of social sign? Are we, then, to conclude that signs are general rather than particular, the latter meaning that they are socioculturally *constrained*? Brook's *Mahabharata* is a challenging case. It amalgamates sign processes from such diverse provenances as Indian classical dance (by no means a homogeneous bloc), Chinese martial arts and Chinese and broadly European acrobatic traditions, among many examples. It can be argued that *The Mahabharata* belongs to a totally new theatrical genre created drop by drop over ten years and more by Brook and the CICT. Since this new genre does not have one, definite social source, must we abandon all hope of the social sign and approach Brook's productions through his own guidelines, particularly those on what I have called the transcendent sign?

The situation, in Brook's case, is perhaps not as drastic as it first appears

insofar as each different sign process used in *The Mahabharata* has culturally specific origins. For example, movements and gestures recalling Kathakali invoke Kathakali: there is no mistaking their source. Chinese acrobatic tumbles which blend with other kinds of tumbles nevertheless show the culture that had inspired them. Thus each sign process in the production comes from a precise cultural location. It is not initially conceived of as an indeterminate, amorphous, general sign. However, it is *generalized* through the way it is used for performative ends, its merger with comparable sign processes (for example, Chinese Opera tumbles with “western” circus tumbles) contributing significantly to the generalizing power of all the signs-in-action throughout the performance.

Brook’s art of blending presupposes that a production can be understood by a whole range of people from disparate cultures. The universalizing power of a work may be said to lie in its diverse spectators’ capacity to recognize, appreciate and even accurately place what the work is doing. Brook’s supposition is perfectly justified in that art works have been disseminated across countries for centuries. There is, in other words, a historical precedent for the strong international distribution of art works in our time. What needs to be considered is the fact that this “world heritage” of art which, precisely because it is said to be *of* the world, is supposed to belong to no one in particular, is fundamentally the culture of an elite. This elite is defined in the first instance in relation to its own national context. When it becomes international, it is defined in relation to elites across the board. Elites, then, are the first to enjoy the fruits of the world heritage. And here begins the problematical relationship between an elite’s “high” culture and the so-called “low” cultures of subaltern groups in which, somewhere, lies the commercial monster known as mass culture.

The issue is a very difficult one, bringing into play the questions of access to, and the accessibility of, art works to social groups who have neither made them nor necessarily have the keys - or the desire - for an understanding of them. Brook takes seriously the notion of maximum access to art irrespective of social barriers. Hence his hypothesis that universal *communication* is possible is not a mere abstraction. The difficulty, then, is not to be found here. It lies, rather, in our understanding whether, how and why performative processes, whose capacity for communication partly relies on the theatre culture accumulated by spectators (which accumulation already defines them as belonging to an elite), communicate to spectators who have *not* acquired the same culture and may not even have *any* theatre culture at their disposal.

There is, in addition, the great problem of cultural domination or, when neo-colonialism is at issue, of cultural imperialism. Spectators in a colonial or neo-colonial situation will not necessarily see with the eyes of a colonizing elite, not, that is, unless they are in complicity with that elite whose culture, for all its apparent "civilizing" purposes, operates objectively as an instrument of oppression. When these sorts of points are taken into account, the question of the sociocultural specificity and historicity of signs reappears with renewed vigour, forcing us to look closely, once again, at the nuances of meaning introduced by universalists of one kind and another. It is also necessary to ask whether the theories of a given director are strong enough to undermine the concept of social-cultural sign, particularly as regards productions that manifestly do not share her/his ambitions.

Let us now take the psychobiologism inherent in Grotowski and Barba's perspectives. The argument that we have breathing patterns in common because of the way the human organism is structured is hardly alarming. That these patterns can be explored for the sake of developing performative processes is simply an aestheticized variant of a biological "fact". However, this naturalism, where "natural" bodily functions are pushed to the extreme to create artifice that does not look artificial, presupposes that whatever mediation occurs on the part of the performer occurs in a pure state: that is, mediation can never come from outside the "natural" body, which, since it is always in its natural, pure state can be nothing other than an elemental, primitive or primeval organism. In other words, no matter how sophisticated, supervised and controlled the breathing patterns of the performer have become (taking only this example), they are supposed to stay within the orbit of the body. Putting it aphoristically: nature is not transformed into culture; nature is returned more than ever to itself.

The banal example of eating - perhaps the next step after breathing - may be taken as another case in point. Eating is a biological necessity. But how we eat what we eat is socioculturally motivated. Signs made during the act of eating reverberate with sociocultural denotations and connotations. In other words, the passage from nature to culture is mediated by social intervention. Barba's "theatre anthropology", on the one hand, and Grotowski's "science" of natural (if subliminal) behaviour, on the other, appear to be founded on the idea that natural behaviour is transformed into culture precisely because it is transformed into performance. The idea seems to be all the more persuasive because behaviour in a "performance situation" (Barba) is not presented as merely a replica of natural behaviour in its crude state. The missing link, however,

in this conceptual-practical schema is the mediation through social intervention which is part and parcel of "behaviour" and without which behaviour would be reduced to snorts and grunts and other reflex actions. It is precisely because this intervention occurs that we have *performance* and not random activity; and a plurality of theatres instead of one grand syncretic fusion of many.

The upshot of all this is that the concept of social-cultural sign must also enter this particular, biologicistic picture. Signs are processes of reprocessing sounds, gestures, and so on, that from the early days of a human being's life are steeped in social and cultural particularity. How a Japanese actor emits a guttural sound may be imitated by an Italian actor. This sound may then become part of the psychobiological stock of sounds, gestures, and so on, accumulated by theatre anthropology. But the sound produced by the Italian actor may not be emitted in exactly the same way or convey exactly the same nuances - physical, facial, and the like - which accompanied it when the Japanese "model" produced it. As a consequence, this sound cannot evoke the same emotions or communicate the same meanings, whether cognitive, affective, or spiritual. Exact reproduction may not even be possible, not least because one psychobiological factor is not isolated from another. For example, breathing in the emission of the guttural sound is connected with the centring of the body and the carriage of the head. How a performer combines these psychobiological factors when she or he reprocesses the desired sound will depend on how the sociocultural conditions pertinent to the making of this sound made it the sound it is in the first place. These very same sociocultural circumstances contributed to making the performer. Think of the sounds produced by the great Kabuki actor Nakamura Utaemon. Can anyone outside his cultural context actually reproduce them, let alone move spectators in the same way? *This* is the domain of social-cultural signs. No amount of laboratory experimentation in Poland, Italy, Denmark or France can capture cultural uniqueness.

Productions and Cross-Cultural Perception: Some Examples

Details from several productions will now help us to explore a little further the problems that have been raised, as well as introduce a number not yet discussed. Needless to say, this empirical data does not consist of raw facts assembled by a dispassionate observer. It is channelled through the reflections and theoretical categories of the preceding pages, which may allow us to refine the arguments presented and perhaps even consolidate some of them.

The Royal Court, a theatre well known in England for its support of new playwrights, brought to Australia in 1989 a play that had already had considerable success in London. The play, *Our Country's Good*, by British author Timberlake Wertenbaker, is based on *The Playmaker*, a novel by the Australian Thomas Keneally. Keneally had covered all the historical research necessary for the authenticity of his book, and on which the play relied thereafter for its resonance. Thus his research incorporated numerous crucial tasks: identify the convicts who had been sent to establish a penal settlement in Sydney in 1788 and the reasons why they had been so severely punished; bring to light the circumstances in which George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* was the first play to be mounted in the colony; understand the motives of Lieutenant Ralph Clark in staging Farquhar's big hit of 1706 with convicts who were diametrically opposed to the upper-class characters that they were playing; explore the disagreements between the military authorities on how to run the colony, Arthur Phillip, the Governor, supporting Clark's venture while other senior officers were against it.

Wertenbaker pares the mass of historical information available in the novel down to the barest essentials. Her text comprises twenty-one short scenes, all of them made up of sparse, elegantly-proportioned dialogue, verbal ellipses and innuendoes that fill in, so to speak, the silences between words. The scenes have montage-like concision and speed, although the narrative carried by them is linear, respecting sequences of events and the logic of cause and effect. Wertenbaker also uses Keneally's documentation to flesh out protagonists who are faced with the unprecedented situation of a gentleman's play being performed by convicts in anything but a gentleman's setting. These players, needless to say, have virtually no idea of the theatre, let alone of how to perform.

Clark, on the other hand, is knowledgeable about theatre art and is

devoted to it. Like Phillip, he has humane sentiments. Phillip argues step by step as the dialogue unfolds that convicts will remain beasts unless they are exposed to the moral, “uplifting” benefits of civilized society. Theatre, to his mind, is a civilizing power. A Scottish officer, who synthesizes the viewpoint of Phillip’s opponents, argues that flogging has the best civilizing effect on felons. The debate reverberates with opinions and attitudes to be taken as representative of the colonial policy of the period. In this larger context, Phillip’s view increasingly appears to be a personal rather than an official position.

The debate on the side of the convicts revolves around their miserable plight, their disdain for a barren landscape whose strangeness is sharpened by memories of the teeming squalor of London, and their disarray in the face of penal brutality. Pointed reference to their continuing crimes, especially to the theft of food, reminds spectators of the original, frequently petty crimes for which many of the convicts had been transported. The convicts’ awareness of how the scales of justice have been, and continue to be, weighted against them is summed up by John Wisehammer, the only convict-actor capable of intellectual rather than visceral criticism, when he composes a poem intended to replace Farquhar’s epilogue. Wisehammer’s composition, which sounds like a pastiche of Farquhar, concludes with lines on how convicts were transported for their country’s “good”.

The fact that Wisehammer comes from London’s impoverished Jewish population and is described by fellow convicts as non-British provides additional ironic commentary on the ruthless, and in several respects arbitrary, legal system that had rationalized the establishment of a colony in Australia. The actor playing Wisehammer delivers the poem naively, as if it had come to the character spontaneously. Its satirical thrust is intensified because Wisehammer is portrayed throughout as something of a Shakespearian fool. His insight into the grimy realities of colonialism is endorsed by Clark’s embarrassed reactions. Clark mutters incomplete phrases until he finally states that the poem might be thought by the authorities to be “political”. Wisehammer’s epilogue is predictably revised for the performance which is about to begin when the production of *Our Country’s Good* ends.

The structure is that of a play-within-a-play since most of *Our Country’s Good* is taken up with preparations for, and rehearsals of, *The Recruiting Officer*. It is interspersed with miniatures of the physical, psychological and cultural deprivation endured by the convicts, on the one hand, and with those highlighting patrician confidence, on the other. The whole,

while consistently sharp-witted and humorous, never loses sight of a Britain divided into two nations, the privileged and the poor, who, for the purposes of historical accuracy for the production, are the London Cockneys and Irish forming the workforce of the colony. Wertebaker and director Max Stafford-Clark thus foreground Britain's imperial role, as well as the contrast between her high culture and the low "criminal" culture she exported to Australia. The actors' accents, speech rhythms and pace bear out the social contradictions on which the colony was founded, as do their mannerisms, facial expressions, posture and gait.

The production casts a harsh light on Britain's self-interested pragmatism to which the civilizing force of playmaking is fundamentally subordinated. Nevertheless, it takes an optimistic view of how theatre culture might be mobilized for the purpose of humanizing social groups that operated and survived on inhuman premises. One of these premises, the genocide of the indigenous people, is not approached directly. Allusion to the fact that *Terra Australis* had been populated for centuries by aborigines is made musically. The pulsating sounds of a didgeridoo, the sign of aboriginal culture par excellence, introduces the second Act. The music closing the production is a triumphant symphony. In terms of narrative, it refers to the imminent success of the play. However, since it is so obviously part of the hegemonic culture transferred to hegemonized soil, it can be interpreted in broader social terms. The music's precise significance for spectators largely depends on their own sociopolitical and cultural horizons. Black Australians, for example, could well perceive this music as a statement of British-European domination over them. Given the politicization in recent years of black Australians, their demands for land confiscated from them and their renewed pride in their own culture, a perception of this kind would not only be probable but also pertinent.

Here we are led straight into the difficulty of assessing which audiences are addressed, potentially or actually, by *Our Country's Good*. The production was performed in a Sydney theatre (Sydney Theatre Company) whose spectators are principally drawn from the managerial groups and liberal professions. Among them are spectators from the artistic professions. Few regularly attending this theatre belong to the numerous non-Anglo/Celtic ethnic groups constituting a good third of Australia's "multicultural" society. (The term is in quotes because multiculturalism has been an official policy since the Whitlam Labor period, 1972-75.) When these groups are represented in the audience, they appear through their adult children. The children, unlike their parents, were born and educated in Australia and frequently become detached from their

sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds.

These first-generation Australians are upwardly mobile. Those who have not progressed socioeconomically beyond their parents rarely attend professional theatre. But the parents of both groups are even less likely to set foot in theatre houses they consider alien to their culture. Linguistic and class barriers have been too strong for too long. Add to this the geographic location of theatres in the business districts of the inner city where a certain veneer of sophistication creates sociocultural distance. Add again the lack of theatres and even of makeshift performance spaces in the neighbourhoods densely populated by non-Anglo/Celtic communities. And add, among many more social factors, the ongoing discrimination experienced during the past forty years by non-Anglo/Celts. Racial discrimination has bred cultural shame among them. It has also fostered in the Anglo/Celtic majority a hostility towards cultural manifestations that cannot be translated easily into folklore (usually culinary folklore or representations of folkloric characters such as Con-the-Greek-fruiterer who gabbles advertisements on television).

The panorama is not altogether negative insofar as community theatres of a predominantly amateur kind have flourished over the past ten years. Bilingual performances (Italian/English, Greek/English, and so on) have begun to break up the pattern of ghettoization and isolation. And, although institutions and executives are Anglo/Celtic, thereby showing that multiculturalism operates within permissible boundaries, these performances at least give the doctrine of multiculturalism some credibility. The parents of the children attending *Our Country's Good* will not have seen this production. They will have attended, instead, the bilingual performances on immigrant life as they know it. Since these performances take place in "ethnic" zones, that is, working- and lower-middle-class suburbs inhabited also by Anglo/Celts, they will not have crossed the class threshold separating them from mainstream theatre and establishment theatres.¹⁴

All in all, then, the actual spectators of *Our Country's Good* are primarily of British, if not necessarily English, stock. Much the same could be said of the production's implied spectators, though not only because it was made in England. Its subject matter and performative style anticipate spectators who know the difference between, for instance, an upper-class English accent and a working-class Irish one. These spectators would be just as aware of the myriad of sociological meanings sparked off by each accent. The production works for recognition of this kind and, in this way, indicates whom it is seeking to address in the first instance.

Implied spectators may thus be identified in a reasonably sure manner. Anglo/Celtic Australians would have no trouble whatsoever in making the distinctions requested of them. This is so because the distinction between "high" and "low" accents is reproduced in their own society according to the British model. The model is close at hand insofar as what is called "educated Australian" is an attempted reduplication of its upper-class English counterpart. Meanwhile, the vernacular is aligned to Cockney English and all it implies socially, convict heritage included. Similar comments could be made about the mannerisms, grimaces and other sign processes mentioned earlier. The ins and outs of these details, while communicating maximum meaning to Anglo/Celts, would communicate less to second-generation non-Anglo/Celts and would probably escape their parents altogether. Not only would the sociocultural gap be too great for these parents, but the returns on the time, energy, effort and psychological stress invested in bridging it would be minimal.

What if we were to turn the tables and take the production back to London? London audiences similar in composition, level of education, job-and-culture aspirations, and so on, to audiences in Sydney would also have immediate access to the sign processes interconnecting with each other on stage. Nevertheless, these processes would set limits to the interaction between performers and spectators in London precisely because the latter would respond most to what makes most sense to them, leaving in an incomplete state what they would not have managed to grasp firmly.

There is, to start with, the whole Australian side of the story. What emerges as a potent critique of British dominion from Stafford-Clark's production, however finely overlaid with humour, is mediated from the perspective of the convicts. Secondly, from the standpoint of Australia today, especially since the 1988 bicentenary celebrations, this critique is potentially explosive. Remnants of colonial behaviour survive beneath the skin, ready to leap out at the smallest scratch. Australia is still constitutionally tied to Britain. Prime Minister Whitlam was sacked in 1975 by the Governor-General who, although an Australian, represents the British Crown. Spectators in Sydney in 1989 grasped meanings that spilled over into areas of contemporary importance, the call to Republicanism not least among them.

It is doubtful whether English spectators would be as alert, as sensitive to the implications for Australia's present of a play set in her past. Unless, of course, they were as historically informed and historically astute as Wertenbaker and Stafford-Clark themselves. As for the production's perspective from the vantage point of convicts, spectators would have to accept it in order to benefit maximally from what this perspective was

showing. Modern British patricians might well not share its unsentimental sympathy for the damned, nor concur with the interpretation of history filtered through it.

These remarks indicate that the sociocultural meanings permeating a production neither can be nor are perceived uniformly across the different social groups who may be interpreting them. This lack of uniformity becomes a more complex matter still when cross-cultural perception is involved, namely, when Australians view a British production, or the English view it, as occurred in the case of *Our Country's Good*. Imagine Northern Irishers viewing it today. Or spectators in India who have fought, and whose parents fought, for independence. Or spectators in France, for whom Britain's colonial history may as well have taken place on the moon, so foreign does it appear, despite France's own colonial history.

We have noted how sociocultural meanings are grasped according to varying degrees of understanding within one society. They may undergo profound transformation when they go across from one culture to another. The higher end of the scale of understanding, where sign processes are interpreted on many possible levels of meaning simultaneously, could be called refined perception. But this type of perception depends on the knowledge and heart of spectators or, when a vital component is missing, on their openness, willingness and ability to leap over the chasms separating them from a production. Even so, openness, willingness, and so on, are not acts of magic. They must start from something concrete, from some entrance point that is culturally and historically capable of being an entrance point for them. And even when the conditions of understanding are optimal, each order on the scale of understanding, whether closer to the higher or lower end, is only partial, only part of the global whole that a series of performances of the same production will yield as its "true" meaning.

The difficulties associated with cross-cultural interaction suggest how the assumptions of transculturalism as conceived by Grotowski and Barba founder when they are assessed not from the standpoint of performers but from that of *spectators*. In other words, when performance processes are felt and seen (and thus interpreted) by this or that group of spectators, they are not abstracted from a context that makes them feelable and seeable in the first place. Without concrete points of reference, spectators would be in a state of complete incomprehension. This is called mystification; and mystification is not to be confused with transcendental states of consciousness and related mystical experiences.

Our Country's Good, when performed in Australia, depends on cross-cultural processes of communication insofar as broadly English and broadly Australian sociocultural resonances are not exactly the same, whatever similarities may exist between them. It will be useful, in the framework of this discussion, to look briefly at a production where the distance between two cultures is far greater. The production is *Greek Tragedy* (also performed in 1989) by the English writer, director and filmmaker Mike Leigh. Leigh is well known for his unorthodox working methods. He usually develops a script from the social experiences of ordinary people in a circumscribed community or from those of the actors with whom he is working. He then selects ideas, fragments of dialogue and conversation and whatever else may have arisen from the working process and puts them together to form a coherent text. In other words, the text and the preparations for production are closely interconnected, making for an organic performance whole. Leigh was invited to undertake a project of this kind by a Sydney theatre (Belvoir Street Theatre) which, although in the mainstream, welcomes experimentation and hosts a variety of new, marginal or even one-off theatrical ventures.

The script for *Greek Tragedy* was not completed until the opening night. Its subject was ostensibly a day in the life of the Australian-Greek community. Leigh's observing, note-taking, documentary - in short, somewhat positivistic - approach resulted in a naturalistic production. Each and every detail of the decor, lights, corporeal expression and music (Greek bazooka) tells spectators that they are in a working-class environment which, in addition, is meant to be Greek. Just how Greek it is becomes a central question as the performance progresses, and for several reasons, including the fact that the working-class rather than ethnic category emerges as the production's main point of reference.

A small-time Greek-Australian businessman and a female piece-worker who sews clothes at home are the focus of attention. The man is the former employer of an intermediary for another small business whom he encounters in the woman's house on one of his rounds for collecting finished articles. The woman is submissive to her husband and deferential to their successful compatriot. Her sister, who arrives towards the end of the performance, is an air stewardess. She is confident, articulate. Her clothes, make-up, words and movements indicate that, unlike her seamstress sister, she has adopted "Anglo" customs and habits. She is also emancipated, this intentionally suggesting, as does everything else about her, that she has been assimilated into the majority culture. She emulates, in other words, the presumed liberation of Anglo/Celtic women, which the

production takes not to be the case for Greek-Australian women in general. *Greek Tragedy* homes in on the oppressive, obtuse vulgarities of the male characters, but is essentially the tragicomedy of a woman imprisoned by her gender, class and ethnicity.

The young Greek-Australians in the audience whom I spot-interviewed after the show felt that the production had exploited national stereotypes. They believed that its negative image of their community was doing a disservice to Greek-Australians (who, in any case, had been fairly systematically represented in a stereotypical fashion in society at large). As another spectator, with another cultural frame of reference, I nevertheless shared the general feeling of these spectators. However, my own criticism went in another direction. It seemed imperative to note how the production had reduced burning social issues to a matter of interpersonal behaviour pure and simple, as if Leigh and his actors believed that only individuals counted, the "social" side of their existence being somehow outside the personal (and domestic) sphere. In the light of the then considerable backlash in Australia against multiculturalism, both institutionally and at the grass-roots level (this regression also expressed in debates on Australia's immigration policy), the production's narrow focus seemed all the more disturbing. Equally disturbing, to my mind, was the way the young Greek-Australians, who were uneasy about the production, had reduced the complicated issues concerning non-Anglo/Celtic immigrants past and present to a question of ethnicity per se, which we could write as Ethnicity in the abstract. It was as if they had formulated their whole notion of ethnicity in a vacuum, well and truly out of the sociological contingencies which were integral to their family experiences. Or was this a case of unconscious amnesia, Ethnicity becoming a scapegoat or at least the instrument for blotting out the memory of painful economic struggles which all the characters on stage had signposted deliberately but had dropped relatively quickly?

A similar bias towards ethnicity as such is to be seen in the production, in that "Greek-Australianness" becomes the centre of the debate between the successful sister and the unsuccessful one and the upwardly mobile male. The actors are all Greek-Australians and are closer in outlook by virtue of age, education and social mobility to Greek-Australian spectators in the auditorium than to their parents. The "assimilated" sister on stage appears to be their image of themselves - a desirable "other" or alter ego who represses the sister who has not "made it". The actress plays the role of the unassimilated sister with finesse, and the way she appears to have been directed by Leigh suggests that he feels deep sympathy for the character. However, in the final analysis, the performance highlights this

piece-worker's behaviour without, at the same time, foregrounding the social pressures that help to explain it. This rather descriptive approach is certainly linked to Leigh's working methods, which I have termed "naturalistic". It is also surely linked to how essentialist notions of ethnicity end up dominating the production. And it raises an important question regarding the - to my mind - unresolved tension between what seems to be the director's focus of sympathy and what turns out to be the actors' focus which, as the performance unfolds, gains the upper hand. Does the production express a cultural contradiction between two different views of one subject, Leigh's view (Englishman, "outsider") and that of the performers (Greek-Australians, "insiders")? And is this cultural contradiction exacerbated by the social positions taken, Leigh viewing them from the standpoint of a *working-class* character who is also a Greek-Australian and the performers viewing them from the standpoint of a Greek-Australian character who also happens to be a working-class woman? Since Leigh's method is to go with the material his performers present, the predominance of the second viewpoint in the contradiction noted is not surprising; and is a tribute to Leigh's generous, self-effacing approach.

The processes of abstraction that result from essentialist ideas about ethnicity have other consequences for the production in that, when push comes to shove, *Greek Tragedy* could be about any victimized woman and any sexist men: despite its culturally specific signs, and even its ethnocentricity, it ends up making gender statements which, in turn, are based on an all-embracing abstract notion of the "human condition". Thus the "human condition", gender absolutes and national stereotypes converge. From here to universalism is an easy step, all the more so because any declaration concerning the "human condition" is itself, by definition, universal. However, the universals at the core of the production are situational, namely, in respect of Greek-Australian characters in a Greek-Australian setting. And what emerges from the defined situation seems to be an Anglo/Celtic view of Greeks in Australia. The issue of cross-cultural perception and interaction of concern to us opens onto several hypotheses: director Leigh, although viewing things from the standpoint of the working class, tends to see the situation from the vantage point of the English working class; the performers, although Greek-Australians, have no intention of taking up their parents' mantle and asserting Greek identity; although of dual culture, they opt for a single culture, as expressed by the assimilated sister. The two hypotheses concerning the performers suggest that, in either case, they do not perceive

the situation from the standpoint of Greek-Australian immigrants.

The question of point-of-view, which has received enormous attention in literary studies and almost none in studies of the theatre, is crucial for understanding how productions are produced and performances performed. It is also crucial for the sociology of the theatre to which the numerous questions raised in the course of this discussion must belong. It must, therefore, be raised in issues to do with culture, whether culture is situated sociohistorically and its particularity affirmed, or whether it is abstracted out of context in the name of a transcendent sign (which amounts to a negation of culture). There is a great difference between the universalism projected by this or that work and the generalizing power emanating from a work that does not deny its sociohistorical and cultural space. Cultural constraints of some sort might well be necessary, not only for anchoring a production as a work of art, which involves aesthetic evaluation from performers and spectators, but also for communicating emotion and meaning, which involves social evaluation and some sense of cultural appropriateness.

NOTES

1. The philosophical expression of these methodological procedures, which presuppose the virtual non-existence of an author, may be found in Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie* 63 (1969) and Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, London: Fontana, 1977, pp. 142-8. Both writers develop a discourse theory congruent with the conceptual principles of structuralism and semiotics and which as good as eliminates any notion of the "subject", that is, of a speaking, inventive and doing/acting being. This elimination of the subject who is the architect of her/his own discourse is antithetical to the principle of social agency which is fundamental to sociology.
It should be noted that, although I refer here to stage productions in order not to create a confusion with "production" in its general sense, I by no means confine my discussion to productions performed on a proscenium stage. My discussion includes productions that may well be performed in all kinds of non-traditional performance spaces. What matters is the fact that these performances are put together by design and are not random occurrences or happenings (although "happenings" can also happen by design, as John Cage, *The Living Theatre* and others have shown).
2. "The Sociology of the Theatre, Part Three: Performance". *New Theatre Quarterly* V, 19 (August 1989), pp. 282-300.

3. For the requisite documentation concerning these points see Maria Shevtsova, "The Sociology of the Theatre, Part One: Problems and Perspectives". *New Theatre Quarterly* V, 17 (February 1989), pp. 23-35. See also my *Theatre and the New Cultural Policy of France's Socialist Government. Theatre Papers. Fourth Series. No. 7*. Devon: Dartington College of the Arts, 1981. This monograph is not cited in the article above. On questions concerning cultural policy vis-à-vis the theatre, see also *Per una politica del teatro. Atti del convegno sul teatro del partito comunista italiano* (Prato 24-26 September 1976). Rome: Bulzoni, 1977 and Bruno Sanguanini, *Il pubblico all'Italiana*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 1989. For policy in respect of an overview of the arts in general see John Pick, *The Arts in a State*. Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1988. For an excellent regional study concerning policy and the arts see Bruno Sanguanini, *Fare cultura: attori e processi della modernizzazione culturale; il Trentino*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 1992. To be noted is the fact that Pierre Bourdieu, in his study of the social distribution of the arts, cultural values, "cultural capital" and related issues characteristic of the author's research, sorely neglects the theatre (though no one, not even Bourdieu, can cover everything!). See *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art: genèse et structure du champ littéraire*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1992 which, as its title suggests, focuses on literature (and especially Flaubert).
4. Paris: Editions Gonthier, 1966. Goldmann argues appropriately that the question of science in the social sciences cannot be broached via the idea of value-free, detached observation which is modelled on the methods of the physical and natural sciences. The researcher, an active subject who undertakes a sociological study of a given object, is always in some relation to the latter by virtue of being *in* society and not outside it. Objectivity in the social sciences, Goldmann argues, is only possible when the ensemble of social relations in a delimited society is taken fully into account. Consideration of this ensemble or "social totality", as Goldmann calls it, protects against partiality of judgement and mere opinion, on which subjective assessments are founded. A clear view of the social totality requires placing it in a historical framework, this procedure giving the "historical sociology" which Goldmann distinguishes from positivism (and thus positivistic sociology), empiricism and other methodologies that Goldmann deems to be parcellized and, therefore, inadequate.
5. The theoretical underpinnings of the concept of social sign used here are to be found in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin (and notably in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1986; original Russian 1929). I discuss the implications of this concept at some length in "The Sociology of the Theatre, Part Three: Performance" as noted above.
6. As occurs, for example, in Brook's *Mahabharata* where martial art exercises, particularly those requiring sticks, practised during the "training" periods of the actors, are left behind almost intact in the production.

52 *Theatre and Cultural Interaction*

7. See, in particular, *Les Ombres collectives: sociologie du théâtre*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1965 and *L'Acteur: esquisse d'une sociologie du comédien*. Paris: Gallimard, 1965.
8. *The Empty Space*. London: Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968. It is also useful to consult *The Shifting Point*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987. For an excellent "summary" of Brook's achievement up to *The Mahabharata* see David Williams, ed. *Peter Brook: A Theatrical Casebook*. London: Methuen, 1988.
9. For material relevant to some of these issues see Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, pp. 160-216, trans. Loren Kruger. London and New York: Routledge, 1992 and the essays in Patrice Pavis, ed. *Confluences. Le Dialogue des cultures dans les spectacles contemporains: essais en l'honneur d'Anne Ubersfeld*. Saint-Cyr L'Ecole: Prépublications, 1992, as well as his "Une Rencontre interculturelle: Wilson, Brook, Zadek". *Théâtre/Public* 105 (May-June 1992), pp. 36-45. See also David Williams, "Remembering the Others that are Us: Transculturalism and Myth in the Theatre of Peter Brook". Forthcoming. It should be noted that there are slight, though not insignificant discrepancies of meaning between Pavis' "intercultural" and Williams' "transcultural" and, it seems, between the latter and my own use of the term.
10. "Theatre Anthropology". *The Drama Review* 94. 2 (Spring 1982), p. 5.
11. Barba's search for resemblances, for variations on a given, stable theme is, in my view, comparable to Foucault's quest, notably in *L'Archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969. See also, in the framework of the present argument, Foucault's *L'Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1961; *Surveiller et punir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1975; and *L'Ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.
12. "The Fiction of Duality". *New Theatre Quarterly* V, 20 (November 1989), p. 312.
13. *ibid.*
14. These observations are largely, though not exclusively, based on my research by questionnaire on audiences attending Italo-Australian productions in Sydney. For some general reflections relevant to the present discussion, see my "Théâtre multiculturel, nouveauté et perspective ethnique". *Sociologie de l'art* 5 (1992), pp. 69-79.