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English language usage in South African theatre since 1976

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE IN SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE SINCE 1976

Yvonne Banning

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
University of the Witwatersrand for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Johannesburg 1989

ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes some of the ways in which English is being used in contemporary South African theatre. It argues a close connection between language use and perceptions of identity. It focuses particularly on current perceptions of White English-speaking South African (WESSA) identity and on the relationship between the WESSA and South African English (SAE) within the context of SAE usage by second language African speakers of English (ALSe).

Because theatre performance is a collaborative cultural activity, a study of the language usage in a theatre performance allows the researcher to bring a variety of perspectives to bear on one another. The theatrical connection between orality and literacy is examined, as is the relationship between the constructed dramatic world of the play and the theatrical relationships existing during performance between performers and audience.

In tracing these relationships the study contributes to the critical discourse of performance in two ways: by documenting some examples of contemporary theatre events; and by offering some theoretical arguments about the subject and methodology of performance studies. Out of this convergence of the practical and theoretical aspects of performance studies there emerges a perception of the processes by which theatre performance both articulates and creates consciousness of the socio-political conditions of its making. Performance discourse can thus be seen to have a firm philosophical base and an important role to play in academic discourse.

Three plays are analysed: Paul Slabolepszy's Saturday Night at the Palace, The Junction Avenue Theatre Company's Sophiatown and Mbongeni Ngema's Asinamali. Each analysis takes account of the socio-economic, political and historical conditions of production and connects these to the dramatic structures of the play through the varieties of social, political, theatrical and dramatic functions of its English usage.

The study concludes that English usage and theatrical practice in South Africa are indices of language and cultural change in South Africa.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

_____

(Name of candidate)

_____ day of _____, 1989

In memory of
DAVID HORNER
my mentor and friend

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PREFACE

This study has two purposes:

- to contribute towards a clearer perception of the subject and methodology of performance studies as an academic discipline; and

- to pursue the implications of English usage in South Africa in the context of current South African perceptions of identity.

The impetus to undertake this study has been provided by an urgent need to bring diverse aspects of my own experience to bear on each other. Teaching in the School of Dramatic Art at the University of the Witwatersrand teaches me continuously that conceptual and language skills must be honed by the processes of analysis and debate; that understanding emerges slowly and only by the most rigorous and persistent commitment to asking and (provisionally) answering theoretical questions.

But fifteen years as a freelance professional performer has given me the greatest respect for those who do what others talk about. The traditional academic distinction between theory and practice has always seemed an artificial one to me. For in my experience, constructing a performance demands a high degree of consciousness about what one is doing and why. Equally, talking about performance in general requires a strong sense of all the elements involved in particular performances and the curious and often unexpected ways in which these combine to bring about that enormously rich sense of consciously lived experience that theatre performance can produce in its participants.

Theatre performance enacts the discovery of its own theory; it identifies itself only in its actions. We know what it is only by what it does. So this study begins from a perspective that sees the practice of theatre, and the action of language in the theatre, as simultaneously the process and the product of theoretical understanding. The progress of my research has followed a similar pattern to the process of theatrical production: only at the end of the action have I begun to understand something of the nature of the subject and my relationship to it. And it is only in that relationship that I have been able to perceive the subject, and it can present me with an image of my thinking. Hence an 'objective' separation between researcher and subject, or theory and practice, is not a condition for me for performance research. I believe there is greater value in responding to the intense commitment performance studies demands of its practitioners to acting their theories and theorising their actions.

My active theorising during the course of this research has made considerable demands on the time and patience of those people whose common interest in performance allowed them to indulge me in my quest for understanding. In particular I have to acknowledge the unflagging energy of my supervisor, Professor Ian Steadman. I demanded that he debate ideas with me, direct me to more and ever wider sources of information, provide me with contacts and boost my failing confidence. All of which he did; and then matched my demands with his own for ever more rigorous analysis and methodological precision. It was an exhilarating if somewhat frightening experience, for which, in retrospect, I most heartily thank him.

Colleagues and students in the department have contributed greatly through their willingness to argue with me in classes, corridors and lifts. Malcolm Purkey and Dr.

Frederick Hagemann bore the brunt of my interrogations about their methods and their theatre productions. Among my friends, professional colleagues and acquaintances in the theatre, their willingness to be interviewed formally and informally testifies to their commitment and courage in subjecting themselves to such scrutiny in the cause of theatre. Paul Slabolepszy, Pieter-Dirk Uys, Dorothy Ann Gould, Jenny Reznek and Lucille Gillwald all agreed to lead seminars with my students, which produced lively debate and enriched my ideas. Deon Opperman, Peter Terry, Bobby Heaney, Sached and the administrative staff of the Market Theatre provided me with primary unpublished material and documentation. Temple Hauptfleisch and Eunice Reynecke lent valuable aid in dealing with the methodological difficulties. I am grateful, too, to Mrs. Naomi Gunders, into whose capable hands I at last delivered my final draft for typing. My confidence in her has been well-placed.

Finally I acknowledge gratefully the financial assistance given by the University of the Witwatersrand. They have contributed towards the costs of photostating and printing; and a University Council Research Grant for the Human and Social Sciences enabled me to have six weeks free of teaching duties in order to complete my research.

SPECIAL TERMINOLOGY

Theatrical: refers to

1. the processes by which a performance is constructed; all the activities involved in preparing for the presentation of a production to an audience;

2. all the specific conditions in which a theatre performance takes place;

3. all the elements of performance which sustain a relationship during a performance between actors and audience; including the presentation of the dramatic text.

Dramatic: refers specifically to the dramatic world which is constructed within a performance but is separate from the 'real' world of the actors and audience; involves the written text as well as the text in performance.

SAE: South African English

WESSA/WESSAs: White English-speaking South African(s). This term applies specifically to white South Africans whose first language is English; as distinct from

ESSA/ESSAs: English-speaking South African(s) ie. first and second languages *speakers of SAE*. The subjects of this study are all ESSAs.

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Abbreviated titles: Long play titles are abbreviated after their first use, as for example, Saturday Night at the Palace (SNAP); The Fantastical History of a Useless Man (FH).

In the bibliography certain well-known publishing houses and journals are abbreviated as for example English Academy Review - EAR; Witwatersrand University Press - W.U.P.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. ARGUMENT

> We cannot afford to be uncritically complacent about the role and future of English in South Africa... The *problems of society* will also be the problems of the predominant language of that society since it is the carrier of a range of perceptions, attitudes and goals. Through it the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. (Ndebele 1986:11)

English Language Usage in South Africa

Perceptions of the particular conditions in *which South* Africans live are expressed in their daily language usage. The predominance of English as a *second language* among South African speakers reflects its international role as a major second language. *Estimates of world wide* English users vary between 600 million (Strevens, 1981) and 115 million (Kachru, 1981).

A study of international *English* usage (Platt et al, 1984) emphasises its importance as a second language:

> The spread of English to so many parts of the world and the increase in the number of those learning it and using it *has been the most* striking example of 'language expansion' in all recorded history. It has far exceeded that other famous case, the spread of Latin during the Roman Empire. (p. 1).

From this the writers conclude:

> Whatever the dictates of language policies there are two reasons why English is needed *in* the New Nations. One is its use as an international language all over the world and

> the other is its use as a neutral lingua franca, a neutral language of wider communication without a country. The first need could be fulfilled by a small English educated elite but the other could not. In nations where there is a great ethnic and language diversity and where no alternative lingua franca exists, English may be required for some time to come (p. 201).

The use of *English in South Africa* as an international language may be firmly (and perhaps irreversibly) established, but *I shall argue* that its role as a neutral local lingua franca is not. There are signs of *alternative languages* emerging which may fulfil this need. Moreover I shall contest the assertion that *English usage for* whatever purpose can be 'neutral' within the context of political, economic and cultural *dominance* that is a feature of contemporary South Africa. I shall assert that language usage can never be 'neutral' in whatever language is used, its usage enacts a co[illegible]lectic between the lived experience of the user a[illegible] accumulated concepts and ideological assumptions th[illegible]se language's history brings to bear on its users. Language usage cannot be isolated from the historical processes that are inscribed in its grammatical constructions, vocabulary, idioms and spelling, all of which pre-exist the individual user. In turn the users contribute to the ongoing historical process by their modifications, their 'errors' and their expansion of vocabulary according to the particular contexts of their utterances. So language cannot either be dissociated from the perceptions of its users.

My interest is in identifying the kinds of usage that are occurring in the specific context of South African theatrical language practices in English, for reasons which are elaborated below.

This dissertation sets out to examine:

- how and why English is currently being used by first and second language speakers in South African theatre;
- what perceptions of identity are recognisable among South African English speakers; and
- whether the use of English among a range of South African speakers can serve to develop a perception of a South African national identity which is not tied to any one socio-economic, language or racially specific group, but can include all South Africans.

Current English Usage by South African First and Second Language Speakers

To account for contemporary English usage it is necessary to refer to the historical pressures of which we are the inheritors. Underpinning this study is an idea of history as

> The ways in which a portion of South African society tries to tell itself, and others, what the world is like. In other words (it is) an interpretation, instead of a mere description of reality.
> (Boonzaier et al 1988:1)

Much of South Africa's history is interpreted in written English. There is little to be read in other South African languages compared to the sheer volume of English accounts. Afrikaans has contributed, but of black South African perceptions of the past there is little that has been recorded in languages other than English. The telling of history in English is an act which itself is subject to the ideological hegemony inscribed in the use of English. In the same way that

our understanding of historical events is shaped by our perceptions of our contemporary position in relation to the past, so our telling of that history is shaped by the actual vocabulary, grammatical constructions and belief systems the language we use carries within it. It is likely, therefore, that cultural and political anglicisation is a feature of widespread English usage in South Africa.

The struggle to 'understand' is enacted continuously in the linguistic choices we make, not only among South African languages, but within the language we use as a first language. To choose which language we use in which particular situation, is in South Africa a political choice, quite as much as it is a result of social training and contact, or personal, familial background. Where multi-lingualism produces a greater freedom of choice, the political significance of such choices increases. Conversely the limitations imposed by monolingualism will tend to confirm the speaker's unconscious submission to the ideological tenets of his language. Among South African native English speakers this is particularly evident. The hegemonic effects of English make them particularly susceptible to the 'naturalising' and 'universalising' tendencies of English usage. In second language English speakers these tendencies are less well developed, though present, because in choosing to speak English the political, social and cultural effects become more immediately and consciously apparent. For Afrikaners, for instance, the concept of language loyalty and the association of Afrikaans with a specifically Afrikaans national identity may produce open conflict at a familial, social or political level where English language usage and concomitant acculturation occurs. Among African language speakers the use of English tends to involve questions of class identity because of the association of English with education. The status of English as a language of

political and economic domination may also involve these English speakers with questions regarding their *political affiliations*.

Who uses English in contemporary South Africa, and why, are critical questions in attempting to recognise what *features are* common to all South African experience and which are specific only to particular groups. But again, in identifying differences among groups the terminology used - the categories by *which South Africans* are currently differentiated - is linguistically as well as politically determined. And these categories are themselves unstable, as the changes in official terms demonstrate. Familiar South African concepts of race, class, culture and nation have a linguistic history which is inscribed with the conceptual and political modifications effected by the politically dominant group. Boonzaier *et al* (1988) have traced some of these linguistic shifts that function as indicators of shifts of consciousness among the users of the language. For example, they cite the change from *tribe to race* to ethnic group to nation (pp. 66-78).

These linguistic shifts are inseparable from the socio-political manipulations which create and adapt the structures and organisations of dominance and subordination in South African society. They provide evidence of the centrality of language in reflecting and constructing consciousness.

The relation of English to the dominant structures that entrench political and economic power in a minority differentiated by race is complicated by English usage among those who seek to alter these power structures. In co-opting English into the struggle to redistribute economic and political power, oppositional cultural *workers appear to place* increasing importance on English as a site of struggle because its usage encompasses both

dominant *and dominated.* Linguistically the struggle in English becomes one waged between conservationists and *liberationists. The* conservation of white cultural and economic dominance is fought for through the preservat*ion of* traditional standards of usage. The struggle for political and economic liberation exhibits itself linguistically in new forms of English usage which deny or ignore these traditions.

The multiple functions that English has in South Africa has resulted in an expansion in its range and variety of expressiveness. Some users are engaged in using it to promote the racial and class divisions that sustain the political status quo. These - and they are by no means limited to native English speakers - vigorously promote English as a European language and believe that 'good' is traditional usage allows access to the beneficial effects of Western culture, economic practice and power sharing. English, in this view, is implicitly 'better' than other languages and 'correct' usage ensures that the speaker will reap the economic rewards of the capitalist system and the cultural benefits of exposure to the largest and fullest traditions of cultural excellence as well as membership in an international language community, thus enlarging his conceptual framework beyond the narrowly parochial or purely national. The notion of democracy here assumes a common predominantly cultural goal, that of 'Englishness'.

Other users are engaged in promoting its use for a different kind of democracy. Rather than subscribing to the elitism and competitiveness that Western democracy practises, they use English to mobilise masses of people who share similar socio-political experiences. English in this case has a non-cultural function in that it is used as a lingua franca, a contact language among different language groups. The recent growth of many literacy programmes, the majority of which teach reading

and writing skills in English, testifies to the urgent need for a common *lingua franca among* the disenfranchised. Here the democratic goal is not primarily cultural: the supremacy of English culture *is valued* less than the access it provides to economic power and its usefulness as a linguistic means of negotiating *with those who* possess that power. So usage is a means rather than an end.

Between these two poles - the use of English as a demonstration of cultural excellence and as a *tool for* acquiring economic and political power - there are many varieties of English usage evident. For neither pole is mutually exclusive. The hegemonic spread of English culture among English users ensures that traditional standards of usage and culture are acknowledged and valued to a greater or lesser degree by all English *users*. Equally the transmission of concepts of alternative economic structures and their accompanying *political concepts* impinges on the notions of democracy that traditionalists sustain. The effects within English of *such continuous* traffic among varying purposes and practices means that there is continual reassessment of the language *itself*. Its vocabulary is constantly subject to the actual conditions of utterance - who is speaking, about what, *to whom* and in what context. This produces a tremendous pressure on its users to identify themselves, the words in which they *frame* their concepts and the reception of their ideas by their listeners. Actual English usage is thus the *subject of* closer scrutiny than previously, and is constantly reviewed, adapted and elaborated in the *interests of exchanging* meaning by speakers themselves, as they speak. For meaning cannot be assumed to be common to all its speakers.

Language consciousness has always been a feature of South African political practice. It has, and continues to be, used legislatively to create and identify

separate groups of South Africans. Now, as apartheid is challenged increasingly openly and powerfully, the discourse in which the apartheid debate is conducted is itself under examination. English's colonial history, which was partly responsible for the linguistic divisions used to separate South Africans, has also provided the lingua franca in which the discourses of power can be debated. Apartheid language consciousness is gradually being replaced by a more positive attempt to explore the possibilities of expanding English usage to accommodate diverse cultural and socio-political experiences within it. Whether this consciousness of English can or will eventually make English the language of South African unity can be only speculatively answered at present. What can be offered is evidence of current perceptions of identity that are held by some South Africans and the degree to which their use of English demonstrates a felt need to affiliate themselves with others who also use English.

Concepts of Identity in South African English Speakers

In South Africa official demarcators of identity are race, language and place of origin. Legislative practice has effectively enacted the ideological principles of apartheid so that few if any South Africans are exempt from the hegemonic absorption and internalisation of these criteria in their perceptions of identity. More recently cultural criteria have been added to institutionalised definitions of identity when 'place of origin' conspicuously failed to maintain clearcut divisions. The emergence of 'ethnicity' as an attribute of identity is an example of this refurbishing of old concepts in new words.(1) Identity is thus largely determined by emphasising difference between individuals or groups. The increasing use of English seems to be re-introducing a balance between difference and similarity in

constructing representations of identity, in that the racial distinctions *no longer* match the language distinctions as closely as before.

I shall be arguing that because language constitutes one of the critical paradigms of *official identification*, English is both an instigator and perpetuator of these ideologically entrenched perceptions of identity and at the same time a means of combating the prescriptions that the race/language/ culture cluster imposes on such perceptions.

Politically English is used as a weapon by contending groups. The hegemonic spread of dominant values through widespread English usage serves the interests of the dominant white minority by 'taming' or naturalising *dominated* groups and incorporating them into established practices. For the dominated classes, though, it *provides* a common voice that can be raised against the oppression that unites them in common cause against the oppressors. *In* this *way* English assists in articulating new paradigms to counter the racial ones. One of the new paradigms is the *class one* (2). Another, to counter the old cultural superiority of Europe, is that of numerical majority.

English is eminently well-placed to *gather* all the contestants under one umbrella, so to speak, and provide common linguistic ground for the contesting *ideologies*. Coupled with this, the high status accorded to English usage locally (deriving from effective cultural colonisation) suggests that the 'rules of the game' (provided by English's own ideology) are understood and respected at least to some degree by all the English users involved.

English Usage in Relation to a National Identity

English in South Africa is eminently well-placed to gather current racial, linguistic or class specific concepts of nationality into a more broadly inclusive concept of a South African national identity, precisely because its language community is beginning to accommodate the majority of South Africans. The more general usage of English among and within racially and economically segregated groups is assisting conscious political strategies to displace apartheid structures in favour of other forms of social organisation, whether these are reformist or revolutionary.

It is my contention that language does provide a primary means of perceiving identity. Language is thus a sensitive issue, as the consequences of apartheid language policies demonstrate only too vividly in, for example, the Soweto uprising of 1976 (3). But if actual English usage by disparate South African language communities becomes common practice, the artificially constructed language divisions imposed by official language policies demonstrably cannot sustain credibility. The expansion of the English speaking language community in South Africa is both a sign and an initiator of an expanding sense of identity towards a national identity which can incorporate the diversity of other factors - such as class, cultural practices, regional loyalties and political affiliations.

There are dangers inherent in asserting the primacy of language as a marker of identity within a South African context. It may be seen as an attempt to impose a sectional concept of English nationalism on South Africans, similar to the coercive attempts to promulgate Afrikaner nationalism as synonymous with South African nationalism, or the attempts of factions within the Black

Consciousness Movement to invert this with a rival sectional concept of nationalism based on similarly exclusive paradigms (4).

The privileged status of English in South African consciousness also demands some caution when considering its possible role as a serviceable means of promoting a national identity. Its colonising history, coupled with current attempts to isolate South Africa culturally, economically and politically from the rest of the world, and especially the rest of Africa, makes English particularly attractive to South Africans as a means of sustaining contact internationally. This carries its own dangers, for there may well be few restraints on the processes of cultural anglicisation where people willingly turn to English usage.

Actual English usage may provide the necessary *constraints*, provided that traditional notions of standards held by South African native speakers of *English* are consciously redirected towards accepting actual usage by second language English speakers and *modifying* their notions of 'correct' accordingly. For as larger social configurations within the South *African English* language community contribute their varieties of social experience to the range of expressed *perceptions* in English, there is likely to be a rapid expansion of vocabulary, grammatical forms and *richly connotative* idiom from which native English speakers may benefit.

It is largely a question of adjustments of attitude among those *English speakers* in South Africa who currently perceive English as 'their' language and thus tend to *wish to retain control* of it in their own hands. In democratising English it is necessary to democratise attitudes to *English* concurrently. Perceptions of a decline of standards need to be refocused towards a *perception of an* enriching of English by the emergence

and acceptance of new forms of usage that articulate the socio-political and cultural experiences of all its users. Equally notions of tradition need to be readjusted to recognise current usage as part of an ongoing tradition in which there is continuous exchange between past and present.

Given these provisos it may well be possible to generate both a revitalised South African English which both expresses and shapes perceptions of what a fully South African identity might entail.

2. METHODOLOGY

> A crucial component of theatre, as of all art, is its immediacy, its newness, its status as event .. To be in the middle of a process is not always to be clear about it. The kind of clarity academics strive for seems always to come, if at all, only afterwards. The problems of ... drama today are as acute and difficult and urgent and present as they ever were ... the problems of audience, of style, of venue, of standpoint, of objective ... There is, it seems to me - a continuing difficulty of language, despite the articulateness: a difficulty in pinning down the problems, a difficulty in expressing the partial solutions people have found in the daily work of practice ... That is one of the reasons why the whole art of drama sometimes imposes itself upon us as necessary and irreplaceable. (Bradby et al, 1980:273-5)

In constructing this study I have drawn on theorists from three disciplines, viz. performance theory, socio-linguistic theory and cultural theory.

Performance Theory

Theatre semiotics has provided the underlying framework that identifies performer, audience and performance as the key constituents of a theatrical event. Equally fundamental is the notion that performance is constructed from two interactive systems: visual signs and audible signs. While I have not overtly examined the models proposed by Elam (1980), Pavis (1982) and Bassnett (1980 & 1985) here, their work has informed much of my thinking about theatrical performance.

Another key concept - the relationship between orality and literacy as it is expressed in theatre performance - derives from the work of Ong (1982) (particularly), de Marinis (1987) and de Kerckhove (1987). These theorists offer a historical perspective which illuminates the complexities of contemporary theatrical and dramatic language in a most helpful way.

Regarding the distinctions between 'theatrical' and 'dramatic' in both language and *performance*, a number of theatre practitioners and theorists have contributed to my understanding of *the relationships* between the two, and the crucial role that an audience plays in constructing this *relationship*. *Performers*, directors, playwrights and reviewers have assisted in enriching my sense of the *complexities* of relationships that exist in theatrical and dramatic language, while the most predominant *theoretical* sources have probably been the writings of Brecht (S), Artaud (1977), Styan (1975, 1979, 1982) and Raymond Williams (1975, 1977,1980, 1987).

Socio-Linguistic Theory

In comparing dramatic dialogue with 'ordinary' speech or 'naturally occurring language' the concept of function

has emerged as a key analytic device. Austin's speech act theory and analyses of actual language practice in Edwards (1976), Bloomfield (1979), Hayakawa (1971) and others (Hudson, 1986) have sharpened my sense that *function* is a crucial means of distinguishing dramatic dialogue. Burton's analysis (1980) of Pinter's dialogue assisted me in applying socio-linguistic principles to the specific area of dramatic language usage in South African theatre productions.

Regarding the concept of audience I have used two general models: that of Canetti (1962) (crowds) and Edwards (1976) (social groups) to try to find a means of analysing the composition, function and action of an audience *within* a theatrical performance. That neither has proved adequate to the specific context of theatre in no way implies any disparagement of their theories, only that the search must continue for a theatrical model.

Literary theorists have contributed here, too, in their focus on the cognitive aspects of reader, writer, text relationships, though again the work of the French and German reception theorists appears to apply less aptly to the theatrical *relationship* between audience, performers and performance (Holub, 1984; Freund, 1987).

Literary theory, in fact, has proved a less useful source in that the exclusive emphasis on written language that it engages in *tends to detract from* the emphasis on oral language in theatrical performance. So literary theory has been largely avoided here.

Hauptfleisch's empirical work on theatre audiences (1980) offers a small body of *statistical evidence* to support theoretical argument and if nothing else has pointed to the urgent need for more research of this kind.

Equally, his survey (6) of registered theatre research in South Africa in both literature and drama departments (Hauptfleisch, 1984) points to the paucity of research that supports the fledgling discipline of performance studies. His survey indicates that a disproportionate amount of such research in progress is directed towards studies of dramatic texts and of literary biographies of playwrights. In comparison, research into the socio-cultural and political functions of theatre or into the role of audience in the theatre performance is sparse indeed.

So this study is an attempt to begin to redress this over-emphasis on written language in South African theatre studies, and on dramatic rather than theatrical features of performance.

I am also concerned to stress the relatedness of all aspects and processes of *theatrical performance*. There is a tendency, it seems, to isolate elements of theatre from each other for the *purposes of analysis*. I wish to strengthen the connections between theatre performance and other kinds of *cultural work* and social behaviour.

Cultural Theory

Cultural theory and in particular a historical materialist *approach* has provided me with the most pervasive model for my methodological approach. Raymond Williams' *writing* has provided the concepts and direction for this study. In particular, his arguments for the importance of *process*, of 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1987, pp. 16-20) and for actual practice as areas of critical *enquiry* have largely determined the general perspective from which to view the specific subject of South African

English in the theatre. This study relies most fundamentally on his seminal accounts of hegemony, ideology, historical process and acculturation. For the particular manifestations of Williams' general theory in a South African context, I have referred to the recent publication by the University of Cape Town's Sociology department (Boonzaier et al, 1988). Their analyses of the political implications of the historical shifts in terminology that have and are occurring in South Africa - specifically the use of terms such as race, nation, ethnicity and so on - have critically influenced my thinking about language and identity in South African terms. Equally potent an influence in my thinking about the cultural and socio-political context of theatre in South Africa has been Dollimore et al (1985) and Martin Orkin's book, Shakespeare against Apartheid (1987). Both have offered valuable theoretical models for formulating ideas about the dialectics between theatre productions and the societies in which these occur.

In applying Williams' historical approach I have found much assistance from current work by popular historians, particularly that produced by the Wits History department (Callinicos, 1981, 1987a, 1987b; van Onselen, 1982). Their emphasis on the retrieval of alternative history through personal testimony has initiated much fruitful thought about the historical function of theatrical language and has expanded the context of theatrical language for me.

Finally, this study relies on a number of concepts drawn from a variety of disciplines. These can be grouped in clusters under each discipline, but it is not my intention to do so. My interest is not so much in the derivations of the concepts as in how they operate on each other. Theatrical, sociological and cultural theoretical principles do, I think, illuminate each other, but collectively they provide a dense account of

the *complex* dialectical processes that seem to me to be at the very heart of theatrical performance. In constructing a multi-disciplinary framework in this way I am asserting a premise that the subject (theatrical language performance) is more than the sum of its separable parts; and that in spite of the subjects' insusceptibility to research methods which rely on immobilising and objectifying the *subject*, theatrical language in performance can be identified, scrutinised and *theorised successfully* by methods which take account of its peculiar volatility. What is necessary is that performance methodology articulates those theatrical relationships which sustain performances - that the methodology and the subject shares the same criteria, that performance analysis recognises and participates in precisely those dialectical relationships that differentiate theatre *performance from other* kinds of cultural work. There is a need to develop a performance theory that *can* say what performance might be and what it can do, rather than what it cannot be or cannot do.

Hence, where many theatre researchers will strive for 'scientific' distance and objectivity between themselves and their subject, my approach suggests that *engagement* in the subject is a methodological imperative. I see the relation of researcher to subject as analogous to that between audience and performance: both researcher and audience participate in the creation of the subject at the same time as they reflect on that subject. So they are both subject to and objectifiers of the processes of performance. And it is this mutually dependent identifying process that I would seek to place at the centre of the research methodology of performance. *It is a* precarious position to maintain: too much insistence on active participation *within* the subject will (justifiably) lead to charges of mystifying and personalising *the research*; too much separation between researcher and performance denies the essential conditions (exchange,

mutability, collaborative action and collective experience) which characterises performance as distinctively different from, say, dramatic literature or other forms of cultural work. Continuous action, involving all the participants in a theatre production, is fundamental to performance. To diminish this aspect of the process in order to promote theoretical coherence seems misguided to me. For performance studies needs to develop a body of theory which centralises the concept of action - whether dramatic, theatrical, linguistic or gestural. If, as seems the case at present, this presents difficulties, it is not a matter of adjusting the subject to suit the methods of enquiry, but of extending and intensifying the search for methods of enquiry that most precisely register the particularities that make performance an identifiable discipline. More acutely, in attempting to build a theory of performance which is differentiated clearly and unambiguously from other related disciplines, the connections between theory and practice will have to be addressed with rigour. It is not satisfactory to say that performance theory is exemplified by particular performances; nor that performances provide the tools for constructing theory. For it is in each performance that participants discover, construct, describe and enact the concepts of performance. The processes of performance are, I would contend, the theory of performance in action as it presents itself to its participants.

3. PRIMARY SOURCES

Criteria for Selection

In a study of theatre performance there are always difficulties attached to engaging in a written study of an ephemeral and constantly 'vanishing subject'. My selection of particular productions has therefore been limited by practical considerations such as the availability of records of contemporary South African works, either in the form of working manuscripts, published texts or video recordings of productions to overcome the problem of providing the reader with some reference to the primary source. Where published texts are available, these will be used in conjunction with such description of the features of spoken dialogue and physical action in the productions as seem necessary.

Beyond these practical considerations my selections have been based on the following criteria:

- a production clearly articulated perceptions of a particular language group in its relations to other language groups;
- a production appeared to be a development from earlier work by the same writer or company in terms of shifts of perceived identity;
- a production demonstrably extended South African English usage in its theatrical dialogue;
- a production attracted popular attention or critical acclaim.

Regarding the last of these, popularity is an ambiguous concept of which there are a number of contradictory features. Numerical and financial factors are only two

of the variables that may determine the 'success' or 'failure' of a production. The composition and perceptions of an audience are subject to the *relative effects* of things as various as the location, accessibility, *architecture* and technology of the venue; marketing procedures; the relation of ticket prices to income; advertising and word of mouth as well as newspaper or broadcast reviews and articles or arts programme inserts. Then there are the specific conditions of a *particular* production that contribute to an audience's eagerness to attend a performance: the genre of the play; the language it is presented in, compared to the language(s) of its audiences; the status of the performers, the director, or the designer or the writer in the *eyes of* both the management and potential audiences. Expectations of visual spectacle or witty dialogue may persuade people to attend for a variety of reasons.

The theatre management as a cultural infrastructure is *likely to bring* its *own* variables to bear on the popularity of its productions as well. Its ideological perspective will be inscribed in its policies regarding reduced ticket prices for favoured groups; its billing of plays, players and writers; the comparative costs it assigns to backstage labour, performers, writers, publicity, set design, tours and so on. Its artistic and/or commercial policies are likely to attract or circumscribe its potential range of audience appeal, as are its stated or implicit connections to other social and/or state *institutional structures*.

Within this immensely complicated scenario perceptions of popularity cannot be a matter decided by scientific method. I have thus broadly defined a popular production as one which has attracted *critical notice*; has been widely talked about among theatre practitioners; has generated consistently increasing audiences (relative to its venue) that have grown throughout its run; and in some cases which has returned for a second season.

The kind of audiences a production has attracted has also been a consideration. *This is difficult* to establish as there is very little statistical evidence of the sociological composition of Johannesburg theatre-goers. But it seems reasonable to assert the premise that white English-speaking middle class South Africans constitute the majority of audiences at the productions that are the subject of this study, for reasons that are given elsewhere. This is borne out by my own observations at performances of these productions.

The way in which a production evolves - whether from a text or from a collective workshop method - seems to me to be important in assessing the English usage that it presents in performance. Textual modifications always occur (with or without the consent of the playwright) in the rehearsal of a new scripted play, but these generally do not alter the fundamental conceptual and ideological perspectives of the playwright. Changes in dialogue are usually in the interests of the actor's articulatory convenience, or for the purposes of defining dramatic character or plot more sharply. The value of a study of *examples* of these plays lies in their representation of a particular ideological perspective within the *range of positions* that are articulated in other English cultural works. Where the reception of a production indicates *strong grounds* for assuming that audience and playwright share this perspective the play may well be said to be representative *of a* particular socially constructed group - as, for instance, in the case study of Paul Slabolepszy's play *as* representing WESSA perceptions.

In collective workshopping, however, the dialogue is the result of complex processes of negotiating linguistic and social meaning among all the participants. The spoken dialogue tends to exhibit features of this in the English language usage. Hence there is great interest

for the language researcher in productions where WESSA and ALS speakers have co-operated in constructing a new production, for it is here that the processes of theatrical production may be asserted to be microcosmically enacting the social and linguistic negotiations that are occurring among South African English language users beyond the restrictions of legislated apartheid.

The Question of Representativeness

How far theatrical activity may be seen as representative of other forms of social activity involves questions regarding the relation of cultural work to other forms of labour and leisure activities. It also involves most crucially the relation of the dramatic world to the 'real' world. One of the premises on which this study rests is that in constructing the dramatic world the creators speak from particular ideological positions which are determined by their *experience of* the 'real' world. The task of this researcher is to identify from the linguistic features *of the dramatic* worlds presented what these may be. Theatrical representations of reality are themselves *as much* part of the perceived 'real' world as they are imaginary inventions of possible alternative *constructions of reality*. Critical analysis of a production can thus be used to identify characteristic patterns of linguistic behaviour which apply beyond the specific practices of theatre; or it can be used *solely to examine the* internal relations of the dramatic world. It is the former purpose that supplies the *perspectives of* this study.

The *selection of productions* does not imply that the makers of each production are intended to be seen as the sole *theatrical representatives* of a particular social category of South Africans, nor that all South Africans are fully or satisfactorily represented. Afrikaans

language speakers, for example, do not feature in the study at all, and are only peripherally presented among the dramatic characters. In the two language-based categories - WESSA and ALS - there are other contemporary voices among theatre practitioners whose plays present other perceptions and other linguistic features which are not evident in this selection. But where a playwright evokes responses of recognition and familiarity in an audience, this may I believe be taken as evidence of a commonly shared perception of his function as "one who speaks on our behalf" and so support a view which claims a degree of representativeness for him.

So a particular production is no more and no less representative than other particular examples of cultural expression: who it represents, to whom and under what conditions, remain the central issues.

The representativeness of the researcher is equally subject to the same conditions as apply to the making of the theatrical production. In this sense "objective" research has little bearing because of the necessity of approaching the subject through the intricate systems of relations that operate in the constructions of meaning. Indeed the subject itself is less a stable entity than it is a process of engaging in these constructions. The researcher stands in the same relation to the subject as an audience does to a performance, neither distantiated nor vicariously engaged in the action, but poised between the two, simultaneously receiving and making meaning.

Productions Selected for this Study

Three productions have been selected:

Paul Slabolepszy: Saturday Night at the Palace
Junction Avenue Theatre Company: Sophiatown
Mbongeni Ngema: Asinamali

Slabolepszy's play was scripted prior to rehearsal though it underwent considerable change during the process of rehearsal (7). The text was published some time after the initial production.

Both Sophiatown and Asinamali were devised through workshopping process. Sophiatown has subsequently been published as a play text (8), though Asinamali has not. Where reference is made to specific section of dialogue the source is the published text. In the case of Asinamali my sources are the working manuscript of the original theatre production as well as verbatim transcriptions from the video production of the play (10).

NOTES - CHAPTER ONE

1. "Both `ethnic groups' and `nations' are fundamentally constructs of the human imagination rather than entities with a concrete, practical existence in the social world." (Boonzaier et al p. 80). Sharp then goes on to argue that the shift in terminology was not matched by a shift in the ideological vision of apartheid.

2. The concept of class is a vexed one in South Africa because of the dominance of racial divisions over all other identity determinants. Slovo, of the ANC, discerns "a degree of stratification within the black population" (Lodge, 1983, p. 92). Sharp (Boonzaier et al, p. 175) contends that class "does not form part of the dominant political discourse in South Africa" (p. 175), which may account for the relatively minor part class plays in black communities. However, recent governmental support for black entrepreneurs and "the informal sector" suggests that there is an attempt to develop and use class strategies in the interests of sustaining the dominant status quo.

3. Lodge (1983) sees economic recession, a more politically assertive African petty bourgeoisie and consecutive waves of labour unrest as the background against which the Soweto children's language protests grew (p. 326).

4. "Blacks had to create a social identity to replace the concepts generated by white liberal notions of African integration in a Western capitalist society. To this end blacks should draw on indigenous cultural traditions and critically scrutinise externally derived ideological systems" (Lodge, 1983, p. 323).

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5. *Accounts* of Brecht's theories have been drawn from Braun (1982), Bentley (1983) and Roose-Evans (1984).

6. See appendix B.

7. The director of the production, Bobby Heaney, gave me access to the original preproduction ms of Saturday Night at the Palace, with the proviso, however, that it may not be quoted directly. A comparison of this early version with the dialogue of the production and with the published text is of considerable interest, but is not included here.

8. Malcolm Purkey provided me with a ms of Sophiatown which was put together in July 1986, ie, subsequent to the initial presentation of the production, but prior to its publication. This has been my source, but as it is substantially the same as the recently published text, references given refer to the published text.

9. My thanks to the Market Theatre for their assistance in locating this (incomplete) ms and for permission to use it for this study.

10. The video production cannot be equated with the theatrical production. Features of performance, the selection of camera angles, the studio setting and the differences that the two media exhibit in relation to each other all *profoundly affect* the reception of the spoken text. However the actual dialogue, though not the order of the scenes, remains substantially the same, so that it seems justified to use *this source as an* adjunct to the theatre ms where issues of orality are the focus of the analysis. *Neither the ms nor* the video production can substitute for the performance but they do go some way towards supplying *records* of it.

CHAPTER 2: LANGUAGE IN THE THEATRE

Theatre is an eminently suitable cultural activity for tracing the changes that are occurring here and now in a society whose transitional processes are accelerating. For it is in theatrical performance that the immediate effects of ideological shifts can be publicly demonstrated to both performers and their audiences as they occur.

Definitions of theatre are as various as the venues in which such activities take place and the people engaged in it. The ideological perspectives it renders visible and audible are equally various. Productions may be offered as consumer products; as rehearsals for social or political action, (1) (Boal 1979) as an escape from the 'real' world or as an invitation to examine its own specific structures and practices as they pertain to its audiences or to others not represented in its audiences. There are elements of theatre which require personal identification with the dramatic characters and their dramatically constructed world, and theatrical techniques which direct audiences to distance themselves from such empathetic involvement.

The functions of theatre performances range as variously; from the instructional purpose of didactic political and educational drama to the expressive function, where audiences enter into an implicit contract with the performers, allowing them to enact on their behalf the myths and rituals which express collectively shared beliefs, as in the acting out of folk tales or legends. Where theatre performance stops and other kinds of cultural action begin is by no means clear - how much, for instance, wrestling is a theatrical event and how

much a *competitive sport* is a question that excites considerable debate.

Theatre performances are above all, though, collective, public, social events. The creation of a dramatic world requires at least the consent of its audience, and an audience's active or vicarious participation in its construction of the dramatically 'real' world. *The greater* the engagement of an audience in this conceptual task *the more* the dramatic world created presents to an audience a framed image of itself, Shakespeare's mirror held 'as twere up to nature; to show ... the very age and body of the time his form and pressure' (III, 2, 20-24). Underpinning this study is the premise that all theatrical activity, like all other forms of cultural, political and socio-economic activity, serves the interests of those who *participate in* it; that in all its theatrical forms it is an activity by its community, *occurring* within the conditions existing in that community, and for that community (2). It is distinguished as a particular form of social action by its specifically theatrical (rather than dramatic) practices which involve all the features of performance - acting in a continuous present; continuously making unstable, incomplete meanings; and participating in conceptual exchanges among a group.

Hence the construction of a dramatic world is only part of the complex theatrical experience that occurs during performance. Dramatic language has to engage itself in the immediate theatrical relationship between performers and audience as well, in order to sustain its connection to 'real' life.

This chapter *offers four* theoretical perspectives from which language usage in theatre performance may be analysed:

- the relation between dramatic dialogue and *'ordinary' speech*;
- the construction of dramatic reality in and through language;
- the cognitive and expressive effects of orality and literacy in the theatre;
- and the linguistic implications of the presence of an audience at a theatrical performance.

Because the presence *of an audience* is a crucial distinguishing feature of theatre performance, this section will examine in some detail the linguistic activities an audience engages in; the relationships created *linguistically* between performers and an audience; and finally who or what comprises an audience, together with a brief account of current methodological problems in local performance research.

Dramatic Dialogue and 'Ordinary' Speech

'Ordinary' speech is a physical enactment of ideological patterns. Dramatic dialogue transforms 'ordinary' speech into a specifically cultural process by its theatrical framing. But dramatic dialogue is not characterised by a specific range of specialist vocabulary or particular grammatical structures. It does not function as a social register associated with the work or leisure activities of a *particular social group*, though it may encompass a number of these. Moreover it does not appear to be confined to a theatrical context alone. Energetic expressions occurring in an everyday context, *of indignation*, contempt, hilarity and so on, are likely to be described as 'dramatic' or 'theatrical' outbursts by a witness to them, though not by the speaker.

It appears then that language usage is perceived as dramatic by reference to its context. `Drama´ and `theatre´ are not synonymous, though they do require each other to produce theatrical performance and a dramatic text. Popular usage of the term `drama´ tends to blur the distinction between the two concepts and this is a tendency that is encouraged by theatre practitioners themselves. Many companies are attempting to escape the confinement of their activities within a narrow `high culture´ category by taking their performances outside established theatrical infrastructures - a theatre building, advertising in newspapers, traditional performance times, and so on. Theatre performances may currently be found on street corners, in shopping malls, on sportsfields and factory floors, in classrooms, and even (as I have witnessed) in lifts. These locational changes indicate a shift in perceptions of the function of drama and in the reversal of hierarchical status between drama and theatre. Where drama was previously seen as having a primarily literary function, and thus found a place in departments of literature or written language, it is emerging now as a discipline defined by its theatrical elements, which has *more in common* with history, sociology and psychology departments.

In its emphasis on the *behavioural aspects of* the human personality and the structures that sustain relations between groups of people, performance is becoming the focus of *research*, *rather than* the written text. In dramatic language, therefore, the act of speaking, as against reading what has been spoken, is assuming a *central place in concepts* of drama, with an accompanying shift of emphasis from `drama´ to `theatre´, from product to process, from containing the subject within *fixed definitions*, to describing the subject in terms of its relations to other aspects of human experience.

The accompanying tendency to stress the similarities between 'ordinary' speech and dramatic dialogue has far-reaching implications in the study of theatrical structure - genre, audience/actor relationships and ultimately the construction of performance meaning - and thus in perceptions of the functions of dramatic language.

Deirdre Burton's socio-linguistic analyses (Burton, 1980) exemplify the cross-referential space in which dramatic language functions, at the intersection of ordinary conversation, recognition of linguistic patterns and dramatic structure. Burton analyses works by Pinter, identifying in them the formal linguistic features that allow us to recognise (accept as familiar) in Pinter's dialogue patterns of language behaviour that occur in everyday speech: repetitions, questions to confirm what is *already known or believed*, silences that 'belong' to one or other speaker, the circularity of *conversations* that serve a phatic function and so on. She then demonstrates how the formal dramatic organisation of these features, together with the theatrical context, allow us to make different conceptual clusters of meaning from them because of the unfamiliar combinations that such repatterning constructs (3). 'Defamiliarising' (4) or 'making strange' in this way is a concept common to *literary* and performance theorists (Jefferson, 1986; Ben Chaim, 1981; Hilton, 1987; Hawkes, 1977). It directs us continuously during performance to the process of exchange between the dramatic dialogue and 'ordinary' language usage, rather than to either separately. The operation of dramatic language in the theatre provides a critical reference beyond the drama and continuously maintains a connection *between* the dual theatrical realities of drama and 'real' life. This connection *is essential* for the successful construction of dramatic reality.

An audience's 'reading' of the linguistic signs in performance is a complicated social linguistic and theatrical activity. Because the signs are predominantly aural, within a continuous present, no isolated moment is possible. Meaning is constructed provisionally, never completed and subject to continuous modification, not only by the relationships *within the linguistic semiotic* system of dramatic language, but by the relation of *dramatic language* to other theatrical semiotic systems (5), such as movement, gesture, scenic design and so on, all of which are themselves unstable and continuously transforming systems. Each language action occurs as a response to a prior action, as utterances are responses to what has happened before them in ordinary *conversations*. And each line of dramatic dialogue will change the conditions for *the next line*. For example, the failure of an audience to laugh at a line delivered in the *expectation* of laughter will affect the timing, delivery and context of the following line. For the audience, the recognition (too late) of having missed a laughter cue or their unwillingness to respond with laughter will influence their reception of the following line.

So there can be *no clean* starting point for any language action during a performance. Even the opening line of a play is preceded by a series of visual and linguistic and non-linguistic theatrical signs associated with the social framework of entering the theatre, buying a ticket or programme, finding the seat and so on, all of which provide preliminary information to an audience regarding the role that has been *structured for him* and the expectations he may reasonably have of the theatrical *event and his relation* to it and in it.

The continuousness of performance affects the dramatic language usage in other ways too, one of which is the construction of dramatic conventions or norms, the 'habitual modes of representation' (Bennett, 1986, p. 54) (6) which operate for the duration of the performance. These conventions provide the framework of the genre and involve the gradual accumulation as the performance proceeds of information about consistently operating rules that apply in the dramatic world. They will include visual signs as well as linguistic devices which are introduced during the construction of the dramatic world but which function retrospectively and progressively to give the play its logical and structural coherence. Linguistically such devices may be the presentation of speech as song, or soliloquy, as asides or direct address to the audience; or they may involve a structural change from verse to prose, or vice versa. Paralinguistic features of speech will be included - intonation patterns, changes in volume, pace, rhythm and stress - all of which establish what *norms* are operating for the purposes of the dramatic action. For example, if all the characters speak in verse, verse becomes the operating *norm* for the *performance*, and any character who speaks in prose is noticeably not conforming to the rules of the dramatic world. Dramatic significance is *thus marked* by deviance from the dramatic norms established within the performance.

Dramatic conventions need not necessarily conform to those operating outside the dramatic world; they may in fact suspend the laws of the natural and social world (as for instance in Ionesco's Rhinoceros or Brook's all-male production of As You Like It). An audience is thus continuously made aware of the internal consistency of the dramatic world and alerted to deviance within that world as dramatically significant. At the same time they are invited to recognise the natural and societal

structures of convention in which they live by comparison with the overt constructedness of the drama's conventions. Where social conventions and dramatic conventions appear to overlap, the operation of familiar assumptions intensifies the reality of the dramatic world and confirms it as real. For instance, there is the assumption in Vega Albert (Mtwa et al, 1983) that Morena's ability to walk on water confirms for the audience his dramatic reality as the returned Jesus.

The dramatic `defamiliarising' referred to earlier thus needs its counterpart - recognition of the `real' world - to complete the cycle of exchange between the two worlds of the audience and to construct dramatic and social meaning. Dramatic language quotes its own context as part of the way in which it insists on its own `normality'; it makes itself `familiar' and thus recognisable at the same time as it points to its theatrical framing to demarcate itself as different. For example, Hamlet's soliloquy `To be or not to be ...' (*New Shakespeare*, 1969) points to its own defamiliarisation from other parts of the play by its use of verse and its soliloquising function. The norms established elsewhere in the play (Hamlet's prose speeches and the functional difference in his exchanges with Gertrude and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which are made in verse) are deliberately broken and hence the audience recognises the speech as dramatically important. Equally this speech deviates from the norms of extra-theatrical language utterance: talking to oneself in verse is not deemed `normal' behaviour outside the dramatic world any more than it is inside it (it contributes in the play to the other characters' belief that he is mad, just as it would in the `real' world). Moreover Hamlet is the only character who habitually soliloquises in this particular dramatic world so that he is perceived to be outside both the norms of his dramatic society and his audience's. This

privileging of dramatic characters renders them dramatically important and invests them *with intensified* human qualities that tend to allow audiences to identify with them as 'real' people. Much of the critical writing about Hamlet reveals this tendency to regard Hamlet not as a dramatically constructed role but as a person (7).

The Construction of Dramatic Reality

Dramatic theorists from Aristotle to Brecht, Artaud and Grotowski have recognised that the perspective from which an audience interacts with a performance *is a* determinant of the genre (structural style) and meaning of the performance. Literary and performance theorists alike have long debated the relationships between reality and theatrical illusion, empathy and disengagement, subjectivity and objectivity (the terminology varies, though not the oppositions) that produce an audience's 'understanding' of drama. The debate is by no means resolved, but *however* disparate the position of each theorist may be, there does appear to be agreement regarding the critical connection between distance and function in experiential and aesthetic analyses *of* drama.

Language is at the centre of the debate because it is in dramatic language and the dramatic conventions that *organise* this language that the structural conventions of drama most powerfully operate. Words in drama acquire the power to make things so: a character can refer to a non-existent castle and *for the purposes of* the play it exists in a particular location (which may not be visible). He can refer to previous events, or describe immediate non-visible events as they are happening and the words alone make them 'true'. They have happened, are happening. In the theatre Whorf's theoretical assertion that language determines reality (Whorf, 1956) is literally true.

But the case is more complicated, for the reality of the dramatic world depends too on the simultaneous continuation of the reality of the participants' actual world. Dramatic language points only to those conditions in the alternative dramatic world which are different from those of 'real' life. An audience's knowledge of the 'real' world and the ways in which language operates there, is brought to bear on the dramatic world. The conventions structuring his experience there are transferred to the dramatic world, unless the dramatic language directs otherwise (8).

So dramatic language invokes the two realities simultaneously, maintaining the norms of ordinary life to direct an audience towards recognising in what these consist and to what degree the dramatic world is like, and unlike, their knowledge of real conditions.

The referential function of language (Bennett, 1986) not only serves to maintain these dual perspectives within the temporal dimensions of the present, but allows them to operate backwards and forwards along a time axis, so creating a dramatic past and a dramatic future parallel to and interlocking with 'ordinary' time. The visual systems of the theatre cannot provide this retrospective and anticipatory dramatic action, as language can, for gesture and movement are constrained within the present. Language is not subject to such constraints and thus is a primary means of expanding and intensifying the dramatic world.

Equally language expands the spatial dimensions of the dramatic world beyond what is visible in the stage space. It can surround the theatrical space with other non-visible locations, providing a geography in which the stage space is located. This intensifies the dramatic reality of what is seen and the actions (verbal and visual) that occur in the sight and hearing of the

audience reinforce the dramatic offstage reality, which in turn resonates back into the dramatic space of the theatre stage.

Language then functions as a *mediator* between these dual realities, fusing the effects of one into the other, so that perceptions of each reverberate beyond the limits of each reality. The dramatic world is 'real' because its language connotes the 'ordinary' world; perceptions of what constitutes 'ordinary' reality are sharpened by the alternatives the dramatic world acts out.

An audience's consciousness of this interpenetration of simultaneous but opposing realities - their apprehension of the metaphoric significance of performance - appears to depend on the comparative foregrounding of dramatic language in a performance against other theatrical semiotic systems. Brecht and Artaud argue from opposite ends of the theoretical spectrum regarding the relationship of language to the visual systems of meaning in theatre performance. For each maintains a different sense of the proper relationship between audience and performance.

Brecht argues, in his famous Verfremdungseffekt (Esslin, 1970, pp. 106-129) for the use of theatrical and linguistic techniques in performance that sharply *separate* theatrical performance from events in everyday life. Artaud (1977) conversely argues for the elimination of dramatic distance through reducing the primacy of language in theatre performance. This, he maintains, will intensify the connections between dramatic reality and 'real' life, and in so doing intensify an audience's consciousness of extratheatrical reality.

Both centre their arguments around the use of language in the theatre and the degree of distance it inserts between actor and audience and between an audience's

relative perceptions of dramatic and 'ordinary' reality. The theatrical alienation devices that Brecht introduces indicate his emphasis on the *analytical distancing* function of language.

These include historicising the dramatic event through narrative techniques, such as monologues and direct address to the audience, separating *scenes by written* titles, songs or newspaper style headlines that comment on the dramatic action; the use of quotation devices to maintain separate identities for actor and character; and the juxtaposition of inconsistent theatrical language conventions. All these serve to *induce a high* degree of language consciousness in his audiences and *foreground* the ways in which dramatic language is functionally different from ordinary language.

Conversely Artaud directs attention away from such theatrical self-consciousness, which like Brecht, he sees as a particular effect of language. He favours replacing language in the theatre with "a kind of unique language somewhere in between language and gesture" (p. 74), "... spatial poetry free from spoken language" (p. 68). But his position is not so extreme as to propose that language *should* vanish altogether from theatre performance. He concedes: "There is no question of abolishing speech in theatre, but of changing its intended purpose, especially to lessen its status" (p. 53).

What this debate suggests is that language and its use in the theatre is a powerful determinant of the relations between audience and performer in its capacity to enlarge or diminish symbolic distance between them. Where the cognitive aspects of language are foregrounded in *its theatrical* usage, the distance between audience and performer is greater; where the expressive function is foregrounded empathetic responses diminish the metaphoric distance between audience and actor, actor and

character. Between these two extremes though, dramatic *language* may be said to exert considerable influence on the kind and quality of the theatrical relationships occurring in a theatre performance. The theatrical function of a *performance is powerfully influenced* by the ways in which the language of the performance is constructed and used.

Orality and Literacy in the Theatre

In language as it operates in theatre performance, it is possible to identify two kinds of language codes in which an audience member receives part of his theatrical understanding. These are spoken language and literary language.

'Reading' the language of a performance 'text' involves both oral and literate cognition. Orality provides the spectator with the means of entering into dramatic reality and thus engaging directly and empathetically with the sensorily apprehended experience of immediate events.

Literacy invokes a different kind of cognitive action, involving the processing of such experience into formalised abstracted spatio-*temporal patterns* which permit reflection about the representativeness of the action, with a resulting capacity to expand the frame of reference beyond the immediate context of the dramatic experience. It also opens the spectator to the possibility of recognising dramatic structures as organisations of experience, and so makes it possible for him to make genre distinctions beyond the immediate constraints of the *temporal present*. The contextuality of specific theatrical events can in this way be widened to accommodate a historical and generic contextuality.

Walter J. Ong's illuminating study of the cultural effects of the shift from orality to literacy (Ong, 1982) offers an analysis of the characteristics of each, which seems pertinent here. For determining what kind of *perception an* audience member may have and how he may make his meaning, seems to involve the question of the degree to which theatrical performance engages oral and literate thought.

Ong defines the difference between orality and literacy as primarily to do with perceptions of time and space. He suggests that the evanescence of sound (in the spoken word) "totally resists a holding action, stabilisation" (p. 32). Written language, on the other hand, "favours immobility". So spoken language characteristically *develops features* that take account of this dynamism - "either the use of devices such as mnemonics or formulae to assist memory and recall, or of physical sensations (gesture particularly) - by *incorporating such features* into its utterances as part of its semantic function." (p. 32)

The effects of literacy on cognition have been identified and described by Whorf, Goody and others (McNeill, 1987, pp. 173-198). Derrick de Kerckhove (1987) in particular offers a dense argument accounting for differences between *oral and literate cognition*. "Literacy" he maintains "brings on a psychological revolution" (p. 2) because "it separates the knower from the known" (p. 9). He supports his argument with neurological and anatomical evidence and goes on to suggest that "early Greek tragedy was no more than a sophisticated system of tension management to pacify an edgy audience subjected to rapid social change brought on by the advent of literacy" (p. 13).

Like Ong, he identifies perceptions of time and space as the critical areas in which change is registered in the

movement from orality to literacy. 'In a culture experiencing *the environmental growth* of literacy, the change of perceptual priorities would require some training, such as was provided ideally by the theatre' (p. 11), because theatre provides a model *for* 'visual space' and 'linear time'.

These two concepts require some explanation. 'Linear time' here refers to the sequencing properties of written language as distinct from the contextual (or space-referential) properties of oral speech. The concept of linear time thus expands rather than contracts contextuality, *making* the past available for incorporation into the present. It is thus possible to discriminate degrees of experiential difference and similarity along a time axis, so that past experience is released into present action. In this way the context of the present is itself intensified.

Visual space refers to the relation between cognitive *organisations* and their manifestation in the spatial organisations in a theatre. De Kerckhove argues that literacy involves the restructuring of 'our principal cognitive strategies' (p. 3) *whereby* 'even when we are confronted with oral speech, we impose a logical grid on the verbal content ... We read other people's words rather than hear their voices' (p. 4).

The analytical and synthesising properties of language are expressed in the theatre in the spatial divisions and arrangements of the theatre space - including both the *theatrical* and the dramatic space. Thus both literate and oral cognition meet in the theatre, and the tension between the two is expressed in the multiple dimensions of theatrical and *dramatic time and space*.

Theatre becomes a model for visual space and linear time because it offers a physical stage space analogous to

mental space *conceived in this way*, in which images are processed sequentially through the organisation of plot and action. Moreover, symbolic action, which is a feature of oral language, occurs in the theatre in a physical space separate from the spectators, so that 'watching someone else speak in a formal setting such as the stage teaches the spectator to separate the symbolical content of the speech *from* its physical manifestation' (pp. 7-8). This allows for contemplation as well as (limited) physical participation, and according to de Kerckhove, promotes 'three-dimensional over two-dimensional representations of space in our mental space' (p. 10).

This gives theatre 'the position of being a "half-way house" between the exclusively oral and the fully literate psychology' (p. 11) in that *meaning emerges* from the symbolic action and the physicality of oral speech, *in a formal spatial organisation* characterised by focus, depth of field, and distance of the perceiver from the perceived. The kind of meaning available from this experience is integrated by a new consciousness in the spectator of causal relationships (evolved through concepts of linear time); of cognitive abstraction from concrete manifestations; of perspective, through physical distancing; and of 'visual access to meanings previously committed to an aural constraint' (p. 12).

The Role (s) of an Audience in a Performance

During a performance the actors speak as himself, as a representative of the author and as an *autonomous* character in the dramatic world. He is simultaneously playing a *social role* (as a social being in a public exchange), a material representation of authorial and/or directorial intention and a character in role. None of these roles is hidden from an audience; all are

accessible to an audience continuously, though one or other is likely to be more prominent at particular moments during the performance.

A theatrical and dramatic contract exists between audience and player which consists in each accepting the material presence of the other throughout the performance. Only in this way can the interpenetration of dramatic and social reality be sustained. An audience does not forget, ignore or suspend their awareness of the actor because of the dramatic character; his physical presence inscribes the character with a social as well as dramatic presence. The audience is thus able to respond in varying degrees to any or all of these roles, from a variety of audience roles. This accounts for the extraordinary range of responses that a performance can produce among its audiences.

This conjunction of dramatic role and actual material presence occurs in an audience as well. *Each member* of an audience will assign to himself a particular kind of participatory role according to the degree to which he is prepared to respond to *any of the actor's roles*. His responsiveness will depend largely on his expectations regarding the function of the performance. He may see his role as 'one of a particular social group' - of friends, of work colleagues, of first-nighters, of theatre cognoscenti, of fun-lovers, or of serious students. The possibilities are endless. But whatever self-defined role he adopts depends on how he sees himself in relation to the whole performance event, and to *each of* the elements within the theatrical structures.

An audience is one of the semiotic systems in the whole network of performance systems, but its relationship to other elements is marked by greater independence than, say, the visual or language systems, though at the same time, all the semiotic systems of the drama require the

presence of the audience to transform them into a theatrical event. An audience performs a mediating function among all the other elements out of which theatrical performance emerge; *their presence is* thus a central focus, yet in a sense the audience stands outside the whole construct.

The network of social, theatrical and dramatic structures which surround an audience collectively operate within the composite elements of individual members of that audience too. *Each audience* member, like each actor, may respond to the event in 'private' non-collective ways. His social role does not exclude areas of personal thought, feeling and behaviour. These will be incorporated into the structure of relationships. Any actor is familiar with the solitary laugher in an audience whose effect on audience and performers alike substantially *alters attitudes to the play.* His response may induce an ad lib response from a confident actor, or shift the focus away from the dramatic events on the stage to the social relations within the audience.

Where an actor has personal habitual mannerisms of speech or gesture an audience is likely to attribute these to *dramatic character.* Equally, personal linguistic connotations by an audience member are likely to be dramatically contextualised, so that his recognition of an actor's speech patterns as 'so like Aunt Mabel' will be 'read' as a deliberate formal dramatic device constructed by the performer to substantiate the character's dramatic reality by referring it to detailed selection from everyday *reality (10).*

Marco de Marinis (1987) identifies two aspects of the relationship between the audience and the whole performance: 'the manipulation of the audience by the performance' and 'an active co-operation by the spectator in the performance' (pp. 101-102), both of which occur simultaneously.

The first relationship arises from the directorial *strategies* which organise the semiotic systems in order to 'induce in each spectator a range of definitive transformations, both intellectual (cognitive) and affective (ideas, *beliefs, emotions, fantasies,* values, etc.)' (p. 102). In other words, the director processes a fairly stable a priori product with which an audience can engage.

The second relationship emerges from this initial process. De Marinis expresses the process in terms of Greimas' theoretical distinctions of 'making-done' (*faire-faire*) and 'making-believed' (faire-croire) rather than 'making-known' (faire-savoir) (p. 106).

These are important *distinctions* to *make* for they involve a recognition of three kinds of active participation in the relationship between audience and performance.

First, 'making' recognises performance as continuously present and incomplete in itself. An audience is necessary before a performance can be said to be existing. So the audience is both a component in the process and a *recipient of the product.*

Second, the idea of 'faire-faire' introduces the concept of action in both a dramatic *and a theatrical context,* ie the 'doing' is not solely a feature of the actors. The performance engages the audience in some kind of 'doing' as well as and as a result of the performance's own 'doing'. The audience's 'doing' consists of making meaning out of the signs of meaning that the performance is constructing. But because the signs may release meanings other than those predetermined and consciously *constructed* by the *performers* during rehearsal and presentation, meaning cannot finally be controlled or predetermined by the performers. Both performers and audience may discover other kinds *of meaning during*

performance because of the audience's presence and action.

Finally, in 'faire-croire' there is a recognition that the activity of theatre reaches beyond itself. The effects of theatre performance extend into the ideological structures of non-theatrical belief. Ideological patterns of behaviour which ordinarily are not perceived as being patterned by cultural, political and economic conditions may be presented for attention in the theatre. What may be held to be normal or 'natural' in everyday life may be recognised as socially constructed because it is contextualised within the theatre's artificially constructed belief system, a system an audience knowingly consents to believe in when they agree to believe in the dramatic world. An audience member is invited, by witnessing the process of constructing and enacting belief in the theatre, to see that ordinary behaviour is constructed in the same way. The more he subscribes to temporary dramatic belief during a performance, the greater the opportunity for him to recognise his extra-theatrical beliefs as 'made belief'. For instance, if an audience member finds a performance of Sophiatown very 'real' and believable, he is likely to be more convinced of the 'truth' of the beliefs of the dramatic characters. If these beliefs are different from those he holds outside the theatre, he will need to account for the differences. He can do this by accepting both as 'true' (believed) in the same terms. Hence by recognising his beliefs as beliefs, he can if he chooses, continue to assert them, or transform them. If however, he does not willingly suspend his disbelief in the dramatic world, he is unlikely to make a connection between himself and the performance, or between the theatrical performance and his 'natural' social relationships.

What is clear from these distinctions is that theatrical and dramatic reality is crucial to the functioning of theatre and that this reality depends profoundly for its construction on both performance and audience, and their relationship.

If this relationship is to be successful, a degree of competence is required from both the performers and the audience. The construction of dramatic reality relies on the performance skills of the actors and the reception skills of the audience. And like language competence (11), performance competence is culturally and ideologically determined. An audience's competence consists in their ability to respond to multiple and *simultaneous* signs and to construct connections among these often contradictory signs. The conceptual *patterns* they construct will ultimately determine the 'meaning' and thus the identity of the *performance for them*. So an audience's function can be described as an integrating and synthesising one. As de *Marinis has noted:*

> *In* the case of theatrical performance there is no doubt that the sensory faculties of the perceiving subject are called on to sustain *an effort*, which for both quantity and quality, there is no equivalent in any other artistic field (p. 106).

Who or what is an audience?

I have argued that the concept of theatre performance *involves* the simultaneous interaction of three elements: performers, [illegible] actions and an audience. The composition of an audience is thus extremely important in creating the meaning of a performance and in describing what a performance might be. But determining who or what comprises an audience is no easy matter and it is made more difficult by the paucity of research undertaken in

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this area and subsequent lack of empirical evidence about audiences.

Theoretically an audience may be seen to consist of:

- a collection of individuals;
- a social formation; and
- a semiotic system interacting within the theatrical structure with other semiotic systems.

The notion of individuality certainly plays a part in the formation of a collective unit called *audience*. As I have indicated previously the possibilities of private, idiosyncratic response are frequently evident in an audience member during a performance. Individual action and reaction is accommodated *within* the flexible relations that sustain any particular performance. But theatre is primarily a *public* and therefore socialised event. It cannot be created solely by an individual. An audience member is not *in the same* relation to a play in performance as a reader is to a play text, a novel or a poem. *Literary reception* theory (Holub, 1984) and reader-response theory (Freund, 1987) is only of limited applicability to the relation between an audience member and the whole theatre event, because of the primary *focus of these* theories on the solitary reader.

Sociological theories provide a more useful approach, in that they place the individual in a context of relational structures between himself and other individuals (Hudson, 1980). And these relations produce changes and modifications within the participating parties. The construction of a group in these terms implies that the characteristics of a group are not necessarily those of its individual elements.

Canetti's analysis of crowds (1962), their formation, actions and disintegration, appears to bear some

connection to the ad hoc gathering of a theatre audience for a form of collective action and its eventual dispersal. Actors appear to function very much as Canetti's 'crowd crystals' do (p. 85). And there is a distinct parallel between the theatrical concept of Aristotle's 'catharsis' (Aristotle, 1940; 1961) and Canetti's 'discharge' (p. 33). But such similarities do not extend into more finely discriminated areas, in spite of the superficial analogy. The identity, function and action of an audience in a theatre is not satisfactorily accounted for by reference to Canetti's crowd theory. Indeed, Canetti himself sees theatre audiences as only *marginally* constructed as crowds. He describes theatre audiences as 'stagnant crowds of a much more passive *kind*' (p. 40) than those at sports meetings, religious gatherings and public executions (sic). The only other crowds which rank for him as more passive than theatre audiences are concert crowds (orchestral, not rock or pop).

What is interesting about his analysis is his account of the factors which prevent crowd formation in a theatre auditorium: the fixity of the theatrical conditions of performance; the persistent awareness of individuality in members of an audience; and the substitution of the actors' voices for a collective audience voice. All these point to the constraints that *do exist on* the theatrical relationships in a performance. An audience is free to respond spontaneously to any *elements of* that performance, but such spontaneity is directed by the predetermined conditions of the rehearsal process. The collective will of an audience may be expressed during a performance but will not (usually) alter the outcome of the dramatic action. There are exceptions though: children's theatre is often partially exempted from these conditions of restraint. Actors will invite audience suggestions as to what to do next, though unless the suggestions correspond to previously planned

outcomes, only the boldest actor will act upon them. Actors tend to be fearful of the 'loss of control' it may produce (though whether theirs or the audience's is never made clear). Perhaps their wariness is indicative of the fine balance that needs to be found in performance between spontaneous behaviour and formal dramatic structure.

Other sociological definitions of audiences imply that an audience is a group with particular identifiable characteristics deriving from quantitative measures such as age, sex, education, geographical location, economic status and so on. This is more useful, but again there are difficulties. For such definitions assume there is a collective purpose that binds all the members together and this may well not be so. A socially uniform group suggests uniformity of circumstance, conformity of purpose and parity of ideological perspective among the members of a group - a perception of themselves as a group. In some ways this may be satisfactory: an audience is in the same place at the same time, witnessing the same event from more or less the same perspective. (Theatrical forms of presentation such as theatre-in-the-round and other alternatives to proscenium arch forms contradict this somewhat). Audience members can generally be said to share the same purpose, 'to go to this production tonight', but the commonness of purpose does not extend very far. Individual members may go 'to celebrate', 'to study', 'to be entertained', 'to be seen there' or for any number of reasons. These may well not be explicitly expressed, least of all in a research survey.

Equally it is likely an audience will share something of a similar ideological perspective: 'it is more important to be at this theatre tonight than to...'. But precise differences in value systems are unlikely to be revealed. It is at this point, where the specificities

of particularity enter, that sociological methods will tend to break down under the sheer number of variables that need to be accommodated.

Another inhibiting factor to a sociological method of identifying *an audience* is that the composition of an audience for the same production on successive evenings is likely to vary to *a more or* less significant degree, depending on other sets of variables beyond the strictly theatrical conditions; *factors such* as the weather, family and social occasions, other cultural events such as television newsbroadcasts, *political speeches*, sports events or social disturbances as well as variable economic factors. A theatre *production is not only* an event, or even a sequential series of a repeated event. Theatre practitioners (including audiences) *acknowledge* the continuous changes in conditions between successive performances of a production. Actors dread second nights; audiences find a special value in the experience of first nights; managements charge different admission prices for different nights of the week and recognise contractually the need to re-rehearse or replace performers at specific times during an extended run.

So any production is both a nightly product and a process during the course of its public presentation. Its stability as a cultural artefact is continuously under pressure from the instability, evanescence and *uncompletedness* that it enacts in its continuous making of itself.

But while all these factors appear to fragment audiences into unassimilable units, t*here* are factors that operate to assemble an audience *with*in a principle of unity. Some of these *are found in the pre*-production elements of the performance process. The initial planning and rehearsal stages of a *production anticipate* an audience's presence. The detailed preparation of design,

lighting, costume, sound effects and actors' performances, as well as the dramatic structure of the play, are all directed towards presenting a coherent and multi-faceted experience for an audience. Directorial choices are made essentially for the anticipated audience, *on its behalf*. Even in its absence an audience impinges on the processes that lead up to presentation. It is the audience, *finally*, that provides the performance with its impetus, its purpose and its identity.

The need for local empirical audience research

The ad hoc constitution of an audience makes it extraordinarily impervious to analysis based on a fixed theoretical model. Because theatre-going *is a* cultural activity that occupies leisure hours it is more flexible and less subject to infra-structural constraints than those activities associated with the work-place. Nor does it formalise its audience's activities in the same way that other social leisure activities do - church or sport attendance, for example. Membership of a formally constituted club, society or organisation is not a prerequisite for theatregoing generally, nor is there any compulsion to attend regularly (except perhaps among students). The informal and apparently unstructured composition of an audience limits the effectiveness of sociological methods of identifying and analysing an audience.

The difficulties in current South African research of this kind are pragmatic as well as theoretical. Evidence from such sociological surveys of local audiences as exist is scant. What there is, too specifically tied to particular theatre institutions to serve as a general model with wide applicability. At the same time the measurements are too few and categorically too wide to yield enough specific information to give a profile of a

generic 'South African audience'. Much more data-gathering will have to be done before sociologists can significantly assist the performance theorist.

Hauptfleisch (1980) has contributed some assistance with his *preliminary* survey of PACT audiences. He has provided a profile of Pretoria and Johannesburg PACT audiences based on the categories of age, occupation and educational status (12). The results are interesting, but cannot be applied with any reliability to, say, the Market Theatre audiences. Until further similar work is done on audiences attending other theatrical institutions, theoretical work remains largely speculative.

I do not believe, though, that it is premature to engage in such theoretical work. Approaching *performance* through focussing on a theoretical or 'ideal' audience can assist the search for data about actual audiences, for neither approach is self-sufficient. Empirical studies are open to a number of criticisms which a theoretical approach can help to counter. One of these criticisms is that empirical approaches in cultural studies tend to 'prove' what is not in doubt and that they raise more questions at the theoretical and methodological level than they answer. As Holub (1984) points out

> the majority of questions that matter in literary scholarship cannot be proved by *empirical* methods - or if they could be 'proved', they would already have been noticed by perceptive students of literature without the statistical detail (p. 40).

There is also the danger, that Steadman (1985) neatly points out, of

> finding what one is looking for rather than looking for what might be found (pvi).

Statistical evidence can and does produce useful information of a particular kind about an audience, but it cannot provide information about the unsocialised aspects of audiences, and this is likely to influence audience responses to a considerable extent. Empirical evidence must not be taken for more than it actually is, any more than it can be dismissed as valueless; nor must its part be mistaken for the whole in performance research. While empirical research remains important, there is little to be gained in waiting for such surveys to become available, for they are likely to confirm speculative theory, where this takes account *of socio*-economic, cultural and political conditions.

Summary

In this chapter *I* have *examined* the concept of audience from a number of perspectives. I have tried to establish ways of *identifying who an* audience might be; what activity an audience engages in when attending a performance; *what kinds of relationships* may be established between audience and a performance; in what ways language is *involved* in the establishment and processes of such relationships; and how language usage in the theatre may be *regarded* as a primary system for making and transforming meaning.

In this chapter I have endeavoured to provide a framework for subsequent analysis of specific plays. The framework has as its key reference points:

1. the notion that theatrical performance requires the presence of an audience; and that neither a written play text nor a production can be examined satisfactorily without reference to an audience, where performance is the subject of the study;

2. the notion that an audience includes a consideration of an audience as `a crowd`, as `a social group' and as `individual members of a group';

3. that language in theatrical performance is a crucial *means of making* and transforming meaning, both within a performance text and among the participants in dramatic and theatrical action;

4. that orality and literacy produce different kinds of cognition and contribute in different ways to the making of cultural *meaning* in South African performances in English.

CHAPTER 2: NOTES

1. Boal proposes a *changed relationship* between actor and audience in this kind of theatre:

> it is necessary to humanise (the spectator), to restore to him his capacity of action in all its fullness. He, too must be a *subject*, an actor on an equal plane with those *generally* accepted as actors, who must also be spectators. All these experiments of a people's theatre have the same objective - the *liberation of* the spectator (p. 155).

2. *This echoes* Steve Gooch who describes 'a theatre which can address the whole of the community on matters *which concern* the whole of the community' (p. 87). Locally Hilary Blecher sees the function of theatre in *similar terms*

> for the dissemination of new cultural and political concepts ... to provide the individual with insights into the actual conditions *of his life* and the environment in which he finds himself (p. 23).

3. cf Particularly Chapter 5:

> drama data can force the analyst to reexamine his taken for granted *assumptions* and provokes powerful and fascinating insights into everyday conversational structures (p. 116).

4. This concept was first used by the *Russian* Formalists. Derrida's concept of 'differance' has much in common with it.

5. Contemporary theory of theatre semiotics can be found in the work of Pavis (1980; 1982; 1985) Bassnett-McGuire (1980; 1985) and Elam (1980), Schmid et al (1984).

6. This phrase is used to describe the way in which language *constructs* a particular reality and simultaneously presents this as reality itself.

7. For example: `If we may assume that Shakespeare had not read Sophocles - and that Hamlet had not read him, at Wittenburg, behind Shakespeare's back...' (Kitto, HDF, 1970, p. 153).

8. `The spectator assumes that the represented world, unless otherwise indicated, will obey the logical and physical laws of his own world'. (*Elam*, 1980, p. 104).

9. For accounts of role , lay theory of Courtenay (1974) and Goffman (1969).

10. A good example of the blurring between actor and dramatic character is given in a review of `Road to Mecca' by McLiam (1984):

> Louis van Niekerk gives his interpretation of Dominie Byleveld a hesitancy of speech which made me wonder whether he was entirely comfortable in the part or whether he was portraying a character who is given more to action than words.

11. The *notion* of language competence was first propounded by Chomsky (1972).

12. cf Appendix A.

CHAPTER 3: THE VESSA IN RELATION TO ENGLISH IN SOUTH AFRICA

> *To* talk language is to talk politics; to talk about the past twenty-five years of English in South Africa is to talk about the present; and to talk about the present *is* to talk about a future South Africa.
>
> (Gardiner, 1986)

In examining contemporary *South African* drama it is necessary to establish who is writing and performing in English, for whom and why. This involves questions as to *how English* is perceived by the VESSA, as well as by other language-determined groups in a multilingual context. The *historical basis for* such perceptions also needs to be taken into account.

Language, particularly language in drama, provides a central site for enacting the socio-political, cultural and economic power *relations* in a society, for it is largely in language that we identify ourselves, our values and our ideological world view; and, moreover, *articulate* these relationships publicly. Drama is a cultural form particularly sensitive to rendering such subtle and delicate *negotiations* of perception. The task of the performance critic as Styan (1987) perceives it is a painstaking one of

> think(ing) like the author, the actor, and the audience, for at such moments all three parties to the play are in conjunction and he must take in the whole of the potential theatre event and embrace every thoughtful *and* sensory sign and indication in order to arrive at what is going on between the stage and its audience. (p. 12)

This view seems particularly pertinent as a model to related disciplines which share an interest in the contemporary *cultural life of* their society. For participation is the central focus of drama and the

possibilities of multiple perception inhere in the process of theatrical production. Performance criticism is pre-eminently to do with registering microcosmically the operations of the society within which performance occurs. The field of performance criticism cannot therefore exclude considerations of those forces operating on the society at large.

In the following sections then, I propose to examine the way in which English is perceived as functioning by two groups of South African English speakers, viz WESSA and ALS. I have chosen this approach because in this way the identity of the perceiver becomes a crucial factor in establishing the effects of English usage. If, as has been suggested, the WESSA is currently suffering a group identity crisis, it may be possible within the paradigms of this study to infer the likely future relations of the WESSA to English in South Africa, as evidenced in contemporary theatrical performances in English.

English is the subject of an intense debate (1) currently occupying WESSA academics and educationalists concerning the function and role of English in South Africa now and in the future. For the WESSA the central question in the debate appears to be to whom does English 'belong'; in whom does authority rest to determine standards of usage? This question has induced a sense of crisis, involving the WESSA in an acute sense of loss of identity which is intimately connected to his sense that the control of English is slipping out of his hands.

English as a Local Lingua Franca

According to the 1980 census (Lanham & MacDonald, 1979) English is the home language of 2,815,640 South Africans out of a total of 24,886,020. Of these 763,220 are WESSAs. English is the dominant home language in only

three districts in the country, viz the Cape Peninsula, the Durban-Pietermaritzburg area and the Witwatersrand. In all districts in South Africa less than 7.5% of the population *has* English as its home language. In contrast, English as a second language is widespread: Schuring's report (1979) *demonstrates* statistically that "English is far more popular than Afrikaans" (p. 60) among Black language speakers; *Hauptfleisch* (1983) shows "that the Afrikaner has a greater predilection for speaking L2" (p. 60) and "a *greater preference* for English as a medium of communication" (p. 61). In a small sample, 49 out of 52 shifts *in language* occurred from Afrikaans to English and as Hauptfleisch points out, "language shift is accompanied by cultural *shift in* almost 70% of cases" (p. 61).

In this context the WESSA is outnumbered by those who speak English but do not categorise themselves nor are categorised as WESSAs. The WESSA perception of English in relation to himself is thus likely to be extremely ambivalent. The popularity of English among other language groups gives him an elite status locally, in that "his" is the language that others aspire to. But these popular aspirations are directed towards contact with British and American culture, the WESSA's relation to which is only marginally closer than theirs. His relation, like theirs, is post-colonial. He may have greater familiarity with these cultures, yet neither *locally* nor internationally do second language speakers depend on him for their contact with these cultures. Because English serves as a means of communication among other language groups in South Africa and not simply between *himself and* them, he finds he has progressively less claim on English as belonging to him. His cultural history, *insofar as he identifies* himself with the cultural traditions of English, is available, without mediation through *him to any second* language speaker of English. He therefore perceives English as functioning,

growing and changing in South Africa independently of his intervention or control. He is in a sense relegated to the sidelines of what used to be his territory.

Language, as I have indicated, is one of the primary means of supplying a personal and social identity. In South Africa, community identity is exclusively determined and legislated by concepts of race and language. The WESSA then faces a future where he can no longer claim an exclusive identity as 'English-speaking', for this is already in the process of being assimilated into a larger group of many speakers of English whose cultural history is not English. The availability of the WESSA's cultural history to all speakers of English effectively undercuts his proprietary claims to his culture, the possession of which is too widespread to denote the particularity of his geographical situation, or of his perceptions of his cultural and political place in the society in which he lives. The WESSA's sense of an identity crisis arises from these conditions. In a post-colonial society such as South Africa, the colonial history of the conquerors proved to be a double-edged sword. And it is to this history one must turn to find the present position of the WESSA and his perceptions of his present and future relations to English.

COLONIAL HISTORY OF ENGLISH (2)

The colonisation of South Africa by Britain, which began with the arrival of the 1820 Settlers and ended with the declaration of the Republic of South Africa in 1961, is characterised by the creation of industrial and commercial educational and class structures developed from the economic needs of Britain and sustained by a philosophy derived from these needs.

1. Industry and Commerce

The need for sources of raw material arose as Britain developed industrially. Growing urban populations, the emergence of a commercial middle class who owned the means of production, and the growing consumerisation of the working class, meant that Britain needed viable economic relations with pre-industrial countries to provide a market, a domicile for some of the population, and a junior trade partner. In these relations it was imperative that Britain should retain control in order to satisfy her needs with minimal pressure to take account of her partner's needs. The undeveloped countries of Africa were ideal for these purposes. So the colonisation process began. Subsidised emigration schemes meant that the first significant group of British settlers in South Africa were urban working or lower middle class. Their arrival post-dated the Dutch Settlers who were numerically stronger but primarily farmers. The pattern for English dominance in urban areas and Afrikaans dominance in rural areas was thus established early on and has remained largely intact today (given the general trend of increasing urbanisation across the board). Britain's political and military control of the Cape Colony and Natal enabled English to become firmly entrenched quite rapidly. In 1822 English was proclaimed the only official language of the Cape Colony. British determination to maintain its political control of the territory was expressed in its language policies, which ensured that the public spheres of activity - education, business, law and entertainment - were dominated by the English language. Dutch resistance was effectively contained in the home and permitted in religious matters.

The discovery of diamonds and subsequently gold intensified and extended this dominance through the influx of Uitlanders into the Transvaal, many of whom were urban

British; the swift development of mining towns; the investing of British capital, as well as that derived from the diamond fields in the gold mining companies; and the building of the Cape and Natal railways to British controlled harbours. All these factors entrenched English as the common means of communication among the different European language groups. The fierce individualism of the Dutch Trekker groups, their numerical weakness in the face of the increasing number of immigrants, and their dependence on agriculture as the means of subsistence meant that, emotionally intense though their resistance was, economically they had few means to make such resistance effective. The Second Anglo-Boer War illustrates just how unequal the power relations between Dutch and English language groups had become. The bitterness that remains as a result of it indicates just how powerfully language provided (and continues to provide) a primary means of identification. In South Africa, at least, it can be justifiably stated that 'language is an intensely sensitive political issue' (Hauptfleisch and Steadman, 1987, p. 3).

During the period of British domination, then, English was the language of industrial and commercial exchange. Dutch was the language of resistance.

With the development of the mining industry, South Africa moved from an agricultural economy towards a fully capitalist economy. To provide minerals for Britain, the demand for cheap urban labour grew. This was effectively supplied by the indigenous peoples. They were brought into urban labour relations through the coercive legislation of tax laws and the infamous migrant labour and contract labour practices.

But the growth of the mines brought commercial interests into play more strongly: the need for artisans, craftsmen, clerks and small service factories became evident.

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Dutch farmers, for whom farming was becoming increasingly difficult, began to be attracted to the burgeoning *mining* towns and brought with them the skills they had learned on their farms. They became involved in small manufacturing enterprises and transport riding companies that serviced the mining companies. Their lack of literacy skills tended to prevent them from finding work in municipal administration, but there are accounts of their involvement in small brick-making yards, bakeries, transport companies and machinery repair shops (Callinicos, 1987, pp. 50-53). Anglicisation policies were easier to enforce in an already predominantly English urban context and the eventual entry of the Afrikaners into the capital market encouraged a greater degree of English language usage among urban Afrikaners than among the rural Afrikaner communities. This is a trend that is still evident today, and is the reason why urbanisation was seen 'as a major threat to the Afrikaner nation' (Lanham and MacDonald, 1979, p. 12).

2. Education

If industrialisation and its *control* by Britain was a major means of transforming English into the local lingua franca, an even *more effective means* was through education, which not only enforced English as a medium of instruction (*thereby ensuring* its wide usage) but provided 'an authentic cultural context for the learning of English' (*Lanham* and MacDonald, p. 14). Most formal teaching was done by English speaking immigrants, who *through their own* education were instilled with British value systems and the culture that expressed these. *Initially* the responsibility for teaching was in the hands of British missionaries and was managed by tying *teaching* to religious evangelising. Later, with the development of formal education structures, professional teachers were brought from England to teach the skills

necessary to the maintenance of British economic and political dominance. Thus early British educational policies promoted functional learning in and of English. The learning of spoken English was seen as the basis of all education, and little else was taught to the indigenous peoples as it was felt to be unnecessary to their 'station in life'. Inevitably acculturation accompanied this learning of functional English. Pupils readily recognised the material benefits that accrued from using English and at the same time absorbed the value system that tied religion to a British way of life. The hegemonic spread of Britain's cultural history, particularly of English literature, was ensured by the association of the English language with literacy. For until compulsory education was introduced, literacy was comparatively rare even among adults and thus a highly prized accomplishment.

3. Class Awareness

British settlers came from a society accustomed to distinctions of social status based on economic relations to the means of production. British society had been highly stratified since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. In a monolingual country such distinctions remained clear-cut. But multilinguality in South Africa brought other factors to bear much more directly on these concepts of class. South African society, from the earliest days of colonisation, tended to be characterised by distinctions of language rather *than those of class, for two reasons. Early English* settlers were drawn from a relatively homogeneous class because of the organised emigration schemes arranged by the British government; and capital power was not as tied to a particular class as it was in Britain, which had monolithic class structures support . by a lengthy history. The possibilities of acquiring capital in the

new mining towns did not depend in the same way on forging connections with those already in possession of capital. Fortunes could be made with minimal capital investment; entrepreneurship could turn a small manufacturing concern into a vastly profitable one as demand for services often exceeded supply. The visible possession of money was likely to be a stronger determinant of social prestige than considerations of class. The ability to engage in the acquisition of wealth in an urban environment presupposed a certain degree of exposure to education, however, so that English was likely to accompany a rise in social status. Thus either through money or education, or both, 'English-speaking' became an indicator of social prestige. Culturally, the prestige of English was high because it implied familiarity with wider structures of influence than local ones. As local economic power devolved ever more visibly on the Randlords who owned the mining companies, so their social dominance grew and perceptions of status became standardised against their language and cultural affiliations. English was seen as the language of local and British power and the cultural traditions of English gained supremacy as the dominant culture. In this way perceptions of identity came to be sited predominantly in the mother tongue of the speaker, with the WESSAs acquiring greater social status because of their more immediate connection to English, as well as because of its local dominance functionally, culturally and politically.

POST-COLONIAL SOUTH AFRICAN ENGLISH

With the declaration of Union and the progressive detachment of South Africa from British influence, it might be expected that English's influence would begin to decline or that its status would lessen. But this has not been so. The success of the colonisation process allowed the language colonisation of English to continue independently of British economic and political dominance. But this hegemonic spread has not gone unchallenged. From 1910 until 1961 the 'taalstryd' between the two official languages flared into open conflict with the rise of organised Afrikaner nationalism. The Afrikaners' success in resisting the military force of Britain in the second Anglo Boer War and their subsequent political success in negotiating a degree of independence from Britain, engendered a powerful sense of Afrikaner identity, symbolised by official recognition of their new language, Afrikaans. Growing confidence in their political capabilities and greater control of political policy gave the Afrikaners the means to protect and extend the use of Afrikaans through legislation. Afrikaans now formally carried equal status to English as one of the two official languages. The WESSAs, on the other hand, were beginning to lose their immediate connection to Britain. Many were now second or third generation colonial families whose local financial interests no longer entirely depended on Britain. Loyalty to Britain was still strong, though many were critical of the savage military strategies Britain had adopted in the last stages of the war to try to subdue the rebellious Boers. Such loyalty though was tempered by pragmatic considerations. Urbanisation had brought WESSAs into closer contact with Afrikaners who themselves were to some degree anglicised. Union of the provinces enabled the WESSAs to conceive of an English-based identity which was no longer entirely British. Confidence in the historical prestige of English in

South Africa and its international status culturally and commercially, tended to allow the WESSA a degree of tolerant complacency towards the emergence of Afrikaans.

But when Afrikaner Nationalists gained political power in 1948 it became evident that language would be a decisive factor in the struggle to determine power relations between the two groups. The WESSAs largely controlled the economic power, while the Afrikaner now held political power. This uneasy balance of power directed the struggle for dominance into the language arena. The aggressive nationalism of Afrikaans was now pitted against the cultural weight of English and its history of cultural colonisation.

The 'victory' appears to be going to English, but in terms of the WESSAs this may be Pyrrhic indeed. For the price of English as a lingua franca and as the provider of a dominant cultural history in South Africa may well be the loss of a distinctive identity for the WESSA within the language-determined social structures of his society.

The Division of WESSA Identity from English

One of the strategies the WESSA has adopted to deal with his anomalous position regarding English in its relation to the historical struggle for economic and political dominance is to seek to broaden the base of his identity. This involves the idea of uniting with other language groups opposed to Afrikaans and Afrikaner ideology, and of making political and economic alliances other than those of his colonial history. But even these manoeuvres involve him in questions of language and the powerful cultural history of English both helps and hinders him.

Alliances with Afrikaner capital have arisen from common economic interest. Both groups participate in the economic structures of power in ways that ensure their capitalist ascendancy. So strong are these bonds of economic necessity that they operate across the political and language divisions, though English remains the language of economics. But this economic (and thus class based) alliance emphasises the WESSA's position as beneficiary of the effects of apartheid and makes the alliance a somewhat guilty affair on both sides. For the Afrikaner it tends to make language disloyalty emerge as an issue; for the WESSA the association of economic power with political power renders him open to the charge of supporting Afrikaner nationalism and the ideology on which it is based. His economic activities in promoting capitalism are interpreted as veiled apartheid trying to render itself acceptable by appearing in English.

In an attempt to escape the effects of his historical role as the colonial oppressor the WESSA has attempted to identify himself politically with the aspirations of post colonial Black South Africans. It is here that *English and its colonial and cultural history exert a* significant influence on his capacity to strengthen these ties by reinforcing the traditional opposition between English and Afrikaans. With the reversal of political power the WESSA was able to establish English as the language of official political opposition, in the same way that Afrikaans, during British colonial rule had been the language of resistance. Because of the acculturation that had occurred during Britain's colonial dominance, this move was greatly assisted by Black second language English speakers, particularly urban educated Blacks. English had already become a means of unifying various Black language speakers in common cause against their new oppressors, the Afrikaners, so the WESSA found a place readily enough

among the ranks of the politically disenfranchised. With the growth during the *Seventies* of Black Consciousness, however, this membership in an oppositional language community was seriously questioned and rejected. Attempts to topple English as a local *lingua franca* proved unsuccessful (3), but for the first time the WESSA became aware of the possibility that his identity could be divided from his language, and that as a result of such a division control of his language did not by right of usage reside in him. The Black Consciousness movement pointed to his race-based alliances with Afrikaner oppression and rejected his claim to language-based differences between WESSA and Afrikaner. The WESSA found himself trapped between growing Black race consciousness induced by race-based political exclusion on the one hand; and on the other by the continuous Afrikaner emphasis on language consciousness.

The WESSA had to engage in a radical reassessment of his sense of identity and status. He needed to create a new set of relations for himself within the spectrum of South African society, in which his claim to a specific identity was founded on parameters other than language and race.

THE DILEMMA OF THE WESSA IN THE EIGHTIES

If the WESSA is to find a new identity, his relationship to English will necessarily have to shift considerably. But the nature of this change is difficult to predict. Some options as to the kind of identity he would prefer and the way in which such identity would be received by other South Africans are beginning to become recognisable.

One such option is that expressed by Guy Butler (1985). According to his view the new WESSA will grow from `two among the many good things which the British brought to South Africa ... first the democratic tradition, and second the English language. These are deep in the WESSA's birthright and tradition, and are open to all South Africans' (p. 172). The implications of this option bear some scrutiny.

In referring back to the historical processes from which the WESSA's current position emerged, Butler recognises the cogency of making sense of the present by appealing to the past. The effects of the past reverberate within the present and impinge on the future, and so cannot be dismissed by an act of will or intellect. As Butler points out, `There is no short cut to identity. New identities are *the gift of long* and complex processes' (p. 172). But in accepting historical causality one needs also to be aware that the past is accessible only through accounts of it. The attitudes and values we ascribe to past events are equally a legacy of the particular perspectives of the writers of history. In the case of South African history, events of British colonial rule are offered to us *through the eyes of* the past rulers and supported by present ones. Until recently *alternative* views were not available. There is a danger of confusing the events of history with the perspective from which these events were viewed and of failing to distinguish the ideological bias operating on the present reader of history and within the recorders of history. This is a confusion in which Butler appears to have become lost. `The democratic tradition' is precisely one *such ideological myth* of which we are the inheritors. It is a peculiarly British legacy, but it is a feature of belief rather than of actuality. Butler is conveniently vague about the practices denoted by `the democratic tradition'; he asserts its presence generally in `some system that will reflect the citizens' opinions

in both national and regional or cultural matters' (p. 173). It is as difficult to find such a system operating in present day South Africa as it is to find it in British colonial history, except in its potency as a collective WESSA belief.

The characteristics of such a belief system are, according to Butler, 'anti-sectional, liberal and hospitable to all languages and races' (p. 171). This is not fundamentally different from the liberal paternalism of colonial British historical attitudes *and reveals* just how deeply inscribed in present WESSA attitudes are the myths of the selective history of his dominant ancestors. *WESSAs such as Butler appear* still to cherish a belief in the innate superiority of their language and their belief systems and sustain their beliefs by *referring back to 'tradition'*. Little seems to have changed here other than the terminology. The WESSA's position is still defined for him by reference to his *traditional* domination.

Ndebele (1987) has already challenged this liberal generosity by describing it as 'a permissive attitude that goes hand-in-hand with the prescription of standards. Let us call it a prescriptive open-mindedness' (p. 4). This option does little either to promote a new WESSA identity or to provide a genuine basis for a new relation between WESSAs and English. It continues to assert the position of a privileged minority for the WESSA's societal relationships and seeks to retain control of English in his hands. Its only difference lies in the substitution of race demarcations with a 'democratic' assertion of the supremacy of English culture. The ideological supremacy of English over other languages in South Africa remains unquestioned.

A second option that has been offered is that of substituting ideas of nation and culture for race and

language as the parameters for determining identity. Stephan Gray (1982) has urged a re-evaluation of English as `only one of the counters for idea-trading' (p. 14) in literature. He argues

> Although we may appreciate and admire the global manifestations of English and be aware of how very far English does take us around the world, a purist approach that stresses the universal generalness of English can be very flattening; there is such a thing as language imperialism which, because of its insistence on the common denominators, tends to screen out what are often the strengths of literature itself, the regional variations. The Southern African cultural world is multi-lingual, its people polyglot. This is our daily experience (p. 14).

He sees literary history in South Africa as `a cultural battle for supremacies' (p. 6) with the result in the early eighties that `the language groups each fight their own battles, seeing them as attempts to achieve independent *maturities*' (p. 6). From this he concludes that

> South Africa cannot as yet be said to have developed a literary consciousness (p. 6)

and leads him to make this plea:

> that the interrelatedness of language and of all literature be paid special attention and English learns once again to see itself in relation to other disciplines (p. 15).

Five years later Dalrymple (1987) picked up this theme of South Africanisation when she challenged the special status of English culture in drama studies.

> The cultural history of the English ruling class is the heritage of English speaking South Africans and in a clear case of colonial dependency we have clung to this heritage with great tenacity and imposed it on the indigenous population. Supported by a notion of universalism we have been able to genuinely believe in the importance of the nurturance and transmission of this cultural heritage. (p. 27)

For her, as for Gray, national identity, language and culture are inextricably bound together and the identity crisis of the WESSA arises because

> we have jumped over and greatly prejudiced the culture and history of our own land and peoples in our definitions of cultural history. (p. 27)

Dalrymple carries the South Africanisation debate further by examining the implications of retaining identity through waging a cultural struggle among ethnic groups in South Africa. She sees the need to fight such cultural battles on behalf of identity as an inevitable result of the separations engendered by apartheid. The WESSA's 'struggle for cultural dominance has been particularly important and effective in replicating Apartheid', she maintains, for in this struggle language 'is fostered to keep the distinction between ethnic groups very apparent' (p. 29).

Thus the WESSA is caught between two contradictory impulses: his historical tradition of cultural dominance, reinforced by current language apartheid on the one hand; on the other, an urgent need to expand his cultural history and thus his identity by cultural interchange, using English as the means of doing so. It is through the latter that he can hope to develop an alternative identity to that which his history has made for him. He cannot ignore or change his history, but he can discover other ways of seeing it, if he can learn by exposure to those who view it differently.

This option seems to be the only viable solution to establishing a new South African identity which has a firm basis in a revitalised WESSA cultural tradition. The process of extending such a tradition is fraught with difficulties and will require the most delicate poise. Too much insistence on promoting English as the language of cultural diversity will drive him back

towards a position of asserting the superiority of English culture; too little resistance to divisive language policies will ensure his cultural isolation as the inheritor of a historically rich but stultified culture of his own.

How to set about such a move remains the critical question for the WESSA in search of a new identity. Strongly articulated resistance to the formal operations of apartheid can go far in demolishing the racial divisions that these enforce, and go some way towards preparing the ground for positive steps by the WESSA to find what his contribution to a South African identity might be. The 'special status' that race confers on him can be as well demolished by legislation as it has been enforced. But language and culture are not so susceptible to such simple legislative solutions and it is here that changes to the WESSA identity will be determined. The willingness to be South African rather than WESSA, and to be perceived as such, is already a matter of record, as is the degree to which the WESSA's perception of himself disclaims special reference to his culture as an 'own affair'. Lanham's research (Lanham and *MacDonald, 1979*) leads *him to infer that*

> English language-group identity among Whites is a composite phenomenon. In terms of a widespread and coherent group consciousness, there are no English South Africans (p. 31).

The process of South Africanisation of the WESSA appears to be under way, at least as far as WESSA consciousness is concerned. Perhaps the WESSA identity crisis may be interpreted as symptomatic of the preliminary stages of a real and visible change, though there are many obstacles in the path from a WESSA identity towards participation in a fully South African identity.

The Conditions for Transforming WESSA into South African

For the WESSA membership in a fully representative South African national identity would entail a conscious realignment of his traditional attitudes to English. Such a nationalism would imply cultural diversity, with multilingualism as a feature of its practices. This presents the WESSA with a pragmatic difficulty associated particularly with him. Because of the popularity of English among second language speakers the WESSA tends to be less proficient in other South African languages than other language groups are in English and considerably more WESSAs are monolingual than any other group. Their ability to assimilate into a wider cultural mixing is circumscribed by their relative lack of proficiency in languages other than English. This, together with the relatively wide use of English as the language of cultural expression, reinforces the WESSA's dependence on English for his cross-cultural experience, thus creating a language consciousness in him which may well retard a more democratic attitude to English. Willingness to assimilate may well be counterbalanced by pressure from other English speakers who value English as a cultural vehicle.

One effect of encouraging the use of English as a multicultural language and refraining from prescriptive attitudes to such use, would be a tremendous expansion of the vocabulary, syntactical structures and idioms available to the native English speaker. English could revitalise itself without trespassing across the fine line which separates language assimilation from language colonisation. Areas of usage and thus areas of experience previously inaccessible to the English speaker would become available to him, enlarging the possibilities of participatory exchange and strengthening consciousness of a fuller range of meaning attaching to `South African'. By blurring language barriers in this way, the

routes from English to other local languages become more familiar and thus less problematic to travel. The English speaker's willingness may be assisted by the opportunities to explore the previously clearly demarcated areas between languages with greater confidence. This would provide a welcome means of escaping his cultural entrapment in monolingualism and allow him more actively to pursue an alternative multilingualism.

But the choice of English as the language of South African culture would not rest with the WESSA, but would be determined by the cultural workers themselves - the dramatists, performers, poets and novelists - according to the specific demands of their subject, the cultural medium, their audience, and their own needs. This kind of cultural as well as functional use of English appears to be developing quite strongly already through blurring the edges of separate South African languages. If a SAE can become the cultural and functional standard of WESSA work, it is likely that a far greater flexibility of usage will become acceptable to him and the pressure on the WESSA as cultural custodian of English will gradually slacken. He will be able to resign from his self-appointed role as the watchdog of general standards and apply his energies to a more specific area of usage which will serve his perspectives best.

For a English is to become sufficiently flexible to express the range of all the experiences that constitute a South African consciousness, he will be able to determine only the kind of English in which his cultural values are best expressed. The way to achieve this sharpened focus is by vigorously producing cultural artefacts, such as plays, which derive from his specific consciousness of what he perceives his conditions to be, and to find the language that describes it. Resting on a *generalised* international English culture will not assure him of the means to embody his own experience in

English, nor will it provide a solid base for participatory exchange within the amalgam of a multicultural society, nor assist him in discovering in what precisely his own contribution consists. Hence it is vital that the WESSA applies himself energetically to the task of making cultural work which renders his experience known to himself and to other South Africans. It is only in the making that he can create and own a particular cultural identity within the framework of a South African context. Because of this it is imperative that an active, independent, articulate and socially sensitive literary and theatrical tradition be developed and cherished as part of the process of redefining the terms and conditions that will determine the nature of his new South African identity.

Three other obstacles lie in the path of enlarging WESSA identity towards a South African identity. These arise from contemporary concepts of Africanisation and nationalism, and from the search for a common denominator within the multicultural experience of South Africa that might serve to unify such diversity under a common South African identity.

1. Africanisation

The concept of Africanisation presently is a dangerously ambiguous one. Originating in the attempt by Black South Africans to reclaim a cultural past and a connection to the rest of Africa, it has inevitably become a rallying *point for people politically dispossessed and rendered* voiceless by the forcible imposition of a foreign Eurocentric culture by European rulers.

But Africanisation has become associated with the coercive strategies of apartheid. The appropriation of Africanisation by apartheid's legislators is an attempt

to restrict the cultural and social mobility of all ethnic groups. Apartheid education manipulates African aspirations to recover and express their cultural heritage and connections, by enforcing separateness and so limiting the audience for such expression at the same time as restricting access to Western culture as far as possible. All too familiar legislation regarding 'own affairs' 'independant homelands' (more recently 'national states'), 'group areas' and 'national education', and language laws are all aspects of this race-based divide-and-rule strategy which effectively makes Africanisation a means of ensuring the hegemonic control of power by the racial minority.

Africanisation ('back to beshu thinking' as Dalrymple describes it: 1987, p. 30) is eyed with deep suspicion by nearly all South Africans for it may mean the real aspirations of Africans, or it may indicate the manipulation of such aspirations. The contexts for its meaning vary according to the political perspectives from which it is viewed.

The idea of Africanisation though, taken beyond such immediate contexts, is no more threatening than the idea of international English: both acknowledge a wider context for South Africa than the *geographic borders of* the country. In both cases the recognition and establishing of connections extra-territorially is a necessary accomplishment. But *establishing such connections* depends to a large extent on the creation of an inclusive national character through which such connections may be entered into.

Like English's internationality, Africanisation presents the likelihood of the 'flattening' effects of universalism. But, as with English, such effects can be overcome by a rigorous attention to those features of localised societal relationships which are peculiar to our region.

Again, the need to perceive our own conditions acutely will determine the nature of our contact. The more fully developed and articulated our sense of national identity, the greater our capacity to enter the dialectics of pan-African and international relations. Cultural expression in languages available to other nations is important; but learning what we have to say may only be possible in exclusively regionalised forms of language.

2. Nationalism

Regarding the concept of nationalism, much the same ambiguity pertains because of the racial definitions that determine identity in South Africa. Black and white racial differentiations have narrowed the definition of national. As has been shown, 'national' has been appropriated by both Afrikaner and Black African in the current struggle for the decisive control of power. For the WESSA both kinds of national identity partially exclude him, or but marginally acknowledge his presence. For the Afrikaner, nationalism is the myth that sustains the supremacy of white; for the Black South African it is the hope of healing the rift created by enforced ethnic divisions, of establishing unity among Black groups. So nationalism on the one hand expresses an elitist minority superiority; on the other it is an assertion of popular majority-based unity. Each is a limited concept, though African nationalism is numerically a more accurate indicator. Yet even this tends to exclude the WESSA by virtue of his racial and political position. Dalrymple suggests that present conditions prevent the emergence of any meaningful idea of national identity.

> The only sense of identity that we have successfully achieved in South Africa is a community identity because of separations and divisions in the society. There is very little sense of either a national identity or

> a class identity. A national identity, where the "culture of civilisation" is generally accepted, is a basic requirement for the successful functioning of capitalism or socialism (1987, p. 27).

The idea of nationalism at present appears to be a major obstacle to the achievement of a non-sectional South African identity because of the impossibility of escaping the ideological struggle that the concept implies.

3. Characteristics of a collective identity

The last difficulty facing the WESSA in relation to a really representative South African nationalism concerns discovering what identifying features might characterise such an identity. Within the divisive political structures and the inevitable fragmentations of the society they have produced, it is difficult to envisage real and lasting features at all. Sheila Roberts (1980), however, discerns a collective feature of South African drama of the seventies. She describes 'those meanings and effects that strike (her) as specifically South African and not universal at all' in this way:

> one such meaning is the physical and psychological dispossession of the individual; one of the effects of bilingualism and multilingualism in which South African plays are written is the sense that all South Africans, regardless of dialect and skin colour, are experiencing this dispossession (p. 135).

This sombre perception may well be the only common feature of the social and psychological experiences of South Africans, which Roberts characterises as 'situations of loss of identity, loss of freedom, bodily reduction and nullity' (p. 139). Certainly the effects of independently experiencing legalised isolation are likely to be profoundly negative. Yet Roberts surmises

that a positive movement is arising from this dispossession and suggests that

> it is revelatory of an increasingly integrated sense of being South African felt by all "racial" groups accompanied by a proportionate sense of forced estrangement from the power structure (p. 139).

Whether or not this is simply speculative wishful thinking, it nevertheless casts some light on the way in which cultural activity may be the precursor of new directions in social relations. If South African drama displays this trend it is a hopeful sign indeed. There are indications, too, in research that points to the willingness of all language groups in varying degrees to speak the language of others. Perhaps there is sufficient ground for a tentative optimism that multiculturalism and multilingualism may be accommodated within a national identity. It remains to be seen whether varieties of South African English will provide the ground for this to happen, and whether the WESSA can let go of his language in order that it may develop the kind of flexibility that such multiple demands upon it will make.

For the WESSA then, the question of identity in relation to English may simply be a question of readjustment of attitude rather than of abandoning or denying the potency of English. For its ability to provide a means of integrating diverse cultural experience seems already to have considerable support from second language speakers of English. For the WESSA perhaps it is a matter of transforming his sense of language dispossession into a sense of discovering 'his' English among many equally valuable South African Englishes. If he can do this the move away from WESSA identity will be rendered easier, in that his identity will emerge from his relation to English - *not* <u>*that*</u> *he speaks English*, but <u>*how*</u> *he* uses it; and most urgently, what he discovers he has to say that cannot be said by anyone else, in any other kind of English.

2. WESSAS AS AUDIENCE

The association of English in South Africa with education among speakers of English as a second language suggests that the use of English and literacy go hand in hand in South Africa. So it may be inferred that theatre goers in Johannesburg are all to some degree members of a literate culture, characterised by some degree of competence in the reading of English. While theatre performance in South Africa demonstrates strongly the features of orality described by Ong (1982), the reception of such orality is mediated by an audience and performers conditioned by literacy in English.

The implications of Ong's orality-literacy analysis for a study of a South African audience are difficult to assess. For if, as seems likely, Johannesburg audiences are by and large literate, urban and English speaking, orality and literacy must be set within a complex of other factors, some of *which may be specific* to Johannesburg, some to post-colonial African societies and some to cultures still living 'the trauma of early literacy' (p. 15). Added to this, apartheid policies *have their effects in* the indigenous English drama of urban South Africa - in the subject matter of the plays, the composition of the audiences and the incorporation of traditional African orality into a dominant European cultural tradition. Regarding the effect on a white, English-speaking member of a Johannesburg audience at, for example, the Market Theatre, it may be possible to posit that he is currently attempting to move in an opposite direction from those Africans engaged in moving from early to established literacy. There are indications that the WESSA may be beginning to seek consciously for ways of re-engaging his orality and that his exposure to indigenous drama in English is providing a means to do this. This search may be identified in its crudest form by the admiration and often uncritical acclaim

accorded by the WESSA to what he describes as 'authentic' contemporary African experience that plays are claimed to contain. At an academic level it may be evidenced by the upsurge of interest in orality and local oral cultures whose traditions are still accessible for study. If as de Kerckhove claims, 'African drama and literature are rent with themes of dislocation and destruction' (p. 15) as Africans find themselves increasingly separated from their traditional oral cultures with the advent of literacy, it may be equally true that Europeans in Africa are responding to the growing sense of value attached to orality by seeking vicariously to recover their own oral past (which is virtually irrecoverable) through the more recent oral past of other local cultures. Where literacy may be historically 'new' for many urban Africans and orality still recoverable by *family history*, as well as through the continued illiteracy of many rural Africans, for the WESSA, orality lies too many generations back to be directly recoverable. *Literacy is too deeply* ingrained in the cognitive processes to make its recovery anything but a slow, vague apprehension of what has been lost. *Certainly the WESSA's* tendency to nostalgia is no longer served by recollections of his recent colonial history (4).

The WESSA's participation in colonial and linguistic domination, with its resulting elitism, has turned against the colonisers. The WESSA finds himself now no longer the sole owner of English; at the same time the history of oppression which his language carries, effectively excludes him from access to other language cultures, and particularly to the oral-based cultures which were the subjects of English's cultural oppression. The high status accorded to English in South Africa and the success with which it has been promulgated as the language of international contact, of commerce, and of Western culture, has effectively

trapped native English speakers in South Africa in their own language at the same time as it has removed *their* proprietary rights to it.

Within the linguistic history of English, written forms have come to dominate spoken forms. Until the advent of visual mass media such as film and television, written and particularly printed forms of English supplied the major means of social communication among differentiated groups of English speakers. Distinctions of class and geography with their accompanying variations in spoken English, could be overcome through standardised written forms of English.

But while this may have been the case for native speakers of English, it has not been so for users of English as a second language in South Africa. Because of their more limited competence in written English, there is a more marked difference between spoken and written forms of English in their usage, with a greater reliance on spoken forms. Innovative forms of spoken English are more likely to emerge from second language English users in South Africa than from WESSAs. This is partly because for second language English speakers, *spoken English* competes with alternative expression in other languages. For the WESSA, spoken English is likely to be the only form, or one of only a few, because of English's cultural *dominance in South Africa*.

This suggests that the development of English in South Africa - new idioms and the modification of spoken English - occurs largely as a result of pressures exerted on English by other vernacular languages. The WESSA thus cannot contribute significantly to the development of 'his' language and appears to exert a conservative influence on English in South Africa because he is conditioned strongly by his language's cultural conquest (5).

Within that cultural dominance, too, he is constrained by his literate competence in English, which makes English's orality subject to literate cognition. It *seems* to be the case that the greater the WESSA's competence in English (which will be measured predominantly by his literate competence) the greater the degree of his isolation from the orality of his own language and from the orality of the other available cultures that still have access to their oral histories.

It can be inferred from this that the performance of indigenous plays in English in South Africa has a special significance for the WESSA in that these plays fulfil a function for him that they do not for other language communities. In a sense they provide a means of learning his own language's orality and/or countering the pressure of written English as a criterion for his language usage. It is clear from the popularity of plays such as Paul Slabolepszy's Saturday Night at the Palace (1985) and Making like America (unpublished) that the WESSA delights in identifying himself with a WESSA image that stresses a vernacular English usage that is largely independent of traditional literate *English*. *Marius* Weyers' success in the role of Cowboy in Making like America for example, may be attributed to his identity as a bilingual *Afrikaner as well as to the character's* verbal facility which was independent of his literate ability.

Equally, the continuing success of plays in English by Black writers and performers - such as Woza Albert (Mtwa *et al*, 1983) and Bopha (unpublished)-suggests that the WESSA is extending his tentative move towards accepting greater orality in English towards a genuine curiosity about other cultures. English thus provides him with a means of registering orality more generally. It also allows him to register and respond to the changes in oral English that are occurring, and thus goes some way

towards discovering and participating in the development of his own language. An analysis of the effects on the WESSA of English usage by African languages speakers is offered elsewhere, *for it is a complex matter*. But it can be asserted here that evidence of audience attendance at theatres in Johannesburg points to a strong WESSA presence. His presence is proportionally most marked at productions of 'traditional' English plays such as Charley's Aunt. These are not however within the scope of this dissertation. While he is proportionally *less evident* at indigenous plays, the increasing popularity of such plays and their venues suggests that numerically he may well be represented there more strongly. Though figures are not available, it is likely that at theatres such as the Market, the WESSAs are still the predominant group among the audiences. This can be argued on the basis of the cultural predisposition *the WESSA* has inherited from his cultural history to regard theatre-going as a middle class, urban leisure activity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3: ENGLISH IN RELATION TO VESSAS

1. cf. for example the proceedings of the Silver Jubilee Conference (EASA, 1988).

2. Information for this section is derived from Lanham and MacDonald (1979); Callinicos (1982; 1987); van Onselen (1982); Omar-Cooper (1987); NECC (1987); Cape Action League (1987).

3. For example, Steve Biko saw the predominance of English in education as helping `in the development of an inferiority complex (in the black man)'. For him the need for a common language among ALSs outweighed other considerations. In spite of English's negative psychological and sociological effects on Black Consciousness aspirations, he concluded `I am not complaining about the language' (Arnold, Millard W., Steve Biko: No Fears Expressed, p. 102).

4. The Fantastical History of a Useless Man (Junction Avenue Theatre Company, 1978) demonstrates the unhelpfulness of VESSA history in the contemporary VESSA's search for identity.

5. cf. for eg. the aims of the English Academy of Southern Africa. Appendix C.

CHAPTER 4: SOUTH AFRICAN WESSA DRAMA

Of all the young contemporary WESSA playwrights Paul Slabolepszy is probably the most prolific (1). As one newspaper reviewer (Dean, 1987) asserts

> Six full length plays in less than ten years, plus a couple of one-acters, and two more for television put Slabolepszy in the ranks of the serious dramatist.

His plays are popular as well as commercially successful and Saturday Night at the Palace (SNAP) has won a number of awards (2). It has also been performed outside South Africa and attracted some critical attention at the Edinburgh Festival, in London, Germany and Sweden (3). An analysis of his work is valuable in identifying current WESSA perceptions of themselves and their relationship to a communal South African identity.

The dramatic worlds Slabolepszy constructs in his plays within a genre of social realism implicitly enact the socio-political, economic and cultural perceptions of a very particular stratum of WESSA consciousness. Equally audience reception of his productions which have been presented at the Market Theatre suggests that Slabolepszy's perceptions are shared by the theatre going WESSA public.

In the following analysis of SNAP I propose focusing on the ways in which the dramatic dialogue presents evidence of entrapment in isolation for the WESSA dramatic characters. I shall argue that the effects of apartheid on WESSA ideology are present in the dramatic world and that the play accurately reflects WESSA ideology in its reproduction of the practices of this

ideology of dominance. I shall further argue that the isolation that the dramatic WESSA representatives both suffer from and continue to support, arises from an ideology which asserts a traditional, conservative, monolithic value system in an attempt to resist encroachments on WESSA dominance and privilege.

Slabolepszy's plays have an important cultural function in that they accurately render the unease and conflicts within the whole WESSA group. Class divisions as well as the wider race consciousness that operate on the WESSA appear to play a part in making it difficult for the WESSA to identify himself unambiguously. And the ambivalence with which class and race categories overlap and contest for supremacy are evident in these plays. So my analysis is less concerned with dramatic and theatrical aesthetics than it is with the cultural function of this play as a source of contemporary cultural material that assists in identifying WESSA perceptions of actual conditions as they are experienced by him.

Slabolepszy claims not to be interested in politics (interview, 1986). But this disclaimer is not supported by the dramatic genre in which he works. His dramatic world is populated by characters whose attitudes and actions arise from the particular political conditions that exist in South Africa and the pressures on them are at least as political as they are economic or cultural. While the plays do not deal with overtly political subjects they do register the effects of political ideology and the hegemonic infiltration of dominant ideology into the social exchanges that occur in the plays.

It seems that what Slabolepszy's disclaimer implies is an evasion of consciously examining his own ideological stance; and in this I believe he does represent WESSA ideology in action and so speaks in his plays for those WESSAs that attend his plays with such enthusiasm. His

skills as a playwright enable him to articulate very precisely the unconscious assumptions on which WESSA perceptions are built. It must thus be the work of the researcher to draw out from the dramatic material those implicit assumptions that playwright and audience share.

For Slabolepszy is not, I think, wrong when he claims:

> I know the people. I write about them. I am one of them. I know their voice. (Interview, 1986).

The concept of `the people' here is not as problematic as it superficially appears. The constraints of separation in South Africa *limit self identification* to particularly narrow and specific areas, which are demarcated often in conflicting ways, by race, class and geographic *location* as well as language. Thus, though one can talk of `the people' in South Africa, definitions of the term are likely to be extremely *circumscribed*. In Slabolepszy's case, reference to his personal history helps to clarify whose voice he represents.

`I grew up in the Platteland. The Northern Transvaal' he told me (Interview, 1986). Born in Bolton he came to South Africa at the age of three. `He grew up in small towns on the Platteland, matriculating in Pietersburg' (programme notes, 1988). He graduated with a B.A. degree from the University of Cape Town in 1971. Within the parameters of first language South African English speakers, his exposure to rural as well as urban conditions, his geographical shifts between Cape Town and (currently) Johannesburg and his educational background, make his social profile as wide perhaps as it is possible to be within South African political race and language divisions. It may be with some justification that he presents himself as the voice of a generic WESSA which includes more specific class divisions.

But this predominant ideological consciousness is, I shall argue, that of the educated urban middle class WESSA. Rai in spite of his presentation of characters of socio-economically lower class, the perspective from which they are viewed is arguably ideologically that of the educated, urban middle class WESSA, which distances itself from the artisan and working classes that might otherwise be included in the racial and language categories of WESSA.

GATURDAY NIGHT AT THE PALACE

SWAP was first performed Upstairs at the Market Theatre on the 6 May, 1982. It has subsequently been performed at the Old Vic in London as well as in Sweden and Germany. The text was published in 1985 and has been translated into German (under the title Aikona Bose). More recently the play has been adapted into a film. In 1983 Paul *Slabolepszy* won the Amstel Playwright of the Year award for the script.

Briefly, the plot concerns the arrival of two men, Vince and Forsie, at a roadhouse, Rocco's Burger Palace, where the third man, a Zulu referred to as September, is clearing up preparatory to leaving work. It is late at night and September is due to go home the following day to his family for his annual holiday. Vince and Forsie, described as 'youths, both in their late twenties', vandalise the roadhouse and terrorise September. The play ends with September handcuffed to Forsie's motor bike, Vince dead of a stab wound from a screwdriver and Forsie running away in panic from the scene saying 'I'm not to blame'. According to Slabolepszy (interview, 1986) the source of the plot was a short newspaper account of an actual incident similar to this. The dramatic focus of the play however, lies in the shifting relationships that occur among the three characters and

the evidence that emerges in this encounter of the personal histories of each.

The play thus has a strongly biographical style: in performance it combines elements of melodrama within a genre of social realism. The simmering violence that flares up at the climax is dramatically contained by the presentation of the characters as *representative types*. Evidence of their respective socio-economic positions is *offered to account* for the conflicts that provide the key dramatic actions. All the characters are presented as in some way discriminated against by the dominant norms of South African society: September by his racial category, Vince by his 'personal' rejection of them, Fergie by his lack of education. The play thus provides much evidence of current WESSA perceptions of what constitutes these *norms* and *an analysis* of it can usefully serve to exemplify WESSA perceptions of relationships between themselves and other South Africans in the prevailing socio-political conditions in urban South Africa.

The strong emphasis on personal biography in the play makes a methodology used *by contemporary* popular historians (Callinicos, 1987) appropriate to a study of *it. For* similarities between this genre of play and the recovery and presentation of popular history make the differences between the fictive aspects of drama and the factual aspects of history less important within the cultural context of both as carriers of contemporary consciousness of the specific conditions *emerging from* the dominant discourses of politics, sociology and economics.

In a paper giving an account of the Popular History Day at Wits, Callinicos (1987) identifies in popular history the need for

> a continual traffic between experience and theory, a need to both *explore* subjective experiences and locate them firmly in the larger objective social forces (p. 62)

In this way, she asserts

> different and contradictory popular traditions emerge, influenced not least by the extent to which an hegemony has been imposed or absorbed by members of a community. ... Testimonies are not simple and accurate records of the past - they invariably relate, more or less, to the dominant discourses and are not apart from them (p. 62).

Popular history and theatre productions may thus be approached in a similar way because of the common material they share. Callinicos sees

> personal testimony and oral history ... the use of songs, poems, sayings, photographs and other cultural manifestations (as) central in a popular presentation (p. 56).

The presentation of a play is thus a 'cultural manifestation' in that it is a theatrical cultural event; at the same time the dramatic world it constructs is a manifestation of a conscious attempt to order and articulate coherently the playwright's specific understanding of the 'larger objective social forces'. Where the success of a particular production may be measured by attendance, length of run and so on, this may in turn imply its popularity among a particular section of the population; and such *popularity suggests* that the play does represent commonly shared perceptions among that group. The production of SNAP, through its dramatic language and theatrical action, promotes perceptions of the dominant ideology as stable, historically inevitable and unchangeable. It presents contemporary socio-economic conditions as subject to historical causality and implies that both WESSAs and Black South Africans experience these conditions from a position of powerlessness. Further I shall argue that Slabolepszy's ideological stance is shared by his audiences and is

common to most middle class WESSAs. Thus the presentation of the play may be viewed as a cultural tool of the English-speaking dominant class for consumption primarily by that class.

WESSA IDEOLOGY IN THE PLAY

Politically the ideology enacted is one of liberal conservatism. The language in which this ideology is inscribed, particularly Vince's, appears to distantiate the audience from the character because of its deliberate deviance from 'standard' middle class English as used by educated middle class WESSAs; yet this division between character and audience is outweighed by the ideological consensus that exists between playwright and audience. In a sense Vince functions as a scapegoat for the collective consciousness of the play's audiences; his dramatic appeal lies precisely in the way in which he can be enjoyed for his theatricality and rejected for his deviance from acceptable norms of behaviour and expression. He becomes the wayward relative over whom the family sorrowfully *shakes* its collective head because he 'should know better'.

Where he 'breaks the rules' of the WESSA family and must be judged accordingly, September engages our collective sympathy as an 'outsider' who knows the rules and whose behaviour invites his acceptance into the family. He is 'sinned against' by Vince, and the family must make reparations to him on behalf of one of its members, who though wayward, nevertheless is 'one of us'. Audiences may reflect that incidents like this must never be allowed to happen again, but essentially the rules themselves go unchallenged. How to make them work appears to be more at issue than questions as to whether they should be the rules. This is the politics of reform rather than those of change.

In the following analysis of the language of the play, I shall be investigating the ways in which specific usage by each character reinforces the notions of a collectively shared ideological position among its audiences; and the ways in which the language simultaneously exonerates audiences from guilty complicity in Vince's actions and invites audiences to identify with him.

Ideological Distance in the Language of the Play

Sibabalepazy invites his audiences to contemplate the consequences of the ideological clashes that occur *principally between Vince* and September. There is an inversion of the customary South African myths associated with race and class.[4] September's racial *categorisation* is contradicted by his class ideology. His behaviour is inscribed with the values of the middle class: he works as a responsible employee for wages; he supports a young family and provides them with such material benefits as his wages allow; he is polite in the face of extreme provocation; he values the trust of his employer and the stability of his work and accepts his family responsibilities. Within the constraints of a disadvantaging system his illegal acquisition of dagga provides evidence of entrepreneurial skill and his aspirations are tied to the system as it operates. He is moving slowly up the socio-economic ladder. From 'Delivery Boy of the Month - August 1978' at Europa he has moved to the roadhouse because

> The money's better ... Europa - full of troubles. You ask for more money. They say voetsek with your unions. What do you want more money for? So - I come work here in the roadhouse. But the boss here - is very good to me. Every year he gives me a holiday (p. 25).

September sees paternalism as a better system than that *offered* by organised labour-management relations;

individual responsibility as more desirable than collective struggle. Although he hasn't seen his wife for two years and his position within the system is precarious because of *discriminative racial practices*, he nevertheless accepts these practices which deny him the use of his real name. He is proud of his status as 'a good boss-boy'. His dependence on unofficial relationships and material exchanges (bargaining for Forsie's motorbike and his employer's 'goodness', for example) to alleviate the effects of legislated disadvantage on him, points to a profoundly internalised hegemonic influence of middle class ideology.

Linguistically his separation of areas of 'personal' attitude and social expression between Zulu for the former and English for the latter, supports the hegemonic *effects* that can be seen in his actions, (and incidentally protects an English monolingual audience from direct exposure to the emotional intensity of utterances such as 'sesi pheli isikhathi semc zinja za bathkathi nelibambe lingashone' - Your time is up, you dogs of witches. The writing's on the wall) (p. 47). The English he speaks is marked as that of a second language speaker only by the simplification of verbal tenses. There is little mixing and he disapproves of Forsie's use of fanagalo

> Forsie: Kuche stellek
> September: (frowning) Hau, that's not Zulu. (p. 23)

In contrast to Vince's language there is little idiomatic or vernacular colouring in September's dialogue: Despite the simplifications, his English is standardised more markedly. In performance, of course, phonetic variation does add greater difference, but grammatically September's use of 'correct' (ie. literate) construction is more frequent than either Vince's or Forsie's. Where Forsie's, for example, consistently demonstrates the influence of Afrikaans grammatical order and tense,

September's is more 'neutral' for a *WESSA*, *as for eg:*

Vince:	And you boss-boy?
September:	That's correct.
Vince:	(to Forsie) Amazing. Give them a tie and a kierie and all of a sudden it's boss-boy.
Forsie:	Were you born in September?
September:	*My boss?*
Forsie:	Why you called September?
September:	September is my name.
Vince:	Tell me September. You like being boss-boy?
September:	I like it very much.
Vince:	You a good boss-boy?
September:	I'm good. Very good. (1 46)

Here both Vince and Forsie use abbreviated verbs rendering a kind of pidgin English. This may be read as patronising in Vince's case; in Forsie's it is perhaps an effect of his own difficulties with English verbs; but September replies with expanded verb forms (not, as might be expected, 'September my name', if his language use depends on the models Vince and Forsie provide). These subtle indicators are less significant as dramatically consistent character markers, than they are significant of the ideological pressure in the play to incorporate September into the norms of SAE and its ideological norms. September's language patterns make him 'more like us' for a WESSA audience and Vince correspondingly 'less like us'. So through exchanges such as this September becomes associated with middle class concepts of 'decency' and 'humanity' and all the other values that underpin liberal humanism.

Ideological Representativeness in the Play

Vince then becomes the articulator of the obverse side of the ideological coin: he is not 'decent'; he is deeply 'anti-social'. But he does not represent an alternative set of values. He stands as the negative version of the same values that September so positively represents. It is not that Vince denies the importance of the values that September exemplifies. He simply rejects them where September accepts them. But both recognise them as operating potently as the conditions imposed. Where September seeks to fulfil his aspirations within these conditions, Vince tries to enact his aspirations in spite of them. He exempts himself from the rules, yet demands that everyone else sustain them. He would 'rather keep (his) dignity. Stay unemployed' than 'do kaffirs' work ... (and) do it with them' (p. 50). His justification for the rules of the status quo is that of historical determinism:

> It's thanks to us they got a job in the first place. I mean, who found the mines, hey? We did. (Shouting for September's benefit) We found the bloody mines!! (To Rorsie) If we didn't find the mines they's still be hanging from the trees.
> (p. 50-51)

Vince recognises the power vested in the social and legislative rules. For him it is precisely the rules that provide him with the freedom to flout the rules. Modifications to the rules erode his *personal freedom*; for by definition the rules protect him because he is white. Extending this protection to others like September, who can pursue their aspirations successfully by the rules, *exposes the artificial antagonism* Vince has created between himself and his society. Vince must fight to maintain the status quo which privileges him. His strongly racist attitudes and utterances mask a *real* fear that *without the rules* to protect him he will have to attribute his failure to secure respect to

personal incapacity. Beneath his apparent defiance of the social norms of middle class WESSA behaviour, his adherence to the ideological base for the rules *governing this behaviour remains* intact. Concepts of the unique individual, - of personal merit unrelated to social conditioning - and of capitalism as a system that rewards admired characteristics of personality (such as competitiveness), are deeply imprinted on his thinking.

> I'm not going to spend the rest of my life messing around with nobodies (p. 54)

he declares, yet in defending himself against becoming a nobody, *by referring to the rules*, he has to face the very real possibility that the rules may prove him a nobody.

> My old man said it and he's bloody right; the day you let a kaffir get the better of you that's the end. You finish. There's no going back. (p. 50)

His mythical heroes, drawn from international soccer (Georgie Best, Bobbie Charlton, Pele) mirror his belief in the dominant ideological myths (4) of the practices he professes to deride. Like Porsie's film hero, Clint Eastwood, they encompass the notions of privilege and reward for personal charisma and 'natural' skills.

None of the characters in SNAP contests the hegemonic control of dominant WESSA ideology. Vince provides a genuine 'anti-hero' for the WESSA. Identification with him at an ideological level ensures that even while *judging him, an audience may* 'understand' him. Nor does September provide an alternative hero for the play: he is a victim of unfortunate circumstance insofar as the dominant ideology provides the circumstances. But his submission to and belief in the practices that enact this *ideology ensure his sympathetic reception* by WESSA audiences.

But the *ideological identification* an audience may make with him are tempered by the racial aspects of the dominant ideology, which operate in practice far more overtly. At best, then, the racial divisions make him an *approximation* of the ideal WESSA mythical type - something of an 'honorary WESSA', in the way in which Japanese were legislated as 'honorary Whites' during the 1960s.

The property he tries to defend against Vince and Porsie is not his; it is entrusted to his care by his white employer. That he does try to defend it with such determination is a source of admiration for an audience that values property as a sign of material status, and includes fidelity among its list of virtues. But because September's actions are done on behalf of his white employer, the naturalising of conditions that exist cannot be fully accomplished. He remains outside the racially protected category of 'owner of business premises in a proclaimed white area'.

The anomalies of the dominant ideology and its categories are evident in the anomalies of September's dramatic situation. An audience can provisionally release him from the racial categories that apply outside the theatre for the purposes of the drama. They can vicariously identify with his defence of property; yet at the same time they have to recognise they are making an exception. He gains 'personal' heroic qualities, yet loses dramatic authenticity. The qualities of courage, patience and control that he exhibits make him a worthy hero; but the conditions in which these are demonstrated must be acknowledged as either dramatically implausible, or an indication of his profound entrapment by WESSA dominance. In the context of the end of the play, where he is physically powerless, the latter is more probable. It is only in defending an ideology which actively works against him - 'I help you, boss ... I'll

tell them what happened, boss' (pp. 73-74) - that September begins to understand the racial exclusions which underpin the whole system. When Forsie desperately tries to save himself, he resorts to the most fundamental assumptions of racial difference that the ideology sustains, that of the racial superiority of white over black. 'They won't listen to (you). They won't believe you, man' (p. 75).

WESSA Audiences and the Ideology of the Play

WESSA audiences have been shocked by the ending; the sense of betrayal they have registered is profoundly to do with recognising in the dramatic denouement that the racial divisions they deplore so articulately are embedded in the ideology they *uphold*. *Dramatically, the shock* they encounter at the end of the play is one of recognition rather than one that triggers transformation. Their putative vicarious hero cannot emerge the moral victor precisely because he is black. The power of the white man is unchallenged and unchallengeable; the worst white man still holds greater power than the best black man. The black man can finally never be 'one of us'. *WESSA middle class morality* is intact; but the price is the sacrifice of the one character who, if it were not for the genetic difference of a black skin, might have become a symbol of the triumph of universal liberal values and thus most truly representative of 'South African' as the WESSA perceives it.

This exposure of the overlap in South Africa of race and class distinctions finds no resolution in SNAP. Like September a WESSA audience is impotent at the end of the play, caught between vindicating the 'truth' of WESSA ideology and appalled at its self destructiveness. As in Making Like America (MLA), SNAP ends in a fade to black while 'September stares blankly into the growing

darkness' (p. 75). There is an unresolved deadlock that freezes the moment. The present remains fixed and the future is dark. The universality of liberal values is tainted by the facts of South African racist practices. Actual conditions inescapably impose on the democratic beliefs that WESSAs cherish and have promoted so successfully.

By. Slabolepszy does seem to provide an escape from the impasse for his audiences. Either they can accept their guilt by complicity through identifying with Vince and Forsie on racial grounds; or they can reject such identification on the grounds that there are class distinctions that *separate them from Vince's* and Forsie's representativeness as WESSAs.

Slabolepszy seems to favour the second option in his presentation of the limited choices in the play. For there is implicit in the language of the play an assumption that the dramatic world is unfamiliar to its audiences. In the published text, for instance, there is a glossary of terms which explains the vocabulary of the dramatic sociolect used by Vince and Forsie. These terms are derived from popular South African mixed language usage, many of them borrowed from Afrikaans, and associated with white working class fringe groups, such as the petty criminal group. Clearly the published text is aimed at a non-South African readership, for words such as 'braai', 'dagga', 'knobkierie' and 'KwaZulu' are included which are in general SAE usage and will be heard readily in state broadcasting.

In the performed play, however, the linguistic and visual elements function more ambivalently. An audience is led to recognise familiar signs of 'South Africanness' at the same time as it is directed to distantiate itself from them. For instance, in the detailed stage directions at the beginning of the script the 'usual menu and tariff

lists' are referred to, as is the '*mindless* roadhouse music' (my emphasis) (p. 9). September begins the dialogue with a telephone conversation that immediately establishes the race and class conjunction that ensures his role is subservient

> Hallo my boss ... Yes my boss ... No my boss ... Thank you my boss (p. 10)

Immediately after the establishing of racial and class separations as the norm, cultural and language differences are emphasised when September substitutes 'Bantu music' for the 'mindless roadhouse music' commenting, in Zulu, 'They kill us with cowboy music' (p. 10).

According to Venables (1982) this familiarity made the production

> a disturbing play for South African audiences - its characters and situations are all too recognisable as a metaphor for our society.

Another reviewer, Barrie Hough (1982), described it in Die Beeld as

> The kind of work one could present with pride overseas because it contains the best of what South African theatre has to offer ... totally South African in every sense.

Like Slabolepszy's, the particular race, class and ideological position of these reviewers is generalised - if not universalised, at least nationalised - so that a class-specific consciousness is assumed to be representative of all South Africans regardless of differences in perception that shifts of perspective among these *parameters entail. The play and its reviewers confirm* each other because their perspectives are similar. Hence for them South Africa is reflected truthfully because their perceptions are reflected in the play. For both reviewers the universalising tendency leads them to identify closely with the characters and action with the

result that they see the performance as an exercise in mea culpa - this is what we are like, this is what we do. The London Financial Times critic (Young, 1984) also (more understandably) assumes the play to present general South African conditions and sees the production as a public confession:

> If it is the Market Theatre's aim to show how horrible South African life is, they have succeeded admirably,

he comments. Again there is an assumption that 'South African life' can be determined by the consciousness of one fragment in a highly fragmented society. Responses such as these that perceive the world of the play as 'disturbing' or 'horrible' accurately reflect the effects of a class ideology. In this they are representative of WESSA audience response.

A marked feature of audience response at performances of SNAP and other South African plays such as Sophiatown or Asinamali and the updated version of No Good Friday is the range of responses that such plays evoke in audience members of different classes and racial categories. Where white audiences tend to be quiet during scenes of violence or during racial confrontations, black audiences will respond with noisy delight. A number of white drama students have found this disturbing and have said "How can they *laugh when it's so awful?*" With *no* research evidence it is difficult to answer; but the point is that middle class white experience does not represent a 'totally South African' experience of the general conditions that apply in South Africa, any more than Afrikaans language plays can claim to be representatively *South*) 'can.

The widespread use of English to express the experiences of a wide range of class and race groups tends to encourage the assumption that any South African play in

English is more representative of South Africa, because of the assumption that language and ideology are interchangeable concepts. This is patently unsound. While English in South Africa is closely associated with the hegemonic spread of English ideology, the multiple functions of English in almost all racially and class defined groups in South Africa precludes the kind of unanimity of ideological assumptions that middle class WESSAs make.

Dramatic Stereotypes and WESSA Ideology

When Slabolepszy describes himself as representative of 'the people' this has to be interpreted within the particular context of South Africa's racial and class *divisions. He does not speak for all South Africans; nor* is his ideology a national one; though it may well be a dominant one. (Dominance in South Africa refers to the control exerted by a numerically minor group, which is further divided by language affiliations). For Slabolepszy, then, and the people he does represent, the norms appear to have emerged from a historically determined set of conditions: In the world of SNAP divisions of race, class and education pre-exist the present and, he implies, are natural phenomena. His characters can only respond to these in various (usually unpleasant) modes of behaviour. And the forms of response are seen as characteristic responses to the 'natural' laws of race and class. So Fonsie's attempts to learn Zulu and perform a gumboot dance are as typical as Vince's belief in his father's dictum that

> the day you let a kaffir get the better of you that's the end. (p. 50)

Equally typical and therefore 'understandable' is September's fear of state reprisal should he come to official attention:

> Boss: I've got no permit. No papers. I lose my job. They send me back home. (p. 65)

The naturalising and generalising of racial and class stereotypes that occurs in the play functions as a catalyst to confirm the fixity of the ideological categories these typical characters represent.

Racial difference is a significant 'fact' in the play and violent inter-racial differences can be dealt with only by careful standardising of the manner of these contacts. Vince and Forsie offend because they deny the (WESSA) model of 'correct' behaviour in their inter-racial contact. This model presupposes politeness, restraint and social distance among strangers. For the WESSA audiences denying this model will allow them to sympathise with Vince and Forsie; sustaining the model means they must condemn their representatives. This produces a fundamental ambivalence in the play; for Vince's dramatic flamboyance and Forsie's naivete make *them eminently appealing* as individual characters. Yet the model of 'correct' behaviour that September provides provokes moral outrage at his treatment. There is a conflict in the dramatic function of these characters here: between their symbolic representativeness as stereotypes and their presentation as socially real individuals. To resolve the dilemma an audience can make only one of two choices: accept the stereotypes as 'true', in which case dramatic distancing occurs and questions of ideological principle provide the 'meaning' of the play; or deny the stereotypical in favour of sustaining the framework of social realism, in which case the play represents an 'unfortunate' incident which does not reflect general standards of middle class WESSA behaviour. This option allows the audience to dissociate itself from the characters and escape into vicarious enjoyment of the peepshow variety. Neither choice is satisfactory. The first asserts the truth of fixed

stereotypes and cushions an audience from the effects of Vince and Forsie's dramatic characterisation. The second diminishes the significance of the action, by making it an isolated incident, unrelated to other dramas or to real questions about the ways in which such incidents result from actual conditions in South Africa.

Neither choice involves examining the pre-existing ideological categories that *produce these notions of* difference. Moral judgements become a personal affair for each member of the audience. It becomes a matter of confirming or denying the ideological 'truth' you already know, rather than probing the unarticulated assumptions on which middle class ideology rests. Hence there is an emphasis in most of the critical reviews on the emotional impact of the play as drama, rather than its cultural significance as an expression of the consciousness of a particular section of South African society.

Because playwright and most audiences shared similar ideological perspectives, what precisely these might be went unremarked and audiences were able to frame the dramatic experience within the narrow margins of personal morality. Reviews commented almost exclusively on Vince's 'intense pain' and contrasted this with his 'vicious revenge' (Hough, 1982); September's 'quiet suffering' and his 'courage and dignity of a proud man in a hopeless and humiliating situation' and on Forsie's 'childlike nature and murderous anger'(Venables, 1982). Venables particularly focused almost exclusively on the emotional appeal at the expense of connecting this to actual conditions as he experiences them. He saw the play as

> contrasting elements of pain and laughter, violence and pathos ... so that the audience rides a sort of emotional roller coaster. (Venables, 1982)

These views unconsciously enact *WESSA ideology* as it applies to concepts of drama. Underlying assumptions of separateness dislocate theatrical performance from other cultural forms of experience. Drama seems to function autonomously, and serves its society as a safety valve for emotional release, in the Aristotelian sense of catharsis. Drama does not seem to contribute to 'real life' in any but the most marginal way. The production of *SNAP* in its *confirming ideological aspects can be* said to close the ideological circle around the theatre-going WESSA and to promote his isolation in a safe and exclusive position in his society by affirming the stability of the artificially constructed framework of his society and sustaining the dominant discourse that produces mythical stereotypes such as Vince, Porsie and September.

FEATURES OF LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL TYPING

The social typing of the characters in SNAP is achieved primarily through specific language features in each character's English usage.

Vince's Language

Vince's register offers the most flamboyant departure from 'standard' SAE. Features of his language include a vocabulary derived from Afrikaans (jol, kaalgat); 1950s tsotsitaal (tjerrie); schoolboy and petty criminal sociolects (zoll, chaff, my china, cossie); as well as the cliches of Hollywood films ('A man's got his pride'); ideolectical variations of general platitudes ('If you want a goose you got to catch them young and treat them rough. Time and chicks wait for no man, man'); and conscious inversions of famous utterances ('one giant swipe for mankind').

He switches easily from standard to idiomatic and idiosyncratic forms which creates an impression of versatility and range in his linguistic contacts, and implies an intellectual range and emotional responsiveness which is not borne out in the narrow and rigid range of his actions. For instance, in his contemplation of potato crisps, the linguistic flexibility suggests a poetic consciousness lurking beneath the glib external character we see in the play:

> I mean check at the shape. Delicate wafer. Tiny ripples for artistic effect. I mean this isn't just sommer a chip any more. It's a bladdy twentieth century work of art ... Picture it, Forsie. Mcersa great factory *somewhere* ... *Mountains of freshly* peeled potatoes moving unsuspectingly towards the slicing machine ... chop chop chop chop pssh. Deep fried in golden batter, drained, sprinkled with salt and vinegar - peboop. Vacuum packed for your satisfaction and mine. (pp. 36-37).

This is perhaps the poetry of advertising, but its proximity to the 'unpoetic' vernacular, together with the emphasis of sensory verbal sound effects, serves to imply dramatic three-dimensionality in the character which is not sustained later in the play. The *stereotype* inflates momentarily with the possibilities of a fully naturalist treatment, but subsides again.

This example points to a weakness in the control of the language's dramatic function, which is less apparent in MLA. It seems that the linguistic exuberance of SNAP is not always directed sufficiently towards the dramatic depiction of character so much as it is used for its own sake. Compare, for example Vince's linguistic puns with those used by Wes in MLA:

> Wes: Hello, this is Wesley Buys. I'd like to speak with Mr Harold Wainwright ... Buys - as in baseball bat.
>
> Forsie: *I've never thought about chips like* that.

> Vince: You should. It's a humbling experience ...Not to mention the microchip ... Now there's a chip. (p. 37)

In the former the weakness of the pun points strongly to Wes' uneasy attempt at social familiarity with those he regards as his social superiors. With Vince's play on words the linguistic game is both a linguistic and dramatic non sequitur, used simply to provide an opportunity to exercise the playwright's wit. In the context of broad stereotypical performance it would be acceptable (Tom Stoppard's farces use this technique frequently) (5) but yoked so closely to the attempt to render Vince as a rounded character that occurs immediately prior to this, it has to be seen as evidence of dramatic uncertainty on the part of the playwright.

The foregrounding of language for its own sake is a feature of Vince's language in SNAP. The control of register is more finely developed as a dramatic device in MLA. Linguistically Vince is perhaps the precursor of Cowboy: their speech is similar in its reliance on a wide range of derivative phrases, given slight ideological particularity. But where Cowboy's speech patterns are picked up and echoed by Wes only when the potency of the past draws Wes away from his attempt to make a new future for himself, Vince's and Forsie's utterances are only minimally distinguished from each other.

Features of Forsie's Language Usage

Forsie's speech seems to be a restricted version of Vince's. Both are marked fairly consistently by abbreviated verb forms; such as

> Forsie: I got a job

and

> So what we going to do?

Vince: You scheme you a ace with your money?
and So what you okes discuss?

But both can and do use extended grammatically standard verb forms just as frequently. For example:

Forsie: No, I was just saying Hollywood. That's where I would go. (p. 31)

or Are you trying to tell me you didn't do it? (p. 42)

Vince: People have been whizzing around up there the last twenty years. Okes like you and me, we haven't even been overseas. (p. 31)

It is difficult to account for the co-existence of both these forms in Forsie's and Vince's speech. Dramatically *there seems* to be little significance attached to the use of one or the other, either in terms of character, or the subject they are discussing. When either speaks to September, however, they consistently use the pidgin form, which may indicate their belief in the educational superiority their white categorisation gives them. This would find support in September's angry rejoinder to Vince:

Vince: Can't he read?

September: Yes I can read. I can also write. But even if I couldn't read or write that doesn't mean I'm stupid ... You think because some of our people can't read they can't think. We are not stupid. (p. 60).

We know that Vince has completed Standard Nine and it is implied that *Forsie's education has been less than this.* September's language here is much closer to standard educated English than either Vince's or Forsie's, though the history of his employment as a delivery 'boy' does not preclude the possibility that he is better educated than they are. Certainly he has not achieved the 'bloody three-piece suit' that Vince takes such exception to

when it goes *with a black face because he feels threat*ened by blacks who are educationally equipped to get a better job than he is. The language differences, then, do not apparently point to educational distinctions either between Vince and September, or Vince and Forsie. Indeed the latter are only very loosely indicated through Forsie's ignorance of commonplace information about Hollywood, the landing on the moon and his *speculation that perhaps the Milky Way* is visible only in Durban. But this lack of access to information is not necessarily seen as a consequence of lack of formal education, and certainly is not exhibited by ignorance of the rules of grammatical expression. Slabolepszy seems to have taken dramatic licence to extremes in this regard. In consequence the stereotype that Forsie represents is sometimes stretched towards caricature.

In terms of the use of vernacular vocabulary there is the same inconsistency and blurring of dramatic distinctiveness between Forsie and Vince. Forsie uses it almost as much as Vince, as, for example:

> Vince, stop gooing strop now, man (p. 36)

and

> I think she smarks me. (p. 28)

but the choice of slang appears not to be connected to the subject under discussion.

The absence of linguistic significance in the forms of expression Vince and Forsie use tends to undermine the individuality of each character and enhance the generalising tendency of the stereotypes to the point where they become two aspects of the same myth, Forsie assuming a 'tamer' and weaker version of Vince. The performances in this way turn inwards theatrically, creating a kind of self-conscious performance within the theatrical performance. Vince and Forsie perform a kind of comic double act for themselves as much, if not more, than for their theatre audience. The audience thus becomes a witness at one remove of the linguistic action.

This may be an effect of the close friendship and working partnership of the two actors who played these parts (Paul Slabolepszy and Bill Flynn), though this is difficult to assess because there has not yet been a local production where Vince and Forsie have been played by other actors. But I think that at least some of the emotional vitality and spontaneity that was remarked on by many audience members overflowed into the dialogue to create this sense that the actors were entertaining each other within the character relationships. The difference between the first draft of the script and the final published text shows how much collaborative work in rehearsal modified the original dialogue.

SUMMARY

The dramatic world of SNAP is thus sharply differentiated from the 'real' world of the WESSA audience through the creation of a common dramatic sociolect for the two WESSA characters. But within the dramatic world fine discriminations between characters are blunted by the common register they both use. This, coupled with conspicuous absences of information in the personal histories of the characters, increases the generalising tendencies identified already in the ideological constructions of the play. The dialogue, while largely successful in creating a dramatic register uniquely its own, is not finally dramatically serviceable for sharply defined dramatic characterisation. This in turn creates uncertainty in audiences as to how to place the dramatic characters and the theatrical performance in relation to their own perceptions.

Slabolepszy's later play Making like America demonstrates a firmer linguistic control which enables it to offer a more cohesive theatrical experience and thus a more coherent ideological statement. But his most recent

production, a series of sketches entitled Travelling Shots (December, 1988) appears to be plagued by the same theatrical and ideological uncertainties as Saturday Night at the Palace.

CHAPTER 4: NOTES

1. Sibabolepszy's theatre productions to date:
   1980: The Defloration of Miles Kowkemcer.
   1981: Saturday Night at the Palace.
   1983: Karoo Grand.
   1984: Under the Oaks.
   1985: Over the Hill.
   1986: Boo to the Moon.
   Making like America.
   1988: Travelling Shots.
   Television productions: Highrise Cowboy and People like Us.

2. AA Vita Award - Most Promising Playwright for Saturday Night at the Palace, Standard Bank Young Artist of the Year Award (Grahamstown 1983) for his contribution to South African Drama; as well as acting awards. (Programme notes 1986; 1988).

3. 'His plays have been translated into German, Swedish and Hebrew' Programme notes (PACT 1988).

4. For an account of how these myths are constructed and enacted by dominant legislation cf Boonzaier et al (1988).

5. cf for eg: Stoppard.
   Withenshaw: These Americans, they get in everywhere.
   Cocklebury-Smythe: Far too many of them about
   McTenzie: Hear, hear!
   Chamberlain: Absolutely!
   Withenshaw: (to Maddie): Would you care to take my appendix out and pass it round. (Dirty Linen, p. 31).

CHAPTER 5: AFRICAN LANGUAGES SPEAKERS IN RELATION TO ENGLISH

> We cannot afford to be uncritically complacent about the role and future of English in South Africa for there are many reasons why it cannot be considered an innocent language. *The problems of society will also be the* problems of the predominant language of that society, since it is the carrier of a range of social perceptions, attitudes and goals. Through it the speakers absorb entrenched attitudes. (Ndebele, 1986, p. 21)

In tracing the historical relations of African languages speakers (ALS) to English it is the association of English with key institutions *and structures of* domination that commands attention rather than the functional use of English in isolation. That English was, and is, a major second language internationally as well as locally, is too well documented to require arguing here. What does seem necessary is to trace how and why English has so successfully dominated other South African languages.

Historically English's most potent successes have been in the spheres of education (through the church) and capital - what Marks and Rathbone (1982) described as 'the equally constraining demands of Gold and God' (p. 33). Politically English has emerged as a force for opposition and in an ambivalent sense has provided a common language for many disaffected South Africans from different language groups. Culturally its internationality has ensured that it meets with little challenge from other South African languages. Socially it has impinged on other cultures to the degree that it has successfully brought its own standards, conventions and aspirations to bear on existing social practices.

But these empire-building characteristics of English history in South Africa have had constraints upon them too. It has not been a victory by default. These may be identified by considerations of the concepts of race, class and nation, which in South Africa are inextricably bound together in the formation of perceptions of identity. For ALS as with all other groups officially designated through these concepts, the use that has been and is being made of English provides a critical point of reference.

In this section, then, I propose to point to some of the historical effects of English usage in education, commerce and industry, and political discourse. This is an enormously complex area, for these are not autonomous entities. In the case of Black South Africans, particularly, as Marks and Rathbone (1982) point out, 'the relationship between the political and the economic, or most crucially ... the relationship between class formation, political consciousness and culture' (p. 7) is dense with complexity because

> we know remarkably little of what these dramatic (historical) events meant for Black South Africans in terms of the changes wrought in their material conditions, or how these changes were shaped by, and in turn reshaped their culture and consciousness (p. 1).

Recorded history is largely silent just at those points which could most pertinently reveal the cultural effects of political action on those who were dispossessed by it. It is only recently that the recovery of such information as these historical silences blanket, has begun.

In considering such evidence as is available, it is necessary to bear constantly in mind that interpretations of this material are subject to the cultural and linguistic as well as historical differences that exist between the researcher and the experiences he describes.

Given this proviso, I shall be attempting to trace a connection between the ways in which English has served various and often contradictory functions in the processes of education, industrialisation and the political subordination of Black South Africans through its role as one of the crucial markers of conscious identity within the context of racial, class and national paradigms. This is in no way meant to imply that such an account is any more than *highly selective. Its purpose* is to discover some of the historical conditions which may clarify the attitudes of ALS dramatists to contemporary drama in English.

1. EDUCATION AND ENGLISH

English and the Mission Schools

The educational work of the evangelists and mission schools marked the beginning of the hegemonic success with which English radically altered African perceptions of African culture. Mphahlele (1980) identifies

> events that were conditioning and redefining the culture of the African people in the nineteenth and early twentieth century

as (among others),

> vehement missionary evangelisation and the establishment of church schools, teacher-training institutions and presses. (p. 3)

The effects of these are exemplified in a series of addresses *given by D.D.T. Jabavu* at 'Native Teachers' Conferences' during 1918-1920 (Jabavu, 1920). Jabavu continually urged native teachers to live up to the demands of 'civilisation' in their codes of behaviour, dress and intellectual habits.

> The native teacher is too apt to forget the important fact that he is an agent and pioneer of civilisation in his location, (p. 79)

he declares. And elsewhere:

> Worries have to be faced, fought and overcome by our teachers if we as an African race are to attain to the intellectual and moral requirements of true civilisation. (p. 70)

Or, in another address:

> The teacher is one who constitutes a connecting link between the manifold secular interests of the village and the Church. It is through the agency of our teachers that the ideals of civilisation and Christianity are going to be transmitted to our masses at large. (p. 77)

Jabavu's addresses vividly enact the cultural collision that occurred as a result of the combination of English, education and Christianity within mission schools such as Lovedale. The three aspects of anglicisation become almost interchangeable and all produce an ideological shift away from familiar practices towards 'civilisation', whose 'superior' virtues are absorbed in the learning of the English language.

What Mphahlele (1980) recognises as 'the grand Christian design for the taming of the African landscape, both human and physical' (p. 3), produces in Jabavu a statement of belief derived from the irresistible hegemonic pressure of these combined forces. Even where these are recognised as the means of ensuring his own disadvantage in the 'civilised' world he seeks to enter, he himself becomes the means of spreading the 'gospel' of 'civilisation'.

> We have adopted European habits

he asserts

> our wants have increased, we believe that the satisfaction of those wants is a step in our

> evolution to a better and fuller life and yet they (our European friends) give many of us wages less than those given to many uncivilised Natives in the larger towns. (p. 76)

For him, `taming' is a `stage of our transition from the old tribal system to the European idea of city life' (p. 72) in which `our model of civilisation is the white man' (p. 82).

Even the evident failure of the white man to provide the `native teacher with the financial power that will confirm his entry and progress in civilisation does not shake the ideological tenets Jabavu has learned so successfully in his English Christian education. In his perception there are no possibilities of opposition, nor alternatives to the inevitable path towards white, urban, capital power. This is a classic case of the subject actively co-operating in his own subjugation with all the strength of his `own' conviction. While Jabavu recognises, too, the manipulation of concepts of race occurring within his society, charges of racism are not laid at the door of `our European friends', but are seen (in a curious hegemonic inversion of the terms of perception) as `tribal distinctions (which) were perhaps useful in primitive times' (p. 82). This displacement would be ironic if it were not so tragic, for it reveals the degree to which English Christian educated dogma has succeeded in establishing itself as a monolithic irrefutable ideological structure, against which opposition defeats itself. Deny it and you are `primitive'.

Thus the white man's supremacy economically, politically and culturally is unquestioned: religious belief incorporates belief in the educational and cultural practices taught in its name, each confirming the others. So for Jabavu, in the early twentieth century in South Africa

> Today we are all under the white man and he *legislates not for* Baasa *and* Fingoes only but comprehensively for "Natives" as from the

> Native Affairs Department. The evil of it lies not in differences of name but in the assumption that difference connotes enmity. (p. 82)

Like God, the white man is exempt from the conditions he imposes; his difference is marked by a grand benevolence in treating the 'less civilised' in the same way; such guilt as may be apportioned is the responsibility of those who differentiate among themselves through 'enmity'. The fundamental enmity that dominance and subordination implies goes unrecognised.

This kind of collaboration in one's own 'taming' is a feature that Raymond Williams (1977) identifies as the means by which hegemony most distinctively operates as

> a whole body of practices and expectations ... a lived system of meanings and values ... which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. (p. 110)

The role of English in this hegemonic process is perhaps the most crucial of all the three elements: education, religion and language. *English served as the* mediator between the church and education on the one hand, and the colonised participants in these practices on the other. Autonomous from education and religion, the use of English brought with it its own social practices, beliefs, assumptions and *institutions and established* its own cultural history, resistance to which was almost impossible as long as English was used.

If formal education is primarily to do with the transmission of ideas, concepts themselves, as Mphahlele (1984) asserts,

> are only possible when you have a language for them.

Likewise, if you have a language you can create new concepts. But Mphahlele found that

> the mother tongue was not equal to this. (p. 98)

This is a moot point: psycholinguists (McNeill, 1987) and translators have long debated the degree to which language and ideas are connected and in what ways. The debate is too complex to probe here. Nevertheless it can be stated that there is a connection between concepts *and the language in which these are framed*.

For Jabavu there appears to be a looser connection than Mphahlele suggests, for Jabavu tentatively implies a role for 'the mother tongue' (in his case, Zulu) in creating new concepts when he urges teachers to read:

> The reading of newspapers is valuable also. A progressive teacher acquires from his reading at least one new idea every day and one new idiom in the English language. (p. 68)

And elsewhere:

> You as teachers should each subscribe to at least two newspapers, say one English, the other Zulu ... to ventilate your minds with the fresh breezes of new ideas from the world of science and literature. (p. 74)

Zulu appears somewhat forlornly here in the context of such linguistically and conceptually specific categories as science and literature.

It appears too, from Mphahlele's account (1980) of criticism by the poet I.W.W. Gtashi as early as 1863 of the Zulu journal Isigidimi, that even other languages did not escape from the enforcement of 'English ideas':

> the paper silenced attacks on the white administration made by Africans but gave prominence to articles that were favourable to whites. (p. 2)

Literacy and English

Another hegemonic effect of the promotion of English usage is evident in Jabavu's belief in the value of reading: the assumption of the supremacy of the written word over spoken language. In South Africa there has been and continues to be a relatively small amount of published literature in indigenous South African languages (including Afrikaans) compared with that of English. This is not only due to the predominance of English as a spoken language - economic factors and access to published material from outside the country assists the process.

Regarding the publishing of African language material specifically, however, Mphahlele (1980) asserts that

> as Afrikaans publishing has captured the largest share of the school market of African areas ... scores of manuscripts in African languages are entirely prevented from reaching the school readership and the general public. (p. 6)

While this may be so, I would suggest that Afrikaans publishing is not the primary cause of the lack of published material in African languages. What this may more fundamentally be ascribed to is the tendency for the written word to be privileged over the oral and this is pre-eminently attributable to the incorporation of education into the territory of the English language.

English literature has since the eighteenth century (and some might argue, well before then) laid claim to elite and unchallenged status as the repository of English cultural values. Stephen Gray (1985) suggests that in the movement from orality to literacy that began in the last half of the nineteenth century and continues today,

> Literary activity in orthodox Western forms is still a somewhat elitist affair, confined to a relatively small readership. (p. 10)

In South Africa this has only recently begun to be challenged, for no other local language could demonstrate so stable and durable a canon of linguistic cultural artefacts. The arrival of 'civilisation' meant the introduction of all that was finest in English cultural history. Plays, poems, novels, - and reading and writing - in English were thus presented and promoted as the best that civilisation could offer in the way of standards. Access to reading and writing meant access to these standards, so the acquisition of reading and writing skills was inescapably tied to the supplanting of flexible oral standards by a new English, literary, standard.

Hence English could sustain its privileged status through the access it gave to the printed word and this was an area in which other South African languages could not compete. Afrikaans simply did not have the volume of printed material that was available in English; and African languages had no literary tradition at all. The struggle for Afrikaans' independence from its literary antecedents effectively depleted the Afrikaans canon of literature, thus diminishing the assistance of cultural history in formulating concepts of Afrikaner group identity.

For Africans the primacy of the written word diminished the value of their cultural history, which was sustained by a strong oral tradition. Oral culture became associated with 'primitiveness', literacy with 'civilisation'. And because literacy was attainable largely through education, which was controlled and taught by the English, this interdependence ensured that English - its values, standards and usage - determined the cultural values for all. Speaking English was good, because it enabled you to make contact with those that could provide the educational skills that permitted you to gain acceptance in the new civilisation. The acquisition of

spoken English would promote your perception of the need for reading and writing skills; and these would be provided in English. But reading and writing English was better, because it demonstrated educational status as well as an English cultural standard.

Inevitably the association of English usage with literary standards promoted literary competitiveness among second language English speakers. For if literary English provided the standard for 'civilised' accomplishment, then second language writers would be required to demonstrate their qualifications for entry into civilisation through literary style.

This meant that it was unlikely that English itself would be revitalised through the injection of culturally specific African experience and expression into the canon of 'good English Literature'. Early African literature in English exhibits this constraint quite markedly. Lanham (1976) asserts that this is still the case today. African English in South Africa, he says

> stands constantly in the shadow of English English and unless a speaker or writer knows that he controls the latter any public display of African English is marked by hesitancy and self-consciousness. (p. 290)

The cultural imperative that such English English demands of second language English users leads Cronin (1985) to discern a 'disqualification' effect operating on African writers which extends beyond linguistic skills. He observes that:

> Written into the dominant discourses in South Africa is a severe exclusion of blacks ... the African English language poets in South Africa are, then, operating within a language that is redolent of social significance, and which is widely experienced in a disqualifying manner. (p. 28-29)

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In the light of this sober reflection I would suggest that where literary English practice by Africans in the Seventies did produce a negative self-consciousness, in the Eighties this is being transformed, largely through dramatic literature and most noticeably in theatre performance.

The shift to drama seems to have occurred because dramatic writing and theatrical performance are more immediately concerned with spoken forms of English and so enable the writers and performers to recover and revalue orality, and thus the powerful features of orality, that were so recently despised in comparison with literary traditions. This has provided a means of escaping the disqualifying experiences associated with becoming entrapped in the dominant ideological myths of English literary tradition.

Where the processes of appropriating English to serve African consciousness in literature have tended to founder under the sheer immutability of historical traditions attached to English, theatrical performance can far more readily capture contemporary consciousness spontaneously and immediately. The ephemerality, changeability and apparent informality of the spoken word, compared with the fixity and enduringness of written words, make public theatrical performance eminently suitable as a means of freeing expression from prescriptive aesthetic criteria. The exchange between expressive and critical discourses in performance is less critically weighted than in literature: innovations in linguistic forms of expression can occur more readily because judgements are likely to be made on social rather than aesthetic appropriateness; and as playwrights and performers know from encounters with censorship laws, spoken language is far more difficult to control by reference to pre-existing standards.

Hence for African writers considerably more freedom is offered by this form of cultural expression; aesthetic or political constraints from historically dominant value systems occur generally only after the primary cultural event - the performance itself. This coupled with the concept of theatre as a 'halfway house' between literacy and orality (de Kerckhove, 1987) perhaps explains the emergence of theatre in the Eighties in South Africa as a highly popular cultural form of expression for African users of English.

Orality and English

In current South African conditions - with a seemingly continuous State of Emergency and the accompanying stifling of the written word - the pressure on spoken language as the cultural inheritor of literate African consciousness has produced a situation where English appears to be rediscovering its own orality. The greatly increased interest in the oral cultures of Africa (as is evidenced in history and sociology departments) has contributed to the redefining and revitalising of oral English as a cultural carrier.

This in turn is creating valuable connections among previously separate areas of language use among second language speakers and home language speakers of English. The readiness of ALSs to use English to express black South African consciousness, coupled with the willingness of WESSAs to expand their cultural contacts, is creating a rich opportunity for English to function, culturally at least, as a meeting point in the apartheid wasteland.

Since the beginning of the Eighties South African theatre productions have shown a marked increase in work produced by multilingual companies from workshop

processes. The proportion of second language speakers of English in Market Theatre audiences has been noted by the management of the theatre complex with some satisfaction (1) (though there are no statistics available). The 1988 Amstelfest attracted good audiences and a variety of performances in a variety of Englishes and other South African languages. Multilingual community cultural centres are functioning in many areas of Johannesburg and Soweto - usually with English as the medium of teaching (because teachers and pupils have English as the only common language)(2) and the pressure for contact, so effectively countered in the political arena, appears to be finding an outlet in oral cultural areas, particularly in theatre. ALS writers and performers are presenting more work in English (3), using the opportunity to introduce non-ALSing audiences to their experiences and simultaneously popularising new theatrical forms and English language varieties in the process. The success of productions such as Ecpha, Asinamali, Woza Albert, Sophiatown and Sarafina, both *here and in some cases in Europe and the United States*, lends support to the view that non-ALSs are as eager to learn about as ALSs are to articulate their consciousness.

Culturally, then, English seems to be acceptable to most as the language of cultural unity in multiplicity. The benefit to English is potentially enormous: legislated language boundaries are giving way, with the resulting variety and flexibility.

For the ALS playwrights and performers the incorporation of English into the multilingual context of other South African languages ensures that it can be used with greater confidence because it relieves them of the necessity of conforming to prescribed standards. What is being said has never been said before in English, so traditional rules cannot apply. For the WESSA audiences

new consciousness, expressed in new linguistic forms, engages them in cultural discoveries at the same time as they are exposed to new linguistic perceptions of their 'own' language, providing them with the safety of familiarity while readjusting the linguistic conventions that such familiarity can make stale.

So for both WESSAm and ALS second language English speakers the freedom of linguistic association that English usage in the theatre is currently providing may well be a small but hopeful sign of a viable new South African consciousness.

2. COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY

English and the Formation of a Black Urban Working Class

Where the use of Afrikaans is pre-eminently associated with the acquisition of power through the acquisition of land in the nineteenth century, English is associated with economic control through commerce and industry. The industrialisation and increasing urbanisation of South Africa with the development of the mining industry provided the conditions for English to dominate, through the decline of agriculture that went with urban industrial growth.

Callinicos's accounts (1982; 1985) of the political and economic pressures on African and Afrikaans farmers to move to the mining centres of Kimberley and the Witwatersrand provides a wealth of information about the effects of the English-speaking Randlords' control of black and Afrikaans farmers. The rapid growth of the mining industry and resulting political legislation designed to promote the flow of cheap labour to the mines and to Afrikaans-owned farms, brought race and

class-based alliances to bear on identities hitherto based most strongly on language and culture (4).

With the alliance of Afrikaans and English speakers in the interests of capital, black workers were increasingly separated from control of the conditions of their lives: from a rural population they rapidly transformed into a largely migrant urban proletariat through legislative coercion. They were isolated linguistically and consolidated as a dispossessed class partly by their unfamiliarity with either of the languages of domination.

Because White skilled and semi-skilled workers perceived African workers as a threat to their own livelihood - legislation uming racial distinctions created African workers as a separate and more exploited class within the proletariat - African workers were further discriminated against in terms of wages, working hours and other constraints upon their working lives. Capital power was obliged to juggle its need for regular cheap migrant labour with its need for the skilled labour of immigrant Europeans i: the investment in mining was to show satisfactory profits.

The Randlords dealt with these difficulties by inventing racial categories which would effectively separate and maintain these conflicts of interests, while securing the lowest possible costs for unskilled labour and satisfying the skilled labourers with comparatively higher wages and shorter working hours. Legislation such as the Job Reservations Bill ensured that the relatively well-organised and unionised European workers were protected from competition from lower paid African workers, the cultural effects of which were to redirect class interests along racial or 'ethnic' lines (Boonzaier, 1988; Chapter 6, pp. 79-99). Language thus inevitably became a crucial feature of economic class distinctions because of its function in determining ethnicity.

Language Exchange Across Ethnic Divisions

Linguistically one of the most interesting developments arising from these economically engineered perceptions of ethnicity was the growth of `fanagalo' as a mining register which served as a crude pidgin lingua franca. Limited in vocabulary and grammatical structures it incorporated primarily Zulu vocabulary and served to issue commands from white foreman to Black workers. Initially it operated only at the work-face, though by the Fifties it was commonly used by white employers to domestic workers. By the 1950s mining companies were including a short course in fanagalo in their `training programmes' for all newly recruited African mineworkers. But there is no evidence that it was ever used by Black workers among different African languages speakers. It seems to have been perceived as a `*white man's* language', probably because its use daily enacted the inequalities and exploitation of the workplace, and was associated primarily with the dehumanising effects of economic and political domination.

The bringing together of multiple language speakers in the mine compounds, however, did establish common experiences for large numbers of otherwise different cultural communities. The enforcement of `home' language policies produced as an adjunct the need for a common language to express this communality of work experience. Urban wage labour conditions of living, so different from the rural subsistence farming conditions of home, required new forms and vocabulary which `home' languages had no words to encompass. Exposure to a variety of `ethnic' indigenous languages, as well as to the languages of their urban masters, provided the means for each language to contribute to new forms, and considerable mixing of languages. English and Afrikaans were used where particularly urban experience was involved; and the `home' languages provided domestic and cultural expression.

Many complex cross-lingual modes of expression have emerged through the continued and intensified contact among urban Africans. All of them are characterised by multilingual features combining colloquial forms of a variety of languages, with one language tending to predominate in grammatical structure. Great flexibility and adaptiveness is evident in their usage: the ability to adjust during conversation to greater usage of the language of the listener is seen as a sign of long standing urban identity.

The tsotsitaal of the Fifties and more recently other as yet unnamed forms of cross-lingual communication are examples of sociolectical forms gaining widespread acceptance as a common language among urban ALS. 'S'camtu' and 'ringus' are informal names given to some of these forms which are currently used in Soweto. The generic name 'Sowetan' is used to categorise them collectively. They cannot be regarded as fully-fledged languages as yet, in that they appear to be regionally specific, *though in the sense that they are evolving out of the* needs of the workplace and as expressions of social conditions it may well be that they are well on the way to becoming so.

Contemporary accounts of language use in Soweto (5) suggest that among urban speakers of different languages there is a fluid, flexible shifting 'common language' which depends predominantly on Zulu and Sotho grammatical structures, but which incorporates vocabulary from many other linguistic sources, including English and to a lesser degree since 1976, Afrikaans. The forms it takes depend on who is involved as speaker and listener in the exchange. It is adapted by considerations of age, public status and degree of intimacy between the speakers as well as the participants' range of multilingualism.

But it is not solely a system of `borrowings' - new vocabulary is emerging which, according to my informant, is untranslateable. He gives the example of `tshwe' as a word which he describes as `an all-purpose action word', used variously to indicate physical movement, sexual suggestiveness and as an expressive term for emotional degrees of intensity as various as a `well, what can you do' tone to a much more forceful and explicitly intentional tone, as in `I'll tshwe you!'

Concepts of Language Purity Among South African Languages

Where the white languages have been consciously and legislatively maintained as historically separate entities, the concept of language purity among African languages appears to be sustained only by practical considerations such as geographical distance from other language speakers. Where physical proximity occurs, as it does in urban townships, `purity' is diminished. So rural Africans tend to speak `purer' forms of Zulu, Xhosa and so on, than do urban African speakers, in the sense that traditional forms of these languages are not exposed to other languages in the way that urban usage is.

Evidence of this was provided for me during the making of a television drama for the Xhosa service of the S.A.B.C. in 1983 (6) (the first drama on a `Black language service' where languages were `mixed' in the narrow sense that individual actors from English and Xhosa language groups spoke their own language). One of the urban Xhosa-speaking actors complained that the `language advisor' (ironically an Afrikaans `home' language speaker) kept correcting his language usage, saying he was allowing Zulu characteristics of grammar and vocabulary to impinge on his Xhosa. The actor

maintained that his Xhosa was dramatically more appropriate to the urban educated character he was playing. The `pure' Xhosa the language adviser insisted on would instantly stereotype the character as a rural uneducated person, he said.

The actor then elaborated on his own language background to me: born in Soweto, he spoke both Zulu and Xhosa at home, as well as Venda, North and South Sotho; and English and Afrikaans, socially and at work. He worked extensively in all five `black' languages doing radio commercials for the various radio services, which he said, indicated the accuracy and acceptability of his usage in each. He indicated that in each of them there was a fair degree of transfer of grammatical forms from other African languages and that the commercial sponsors and the S.A.B.C. allowed this, presumably because the majority of the listeners were familiar with this kind of usage. `Any Sowetan' he maintained understood and used such cross-lingual forms conventionally. He described `pure' forms of each language as `old-fashioned'.

This kind of multilingualism confirms Hauptfleisch's findings (1978, p. 63) regarding bilingual `blending' among Afrikaans and English speakers where social contact is common. Given the greater exposure to many South African languages in Soweto, and the compulsory acquisition of at least a degree of competence in English and Afrikaans from school, the ALS is eminently well-placed to create new versions of South African languages, as Afrikaans and English speakers are not.

Multilingualism in this context has different parameters from those operating in the concept of bilingualism as it applies to English and Afrikaans. Where language mixing is officially deplored and `purity' through separateness is approved for English and Afrikaans, this

is not the case among African languages. Here borrowing and synthesising appear to be common practices and as such, are not susceptible to the judgemental values of 'correctness' and 'purity' (except in state institutions such as the S.A.B.C. and schools)(7). Whether this is the case in written forms of African languages I am not competent to investigate, though I would suspect that written forms are more amenable to ideological prescription than are drama and other forms of oral language. The association of literacy with English would tend to impinge on African literature, bringing similar notions of 'good' or 'correct' usage to bear as occurred in traditional English criticism. The tendency of literary criticism to conserve traditional aesthetic standards does serve to make innovations in written language use a slower process.

English Usage and Class Among ALS of English

Class considerations appear to be less prominent in the language experience and responses of ALSs; the distinction between rural and urban applies more strongly. But the ability to speak English (rather than proficiency in other African languages) does demarcate class consciousness. This is because proficiency in English implies education. The way in which you speak other African languages appears not to carry perceptions of class or social status, as the way in which you speak English does. Thus the artificially created 'ethnic' divisions imposed by legislation are not sustained against the more immediate perceptions of being African (economically and politically dominated) in comparison with being White (economically and politically dominating).

The idea of ethnicity assumes fundamental differences in cultural and linguistic practices among groups of people who share similar experiences socially and at work. But

this is not borne out in linguistic practice; nor, it seems, in other cultural practices. It seems that common experiences of actual political and socio-economic conditions over-ride traditional differences, particularly where tradition has been ideologically manipulated in the interests of preventing powerful class formations among the disempowered population.

Concepts of race as a substitute for concepts of class have in a sense assisted the formation of a unified working class consciousness among Africans in spite of attempts to fragment them linguistically and culturally, because the racial concepts of white and black subsume cultural differences among blacks into more pressing perceptions of themselves in relation to the politically and economically powerful group of "whites".

Perhaps the role of English in this context is most usefully summed up by Neville Alexander (1986) when he states:

> the fate of language is decided in the course of class struggles in which the linguistic elements are never, or perhaps only seldom, pertinent as such. (p. 32)

3. ENGLISH AND AFRICAN POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

As co-ordinator of the Silver Jubilee Conference of the English Academy of Southern Africa, Michael Gardiner (1986a) said

> there is open and intense ideological dispute around every aspect of language in South Africa, especially English. (p. 2)

Certainly the intensity with which language and identity are perceived to reinforce each other in South Africa,

makes English in relation to ALSs particularly susceptible to ambivalent attitudes. For English is manipulated as a political weapon by all its users here.

Widespread usage of English by ALSs indicates that the question of English usage is a manifestation of conscious ideological choice as much as it is of the hegemonic processes. In the context of the struggle to resist and oppose the dominant hegemonic discourse, English has been co-opted into the resisting and opposing forces of African consciousness, in spite of its association with the dominant power structures.

The anomalies of its position as a political weapon in the struggle make the position of English as a site of political struggle a crucial one. For the complexities of this struggle to discover and assert an all-encompassing South African identity find their expression largely in English (when the struggle occurs in language and not in physical action). The recent suppression of journalistic reporting of violent action, under the Emergency Regulations, has to be seen as political action at least as decisive as the overt physical brutality that suppressed the mass gatherings and marches immediately prior to and during the introduction of the first State of Emergency.

The importance of language in the political arena can be demonstrated by this censorship: first in the use that is made of language as a means of controlling or substituting for physical action; secondly, in the way in which the government has used language to suppress other alternative perceptions <u>in</u> language. Language then, is placed at the top of a hierarchy: what may be said - and heard - becomes paramount in attempts to control perceptions of the conditions under which we live. In a sense, what is not said or heard does not exist, or can be made to disappear. The selective news broadcasting of state-

controlled mass media effectively engenders limited perceptions and creates strong systems of belief in the 'truth' of these perceptions by the simple expedient of removing linguistic (and visual) evidence of events that cannot be made to correspond to a particular world view. Language tells us what it is we know; and if language does not tell us then we have little recourse to alternative systems that can.

The growth of political consciousness among ALSs is in part the result of

a) the co-option of languages (and in particular the concept of 'home languages') into the strategies of control used by the dominant group to contain and divide the dominated African masses; (8) and

b) African exposure to English as a language that could be used to express African aspirations, to convey 'a message for the white oppressors who would otherwise not understand what they (Africans) (were) saying' (Kunene, 1986, p. 46).

Regarding the first point - the co-option of language into the political arena as a weapon - Michael Gardiner (1986b) points out that

> the teacher of English should realise that access to language is access to power, a power which the users must make their own. (p. 45)

Among both the dominated and the dominators there is strong recognition of the relation between language usage and political and socio-economic power. Each group in South Africa includes language among the overt methods and goals of the struggle: the dominant group through the force of legislative acts (the Bantu Education Act of 1955, for example), the dominated African group through strategies such as Mphahlele's:

> we have appropriated (the) colonial languages, domesticated them - harnessed them to liberative purposes and processes. (Sands, 1986, p. 9)

Race, Ethnicity and Identity

Official language policies have ensured that language is a determining factor in the establishment of 'national' identities, and indeed, a determinant of race (and thus class) as well. In 1971, the House of Assembly Debates recorded:

> ... the decisive factor by which the nationality of a person is determined is not his birthplace, but rather his race descent and language. (H.A.D. 19 May, 1971)

This kind of statement is possible only in the context of the continuous political necessity that capital and apartheid created for themselves to ensure the separation of the African workforce from ownership of land or access to the means of industrial and commercial production. The Land Act, the Influx Control laws and the Group Areas Act all emerged from the same imperative that designed the Bantu Education Act: to sustain capital-labour relations (that is, class relations) through codifying them in race and language apartheid. Divisions of race (the shift in terminology recently to 'nation' does not change the terms) could be most effectively implemented through the cultural criterion of 'home' language. The language you spoke (if you were racially 'black') would determine your 'ethnic' classification. While this may have been relatively accurate while Africans were still located geographically in fairly consistent cultural rural communities, it collapsed into absurdity with the introduction of migrant labour policies, which formed workers into an urban proletariat.

As new generations of urban Africans grew up, the patent and often tragic absurdity of these definitions of 'race', 'nation' and 'ethnic group' had to be enforced ever more conspicuously and artificially through the promulgation of 'homeland' policies. These laws forcibly removed 'unproductive' urban Africans to geographically foreign locations determined by 'racial descent', determined either by their 'home language' or their parents' (or grandparents') place of origin, each of which provided evidence of their 'ethnic' and personal identity.

This system of control is a good example of the way in which ideological systems are *self-sustaining and self-regulating*: it provided simultaneously its own means and its own proof that its premises were 'true'. Moreover its practices were self-generating, in that 'awkward' *cases in practice could be redressed by reference to its own principles.*

African 'Home Languages' and English Education

The 'home' languages policy enacted in the Bantu Education Act 'preached the importance of our ethnic languages' (Sepamla, 1980, p. 26) but implicitly enforced apartheid through and in language (9). African political, economic and cultural isolation was manifested most acutely in their lack of formal access to the official (dominant) language of urban capital power - English. For in the new education policy, English was introduced only at the Standard 5 level. Bearing in mind that in 1955 only 10% of the African population was in school (about a million African students) and that the pressures on African children to drop out of school were great, the majority of African Children were not continuing school past primary school (Hyslop, 1987).

Schuring's figures for 1960 and 1975 (1979) indicate that the percentages have grown since 1955, though not as greatly as one would wish: according to him, in 1960 12.4% of the African population was at school; in 1975 this had risen to 17.27%.

A further breakdown offered by Schuring (p. 4) shows that in 1975 Africans with educational qualifications of Standard 2 or less constituted 54.4% of the population; those with standards 3 - 7 constituted 40.7%; and those with standard 8 or higher a mere 4.9% of the (African) population.

Thus English both before and after 1955 was not available to the majority of Africans through the formal educational system. Cronin (1985) suggests that this linguistic `disqualification' to which Africans were subjected focused their perceptions of a whole range of other `disqualifications'. Writing about the `voicelessness' of African poets in the Seventies, Cronin identifies

> the absence of basic citizenship rights and in particular a parliamentary `voice', the silencing through repression of the major political organisations of the 1950s and 1960s

as part of the

> cultural and linguistic disqualification. (p. 28)

Given this situation, coupled with the historical privileging of English in education that the mission schools had set in motion (referred to earlier), it was inevitable that political consciousness among Africans in Soweto in 1976 should have erupted into fierce physical protest centred on educational language policy. The substitution of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction for half of the curriculum provided the rallying point that collected all the other `disqualifying' practices to which Africans were subjected round it.

Questions of language, then, are deeply embedded in all socio-political, economic and cultural practices. As Hyslop (1987) states:

> The crisis in education has been part of the crisis of urban social reproduction ... Since education provides the key to the limited employment opportunities available and since it is the site of socialisation and daily existence for masses of working class youth, it is understandable that it should become an arena of contention over scarce resources. (p. 8)

Language Policies and National Identity

Language policy, therefore, specifically as it is practised in education, critically enacts political and cultural issues in that it expresses the fundamental concepts of national identity that a dominant power is concerned to promote. Both fractions of the South African dominant group - English speakers as well as Afrikaans speakers - have systematically promoted their respective languages among black South Africans, though by varying means and with varying degrees of success. English has been and continues to be promoted by means of cultural and economic colonisation and by referring to its international cultural prestige and its capacity to unify by assimilating second language South African speakers into the community of all English speakers. Afrikaans has been promoted with some success by legislative means, and by appealing to its pragmatic local value.

Schuring's survey supports this. He sums up his report by saying:

> Afrikaans is used more often than English at the acoustic level. (p. 60).

though he concedes that it has not had much success among Africans at the cultural level. In contrast

> English is far more popular (among Africans), (is) ... more strongly established amongst those with higher qualifications and amongst urban blacks, (and is) ... used more often than Afrikaans at the graphic level. (pp. 60-61)

Questions regarding the relation of South Africa's 'official' languages to its unofficial or 'home' languages are especially difficult to deal with coherently. The promotion of Afrikaans through legislated policies appears to rest on a belief expressed by the U.N. Institute for Namibia in Lusaka which stated that

> a uniform language policy is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for promoting durable nationhood. (Alexander, 1986, p. 33)

Whereas the relatively loose application of coercive legislation regarding English (except for the fundamental 'official language' status it is accorded) suggests that another belief is operating here which may be expressed like this:

> The deliberate use of language policies for purposes of creating a national identity and fostering sentimental attachment is usually not desirable. (Kelman 1971, p. 43, quoted by Alexander, 1986, p. 33)

However, it may be simply a case of hegemonic saturation. It may well be that English in South Africa needs no official sanction to enforce its usage because historical acculturation has ensured its widespread usage among ALS.

English and National Unity

ALSs appear to be promoting English usage themselves, both among themselves and between Africans and 'white' languages speakers, as the language of national unity and of liberation from apartheid. Attempts by the Black Consciousness Movement during the Seventies to forge a new national consciousness among Africans in South Africa failed to disrupt perceptions of English as a unifying force, partly because alternative 'home' language use was not practically viable, partly because of the association of 'home' languages with the structures of oppression. The emphasis now among ALSs appears to be less on whether English is usable than on how it can be used to

> build the mutual dependencies upon which society is based, so as to unearth the riches which an entire community can offer as education of the young and of itself. (Gardiner, 1986b, p. 45)

It seems that WESSAs and ALSs aspire to the same goal - the widespread use of English in South Africa - for different reasons and from different ideological perspectives. Guy Butler (1985) observes with some satisfaction that Blacks

> are entitled to English, and as much of English "culture" as they care to take (p. 170)

and that

> twenty million Blacks will use English for their own interests and ends, without worrying much about the views of less than 2 million WESSAs. (p. 170)

And this is a view that echoes those of Gwala, Mphahlele, Kunene and others. Ndebele sees

> a spontaneous transformation of the English language occurring where Africans are fashioning a new language for themselves. (Ndebele, 1986, p. 14)

Meerkotter discerns a similar trend:

> English is being africanised and internalised by Africans. ... Black English lives and thrives in South Africa (p. 30)

and he cites as examples

> the "Black" press in South Africa, which is in English, and the number of dynamic "Black" dramas currently being staged to prove the point. (p. 30)

A FUTURE FOR ENGLISH IN SOUTH AFRICA

So in the Eighties there appears to be considerable consensus among ALS and WESSAs as well as (to a more limited extent) Afrikaans speakers, that English and a fully representative South African national identity are linked; and that the present development of English usage is a factor in realising a future South African identity where the fractures induced by apartheid may gradually be healed by acts of communal creation.

Linguistically these acts involve the creation of many varieties of English usage drawing on surrounding 'regional' languages. Alexander (1986) offers a possible linguistic future when he writes:

> What is abundantly clear ... is that a democratic language policy for the future must be based on the reality of a multilingual nation (a concept that until recently was - and for some people at this moment still is - a contradiction in terms) ... It is quite conceivable that after an initial phase of dominance of English, one or other of the indigenous African languages such as consolidated 'Nguni' or a consolidated 'Sotho' could become the lingua franca of a future Azania/South Africa. (pp. 34-35)

While I do not agree with this, it is an appealing model and appears to be borne out in current mixed Sowete languages today. But Alexander does not sufficiently recognise, I think, the involvement of English in his consolidation of various influences on indigenous African languages in urban situations.

In 'Sowetan', for example, English is strongly marked as a feature of expression to do with common urban conditions as they apply to concepts of time, place and legal constraints. Days of the week, months of the year, hours and minutes are usually rendered in English, as are street names and numbers and public buildings. More striking are the references to statutory laws in English (not Afrikaans). This suggests that English is both embedded in African urban consciousness and at the same time functions as an index of perceived difference where political or economic impositions are at odds with African interests. That Western concepts of time, space and political structure appear to be consciously associated with English usage implies that urban identity is intimately bound up with familiarity with English terminology in these areas. Equally notions of 'cosmopolitan' are registered in a greater use of English in all social as well as work exchanges. It is hard to see how English can be left out of the future picture as long as urban living conditions apply.

The regionality of indigenous languages is also a factor that Alexander does not really acknowledge. 'Sowetan', for example, is fairly regionally specific and does not apparently transfer from one geographically distant urban area to another, nor certainly from urban to rural areas.

Discussions with Sowetan students at Wits revealed that a student from Cape Town who is proficient in Xhosa and Zulu as well as English and Afrikaans had difficulty

when the Sowetan students spoke among themselves because he had continually to ask what they meant.

There has as yet been little formal research of this linguistic form. Until this has been done it is difficult to determine how strongly this cross-lingual usage may provide a new `standard' South African national language. At present `Sowetan' appears to be dialectical in its regionality and sociolectical in its use by predominantly young urban Africans. But with its adaptability, its free `borrowings' and its coining of new vocabulary, it may well be the beginning of a new language.

Its interest in the context of English language users is the degree to which English usage is incorporated and what kind of effect this may have on current *SAE. For* it is one of the few areas where in the relationship between English and other South African languages, English does not play a dominant role. Yet its occurrence as a narrow and highly specific register for those areas of experience where conformity and agreement are essential (time, place, sanctioned behaviour, etc.) suggests that it does occupy a crucial place in the consciousness of *urban Africans which* is unlikely to disappear.

AFRICAN LANGUAGES SPEAKERS AND THEATRE PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH

ALSs are bringing their own language forms to bear on the `standard' forms of English cultural usage. These vary widely according to the needs of the performers themselves or the dramatic presentation of the thematic concepts the work enacts. In Fatima Dike's play (first presented in 1977) The First South African, (1979), for example, the dialogue has a strongly `translated' feel

to it. The English here accurately registers the formality of second language speakers in its vocabulary, which is sometimes colloquially archaic, and its structures, which are generally longer and less contextually allusive than those of English idiomatic conversation. This rendering of the *carefulness* of English usage catches the lack of spontaneity that characterises the utterances of speakers who are more familiar with written than oral forms of English, making much of the speech in the play faintly anachronistic. For example:

Austin: Oh, you know your rights as a man when your girlfriend is involved, but when your morals as a man are involved you do as you like.

Freda: And remember who you're talking to, this is not one of your friends.

Rooi: Mama, tate, if you want me to be a sissy, say so.

Austin: We don't say be a sissy. We expect all that is good and beautiful to come from you.

Rooi: Mama, tate, I still say if that boy calls me a white man I'll beat him up and he can do what he likes. After all, I'm not the first person in this location to go to jail.

Freda: But you'll be the first one in this family.

Austin: Hayi ke mfo wam ugqibile, you have made yourself clear.

Freda: Not in my house. If Zwelinzima feels that his balls are big enough, he must go. After all the council has hostels and bachelor quarters. He must go and rule himself in his own place, not here. (p. 17)

Compare this for example, with the family scenes in Sophiatown (1988) (first presented in 1986), where the grammatical structures are closer to idiomatic spoken English in their brevity and contextual allusiveness:

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> Freda: But you'll be the first one in this family.
>
> Austin: Hayi ke mfo wam uqqibile, you have made yourself clear.
>
> Freda: Not in my house. If Zwelinzima feels that his balls are big enough, he must go. After all the council has hostels and bachelor quarters. He must go and rule himself in his own place, not here. (p. 17)

Compare this for example, with the family scenes in Sophiatown (1988) (first presented in 1986), where the grammatical structures are closer to idiomatic spoken English in their brevity and contextual allusiveness:

Lulu: What's going on?

Mamariti: Hey, Lulu, tell that madman from Drum to stop die geraas.

Lulu: Jakes, it's five o'clock in the morning.

Jakes: You tell your mother I pay good rent. This is my bedroom. You see the chalkline on the floor?

Lulu: So?

Jakes: Well, I work in my bedroom, so leave me alone!

Mamariti: (offstage) Luister! You bloody keep quiet - or out!

Jakes: Jesus, Ma, you're like the Boers. You want me on the streets. I'm working, I pay rent, this is my space, pitiful as it is, and history is being made right now - and you want silence!

(There is a knocking at the door)

Jakes: Jesus Christ! What now? Surely not today?

(Enter FAHFEE carrying a suitcase)

Fahfee: They got me. They knocked down my shack before my eyes. (p. 63)

Specific differences in utterance here involve the use of different languages for emotional expression (Mamariti uses a mixture of English and Afrikaans, where Austin uses Xhosa, followed by direct translation into English, and Jakes uses *solely* English: 'Jesus, Ma, you're like the Boers'). There are also differences in grammatical organisation: 'He must go and rule himself in his own place, not here' uses sequential positive and negative contrast between utterances, whereas 'You bloody keep quiet - or out' performs the same function using two positive commands. There is metaphoric expansion in each example, though again this occurs in

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different ..ays with different effects: in Dike's play ('If Zwelinzima feels that his balls are big enough ...') the metaphor serves to confirm general social experience; in Sophiatown ('history is being made right now') it serves to focus attention on the importance of individual areas of action by investing them with the significance of collective action.

All thes.: linguistic differences point to the cultural differences existing between the dramatic worlds each play creates. These kinds of changes give evidence not simply of the different conditions in the two dramatic worlds - the differences between rural and urban family relationship, for example. More fundamental differences in socio-political perceptions are rendered in the stylistic differences in the language usage in each play. Sophiatown incorporates oppositional strategies in its responses to the particular conditions that threaten the Sophiatown of the Fifties. Fahfee declares: 'They can't stop us forever' (p. 73) and Jakes affirms this more directly:

> Sophiatown was a cancer on a pure white city
> moved out at gunpoint by madmen. With its
> going the last common ground is gone. The war
> has been declared, the battle sides are
> drawn. Yeoville and Meadowlands, and a waste
> land in between. (p. 73)

And in the final moments of the play:

> Memory is a weapon . (p. 73)

In The First South African, on the other hand, the destruction of Kooi's identity and sanity remains a personal familial tragedy. There appears to be no way of resisting or countering the effects of imposed racial classifications. Kooi, like the others in the play, must live as best he can within the conditions created by the Population Registration Act, which makes 'boys' out of men and where the white man is 'my baas'. There is no relief or hope; no weapons for defence or attack.

The Availability of New Audiences for African Performers

In the ten years since the inception of the Market Theatre African performers have found a new venue there which has enabled them to escape from the cultural isolation resulting from the restrictive home languages and own areas legislation. But because the Market audiences initially (and currently) comprise predominantly White ESSAs, ALSing performers had to find a distinctive English voice with which to address their new audiences. The pressure on English to function effectively as a means of expressing a distinctively African consciousness has occurred in a context of white cultural consciousness. So initially conformity to WESSA standards of usage exerted the greatest pressure. The context provided by the audiences meant that African consciousness has to be framed within the dominant (White) prevailing cultural expectations of that venue. African plays were fringe activities set within the continuity of plays which were either imports from Europe or were indigenous works in which white South African experience was rendered in dramatic and linguistic forms derived from European concepts of culture.

A list of early productions (1976 - 1984) (10) shows that of some 92 productions (including musical and dance programmes), 41 were published non-South African plays in English; 46 were new South African plays in English, one in Afrikaans. Of those written or performed in English, 7 were the work of ALS.

In the Upstairs Theatre for the same period there were some 97 productions (including musical evenings, dance productions and children's plays); of these 43 were non-South African published plays in English; one in Afrikaans. 36 were new South African plays in English, of which 5 were plays written or workshopped by African performers.

The third venue, the Laager, is the smallest of the venues. Because its seating capacity is so limited, it is rarely a commercially viable venue, so it is used largely as a showcase for new or experimental work. The Market Theatre Company makes it available to small ad hoc companies on a rental basis at terms which make it accessible to groups with few financial resources. Here the Market records show that during the same period there were some 78 productions, of which 18 were non-South African published plays. Of the 48 South African works (including musical and dance programmes), 8 were presented by ALS. There was one Afrikaans musical evening and three Afrikaans plays. (The total number of productions includes return seasons of popular productions.)

In this venue there was a number of workshop productions developed by multilingual groups under the direction of WESSA co-ordinators - Malcolm Purkey and William Kentridge and the Junction Avenue Company; and Barney Simon's collaboration with Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema, for example. There were also some productions in English by Afrikaans writers or directors - Johan Blignaut's At the Gate and Pieter Dirk Uys' Faces in the Wall and Uyscreams. Since 1984 there has been a rapid increase in the number of plays in English by ALS writers and a noticeable increase in their popularity as is evidenced by the transfer of a number of productions from the smaller venues to the main theatre, or their premieres in the large auditorium. Sarafina, Woza Albert, and Sophiatown are examples of such productions.

The Market Theatre has thus contributed greatly to the movement away from Eurocentric theatrical models and the development of indigenous forms. This has been accelerated as well by the cultural boycott which has denied local managements access to the scripts of British and

American plays. The opportunities thus provided by the Market Theatre as a venue *associated* with multicultural South African new works and South Africa's enforced isolation from English language 'international' works, have created conditions where WESSA audiences are exposed to new kinds of theatrical and linguistic experiences in *English*. *Africanising* WESSA consciousness has resulted from this exposure, and judging from the commercial and critical successes of many of these productions, the WESSA is willingly acquiescing in this reversal. It has become fashionable to be seen to be supporting the *Market Theatre* among middle class WESSAs whose cultural heritage is maintained in the tradition of theatre-going.

CHAPTER 5: NOTES

1. From informal talks with members of the Market Theatre publicity team, and Mannie Manim's personal assistant, Regina Sebright.

2. My own experience as a teacher at the Kopano community centre is supported here in informal talks with Bess Finney and Donalda Patrick, both teachers in other similar centres.

3. A list of the productions presented at the Market Theatre (Schwartz, 1988) confirms this trend.

4. The debate regarding the relati[illegible]etween race, class and consciousness in South Africa is a complex and continuing one which lies outside the scope of this study.
But it is useful to note Marks' & Rathbone's (1982) comment here that 'Capital did not invent racism ... (but) there has at least been a certain reciprocity between South Africa's racist practices and its industrialisation' (p. 6).
Boonzaier et al (1988) are extremely pertinent here too. For theories of class outside a specifically South African context cf. Laclau & Mouffe (1985) and Marshall (1988).

5. My information here is derived from a number of informal talks with a third year student in the Wits School of Dramatic Art during 1988. His comments are confirmed by other Sowetan students in the School and adult Sowetans in the Kopano community centre.

6. `The Thirteenth Floor' produced and directed by *Pierre* Hinch, re-broadcast in January 1989.

7. This may well apply to universities as well: Gwala (1984) charges academics with fostering this concept when he writes: `There never has been such a thing as pure language ... only academic fallacy can defend such an abstraction.' (p. 43)

8. Kunene (1986) asserts that `We are bound to the demands of our own historical context so that while our English medium is being shaped by our history "command of the English language" is a myth of the first order'. (p. 53)

9. For an elaboration of this see *Meerkotter* (1986) pp. 26-31.

10. I have used a typed list provided by the Market Theatre for these. *Since then Schwarz's* book (1988) has been published with more accurate records. These confirm the trend away from Eurocentric plays at the Market Theatre towards indigenous drama in English.

CHAPTER SIX: ALS DRAMA IN ENGLISH

It is at this point that neat analytical categories begin to blur in the face of actual theatrical practice. For the purposes of this study I have artificially separated WESSA speakers of English from ALS English users. In actual theatrical practice, though, these distinctions are not clearly maintained. As will be shown in the following analyses of Sophiatown and Asinamali, neither is wholly a product of either language group. There is justification for including these two plays within this category, however. Though each play presents a markedly different dramatic world from the other, they do have in common:

- a similar process of making, in their workshop methods;
- the same venue (the Market Theatre) for their presentation to WESSA audiences; and
- a similar function, in presenting ALS perceptions of the conditions of the *past and the present in* South Africa for a predominantly WESSA audience, in the language of that audience.

These analyses focus on:

- *the relationships* expressed in the dramatic action;
- the theatrical relationship between audience, performers and performance;
- the perceptions of identity, particularly WESSA identity, that are expressed; and
- the function of English in promoting all these aspects.

1. JUNCTION AVENUE THEATRE COMPANY'S SOPHIATOWN

There are strong thematic connections between Sophiatown and an earlier work, The Fantastical History of a Useless Man (FH), which was first presented in September 1976. FH was described as

> addressing itself very consciously and directly to the self-recognition of the young, White English-speaking South African at a moment of crisis, viewed against a boldly sketched perspective of the country's history. (Abrahams, 1978) (1)

Sophiatown was first presented in 1986. It is demonstrably different in its subject matter, dramatic structure and language usage, yet is still preoccupied with the question of WESSA identity. An analysis of the later play provides useful evidence of the effects on WESSA consciousness of the ten years after the Soweto 'moment of crisis'.

Both plays equally exhibit an intense concern with 'the *recovery of discarded areas*, or the redress of selective and reductive interpretation' of the past (Williams, 1977, p. 116) and the implications of such a reshaping of history on the present. Hence, like Asinamali, Sophiatown very consciously engages in

> an adequate recognition of the indissoluble connections between material production, political and cultural institutions and activity, and consciousness. (Williams, 1977, p. 80)

This notion of history allows the contemporary researcher and the play to stand in a relation similar to that of the audience and the play. Both researcher and audience participate in the present as 'history in the making'. Neither is exempt from the process out of which the particular conditions of the play emerge; both

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construct their perceptions of the present in their own image because they are inescapably tied to the conditions of the present. Hence the play functions as a self-reflective activity for its WESSA audiences, demarcating the limits of its understanding of the socio-political pressures on them that have prescribed such limits.

The historical approach is well-suited as a methodology for the study of theatre performance because meaning is inevitably provisional, incomplete and unstable when such a methodology is applied; just as the process of performance enacts the construction of a dramatic history in the same way.

Both FH and Sophiatown establish this historical context immediately through the introduction of a narrator figure who speaks from a contemporary perspective. The Compère in FH opens the play with a specific directive to the audience as to the purpose of the theatrical action:

> Our fantasy is designed to throw light on our Useless Man's predicament as we probe his past and predict his future. For if we are truly to understand the complexity of the future, we must understand the stupidity and greed that constitutes our past. (p. 13)

In the later play, Jakes, in a similar role to that of the Compère, points to the historical processes at work in his present (the 1950s) in the recurring phrases 'history is being made right now' and 'this is history - we're in history'.

Central, too, to the Junction Avenue Company's perception of history is the concept of mediated action. Malcolm Purkey, director of both productions, in answer to the question what do you mean by mediation, replied

> the filtering ... where for example societal relationships that are abstracted and analysed and made theoretical are shown in their

> living and palpable form in the interstices of men and women ... perhaps that's what mediation is - I know it when I see it happen in the theatre. (Abrahams, 1978)

Theatrical and historical mediation appear to have in common the framing of particular action within a time continuum. Awareness of the continuum creates a dialectic between the vividness and absoluteness of things as they are now, and a lived sense of how they have been and might be. Theatrical mediation implies a similar process: dramatic action happens and cannot be undone; the audience knows this and accepts the inevitability of the dramatic continuum. Yet they simultaneously frame the dramatic historicity of the play with their awareness of drama as only one of many activities in their lives. The terms the drama sets up are not the same as those determined by actual conditions and practices outside the theatre. The tension between actual and possible is thus established. The dramatic events are thus both representative of a general condition and specifically those of people responding in a particular way to conditions that generally apply in that world.

Sophiatown displays a considerable movement away from the relatively narrow South Africa that surrounded the middle class WESSA of liberal sympathies in F.H. The spectrum has enlarged here and the white liberal voice is a solitary, displaced sound among a range of other culturally and economically grouped voices. WESSA experience, while registered as different from all other kinds of experience in the play, is seen as a peripheral but 'special' one. Again the WESSA is perceived as ineffectual ('useless') though for reasons different from those in F.H. Where F.H. was concerned with the hegemonic control that history exerts, Sophiatown's focus shifts to the effects of such historical hegemony on the people who participate least in the exercise of

ideological, political and economic power but are most subject to its enactment.

This is not the familiar terrain in which the WESSA is at home, where isolation is perceived as privacy and allows for the kind of introverted self-analysis of which F.H. is a product. Sophiatown is set in precisely the location that has been separated and mystified out of existence in dominant white consciousness. 'It's our territory' says Mingus (p. 25).

For the WESSA it is a foreign country, with all the excluding infrastructures and habits that reduce a foreign visitor to the status of a child, in a strange country. Here the WESSA is 'the other'. The WESSA's 'habitual modes of representation' (Bennett, 1970, p. 54) do not operate as the norm. It is the WESSA who is the outsider. For Ruth Sophiatown is 'the other side of the world' (p. 32). For the household she is 'a European and a guest' (p. 21).

But significantly the 'otherness' proves permeable, temporarily, at least. This is partly an effect of language: in the play English is common to both the Sophiatown residents and to Ruth. Ruth, the WESSA representative - the 'White girl' - is shown to be capable of being absorbed to a certain extent into the conditions and practices hitherto outside her range of experience. For the duration of the play she is largely absolved from her unwilling and unwitting identification with a racially exclusive dominant minority, and allowed to share the conditions imposed by 'her' group on the 'real' but ma ised people of Sophiatown.

How far her acceptance by the Sophiatown household goes and what kinds of terms are established as a modus operandum between her and them is one of the major interests of the drama for a WESSA audience. For there

is no question of her becoming 'one of them'; her role is always circumscribed by her 'otherness'. At the end of the play she is as displaced as they; she finds she can neither return to Yeoville (a personal ideological choice) nor can she go with them to Meadowlands (an ideological restriction imposed by legislation).

The play involves an explicit examination of the way in which the WESSA views himself in relation to a group officially categorised as oppositional in terms of race, education and class; and in turn how he is viewed as other by that group. The play is structured around a fundamental racial and cultural dichotomy in which the apparently unifying factor of language is involved. The household's stereotyping of Ruth as 'the white girl' and Ruth's own assumptions derived from her Yeoville upbringing rebound on each other to confirm her differentness. For instance Mingus' determination to provide her with a bath, and her assumption that baths in Sophiatown are as available as they are in Yeoville, reinforce each other: they confirm for Mingus the *demands on his time*, effort and ingenuity that whites make; for Ruth the distance that her assumptions create serves as a retreat as well as an embarrassment when she becomes conscious of *them*.

The status quo of difference and distance appears to be acknowledged and accepted (with some relief) by both. When Mingus makes sexual advances to her, Ruth retreats into the distinction of not being a 'kjerrie'. So the privileges accorded to 'white' and to 'middle class' are firmly sustained by Ruth herself and by the Sophiatown community, granting each a measure of protection from the other. For the household it means that Ruth cannot impinge too far; for Ruth it means a degree of privacy. Distance between Yeoville and Sophiatown is, it seems, regrettable, but inevitable and perhaps necessary. The most that can be achieved is 'understanding'.

In this, Sophiatown perhaps most accurately embodies the 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1967, p. 16) of its time. The early Eighties, in the aftermath of the Soweto tragedy, engendered in both black and white South Africans a sense of despair and 'psychological and physical dispossession' (Roberts, 1980, p. 135). The WESSA tendency to solitary nostalgia, evidenced in F.H., found an answering tendency among black South Africans to look back at the past to find the means of changing the present. The destruction of Sophiatown provided a historical symbol for both: psychological dispossession for the WESSA, physical dispossession for the ALS; a unifying sense of loss for both.

Language Usage in the Play

More striking, in comparison to the common voice heard in F.H. is the broadening of the English usage in Sophiatown. The expansion is more crucial than simply an extension of the vocabulary and structures to include varieties not heard in the Eurocentric monocultural and literate usage of F.H. English acquires a number of functions and correspondingly is required to recognise its own internal contradictions and inconsistencies. Hence English enters the play not simply as a means of expressing the political, economic and cultural pressures on Ruth and the household. English is used as an actor in the drama.

Sophiatown is pre-eminently a play about language and its uses. The dramatic action is predominantly linguistic action. Words are weapons against other words: official decrees can be defied only by speaking against them. For want of any other means of defence, words have to oppose the physical force with which such official decrees are executed. Spoken words are the only *defence* against 'These Boers (who) are trying to take

over the country ... with their lorries, their guns and their bulldozers' (p. 50).

So English serves as the last possession of a people dispossessed of their homes, their freehold rights to the land, their history and indeed their 'lifestyle'. If 'English is the language that unifies us', as Jakes claims (p. 52), the relations within such a unity remain desperately unequal, for the price of unity appears to be hegemonic absorption and submission to the ideological imperatives of English, and thus white dominance. The struggle inevitably takes place within English itself, for the price of defying the race ideologies inscribed in English is voluntarily to sever connections with the 'Softown lifestyle' itself. For this lifestyle involves the cultural history provided by English.

> Here we listen to Bach and Beethoven. We listen to great American jazz. We read great Russian novels. We are a brand new generation. (p. 53)

English is the language that brings Sophiatown into a larger cultural community than a South African community. Locally English words are racially inscribed; they are 'sweet white words' (p. 29). In a wider frame of reference they are a measure of cultural 'greatness': they can tell 'all sorts of truths' (p. 31) because they can tell both Shakespeare's truths and Lulu's. English is part of the Softown lifestyle.

> Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane wrote their best, here in Sophiatown. (p. 1)

And they wrote in *English*. *So English is the means to* gain recognition, to escape the entrapment in 'the Boere's dream of a whites-only world' (p. 2) and find a place in a world which offers 'freedom ... meeting ... *fantasy ... access. White bohemians* and black intellectuals'. (p. 2)

English is also inscribed in the history of the Sophiatown people through their education in English.

> If there was one thing we got from our church schools, it was a *love of English* (p. 52)

says Jakes.

English usage is thus not only critical as a weapon in the struggle; it is the disputed territory. Its use is both the means of articulating the meaning of the Softown lifestyle and one of the identifying features of it. In the difference between a 'native location' and a 'freehold suburb' English is the provider of the terminology and is a measure of that difference. Such are the hegemonic influences of English's history in South Africa that the struggle to escape its ideological stronghold has to be fought with the words that English provides.

The cultural dominance of English is inscribed in the ideological base of the *whole play*. The argument over Lulu's education provides a platform for two explicit and opposing ideological stances about language. Implicitly powerful connections are made between *language, education and identity*. All three generations in the family, Mamariti, Jakes and Lulu, reject Ruth's proposition that 'you're not illiterate if you can speak Zulu and Xhosa and Sotho' (p. 52). The alliance between English and literacy has become a tenet of faith for them. And the same holds true, it seems, for the performers.

Ruth argues for a democracy of languages in South Africa, where each holds equivalent value, but her arguments lack specificity and conviction and rely on vague generalisations:

> You don't want to lose your own language

she says, and

> I just think it's a terrible thing to lose a language.

Jakes' counter argument

> But you're still Jewish and you can't speak Hebrew, right? That proves my point

comes much closer to rendering the ambivalences inherent in the use of English as a marker of identity in South Africa. English usage does sustain Sophiatown's sense of its own identity, just as Ruth's sense of identity is bound up with being English-speaking. For Ruth, though, 'English-speaking' is fused with the concepts of 'white' and 'South African'. For Jakes its associations are not racial and national but cultural and international.

During the action of the play the audience is exposed to the tensions existing between these two perspectives. Solutions are not forthcoming, but the dramatic action finds a theatrical parallel in audiences separated from Sophiatown of the Fifties by some thirty years and the 1976 Soweto uprising where the rallying point was protest against official language policy (2). Jakes speaks into the theatrical world from the dramatic world when he declares

> Softown is a brand new generation and we are blessed with a perfect confusion. (p. 44)

An audience in the Eighties is invited to see themselves in the Sophiatown of the Fifties, and to recognise Sophiatown perceptions as those of the Eighties. History is 'right now'.

Varieties and Hierarchies in English

In Sophiatown, unlike the earlier E.H., characters are distinguished from each other by the way in which they use English. Relative social status is thus signified by

the speaker's relation to English and its usage. Those characters - Jakes, Fahfee, Ruth and Lulu - who have the fullest range of registers have the greatest effective power in the structures of the household. Those who have only a tentative ability to speak English and whose range of register is limited (Mammariti, Princess and particularly Charlie) have least control over even the most immediate conditions of their lives. Mingus, as will be shown, presents a more complex case.

The kind of English in which the characters are most competent determines the areas in which they can exercise their power. Jakes, for instance, holds the authority of the written word over the spoken. He is the one who creates public identities for Ruth and the others through his article in Drum. He is the mediator between the family and their wider relations with the rest of Sophiatown, in the same way that he is the mediator between the characters in the dramatic world and the audience in the theatrical world.

A clear linguistic hierarchy is established in the play which places the written word above the spoken word. And even within this there are refinements of status. In the written word the 'special notice' (the written decree announcing their imminent eviction) is paramount. Its power to determine the social, economic and political conditions of their lives is unchallengeable. In the descending scale of value, Jakes' articles for Drum come next. At this level factual reporting is valued less than writing stories, which "don't have to be true" (p. 39). Boxing reports are 'banging out a living'; 'dealing with socialites' will make Jakes 'the talk of Softown. This here is my big break'.

The written word has greater prestige than the more informal handwritten one. Lulu's account of her family for her school essay, in which she incisively counters

the ideological slant of the play with a version of her own, focuses on those aspects of their actions which are not otherwise acknowledged. According to her definitions "Mingus steals goods from the railways"; Mamariti is

> just a cheeky old woman, breaking the law, working on her beer, and planning for a future which never comes. (p. 30)

Ruth criticises Lulu's essay for being only one of "all sorts of truths".

Fiction is more potent than truth, it appears. Certainly the play promotes its own mythologising fictions, and enacts them, in the same way that the special notice enacts the apartheid myths that sustain dominant ideology. As Lulu declares:

> Everything in this house it's just fiction, fiction, fiction. (p. 32)

But the fictions of written language are stronger than the mythologising power of spoken language. One of the major dramatic conflicts in the play is enacted in Jakes' dual role as the narrator of Sophiatown history. Theatrically he functions as a historical mediator between the audience and the fragile construction of an oral history of Sophiatown. His spoken narratives reverberate with all the techniques of orality: the rolling lists of names and places that conjure up a richly textured physical context; repetitions, mnemonics, the identification of the narrator's persona with a communal we; and the association of identity with occupation.

> Sophiatown, Softown, Koffifi, Kasbah, Sophia ... Place of Freedom Square, and the Back of the Moon. Place of Can Themba's Place of Truth. Place of the G-men and Father Huddlestone's Mission. Place of Balansky's and the Odin Cinema. And let's never forget Kurt Boy and Jazz Boy and the Manhattan Brothers, and Dolly Rathebe singing her heart out - here in Sophia ... it was grand because it was Softown. Freehold! It was ours! Not mine exactly, but it was ours ... Boxing was

> my beat, but I wanted to cover the Softown lifestyle. Anything could happen here, and if it did I wanted to be there. (pp. 1-2)

Yet the fullness and 'truth' of oral history of this kind is diminished by Jakes' urgent sense that the potency of such orality is more effective when transformed *into a written record*. '*Memory* is a weapon' he declares at the end of the play. But it is a more effective weapon when it is written down.

This sets up a conflict between the dramatic and theatrical elements in the play. Theatricality is always expressed in orality; yet the dramatic techniques which make Jakes, a journalist, the custodian and constructor of a mythical, alternative past, denies the potency of the theatrical medium. Ironically the dramatic action embodies the defeat of spoken language by the force of governmental decree. Theatrically the success of the play depends on the degree to which the spoken language of the play is memorable. Only if the theatrical oral features of the language usage are richly realised, can the alternative ideology of the drama be registered.

To a certain extent the imbalance between theatrical orality and dramatic literacy is redressed in Fahfee's role as the bringer of the 'news of the day'. For him 'words on paper - useless' (p. 65). Words, like guns, must be active, not substitutes for action. Like Mingus, who is illiterate, he functions in an oral world of doing and speaking. Theatrically he enacts the values proposed by the dramatic world. History is alive as long as the anger, despair and faith of the people is expressed. Unlike Jakes the lines between official and people's history are clearly drawn for him. People's history is oral; official history traps the lived experience of the present as history in the immobility of literacy.

The 2 appears to be an ideological and linguistic fifth column at work in Jakes, a hegemonic effect of his greater exposure to the institutions and practices of dominance. Drum may be 'a native magazine' (p. 36), but it is nevertheless incorporated in the economic and journalistic practices of a newspaper world dominated by white capital and ideology. Jakes' belief in the concept of recorded history is an inevitable consequence of such hegemonic exposure. Its unconscious and unarticulated presence in the dramatic world of Sophiatown damages the case presented consciously for supplanting selective recorded accounts of history with 'living' history. The internal contradiction between theatrical means and dramatic purpose *here emphasises the danger of engaging* with the concept of theatre from a literary perspective.

Throughout the play the written word is privileged over the spoken word and this privileging is thematically embedded in the action. Written language skills, particularly *in English*, are valued and shown to be effective in social action, where oral skills are not. Congress's call for action against the forced removals fails, partly because it cannot organise its 'call' into printed instructions. Mingus' exercise of social power as a member of the Americans is limited by his illiteracy, for he too sees authority as vested in the written word. Where matters of significance have to be dealt with, he insists on having them written, even though he must enlist the aid of Jakes, as, for example, in the letter writing scene. Because Mingus' sexual and personal identity is tied to his public identity as a gangster, his literary incompetence makes Jakes appear to him as a serious contender for power in both the public world and in his private relations. Hence his jealousy of Jakes over Ruth and his sneers at Jakes' literacy

> You bloody situations, you're full of words. (p. 65)

He adopts a strategy for diminishing the power of literacy by translating it into orality. Lulu confides to Ruth

> Do you know, Mingus and the Americans stop the intellectuals, die situations, on the street corner, and to make trouble they make them recite Shakespeare. (p. 30)

For Mingus the power and mystery invested in the written word can be appropriated by himself in this way. The myth of Shakespeare is more potent than the myths he can construct out of orality.

English is thus a central site for the ideological struggle, the war waged between Sophiatown and Yeoville. But the linguistic weapons are unequal. Written words are supported by 'guns and tanks'; spoken words by 'blood'. And even Jakes' typewriter, symbol of power in the household, cannot withstand the anonymous and reductive power of the printed words of the State's decrees.

English and Social Identity

The interpenetration of the particular and the general is a feature of all theatre performance but in Sophiatown this theatrical principle is explicitly examined in the thematic action of the drama. The relationships between Ruth and the other members of the household becomes a central focus and two opposing perceptions of identity are presented. Ruth operates from a perspective of a free, responsible individual; the family operates as a socially structured unit.

For the family, the business of one is the business of all. Ruth's learning of tsotsitaal involves all the men of the extended family because they all have a vested interest in her. Mingus can establish high status in the Americans by claiming her as his property and denying

the others the opportunity of sexual encounters with her. His `protection' of her also confirms his role as the patriarch of the family. Jakes needs her to make his `big break' as a journalist. Fahfee sees in her the possibility of widening the base of popular political activity through cultural exchange and multilingualism. Ruth will make the whole household `the talk of the town'. She can provide Mamariti with `spirits from town' to promote her shebeen business; and Lulu with help with her homework. Thus what is good for the family is good for Ruth.

But Ruth mistakes the terms in which she is accepted into the household. It is not her individuality which serves them, it is her representativeness. The concept of the primacy of the individual in the construction of *identity, a cornerstone* of liberal European thought, confuses her ability to perceive the essential difference between Yeoville and Sophiatown. The illusion of personal freedom is more easily sustained in Yeoville where the divisive structures of apartheid surround rather *than intrude on the daily conditions* of living. In Sophiatown, where daily survival depends on illegal activities (Mamariti's shebeen and Mingus' stolen goods), the illusion of individual moral sensibility gives way to codes based on the protection provided by relationships of family and friends, *and on practical expe*dience. Where individual control of the conditions under which one lives is eroded, the liberal notion of individual moral responsibility is a useless and meaningless luxury.

Perceptions of WESSA Identity in the Play

Ruth's first appearance begins the thematic dialectic between these two concepts of identity that is sustained throughout the action. Her first introduction of herself to the family is an attempt to establish contact at a personal level of first name terms.

> Hello! I'm Ruth. (Silence) Ruth Golden. (Silence) I'm the Jewish girl. (Silence) (p. 10)

Met with silence she gradually expands her representativeness by using her surname, then her social and geographic references ('I'm the Jewish girl from Yeoville'). It is only when Princess categorises her racially ('We don't want European girls here. European girls mean trouble') that even preliminary exchange is possible. This linguistic movement by Ruth from the personal towards a wider social definition of herself enacts the shift she must make from her habitual perception of private identity to one where her identity is defined within the structures that support the household in the actual conditions of Sophiatown. Her whiteness is the predominant feature of her identity in Sophiatown and all other perceptions of her identity are subsumed in it. Her confusion about who she is is isolated and confined within the all-encompassing difference of race. Early in the play the apparent range of possible identifiers seems limitless, and produces 'a perfect confusion' in her

> *I don't know what the hell I am. I'm Jewish* on 'Mondays, I'm White on Tuesdays, I'm South African on Wednesdays, I'm a Democrat on Thursdays and I'm confused on all the other days. Mostly I'm just confused.' (p. 27)

But in the context of the household's perception of racial difference, the question of her identity is an 'own affair' which makes little difference to anyone

else. For the Sophiatown residents the representative categories of race and gender are sufficient. Questions of personal identity do not materially alter the prevailing conditions determined by racial policies. For them she is and consistently remains `the white girl´, for that is the only category in which Sophiatown can accommodate her difference.

So while Ruth struggles to determine her own identity, `trying to change my whole life´, the household indulges her, secure in the knowledge that her whiteness is the only category which is immutable and cannot be changed by an act of personal will.

Nowhere is the oppressive reality of apartheid practices registered more strongly than in the ideological embedding of racially discriminative practices in the experience of those most oppressed by such practices. The household knows, as Ruth does not, that the barriers erected between black and white can be removed only by dismantling or destroying the economic and political structures which sustain the racial ideology. Ruth *believes she can `change her whole life´ within the* existing structures. But the family knows that wanting is not enough. Mingus eventually challenges her assumption explicitly

> Ja, white girl. What do you do? You never work. You just want, want, want (p. 65)

to which Ruth has no reply except a sense of exclusion

> What´s going on?

Even at the end Ruth cannot finally relinquish her belief in the potency of personal identity, Jakes´ as well as hers.

> Jakes: There´s nothing you can do.
>
> Ruth: If you had opened up for a moment, anything would have been possible. (p.70)

She never fully acknowledges the connection between her personal identity and her representativeness, between her personal relations and the effects of actual conditions on them; her own entrapment in the legislated categories of identity that definitively deny her personal `I' a place in Sophiatown's communal `we'. All she can do is divest her already threadbare sense of identity of its Yeoville elements by an act of negative will

> Jakes: We've both known you have a back door to Yeoville.
> Ruth: That door is closed.
> Jakes: No it's not.
> Ruth: Yes it is.
> Jakes: Nonsense.
> Ruth: Jakes right now I don't know where I'm going but the d[illegible] to *Yeoville* is shut.
> Jakes: No ...
> Ruth: *I'm* the one who's [illegible]g it. (p. 71)

Dispossessed of her linguistic, cultural, national and political identity, *Ruth vanishes into the* `barren ground' between Sophiatown and Yeoville `so large it will make us invisible', forlornly clinging to the last untenable but *inviolate tenet of her faith* in the power of individuality.

She has no identity and no place except `the wasteland'. Her language cannot withstand the greater might of her race.

Like the family she lives with, Ruth becomes a displaced person. But theirs is a publicly acknowledged and visible *deprivation. Hers* is not, and indeed makes no difference to her public identity. The visible and confirmable failure of her cherished ideal of the `free individual' redounds only on herself without effectively opposing the

structures of an oppressed and oppressing society. The extinction of the WESSA, like his construction, is entirely a private affair. The 'Useless Man' of the earlier play has dematerialised himself into a solitary ghost, a lingering after-image of a WESSA idea.

Cultural Unity and Racial Separation

But the liberal, literary tradition of Europe which sustains Ruth's concept of individuality finds an answering echo in Sophiatown, in the farewell scene between her and Jakes. Both here subscribe to the Eurocentric literary tradition that makes tragedies out of the opposition of individual love and the social structures in which their love is enacted secretly. With Romeo and Juliet as their *literary* models they see themselves as would-be 'star-crossed lovers'. At this point the play becomes not so much the recovery of an alternative past as a nostalgic re-enactment of a European literary tradition. Ruth's voice and Jakes' responses turn the dialogue into a song for *two parts in harmony*. Ruth speaks from Yeoville and finds an answering voice in Sophiatown, speaking the same language and sharing the same ideological perspective of English culture. Here, in the tragic consequences of apartheid, the tragedy seems to lie in the separation of like-mindedness, rather than in the *suppression* of alternative ideological perspectives. Momentarily English reasserts itself against the dominant racial perspective. Ideological unity, through a shared literary history, is a fragile bridge across the wasteland of racial difference. But it is recognised as such too late and the unity it promises appears too little against the 'wedge' the 'Boers' have driven between them.

> Jakes: We lost what little chance we had.
> Ruth: We never took it.
> Jakes: Well, let's just say we failed. (p. 70).

English, Tsotsitaal and Fahfee's Numbers Language

One of the language features of the play is its use of tsotsitaal. Kavanagh (1985) identifies tsotsitaal as the language of the proletariat while 'educated Blacks speak English' (p. 40). He describes tsotsitaal as

> originally an Afrikaans dialect used by criminals ... it has been taken up by other sections of the black groups in urban areas, for example by the youth, the musicians and journalists. It became virtually the accepted idiom of the shebeen subculture ... it linked sections of the intermediate class with sections of the proletariat. (p. 42)

In Sophiatown the use of tsotsitaal raises interesting questions regarding an audience's perceptions of English in relation to a range of class structures among the characters. Mingus is primarily associated with tsotsitaal in the production, yet it is Fahfee who leads Ruth through her lessons in it. Jakes' article in Drum features an American-English idiom rather than tsotsitaal; Mamariti, the shebeen queen, uses it not at all, preferring English heavily spiced with browaway comments in Zulu. It may be that there is a distinction here between its use as a dramatic device and for the purpose of reflecting social 'authenticity'.

In the scene where Jakes, Mingus and Fahfee are teaching Ruth 'the language of the streets', it is evident that all three men are familiar with tsotsitaal. Mingus and Fahfee speak it, and, though Jakes doesn't use it, he confesses 'in moments of weakness I even speak tsotsitaal'; it is clear that for him his connections are class rather than race-based. He regards himself as 'a would-be intellectual' and so dissociates himself from the proletariat and their language. Fahfee has a different view: 'It's die taal van die mense. It's a sophisticated taal.' His connections with the working class are closer, as are his sympathies.

But Fahfee's languages include a variety of Englishes. As well as his proficiency in both Afrikaans and tsotsitaal, he uses a range of English registers. There is his 'language of numbers' which may be described as his occupational register, characterised by short utterances, ritual incantations, non-grammatical forms and rhythmic repetitions. Within this register the metaphorical code of meaning attached to the numbers expands the possibilities of theatrical significance, allowing the language a dramatic resonance too:

> What's the number? What's the number? Number 4 - dead man, trouble. Number 26 - bees, trouble. Number 27 - dogs - trouble.

The summarising characteristic of newspaper headlines is a feature of his register as the bringer of news and shares with his numbers mode a brevity of sentence structure and use of repetition:

> Hey, hey, hey. News of the day. News of the day. Albert Luthuli has been banned. Eleven houses to be sold to the Resettlement Board.

Here the attention-getting device of the newspaper headline is expanded to accommodate the verbal patterns of speech, but the similarity of the two kinds of utterance allows for the formation of a personal idiolect which distinguishes Fahfee from all the other characters and reveals his social contacts as wider ranging than theirs. Because his language is more flexible he stands in an intermediary position between all the classes and social groups represented in the play. His proficiency and his pleasure in tsotsitaal emerge in his role-playing function as Ruth's partner in the lesson, so that the lesson serves as a lesson for the audience too. They are introduced, as Ruth is, to the social forms of a class generally inaccessible to them. Tsotsitaal here is used as a carrier of the behavioural norms of the gangster sub-culture, rather than as a means of verbal communication. As Dollimore (Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985) states:

> To learn another language is to acknowledge the existence of another people and to acquire the ability to function, however crudely, within its social world. (p. 36)

Beyond this cross-cultural and inter-class framework in which the lesson is presented, Fahfee uses tsotsitaal in another context: as a carrier of feeling. When he is emotionally engaged he discards his other forms of speech and uses a tsotsitaal which has none of the ritual phrasing of the lesson:

> Hulle sê die Native Resettlement Act of 1954 sê die hele families wat hier in Koffifi phola, hulle moet klerie. Hulle sê daar's accomodation in die new location van Meadowlands. (p. 35)

Compared with Mingus' much more self-conscious and extravagant use of it, Fahfee's tsotsitaal appears embedded in his daily experience. Where Mingus uses it to present a particular public image of himself, Fahfee uses it to convey factual information. An analysis of its elements reveals that Afrikaans predominates in vocabulary and grammatical structure ('die hele families wat in Koffifi phola'), yet key information is rendered in English ('new location') and, more surprising, so is reference to the legislation which enforces the removals and which makes Afrikaans the language of oppression. The association of English with this oppressive system of government (which is closely associated with 'die Boere' in the play), needs to be accounted for. It may be that the explanation is to be found in socio-political terms - Afrikaans is reserved only for formal necessities; the establishment of English as a lingua franca among blacks, makes it more suitable for informal conveying of information, and in a sense removes the speaker one step further from the hated legislative structures of government. Or the explanation may be one of dramatic necessity - the need to provide key information to a largely monolingual audience, in their language. The

latter seems more immediately likely, (though the former does seem to operate at an unconscious level), for in the context of the whole play a feature of the tsotsitaal usage is a tendency to incorporate immediate translation into the structure of the dialogue. A word or phrase in one language is usually followed by one or more equivalent expressions in another language (eg. 'my sweetie, my tjerrie, my wietbit'), or it is explained, as in 'I'm a virtuous, well-bred girl, I'm a nylon'. This tendency suggests that translation is a dramatic technique rather than a feature of tsotsitaal itself: it assumes the presence of monolingual English speakers in the audience as well as bi-lingual and multi-lingual English speakers, and it is a technique employed even in the absence of Ruth.

This is a device noted in township theatre by Coplan (1985, p. 213), where tsotsitaal is readily adapted to the predominant language of any particular area, whether Zulu, Sotho or Xhosa. Because of the informality of its structure, tsotsitaal seems remarkably flexible and the conditions of its usage as a class-based lingua franca make it particularly susceptible to accommodating changes such as this.

In Sophiatown, however, it is not presented as a rival lingua franca to English; instead English incorporates the tsotsitaal, largely through the *Fahfee's easy* movement among the various registers of his English, a movement which extends into free intra-lingual movement, so that tsotsitaal becomes increasingly like an idiomatic or dialectical *extension of English. Separations* between languages blur as elements merge in the course of one utterance or thought. And though Fahfee is the major exponent of this new linguistic formation, it is present in *the speech of Mingus, Princess* and Charlie, though not in those whose affiliations are narrowed and sharpened by class loyalty, education or social aspirations.

Dramatically, then, the play is not concerned to explore the tensions that a multi-lingual society may be subjected to, nor to ascribe politico-cultural tensions to linguistic separations. Only in Mingus does any difficulty emerge and this is more to do with dramatic tension within the character than with a thematic exploration of intercultural relationships through language.

Mingus' use of tsotsitaal is the only indication in the play of possible opposition between English and tsotsitaal. For him tsotsitaal is an identity marker and is used as a weapon in the defence of his particular social status, much in the same way that Maurer (1950) describes the use of argot as 'a powerful reinforcement and a defensive reaction to the hostility of the outside world' (pp. 114-133). But for him, too, tsotsitaal functions as a sociolect of English rather than as a separate language. His insistence that Ruth learn it derives from both a determination that she should recognise her foreignness in 'his' world and a wish to induct her into the secrets of his gangster subculture in order to impress her. For him it provides a defining image of himself in relation to a very specific social group. For Fahfee it expresses cultural as well as class connections.

Language Usage and Social Stereotyping

But for all Mingus' insistence on the idea of tsotsitaal as a secret code that allows entry into his world, his language usage is predominantly tied to the standard English of the play. He is more acutely aware of social and class differences than any one else in the play - he categorises other characters (and himself) by a rigid system of social structures derived from the ideological values of the dominant middle class. With it this his own status is achieved by placing his gangster sub-culture

in a 'special' category outside, and thus not subject to, the low status that it would otherwise hold. But even within his own social group, the hierarchy reflects the same ideological stratification: he exercises his power over Charliw in the same way that he demands recognition of his status as patriarch of the family (however token). His power base rests on physical force, just as Sophiatown's subjection to governmental decree does; and in his relationship with Ruth he assumes the same power operates in maintaining gender distinctions; hence his defensive deference to her. His class, race and gender categories are monolithic, unchanging and exclusive. There is an assigned place for everyone and everyone must remain in their place. Ruth's arrival creates disorder and panic, for she is a rogue presence who breaks the established hierarchy and requires *new categories to* be made in order to re-establish his sense of order.

Mingus' confusion is rendered in his linguistic action, particularly in the *uncertainty of his registers*. Just as his social behaviour depends on performing within an inflexible code of norms, so too does his language performance. His language usage shifts according to a *fairly rigid hierarchy which* is dominated by Ruth's white middle class English. His use of tsotsitaal appears to be a deliberate move to declare his allegiance to a social stereotype (3) by donning the *linguistic* and *dress codes* of his special social group and thus demanding acknowledgement of that group. His heavy reliance on the verbal and visual signs of his gangster role indicates a demand for acceptance as a *member of* that group, *not* as an individual. The clearest demonstration of this occurs in the scene where he attempts to seduce Ruth.

Until this scene he insists on stereotyping Ruth - she is 'the white girl', the 'European', the 'guest', the 'visitor' - and then attacking the stereotype he has

made - 'Ja, white girl, it's your fault'; 'Look here, you're a bloody ungrateful. Why don't you bath? I brought it specially for you'. He seems unable to find a personal relationship to her, for the personal area threatens the clearcut roles and rules he lives by.

In the seduction scene (Act II, 4) his language reveals uncertainty through his attempts to use a variety of registers, none of which is sustainable. First there are the formal distanced utterances of the stranger ('Miss Golden') with touches of assertive idiom to *maintain the* social distance ('Ja, and when the majitas come?'). An attempt at accommodation occurs when he turns to a register reminiscent of 'high' *literary style* ('*Tonight* there's no sleep for either of us'). But this is too far from his experience to sustain and he moves back to his own familiar ground, and *reasserts his racial categorising* in a move to deny personal intimacy ('What's the matter with the white girl that she won't get in a car and come *for a midnight ride? Is there* something about Mingus' face she doesn't like?'). In this utterance with its refusal to identify either of them with personal *pronouns, he effectively escapes from* the intimacy he pretends he wants, using the distantiation of the stereotype to separate them.

This contrasts sharply with the stability of Ruth's utterances in this scene. She consistently uses a *personal mode of* address here (as she does throughout the play) and at this point her personal register negates Mingus' stereotype and asserts her presence as an individual ('Look, Mingus, It's late. I don't feel like going for a ride'). This drives Mingus to a more heated defence of his own position and he uses tactical to reinforce the social roles he insists they play ('You're too much of a larnie, you make yourself a can't-get, a nylon'). The effectiveness of this language shift lies in the generalising nature of the nouns; he has successfully imposed a role on her, determined by

language and the social structures it contains. By turning to 'his' language he has successfully taken control of the terms of the relationship: they are his terms, both linguistic and social. And the defining categories are broadening. Where initially he used race classification, he now extends them to more general gender classification: Ruth is moved from 'the White girl' category to the 'tjerrie' category, thus effectively subsuming her racial and class differences in her sexual sameness with Princess and all other 'tjerries'. Through linguistic manipulation he can control and direct the terms and the course of the relationship. The fight for power is all but won. Ruth's linguistic limitations prevent her from countering this manipulation: she can respond only within her own range and concedes defeat to him ('you're making it impossible'). Her only way out is to resort to non-verbal measures and she removes her physical presence from the arena. Left the verbal victor, Mingus celebrates his victory with an outburst of tautaitaal, the symbol of that victory, using it now not only to assert his triumph but to express the physicality of the exchange. Freed from the physical presence of Ruth, he can now admit and express his sexual interest without having to enter the strange and for him inhibiting area of personal relationship. That the physical images are abusive and insulting is a source of satisfaction to him, part of the triumph of his language, as well as a solace. His linguistic assertiveness allows him to regard his physical rejection with some complacency and reasserts his control. He is able to turn a personal rejection into a rejection of himself as a representative of 'black', 'gangster' and 'man' and so save face while simultaneously reducing her to 'dangling balloon tits ... bloody backside ... hoendervleis ... bloody nylon ... bloody bitch'. She is a stereotype again, and her rejection of him is simply another confirmation of that stereotype; his rejection by her is a socio-political rejection, not a personal rejection. The status quo is re-established.

Mention has already been made of the thematic dialectic *between personal* and social identity in the play. This scene provides a complex and inevitable enactment of this tension. In contrast to Ruth's farewell scene with Jakes, it indicates a sharp *differentiation of voices*: Mingus speaks from an ideological position quite different from Ruth's and Jakes'. His unwillingness to take account of personal factors is matched by Ruth's inability to function outside the personal area. But *there* is a disturbing ambiguity about this scene: it is difficult to determine how 'real' Mingus' interest in Ruth is intended to be. There is little evidence in the rest of the play that *Mingus' character* is structured on the Western notion of 'personality' as distinct from his social reality. There are strong indications that distinctions of this kind simply do not exist: *his public* role <u>is</u> his personality.

Yet the style of the play is very much that of Eurocentric drama, where individuality provides the *source of dramatic* conflict. Dramatically speaking Mingus appears to belong to another theatrical genre from the other characters in the play. This clash of theatrical style makes the *task of the audience difficult*, for it does not allow them to synthesise these disparate theatrical elements coherently. In this scene the marked differences between Mingus' reality and the naturalistic reality upon which the others depend confront each other, and the result is substantially in favour of the naturalistic reality familiar to an audience culturally inclined still to look to Europe for its values.

Not that Mingus' style is exclusive to Black culture. The performance skills he uses are similar to those required in a Brechtian epic *performance - the flam*boyance of heightened physical and verbal movement that allows the actor to be perceived behind the character, the technique of playing <u>to</u> an audience within a scene,

which deliberately creates a double perspective for the audience, balancing the actor's physical presence with the constructed reality of the dramatic character (4). The Ruth/Mingus scene is constructed around an assumption of pretended privacy, where Mingus' character is constructed from an assumption of the publicness of performance - it is not a pretence at behaving as if in private. And because the whole play rests on the assumption of the pretence of privacy, the presentation of Mingus is not comfortably accommodated within the dramatic genre of the scenes in the play, though it is similar to the style used in the songs.

Summary

The production of *Sophiatown*, then, can be said to demonstrate in its genre, its content and ideology and its linguistic elements, its allegiance to dominant middle class South African values. Ruth finds acceptance in Sophiatown because the Softown lifestyle derives its values from a Eurocentric middle class perspective. Where alternative cultures or subcultures are represented, these are assimilated. The hegemonic control that English asserts is seen to be almost complete, so that linguistic alternatives such as tsotsitaal can be readily encompassed. The audience, the makers and the performance are all acculturated into the colonial cultural history of English, which may be described as enlarging its cultural associations through the addition of elements of tsotsitaal, Afrikaans and indigenous Black languages. The exposure of the mono-lingual WESSA to these developments may well be part of the process of altering the standard English of South Africa to a broader-based, more 'popular' norm derived from Black multi-lingual English speakers, as Ndebele recommends (1987, pp. 13-14).

2. ASINAMALI

> It is this, in the first instance, that I mean by the structure of feeling. It is as firm and definite as 'structure' suggests, yet it is based in the deepest and often least tangible elements of our experience. It is a way of responding to a particular world which in practice is not felt as one among many others - a conscious 'way' - but is, in experience, the only possible. Its means, its elements, are not propositions or techniques; they are embodied related feelings. In the same sense, it is accessible to others - not by formal argument or by professional skills on their own, but by direct experience - a form and a meaning, a feeling and a rhythm - in the work of art, the play, as a whole.
>
> (Raymond Williams, 1987:18)

Where Sophiatown is concerned with the effects on the present of recovering and articulating the silences of history, Asinamali engages itself predominantly with the present as the history of the future. Its characters recount their personal stories, describing the events that have brought them as prisoners to Durban Central Prison. Bongani is a migrant labourer who has killed his girlfriend; Thami is a farm labourer who was seduced by his white employer's wife and convicted under the 'Immorality' Act; Bhoyi is an activist friend of Meize Dube, a popular leader of the Lamontville 'Asinamali campaign'; Solomzi is a victim of a confidence trick by Bra Tony, a petty gangster whom he admires; and Bheki finds himself convicted of 'political' crimes and sentenced to seven years after a police raid on the house of his common law wife.

The play invites its audiences into a dramatic world where survival is a question of evading for as long as possible the legal system and its representatives which make criminals of us all. Inevitably, though, the state and its machinery impinges on all the characters and with its attention comes an inevitable path through the law courts and the prison system.

Botu omuhle sewuzawufela ejele
sewuzufela ejele botu omuhle
Mina nawe siboshiwa sofela la.
(A handsome guy, you will die in jail
Go on - you'll die in jail
Me and you, prisoner, we'll die here) (5)

the prison officer sings. Unlike the world of Fugard's The Road to Mecca, there is no personal salvation possible here, no escape from the conditions imposed by the dominant system of state control, except in death. All roads here, for the living, lead inevitably to the prison cell.

Williams' concept of 'the structure of feeling' provides a theoretical basis for examining the dramatic world of the play, of registering 'the effect of a whole lived experience (as it) is expressed and embodied' in the play, in order to assess the degree to which Asinamali may be said to express a particularly contemporaneous South African sense of identity. Hence in this study, I shall be continuously relating the language usage to:

- the theatrical techniques as they are expressed in the dialogue;

- the conditions of the making of the production insofar as these can be inferred from the language of the play; and

- the cultural function of the play where this can be seen to express a particular sense of theatrical function within the dislocated structures of apartheid politics.

Theatrical Collaboration and a South African Identity

The association of Mbongeni Ngema, the author and director of Asinamali, with the Market Theatre has been a long and fruitful one. Starting with Woza Albert in 1981, it is continuing currently with a second Sarafina

company due to open at the Market Warehouse in December 1988, while the original performers are playing in New York under the Market banner. The association appears to be marked by Ngema's increasing control of his work and his companies of performers, although financially the Market appears to retain control of the economics of production as well as of touring, which suggests some degree of artistic control as well.

Ngema has established himself, though, as an international representative for South African theatre, as Gibson Kente, for instance, has not. This has largely been due to his association with the Market Theatre. Asinamali may thus be seen as a product of the interregnum political conditions in South Africa, where 'Black' theatre is marketed abroad through the infrastructures of white managements. Although the play was created by black South Africans exclusively, it cannot be described as an example of all-African theatre, in that it is through its association with and financial support from established white cultural institutions such as the Market Theatre that it has achieved its popularity and critical significance as representatively South African in both a local and international context.

The anomalies of the Market's own history - its growth from an 'alternative' cultural fringe venue to an established and economically viable theatrical institution - invite questions about the relation between its cultural activities and perceptible changes in dominant local ideology, but these are beyond the scope of this dissertation. It is possible to assert, though, that the association of Asinamali with the Market Theatre Foundation is indicative of a developing sense of South African identity arising from creative, collaborative theatrical productions where African performers articulate their experience of contemporary conditions for white audiences supported by white managements (6).

Anomalous though this South African identity might be, the kind of collaborative effort this involves structures a different set of hierarchical relationships from those of, say, Sophiatown, where the terms appear to consist in white cultural facilitators structuring the 'raw material' of black experience into culturally and theatrically recognisable (familiar?) forms. In contrast, too, to Saturday Night at the Palace, with its highly specific representativeness of WESSA consciousness, Asinamali is neither 'purely' African, nor does it overtly present itself as a bridge across the gap between white and black 'structures of feeling' in the way that Sophiatown does. Indeed, many of its internal contradictions seem to arise because it recognises and enacts the gap that exists between white and black perceptions of socio-political conditions operating in South Africa. This is nowhere more evident than in the uneasy shifts of stance that it takes in relation to its audiences: there seem to be two distinct and separate groups that it addresses and the divisions appear to be made on the familiar race - language intersection which most profoundly imposes on all South African groups.

The language usage in the play - its multilingualism as well as the inconsistencies in its functional use of English - are indicative of more fundamental ambivalences regarding the theatrical relationship between audiences and performers. Theatrical questions arise, such as how the characters present themselves to their audiences; on whose behalf they speak, to whom; and in what relation audiences are invited to place themselves in relation to the characters and the performers. I am proposing that in attempting to answer these questions through an analysis of the play's language usage, Asinamali may be seen as an example of what the concept of a South African identity currently encompasses in a specifically theatrical context. The ambiguities of 'we', 'them' and 'you' as they are used in the dialogue

renders precisely the ambiguities with which current ideas of South Africanness are invested. It is my contention that these language shifts within the play are accurate registers of the unease and ambivalence which constitute the 'structure of feeling' for performers and audiences alike. Further, it is this responsiveness to current 'structures of feeling' that has made the play so popular.

Language: Function, Role and Representation

The dialogue is characterised by clear distinctions between the three languages used. English predominates, with a strong (though variable) proportion of Zulu being used, and relatively little Afrikaans. Blending is not a feature of the language usage; and the usage in each language appears to conform to current 'standard' South African speech.

One critic commented on the play's 'simplistic language' (Simon, 1986); another noted that 'the English parts are lucid and clear' (Williams, D., 1985). Unlike Saturday Night at the Palace the English usage here does not feature extreme vernacular variations, nor, as in Sophiatown, is the English marked as that of second language speakers. There are few distinctions between the language of the narrative sequences and the sketches, and few ideolectical variations among the speech of individual characters (with the exception of Bongani, who stutters).

Narrative utterances are characterised by short sentences, simple statements relating action and emotional distance from the events described. The tone is reminiscent of the carefully structured narrative progression to be found in the textbooks of alternative or people's education courses. For instance, Bheki's personal testimony begins like this:

> I come from Zululand. In Durban I got a place to stay in Lamontville township. During that time Maize Dube - a very strong leader and a powerful voice for Lamontville - was killed. The reason for his death was that he maintained that we have no money, so we cannot afford to pay high rent increase. People took up a slogan 'Asinamali', and police went to work. Many of us died and many of us went to jail. Me too. (But it was all a mistake)(7).

This suggests that one of the play's functions is to serve as an oral history for the people encompassed by the 'we' of the narration.

Personal testimony is providing popular historians with the material of popular history and in this sense Asinamali does offer itself partly as a social historical document. Like the popular history courses, it is concerned to develop a broader sense of community among geographically separated people who share similar experiences of socio-political conditions by acting as the transmitter of information about regional conditions to other similar township communities. Like the teachers in people's education, the actors assume roles as local representatives. A certain authority is vested in them as providers of information, though this authority derives from and represents the consent of the group in constructing particular perceptions of themselves. Mheki, in this speech, speaks with the voice of 'one who knows Lamontville'. His personal 'I' is rapidly subsumed in a communal 'we'. By the end of the speech the 'me' has acquired a communal identity, so that his language is inscribed with the shifts in social relationships that accompany a geographic relocation from a rural homeland to an urban township.

The 'simplicity' of the language here, where idiosyncrasies of utterance are avoided, focuses theatrical attention on dramatic events rather than on dramatic character, towards narrative rather than expressive

theatrical purposes. Theatre's participation in the making of cultural history is thus foregrounded. For an audience each character speaks as the representative voice of a particular community and their representativeness is confirmed by those in the audience whose experience is similar. For those who do not share these conditions, the actors acquire a different kind of authority: they speak with the authority of 'those who know' to those who do not'. For them the 'we' is exclusive, and places them in an implied other category of 'them'. Thus it is possible to sustain different and conflicting relationships within a single audience simultaneously. The relationship between performers and any member of an audience will depend on extra-theatrical 'structures of feeling'. An audience member 'translocates' his theatrical experience from his own picture of the processes that have shaped his ways of making operate equally in the dramatic world.

Where Brecht's theatrical method was to draw an audience towards identifying (temporarily at least) with a particular group or an individual within that group, Artaud's method is initially to invite an audience to occupy the place of a group represented by each of the actors. I distinguish between a psychological and a social approach with all the implications of 'theatre' that I share that these approaches entail.

With any theatrical performance, though, there is another representative role played by the actors: for the duration of the play they serve as representatives of the audience itself, so that whatever the schisms operating within the audience they are simultaneously forged into a small identifiable community themselves. This is achieved through using the actors as listeners to the stories of each of the other characters. Their role here is to serve as 'crowd crystals' (Canetti's phrase), to speak as the voice of the audience. A good

example of this can be seen in the following passage, where Bheki is the story-teller. The other characters interject with questions to elicit further information, comments about the events which provide the norms that an audience may be expected to hold; and bursts of exuberant emotional response that direct and focus the responses of particular members of an audience.

A noticeable technique here too is the delighted pre-empting of the story-teller's next words by the listeners, which serves to confirm an audience's knowledge of what has been said before. This is a standard teaching technique and its use here strengthens the educative function of the play by sustaining the teaching role of the actors.

Bheki: And then I came back to Durban

Bongani: Lamontville.

Bheki: No by then I had no place to stay.

Bhoyi: Kanti ubuhlalephi wena mfowethu?
(Where did you stay?)

Bheki: E Durban Station!

All: Durban Station!

Bheki: For four months.

All: Four months.

Bheki: Everyday I pretended as if I've missed the last train, and whenever a white railway policeman came by, I would grab my bag, look at my watch - which was not working -

All: (Laughter)

Bheki: - shake my head and mumble some words in Zulu.

Solomzi: In Zulu!

Bongani: Ubengathi usala ushiwe yistimela kanjalo.
(As if you've missed the train.)

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Solomzi: In Zulu!

Bongani: Ubengathi usala ushiwe yistimela kanjalo.
(As if you've missed the train.)

Bheki: Ja mfowethu!
(Yes my brother)
Every morning I would go to the toilet, wash my face and then go look for work.

Bhoyi: What about your luggage?

Bheki: It was under the chairs in the waiting room. Hela kwase kuvumunzi wami ke loyo (because it has turned to be my house) and for four months I would go up and down the streets looking for work. Standing in those long queues with my passbook in my hand and ten times a day that same answer -

All: No vacancy!!

Bheki: Ayintlanga landeba madoda.
(That's not good)

Bhoyi: Imbi!
(It's bad)

Bongani: Usho uliphinde lelo mfo ka Mqadi
(You can say that again Mr. Mqadi)

Solomzi: Imbi, imbi imbia mfowethu.
(That's bad, that's bad my brother)(8)

The scenes (perhaps sketches is more accurate a term) are not distinguished sharply from the narrative monologues by different linguistic or theatrical techniques. They emerge from the narrative and become an extension of it. In the court scene, the 'pipi office' scene and the 'shoebox scene', for example, actions are seen, rather than described in words, so that the language no longer has to carry the narrative line.

With this functional shift from linguistic description to visual demonstration, the language function shifts to non-narrative 'embellishment': character types, the technical versatility of the actors and, most noticeably, the play of linguistic wit develop around the narrative thread. It is the performance qualities of the verbal exchanges that command attention here. The

assistance of the whole group of prisoners in enacting each others' stories in the scenes produces a high theatricality which defies the logic of non-dramatic reality. This theatricality is expressed in the extreme *range* of contrasts in the physical sound patterns of the actors' speech: intonation patterns extend their range towards the melodic patterns of music; syllabic contrasts in length *are increased; vowel shapes* held and energy levels swiftly juxtapositioned. The interruption of sound by long silences also occurs noticeably in performance at these points.

The effect is of bravura playing by the actors, which finds its greatest force and economy when 'scenes' are enacted by a single actor, as for instance in Bheki's *whispered confidences* through the keyhole to Sergeant Nel. Part of the effectiveness of this dramatic monologue lies in the enormous physical energy generated by the stage whisper in which this scene *is* played. For physical energy is theatrically the material means of embodying emotional intensity. The constraints of the situation (Bheki wants not to be heard by anyone other than the Sergeant) and the physical demands on the actor's energy to be heard clearly in the auditorium create a strong theatrical counter-tension which is exhibited linguistically in greatly increased articulatory and breath *energy*. *Consonantal* prominence is balanced by greater length and openness in the vowels, so that the physical sound systems of spoken language are emphasised, enhancing the emotional context of this speech.

At one point some two-thirds of the way through the monologue the utterances are written in this way:

> Always when he does night shift he goes there and takes out a girl and then late late we hear him come back with that woman.

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On paper this reads as continuous, rhythmically even and primarily narrative in function. In *performance*, however, the actor interrupted the flow frequently with a variety of pause lengths, replaced the rhythmic regularity with constant variations through lengthening and shortening syllabic vowels and on `late late' carried the speech into the melodic range of song, repeating `late' five times in a falling, diminuendo inflection so that the speech generated powerful emotional meaning and redirected its purpose towards expressing collective outrage at a personal level.

Orality and Literacy *in* the Play

This emphasis on the physical qualities of sound in language is characteristic of story-telling *in* oral cultures. As more than one critic has remarked both the theatrical and linguistic structures of this play are informed by the traditions of the story teller. All the features by which Ong (1982) identifies oral as against literate thought were apparent in the performances of Asinamali -

> the intimate linkage between rhythmic oral patterns, the breathing process, gesture and the bilateral symmetry of the human body. (1982:470-481)

Like Malinowski before him (1923), Ong discerns the difference between orality and literacy as primarily a difference in the function of language:

> among oral peoples generally language is a mode of action and not simply a countersign of thought. (1982:32)

Yet it would be naive to categorise Asinamali as simply a contemporary example of a `traditional Black cultural form'. Asinamali cannot evade the pressures of the literary-based culture in which it has been made, nor the processes of rehearsal out of which it emerged. Both

have served to exert a stabilising influence on the dynamics of its orality. There exists a number of written versions of the *performance* text, as well as a video recording of a performance constructed for television. So the continuous present in which the spoken word occurs can operate only in a *performance*. The evidence that these *records of* language action provide, point to but do not substitute for the evanescence of spoken language's special relationship to time. As Ong remarks, "Sound exists only when it is going *out of* existence" (1982:32).

While this may be true during performance, the production is stabilised by the *relative* fixity of the structures and *systems* in which it is constructed, marketed and presented. The continuous repetition of rehearsal, the gradual substitution of formal dialogue for improvised exchange among the actors, the conscious selections of *particular theatrical* effects which determine and fix relationships within the drama and between audience and performers are indicators of the interaction between literate and oral thought *in this* play. Ong describes this *interaction* as a general condition.

> It is the oral word that first *illuminates* consciousness with articulate language, that first divides subject and predicate and then relates *them* to one another, and that ties human beings to one another. Writing introduces division and alienation, but a higher unity as well. It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more conscious interaction between persons. Writing is consciousness-raising. (1982:179)

Perhaps the most telling indicator of Asingamali's inability to evade the effects of literacy is its insertion into the *commercial*, competitive market of popular theatrical entertainment, and its success there. This precludes any attempt to give it reductive labels such as "traditional", "ethnic" or "Black" to isolate it from other kinds of contemporary theatre or from its own

contemporaneity. Asinamali is most particularly of its own time and of urban South Africa. In the two years since its last *performance* here this has become more apparent. The vehement outburst against 'the bloody fucking pass laws' and the enactment of the burning of an informer might now be viewed (with some relief) as recently past, but our consciousness of these as recent history informs our sense of what constitutes our here and now as different. That it does not seem so very different now, given the continuing State of Emergency, is partly an effect of the theatrical intersection of orality and literacy that invests the play with its remarkably vivid performance values.

Concepts of History

Where Sophiatown directed its 'consciousness-raising' towards a historic past, Asinamali directs it towards a historical present. So it simultaneously offers the present as a historical moment to be lived through, and to be recognised as a separate and particular moment in the historical continuum of other particular moments.

The two plays thus embody different concepts of the historical process and the relationship between past and present. In Sophiatown 'memory is a weapon'; recovering the past is perceived as impinging causally on the present. In the historical continuum the events of the past prescribe the possibilities of the present and serve as a measure of the choices that can be made in the present to direct the future.

In Asinamali the present is history; past events are impotent and meaningless except in their felt effects now. This historical continuum is sustained not by the causality of actions but in continuous and consistent resistance to historical causality. Both plays demand a

future different from the past, but the means of breaking the causal chain are *seen* as different. Sophiatown proposes that re-enactment of past failures makes understanding of the present *possible*. Its didactic function as a kind of oral educational reference work takes precedence over its function as a contemporary historical social testament. In its theatrical genre it compensates for this distancing by emphasizing a naturalist style, so that empathetic response to character counterbalances the literate historical perspective it presents.

Asinamali, in contrast, roots itself powerfully in the oral perspective of an eternal present and engages its audiences in active responses to the moment. Hence structurally it appears more random in its theatrical arrangements, and more erratic in its relationship with its audiences. In its accounts of past actions - the killing of Mxize Dube and Bongani's seduction by Mrs. van Niekerk, for example - these are presented within an all-encompassing present. When a story is told the emphasis is not on the fact that it happened but on its recreation now and the responses it evokes now. In this way what is now, was then. The present contains the past; present anger or laughter reaches back and makes the events of the past real, tangible and immediate. The past does not determine the present; rather it is the present which makes the past accessible. This perception evolves from the emphasis on the features of orality, in contrast to the literate perspectives that Sophiatown favours.

The Play's Multilingualism

At certain moments in the play English, Afrikaans and Zulu are presented as separate systems functioning autonomously along parallel courses, with predictably comic results. This is particularly evident in the court

scene where Sheki is convicted. But at other moments, English substitutes for Zulu. The implications of this will be discussed separately.

In the court scene the divisions and confusions that separate languages produce are theatrically exploited to intensify the tension between the energy of performance and the intractability of the apartheid structures against which the play hurls its theatrical energy. All the comic effects of translating literally between English and Afrikaans are used to render both languages comically 'unnatural': meaning dwindles under the sheer quantity of words required to conduct the trial in both official languages, while the accused's use of Zulu further separates the official languages from any semblance of relationship with contextual meaning. This scene linguistically enacts the unbridgeable gap between the operations of Althusser's 'Ideological State Apparatuses' and Williams' 'structure of feeling'. The due process of the law pursues its course mechanically and inexorably in the two official languages, finally crushing any verbal resistance in its path by the weight of its own 'runaway bureaucracy' (Dean 1985).

Only the interpreter (played by Bhoyi) sustains a tenuous link between statutory constructs of identity and those constructed by social and personal relationships. It is through English that the official exercise of Afrikaans magisterial power is enacted on the luckless Zulu victim. Much of the satirical intent of the scene occurs through the interpreter's control of the situation through his possession of multilingual proficiency and his power to censor the utterances of the accused. It is his judgement rather than the magistrate's that determines the course of justice: in him we see the monolith of state dominance momentarily influenced by personal considerations when he decides whether or not to translate the prisoner's defence against the accusation that his testimony is unreliable.

Bheki (prisoner)	Babe ingishaya baba, they were beating me up Makhosi!
Bongani (policeman)	Kade ushawa wubani? (Who was beating you?)
Thami (magistrate)	Wat was dasi?
Bhoyi (interpreter)	Dis twak agbaar.
Thami (magistrate)	Skuldig!!
Bhoyi (interpreter)	Skuldig!!

The interpreter's choice here is a critical one, and is made on the basis of his personal entrapment in his official identity. His work provides him with the protection of the state judicial system and he must sacrifice Bheki in the interests of his own safety from similar police action against himself. Satisfying the requirements of the judicial system means denying those aspects of identity which connect him to the prisoner, but it also means he controls the system and its highest representatives. The corrosive effects of collaboration are introduced comically here, to be taken up later in the play with more devastating emotional effect in the scene which enacts the digging up of the informer's body and the mob burning of a policeman.

Another source of comedic sharpness in this scene is in the subtle distinctions of meaning that occur in the literal rendering of meaning from Afrikaans to English. During performances there was evidence of huge delight among the multilingual performers and audience members in registering the linguistic comedy. For instance, the Afrikaans use of 'vrou' does not distinguish, as English does, between the possible contexts of 'woman' and 'wife' (with all the social and cultural ramifications that these entail). This produces confusion in the distinction between a common law wife and an 'official' wife. The generality of the concept 'vrou' in Afrikaans is juxtaposed with the extraordinarily complex workings

of the official legal *system and Afrikaans* is demonstrated to be inadequate in administering its own systems of dominance.

English is not exempt from this kind of *ridicule either*. The Afrikaans phrase `die skuldige gewete' is rendered in English with the definite article - `the guilty conscience' - a deliberate awkwardness which renders the meaning of the Afrikaans phrase absurd and its expression in English equally so. Bilingualism here is used as a weapon to diminish both languages.

Zulu in this context serves as the language of `real life' as against the official categorising that the two official languages engage in. The introjection of Zulu *into* the already confused language relationship between English and Afrikaans almost destroys the ideologically *determined* linguistic categories the court sustains. It requires the intervention of the policeman, with the *implicit physical threat* this implies, to restore the myths and the power of official discourse.

Thami:	Sê by nie papa na jou?
Bhoyi:	Does he not say papa to *you*?
Bheki	Uyasho impela athi baba impela nguyise noma kungeyena owesende (Yes he is my son but he is not legitimately mine)
All:	Aha! Aha!
Bongani:	Wayidida inkantolo lomuntu! (Here - you are confusing the court!)(9)

During this scene Bheki is reduced to silence while the weight of the legal discourse gathers its power in the double iteration of the charges in English and Afrikaans: nine charges become eighteen and a seven year *sentence* doubles in length. State control exhibits itself most formidably through the action of its languages. *Language is power*; words are weapons against

meaning. As meaning *vanishes* the sheer quantity of official words effectively crushes any verbal resistance and traps its victim in *incomprehension* and silence. Zulu and its speakers can exist only in the gaps and silences of official discourse.

Articulating the Silences

But most of the play enacts precisely the life that does exist within these gaps and silences. Much of this life is articulated in English. English thus shifts contextually from its oppositional stance to Zulu to a functionally substitutive role.

Earlier one of the play's functions was identified as creating a broad-based sense of community among all the *disempowered* and *marginalised* people of the townships surrounding Durban, Cape Town, Johannesburg and *Bloemfontein*. But it is apparent that there is a simultaneous contradictory impulse present to speak to people who constitute the *dominant* 'other'. That both these impulses are articulated largely in English invests the play with much of the *ambivalence* that is characteristic of attitudes towards English in South Africa.

Certainly the use predominantly of English as the lingua franca of the play suggests that *commercial rather* than political considerations were largely responsible for this choice. This implies that the *production* was designed primarily to present its community to others rather than to itself. Generating resistance and solidarity among those it speaks for appears to be less important than endeavouring to reach a wider local and international audience.

But neither purpose necessarily excludes the other. To elicit a sense of solidarity among those who experience

apartheid as oppressive and dehumanising requires presenting situations that are recognisably similar to those actually experienced in the townships.

Equally, in striving to engage members from other dominant South African groups, as well as audiences in other countries, in sympathetic support for such resistance, it is necessary to provide evidence of the events which evoked the violent anger and frustration that resulted in such extreme mass action as the burning of informers. In both cases the play must serve as a socio-political historical 'document' in order to achieve its effects on its audiences.

Ngema described the play as "a testament as opposed to a celebration" (Dean, 1985). While this needs treating with some caution in its context (as a statement to a representative of the white South African press given during the play's first presentation at the Market Theatre), it does emphasise the pedagogic aims implicit in the play. I would hesitate, though, to dismiss its celebratory appeal as either reductive of or oppositional to the testamentary function. The point is that it is only through offering testamentary evidence of actual conditions that either purpose can be achieved.

But it does seem that there are limits set in the play on the degree to which a white South African audience may engage in the events of the play. This is evident in Ngema's use of Zulu and English as interchangeable languages. For he deliberately reserves each language for particular kinds and qualities of theatrical and extra-theatrical experience, in spite of the apparent interchangeability. This is particularly evident in the songs.

The Use of Songs

All the songs in the production are sung in Zulu. While the video production provides sub-titles in English, in the theatre production there was no equivalent access to the meaning of the words for non-Zulu speakers, even during its presentation in the United States and Europe. Ngema seems to be deliberately withdrawing at these points into linguistic privacy and using Zulu as a linguistic barrier between some aspects of the play and the audiences he purportedly seeks to engage. As I shall demonstrate, this exclusion at critical points in the play produces theatrical uncertainty and a misdirection of audience response which damages its intensity and perhaps its integrity.

The songs serve as a means of expanding the play's action into a symbolic representation of a perceived general condition. There are work songs, laments, songs that call for action and songs that prepare the participants for action (10). Dramatically their effect depends on taut counterpointing between the musical elements - the rhythms, melodies and contrapuntal question-and-answer structures - and the meanings supplied by the words. But Ngema has removed many of his audiences from the means of responding to the theatrical tensions between the words and the music by mystifying the language at points where he is most critical of white South Africans.

As an example, one of the songs, a jauntily paced work-song which occurs immediately after a direct address to white audiences, serves apparently as a release of theatrical tension from the intensity of the didactic confrontation that precedes it. But the lyrics of the song sustain the confrontational stance:

Abelungu wudami
Abelungu wudami
Ngifice abafana bethondu na ngathunda
Agabhajwa ngqi
(Damn the Boers
(Damn the Boers
I found the boss ejaculating. I ejaculated.
I got v.d. on the spot) (11)

Again, after the account of Bra Tony's conf'dence trick with the shoe-box, there is a song in which the words and music are set in ironic counterpoint: the music is slow, somewhat wistfully reflective and low key, while the words say 'We're on the march, no matter how hard it will be'.

There are a number of possible explanations for this apparent theatrical failure, one of which is likely to be the need to circumvent local censorship and State of Emergency laws which might well result in the banning of the play for presentation to white audiences. This would not account, though, for the protection of ignorance that Ngema provides for other European audiences.

Another explanation may be found in the history of the play's performances. It was initially presented to township audiences, where Zulu would not provide a linguistic barrier in the same way that it does for white South African audiences. Its move to the Market Theatre and subsequent American and European tours has meant that the production's history is inscribed with often disparate elements of that history. The use of Zulu may well have been judged to induce the specificity of 'authentic' language and thus confirm the authenticity of the conditions it testifies to.

Or the linguistic barrier that is set up may be indicative of a more deeply embedded opposition to the

concept of shared identity in a South African context. Ngema's willingness to enlighten his 'other' audiences may have limits: thus far and no further.

Whatever the reasons, the result is to diminish the dramatic effectiveness. Theatrically the play depends on the intricate systems of confrontational strategies and invitations to its audiences. The direct polemic address by the actor (not the character) to the audience after the account of Msize Dube's death (12) relies on the audience's possession of trustworthy information about the feelings and attitudes of the people it represents. Only then can its didactic purpose succeed. But by permitting an audience to respond only selectively to one aspect of the songs, these delicate dramatic balances tend to collapse. This is borne out by reviewers' comments (both local and American). Generally they were unaware of the dislocation between music and lyrics so that thematic considerations were ignored and attention focused on emotional response to the physical features of their performance, thus perpetuating the myths sustained by dominant discourse about the 'natural' musical and performance attributes of African performers (13).

Audiences are thus divided by the separation between English and Zulu in the play, for responses depend strongly on whether or not audience members are proficient in Zulu.

The language strategies of Asinamali are thus very different from those in Sophiatown, where the use of tsotsitaal (by its blending of languages) and the blurring of distinctions between languages opens rather than closes access to shared meanings. By sustaining the boundaries between English and Zulu and retaining each for specific qualitative experience, Asinamali often denies the possibilities of meaning common to all its audience members. From accounts of the production's

reception in the United States and Canada it seems that Ngema was aware of this. In one interview he is quoted as saying

> Things have to be clarified (here) in a way that's just not necessary back home in the townships "The subtle things you can say in Afrikaans and Zulu just aren't there" (Grigsby, 1986).

Certainly the progressive adaptations of language usage that successive manuscripts exhibit point to a continuous responsiveness to the effects of different venues and different audiences on the play's performances. Yet *where* much of the Zulu dialogue has been replaced by English in later performances, the Zulu songs are always retained in their original form. It is as if the discourse of *apartheid is so deeply embedded* in South Africans at an unconscious level that separateness remains an unalterably persistent condition of identity, even among those who most ardently seek to *dismantle it* and who consciously resist its manifestations. Even in Asinamali the dominant ideological construction of identity through associating race with language appears to be hegemonically unshakeable.

Other Gaps and Silences

As has been shown, Asinamali's language enacts the oppositional relationship between dominant 'official' discourse and the silenced majority through its use of Afrikaans and English as 'official' languages on the one hand, and Zulu and 'unofficial' English on the other. The triumph of dominant discourse in the court scene and the articulation of alternative silences in other scenes form the structural basis of the play's theatrical shape. But there are other silences which the play does not articulate; and it is in these that the triumph of dominant discourse is most tellingly *enacted*.

One of these is the conspicuous dominance of male discourse and the equally telling absence of the discourse of women. As all the characters are men the production inevitably marginalises the experience and responses of women among its audiences. More noticeably there is a silence too in the dramatic world about the effects of official dominance on the lives of the women of the townships. The women who do exist in the dramatic world - Bheki's woman, the women prisoners, Mrs. van Niekerk, Mrs. Mandela and Mrs. Botha - exist peripherally as providers of the means of economic, political or procreative power to promote a male struggle. They are not themselves participants.

Bheki's woman pays the train fares and her house in Lamontville enables him to become "a boss in a dead man's home". Mrs. Mandela produces "heroes" and "revolutionaries" for the struggle; Mrs. Botha breeds "dogs" and "armoured cars" in retaliation. The women prisoners are the means by which the Sergeant can find his own sexual gratification and demonstrate his power over the male prisoners. His sexual abuse of "their" women enacts his abuse of his officially sanctioned power over them. Their sexual deprivation exemplifies their political impotence; his sexual freedom within the prison is possible only within the protective custody he enjoys within the laager of the state's dominance.

Sexual activity is thus an unacknowledged weapon in the economic and political struggle. But the *weapon is women* and the wielders of the weapon are men. Warders and prisoners alike subscribe to a dominant male ideology in which women and their *possessions are owned by men.* Although women are prisoners, too, at Leeuwkop, their imprisonment is not subjected to the same scrutiny. *Their cell is off stage. And so too is their dramatic* role in the play.

For while women are presented as possessors of material and sexual goods, they appear in the dramatic world only to provide these for the men. Hence sexual possession of women implies economic and political possession of their power. Just as Bheki acquires 'a home in Lamontville' and becomes 'a boss' through his sexual possession of his (unnamed) woman, so the Sergeant can flaunt the power his official status gives him over the other male prisoners by his possession of 'their' women. Women are objectified into the means and indicators of male political power. And it is in this discourse of maleness that state power and resistance to state dominance find common ground. Dominance is, beyond the political struggle, finally male. While women may themselves possess the means of surviving and resisting state encroachment - money, a house, children - they can participate in the political and economic structures of opposition only by providing goods and services to the men - by offering their material possessions and their sexual and procreative capacities to men, for men. Thus in the play they serve as 'natural' resources for the men. Their power as owners (of their bodies, their homes, their money) is acknowledged only insofar as it serves the interests of men. Only Mrs. van Niekerk evades total entrapment in the silence that male discourse imposes on the women in the play and even here the silence is only briefly articulated in a very small whisper which fades quickly into silence again.

When her husband is sent to the border for army duty she invites Thami to provide her with her sexual 'daily bread'. But this encounter as it is rendered in Thami's story is tightly constrained by male discourse to marginalise and diminish it. Dramatic techniques such as gender-substitute performance (as occurs in pantomime) and a falsetto voice are used to broaden the character into caricature. The actors respond to the story with broadly stereotypical responses to induce in the

audience the notion that the episode is outside the norms of expected or accepted behaviour; and much emphasis is laid on the racial categorising at this point in order to stress the abnormality of the event. All these techniques ensure that Mrs. van Niekerk's femaleness is subsumed by her whiteness and her individuality by her representativeness. For instance, when she asks 'How do feel about a white woman?' Thami replies 'I want <u>them</u>' (my emphasis). Equally she is depersonalised by the contrast between her and the pigs. For Thami the relationship with her 'was like a dream', whereas he

> knew (the pigs) all by their names. They knew me too, they knew all my sounds . . . I would sit in the middle of the pig sty and listen to their voices as they talk to each other. Lovely creatures.

The incorporation of female sexuality into those classes of relationship which are 'forbidden' (the racial category forbidden by law, the animal by a more fundamental belief in the difference between human and animal), serves to sever connections between the story and 'real' dramatic life, so that the whole episode assumes the apocryphal proportions of myth or farce. Mrs. van Niekerk's sexuality is not in this context then a real or necessary element except in its effects. It makes Thami 'a boss', 'a great man': it makes her an object to be embraced with dirty hands full of the pig's food'. She engenders response in Thami and in his *audiences*: they can acknowledge her cleverness ('kua clever nokhu aku wumadam'), her whiteness, and her difference without having to acknowledge her *femaleness which can* be successfully mystified by being subsumed in the other categories. With the arrival of her husband she vanishes into the *silence from which she so briefly emerged*. The story is completed without her: 'What happened? Shit happened. Kak happened. That is why I'm here'. She has

initiated events but has no part in the consequences. She creates situations but lives in them only vicariously.

SUMMARY

Asinamali is thus a play of paradoxes, contradictions and separations. Its call for unified resistance among the officially silenced people of the townships is flawed by its own unrecognised silences. Its determination to resist the fragmentation of identity that legislated identity creates is often undermined by similar fragmentation. *The racial and economic* practices and hierarchies it seeks so energetically to dismantle are themselves embedded in the ideology enacted in the dramatic events of the play, so that it seems unable to escape the destructive effects of the conditions out of which it emerged. Its performances enact theatrically precisely those tensions and dislocations about which it speaks dramatically and its success depends finally on *the degree* to which an audience recognises this.

NOTES: CHAPTER 6

1. Compare this with Purkey's later sense that self-recognition was not enough: 'if we wanted to understand who we really were, if we wanted to find out our real history and reflect what was really going on around us, we could not remain an all white group. We had to overcome the barriers imposed by *apartheid*' (Purkey, 1985, p. 234).

2. For an analysis of the various factors that contributed to *the Soweto uprising* cf. Lodge, 1983, Ch. 13 especially

> To an educational system already subject to severe *strains was added* the doctrinaire ruling on the use of Afrikaans in mathematics and social studies. This was objectionable on several grounds: few teachers were qualified to use the language, *proficiency in English* was popularly regarded as a pre-requisite for clerical employment, and Afrikaans was unacceptable for ideological reasons (p. 331).

3. The concept of social stereotypes derives from Labov's work, cf. Edwards, 1976, pp. 26-30.

4. This theatrical technique is described in Brecht's *theories of performance*, cf. the chapters on Brecht in Braun (1982), Roose-Evans (1984).

5. Textual quotations are derived *in part from an early* draft manuscript as well as from transcriptions of the video recording made by Portobello Productions in London . The lyrics of the songs are given in Appendix C, together with manuscript translations and/or video subtitles.

6. Support for this kind of collaboration in theatre *production was given* by John Kani in a speech at the

launching of a book about the history of the Market Theatre (Schwartz, 1988). Kani said 'I am glad as a South African first and a black man second that the Market Theatre exists' (December 1988). But this attitude is by no means shared by all Black South African theatre practitioners. Gibson Kente is quoted (Hollyer and Luther, 1985) as saying

> The Market is too political. It's a platform for political stands, *and that's not my* kind of thing. I don't like it (p. 30).

Maishe Maponya and Matsemela Manaka resist using the Market Theatre too, though for different reasons

> Both Manaka and Maponya feel the predominantly white and middle class nature of the Market audiences affects their work negatively. (Hollyer and Luther, p. 30)

7. The last sentence occurs only in the video recording, *not in the manuscript.*

8. *The order of the dialogue is different in the video* from the manuscript and some deletions have been *made.*

9. *From* the manuscript.

10. cf. Appendix C.

11. The subtitles render this in a more restrained way. cf. Appendix C.

12. For the full text of this speech see Appendix D.

13. Engelbrecht's review (1985) exemplifies this when he writes 'Each of the five succeeds admirably as a singer/ dancer/actor, confirming my impression that Blacks may be better equipped than the majority of local White performers.'

CONCLUSION

> A nation which does not help and does not encourage its theatre is, if not dead, dying, just as the theatre which does not feel the social pulse, the historical pulse, the drama of its people, has no right to call itself a theatre. (Federico Garcia Lorca) (1)

The aim of this dissertation has been to examine the actual language practices in three examples of contemporary South African theatre productions in English for evidence of current perceptions of identity among SAE users, as well as to discover some of the functions of English in South African theatre.

Each of the three examples offers a particular perception of the intricate relationships currently existing between English and its South African users. There is also evidence that the racial separations engendered by dominant legislation are to some degree mitigated by English usage by both white and black South African theatre practitioners. The variety of that usage further suggests that English is exhibiting a capacity to accommodate a range of contradictory responses to South African conditions. It can thus be argued that the future of English is intimately connected to the development of a comprehensive South African identity.

Two premises underpin this study:

- that language is a primary means of social and dramatic action;
- that language is inscribed with the value systems of its users.

The first implies that assessing the function of particular spoken utterances is critical in determining the *contexts out of which they arise*. In the theatre contextuality simultaneously encompasses all the contexts of the dramatic world; the theatrical immediacy of the event as it happens; and the *dense socio-economic and* political contexts that surround the performance. Hence in analysing the three productions my task has been to determine not only what is said and how, but more importantly, why.

Regarding the second premise: if language is a primary means of identifying the 'structure of feeling' existing *within a particular group* of people at a particular historical moment, then dramatic dialogue, as it is spoken in a performance, performs a double function. It enacts those 'structures of *feeling*', *inviting audiences* to experience them as lived experiences within the continuum of all their accumulating experiences, at the same time as it presents such ideological action as a structure. In other words, responsive feeling and the apprehension of feeling as structure co-exist.

Given these premises, theatre performance assumes a central *position* in the *life* of its society, for it becomes an active cultural manifestation of the ideologies that bind all the participants into an identifiable community. The effects of *a theatre production* on its participants may then be said to be indicative of extra-theatrical social and political attitudes and beliefs of this community. A production is thus both a product of its makers and a maker of its participants, in that the ideologies a production enacts derive from and resonate back into the lives of its participants.

Each of *these* three productions presents a dramatic world unlike the others. This is not simply an effect of theatrical genre but has to do with the specific

ideological perspectives of each group of performers, playwright and director. Within the common factor of English, the varieties of English usage offer clear distinctions among the ideological perspectives of these plays. Function and usage have thus provided the two points of reference from which to identify perceptions of the performers about themselves and their relationship to other South Africans.

One of the perceptions common to all three productions is the strong sense that identity is determined by reference to an 'other' and that this 'other' has profoundly to do with notions of race and language within South Africa. This seems to be the most unassailable barrier to the evolution of *a South African identity. Because* all three plays are performed in English, language is less an issue here. Examining the nature of the relationships that occur *within English between* the imposed 'otherness' of white and black South Africans in these plays is, however, extremely pertinent.

I propose therefore, to conclude by tracing these relationships as they are exhibited in these three plays.

Chapter 3 identified a persistent WESSA anxiety regarding his current political and social identity, revealed in his concern with the uses to which 'his' language is, and should be, put. Coetzee (1988) has discerned a similar preoccupation in WESSA literature:

> Many English-colonial doubts about cultural identity are projected and blamed upon the English language itself ... partly because English makes no claim (as Afrikaans does) to being native to Africa, partly because of the mystique, promoted by emigré teachers with a stake in maintaining a special status, that English is spoken correctly only in south-east *England, and then only* by a certain social class, partly because the writer's audience is split between colonials with whom he has some community of experience and metropolitans to whom so much has to be explained that he inevitably lapses into exasperated simplifications (p. 8).

Saturday Night at the Palace exhibits similar doubts, which are expressed in the linguistic uncertainties of Vince and Porsie's idiom as well as in the play's ideological entrapment in the paradox of both supporting and rejecting the WESSA & dominant status quo. Coetzee attributes the WESSA's sense of the failure of his language (to be 'one in which Africa will naturally express itself') to his 'inability to conceive of a society in which there is a place for the self' (p. 9).

The notion of the self as a private and separate entity is a recurring theme in many WESSA plays. Slabolepszy's Making Like America as well as Saturday Night at the Palace, and Junction Avenue's Fantastical History of a Useless Man and Sophiatown, all exhibit this particular conceptual construction. Vince's aggression towards September and his preoccupation with his own 'specialness' suggests that he suffers from a persistent fear that there is no place for him in an altered society. The social terms in which he expresses his sense of a personal self appear to consist in fighting a lonely personal struggle against a hostile 'other' which threatens to deny him a personal place and to engulf the territory he currently holds.

But the sense of failure and pessimism generated in Saturday Night at the Palace is alleviated to some degree in Sophiatown. Here the WESSA representative, Ruth, also displays a tendency to regard herself as a special, privileged and isolated unit. And in effect she is. As the sole WESSA voice in the play her relations with the Sophiatown household inevitably shift away from the assertive and defensive stance that Vince adopts against both [illegible] and September. Ruth's move from Yeoville to Sophiatown is a conscious attempt to cross the no man's land perceived by everyone in the play to exist between them. The unfamiliar conditions mean she must enter into new relationships which will be

determined less by her than by these conditions. Her place in the structures of relationship cannot be unilaterally claimed.

One of the most interesting developments in this play in the context of the question of *WESSA identity* is the way in which Ruth's consciousness of her personal identity is modified. The frame of reference that Sophiatown sets round her makes her the 'other' against which the Sophiatown community identifies itself. The effects of this displacement are registered in her continual questions about who she is and, more sombrely, in her inability to find answers or a permanent place in her adoptive community.

Vince dies defiantly defending his 'right' to a separate and personal identity. Ruth discovers that she cannot escape hers. Sophiatown is only a temporary refuge from the limits of her Yeoville identity, but even here the Yeoville limits effectively ensure her isolation in a marginalised and increasingly meaningless personal identity. Her place appears to be in the homeless no man's land.

The *hegemonic effects of* divisive 'otherness' operate on the household as well as on Ruth. For in spite of their willingness to induct Ruth into the 'Softown lifestyle' her place is firmly constrained by her 'otherness'. She begins as a stranger, becomes a visitor, then a socially useful asset, and finally, when the pressure of imminent forced removal reaches crisis point, Mingus turns her into an enemy. He blames her for the removals. The limits of shared language and shared daily experience are reached. Words cannot withstand the actual conditions and ideological severances that racial separateness imposes. *English is not enough.* Personal co-operation cannot reach across the wasteland between Yeoville and Sophiatown. The force of English as the language of

official decrees snaps the fragile personal relationships sustained by its use in the home.

In Asinamali the process of diminishing and marginalising the place for a WESSA identity continues. *Oppositional* racially determined relationships between black and white are enacted without him. He has no place at all in the dramatic action and is relegated to observer status in the auditorium. Yet the use of English is retained both in its official form and to voice the *passionate* resistance of the townships to state dominance. This dislocation between the WESSA and English seals the cocoon of silence that began with his own retreat into the privacy of his specialness. The combined forces of race and language, which created the concept *of a WESSA* identity, are the means of extinguishing it. WESSA space in the socio-linguistic and political stage shrinks to a pinpoint and vanishes: his language is everywhere, his race is dominant but he has no identifiable features to make him visible. The fracture *between* 'white' and 'English-speaking' marks the final disintegration of a doubtful identity.

Yet there is a lingering after-image. If he has no voice, the WESSA ghost apparently has ears. The actors in Asinamali *move out of* the dramatic action, speak across the gap between stage and auditorium to address him directly; to challenge his silence and demand his understanding and his answer.

> What is it? Talk. What is it?

the actor *asks a WESSA audience* member. And then, more significantly, the 'otherness' of the WESSA as audience is gathered into the 'we' of the actors:

> My friend, we've got to look for it. We've got to look for it. Its deep down in your heart.

Actor and audience, ALS and WESSA briefly merge in a common identity in which a WESSA identity is

acknowledged ("your heart"). The WESSA momentarily participates in a "we" which grants him a place distinctly his. What defines that place is not clearly identified though it is suggested that part of the collective action of the "we" involves a scrutiny of WESSA beliefs ("We've got to look for it. It's deep down in your heart"). Against all the evidence of the play and its structure of feeling, the image of a WESSA identity glows faintly again, created not by the WESSA himself, but by his "other".

The persistence of the concept of a WESSA identity here may well be the effect of historical mythologising. Yet the urgency with which Asinamali's "case" is presented in English directly to its local and international white English-speaking audiences suggests that ALSs do still perceive the WESSA as important. His judgements do apparently still matter. He is perceived as a *witness* (an audience), distanced from the turbulence of action, and thus valued for his ethical neutrality. As with an audience his verdict is critical to the *success of the* drama; his approval is sought; his understanding is necessary. Only he can complete the meaning of the drama that is enacted. *He has a particular place and a particular role to play.*

The *implications of the theatrical casting* of the WESSA into the role of audience need to be pursued. For if this perception is not simply a fading resonance of the *WESSA's dominant history*, it might indicate a possible identity for the future, based on role and function rather than either race or language. Asinamali does seem *to perceive a* certain serviceability in the silence and inaction of the contemporary WESSA. If the WESSA can accept this perception as a point of departure, he may be able to discard (at last) his current perception of himself as a "useless man" and engage the concept of use more positively. From the ghost of a WESSA identity may emerge a new identity: a USA - a Useful South African.

NOTES

1. Quoted in the *PACT programme for the production of* Travelling Shots, 1966.
I have been unable to trace the original source despite assistance from several PACT administrative staff members.

APPENDIX A: RESULTS OF A SURVEY THE HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL AND FACT UNDERTOOK IN THE TRANSVAAL IN 1978.
From 'Theatre Research in South Africa' in Critical Arts, 1 (3), October 1980.

AGE	under 18	18 - 24	25 - 35	36 - 49	50 or older	No Response
	90	457	885	773	723	4
%	3,26	16,55	29,08	28,13	27,09	

OCCUP.	Economic/ Scientific	Housewives	Retired	Prof./ Lecturers	Technicians	Farmers	Comm./ Indus.	Civil Servants	Profes-sional	Out of work	No Response
	267	326	130	329	67	24	417	440	667	5	2
%	9,67	12,98	4,71	11,91	2,43	0,87	15,10	16,15	24,15	0,18	0,07

EDUCATION	Std. 8 or less	Std. 10	Matr. without Std. 10	Matr. with Std. 10	Prof. Dipl. without Std. 10	Prof. Dipl. with Std. 10	Degree and more	Other	No Response
	140	696	41	97	58	519	1181	46	26
%	5,07	25,20	1,48	3,36	2,10	18,79	42,76	1,53	0,94

APPENDIX B: REGISTERED RESEARCH IN THE THEATRE ARTS. From 'Theatre Research in South Africa' in Critical Arts, 1 (3), October 1980.

REGISTERED RESEARCH 1969-1979 - DRAMATIC DEPARTMENT

	A PRECONDITIONS			B THE THEATRE CYCLE					C FUNCTIONS			
	Psycho-social value	Socio-economic milieu	Socio-cultural milieu	Composer-actor (Playwright)	Text	Interpretation (Director, actor)	Interpretation (Design, technique)	Receiver (Audience)	Socio-cultural role - function	Political role	As psycho-logical tool	As formal tool
1) THEORY	1			1	1							
2) HISTORY	1 11,11			1								
3) STATISTICS												
4) GEOGRAPHY												
5) ANALYSIS + EVALUATION	1 11,11		1 11,11		1 33,33		2	1				25,25
6) BIOLOGY												
7) PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT												
8) EMPIRIC RESEARCH EXPERIMENT												
TOTAL	2 22,2	0	2 22,2	2 22,2	1 11,11	0	2	1	0	0	0	1 11,11

DOCTORATE THEATRE RESEARCH 1969-1979 DEPARTMENTS OF DRAMA

	A PRECONDITIONS			B THE THEATRE CYCLE					C FUNCTIONS			
	Psycho-social value	Socio-economic milieu	Socio-cultural milieu	Composer-actor (Playwright)	Text	Interpretation (Director, actor)	Interpretation (Design, technique)	Receiver (Audience)	Socio-cultural role - function	Political role	As psycho-logical tool	As formal tool
1) THEORY	2		2		2	4	2	1				6 29
2) HISTORY	10 11,11		1				1					
3) STATISTICS												
4) GEOGRAPHY							2					2
5) ANALYSIS + EVALUATION	7		2	10 31,3	2 3,2	12 19,3	6 9,4		1			3 4,7
6) BIOLOGY												
7) PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT						2						
8) EMPIRIC RESEARCH EXPERIMENT								2				
TOTAL	19 29,3		5 9,5	10 15,5	5 7,7	18 27,9	11 17,0	3	0	0	0	11 17,0

APPENDIX G: AIMS OF THE ENGLISH ACADEMY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

The object of the Academy shall be to maintain and propagate in Southern Africa the best standards of English reading, writing and speech by endeavouring to:

1. Stimulate interest generally in the English language and its literature.

2. Encourage the maintenance of good standards of English in schools and universities.

3 Encourage improvement in the standard of English in journalism, commerce, advertising and entertainment.

4 Strive for the attainment of widespread literacy in English.

5. Institute examinations of proficiency in English.

6. Co-operate with other cultural or educational organisations and foster co-operation between school and university teachers of English.

7. Make awards in recognition of achievement in English in writing, speech and drama.

8. Make available books and other publications in English, especially in the fields of science and education.

9. Defend the democratic rights of free speech and publication.

10. Oppose trends and policies inimical to a full and free education in English and a full and free use of English an an official language in the Republic of South Africa.

(Proceedings of the English Academy of Southern Africa
Annual General Meeting 1983
Presidential address - Professor R. Sands.)

APPENDIX D: *ASINAKALI SONGS*

Opening Song

Fanakalo Fanakalo
I come from Zululand
Fanakalo Fanakalo
Hai yenza Fanakalo
Fanakalo Fanakalo
Mena hai funa lo masimba lapa
Hai yena lo Jim butala lo bunnychow
Bulala zonke

(translation given in the manuscript)

Do like this! Do like this! (x 2)
I come from Zululand.
Do like this! Do like this!
Don't do this! Do like this!
I don t want the shit here
Jim you must eat bread and gravy.
But don't eat the chicken
You can eat bread
But don't eat the chicken)

Song Preceding the Work Seekers Scene

Wemali umegoli
Wemali yami
Ngalamba ngayibopha
Wemali umegoli.

(Translation given in the manuscript)

(My money is in Johannesburg
I starved then I decided to love fasting
My money is in Johannesburg
Because most of the gold mines are there.)

Video subtitles:

The money is in the Johannesburg gold mines
But we have no money.

Sons of the Prison Warder and the Prisoners

Prisoners: Abelungu wudami
Abelungu wudami
Ngifice ebafana bethondo ma ngathunda
Agabhajwa ngqi
Welimpomlo sithlele kanzine sithlele
Kanzima Kuginquka ishunu kukhala elinge
Ihunu.

(Translation in the manuscript)

(Damn the Boers. Damn the Boers.
I found the boss ejaculating. I ejaculated.
I got v.d. on the spot.
Limpopo we're having it tough.
The Boer is dying
The other is crying
The other is running away.)

Warder: Butu omuhle sewuzawufela ejele
seutuzafela ejele butu omuhle
Mina nawa sibeshiwa mofela la.

(A handsome guy will die in jail -
Go on - you'll die in jail.
and you prisoner, we'll die here.)

You can go to Central Prison
You will find Warden Sondofish
You can go to John Vorster Square
You will find Makhandkandha - many headed warder
Come here to Leeukop Prison
You will find ndodgmnyama - pitch black man.)

The Zulu version of the second section is not given in the manuscript; the subtitles of the video suggest some transposition of this song.
They are given as:

Prisoners: Are we afraid of them?
No we are not afraid.
We are on opposing sides
And when the fighting starts people will die.
Whites are damned They are damned
Whites are damned and this load is heavy.
On this side of the Limpopo River border
We are suffering.
We suffer here.

Warder: Handsome fellow you will die in this prison
Me and you prisoner we'll die here.
We'll both die here.
Go to Central Prison
And there you'll find Warden Sondofish.
Go to John Vorster Square and you'll find
Makhandkandha the many headed monster
Come to Leeukop Prison and you'll find
ndodgmnyama, pitch black man
Me and you prisoner, we'll die here.

The Song in the `Pipi Office´

Khanda libuhlungu weikhanda mayeza (repeated)
Sikhandamayeza wezikhandamayeza (repeated)
min na nemcane angazibutho ezo Botha (x 2)
Sikhandamayeza wesikhandamayeza (x 2)

(Translation given in the manuscript)

I´ve got a headache witchdoctor
Witchdoctor, witchdoctor
I am still young I know nothing about Botha
Witchdoctor, witchdoctor,
My head is sore with what goes on in this place,
witcadoctor.

Video subtitles:

My head gets sore
I don´t understand Botha´s politics.

The Worksong at Savage and Lovemore Roadworks

Uxam Xakie Nangu
Usam Xakile Bo
Mantsi Imbuubelethe Imbulibelethe (repeated)
Zisbe yam hayam ishawayisezela mntakababa.

(Translation given in the manuscript)

There is a monitor lizard. It is troublesome.

Video subtitles:

I can smell something.
Something is amiss.
Who is guilty? Own up.

The Asinamali Protest Song

The English subtitles on the video translate the song like this:

Mandela's wife breed revolutionaries
Mandela's wife breeds heroes. Hail!
Botha's wife breeds dogs. Kick them out.
Botha's wife breeds armoured cars. Kick them out.
Bishop Tutu is a great fighter. Hail. Hail.
Here comes Mandela our Prime Minister.
I feel like going beserk and burning the informers.
I feel like going mad when I see an informer.
This is a bad neighbour who informs for the Afrikaners.

Song at Begani's Funeral

transcribed from the English subtitles on the video recording.

Fight on.
The sound of their guns reminds me
That the Portuguese lost the war in Mocambique.

APPENDIX E: ASINAMALI

Transcription of the speech addressed directly to the audience after the account of Mxize Dube's death (from the video of Asinamali).

But now, understand. It's not only about the language, Afrikaans. It's not only about the rent increases. It's not only about job reservations or working conditions. It's not only about gold. It's not only about diamonds. It's not only about sugar plantations in Natal. It's not only about ... (indistinguishable) in the Cape. It's not only about the bloody fucking pass book. It's not only about the vote. It's not only about the moral act.

Or is it? or is it? Tell me, what is it? Talk - what is it, huh? What is it? What is it? (Lor se) you think I'm playing games with you? You t acting? I'm not playing games, man. My friend, we to look for it. We've got to look for it. It's down in your heart.

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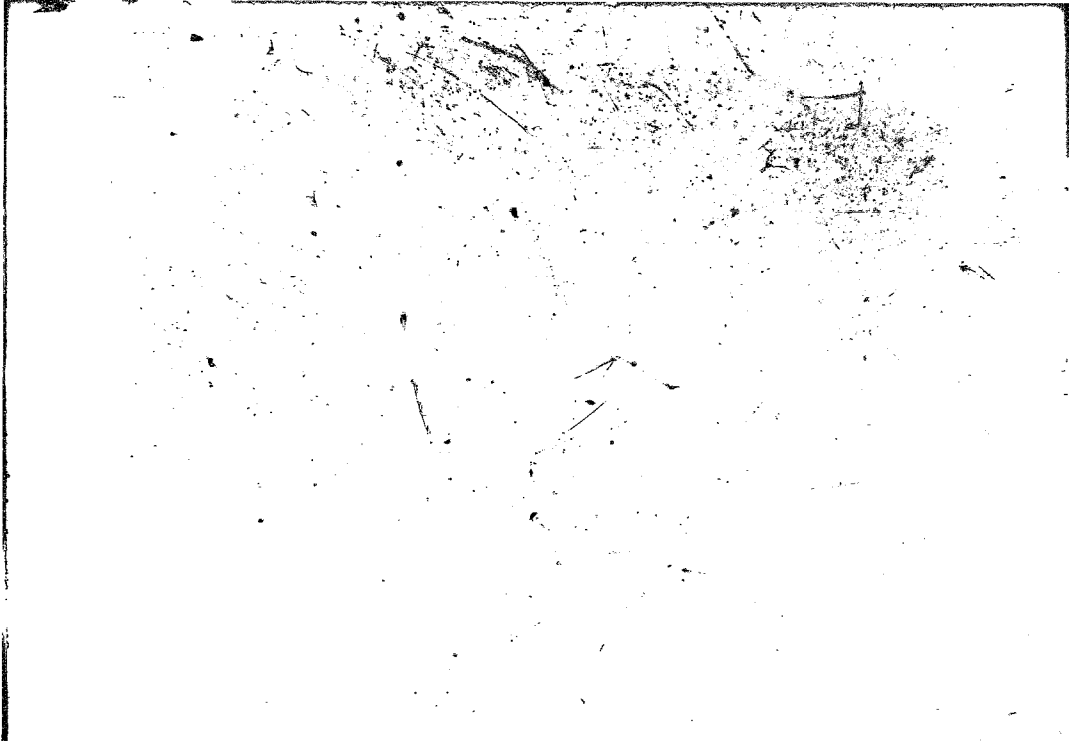
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Author Banning Yvonne
Name of thesis English Language Usage In South African Theatre Since 1917. 1989

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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