Toward a Postmodern Ethnography of Intercultural Theatre: an Instrumental Case-study of the Prague-Toronto-Manitoulin Theatre Project

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Centre for Study of Drama

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Abstract

This thesis examines collaborative intercultural theatre that brings artists from different parts of the world together to create original work. It includes a case-study of the Prague-Toronto-Manitoulin Theatre Project, a theatrical collaboration that took place between 1999 and 2006 and with which I was involved as a performer and facilitator. The thesis considers the case-study within historical context, particularly in relation to the ideas and experiments of influential twentieth-century practitioner-theorists such as Brecht, Artaud, Brook and Schechner. I distinguish between modernist and postmodernist traditions in intercultural theatre discourse by tracing how the latter arose in response to poststructural arguments in cultural theory. In recent decades, theatre practices have accommodated this redirection by being more mindful of politics and ethics. I argue that approaches to research and analysis have lagged behind, and that alternative approaches are needed that are better suited to address contemporary practices and issues. I borrow from critical traditions in Anthropology, Cultural Studies and Education to build up a postmodern ethnographic approach to my case-study of the Prague-Toronto-Manitoulin Theatre Project. At stake in the case-study is the extent to which the additional contextual

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knowledge available to a postmodern ethnographic approach contributes to theatrical analysis and interpretation. More concerned with the instrumental value of the case-study than its intrinsic properties, I use the data to demonstrate that a postmodern ethnography is well-suited to consider ethics of representation in an intercultural context, that is, what the possibilities and limitations of dialogue across cultural difference may be. This, I argue, is as important as ever in a world in which intercultural encounter is common and cultural performance circulates with increasing fluidity and ease.
Acknowledgments

This project owes a great debt of gratitude to my thesis supervisor, Kathleen Gallagher. Kathleen has never failed to make me feel as though this thesis was as important as any other of her many projects. I have learned too many things from Kathleen over the years to possibly account for here, but above all I have learned from Kathleen about what it means to be a good academic. It means keeping on top of your field, but also being constantly willing to re-imagine what that field is. It means creating opportunities for students to build their skills and establish themselves as professionals. It means being skilled at speaking to different audiences with different language without ever speaking down to anyone. Unequivocally, I can say that I was only able to navigate the many layers of personal and academic relationships involved in this study because of Kathleen’s particular skill at doing the same. I also want to thank my thesis committee members Bruce Barton and Veronika Ambros. This study began as a presentation in Bruce’s Dramaturgy class in 2003, and it was at his urging that I developed it further. Veronika, for her part, has brought expertise about both semiotics and Czech theatre, two of the many worlds into which this study enters. Thank you also to Birgit Schreyer Duarte who proofread this thesis with characteristic meticulousness and insight. It is important that I also thank Michal Schonberg, one of the co-founders of the Prague-Toronto-Manitoulin Theatre Project. When Michal consented to my being involved in the project as an assistant director and researcher, he created the space that made this study possible. Though the scholarly issues I became interested in made some of the more confusing and difficult experiences of the project the most interesting, I would say to Michal and my reader that by revisiting these moments my goal is only to make more meaning of the experiences, without which and whom I literally may not have become enamored of theatre or interested in scholarship at all. Lastly, I want to thank my family and friends for their support, not least of all my parents Owen and Audrey Freeman whose hard-work and natural curiosity has always been a model, and to my love, Michelle MacArthur, whose brilliance and beautiful nature inspires me every day.
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INTRODUCTION

Coming in from the Field

The trick, I now feel, lies in figuring out the questions that were on your mind, which led you to accept or reject certain answers or attitudes. What is bugging you? What was bugging me?

— Rick Salutin, from “The Autobiography of an Idea” (85)

The PTMTP and Collaborative Intercultural Theatre

This study is based on my experience with the Prague-Toronto-Manitoulin Theatre Project (PTMTP) between 1998 and 2006. I was first involved in the project as a performer, later as an Assistant Director, and finally as an Assistant Director and researcher. As I experienced and researched intercultural theatre throughout this period, I became interested in how the PTMTP both fit into and departed from earlier intercultural theatre traditions. I saw that there were many other projects like the PTMTP, and together I called this emergent form “collaborative intercultural theatre.” The research I conducted into the PTMTP was a qualitative study of its fourth incarnation in 2006 as well as an immersive study of the project’s respective cultural contexts. This dissertation puts this into conversation with the theory, history and methodologies of intercultural theatre.

The PTMTP was a tripartite collaboration between the Drama Program at the University of Toronto at Scarborough (UTSC), The De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group (Debaj) based on Manitoulin Island in Ontario, and the Divadelní fakulta Akademie múzických umění (DAMU) (the Theatre Faculty of the Performing Arts Academy) in Prague, Czech Republic. The project was co-created and facilitated by professors Michal Schonberg (UTSC) and Jan Schmid (DAMU). In its eight years the project produced four differently themed public performances with four different ensembles. They were as follows:

I participated in *Man and Woman* as a performer, in *Myths that Unite Us* as a performer and an assistant director, and in *The Art of Living* as assistant director and researcher (I was not involved with *I and They*).

I will provide a rough outline of the PTMTP here, and give a more thorough explanation in Chapter Three. The PTMTP brought together a large group of participants—up to nearly thirty—to devise a performance based on the broad theme indicated by the title of each show. The director and principal visionary of the project was Jan Schmid—a Czech director, actor and artist who leads the Ypsilon Theatre in central Prague. Michal Schonberg was nominally the project’s dramaturg, but effectively served as its co-director as well. In each of the first two incarnations of the PTMTP, Schmid and Schonberg gathered together an ensemble of performers who then came together to merge their material into a production that was performed in Prague and Toronto. In 2004, the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group (Debaj) joined the project. With this inclusion came two more collaborators: then Artistic Director of Debaj Ron Bertie (now Artistic Producer) and Delaware Nation poet-playwright Daniel David Moses. These same three collaborators worked together again in 2006 to create the fourth and final incarnation of the project. With the addition of Debaj came performances in their home—the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island in Ontario.

The PTMTP is an example of collaborative intercultural theatre: theatre that brings artists from different parts of the world together to create original work. Many projects of this kind have appeared in the last decade. Though each is unique in its intentions and dramaturgy, each
involves ensembles of performers from different cultures devising original work together that is both created in and performed in each group’s “home culture.” It is not easy to draw a line between projects of this nature and the ongoing work of some theatre companies and schools that do similar work as part of a broader intercultural mandate. In each case, however, there is often a close relationship between intercultural practice and intercultural research and scholarship. Though the form has antecedents in the intercultural research and experiments of twentieth-century avant-gardists, it has flourished for about a decade in its present form. Collaborative intercultural theatre is simultaneously implicated in the geopolitical agendas of globalization and in local theatrical and cultural conditions and seems to issue from an increasing “glocal” consciousness. Because it includes participants from multiple cultural groups in its thinking and processes, it claims to be “egalitarian” and “ethical” and to heed postcolonial criticism that sees past intercultural work as “ethnocentric” (Bharucha, Politics 3) and “corrupt” (Eckersall, “Theatrical” 217). My study, however, will deconstruct such claims together with the evolutionary historiography that they underwrite.

The approach to collaborative intercultural theatre that I develop in this study will not be the first to simultaneously draw from both theatre studies and cultural anthropology. The discipline of performance studies began with the realization that the boundary between these disciplines could fruitfully be breeched. Even back in the 1920s and 30s, Formalists such as Petr Bogatyrev and Vladimir Propp applied their thinking simultaneously to theatrical and folkloric contexts. These examples bear out my conviction that the boundaries between these realms of inquiry are blurry, and that concerns about cultural representation and how we write about culture—those central to anthropology—are artistic and aesthetic as much as they are methodological. Conversely, artistic or dramaturgical choices in the theatre—and especially in
an intercultural situation—are inescapably political, involving crucial decisions about how we represent ourselves symbolically and negotiate individual and collective identities.

I have found that methodologies in cultural anthropology, particularly contemporary postmodern approaches to ethnography and qualitative research, are well-suited to collaborative and intercultural theatre making in particular. The observing theatre practitioner placed “inside” a collaborative process does research and analysis that looks as much like that of a cultural anthropologist doing fieldwork as it does like typical contemporary performance analysis. Theatre studies may have severed some of its ties to anthropology and ethnography as a way of disconnecting itself from the stigmatized tradition of modernist anthropology. This study re-establishes this association by seeking out an alternative to a modernist tradition that, if not itself fully “ethical”, is at least mindful of the ethics of its interpretive gestures. We may learn from the mis-steps of the past, but we should recognize that they are no less possible today.

Collaborative intercultural theatre is a form, and form is of itself neither progressive nor regressive. Certainly, by eluding interpretation within any one tradition or paradigm, the form challenges established analytical practices. The work and the products of collaborative intercultural theatre can emancipate individuals from habitual perception, cultural acclimatization and stereotype. It can expose its participants and audiences to different ways of seeing that encourage intercultural appreciation and knowledge. At the same time, it can also alienate, confuse and frustrate. It can reinforce inequalities in cultural, institutional and individual relationships. It can re-stage misunderstanding and misperception and thereby enlarge separation and ignorance. It can announce itself in the utopian rhetoric of co-operation and yet, insidiously, silence. To twist a common metaphor, it burns bridges as easily as it builds them, and can be seen to do both at once. This study regards all of these outcomes as co-existing
possibilities. I am sceptical of the politics of all evaluative judgment according to, for instance, moral standards or egalitarian collaborative ideals. Like everything else within the shifty territory of interculturalism, standards and ideals themselves are culturally situated.

When I began writing this study, two things were “bugging” me. First, I knew that the PTMTP had been a profound learning experience for participants—not least of all for myself—but I also knew that it had had moments of misunderstanding and frustration that had gone largely unacknowledged. I wanted to address these moments, not in the spirit of checking the “success” of the work, but in thinking through, in a thorough, critical fashion, exactly what the experience was “meaning” for participants on all sides of the project. The experience of the PTMTP had been exhilarating but rushed, and there seemed to be so much more to say, so much more meaning to make. The second thing that “bugged” me was that the literature about intercultural theatre did not seem to arm me with the methodology that I needed to speak about these moments critically and meaningfully. Instead, it tended to analyze how performance manifested cultural differences, usually with respect to visual dimensions of representation such as set, costume and body (read visually). An analysis of the PTMTP in those terms could be fruitful, but it would not access to what was for me the most fascinating arena of meaning within the projects: the experiences in rehearsal as participants negotiated representations among the ensemble. Moreover, the literature appeared to divide modern intercultural theatre into two traditions, one imperialistic, self-interested and undesirable, and the other egalitarian, fair and noble. I knew from experience that this binary would not do, that the PTMTP was not unique in having any number of characteristics to match these general categories. These two issues propelled me forward as I designed a research methodology that would help me make sense of
the experiences I had had, and was about to have.

**About the Instrumental Case-Study**

As an *instrumental* case-study, this study puts its original qualitative theatre research into conversation with theory, methodology and case studies from other disciplines such as performance studies, cultural studies, anthropology, ethnography and drama-in-education. According to Robert Stake, *instrumental* case studies are undertaken to “facilitate our understanding of something else [...The] case is still looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed, but all because this helps us pursue the other interest” (Stake 445). They are distinct from *intrinsic* case studies that are undertaken because “one wants better understanding of the particular case” (Stake 445). In this study, the specific and the general are intertwined; my observations and arguments would not be possible without their foundation in my particular practice and experience. My close research of collaborative intercultural theatre’s dynamics has given me access to the embodied and situated and experiential forces that make it meaningful for its participants.

In a way, this case-study was initially intrinsic but later became instrumental when further research and experience shifted my critical focus to theoretical and methodological issues. As important as the Canadian, Native and Czech contexts of the PTMTP are, I am ultimately more interested in how those contexts shaped what happened and in interpreting my qualitative data in such a way that connects to larger issues. This has two important consequences. The first is that even while Chapter Three will feature a thorough description of the project, I do not have the aim here of writing a “history” or “document” of the PTMTP. Everything I say about the project in here is meant purely to provide the information necessary
for interpreting its creative, cultural and political dynamics. Importantly, this is to be
distinguished from a full ethnography. Ethnography is both a process (ethnographic methods of
studying culture and context) and a product (the written product of such a study). The
ethnography of this thesis’s title refers to the first rather than the second. I used the research
strategies of ethnography (more on these in Chapter Two), but the product is never meant to be a
full ethnography of any of the cultural contexts of the PTMTP. The product, instead, is case-
study, and the contextual elements of the case-study are highly selective. In other words, I am
considering the implications of taking an “ethnographic” approach to theatre by exploring a
particular case-study. The second consequence of doing a more instrumental case-study is that
terminological, historical and methodological issues are given more weight here than may be
usual in a case-study, postponing my engagement with my qualitative research until the latter
half of Chapter Two. I fear that this sorting and defining gets tedious, but in justification of it I
can only say that a century of slippery terminology and realigning arguments in the practice and
scholarship of intercultural theatre has meant that extra definitional work is needed. The
following sections are meant to clear a path through the terminology.

2008: The European Union “Year of Intercultural Dialogue”

Each year, the parliament of the European Union draws attention to a particular policy issue by
specially designating the year according to a theme. 2008 was the “Year of Intercultural
Dialogue,” and for it the EU has allocated ten million Euros to cultural, educational and athletic
projects broadly intended to “raise awareness of European citizens [...] of the importance of
developing active European citizenship which is open to the world, respectful of cultural
diversity and based on common values” (Europa-Culture). Some have argued that the
designation is part of the EU’s larger ideological effort to establish something of a common “European identity.” Indeed, anxiousness about collective identity and citizenship has been on the rise, perhaps because new waves of immigration to Europe have shifted the demographics and challenged the entrenched nationalisms of EU member states. For some, the appearance of huge populations of Islamic citizens in Western Europe—not to mention Turkey’s controversial candidacy for membership—has challenged a Europe united in its Christian heritage if not in its languages and culture. When European parliament president Hans-Gert Pöttering was asked in 2007 about the purpose of the “Year of Intercultural Dialogue,” he responded: “understanding between cultures is crucial for world peace. In particular, relations between the Western world and the Arab and Islamic world will be decisive for twenty-first century” (European Parliament). Pöttering’s familiar twenty-first century geopolitical binary illustrates that the totalized and totalizing East-West binary that dominated twentieth-century (inter)cultural discourse is presently being revised along ethnic and religious lines.4

I cite this example to illustrate one instance of how interculturalism is invoked in the discussion of some of the most pressing geopolitical issues of our day. But the EU’s use of “intercultural” also illustrates how the meaning of the term itself is diffusing. The EU uses interculturalism to mean what the more-or-less familiar “Multiculturalism” has meant: the quest to establish a common framework for citizenship in the absence of a common history or foundational myths. A nation without a notion, the EU constructs an imaginary dialogical space called “intercultural dialogue”—a space in which cosmopolitan citizens may work toward some new, outward-looking nationalism to replace those parochial old nationalisms of the nineteenth century. Interculturalism, then, is a place of dialogue, but dialogue ultimately intended to foster agreement and common understandings. Curiously, however, interculturalism in
academia more often refers to the fragmentation and intermixing of “national” cultures, or else the forming of “unofficial” and potentially subversive local cultural identities. Richard Schechner introduced the term interculturalism to theatre studies in 1982 as a way to side-step cultural discourse focused on national identity and citizenship and to replace it with a discourse focused on culture. For Schechner, culture (used in an anthropological sense) could be used in reference to any kind of group whether in a Balinese village or an American theatre workshop, but it was specifically not a national identity. Schechner explains in a 1996 interview that he meant interculturalism simply as a contrast to ‘internationalism’. In other words, there were lots of national exchanges, but I felt that the real exchange of importance to artists was not that among nations, which really suggests official exchanges and artificial kinds of boundaries, but the exchange among cultures, something which could be done by individuals or by non-official groupings, and it doesn’t obey national boundaries. (qtd. in Pavis IPR 42)

Whereas Schechner is explicitly interested (and invested) in dissolving boundaries, the EU is searching for a common citizenship that—somehow—still observes and respects them. Of course these two examples are not precisely comparable, even if both involve building a new political entity: the EU, a new nation; Schechner, a new academic discipline. Nonetheless, the difference between the two conceptions illustrates how words that circulate throughout multiple discourses—official and unofficial, journalistic and academic—accumulate overlapping and sometimes conflicting meanings. For this reason, I will now clarify some terms.

**Key “Alignments”**

*An intellectual is always at odds with hard and fast categories, because these tend to be instruments used by the victors.*

— Václav Havel (*Disturbing the Peace* 167)

As a world-famous playwright and the former president of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel is perhaps as aware as anyone of the politics inscribed in language. Havel’s reminder is an
There have been numerous attempts in the humanities and social sciences to define intercultural and its cousins crosscultural, transcultural and multicultural. Within theatre studies alone, several typologies have attempted to set the terms of the discussion (Balme; Carlson, *Brook*; Pavis, *IPR*; Lo and Gilbert; Schechner, *Theatre*). Despite (or because of) these efforts, the terminology remains muddy; Rustom Bharucha notes that it is “overdetermined,” (*Politics* 13) and Jaqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert write that it is “wooly, to say the least” (32). On some occasions specific uses of terms has been outright rejected. Indian scholar Rustom Bharucha, for example, famously stripped interculturalism of its utopian connotations by calling it a western enterprise with concealed globalist and imperialist imperatives (see Bharucha, *Politics*). Like Bharucha (and Havel), I am sceptical of the politics that undergird definitions. To organize perception into categories is to argue for a specific order and to also suggest that such an order exists. It may be more appropriate in this field to think of definitions as alignments rather than “hard and fast categories”. Alignments are flexible, shift in practice, and can look quite different depending on the vantage point of the observer. An alignment is both the paradigm of analysis and its location; it is the how and where one looks for meaning. These are seen to be inextricable. The PTMTP, it will be argued, is an inter, cross, trans, multi, Multi and intracultural undertaking all at once. In the spirit of this study, this is meant to point to the fact that definitions do not only describe a pre-existing reality, but also evoke and create it. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) says that one meaning of the verb “align” is “to bring into line with a particular tradition, policy, group, or power.” As a noun, an alignment is a way of seeing that can be associated with certain traditions of practice or thought, though that association can change (as I will illustrate

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later in the case of transculturalism’s association with the avant-garde). Throughout this study I will express reservations about the use of every term I adopt: intercultural, postmodern, crisis, collaborative, poststructural, and ethics all included. I approach these terms with the same skepticism I approach intercultural theatre itself, which is to question whether they are really what they seem. Boundaries are laid down, as well, by ideas. “As cartographers of the imagination,” writes Bharucha, “we have to accept that the intercultural map has shifting boundaries, shifting sites” (Politics 160).

The alignments of inter, cross, trans, multi, and intraculturalism function like spatial metaphors that intimate both geographical orientation and movement: across, between, above, beyond and so on (and alignment itself is a spatial metaphor). Of these terms, I mainly use intercultural and transcultural in this study. Lo and Gilbert draw a useful distinction between these two terms in relation to theatre practices. The intercultural (“inter” meaning “in between” or “in the midst” according to the OED) in the theatre is a hybrid derived from material/symbolic exchange of cultural resources at the level of (i) narrative, (ii) aesthetics, (iii) processes of production and reception (31). That which is exchanged might include stories, myth, language, objects, aesthetic techniques, methods, attitudes, or anything that can be said to be within the domain of culture. Though the term applies to exchange across cultural boundaries, some have argued that it is strictly a Western notion: Rustom Bharucha calls it a “Western vision” (see Politics), Lo and Gilbert an encounter between “the West and the rest” (32), Susan Bennett a Western “obsession,” (166) and Josette Féral a “limitless infatuation” (7). Whatever the axis of exchange, inter emphasizes mixing, contingency of meaning, and new possibilities. Collaborative intercultural theatre projects predominantly align as intercultural.
Trans (meaning “to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of” according to the OED) in the theatre “aims to transcend culture-specific codification in order to reach a more universal human condition” (Lo and Gilbert 37). A search for universality—differently inflected—might be read into many periods of and movements in theatre history—Greek theatre, Neoclassicism and Romanticism, for example—but twentieth-century transculturalism has principally sought connections between those of the West and those who are thought to live “outside of modernity.”

Because transculturalism implicitly dissolves social, cultural, or political boundaries, it is not likely to be accepted by anyone with a vested interest in those boundaries. Preculturalism (pre simply meaning “before” (OED) is perhaps a specific alignment of transculturalism that professes to tap into that which precedes culture: a shared, symbolic, archetypal repertory of human actions, gestures, understandings and archetypes (see Pavis IPR). Examples include Grotowski’s “very ancient form of art where ritual and aesthetic form were seamless” (qtd. in Wolford and Schechner 387), the “transcultural physiology” that underlies Barba’s “pre-expressivity” (Barba and Savarese 188) and Schechner’s “return to traditional, even ancient, values” (“An Introduction” 3).

Collaborative – Imperialistic

This study uses the term collaborative intercultural theatre to refer to theatre work that brings groups from different parts of the world together to create performances combining the skills, stories, and languages of the participants. The intercultural element of this description is consistent with Lo and Gilbert above. The collaborative element suggests a basis in a collaborative relationship between a few artists, theatre groups or institutions. But I also mean collaborative in the sense of collective or devised, meaning that its dramaturgy involves
significant creative input from all of its participants. In this latter sense, collaborative intercultural theatre claims to break from a tradition of intercultural theatre that Lo and Gilbert call “imperialistic” (39). *Imperialistic intercultural theatre*, they argue, is more interested in aesthetics than politics, often exhibits an imbalance of power among its participants and often exoticizes a cultural Other by way of an assimilative or alimentary process. They cite Robert Wilson and Peter Brook as practitioners within this tradition. Collaborative intercultural theatre, on the other hand, is created by participant artists from each of the cultures involved and typically is more attentive to its own politics, maintains more equitable relations among collaborators, seeks out contradictions and resists easy synthesis.

This can be a useful distinction. It separates imperialist interculturalism—with its associations with modernism and avant-gardism—from a collaborative variety thereby characterized as contemporary and progressive. But there are reasons to be sceptical of this construction. First, imperialistic practices are as capable of being collaborative as collaborative practices are of being imperialistic. Imperialistic aspects of collaborative processes are all the more insidious because they can claim to be egalitarian when in reality they are not. Second, it is mistaken to think that collaborative practice is superseding imperialistic practice in a grand evolution toward theatre that is more ethical or politically self-aware. True, collaborative work has a certain political cachet for those who feel it reflects the postmodern spirit and the values of liberal democracy and cultural tolerance. But such values are culturally (as well as generationally) situated. These categories, in other words, are also alignments with their own politics. Consider that when Richard Schechner makes precisely the same distinction as Lo and Gilbert and cites exactly the same artists in a book published two years later, Schechner calls their imperialistic category “positive” and their collaborative category “ironic and probing”
(Over, Under 8). As Foucault would point out, there is no hidden truth behind their discursive categories; they are constructs generated and maintained by certain interests that may create space for and foster discussion, but may also control or even choke off potentially transgressive or disruptive forces.

**Modern – Postmodern**

The aforementioned scepticism notwithstanding, my first two chapters will try to identify a juncture between what I will call intercultural modernism and intercultural postmodernism. The distinction between modernism and postmodernism may be clear and comfortable in other artistic disciplines such as the visual arts, but it has never sat as comfortably in the theatre.¹⁰ The general diffusion of these terms’ meanings is compounded in my case because theatre studies and cultural anthropology—the two disciplines I draw on the most—each define these terms differently. This is worth discussing at the outset because in attending to interculturalism, these definitions collide.

In theatre studies—and in the more expansive performance studies—the distinction between modernism and postmodernism continues to be discussed, though postmodernism has accrued generally accepted features over time: it is reflexive; points to its own artifice and constructedness; mixes popular and literary content, genres and conventions; resists totalizing meaning and allows multiple levels of meaning to co-exist and contradict; is self-referential, slippery and indeterminate, shirking the weight of tradition and evading the control of authorial intent. We might expect modernism, conversely, to involve “naturalized” representation, and a singularity of narrative, style and “message” advanced by an equally singular author within an identifiable tradition. Within this discipline the criteria are largely aesthetic such that we might

~ 14 ~
“read” features of each in performance. When Philip Auslander considers the relationship between postmodernism and performance, he focuses on the aesthetic because “we associate the concept of performance with events whose appeal is primarily aesthetic” (97). Naturally, those who value performance aesthetically will seek out ways to analyze it aesthetically.

In cultural anthropology the distinction between modernism and postmodernism is more methodological than aesthetic. There, modernism is associated with a tradition of nineteenth century anthropology that was compliant with, and complicit in, the imperialist Western project of studying those cultures it was often colonizing. Modernist anthropologists carried with them a notion of evolutionary cultural progress rooted in Enlightenment philosophy that had them explicitly or implicitly characterize those cultures they studied as primitive and unsophisticated, without the comforts of modern living and therefore culturally—if not also intellectually—inferior. Their interpretations tended to be diachronic in that they gauged the proximity of cultures in time to Western modernity as measures of sophistication or enlightenment. The simplicity they projected onto the Other only added to the “truth value” of their interpretations. Decoding the ritual of another culture was an act of interpretation not unlike decoding a poem, and there was a correct interpretation of both. Given that they were witnessing culture in a pre-industrial and therefore unevolved state, it was imagined that the symbolic unity they found in other cultures was also buried deep beneath the religion and literary traditions of the West.¹¹

The outright racism of some of this scholarship did not dissipate overnight and it became the project of twentieth-century anthropology to determine how to approach, interpret, and then write about other cultures in such a way that did not assume superiority to them. First, someone had to give the practice a disparaging name, which American anthropologist W.G. Sumner was to provide in his 1906 work *Folkways* with “ethnocentrism,” defined as “the view of things in
which one’s group is at the center of everything, and all others are scaled with reference to it” (13). If new theory and methodology was to avoid ethnocentrism, it had to analyze culture synchronically, interpret micro-examples rather than macro-evolutions, and resist the temptation to compare across cultures. It was not until anthropology was stimulated by Derrida and Foucault that it began to further interrogate the act of knowing and writing about another culture.

Ethnography—both the process of anthropological study and its written product—became a central focus in discussions of what a postmodern anthropology might look like. The most philosophical and widely cited writer on the subject of postmodernism in anthropology has been Stephen A. Tyler, whose work critiques the modernist project and situates all knowledge in the discourse about objects, rather than in the objects themselves:

One of the constant themes of western thought has been the search for apodictic and universal method. [...] The transcendence of method derives from one simple assumption: rules of interpretation and analysis are separate from what they interpret and analyze. Rules are separate from what rules are for; they transcend their objects and conditions of use; they have universal and unequivocal application. (189)

Tyler takes the argument to a philosophical dead-end, however: “The great problem for postmodern anthropology is either to give up on writing altogether or to achieve by written means what speech creates, and to do it without simply imitating speech” (197-98). He provides no practical suggestions, nor explains how speech-signs are not themselves, like writing, a “shadow of reality” that artificially separate word and world, order and objects ordered. “[Tyler] develops some nearly unbearable truths,” writes George E. Marcus, “that would make it difficult to lend special importance or justification to any practice of ethnography” (566). This problem would be taken up by James Clifford, whose “postmodern ethnography” (my term, not Clifford’s), I will return to later.

The different criteria for distinguishing between the modern and postmodern that issue
from literary and anthropological discourses, then, confuses the use of these terms in the intercultural context. For example, if an intercultural production draws on fragments of foreign cultures it may effect a postmodern pastiche, but at the same time, its failure to attend to the contexts of those fragments or the politics of the act of borrowing itself fails to meet the postmodern requirement that it should attend to the “circumstances of text production.” When Eleanor Fuchs writes in *Death of Character* that “the collapse of boundaries—between cultures, between sexes, between the arts, between disciplines, between genres [...] is what postmodernism is all about,” (170) we should also be confused. Fuchs’ collapsing of formerly distinct categories of representation may describe a postmodernism of aesthetics—in Fuchs’ analysis, a fragmentation of character. But a postmodernism of anthropological enquiry specifically resists the collapsing of boundaries in order to highlight difference, locality and context. The transculturalism I will associate with the avant-garde collapses boundaries in a way that is—according to nearly any available definition—modernist.

Consider the case of Robert Wilson. On one hand, beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, Wilson’s work was canonized as quintessentially postmodern, and not surprisingly considering the presence in his aesthetic of “pastiche, fragmentation, discontinuity, disharmony and eclecticism” that Maria Shevtsova says typifies the phenomenon (*Robert Wilson* 155). Even recently, Katherine Arens writes that Wilson plays “the role of postmodernist par excellence” (84) not only because of his aesthetics, but also because his “critique of at least two dominant forms of contemporary theater, author theater and director’s theater” aligns with the “post” of postmodernism (105). On the other hand, other critics see Wilson’s singularity of vision and symbolist aesthetic as distinctly modern (see Pavis, *IPR* 99). Shevtsova, for instance, argues that Wilson’s “total commitment to the idea that art supercedes all” makes him “anything but
postmodernist” (Robert Wilson 52). Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert consider Wilson to be “part of a Western-based tradition with a lineage in modernist experimentation” (36). Shevtsova and Lo and Gilbert, then, lean toward the definitions of cultural anthropology and not those of theatre studies. What is revealing to me about this is that it is Shevtsova, Lo and Gilbert— theorists of intercultural theatre—who see Wilson’s work as modernist. They do so because the nature of the intercultural work they examine makes the definitions of modernism and postmodernism in cultural studies more useful than those from theatre studies—that their priorities as interpreters in the intercultural domain lean toward the processual rather than the aesthetic.

At least in this one strain of intercultural theatre theory, then, cultural processes are considered to be as important as aesthetics. I mention this here because it makes an important introductory point about my own approach: that in this study, I am more interested in intercultural theatre as a space for intercultural learning (something I will consider later under the rubric of ethical dialogue) than I am with how it offers itself up as artistic product to a theatregoing public. I do consider elements of the public performances produced by the PTMTP at points, but even in these cases my interest turns to the negotiations and understandings that led to the end product. In choosing this focus I have taken a cue in this from the rhetoric surrounding collaborative intercultural theatre, which commonly frames projects as forums for interpersonal exchange and learning.

Choosing that focus leads me to other choices about how I am aligning conceptual terminology in this study. Like Shevtsova and Lo and Gilbert, I use the term postmodern here in an anthropological sense to refer to how my methodology departs from a more modernist kind of anthropology (this will become clearer in Chapter Two). Still, I use this anthropological
modernist/postmodernist distinction with reservations. In Chapter One, I re-inscribe a
historiography of intercultural theatre that divides the practices of twentieth-century modernism
(associated with the avant-garde, imperialism, authoritarianism and globalization) from that of
late twentieth-century postmodernism (associated with populism, resistance, egalitarianism and
locality). I am sceptical of this division and, worse, believe that it can lead to false ideas about
intercultural interaction, the first of which is the idea that intercultural work is progressing
toward some enlightened philosophical or ethical ideal. Subtly echoing the cultural Darwinism of
nineteenth century armchair anthropology, this division can misdirect the intercultural
conversation. I do not believe that there has been a revolution in intercultural theatre that has
overturned the foundations of modernism; in fact, my experience has suggested that modernist
approaches to interculturalism are thriving. Moreover, the more I learn about the intercultural
avant-gardists—some of whom have been pilloried as imperialist and appropriating in
contemporary intercultural discussions—the clearer it is to me that they would appear
postmodern and politically progressive for someone who was willing to look at them differently.
It is not only Robert Wilson who would, for the person who was able to take in plenty of
different facets of his process, appear both modern and postmodern simultaneously according to
the definitions available in both theatre studies and anthropology. Despite all of these
reservations, however, I still find the distinction useful. While it may unfairly delineate practices
that align in complex ways in reality, I believe it does accurately delineate trends in both
research methodologies and anthropological “ways of seeing” the cultural Other.

Overview of this Thesis
This study comprises two parts that correspond well to the two issues I identified above that had bothered me early on in the research. The first part—Chapters One and Two—surveys the history, discourse and methodologies of intercultural theatre and builds an alternative “postmodern ethnographic” methodological framework. The second part—Chapters Three and Four—place the PTMTP in context, analyzes my qualitative research, and considers what kinds of insights are made available to the alternative methodology. The frame around the discussion becomes the ethics of representation, and the Conclusion considers how further research could expand the discussion about ethics in intercultural context as the forms of and arguments for intercultural theatre evolve in the twenty-first century.

In Chapter One I survey the intercultural predilections of the twentieth-century theatrical “avant-garde.” I direct this survey toward what I call the “crisis of ethics” (more accurately a crisis of morals) behind representation that were exposed in the heated debate surrounding Peter Brook’s controversial 1985 production, The Mahabharata. I then work toward a central argument of this dissertation: that much contemporary criticism of intercultural performance is still based on a modernist paradigm (again, modernist in the anthropological sense), and that there is a need for alternative, postmodern critical approaches. I use the word “crisis” with a hint of irony insofar as the crisis of ethics was neither immediately dramatic nor completely redirecting. What it did do, however, was issue a challenge within the discourse and prompt some, at least, to seek out new arguments for a different age.

Chapter Two describes the methodology and methods of this study. It begins by establishing a poststructural epistemology of cultural identity that sees culture as a process rooted in individual experience rather than a static ontological property. This leads toward a “postmodern ethnography of theatre” that I differentiate from an example of a “modernist
ethnography of theatre.” I then attend to the specific research methods I used by delving into my experience in the field, telling the story of how my original research design of the project had to change in response to both practical obstacles and my evolving thinking. The latter part of Chapter Two considers two particularly important clusters of meaning in relation to my research and experience: process and narrative. The chapter closes with a discussion of the potential limitations and pitfalls of a postmodern ethnography.

The case-study begins in Chapter Three with a rumination on what it may mean to “come to know” another culture at all, and what special experience that may be reserved for those who are not yet, so to speak, “in the know.” That in mind, I then sort through the complex cultural and theatrical contexts of the PTMTP one by one, framing the discussion, in part, in terms of my own personal process of dispelling the misconceptions I held about each, that is, my own process of “coming to know.” Throughout, I use some of my qualitative data to build an implicated rather than an “objective” account of the project. The latter part of Chapter Three takes a closer look at the methods and styles of the Ypsilon theatre in Prague for insight into the theatrical “brand” within which the PTMTP was realized.

The lengthier Chapter Four is an analysis and discussion of my qualitative research into the PTMTP. I begin by considering the interpretive mechanics of actually “reading” qualitative data such as interviews. Through a process of exclusion rather than accumulation, I work toward a strategy that allies with the instrumental spirit of the case-study. I then delve into the data: interviews, fieldnotes, immersive knowledge and reflection on my own experience. The analysis begins by attempting to sort participants’ expressions of difficulties with the work into a small set of themes, and then draws on context to frame these difficulties as a product of colliding cultural frames of reference and prerogatives rather than endemic or objective “problems.” From
there, I conduct microscopic examinations of three examples taken from the process of creating the fourth PTMTP, *The Art of Living*. The first two of these specifically look at the body as a particularly charged site of meaning in intercultural work, and describe how, on a small scale, a new understanding was reached that intervened in a process of representation. In the third example I examine a strange and problematic scene from *The Art of Living* by contrasting eight different accounts of that scene offered to me by interviewees of each of the PTMTP’s participant groups. The three examples then lead into a discussion about the ethics of representation in the context of intercultural theatre.

The dissertation, then, somewhat divides theory and practice. While this would not seem to be in the spirit of an *instrumental* case-study, reinforcing what Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert call “the false dichotomy between praxis and theory” (37), I think that it is necessary at the outset to maintain a sustained focus on traditions and theory in order to make some terminological and theoretical distinctions clear. Like Lo and Gilbert, I think that the grounding of theory in specific contexts is important—and I go on to do so—but to engage with theory only piecemeal also runs the risk of relegating important issues “to the particular and the ‘one-off’ rather than relating [them] to issues of knowledge formation” (37). Therefore, given that knowledge formation—or methodology—is a primary interest of this study, I precede the analysis of my qualitative research with an extensive discussion of the methodology that led me to it.

Notes to Introduction

1 The nature of collaborative intercultural theatre projects is such that there is some confusion between the name of the project and the name of any one incarnation of it (an incarnation being one of the four separate versions of the project with a different theme, ensemble and product). I have chosen to refer to the PTMTP in regular typeface and the titles of each of its four incarnations in italics.
Among those that are ongoing in Toronto are: The Cape Town Project (Theatrefront), a Toronto-based company’s collaboration with Cape Town’s Baxter Theatre Centre; Night (Theatrefront), involving artists from Toronto, Nunavut, Iceland and Germany; The Dialogues Project (Modern Times), a project to be devised in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina that intends to use collective creation as a means to open dialogue between its Serb, Croat and Bosnian participants; and Lu Xun Blossoms (Theatre Smith-Gilmour), a Sino-Canadian collaboration based on the short stories of Lu Xun. Many other ongoing projects are based elsewhere in Canada, in Australia, the United States, Japan and throughout Europe.

Examples of those include Anne Bogart and Tadashi Suzuki’s SITI in New York, Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s La Pocha Nostra in San Francisco, The Sulayman Al-Bassam Theatre Company in London, John Martin’s Pan Centre for the Intercultural Arts also in London, Ong Keng Sen’s TheatreWorks in Singapore, Eugenio Barba’s International School of Theatre Anthropology in Holstebro, Denmark and the UCLA Centre for Intercultural Performance and its collaborative intercultural troupe, the “Art of Rice Travelling Theater.”

The East/West binary is all-encompassing, and in some contexts it has only ever meant Arab-Islamic/Judeo-Christian. The “Orient” of Said’s Orientalism, for example, refers principally to the Arab world, with most of his illustrations coming from colonial Egypt.

The origin of the term “intercultural” is unclear. Early on, it seems to have been used exclusively in the US, where it may have been coined to refer to the country’s own fraught race relations. In academia, it becomes popular mid-twentieth-century in the fields of communication and education.

“IPR” will be used to refer to the Intercultural Performance Reader, edited by Patrice Pavis.

The widespread spatialization of cultural interaction—into cartographies, crossings, borders and so on—has implications that I will revisit later when considering the temporality of intercultural meeting.

I alter Lo and Gilbert’s typology slightly; where they use crosscultural as an overarching genus within which interculturalism, multiculturalism and transcultural are species, I assign a different meaning to crosscultural and abandon their too-broad overarching category.

The definition of intercultural in the OED accords well with its usage in the discourse of intercultural theatre, though it is clumsy: “Denoting ‘Subsisting, carried on, taking place, or forming a communication between...’; hence, sometimes, ‘Belonging in common to, or composed of elements derived from, different things (of the kind indicated by the second element).’”

As Richard Drain observes, “[many] of the features commonly identified as post-modernist in the other arts are in one sense or another ‘theatrical’; and they already have a long history in the modernist theatre,” such as “the play of styles, pastiche, the celebration of artifice [...] the cross-over with popular modes” and so on (8).

This is the spirit of social anthropologist’s Sir James Frazer’s 1890 tome The Golden Bough that strongly influenced T.S.Eliot’s The Waste Land.

Throughout the twentieth century Sumner’s ethnocentrism would be differently inflected in discussions of Eurocentrism, Orientalatism and globalization.

This was the work of Franz Boas in America and Bronislaw Malinowski in Britain, both of whom demanded an “insider's perspective” on culture involving embedded and long study. Where Boas was
searching for the origins of culture, Malinowski was searching for its functionality, arguing that all elements of culture fulfilled a knowable function in their society. Boaz and Malinowski were hugely influential, and their strategies permeate anthropological work throughout mid-century.

14 George E. Marcus offers an interesting reverse perspective on this, noting that “the postmodern [aesthetic] notion of juxtapositions [...] serves to renew the practice of comparison in anthropology, long neglected, but in altered ways” (566), in other words, that postmodern aesthetic experimentation is precisely what is needed to redress modernist methodologies (567).

15 Lo and Gilbert's categories of “collaborative” and “imperialistic” are one example. Una Chaudhuri's categories of “Theatre of the Same” and “Theatre of Difference” are another (“The Future” 195)
PRELUDE

A Reflection - Prague, 1999

September 11th, 1999. On a Czech Airlines flight, direct from Toronto to Prague. The in-flight safety video is scratchy and the tracking is off. The flight attendant in the video tells us—in Czech—about the airplane’s safety features. He means his spiel to be calming but he has an alarming look in his eye, serious and piercing. When a female attendant repeats the information in English, a proper British English is dubbed over the recording. This too is alarming. I get lost in the gap between the familiar sounds and the different shapes forming at her mouth. Eight hours later we land in Prague to the sound of Smetana’s “Moldau.” The “Moldau” is probably the only piece of Czech art of any kind I am familiar with, and it’s the first thing I hear.

September 13th, 1999. We’re led around Prague by our hosts from the Ypsilon theatre. We walk through Old Town with its stunning, open square and across Charles Bridge to the Lesser Side, up then over cascades of stone stairs to Hradčany and the magnificent castle that has been the seat of Czech government for centuries. It’s my first time outside of North America and Prague’s architecture is overwhelming, its winding cobbled streets disorienting and surreal. But the romance is punctuated by commercial encroachments: McDonald’s is here too, of course. At the end of Václavské Náměstí, a long open square in the heart of the city, there is a huge brightly lit billboard: DUNKIN’ DONUTS. Aside from this—and the ubiquitous shops hawking tacky souvenirs—nothing is familiar. The next day I leave for rehearsal a bit early to give myself time to get a coffee to take to rehearsal. I visit a few shops and cafes, but with no luck. Out on the street, it suddenly strikes me that nobody is actually carrying coffee anywhere. I resolve not to go to DUNKIN’ DONUTS.

September 13th, 1999. I and the other Canadians are at Ypsilon at the end of our first full day in Prague. We’re to watch a performance of a “folk opera” called “The Bartered Bride.” I’m not familiar with it, but I learn that Ypsilon has been performing it for nearly a decade. That—and the fact that it’s a Monday night—lead me to expect that there won’t be a full house. I’m wrong. There isn’t an empty seat and the atmosphere is electric. The show is lively, kinetic and full of music and buffoonery. Nonetheless, knowing no Czech, my attention drifts and I watch the audience. They seem to eat right out of the hands of the actors. The show is long—nearly three hours—and while some of the Canadians are nodding off near the end, the Czech audience doesn’t seem impatient. The actors come out for a curtain call to great applause. They perform a song. They come out for a second curtain call and perform another song. This goes on. By the time the audience stops applauding I have lost track of how many times they have been out. Seven? Eight?

September 14, 1999. A rehearsal at Ypsilon. It has been an exhausting day of improvising and singing. When the facilitators end the rehearsal, some of the Canadians clap and say things like “good work everyone!” At this, I notice one of the Czechs mutter something and roll her eyes. I want to know why, so I ask in simple and tactful English, trying not to make it sound like a challenge. She tells me that she doesn’t understand why the Canadians end rehearsal this way. It’s just theatre, she says. Rehearsal is just the work you do in the theatre. Sometimes that work is good, sometimes it isn’t. It isn’t something you applaud. It’s not a performance, it’s just
working through ideas and playing. She gets riled up about it and her tone is sharp. As she speaks, I become the object of her frustration, standing in for all the others who have mostly filed out of the room. I’m quite speechless. I tell her that I had never thought of it before.

September 18th, 1999. We’ve spent the day travelling with the whole troupe of Czechs and Canadians to Český Krumlov, a tiny Bohemian town dominated by a dramatic castle near to the Austrian border. It’s now late evening on a perfectly still summer day. On the return trip to Prague we stop somewhere among the rolling hills of the countryside. The low red-orange sunlight casts long shadows over a cluster of buildings that we learn is an old monastery called Zlatá Koruna. At the centre of the cluster is a pink tower with a rough plaster surface. We are told it was built sometime in the 900s. A guide leads us through the buildings, making occasional comments that someone translates. No one speaks much, and when they do it’s in the hushed tone one reserves for sacred places. We enter a small empty chamber with an elaborately painted vaulted ceiling. Our guide says that the material and shape of the ceiling gives the room exceptional acoustics. The Czech group decides to try it out by singing a folk song. The sound is stunning—the harmonies echoing and decaying slowly. When their song finishes the Canadians sing “O Canada.” Our voices mixing in the room, the mystical atmosphere of the monastery, the stillness of the countryside and the low sunlight have a palpable, cumulative effect on me: I am in awe.

Many things have changed since these experiences over a decade ago. Having grown up in a small Newfoundland town and never having left North America before, I was perhaps destined to be awestruck by Prague. Awestruck, too, by its theatre; as a young English literature student at the University of Toronto, I knew little about theatre. The performers and performances I saw in Prague were of a calibre I hadn’t known, and they opened me not just to Czech theatre, but to the whole art of theatre. I returned home hungry to exercise a newly discovered creativity.

Though in this dissertation I will analyze the processes and politics of theatre work like the PTMTP with intellectual skepticism and academic incisiveness, I will do so by admitting and using my personal experience with and investment in my subject. My preface introduces this idea, and is also a reminder that the experience offered by intercultural theatre is an intuitive, embodied and emotional one that does not always take place on a stage. Having now been to the Czech Republic a number of times, having lived there for a short while, having studied Czech culture, theatre and language and having spent so many hours thinking about it all, it is easy to
forget the impact of these first experiences. I cannot recreate that power here; the recollections above are only echoes of the experiences that have remained with me, iterations that no doubt fictionalize and romanticize. If these stories make me realize how much I have changed, they also remind me that Prague has changed as well, radically in fact, along with its country, region and the whole of Europe. Today, the word “Prague” conjures in me entirely different thoughts and emotions than it did in 1999. This is a change not fully in the city and not fully in me, but in an intangible world in which we create a Prague of ideas, desires, emotions, impressions, traditions, opinions, gestures, sounds. All threads, perhaps, in the “webs of significance” that Clifford Geertz says constitute “culture,” but, if threads, ones that Prague and I jointly have rewoven, and are reweaving.

Incredibly, what has remained the same is the Czech Airlines in-flight safety video. Though it is only more alarming now for being played from such a worn cassette, I now find it comforting. I even look forward to it.
CHAPTER ONE
Arguments and Antecedents

The Coasts of Bohemia: Early Arguments

If history is a story of the past, then this is not a history of interculturalism. If history is a story of
the present, however, if history is everywhere we look by being antecedent to the present, then
this study is deeply historical. Much of this chapter will be historical in this latter sense, looking
to those threads of twentieth-century thought and practice that will be most pertinent to my case-
study. There may be a temptation to relegate some of the older practices I describe to the naïveté
or imperialist prerogatives of a different age. We might think that the “human zoo,” for instance,
disappeared along with its zoologist, the nineteenth century “armchair anthropologist,” but if we
sublimate the impulse behind the human zoo into what Raymond Corbey will call “optical
empiricism” later in this chapter, then the practice definitely persists.\footnote{Past ideas and practices
sometimes just change form or argument, that is, they realign. I have continually found myself
returning to historical examples of interculturalism, or perhaps they have continually returned to
me, like ghostly spirits wronged and unable to rest.}

This overview of the intercultural theatre arguments and practices of the twentieth-
century leads toward what I will call a “crisis of ethics”: a decisive moment in the discourse
when firmly established avant-garde (and mostly European) traditions faced-off against new
postcolonial and postmodern (and mostly non-European) thought. I argue that this crisis, which
has its fullest shape in the public controversy surrounding Peter Brook’s Mahabharata, is
actually an interminable discussion that pits the aesthetic imperatives of art against its political
implications. I make the case that escaping this discussion hinges on pursuing alternative
methodologies to compliment the dominance of semiotics. In this way, this historical and
conceptual overview leads directly toward the second chapter’s explanation of the methodology and methods used in this study.

It is important to say at the outset that my historical and conceptual explorations in this chapter started with, and ultimately point back to, the experience I will speak about in my case-study. Reading about historical intercultural undertakings revealed to me that the predominantly transcultural spirit (that “we are all the same” story) of the PTMTP has an important genealogy in the twentieth-century theatrical avant-garde, a fact that has deepened my interest in accessing voices that complicate the transcultural narrative, while at the same time deepening my respect for the basic human desirability of that narrative. In reviewing the history, I have found myself doing generous re-readings of intercultural work that has been sharply criticized, knowing as I do from my experience that work that may from one perspective look appropriative is probably not so from another. Seeking examples and concepts that make sense of my layered experience in the theatre, this chapter ultimately proposes that the broad arguments of the crisis of ethics underscore the need for other research strategies. I do not see my own research as a panacea correcting the errors of present scholarship, but as a rich and worthwhile alternative way in to a complex field of artistic and cultural activity.

Writing a “present history” of interculturalism initially requires expanding the concept of intercultural theatre to include a broad range of encounters between the own and the foreign, regardless of how little cultural mixing is actually involved. Those who use such a broad conception of interculturalism remark that theatre has always been a site of intercultural exchange (see Fischer-Lichte, Dramatic Touch and Semiotics; Carlson, “Brook” and Speaking in Tongues; Worthen, Shakespeare; Lo and Gilbert). Let me outline two historical examples that have each been the subject of pertinent intercultural arguments.
**The Persians and the Mirror Argument**

The first is the earliest extant tragedy in the Western canon, Aeschylus’s *The Persians* from 472 BC. The play is unique in the extant Greek canon because it takes a current rather than an ancient or mythic subject: the Greek victory over Persian invaders at Salamis, an event predating the play’s production in Athens by only eight years. The play is also unique in that it exclusively features non-Greek characters. Remarkably, it tells the story of the Greek victory from the perspective of the badly defeated and demoralized Persians, building toward the appearance of the disheveled and broken Persian leader Xerxes who laments his own folly in song with the chorus.

One reading of the play suggests that it mostly reveals how the Greeks saw (or wanted to see) themselves. This reading would have it that the play sensationalizes the Persian defeat and bolsters Athenian military bravado. There is plenty of evidence to support the reading. The Persians of the play are seen exclusively in a state of shock and mourning. The defeat is related to the audience in brutal detail first by the chorus of elders, then by a messenger from the battlefield, then by the Queen to the ghost of Darius and finally by Xerxes to the chorus. Many soldiers, we learn, drowned in shipwrecks among the shoals, and many of those who managed to get ashore later died from starvation and disease during their desperate retreat overland. It is difficult not to find some of what Attilio Favorini calls “xenophobic self-congratulation” (105) in Aescylus’s repetition of detail. The playwright had himself been a soldier who had fought in the battle of Marathon if not also at Salamis, and, as Anthony J. Podlecki notes, since many in the Athenian audience would also have been soldiers, “at the centre of the play must have stood, undeniably, the fact of Xerxes’ defeat and the converse fact of Greek victory” (in Aeschylus, *Persians* 4).² Philip Vellacott, also, sees the play strictly in terms of the Athenian “creative fever
of ambition” celebrated by the Dionysia, itself an annual “national thanksgiving by Athenians for Athens” (in Aeschylus, Prometheus 17). The Persians effects a didactic tone by using Persians as a moral mirror reflecting proper Greek behavior back at the audience; the reason for the Persian failure, after all, is a decidedly familiar Greek vice: overreaching the Gods. As the conjured ghost of Xerxes’ father Darius says of his son, “Mortal that he was he foolishly thought that he could master all Gods, among them Poseidon” (748-749).

I call this the “mirror argument”: that staging the “foreign” functions (perhaps strictly) as a way for the “own” culture to reflect (perhaps narcissistically) upon itself. Later in this chapter, something like the mirror argument reappears in opposition to late twentieth-century intercultural practices, supporting the argument that interculturalism misrepresents those “behind the mirror.” My own view is that The Persians actually rebuts the mirror argument, for as much as the play may reflect Greek values back onto its Athenian audience, it is undeniably compassionate in its lament for a crushed Persia. Xerxes is not merely a scapegoat for “unGreek” behavior, but rather, as Podlecki writes, “a tragic sufferer, whom the audience would have seen not as an enemy or Persian but as a man subject to the same turns of fortune as other men and victim of the same human condition” (in Aeschylus, Persians 4). This makes the theatrical gesture of performing “Persia” in the heart of the civilization that it unsuccessfully attempted to conquer a reconciliatory one that has the Greeks sharing with the Persians the human tragedy of war. Richard Francis Kuhns interprets the play in this way, citing it as an example of how tragedy allows a society to grieve trauma: “The Persians is not simply a scene in Susa; it is a representation of grief over the disappearance of a city’s young men” (11). Rush Rehm agrees: “The Persians is not a tragedy of partisan triumph but of total defeat, a play of profound sadness about enormous waste and loss: Persia, its ambitions, its sons—gone, dead and gone” (250).
One wonders whether a Persian, infiltrating Athens and sitting disguised in the theatre, would see anything of Aeschylus’s compassion. My own view is that there is, at least, a chance. Were we to run the same hypothetical test on representations of “foreign” characters throughout theatre history, however, we would probably find the depiction to be so broad and stereotyped that the hypothetical spectator would see in it little more than a culture’s own parade in front of the mirror.

**Shakespeare’s Imaginative Cartography**

An interesting counterpoint to *The Persians* (and an appropriate example in the context of this study) comes from Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, written sometime between 1609 and 1611. Borrowing from Robert Greene’s 1588 novel *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, Shakespeare sets his play half in the Sicilian court of the self-destructive King Leontes and half in the pastoral countryside of “Bohemia.” The Bohemia of the play is the setting of a sheep shearing festival and a leisurely discussion about the merits of art, giving the impression of an idyllic rural paradise. Nobody—past or present—has expected Shakespeare’s Bohemia to bear much resemblance to the real Bohemia. Instead, critical attention has focused on a small detail of the depiction: that Shakespeare’s Bohemia (like Greene’s) has a coastline. In Act III scene iv, Antigonus, carrying the banished newborn daughter of Leontes, arrives in Bohemia by sea and proclaims, “Thou art perfect then our ship hath touched upon the deserts of Bohemia” (3.3 1-2: 2913). As Ben Johnson would be the first to point out on record, Bohemia does not, in fact, have a coastline. Modern day Bohemia—along with Moravia and Silesia comprising present-day Czech Republic—does not border the Adriatic sea, and if we project onto history our modern notion of nation-states, neither did it four centuries ago.
Of course Shakespeare committed any number of blunders, intentionally and not, and Johnson himself dismissed them as “the petty cavils of petty minds” (471). Remarkably, however, the matter of Bohemia’s coastline continues to be discussed today. “After nearly 400 years,” writes A. J. Hoenselaars, “critics are still divided into two main camps. [The first] explains the dramatist’s idiosyncrasy with reference to other contemporary sources, including maps, which grant Bohemia a coastline. [The second] argues that Shakespeare’s reference to the unrealistic coastline was a type of stock joke” (242). The first camp—of literary historians, mainly—is thus concerned with whether Shakespeare believed or had any reason to believe that Bohemia had a coast. The second camp dismisses the alleged error as a joke, one that liberates the play from maps and the real Europe, and that is consistent with other anti-realist theatricalizations in *The Winter’s Tale* such as the storm, the shipwreck, and (last but not least) the mauling of Antigonus by a bear. If not a joke, then a “countrified Bohemia” is at least a romantic conceit meant only to provide a foil to the machinations of the Sicilian court, “in the same way that the Forest of Arden relates to the court in *As You Like It*” (Dutton 186). This Bohemia is Shakespeare’s realm of pastoral fantasy from whence he draws the mythic rejuvenating spring that warms the winter of court and clears Leontes’ tortured conscience. Those of this camp see Shakespeare’s un/knowing blunder as one meant to signal to the audience an entry into a world that does not necessarily mirror their own. After all, the title announces, it is only a *tale*.

Most pertinent here is a third camp of which Hoenselaars was unaware. The third camp recognizes the theatricality of Shakespeare’s flight of geographic fancy, but also sees it as a paradigmatic example of the West’s historical-but-ongoing programmatic othering of Bohemia. Derek Sayer’s recent (and excellent) history of the Czech lands, in fact, is called *The Coasts of*
Bohemia. Sayer implicates the example in a tradition that reached a “shameful nadir” in 1938 when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain described then Czechoslovakia “as ‘a faraway country’ inhabited by quarreling peoples ‘of whom we know nothing’” (5). While Sayer concedes that Shakespeare may only have been “signalling that the second part of his fable was set in an imagined Arcadia, a realm of youth and innocence located at the opposite moral pole from the world-weariness, sophistication, and decadence of the equally fictionalized Sicilian court in which the play begins” (5), he nonetheless critiques the representation as one “facile abstraction” among many that construct the Czech nation as “an incoherent other,” outside of “‘Europe,’ ‘the West,’ and ‘modernity’” (16). Similarly, Brigid Haines notes how Shakespeare’s imaginative cartography contributes to the Czech lands’ extrusion from Europe and “continued its remoteness in the mind for Westerners” (11). Where the second of Hoenselaar’s camps made Shakespeare responsible to theatre and not to history or politics, this third camp highlights that even the most ostensibly benign and off-handed gesture to the Other can be part of some greater, subtle and insidious process.

These two arguments—only implicit in the discussion of Bohemia’s coastline—will resurface later in my effort to cleave the modern from the postmodern; the modern supported by the argument that theatre is under no obligation to represent the world accurately and that verisimilitude should be sacrificed at the altar of art, and the postmodern supported by the argument that theatre’s reflection of the world effectively re-makes that world, which in turn renders it responsible for the political implications of its representations. These polarized vantage points have underscored a great deal of conversation about interculturalism in the theatre. They simmer to a boil in the discussion about Mahabharata, and are one binary among others that my own study will have to navigate.
These examples demonstrate that the promising and worrying possibilities of interculturalism in the theatre have been playing out onstage for millennia even if interculturalism itself—as a term and a critical concern—has been a part of theatrical discourse for only four decades. Theatre has always been a place where communities—local, national, human—imagine what they are, and that has often involved imagining what they are not. Of course a history of the theatre through this lens would have to deal with an enormous amount of contextual information, and this partly explains why it has not been undertaken. In the rest of this chapter, I will limit my focus to the ideologically driven and self-identifying interculturalism of the twentieth-century. My objective in this is to understand the juncture between what can be thought of as modern and postmodern strains of intercultural theatre. What precedes this juncture here—the arguments and antecedents of avant-gardist and visionary theatre artists of the early-to-mid twentieth-century—is a sketch providing only as much detail as is appropriate to the scope of this project and a “present history.” This sketch, however, is nonetheless essential to my purpose, since it is my belief that the avant-gardists wrote a particular script for interculturalism that set out its politics and terminology. As the following sections outline, intercultural practitioners and scholars together laid the foundations of what I will call intercultural modernism.

**World’s Exhibition: Avant-Gardists Look to the East**

_The idea of the modern is also the idea of progress. [...] [Progress] can only exist in relation to what is seen as backwardness; that the modern must put not only itself but also tradition on display; the other continents must arrive as contributors._

— Ananya Roy, from “Nostalgias of the Modern” (67)

_Oh, Great Intentions- I’ve got the best of interventions [...] Cannot conversations cull united nations?_
If you got the patience, celebrate the ancients
Cannot all creation call it celebration?
Or united nation, put it through your head
Oh, Great White City - I've got the adequate committee [...] 
Oh, God of Progress - Have you degraded or forgot us?
Where have your laws gone?
I think about it now...

— Sufjan Stevens, from “World’s Columbian Exhibition”

The faith in progress that pervaded the West at the start of the twentieth-century depended not only on the display of its own scientific and technological innovation, but also on a display of others’ primitiveness and backwardness. Nowhere was this more apparent than at the World Exhibitions of the West, where interspersed among pavilions full of scientific and technological gadgetry were elaborate anthropological exhibits of “world cultures” ostensibly meant to both educate and entertain attendees. Some exhibitions featured “human zoos”: at the Paris Exhibition of 1878 four hundred Natives were brought in from the French colonies of Indochina, Senegal and Tahiti for display; and the Chicago World’s Columbian Exhibition of 1893 exhibited indigenous people from Java, Samoa, Egypt and North America (Corbey 341). Throughout the long history of the exhibitions, the human zoos became increasingly theatrical, first featuring props, then elaborate sets, then incorporating ritual and performance. Maintaining the “authenticity” of the performances involved observing a kind of theatrical naturalism; though visitors would sometimes throw money at the people on display, the “performers” would otherwise never engage with the “audience” (Corbey 343-45). In her article “Nostalgias of the Modern,” Ananya Roy observes that these exhibits did not commodify pre-existing “authentic traditions,” but that such traditions became authentic “only in the act of consumption” (63-64). By being staged by and for the West, “authentic traditions” were confirmed and valued in the act of consumption. The exhibits fed into a totalizing “universal modernism,” (67) collapsing
boundaries of space and time in celebration of a scientifically and culturally progressive age whose emergence was made the more immediate and magnificent in contrast to traditions imagined to be timeless. The consumption of these traditions—that which confirms them as tradition—was disguised, argues Roy, by a narrative of nostalgia, a way of looking forward by looking backward. “Look at what we [read: humanity] were,” the exhibitions said, “and behold what have become and are becoming.” An interesting counterpoint to this comes from Sufjan Stevens, who regards the modernist tradition of faith in progress itself with nostalgia. Stevens’ song, from his 2006 musical documentary (or musical ethnography) of the state of Illinois, *Come On, Feel the Illinoise*, reflects on the Chicago World’s Columbian Exhibition. Scheduled to mark the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s discovery of the Americas (the fateful, original intercultural encounter of the modern era), the World’s Columbian Exhibition consisted of a massive complex of pavilions housing technological and ethnographic displays and was one of the largest ever to be produced in America. The complex of buildings came to be known as the “White City” both because of the buildings’ color and because of the new electric lights that brightened them at night. Stevens’ song expresses a nostalgia for the White City’s “laws” and “great intentions”—a longing for the confident and hopeful spirit of the “God of Progress” as well as an erosion of faith, a feeling of having been misled, forgotten, and degraded. Historically, Chicagoans’ own faith in modernity was shaken when the grand spectacle of World’s Columbian Exhibition closed on a shocking, sobering note: then Chicago mayor Cater Harrison Sr., one of the men responsible for the exhibition, was assassinated in his home two days before the exhibition was to end. Harrison’s funeral would become the exhibition’s unhappy closing ceremony. What remained of the dream of progress literally went up in flames a year later, when in July of 1894 a fire destroyed the entire White City.
If, as these historical events and Stevens' song would have it, some utopian dream symbolically died in Chicago, the rest of the world did not seem to take much notice: the World Exhibitions were still to experience decades of enormous popularity in America and Europe. Tempting as it may be to relegate ethnographic traditions like the “human zoos” to the past and congratulate ourselves for our heightened cultural sensitivities, the World Exhibitions established precedents for staging the cultural Other that continue to haunt intercultural practice today. Certainly, the complex interplay between the exhibitions' commercial foundations and their ethnographic displays survives in interculturalism’s present troubled relationship with the hegemonic forces of late-capitalist globalization. Also, one would do well to ask just how different human zoos may be—in their premises if not also in their aesthetics—from many subsequent intercultural explorations, such as the early “research” of “performance studies” in the 1970s, or the grand exotic spectacles of avant-garde directors such as Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine (more on these below).

The “Orient” in Paris and Moscow

The World Exhibitions had a more direct influence on theatre practice: they provided opportunities for European and American theatre artists to see theatre from elsewhere. According to Richard Drain, the entirety of “European theatre” in the twentieth-century “began with the discovery of the Japanese” at the Paris 1900 Exhibition Universalle, marking the start of “an age of global dialogue” (291). Adolphe Appia, George Fuchs and Edward Gordon Craig all attended the Exhibition Universalle to see Sada Yacco and her husband Kawakami Otojiro perform with a twenty-member kabuki ensemble. Appia, Fuchs and Craig all reacted differently to the performance (the misogynistic Craig, for instance, deploring the presence of women on the stage as he did elsewhere in his writings) but all were deeply impressed. Two years later in Moscow,
Yacco and Otojiro would also be seen by a young Russian director and student of Stanislavski, Vsevelod Meyerhold, who wrote that their kabuki performance “demonstrated the meaning of true stylisation on the stage, the ability to economise with gestures, to reveal all the beauty of the composition” (Braun 39-40). Meyerhold’s reaction to the kabuki ensemble, like that of many others to foreign performances at the exhibitions, is concerned with such aesthetic elements as style, movement, gesture, sound and expression. Rarely, if ever, did such responses address the cultures or politics at play in the staging. The ethnographic gaze was naturalized—camera obscura—despite the fact that the colonialist frame of the exhibitions always heavily mediated the performances. Performers usually came “from the colonies” of the host nation, and they and their performances were no doubt being offered up, as Martin Banham has put it, “as exotic fruits of colonial enterprise” (50). This was not the case with the French or Russian kabuki performances exactly, but it was clearly the case at the 1906 Colonial Exhibition at Marseille where a performance by a troupe of Cambodian dancers was the sensation of the exhibition (Banham 49). It was also the case at the Dutch Pavillion of the 1931 Paris Colonial Exhibition, where a Balinese troupe of gamelan players and dancers called Gong Peliatan would perform to a sold out crowd every night for months, a crowd amazed by “the delicate legong dancers, the terrifying masks, and the mysterious sounds of the gamelan” (Bloembergen 333). Not least amazed was Antoine Artaud, in attendance on August 1, who praised the performance to his friend Louis Jouvet as “a fine snub to our idea of the theatre” (168) in a letter written the next day. 9

These brief early twentieth-century intercultural encounters had a tremendous impact on the thinkers of the twentieth-century theatrical avant-garde. Looking for a corrective for a Western theatre tradition stifled by naturalism and convention, they imagined performances from
the East to be everything their own theatre wasn’t: simple and ancient, pure and powerful, symbolic and supernatural. Craig for instance, who had argued in his book *On the Art of the Theatre* that a naturalistic “[a]ctuality, accuracy of detail, is useless upon the stage” (27), found inspiration in Noh theatre’s use of mask to obscure the individuality of the actor. Craig felt that Western theatre could be rejuvenated by Eastern theatre: “Our Western theatre is very much down. The East still boasts a theatre” (176). Meyerhold also drew on Japanese theatre traditions in building his own argument for a stylized and symbolist aesthetic. When he established a studio in Petersburg in 1913, he incorporated techniques of “movement to music” from “the Chinese and Japanese theatres” into his curriculum (Braun 128). Like Craig and Meyerhold, Brecht also admired “Oriental” theatre for its functioning on additional symbolic levels beyond the illusionistic and used it in his formulation of epic theatre: “the only form of acting that I find natural: the epic, story-telling kind. It is the kind the Chinese have been using for thousands of years” (68). On a trip to Moscow in 1935, Brecht saw a performance of the Beijing Opera and was particularly affected by actor Mei Lanfang’s technique. According to John Willet, Brecht’s first mention of the *verfremdungseffekt* was in an article inspired by Mei Lanfang’s performance, “Alienation effects in Chinese Acting.” There were a number of features that Brecht admired about what he perceived to be Chinese theatre: that the performers present directly to the audience, that they often try to appear strange and surprising, that emotions are symbolically and ritually represented and not experienced or felt, and most importantly that the performers observe themselves acting in the moment or are conscious of their performance as performance.\textsuperscript{10} Artaud shared with Craig and Brecht a revulsion of naturalistic acting—though for different reasons and to different ends—and felt that the “West” stood to learn from the “Orient.” In *Theatre and its Double*, Artaud argued that theatre should be “intended first of all to appeal to the senses, instead
of being addressed primarily to the mind, like spoken language” (93). That Western culture addressed itself to the mind and was “contained in written texts” meant to Artaud that it suffered a kind of spiritual illness (132). That Eastern culture was by contrast intuitive and organic opened it to “a deep understanding” unavailable in the West (132). He enjoyed the Gong Peliatan performance at the Parisian Exhibition for its “dance, singing, mime and music,” theatre techniques he took to be of “superior value” to those of Western psychological drama and which for Artaud preceded—rather than augmented—language. Western theatre “could learn a lesson in spirituality from the Balinese theatre,” he wrote, “with regard to the indeterminable, to dependence on the mind’s suggestive power” (90). This reaching beyond verbal language lent an ultracultural character to Artaud’s writing, what Pavis calls a “return to sources and of reappropriation of primitive languages” (IPR 6), though it may only be primitivising in a patronizing sense; Artaud revered physical, sensuous and intuitive channels of expression wherever he saw—or projected—them.

That the artists of the theatrical avant-garde generated influential ideas out of only limited, heavily mediated intercultural contact need not take anything away from the quality and importance of those ideas. On the contrary, that they were able to do so attests to their powers of observation. The subtlety with which Brecht observed Mei Lanfang’s technique impresses in spite of how much he may have misunderstood its significance within its own tradition. But my purpose here is to look at the development of twentieth-century intercultural theatre practices and ideas in terms of the direction and implications of their perspective on the cultural Other. In my view, these artists founded an avant-garde and modernist tradition of twentieth-century interculturalism, one that would be taken up by the next generation of influential ideologues.
What I mean in this study by modernism will be made clear later in this chapter, but by avant-garde I mean to point to an ethos with two primary features as per Matei Calinescu:

(1) the possibility that its representatives be conceived of, or conceive of themselves, as being in advance of their time [...] and (2) the idea that there is a bitter struggle to be fought against an enemy symbolizing the forces of stagnation, the tyranny of the past, the old forms and ways of thinking... (121-122)

The similarity between Roy’s description of the modernist spirit of the World Exhibitions and Calinescu’s description of the avant-garde hints at the close relationship between the two. The avant-garde invoked the “ancient” performance traditions of foreign cultures in an attempt to interrupt Western theatre’s perceived stagnation or old ways of thinking. It staged its own progressiveness by contrasting it with what had remained, by being “outside” of modernity, “pure” and “essential.” The avant-garde was thus ambivalent about modernity itself, pursuing a program of progress and reform by appealing to what it had not yet managed to corrupt. In Calinescu’s terms, its ambivalence formed a “parody” of modernity, both reverent and irreverent, and sometimes “so close to its model as to be confused with it” (141). If, as Eugene Ionesco suggested, the avant-garde artist “is like an enemy inside a city he is bent on destroying, against which he rebels” (qtd in Calinescu 119), then “he” means “his” rebellion to erect a new city on the foundations of its ancient architecture. The next generation of avant-gardists would travel the world in search of theatre’s own ancient architectures of representation.

The Age of Aquarius: Avant-Gardists Go To The East

*In the last few years, I have tried to use the world as a can opener. I have tried to let the sounds, shapes and attitudes of different parts of the world play on the actor’s organism, in the way that a great role enables him to go beyond his apparent possibilities.*

— Peter Brook (qtd. in Drain 320)
The next generation of avant-garde artists turned the tentative intercultural steps of their predecessors into leaps into the unknown. Waves of migration in the post-World War II period, the availability of commercial flight and the dissemination of information through the mass media meant that travel was becoming increasingly desirable and possible for those in the West. While the avant-garde proper lost steam in the 1960s when its artists and rhetoric drifted mainstream (see Calinescu 120-25), new movements were afoot that were unique to the 1960s own post-war euphoria, civic consciousness, and cultural and sexual revolutions. Interest in Eastern art and philosophy drifted mainstream also, becoming a popular fad at the dawn of the optimistic “New Age” or, as astrology and Galt McDermont’s hit song from Hair had it, the “Age of Aquarius.”

This specifically Western search for new consciousnesses and mysticism remained avant-garde in Calinescu’s sense: it imagined a future utopia in which a global consciousness would make world war impossible; and it was countercultural, implicated in an array of social and political movements in different parts of the world. It was the logic of the avant-garde realigned with a dogmatic transculturalism: that theatre did not “belong” to conventional bourgeois institutions, but was a basic human impulse common to people the world over. This generation was intent on travelling around the world to prove it.

The three intercultural theatre artists who would become most famous in the West during this period were Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine and Robert Wilson. When Pavis calls this group the “last dinosaurs” of the avant-garde (IPR 19), he correctly suggests that they were part of an old species but incorrectly suggests that the species would become extinct; while all three had become internationally recognized directors by the 1970s, all three also continue to produce influential new work today. These artists’ knowledge of and exposure to other cultures was far beyond what was available to their predecessors, but the terms of their engagements often
ensured that the “flow” of culture was always away from the cultural Other and toward the Western audience. If the previous generation’s interculturalism relied on impressions, then this generation’s relied on forays that always culminated in productions on Western stages for Western audiences. Each of these artists advances a more-or-less acknowledged transcultural, paracultural or precultural alignment (see Pavis, *IPR*). Their work sets precedents that will figure into my case-study later, but these figures are also noteworthy as intercultural visionaries. As aesthetically and geographically diverse and explorative as their intercultural collaborations were, the directors always positioned themselves at the artistic and cultural locus of the work. Theirs was the theatre of the auteur: theatre that “regards the director as the main ‘voice’ or ‘visionary’ behind a theatrical production” (Schreyer Duarte 172). This will later be relevant to the PTMTP because its principal artistic facilitator is Jan Schmid, the auteur behind *divadlo Ypsilonka* (Ypsilon Theatre) in Prague, where the Czech component of the PTMTP is set (the “director’s theatre”—*Regietheater* in German and *režisérské divadlo* in Czech—is still a strong tradition in the Czech Republic). That collaborative intercultural theatre projects often have such a figure has implications for research methodology that will be explored throughout this and the next chapter.

**The Intercultural Auteur: Brook, Mnouchkine and Wilson**

British director Peter Brook became known in London during the 1950s while directing Shakespearean productions at Covent Garden, but he would go on from there to become arguably the most internationally recognized and discussed intercultural theatre artist of the twentieth century. Drawing inspiration from the “burning intensity of the positions Artaud took” (Brook, *Threads* 134), Brook established a continuity with the avant-garde tradition by staging a Theatre of Cruelty season in 1964 at London’s Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. His
intercultural work began in earnest in 1970 when he used a million-dollar Ford Foundation grant to establish the Centre International de Récherches Théâtrales (CIRT) in Paris (O’Connor 45). The centre became a meeting place for a group of international artists who would travel together—to Asia, the middle-east, Africa and North and South America—and use their experience to generate large-scale productions that would themselves travel around the world. There was some irony in calling the institution a “centre” since the “research” conducted there into the techniques and conditions of performance actually required escaping familiar theatre buildings and audiences and extensive travel. In his memoir *Threads of Time*, Brook reflects on the purpose of the CIRT’s work:

> We could learn about the difference between big and small audiences, about distances, seating arrangements [...] the place of music, the weight of a word, of a syllable, of a hand or foot, all of which years later would feed our work when inevitably we returned to a theatre, tickets, and a paying audience. (176)

Two salient features of Brook’s interculturalism show through in this passage. First, his research was of theatre context and performance, and not of place, people or cultural context. The reason for this was Brook’s unassailable humanist, transcultural search in his work for universals of the human condition (matched by his equally unassailable confidence in his ability to find them). “We are each only parts of a complete man,” he wrote, “[the] fully developed human being would contain what today is labeled African, Persian or English” (*Threads* 320). For Brook, “culture” was only an exteriority that he and his performers—after establishing a good relationship and doing a little work—were able to move beyond. Seeing the world as a “can opener,” culture could be instrumentally plied in an effort to challenge performers to work differently. As intercultural auteur, Brook imagined himself to be the user of the instrument and assigned himself some mixture of cavalier political authority and mystical guru wisdom—he chose which cans to open and how. Second, the quote illustrates the “flow” of culture mentioned
earlier, revealing that the “research” was always intended to generate a theatrical product for a paying audience in the West. This became increasingly true over the years, precipitating the Centre to change its name in 1977 to the Centre International de Creations Théâtrales (CICT); audience demand trumped research and the company transformed itself “from laboratory into production line” (O’Connor 45). The production line was busy, churning out *Orghast at Persepolis* in 1971, *Conference of the Birds* in 1973, *The Ik* in 1975, and the film *Meetings with Remarkable Men* in 1979. As will be seen, by the time the CICT produced *The Mahabharata* in 1985, some were calling for the production line to be halted.

Meanwhile, Ariane Mnouchkine had built a production line of her own. Brook and Mnouchkine had much in common: both led companies with permanent homes in Paris; both had become internationally recognized for theatre productions influenced by Asian aesthetics or using Asian stories; both had productions touring to international theatre festivals; and both were working in both theatre and film. Mnouchkine also saw herself carrying forward the avant-garde interest in Eastern traditions, as witnessed by her repeated invocation of Artaud’s statement that “[a]ll theatre is Oriental” (Innes 210; Mnouchkine *IPR*). When in a 1987 interview Mnouchkine was asked why her productions took Eastern subjects, she answered broadly, “From a theatrical point of view [...] everything draws me toward Asia” (qtd. in Carlson, *IPR* 89). She was more specific in a later interview: “I tell actors to look for everything in the East. Myth and reality, interiority and exteriorization, and the autopsy of the heart by the body” (Williams, *Collaborative* 176). Her aesthetic was framed as an intercultural “voyage of research” (Mnouchkine, *IPR* 96) in much the same way that Brook’s had during the time of the CIRT. Mnouchkine had travelled even more extensively than Brook, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s created a series of productions that drew on her first hand experience on long trips to
Japan, India, Bali and Cambodia. At the same time that Brook was stirring up controversy in New York with *The Mahabharata*, Mnouchkine’s *L’Indiade, ou l’inde de leurs reves* opened in Paris at the Cartoucherie, the home of her company, Théâtre du Soleil. *L’Indiade*, written by Helène Cixous and directed by Mnouchkine, was set in India during the time of British partition between 1937 and 1948. It invited controversy and joined *Mahabharata* as a focal point of an emerging global discussion about theatre and interculturalism, although even with an estimated total audience of about 89,000 (Williams, *Collaborative* 228) it still had a much smaller audience than Brook’s production (and less international exposure, seeing performances in France and Israel only). The production was generally well appraised in continental criticism though less favourable appraisals were at the time of these productions beginning to be heard both in America and India. Marvin Carlson, for instance, dismissed Mnouchkine’s effort to authenticate the cultural experience by serving Indian food before the show, by having ushers wear Indian clothing and mix with the audience, and by decorating the lobby with a huge map of India. These strategies would have been familiar to Théâtre du Soleil patrons, says Carlson, as “essentially a striking and exotic variation upon already established theatrical conventions” that were “not essentially different from the experience of India one might encounter at a theme park” (*IPR* 86).

“Theme park” is an interesting choice of phrase on Carlson’s part, recalling the sublimated impulse of the World Exhibitions’ ethnographic displays. But while Mnouchkine’s defense of the use of other cultures “to construct a theatrical celebration of human brotherhood” (Carlson *IPR* 90) shares with Brook an appeal to humanism and transcultural commonality, Mnouchkine has since demonstrated heightened cultural and political sensitivities. Soleil’s more recent productions, such as *Et soudain des nuits d’éveil* (1994) and *Le Dernier Caravanserai* (2003) at least claim to balance a more leveling humanism with a consciousness of political inequalities.
and ethics. “When you explore a culture,” offered Mnouchkine in 2001, “you want your public to meet it and understand why it is important and why we believe it should not be destroyed [...] by globalization” (Jenkins).

Where Mnouchkine was demonstrating greater political sensitivity and even advocacy, other interculturalists continued to subordinate politics to aesthetics. Most prominent among these was American director Robert Wilson. Wilson first worked as a painter in 1960s New York, during the period in which the avant-garde was particularly influential in the visual arts. Some of Wilson’s work is non-verbal and iconophillic, freely borrowing imagery from cultures around the world. Wilson often also collaborates with designers from all over the globe, and such was the case with his CIVIL warS—perhaps the grandest intercultural theatre project that never happened. CIVIL warS was a massive musical and theatrical spectacle Wilson developed in the early 1980s that was to reach a global audience by being staged at the opening of the 1984 Summer Olympic games in Los Angeles. Conceived as “a huge multinational opera that would draw its performers from many nations, like the Olympics themselves” (Shyer 269), the piece grew during its long development from a “five or six hour work to a twelve-hour international epic of unprecedented scope and ambition” (Shyer 283). Six different composers from six different countries developed music for the piece, and theatres, agencies and individuals from Germany, Italy, Japan and elsewhere funded its multi-million dollar administration and development. The sprawling scope of the production eventually exceeded its funding base, however, and after the Olympic Organizing Committee failed to increase its contribution, the project folded after a desperate search for additional sponsors (see Shyer 268-86). Pieces of the work went on to be performed throughout America, notably the Knee Plays, a series of interludes taken from the classical Japanese theatre and drawing on Kabuki and bunraku. Themselves “an
expression of American-Japanese collaboration,” the interludes were themselves a collaboration of stage designers, actors and dancers from Japan, China, Korea and America (Weiler 108-09). But while the *Knee Plays* were a thoroughly collaborative effort, Wilson’s interculturalism has mainly involved smaller cultural borrowings with little input from, or interest in, their original contexts. Wilson’s indifference to the original contexts of his borrowings has been a matter of contention in discussions about his work. Some take Wilson’s cue and focus on the work's aesthetic innovation rather than its intercultural dynamics. Pavis, for example, questions whether there is “any point in looking for traces of cultural borrowings in [Wilson’s] work,” considering that “the debate on cultural identity is quite alien to [him]” (*IPR* 105). Others see Wilson’s cultural pilfering as a humanist transculturalism. Laurence Shyer detects a “humanist impulse” in Wilson’s productions, an “intense longing for the lost unity in man, nature and animals—the dream of Eden which is sometimes reclaimed at the last” (xix). Robert Stearns finds humanism in Wilson’s desire “to communicate equally with non-English speaking audiences and with people who do not need to communicate with language at all” (36). The arguments should be familiar: they are related to those that gathered around Shakespeare’s Bohemian coastline, though they are in this instance coloured by unacknowledged investments in avant-gardism. What is most interesting to me about Wilson’s case, however, is the issue it raises vis-à-vis “intentionality.” That Wilson is an unwitting or reluctant interculturalist leaves the critic who interprets his work unsure of what interpretive cues to take. Does not evaluating Wilson’s intercultural borrowings require subscribing to the auteur’s vision? Otherwise, would we not be producing an interpretation that is—to use Pavis’ word—“alien” to his work? These questions are ethical at face value, but, as I go on to explain, they are also importantly methodological.
Performance Studies and Theatre Anthropology: Schechner and Barba

*I am arguing for both an experiment and a return to traditional, even ancient, values. This argument has been implicit in experimental art for a long time: it is the root of that art’s “primitivism.” Interculturalism is a predictable, even inevitable, outcome of the avant-garde, its natural heir.*

— Richard Schechner (“An Introduction” 3)

As these prominent interculturalists and self-proclaimed avant-gardists were building their international reputations on productions that borrowed from foreign traditions, their work was receiving support in scholarship from a set of converging academic disciplines that were attempting to make a science of interpreting both culture and theatre. Disciplines that had been separate before mid-century—drama, anthropology, linguistics and sociology—began to find common ground in the study of performance. By way of a gradual Brookean “can-opening” of the world, Western scholars of cultural anthropology and theatre were suddenly opened to what living traditions of “ritual” or “theatre” looked like throughout the world, sparking new discussions in the West about culture and aesthetics. The first questions to be asked were in the transcultural spirit of the Age of Aquarius: What had ritual performances in Indonesia to do with the formal drama of the West? How was ritual a kind of theatre, and vice versa? What “architecture of representation” was common the world over, and what new terminology could be used to describe it? Such questions would be fundamental to the new discipline of performance studies. It, along with the term interculturalism itself, would be the invention of the twentieth century’s most prolific commentator on the interface between culture and theatre.

Richard Schechner established himself in the late 1960s at Tulane University first as an academic, by becoming the young editor of *The Drama Review*, and second as a practitioner, by founding the theatre collective The Performance Group (later the Wooster Group). As a practitioner, Schechner became known for experiments in environmental theatre that challenged
theatre’s conventional relationship to its audience. Following the pattern established by Brook and Mnouchkine, Schechner travelled throughout Asia in the early 1970s, taking particular interest in India, China, Japan and Indonesia. There, Schechner found inspiration for his theorizing, and his interests increasingly dovetailed with anthropological work taking place in those parts of the world. Perhaps it was while teaching both theatre and anthropology at NYU during the 1970s that Schechner began to work through how to fuse the disciplines. In two books, *Essays on Performance Theory*, 1970-1976 (1976) and *Ritual, Play and Performance* (1976), Schechner laid the conceptual foundations of his new “performance studies,” and by 1980 he had transformed NYU’s Drama Department into a Performance Studies Department (see Begnoche).14 Schechner found a like mind in cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, and in 1982 the two planned a World Conference on Ritual and Theater. Turner, along with sociologist Erving Goffman, influenced Schechner’s ideas about performance. Though neither Turner nor Goffman were theatre scholars, both imported the language of theatrical performance to explain how different societies “marked” or “framed” performance. Schechner explains the confluence of their interests:

> For both Turner and Goffman the basic human plot is the same: someone or some group begins to move to a new place in the social order; this move is acceded to or blocked; in either case a crisis occurs because any change in status involves a readjustment of the entire scheme; this readjustment is effected performatively—that is, by means of theater and ritual. (*Performance Theory* 186-87)

In this passage—the final phrase of which morphs into the title of his 1990 book *By Means of Performance*—one can discern the general direction of Schechner’s theorizing toward patterns that govern the purposes and processes of all cultural performance. The patterns Schechner induces from specific examples from around the world are sometimes measured against Western dramatic theory such as *The Poetics* (*Performance Theory* 334) or are observed in canonical
examples such as in Shakespeare (Performance Theory 213). Like Turner and Goffman before him, Schechner also schematizes his patterns in visual representations—“Schechnerean doodles”\(^{15}\)—intended to represent spatially the functionality of representation or the relationships between practices that he separates: drama, script, theatre and performance (Drama, Script, Theater, Performance 5). What this work shares with the avant-garde tradition is its valorizing of the “ancient knowledge,” “ritual” and “traditions” of non-Western cultures. Schechner is fond of citing Jerzy Grotowski’s stated objective of “re-evok[ing] a very ancient form of art where ritual and artistic creation were seamless” (qtd. in Schechner Future of Ritual 246). In his practical and academic work over the last half-century, Schechner has sought to relocate something of this “ancient ritual” in the West. Like the others I have described, Schechner proudly declares the transcultural spirit of his work, noting in 2003 how his work has only become "more and more interested in what links cultures and species" (Performance Theory xii).\(^{16}\) Schechner's own brand of transculturalism is particularly aggressive because it argues for a “culture of choice”: a cosmopolitan and perhaps postnational global cultural consciousness that makes voluntary an individual’s cultural identification and renders culture detachable and mobile. “Culture,” writes Schechner, “will no longer be defined as localized in place, but as localized in taste and practice. One will be able to belong to a ‘drama culture’ or a ‘performance culture’ wherever one lives; just as one can practice a specific religion wherever one lives (hopefully!)” (Over, Under and Around 10). The culture of choice expressed a cavalierism that was typical of the avant-garde tradition, with Schechner’s own harkening back to Gordon Craig’s, who sixty-six years previous wrote: “[On] the day I choose to wander far afield, be it to the moon or into the beds of the Ocean, I may do so ... and so also, I may go to the East and become of it any day I wish” (22).
Neither Schechner nor Craig considers to whom a “culture of choice” is available, nor its implications for citizenship and national identity.

Similar in character to Schechner’s work is that of Eugenio Barba, another director-theorist who has been central in discussions of interculturalism and theatre. Barba founded his company, the Odin Teatret in 1964 and the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) in 1974, both of which are still based in Holstebro, Denmark. The ISTA—better described as an institute rather than a school—holds regular meetings for interested performers and academics, but is also a publishing house advancing the interests of “Theatre Anthropology.” Though strongly influenced by anthropology studies proper, Barba refers to his own evolving discipline with this term, defining it in 2003 as “the study of human beings’ socio-cultural and physiological behavior in a performance situation,” which “does not seek to discover laws, but studies rules of behavior” (Barba and Saravese 6). Not unlike Turner, Goffman and Schechner, Barba’s work is interested in what separates daily physiological behavior from “extra-daily” behavior, a separation that Barba says in the West “is often neither evident nor consciously considered” (Barba and Saravese 7). But whereas those artists’ work is perhaps predominantly transcultural, Barba's is emphatically precultural, seeking to uncover universals of actors’ physicality and energy in performance that somehow precede culture, what Ian Watson describes as “the pre-expressive, [...] and about] how actors ‘shape’ their energy, both of which preclude cultural expression” (IPR 227). In tapping into the pre-expressive, Barba believes himself to be uncovering a “Eurasian theatre” that underlies and connects the theatre of the East and West: “if I consider that which lies beneath those luminous and seductive epidermises and discern the organs that keep them alive, then the poles of the comparison blend into a single profile: that of a Eurasian theatre” (Barba and Saravese 102).
Preculturalism notwithstanding, Barba at least claims to attend to difference across cultures: “In the meeting between East and West, seduction, imitation and exchange are reciprocal,” and that it is an “undeniable embarrassment” that exchange might be “part of the supermarket of cultures” (in Drain 345 and 347). Unlike some of the avant-gardists before him Barba’s group also attends to differences within the umbrella categories of Japanese, Indian and Balinese theatre, identifying and exploring the technique of specific traditions in each and seeing each as living traditions, not “archaic” or “static” ritual distant in either time or space (in Drain 349). The traditions must seem to Barba to have become less distant over the decades; like Brook, Mnouchkine, Wilson and Schechner, Barba also travelled throughout the world exploring performance during the 1960s and 1970s, but now “the world” travels to the meetings of the ISTA in Holstebro. One might question the rigour of Brook or Mnouchkine’s “research,” but Barba’s work is a methodical science of performance, however elusive the tenets of that science may be. The intercultural barters Barba first undertook in the 1970s, however, can be thought of as cultural experiments in a way that, I think, other work of the intercultural avant-garde can not. Barba’s barters are clear antecedents of collaborative intercultural theatre and I will return to them during my later analysis.

**Peter Brook’s The Mahabharata**

If Brook, Mnouchkine and Wilson were the “last dinosaurs” of the avant-garde, as Pavis suggests, then the controversy surrounding Peter Brook’s *The Mahabharata* was the meteoric impact that threatened to destroy them. In 1988, *Asian Theatre Journal* devoted an entire issue to the production. In 1991, David Williams compiled twenty-one articles for his volume *Peter Brook and the Mahabharata: Critical Perspectives*. Brook’s production is the first to be
mentioned on page 1 of Patrice Pavis’ 1996 *Intercultural Performance Reader* and it is discussed by many of the book’s contributors. More recently, Bill Worthen writes that Brook’s *Mahabharata* “[m]arks a decisive moment in the practice and reception of intercultural performance” (*Shakespeare and the Force* 127), and Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins write that it “exemplifies [the] minefield” of “interculturalism in the late twentieth-century” (*Women’s* 10). The production continues to serve as a touchstone for arguments about interculturalism, and it is the principal site of what I will call interculturalism’s “crisis of ethics.”

Brook based *The Mahabharata* on the sacred Sanskrit poem of the same name. A staggering 100,000 stanzas in length, the poem is a “virtual exegesis on the Hindu way of life” (Dasgupta 262). The frame of Brook’s production—as in the poem—has the poet-narrator Vyassa telling a young boy a story that he calls “the poetical history of mankind” (Carriere 3). Brook divides the story into three episodes—The Game of Dice, Exile in the Forest, and War—that together tell the story of an epic battle between two rival groups of cousins: the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The five Pandavas are semi-divine, noble and powerful; the one hundred Kauravas are born of inauspicious circumstances and are jealous and vengeful. By cheating at a game of dice, the conniving Kauravas succeed in exiling the admirable Pandavas from the kingdom for twelve years, with a thirteenth to be spent disguised in an unknown place. At the end of their exile, the Pandavas return and wage a war against the Kauravas, a war that ruins the kingdom and kills nearly all the cousins.

That *The Mahabharata* became a touchstone in the discussion is odd given that it was not very different than what Brook had already been doing for nearly twenty years in pieces such as *Orghast at Persepolis*, *Conference of the Birds* and *The Ik*. But what was different about *The Mahabharata*, to begin with, was its scope. Brook and the play’s writer Jean-Claude Carriere
spent ten years developing the work, intent on depicting as much of the original text as they could. The stage version (which I did not see) was almost eleven hours in duration including breaks; the film version (which I have seen) is half that length. Its costs were enormous, with the stage-run in New York alone costing $2.2 million USD (Williams, *Mahabharata* 290). Most significant was the scale of its visibility. Premiering at the Avignon Festival in France in 1985, the stage production first moved to Brook’s Parisian space at the Bouffes du Nord, and then—after being translated into English—to toured to Zurich, Los Angeles, New York, Perth, Adelaide, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Tokyo. The international profile Brook had by 1985 meant that the production was anxiously anticipated. In Avignon, “25,000 tickets were sold and 60,000 were turned away,” at least according to Carriere. During a 3-month run in New York, notes Marvin Carlson, “virtually every available ticket was sold” (*IPR* 88). Soon after the production closed, $12-13 million USD was secured (O’Connor 113) and the 1988 film version went on to be serialized on television in the UK and the USA and distributed to countries the world over—India included.

No intercultural theatre production had ever received such global exposure, and certainly this partly explains why it attracted controversy. But another reason that *The Mahabharata* became a touchstone was not what was different about it, but what was different about its world. Brook’s intercultural forays could no longer be easily justified by the utopian humanism that had been taken for granted in the Age of Aquarius. As impressive as *The Mahabharata*’s box-office returns continued to be, some members of the audience, so to speak, were no longer “buying it.” Some new voices in the discussion were less than celebratory about Brook’s attitude that the heritage of any particular people in the world was the heritage of everyone.
The “Dusking” of the Age of Aquarius

One such new voice in the discussion was that of Rustom Bharucha, an Indian scholar trained in the West who returned to live in India around the time that Brook’s *Mahabharata* was touring. In his article in Williams’ collections of essays about the production (a republished chapter from his 1990 book *Theatre and the World*), Bharucha calls *The Mahabharata* “one of the most blatant (and accomplished) appropriations of Indian culture in recent years” (*Theatre* 96).17 His objections are many. He argues that Brook demystifies the sacred text in the effort to make it readable to a Western audience, and by so doing severs it from its social and spiritual history and present life: “He has taken one of our most significant texts and decontextualized it from history in order to ‘sell’ it to audiences in the West” (*Theatre* 96). Bharucha doubts whether such a huge and sacred text can be represented by any person who has not “internalized [it] through a torrent of feelings, emotions, thoughts, taboos, concepts and fantasies” (*Theatre* 98), though he distances himself from a purely protectionist argument that makes claims of “ownership.” Ignorance of the social and spiritual life of the text, says Bharucha, leads Brook and Carriere to get some other things wrong in the *Mahabharata*. For one thing, Brook’s effacing of caste distinctions in the text means that he misinterprets characters’ actions and their relationship to dharma, an elusive mystical Hindu concept combining the idea of fate and virtue. Also, by applying to the text the traditional Western dramaturgy of building toward a climax and resolution, the profoundly cyclical nature of the text, and Hindu cosmology along with it, is ignored. “Nothing could be more foreign to the *Mahabharata*,” writes Bharucha, “than linearity” (*Theatre* 104). Bharucha completely rejects the eclecticism of Brook’s vision, his picking bits of culture from around the world for his work as though the world is his playground. The appropriation, for Bharucha, is not only a matter of aesthetic or historical integrity, but of
material exploitation: “One could dismiss this appropriation were it not for the scale of its operation and the magnitude of its effect” (Theatre 96). 18

In a second scathing critique in Williams’ book, Gautam Dasgupta points to Brook’s demystification of the text: “The Mahabharata is nothing, an empty shell, if it is read merely as a compendium of martial legends, of revenge, valour and bravura” (Dasgupta 264). By superimposing “a Homeric idea of The Epic” over the text, Dasgupta argues that Brook makes mortals out of semi-divine characters and misses the weight of Krishna’s speech on the battlefield to Yudhishthira (264). 19 Like Bharucha, Dasgupta sees Brook’s production as a manifestation of a historical tradition of Western Orientalizing of the East, citing Edward Said’s groundbreaking 1978 book Orientalism. Said’s book, in fact, galvanized the counter-discourse that Bharucha and Dasgupta were developing. In brief, Orientalism interrogated the transcultural spirit of its age, looking at how Western visions of the other reflected narcissistically back on and served the interests of their visionaries (the mirror argument). Said defined the concept of orientalism as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in the European Western experience” (1) and used it to make visible not only the constructedness of the Orient but all politics of knowledge, methods and positioning. Dasgupta says that there is something of the “spectre” of Said’s Orientalism in Brook’s work, even if it is well-intentioned (263). 20

These critiques of course should be kept in perspective; the majority of responses to Brook’s production in both academia and in reviews were overwhelmingly positive. Admirably, Bharucha and Dasgupta’s critiques were included in David William’s 1991 collection of critical perspectives on the Mahabharata, meaning, indeed, that the 19 other pieces in the volume are largely “uncritical.” But both Bharucha’s and Dasgupta’s arguments had traction within the
discourse on intercultural theatre. They were using *The Mahabharata* to stage a critique of the whole avant-garde tradition, and the production’s international exposure meant that the critique could have a scope as global as the avant-garde itself had been.

These arguments, however, had actually been set up earlier in 1984 while *The Mahabharata* was still being rehearsed in a pointed exchange between Bharucha and Schechner published in the pages of the *Asian Theatre Journal*. The first article in the journal’s first issue was a polemic from Bharucha that argued that Craig, Grotowski and Schechner’s work exhibited a “subtle exploitation of [India’s] traditions and conventions” (“A Collision” 2): Craig, he argued, destructively mythologized India; Grotowski borrowed from Indian theatre for his laboratory explorations, though he was pragmatic and respectful and could be pardoned; Schechner, on the other hand, was “irresponsible” in basing his work on an unfounded faith in the transportability of culture. Bharucha stopped short of suggesting a “systematized cultural imperialism” or “pervasive ‘orientalism,’” but nonetheless vehemently disapproved of the “ambivalent ethics of cross-cultural borrowings” (“A Collision” 2). The next issue of the journal featured a strongly worded rebuttal from Schechner and a further response to it from Bharucha. Most of Schechner’s rebuttal argues that Bharucha set up a straw man by failing to appreciate Schechner’s nuanced vision of interculturalism—that his own writing and his theatre demonstrates “a very clear awareness of its dangers” as well as the wider “exploitative forces of Western cultures” (“A Reply” 246). Schechner argues that it is Bharucha who has the one-sided view of interculturalism, and points out that a great deal of contemporary intercultural work demonstrates reciprocity and hybridity: “We influence each other, we learn from each other” (“A Reply” 252). In his own response to Schechner, Bharucha zeroes in on what he sees as a fundamental ideological difference between the two scholars: their respective deep investments
in universalism and particularism. Bharucha feels that Schechner’s (and later Brook’s) universalism precludes the possibility that their work will sufficiently attend to the contexts and features of anything. “I cannot accept this dissolution of boundaries,” writes Bharucha, “without fearing that something is being lost or evaded” (“A Reply” 258). Schechner, for his part, resolutely clings to his “culture of choice,” looking with optimism toward a world in which “traditional boundaries not only between peoples and nations but also within nations and cultures are being transformed if not abolished” (“A Reply” 247).

Two camps were gathering: one roughly modernist, supporting the dissolution of boundaries, and another that we can begin to call postmodernist (in the anthropological sense), supporting respect for boundaries and the particularism they contain and define. But at this early juncture the postmodernist camp was as dogmatic as the modernist had been and as some began to point out, neither was sustainable. Some very public disapprovals of The Mahabharata made it clear that artists were subject to new pressures to tend to the political dynamics of their work, but at the same time few could accept the proposition—as Bharucha may have in the 1980s—that intercultural exchange always has selfish motives, always exploits the Other for material gain, and always diminishes the Other’s complexity and power. Accepting such a proposition would mean that the whole intercultural enterprise would have to be dispensed with, and in a world in which communication and travel was becoming more possible for more people, and in which inequalities of power and opportunity were more visible than they had been to a previous generation, the desire to collaborate across borders was only growing.

The debate between Schechner and Bharucha marked an important moment; for the first time, the geopolitics of representation were at stake. Julie Stone Peters describes the moment succinctly in her response to The Mahabharata: “One of the most crucial questions of the late
twentieth century: to whom do ‘cultures’—and the products that configure them—belong? Not (as at mid-century), who has the right to possess cultural objects, but: Who has the right to represent them?” (204). Like many others, Peters rejects cultural relativism—the notion that cultures are only able to (and therefore should only) represent themselves. Cultural relativists, she argues,

fail to acknowledge the fundamental principle of [...] exchange: that translation is indeed necessary in order for communication to take place—communication between cultures and between individual expressions within cultures; that translation is the precondition for human political life, whatever direction that politics may lead. (206)

A few years later, Pavis arrives at a similar idea, describing cultural relativism as interculturalism’s “dead-end” (IPR 14). He notes that cultural relativism is often frowned upon “in Western theatre circles” and by “German dramaturgs” as a “moral and moralizing attempt to preserve a minimum of form in the usage of the foreign culture” (IPR 14). For these unnamed people (one of whom is certainly Pavis himself, who fails here to take ownership of a contentious opinion) cultural relativism is “a sign of conservatism” that leads to “intolerable auto-censorship” (IPR 14). Thus, by way of a process of reactive positioning, the discussion had polarized, and, along the way, had strategically twisted an issue of ethics into an issue of representation. Those who considered the rejection of cultural relativism to be the way forward had dealt only with representation. But neither Bharucha nor Dasgupta were cultural relativists. While they may have skewered Brook’s cavalier attitude, both specifically distanced themselves from the argument that only Indians were able (or entitled) to represent India. Still, they were met with a broad fatalistic argument about representation: theatre always “gets it wrong” simply because representation, as representation is also always misrepresentation. The discussion had boiled down to a false dilemma, a choice between two increasingly extreme vantage points. I call this moment in intercultural discourse the crisis of ethics. I use the word ‘crisis’ with
reservations. For me, it serves as a useful (albeit rough) dividing point between what we can call *intercultural modernism* and *intercultural postmodernism* and it was, as the *OED* definition of ‘crisis’ has it, “a vitally important or decisive stage” in the progress of intercultural theatre. The term is overdramatic; this was not a “dead-end” or even a completely redirecting turning point, but it was a very important moment in the discourse when well-established ideas were having to answer to new ones. It was a crisis of *ethics* because, after all, while Brook was being criticized for the deficiencies of his representations and the inadequacy of his knowledge, what was really at stake was why and how cultures should be meeting through and in the theatre.

**New Arguments for Old Work**

Though *The Mahabharata* had made India a focal point of this discussion, the crisis of ethics was setting in around the world at the same time. In an article first published in 1990, leading scholar of African theatre Biodun Jeyifo describes how it appeared in the discourse on African theatre. Africa had for a long time in the West been the subject of what Jeyifo calls the “first discourse,” the dominant discourse generated by missionaries and anthropologists saturated by ethnocentrism (in Sumner’s sense of evaluating African theatre by Western standards). In the twentieth century, a second “counter-discourse” developed that was “a putatively ‘Afrocentric’, ‘anti-colonialist’ riposte to the ‘dominant’ discourse” (153). Jeyifo suggests that the second discourse, by inevitably being “reactive,” reinforced a subordinating Africa-Europe binary: “Given the fact of this binary, it was inevitable for this reactive counter-discourse to take much of its methodological and thematic cues from the very discourse it sought to displace” (156). Jeyifo proposes a “third discourse” that “pushes analysis beyond” this binary (157). He offers this set of questions as examples of those that would be asked within a third discourse:
Which African or European sources and influences do we find operative and combined in any given African theatrical expression? What motivates the interaction and combination of the ‘foreign’ and the ‘indigenous,’ for instance, an escapist, nostalgic retreat into neo-traditionalism, or a liberating and genuine artistic exploration of the range and diversity of styles, techniques, paradigms and traditions available within the ‘foreign’ and the ‘indigenous’? What social and ideological uses and functions mediate, legitimize or problematize the intercultural fusion of the ‘foreign’ and the ‘indigenous’? (157-58)

The excellent questions initiating Jeyifo’s third discourse anticipate what I think of as intercultural postmodernism. Whatever its label, the critical reorientation set off by the crisis of ethics involved interrogating all of the taken-for-granted assumptions of modernist interculturalism. The focus began to shift to the ideas and motivations of those involved, the specific conditions and ideologies of theatre work, and the nature of the artistic and interpretive work happening through it. What Jeyifo’s third discourse contributes is the idea that intercultural theatre’s political, ethical and aesthetic motivations and narratives are layered and ideologically situated.

It is important to add, however, that the third discourse did not replace the first or the second, but only joined them. Accordingly, while my account of intercultural modernism will seem to have culminated in the crisis of ethics, it is incorrect to think of everything that follows as postmodern. Only for some interculturalists had there been a crisis at all. How many of the hundreds of thousands who came out to see Brook’s _Mahabharata_ saw in it a crisis of ethics that needed to be worked out? Even if there was a perceived crisis, it was in whether one felt that Brook’s work was ethical or not (there being but two choices), and the vast majority seemed to have chosen the former.\(^2\) The extent to which the performers had a “voice” in the creative process or the extent to which their different training and cultures really mattered was not part of the discussion. And why should it have been, given that Mallika Sarabhai—the only Indian actor in *The Mahabharata* and the one who played the female lead—was on record saying:
I have to say completely and unequivocally, both as an Indian and as a woman, that had I not felt that this representation was right, had I felt at any time that there was anything of which I should be ashamed and for which I would have to apologize to Indians, then I would have left. (O’Connor 103)

That she felt the need to say so was an acknowledgement of the crisis of ethics, but if Sarabhai—a known and respected performer in India—approved, what was there to question? What seemed to matter to most critics, in any case, was simply that she and other “foreign” performers were there. 22

Brook and Schechner—who together had rather unfairly borne the brunt of the intercultural critique—continued to produce and be supported for the sort of work that they had always done. The dusking of the Age of Aquarius seemed to have only meant that old work needed new arguments. The first new argument was that transculturalism did not need to efface cultural particularity. Schechner, for his part, argued that his search for one “genuine performance theory” and his “belief in identifying some universal patterns of behavior,” did not have to come with a disbelief “in the minute particulars of each and every culture” (“A Reply” 248). Other scholars joined in. Pavis called for a notion of “world culture” that is “diametrically opposed to the idea of a unified, one-world culture in which all differences are flattened out” (IPR 38), and looked forward to theatre practices that “respect the unique characteristics of each culture and allow each culture its authority” (IPR 38). Maria Shevtsova argued that “plurality does not destroy singularity, even though the universal rather than the particular is sought from their conjunction” (Robert Wilson 218). Transculturalism could be saved, but perhaps realigned; the same work could be seen in new ways, or else be aligned with different practices and traditions. The realignment, however, amounted in this case to a weak re-branding, little more than the expression of a hope that postmodernism and the avant-garde could be reconciled into some kind of postmodern transculturalism. Concrete suggestions about how this could be
accomplished—with what terminology, on precisely what grounds, and by what methodological or dramaturgical means—were few.

*The Mahabharata* was a landmark intercultural theatre production, perhaps the landmark production. It continues to be cited two decades later as a turning point in intercultural theatre practice and thought (Holledge and Tompkins, Lo and Gilbert, Worthen). Arguably the most authoritative source on the historiography of interculturalism in the theatre, Lo and Gilbert’s 2002 article “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis,” places the dividing point between the interculturalism of the avant-garde and contemporary interculturalism squarely upon *The Mahabharata* in its distinction between imperialistic and collaborative practices. Their categories are based on features of practice, but the practices are ultimately appraised ethically, (or, using the terminology I will use in Chapter Four, morally). Certainly there is cause for them to have done so, and certainly some intercultural theatre since *The Mahabharata* exhibits a greater attentiveness to ethics. But there is a danger in a reductive ethics that shuts out the “imperialistic” features of “collaborative” work or the “collaborative” features of “imperialist” work. Both can be observed in nearly any work, and there is a need for more sensitive ethical evaluations of each. *The Mahabharata*, for example, probably the paradigmatic imperialist work within Lo and Gilbert’s scheme, had some support in India, and not just from its lead actress. 23 “India,” to use a construction that breaks down very quickly, was thus complicit in the so-called imperialist undertaking, a fact that Bharucha attributes to India's internalized colonialism, and which leads him to suggest that “there is a Mahabharata to be fought in India today” (*Theatre* 120).

In the fraught and complex world of intercultural practice, and especially in the arena of theatrical collaboration, imperialist and collaborative motivations and tactics intermix and
overlap. Moving toward Jeyifo’s “third discourse” involves cutting through such oversimplified polarities as the imperialist/collaborative and such untenable subject positions as “India.” As Julie Stone Peters writes, “It is tempting for cultural historians to explain cultural products as the outcome of radical polarities because they may, in so doing, place themselves on one side in a clear-cut moral universe” (201). I reject any suggestion that having survived the crisis of ethics means that the ethical shortcomings of past intercultural work have been “corrected.” If there was any lesson to be learned from the controversy surrounding the Mahabharata, it was that interculturalism is not an easily resolved or clear-cut moral universe. What it had suggested was the need to be sceptical of oversimplified arguments of either appropriation or cultural protectionism, to consider multiple and overlapping subject positions within cultural interaction, and to seek out practical and critical approaches to intercultural work that can address the subtleties of social and political positioning and context. There was a need, in other words, for a new ethics, but also a new methodology of researching these forms of theatre. Since The Mahabharata, new forms such as collaborative intercultural theatre have emerged, but they have not come “packaged” with new methodologies. In Chapter 2, I will elaborate on a methodology and set of methods that are appropriate to intercultural postmodernism after the crisis of ethics. First, however, I will more directly address the methodological tradition from which my own approach departs.

The Methodology of Intercultural Modernism

*To see is to know.*

— One motto of the World’s Columbian Exhibition, 1893 (Corbey 338)

My account of the development of interculturalism thus far has focused on Western artists’ “borrowing” techniques and stories from other cultures in such a way that clearly served their
own artistic and material interests. But their efforts served another enterprise as well; Craig, Brecht, Artaud and Schechner were as influential in their theorizing as they were in their practice. Practice and theory were constantly feeding back into one another, together serving a nebulous enterprise that I call *intercultural modernism*.

Today, “interculturalism” is broadly used to refer to exchange between people of different cultures around the world, but recall from the Introduction that Schechner first used the term in opposition to “internationalism” not to point to the dynamics of exchange between peoples, but rather to the ubiquity of performance throughout our lives. Interculturalism, therefore, proposed that performance was a fundamentally human activity guided by the same principles the world over and that was, for that reason, “readable” the world over. Schechner’s vision for performance studies was of a body of theory that would dissolve geographical (and disciplinary) boundaries. As Jeyifo writes, “At the heart of the experimental project of this journey was a search for a truly intercultural ‘grammar’ of theatrical communication, a simple, powerful, universal ‘language’ of theatre which, beyond the divisions of nationality, culture and class, would communicate directly to all audiences in all places at all times” (150). If methodology refers to “the study of the direction and implications of empirical research” (OED), then such a search for a universal grammar of theatre is precisely the direction of the methodology of intercultural modernism.

“Grammar” is an appropriate word for Jeyifo to have chosen, for the development and nature of intercultural modernism is closely related to the development of theatre semiotics, itself a descendant of modern linguistics. The avant-garde desire for global theories of performance influenced and was influenced by those strains of semiotic theory that sought to make a science of theatrical communication. That theatre semiotics became most abstract around the time of the
crisis of ethics in the 1980s and 1990s is perhaps not a co-incidence; the Schechnerean need for theory that would “decode” cultural performance around the world seemed to call on semiotics to abstract itself. This was perhaps more Russian Formalism than it was the semiotics of the Prague Linguistic Circle. In the 1930s and 1940s, Prague Circle theorists such as Jan Mukařovský and Felix Vodička had in fact attempted to reconcile the strict formalist communication model with how meaning was produced in specific historical moments by refocusing critical attention on how meaning was jointly produced by audience and context. Vodička, for example, went so far as to theorize how texts are received and evaluated diachronically within a culture. He argued that readers (and critics, most powerfully) publicly interpret literature by engaging with constantly evolving aesthetic norms, and along with artists, contribute to evolving those norms. The task of the literary historian is to trace both the evolution and to locate specific moments of reception, or ‘concretizations’, which reflect the perceptions of a work in a given historical moment according to the norms of that time. Extraliterary, social and cultural factors thus create the need for new concretizations. The responsibility Vodička placed on the audience to evaluate, as well as the emphasis he placed on the social/historical contexts of reception in fact directly anticipate later postmodern revisions of semiotic theory.

During the 1990s, those who were looking for theory to help interpret Brook and Mnouchkine’s work employed a semiotics that was—perhaps because it had developed quite apart from the Prague Circle—more scientist and abstract in its formulations (see Knowles 2008, de Toro 2008). Among the chief texts of this strain were Keir Elam’s *The Semiotics of Theatre Drama* (1988), Manfred Pfister’s *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (1988), and Erika Fischer-Lichte’s *The Semiotics of Theater* (1992). Forming a bridge between these texts and intercultural studies were *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre Own and Foreign* by Fischer-Lichte
(1990) and Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture by Pavis (1992), both of which began to build semiotic models of intercultural performance. Writing about interculturalism in the theatre soon proliferated. The Performing Arts Journal published a special issue on interculturalism in 1989 (volume 11, issue 3), and a flurry of books followed: By Means of Performance: Intercultural Studies of Theatre and Ritual by Richard Schechner (1989), Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from PAJ by Bonnie Marranca (1990), Imperialism and Theatre edited by J. Ellen Gainor and Pavis’ own influential edited volume The Intercultural Performance Reader (1996). A special issue of Theatre Research International focused on interculturalism followed in 1997 (vol. 22, iss. 1). Among the names that appeared frequently in these texts were Pavis, Schechner, Fischer-Lichte, Shevtsova and Carlson, all of whom continue to elaborate their ideas about interculturalism today. The theatre to which this group responded was predominantly concerned with the borrowing of stories and techniques from non-western cultures (see Bennett, Elam, Semiotics; Fischer-Lichte, Semiotics and Dramatic Touch, Pavis, IPR; Schechner, “Intercultural Themes”), and so too were the typologies and models they created. Some employed a more structuralist semiotics meant to develop theoretical concepts, while others employed a more materialist or social semiotics that was more attentive to specific sites of analysis.

**Modeling Interculturalism**

The first full model of intercultural theatre was rooted in the structuralist semiotic tradition. Patrice Pavis’ “hourglass-model” was first described in his 1992 book Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture (4-6). Pavis’ model involves culture—a system that can be “read” semiotically—being removed from its original context and refashioned to suit a new context. The upper and lower chambers of the model’s hourglass represent the source and target cultures respectively, while the neck contains a series of filters. Pavis draws on a linguistic model of communication.
and speaks about culture in structural terms such as codes and filters. The system is a hermeneutic circle in that the comprehension of “specifically artistic codes generates an interest in the comprehension of cultural and sociological codes in general, and conversely the knowledge of general cultural codes is indispensible to the comprehension of specifically artistic codes” (14). Pavis points out that his model is only intended to help understand “situations of exchange in one direction from a source culture, a culture foreign to us (westerners), to a target culture, western culture, in which the artists work and within which the target audience is situated” (7). Other formulations—of typologies of practice as well as models of intercultural process—followed suit. Carlson sets up a typology of intercultural work that sorts theatre practices according to the extent to which the “culturally foreign” has been “appropriated” by the “culturally familiar” (Carlson, IPR 82-83). There are seven “stages,” with stage one meaning a performance by the familiar culture for itself with no acknowledged foreign elements, and with stage seven being a foreign performance that is “imported or re-created with no attempt to accommodate it to the familiar” (83).

In its strict schematizing of the operation of culture in the theatre, Pavis’ model is an example of the influence that semiotic theory—in one of its incarnations—has had on the study of intercultural performance. In his recent book Speaking in Tongues, Marvin Carlson suggests some of the limitations of such models with regard to interculturalism. Citing Chomsky’s description of a communication model in which “an ‘ideal speaker-listener’ operates ‘in a completely homogenous speech community,’ and ‘knows its language perfectly’” (2), Carlson notes that such models issue from a modernist impulse: “One can recognize in this formulation the regularizing and abstracting qualities, the search for an essential core, that characterizes much modernist thought in the arts” (2). William Worthen finds a similar impulse in Fischer-
Lichte’s theory, arguing that Fischer-Lichte’s defense of Robert Wilson’s intercultural work “enacts a familiar move of intercultural aesthetics, isolating the sign system of the theatre from their social and historical contexts, in order to see intercultural performance as a moment in the advance of a utopian world theatrical culture” (131). At the same time, intercultural performance was for some a moment in the advance of a project of total theory, a hermetic system of meaning that only made sense for interculturalism as Schechner had understood it—as a means to theorize performance everywhere that paradoxically both welcomed in and shut out cultural difference.

The critical offensive against appropriative intercultural practices, however, would soon be expanded into the methodological realm to critique totalizing paradigms of theatre theory that seek out cultural “authenticities” at the margins of modernism (whether those margins are geographically or economically delineated). Pavis’ hourglass model was an early, easy target: just as the “flow” of culture in most twenty-first century intercultural work had been toward the West, the imagined spectator in Pavis’ model is a Western one faced with the task of “deciphering” the “foreign.” Theory, it seemed, shared some of the modernist premises of practice, and even the imagined spectator could not be sheltered from intercultural politics. Theorists of the avant-garde had followed the lead of practitioners just as the practitioners had followed the thinking of the theorists (partly because many of them were both) in a feedback loop that ultimately confirmed Europe and America as the centre of theatrical and theoretical innovation.²⁴

**Exteriority and Optical Empiricism**

All of this describes the direction of the methodology of intercultural modernism, but what about its implications? For my purposes here, an important implication of the search for universals of
performance through intercultural encounters is the intercultural observer’s exteriority to the
subject. In Orientalism, Said points to exteriority as the keystone of his own argument:

> My concern with authority does not entail analysis of what lies hidden in the Orientalist
text, but analysis rather of the text’s surface, its exteriority to what it describes. I do not
think that this idea can be overemphasized. Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that
is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the
Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. (20-21)

Intercultural modernism, too, was initially premised on exteriority. Whether one was a spectator
to a performance with “foreign elements” or an anthropologist doing fieldwork in a “foreign
culture,” one was always describing something that one knew little about. This was inevitable
for the early generation of avant-gardists, since they faced nearly insurmountable practical,
cultural, and linguistic barriers that thwarted—or at least stunted—the effort to build a nuanced
understanding of traditions of performance. As I suggested earlier, their intercultural encounters
were minor and fleeting. Meyerhold didn’t even see the 1902 Otodzio Kawakami performance
in Moscow that apparently influenced him so much. While Artaud drew inspiration from
Balinese performance in his theorizing, he could know little about Balinese theatre conventions
(Drain 293). What Artaud framed as an exposure to a “pure” and “authentic” Balinese theatre
was actually a performance heavily mediated by a colonialist frame of the Dutch Pavillion at the
1931 Paris Colonial Exhibition, a performance environment that Evan Winet says was “closer to
a postmodern Epcot Center than to either a Western stage or an Eastern village” (99). The
Balinese themselves had already begun to distinguish performances such as that at the Paris
exhibition as “tourist samplers” distinct from “genuine ritual performances” (Winet 105).\(^\text{25}\)
Artaud’s obliviousness to this allowed him to make the gamelan performance a metonym of all
Balinese theatre if not of all “Oriental” theatre. Brecht’s unfamiliarity with non-Western
traditions went unacknowledged as well, even though it clearly affected his observations; one at
least wonders how much of the “coldness” and “strangeness” he observed in Chinese acting (Brecht 92-93) followed predictably from his own unfamiliarity with it and its cultural context. Brecht holds up the actor Mei Lanfang as an unwitting master of his V-effect, though he only saw Lanfang perform in Moscow once at the opera and possibly on a second occasion “in a brief spontaneous presentation in a drawing room” (Tsubaki 162). What would it have meant to the V-effect if Brecht would have heard Lanfang say of his acting: “The first thing to do...is to forget you are acting and make yourself one with the part”? (qtd. in Drain 292) Brecht’s objectification also de-eroticized Lanfang’s complex cross-gender performance, allowing him to discuss the performance as an example of Craig’s Ubermarionette that only offers its audience “artistic codes to decipher” (Senelick 113).

This exteriority leads inevitably to a second important implication of the methodology of intercultural modernism: the severing of the visual signs of “foreign performance”—movement, costume, mise-en-scene, gesture, space, etc.—from their contexts in a process of aggressive aestheticization. While this contributed to a discussion about representation and aesthetics, it also re-inscribed the imperialism of the modernist ethnographic gaze; the notion that, as the motto on some exhibits of indigenous people at the World’s Columbian Exhibition of 1893 had it, “To see is to know.” “Knowing” was the urge to organize detached signs together into a new narrative (of performance, of cultural evolution, of nostalgia) but it was also, as Raymond Corbey argues in his analysis of ethnographic exhibition, an “encyclopedic urge” (362) or “optical empiricism” (359) expressing an authority over its subject in its power to photograph and catalogue it. Once culture had been robbed of social meaning and parsed into transportable “tags,” objectified, scrutinized and catalogued, it could be recontextualized and restaged. This is the easy cultural transportability of Schechner’s “culture of choice.”
Examples of Corbey’s “optical empiricism” abound in avant-garde writing. Artaud, for example, desired to replace spoken language in the theatre with different words: iconic and detachable ones that could be read in phrases, sentences, and even a grammar. He called it “a new bodily language no longer based on words but on signs” (Artaud, *On Theatre* 88) and suggested that his Theatre of Cruelty obtained an “objective materialization” through its use of “living, moving hieroglyphs” (Artaud, *On Theatre* 91). The Balinese actor was a literal collage of signs, a litany of body parts and micro-movements: “mechanical eye-rolling,” “heads moving,” “pouting lips,” “twitching muscles,” “a forearm,” “a falling foot,” “fingers that seem to come loose from the hand” (Artaud, *On Theatre* 89). Artaud delighted in his unfamiliarity with the meaning of the gestures and celebrated how they shook the spectator from conventional vocabularies of gesture. If this was not entirely a willed unfamiliarity on Artaud's part, it certainly seems to be so for the next generation of avant-gardists who did have the opportunity for much greater exposure to foreign cultures. Mnouchkine, for example, splits the Japanese performer into signs as well, noting that she learned from the Japanese performer, “[n]ot so as to put his guts on display, but to depict them, to transform them into signs, forms, movements, rhythms” (Artaud, *On Theatre* 95). So much had cultural tags been decontextualized that it wasn't such a great step to manufacturing them altogether, in such a way that they only needed to evoke something foreign. This Brook did with language while working on *Orghast* with the CIRT. Brook had come across Avesta, “the two-thousand-year-old language of Zoroaster” and was moved by what he understood to be the spiritual experiences contained in its “hieroglyphs” (in Drain 321). For *Orghast*, Brook had Ted Hughes create a script with no actual words, but only “gr, and tr and soft sh sounds” that “were intended to transport the listener to Oriental, African, Semitic, Greek and Persian worlds” (Croyden 47). This was perhaps the apotheosis of
intercultural modernism, a complete invention of cultural particularity ostensibly for the purpose of aesthetic experiment.

**Conclusion: Disentangling from the Crisis of Ethics**

These intercultural avant-gardists have been influential: their writing has been studied, their productions celebrated, their global adventures catalogued and admired. That influence disseminated modernist intercultural paradigms and strategies throughout scholarship in ways that are sometimes quite subtle.

Consider, for instance, the ubiquitous spatialization of intercultural interaction. Within a modernist paradigm, culture, and by extension interculturalism, is widely imagined using spatial models and metaphors. The subjects of cultural interaction are mapped into a dialectical relation to one another in space: think of diaspora, liminality, and the dimensionalities suggested by the terms and cross-/inter-culturalism themselves. These spatialized discourses, Helen Nicholson suggests, “signify the impact of globalization on contemporary thought” and “are intended to suggest an interest in disrupting dominant regimes of knowledge” (*Applied* 44). The post-colonial, most obviously, has sought to empower small, peripheral cultures to work against the hegemony of colonial ideologies, themselves positioned at the centre. Most of these discourses are geographically mapped along global East-West and North-South axes, and that spatial relationship is sometimes duplicated in scholarship, notably in Patrice Pavis’ *Intercultural Performance Reader*, which has a section on “Intercultural Performance from the Western point of view,” followed by a section on “Intercultural Performance from another point of view,”—a “West and the Rest” paradigm. Contemporary intercultural theatre scholarship is littered with phrases that map out the aesthetics and politics of space, such as that which appeared in Peter Eckersall’s recent article about the *Journey to Con-Fusion* project: “intercultural theatre has
become the site of contested cultural terrains [...] and hybrid physical landscapes” (*Theatrical Collaboration* 211).

Perhaps, but my own view (and I am sure Eckersall’s as well) is that it is people, and not the spaces themselves, that have the agency to contest and disrupt dominant discourses and established traditions. This is not to say that spaces (or people) are without ideology (“ideology abhors a vacuum,” writes Ric Knowles [*Reading* 117]), or, more accurately, that they cannot reify and perpetuate ideology. It is instead to say that it is people—and through them, theatre itself—that *make* space, transform it according to certain beliefs, desires, emotions and worldviews. The trouble is that these are more difficult to see, and if “to see is to know,” then how are we to know? I do not mean here to know in the sense of apprehending some distant, objective reality or verifiable truth, as was no doubt suggested by the motto of the World’s Columbian Exhibition, but rather *to know more* about the cultural Other and the dynamics of cultural representation and arrive at more nuanced understandings and interpretations. The tradition of intercultural modernism, with its search for universals of theatrical representation, its deliberate exteriority to cultural context, and its parsing and mobilizing of the visual signs of culture has principally served the theatron—the place of seeing—more than it has the lofty aim of intercultural understanding, howsoever empirically measured.

Interculturalism *sees* often enough, but what, and how, can it ever *know*? In Chapter Two I will elaborate on the methodology and methods of a postmodern ethnographic approach that I believe provides an alternative to intercultural modernism. This approach, which starts from different epistemological premises than those underlying the modernist tradition, considers the ways in which the cultural Other may exclusively be seen, but also considers how it is that individuals, institutions, traditions and cultures interact with one another in practice. This
requires seeing theatre as something more than an aesthetic product, an object of analysis, but as an event, a complex network of converging and colliding ideas and processes with significance that exceed the boundaries of either the theatre or public performance. The (inter)personal dimensions of theatrical process and cultural representation need not be placed in opposition to the aesthetic, for they overlap and are inseparable (what is experiential is aesthetic, what is aesthetic—particularly in the theatre—is experiential). The making contains the made, and the process is inextricable from the product. A separation of these is an entanglement, shackling me to a discussion of “art for art’s sake” that puts me out of the reach of my subject. It is, recalling the example of *A Winter’s Tale*, to shipwreck on the coasts of Bohemia.

The crisis of ethics, too, is an entanglement. This chapter has offered many arguments against intercultural encounter in performance: Bharucha that Schechner’s universalism effaces cultural specificity; Winet that Artaud mistook and misrepresented a heavily mediated Indonesian tourist display as a live, vital tradition; Dasgupta that Brook grafted Western dramaturgy and values onto a mystical, spiritual text; Carlson that *L’Indiade* was a spectacle of otherness with little to do with India; Corbey that the human zoos of the World Exhibitions were rooted in an “encyclopedic urge”; Sayer that Shakespeare was complicit in extruding Bohemia from Western Europe; Favorini that *The Persians* languishes in “xenophobic self-congratulation.” But while these arguments are important to my purpose, they have largely failed to deliver new methodologies. I am reminded of a point Clifford Geertz makes in his still very useful 1973 essay, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture”: “If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not at what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do” (5). Taking the apologists here not to be the interculturalists but their
critics, it is worth asking what their critiques really do, beyond holding theatrical practices up to moral evaluation. In my view, many of these critiques of interculturalism were themselves frequently methodologically unsound in that they failed to take processual and experiential dynamics into account, and that if they had, that their conclusions would often be challenged. Brecht and Artaud certainly did disregard the cultural specificity and contexts of the actors they observed, but so did Bharucha and Dasgupta by disregarding the intercultural dynamics between the international cast of performers who developed the *Mahabharata*. Bharucha and Dasgupta simply had other interests (in their case arguing that a sacred Indian text had been exploited for the material benefit of a Western theatrical visionary), but my point here is that methodologies can predict particular conclusions that make it difficult to admit complexity. To disentangle from the crisis of ethics is not to dispense with ethics; on the contrary it is to admit that ethical decisions—about what we are or ought to be doing as artists or researchers, and about how we and others should represent and be represented—permeate creative and scholarly work at all moments, and that broad judgments are neither incisive nor useful. This can only be achieved with alternative methodologies and methods, other ways of seeing and knowing.

Clearing a new conceptual space for this study, I propose that the value of articulating a crisis of ethics in the discourse as I have done is that it underscores the need for alternative methodologies. If the crisis of ethics called attention to the complex political and material implications of intercultural representation, it also called for an informed and incisive critical view of interculturalism’s dynamics that recognizes how interculturalism, and particular projects, and particular examples from particular projects, are each observable from a number of subject positions. With a different methodology providing a different “way in” to intercultural theatre work, we may find that intercultural theatre of today simultaneously aligns with and departs from
intercultural traditions of the past. This, it is hoped, will make available rich responses to the sorts of questions Jeyifo proposed to comprise the “third discourse.”

Notes to Chapter One

1 One need not “sublimate the impulse” to find contemporary analogues of the human zoo; the tradition of world or international festivals and exhibits continue to be staged the world over, frequently featuring “representative” performances of dance, music and theatre.

2 Not only was the battle of Salamis very recent, but its stakes were particularly high. Had the Persians defeated the Greeks at Salamis, they may have been enslaved to the Persians as had their counterparts on the rebelling Greek island of Ilona not long before.

3 Rehm identifies with the play and laments the contemporary imperialist ambitions of his own country, America, hoping that it too may one day may be given “a compassionate space like that which Aeschylus offered the Persians in his simple, profound play” (251).

4 Bohemia has its own folk traditions which are perhaps most vibrant today in the Slovácko region of modern Moravia, but the folk traditions of A Winter’s Tale are decidedly English.

5 Just prior to Shakespeare's time the whole of what is now called “Eastern Europe” was being redrawn along political and religious lines. Under king Přemysl Otakar II the Czech lands expanded into what is now Austria and Slovenia. In the 14th century under king Charles IV, Prague was made capital of the Holy Roman Empire and certainly its influence extended to the Adriatic. More literally, Bohemia was after 1526 a part of the nameless empire ruled by the Habsburgs whose control also reached the Adriatic. There were reasons, then, for Shakespeare to think of Bohemia as coastal regardless of the fact that, as historian Derek Sayer observes, a map of Bohemia produced in England by John Speed just three years after The Winter’s Tale did not show it to have coasts or deserts (8). What Shakespeare would have expected his audience to know about Bohemia is also uncertain. Few were likely to have any specific knowledge of it, even though Bohemia was known in England as a hotbed of the protestant reformation; the wars triggered by Jan Hus and his teachings brought protestant reform to Bohemia a century before Martin Luther (Sayer 36-42).

6 However much Chamberlain’s own gesture may have been theatrical, his act of othering was no trifling matter: Chamberlain’s willed ignorance became a pretence to not defend Czechoslovakia against Hitler's advances.

7 Marvin Carlson’s recent book Speaking in Tongues comes close, taking the political and theoretical dimensions of macaronic performances (performances that use multiple languages) in historical perspective. But Carlson's book is effectively a crosscultural study of how language—in particular the mixing of language—operates in performance.

8 For example, a proper consideration of how Chinese theatre influenced and was influenced by theatre artists such as Artaud and Brecht is itself a large enough task to have produced a dissertation-length study (see Tian).

9 Ironically, though the Parisian performance was framed as “authentic” and “traditional,” members of Gong Peliatan were so respected back home in Bali that they went on to spark a innovatory tradition in
gamelan playing. Troupes evoking the name of the 1931 performers continue to perform today (see Bloembergen 333-54).

10 There was a second level to this intercultural encounter; Brecht's disclosure about the source of his observations about acting technique was not matched by his disclosure about the alienation effect itself, which he had probably encountered on the same trip. Since 1917, Russian formalists had been familiar with Viktor Shklovsky’s concept priem ostranenie or “making strange” through which art “makes perception long and laborious” (Shklovski 6).

11 Artaud never mentions the troupe by name, referring to them only as the Balinese dancers.

12 In fact, Asiaphilia was particularly prominent in music: John Cage was writing about the I Ching, Philip Glass was travelling throughout Northern India, The Beatles were learning from Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and collaborating with Ravi Shankar, and even Elvis was reading The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Lachman 283).

13 In 1987, for example, Soleil balked at an opportunity to perform L’Indiade in Israel. This was during the time of the “first Intifada” or uprising of Palestinians against Israeli oppression, and the company disapproved of Israel's actions in the conflict. In the end, they decided to perform in Israel, but only after sending an admonishing “open letter to the people of Israel,” the full text of which was published in several major Israeli newspapers on 15 April 1988 (Williams Collaborative 159-61).

14 The NYU program still calls itself the Department of Performance Studies, and proudly declares itself to be “the first program in the world to focus on performance as the object of analysis” (see Performance Studies).

15 The term is Professor Stephen Johnson’s. Though Schechner’s diagrams are often quite crude, they are definitely precursors to the more elaborate models later proposed by Pavis, Carlson, and Lo and Gilbert.

16 Schechner really meant “species”; at least in the early phase of his work he considered which of the patterns of human performance might be found in the rituals of higher primates (“Performance, Theatre, Script, Drama” 33).

17 The Mahabharata was an easy target for accusations of appropriation. Jean-Claude Carriere wrote the first draft of the play before he or Brook had actually read a translation of the source poem—Brook and Carriere had only had some episodes from the poem related to them by a Parisian professor of Sanskrit, Philine Lavastine (O’Connor 50). Thereafter the two did visit India. Learning there that the form of The Mahabharata was always changing, they gave themselves license to change the story. In the end, nearly half of the scenes in the play were of Carriere’s own invention (O’Connor 59). In particular, Carriere compacted a huge portion of the epic into the closing scenes, generating what he himself immodestly deemed “the most beautiful ending in the theatre I have ever seen” (O’Connor 59).

18 What was perhaps most alarming to Bharucha was India’s own role in supporting and promoting Brook, an effect he partly pins on Indian hospitality and deference to authority (thereby quite strategically rendering India somewhat noble in its complicity). “There is a Mahabharata to be fought in India today,” he writes, “not just against cultural appropriations like Brook’s production, but against systems of power that make such appropriations possible” (120).
While accusing Brook of undervaluing a single speech in such an epic production might seem quibbling, Krishna’s speech is so substantial and important in Hinduism to be accorded a separate text: *The Bhagavad Gita*.

Marvin Carlson also used Said against the avant-gardists, observing that “for the last three centuries the Orient has served Western artists as a stimulating source of exotic material, but as Said has pointed out in his excellent book on this subject, this was rarely if ever entirely disassociated from a colonialist mind-set” (82). Carlson argues that Brook’s *Mahabharata* and Mnouchkine’s *L’Indiade* were not—and could not be—the site of real intercultural engagement. Everything about them, Carlson argues, encouraged the audience to read in terms of these directors’ projects and aesthetics, and not as any meaningful encounter with another culture. This precluded the possibility of “deal[ing] specifically with what India or even what the concept of India means to us in terms of difference or otherness,” and allowed only the possibility for “a theatrical celebration of human brotherhood” (IPR 90).

The play was praised by critics all over the world, with the notable exception of Frank Rich, who wrote in the *New York Times*: “Though the similarities are there to be found, one can’t help wondering if the idiosyncratically Eastern character of ‘The Mahabharata’ has been watered down to knock international audiences over the head with the universality of mankind’s essential myths.”

This relates the “phatic” function of interculturalism—the sense in which it is received and valued strictly as a gesture and not as an opportunity for intercultural learning or dialogue. In reference to his own exchanges, Barba calls this “potlatch.”

Bharucha makes much of Indian director Probir Guha’s endorsement of *The Mahabharata* in a 1986 interview with Peter Zarrilli, though he suggests that the nature of the interview may have been such that only an endorsement was possible (Bharucha, *Theatre* 119-20). Brook received a financial endorsement from India in the amount of $80,000 from Indian television to be spent on costumes, and so all costumes for the production and the film were made in India (O’Connor 116). This support seems to have had its limits. Brook tried to get the production staged in India, and his (and the production’s) profile was such that he was able to convince Prime Minister Jacques Chirac to send the production to India as a “gift.” No Indian officials, however, could be convinced to support the project, and the idea was dropped.

Among other things, this blinded theorists to what might be “avant-garde” about foreign performance traditions that they constructed as petrified. In their 2006 book *Not the Other Avant-Garde*, Harding and Rouse trace the history of the twentieth-century avant-garde around the world, calling out the “cultural chauvanism” and “Eurocentric short-sightedness” of avant-garde historiography.

William Worthen argues that the spirit of such world’s fairs of the 1930s was the same “theming” that inspired Walt Disney in the creation of his park, a theming that bears “witness [to] the power of metonymy” (93).

In *Research Practice for Cultural Studies*, Ann Gray argues that the exteriorization or visualization of other cultures is the first of two important contemporary problems in cultural analysis: “the ethnographer fixing his or her gaze on different cultures and rendering them visible, through published work, for the gaze of his or her community of readers” (18). The second problem—the epistemological issue of dubious claims to “truth” and “authenticity”—is taken up at the start of Chapter 2.
CHAPTER TWO

Methodology, Method and Praxis

Theatre practitioners as everyday individuals move in a similar fashion through the networks of social life, and the practice they do collectively—contact with spectators included—can neither be dissociated nor isolated from them. One might wonder how else, if not through the interdisciplinary perspectives that provide access to these networks, theatre, and, indeed, performances of any kind, may be fully apprehended.

— Maria Shevtsova (“Social Practice” 135)

Recent decades have seen a seismic shift in cultural studies from a modernist to a postmodernist epistemology. The former proposes that culture is “out there,” timeless, immutable, monolithic and essential in its strictest realizations, the latter that there is no “out there” at all and that culture is constructed, evolving, mutable, contradictory and elusive.

The need of an alternative methodology arises not out of a collision of these attitudes, both of which still have purchase in popular and academic discourse, but between the overdevelopment of one and the underdevelopment of the other, that is, between entrenched modernist methodologies and the unrealized methodological implications of postmodern revisions.

In the previous chapter, I traced the conceptual development of intercultural modernism in the theatre through to the present using historical examples, identifying its closely related practical and theoretical traditions. I suggested, finally, that fundamentally modern paradigms continue to influence the methodologies of theatre studies, even in some cases that purport to be postmodern in approach. In my initial work on this study, I discovered that the present methodologies of intercultural theatre scholarship—which tended to be of a social/materialist semiotic strain that I will describe below—did not assist me in making sense out of my experience on the PTMTP. With notable exceptions, these analyses
did semiotic readings of public performance, while for me the most interesting things were happening between the collaborators and participants during the sensitive creative and political negotiations of the rehearsal process. This chapter, then, explains the postmodern ethnographic methodology and methods that I have assembled in order to better interpret my experience. The latter sections of this chapter consider both the particular foci (process and narrative) and the potential pitfalls of the kind of empirical research I have done.

**Poststructuralism and Cultural Analysis**

Structuralism and poststructuralism share philosophical roots and overlap, and aligning myself with either of these terms will come with some baggage. Each of these movements is actually a complex historically and geographically situated discourse that is only possible to address here in broad strokes. Of structuralism, we could say that there are two divergent schools that roughly correspond to the scientist/abstract and social/materialist formulations of semiotics described in Chapter One. First there is the French school within which interpretation is synchronic, which is to say that it takes place within a single cultural frame of reference at a given time. This tradition is strictly schematizing, first of language, but also of other systems with (an imagined) internally cohesive meaning like literary tropes, genres, or narratives. On the other hand there is the tradition of the Czech school of structuralism that had evolved out of the Prague School Linguistic Circle. The Czech school is more diachronic in nature, meaning that it considers how cultural frames of reference evolve over time and how it is that a work of art may itself be the agent of that evolution. Agency was actually key to the Czech structuralists—it was the source of creativity in the linguistic sense, that is to generate a new meaning out of an available field of meaning. In Chapter One, I mentioned that Felix Vodička pointed to the agency of the literary critic who interprets;
Roman Jakobson and Petr Bogatyrev made a distinction between individual creativity (i.e. of the author of a novel) and collective creativity (i.e. the teller of a traditional folktale) (91). A remarkable feature of the Czech school was its ambitious scope; already in the 1930s and 1940s it was theorizing about how meaning is produced in contexts of performance. Petr Bogatyrev, for instance, analyzed folktales not in a vacuum of contexts but in specific villages in the southeastern reaches of Soviet Russia, drawing on folkloric stories, personal anecdote and contextual knowledge to build an interpretation in a way not at all unlike I will do in Chapter Four (see Bogatyrev Vampires). Other Czech structuralists looked directly to theatre to consider how meaning was being made in contexts of performance. \(^2\) Jan Mukařovský, for instance, not only considers the interplay between the different channels of communication in the theatre (props, setting, actors, speech, etc), but also how—as is often the case in folkloric performance—meaning is collectively created in a live negotiation with the audience. “The theatre,” writes Mukařovský, “is only the basis of an immaterial interplay of forces moving through time and space and pulling the spectator into its changeable tension” (203). Given that those on stage are also “spectators” in a certain sense, Mukařovský’s critical framework foreshadows my own reconciliation of ethnographic and social/materialist semiotic approaches. \(^3\)

My affinities with this tradition notwithstanding, my own aligns better with poststructuralism, with the caveat that the ‘post’ of this term is meant here to distinguish my approach from those iterations of structuralism that posit that there are generalizable, universal patterns of cultural signification to be induced from particular examples (Geertz specifically addresses this later in the Chapter). Poststructural cultural analysis proposes that cultural signification is particular to its own political, social and historical circumstances and
that there are no general rules to be gleaned, and so actually allies well with the spirit of
analysis of some structuralists such as Bogatyrev. Both Mukařovský and Bogatyrev
constantly evaluated their methodologies as they analyzed specific contexts, and so these
structuralists align well with the poststructural claim that knowledge is at least partially about
the production of knowledge itself. Within poststructuralism, the interpreter does not
discover meaning but rather creates it; meaning is inseparable from the interpreter’s location,
circumstances and interests. The poststructural interpreter is implicated in the analysis, their
position vis-a-vis their subject conditioning what their analysis is and can be.

What this means is that poststructuralism historically and culturally situates
methodology itself, and, accurately or not, looks back on structuralism as a particularly
Western, totalizing interpretive quest to render the world in its own terms (itself, perhaps, a
discursively totalizing move). Other discourses have since followed through on this idea.
Postcolonial studies, for instance, works against the totalizing and Westernizing discourse of
twentieth century modernism and attempts to give a voice to those who have long been
Orientalized and essentialized. Subaltern studies, also, focuses on the experience of what
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, following Antonio Gramsci, calls the subaltern—those people
throughout the world without access to the means of cultural production for reasons to do
with class, ethnicity, sexuality and geography. Now well-established, these discourses have
splintered into any number of sub-discussions, some of which follow through on the
promises of postmodernism even further by arguing how these counter-discourses
themselves totalize and essentialize, thereby overlooking the local conditions of people who
are each differently disenfranchised or colonized.

In my observation, these revisions have had a greater effect on the themes and
attitudes of theatre scholarship than they have had on its methodologies. Recalling from the last chapter Jeyifo's “third discourse” that asks more nuanced questions of cultural discourse, this postmodern, anti-colonialist and anti-intercultural modernist shift in cultural studies constitutes the “second discourse.” The second discourse accounts for the criticisms summarized at the end of the last chapter, all of which are related to the mirror argument: that intercultural work serves its masters, always simplifying and misrepresenting the Other with detrimental political consequences. This brings us up to the crisis of ethics, a situation in which postmodern arguments are discussed—paradoxically—within a modernist paradigm that conflates ethical and aesthetic considerations. To move from the second to the third of Jeyifo's discourses is to begin to ask more specific questions of intercultural work to produce grounded interpretations, and not pass totalizing judgments. But what methodology can be used?

The primary site of analysis in traditional semiotic analyses of theatre is either the dramatic and/or the performance text. These analyses situate the aesthetic qualities and nuances of texts within broader conceptual, historical or cultural narratives. Though analyses of this sort are often written in a materialist, poststructural spirit, accounting for multiplicities and contradictions in meaning, they also often exhibit qualities that I have associated with a modernist intercultural tradition, for example an unreflective, under-considered methodology or a focus on aesthetic objectives. At an extreme, this can lead to treating people, too, as “text,” that is, as the “deliverers” of gesture or action who can be read as fixed and a-temporal objects. In the intercultural context, however, that can lead to a deductive form of inquiry that sees culture as a system detached from its bearers.
The theoretical turn from structuralism to poststructuralism posits that individuals are not wholly determined by cultural norms. Taking a post-structural view, cultural identity is always process and not product, always becoming and never is, and theatre is one arena for that becoming. Individuals in intercultural performance are the agents of change; they effect a legitimizing and delegitimizing force on prevailing cultural ideas and practices in an ongoing process. If a methodology is to access and make sense of those forces and processes, it must consider the difficult experiences of the participants in intercultural theatre, and to recognize that the same theatre project (indeed innumerable moments within it) is productively interpreted from multiple perspectives. From a distant vantage point, one may easily conclude that one culture dominates another or even consumes it in an alimentary process; from a closer vantage point, it becomes clear that while some forces are powerful and may insidiously naturalize themselves, ideas and arguments about culture do not disappear or resolve so easily. Individuals are resilient, opinionated, and they find ways to be heard. Many times, while working on the PTMTP, I observed individuals struggling with how (or whether) to perform images of themselves that they do not accept, or, for that matter, even clearly comprehend. I observed instances where participants variously rejected, accepted, revised, and embellished cultural stereotypes, at times consciously and parodically, at times (seemingly) not.

I am hardly the first voice in the discussion of intercultural theatre to suggest the need to attend to particularity, multiplicity and agency. In 1997, Maria Shevtsova, who also regards the semiotic tradition as “predominantly scientist [and] impersonal,” notes that because “social agents are essential for the very action that is performance, the concept of social agent is necessary for analyzing performances” (“Sociocultural” 4). Like myself,
Shevtsova points to the difficulty of creating a semiotics that “incorporates a theory of agents as sign-makers, and whose sign-making is a meaningful process in relation to someone in specific situations” (“Sociocultural” 5). Julie Stone Peters, also, writes that cultural identities “are fluid composites with multiple genealogies,” and that regarding cultural identity as fixed implies “that we cannot change the material we inherited” (210). Instead, Peters suggests that individuals have agency in choosing precisely which of the many legacies of intercultural practice and discourse they can inherit:

> The inheritances of intercultural performance and theatre anthropology are as mixed, as ethically malleable, as the kaleidoscope of inheritances of which any given individual in any group might partake. We are—or at least ought to think of ourselves as—a world of immigrants, granted no fixed culture, but nonetheless granted a great deal of it continually to remake. (210)

Writing in 1995, Peters proposes an exit to my crisis of ethics by suggesting that ethics themselves are malleable—that they may align in complex ways when one looks at individuals or individual groups. Peters conveys the sense that our world has become so open and crisscrossed that the structuralist premise of bound cultures and correspondingly bound traditions and perspectives is less and less tenable. We now have to consider cosmopolitan identities and imagined communities through which people maintain feelings of connectedness with those beyond their national community. The world that was only just “can-opening” to Brook’s generation is now deeply—though not evenly—diasporic and hybridized.  

**The Persistence of Semiotics**

Just as the meteoric crisis of ethics has not extinguished the “last dinosaurs” of the avant-garde, any number of alternative methodologies have not extinguished semiotics. On the contrary, semiotics has found new arguments and applications in a different age, particularly
from performance scholars, and even more particularly from intercultural performance scholars. While semiotics seemed to be less tenable in the 1980s and 1990s as a “science of culture” (Lucy 16), it was re-engineered as a sociological or materialist analysis of the sign in specific social contexts, relationships and configurations of power (see Esbach and Koch; Hodge and Kress). In 2002, Lo and Gilbert mapped out a new “topography of cross-cultural theatre praxis” (31) by reshaping Pavis’ hourglass model and grounding it in specific contexts and politics. In their model, cultures are still subject to the same filters identified by Pavis, but collaborating cultural groups are understood to be sources along a continuum with the target culture positioned between them. More accurately it is a moving target culture in that each group’s representation changes in different contexts. Lo and Gilbert observe that new collaborative work is marked by the active maintenance of equitable relations between partners, a focus on the processes and politics of exchange rather than on product, and the desire “to explore the fullness of cultural exchange in all its contradictions and convergences for all parties” (39). The model improves on Pavis’ by calling attention to the ways groups’ self-representation changes as it travels through different performance spaces. It makes the assimilated culture of Pavis’ model a partner in the collaboration—but an unequal partner that must guard against being appropriated even while sharing the space of the Other. The unequal partner must monitor “ideologically laden sign systems” (46) like language, space, and the body to ensure that they do not insidiously amplify the voice of one group while silencing another.

Other theatre scholars have offered similar reformulations. Maria Shevtsova’s “Sociocultural Analysis in Cross-Cultural Performance” locates the sign in cross-cultural context somewhere between a lesser context, the where, when and why of a specific moment,
and a greater context, the larger socio-cultural framework in which the moment is set (5). In *Reading the Material Theatre*, Ric Knowles presents another social/materialist version of the semiotic model that he intends to be used “for locating cultural production—including the production of theatre—within its historical, cultural, and material contexts, and for the politically engaged analysis of how meaning is produced” (11). Knowles re-positions the performance text as only one site of analysis that exists in tension with two others: the conditions of both the performance text’s production and reception. Knowles argues that the claim of traditional dramatic analysis to speak across difference to our common humanity has “polic[ed] the norms and commonsense understandings” (9-10) and that this generated the false impression that it was possible to isolate an aesthetic sphere of activity from material conditions (an ultracultural space not unlike that of Eugenio Barba’s “floating islands,” occupied, one imagines, by his intrepid “travelers of speed” [*Beyond* 11]). Such analysis implies that it is possible to comment on the world from a position somehow outside of it, but, provided you accept the rather commonsensical idea that all human practice and theories are cultural, then, as Niall Lucy writes “everything you could say about the domain of culture would itself belong to that domain, would itself be cultural” (22). Theatre work, too, is very much in the world; it is conditioned by its world and it confronts its spectator with a particular re-vision of its world (every “floating island” is tethered to the earth). Taking this view, the sign-systems of intercultural theatre at least need to be understood within their specific material circumstances, because “culture does not (cannot) transcend the materials and relations of production” (Knowles, *Reading* 12).

While these social/materialist semiotic models have opened up new sites of knowledge, I believe that they remain uncomfortable reconciliations between a stubborn
modernist methodology and postmodern cultural theory. For one thing, these models still often exhibit the intercultural modernist bias toward the visual, focusing on such elements as image, gesture, movement and mise-en-scene. This may have been appropriate in analyses of theatrical product, but is less appropriate in analyses of cultural process and creative agency. Reading the visual movement of cultural “tags” through public performance is ultimately a taxonomic, “optical-empiricist” strategy that runs the risk of reinforcing fixed categories of practice and identity. It carries forward another legacy of the semiotic tradition and the linguistic model on which it is based: the measuring of theatre work against how it is communicated, which often means, lacking anything other than anecdotes about audience response, consulting theatre critics. In the case of intercultural theatre this can lead to a kind of methodological dead-end, at which positive critical responses are cited as tacit “proof” of the work’s efficacy, or, just as commonly, that negative responses are cited as tacit “proof” of the work’s inefficacy. I see examples of each of these cases in the present scholarship about collaborative intercultural theatre. I think that each of these conclusions is the unsatisfying result of a critical tradition that is not well equipped to access what is really happening in the form.

In stepping away from these generalizing, taxonomic models, we should be equally sceptical about where we step to. Methodologies that claim “insider” status with their subject, for their part, often make equally dubious authoritarian claims that they are entitled to speak for the cultural Other. In her essay “Performance, Narratives, and the Politics of Possibility,” D. Soyini Madison refers to those who hold these two viewpoints as the cynics and the zealots (470). The conflict between these viewpoints is precisely what I have identified in the crisis of ethics, though perhaps taken even further. For the cynics, “any
attempt toward a self-critical or dialogical performance of the Other is ultimately an act of crass appropriation, self-indulgence and distortion [and] all such performances are inauthentic and exploitative” (470). Zealots, on the other hand, “are loquacious advocates with insider status,” who claim to “speak for the Other better than the Other can speak for herself, and they know what it means to be the Other” (470). Concerned with the implications this has for methodology, Madison proposes a “performance of possibilities,” a creative, transgressive approach more concerned with how a subject “constructs and is constructed by a matrix of social and political processes” (473), than with “a counterstance that locks us in a duel of oppressor and oppressed” (472).

All of these methodological concerns take place within the context of a wider discussion in the Humanities about alternative methodologies. Within theatre studies, the growing community of Practice-Based Researchers in particular has been exploring alternative methodologies. Like me, the practitioner-scholars in this field try to turn their practice into research and must, therefore, deal with the relationship between theory and practice. The field of Practice as Research has coalesced around the regular meetings and activities of Baz Kershaw’s Practice-Based Research in Performance (PARIP) project that formally ended in 2006, but also around the Practice as Research Working Group held each year at conferences of the American Society for Theatre Research, and latterly around the newly-formed The Canadian Journal of Practice-based Research in Theatre edited by Clare Borody and Per Brask. According to PARIP, “traditional approaches to the study of [performance] arts are [being] complemented and extended by research pursued through the practice of them,” such that “a growing number of performing arts / media departments in higher education are now offering higher degrees which place practice at the heart of their
research programmes” (“PARIP/Practice”). One of the strengths of practice-based research is its interdisciplinarity (it encompasses theatre, film, television, video and dance), and the many theoretical points of reference for these differently-trained and situated scholars make for a theoretically diverse discourse. Among the ways it connects to the themes of the present study is in its interrogation of the aforementioned insider-outsider conundrum. The field has its “zealots” who romanticize insider status, but also those who ask difficult questions about what this perspective affords. For instance Mark Welton—a contrarian in the field insofar as he does not take for granted that theory and practice should be enmeshed—argues that practice is best theorized from “within practice” in its own terms rather than in academic abstraction (351). Most voices in the discussion theorize their practice however (with varying degrees of rigour and success), and most also struggle with the double-vision that must go along with studying work in which one is implicated. To cite one example among many, Paul Rae (co-artistic director of Singapore’s “Spell#7 Performance” group) spoke at PARIP’s 2003 conference of the “collapse” between researcher and practitioner roles that is occasioned by the demands of practical work, and the tendency for artists or scholars to “tetralogize” (turn into a monster) work that is “consuming.” By adopting a particular kind of reflexivity, one that we expect, “at points may be entirely subsumed within an unreflexive process,” we will be less inclined to resist a desirable submergence in the work and less given to apology for it (see Rae “Re: Invention”). Broadly, Practice Based Research serves as a reminder that the methodological shift I am pursuing in this study is general across performance-related disciplines, and that my own methodology is but one among many that have been articulated as a way of theorizing one’s own work in the theatre.
The postmodern ethnography I will now begin to articulate thus enters into the field of Practice-Based Research as one methodological framework among many for theorizing experience in the theatre. Like Barba—a consummate Practice-Based Researcher himself—I do not seek “proof of the existence of the ‘science of the theatre’ nor of a few universal laws,” but instead offer “particularly good ‘bits of advice’” (qtd. in Turner 42). It is my view that a postmodern methodology of intercultural theatre can arrive at good “bits of advice” by exploring the interplay between practice and theory in a specific context, while carefully scrutinizing its own strategies and representations.

A Point of Departure: Richard Schechner in Sri Lanka

*It is with the kind of material produced by long-term, mainly (though not exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts that the mega-concepts [...] can be given the sort of sensible actuality that makes it possible to think not only realistically and concretely about them, but, what is more important, creatively and imaginatively with them.*

— Clifford Geertz, from “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” (23)

In the 1970s, Victor Turner, Irving Goffman and Richard Schechner forged links between ethnography and theatre studies. Their pioneering work generated the disciplinary field of performance studies by transgressing the disciplinary boundaries between anthropology, sociology and drama and, most of it, in the terms of this study, was strictly modernist. It sought out universal patterns of performance, and exteriorized and essentialized culture by willfully disregarding the specificities of the performers it studied and the contexts in which it operated. The critical move executed by performance studies has been rightly celebrated according to the terms of the avant-garde: it successfully challenged the institution of theatre, and theatre studies and began to see the theatrical, or performative, in all spheres of human
activity. In ethnographic terms, however, that same critical move could also be colonialist and totalizing.

Perhaps the best first step toward postmodern ethnography is to offer a representative example of modernist ethnography: Richard Schechner’s account of a performance event called a *Thovil* that took place January 15-16, 1972 in the village of Koratota in Ceylon, about an hour’s drive east of Colombo. Schechner witnessed about half of the two-day event, which consisted of “dances, songs, chants, ritual observances, partying, gambling, clowning, storytelling [...] and a trance dance” (“Performance” 22-23). In his four-page analysis of the event, Schechner first patterns it, structuring and categorizing it into parts and codes that are subsequently measured against his conceptions of drama, script and performance. He then extracts those elements of the performance that will be most useful to him back in America. Focusing on the trance dance, he writes:

The trance dance is pure theatre. There is no drama, no script. There are certain steps to be done but these may be varied according to the strength of the possession. [...] Drama, script, theatre, and performance need not all exist for any given event. But when they do, they enclose one another, overlap, interpenetrate, simultaneously and redundantly stimulating and using every channel of communication. (“Performance” 24-26)

It is my belief that Western culture is generally unable to enjoy trance dancing because of our insistence on drama and scripts. However, in black and pentacostal [sic] churches—revivals, healing, chants and responses, talking in tongues, snake-charming, and the like—there is ample evidence that trance is a viable mode for theatre in the West, if we so choose. (“Performance” 24)

Schechner’s account has all the characteristics of the modernist intercultural methodology I have described: it totalizes by imagining that grammars and patterns can be found that govern performance everywhere; it exteriorizes and semiotizes culture by experiencing (and evoking) it only visually; it has the benefits of its activity “flowing” from the periphery
(Ceylon) to the centre (America); and it dehumanizes the objects of its study by deliberately subtracting from them their cultural, social and political particularity. The performers of the Thovil are nameless minor figures in Schecher’s greater theoretical mission. Not even the “trance dancer” himself gets a name; despite having been the focus of Schechner’s analysis, having appeared in six photographs in the article, and apparently having spoken with Schechner at length when the two shared a ride to and from the village, we only learn about the man that he is a “young medical technician from Colombo” (“Performance” 23).

Schechner cites (in its entirety, as far as the reader knows) an exchange he had with the dancer on the drive back to Colombo:

How did you become a trace dancer?
*My teacher taught me.*
Why do you do it?
*I like it. I earn extra money.*
Does your dancing conflict with the ‘scientific ideas’ of your work?
*No. Why should it?* (“Performance” 23)

I am struck by the paucity of this exchange. Perhaps, though, there was more to their conversation. Perhaps there was a language barrier between the two and Schechner’s guide was unable to translate. Perhaps there wasn’t, and Schechner has merely paraphrased. Perhaps the man didn’t trust or even quite understand Schechner. Perhaps the man had nothing more to say, and Schechner has recorded the entirety of the conversation faithfully. Whatever the case, we know nothing about the nature of their conversation or their relationship simply because nothing else was thought to be important. We should be thankful that Schechner doesn’t comment on the exchange, because, in fact, he has left little to comment on; so much has been subtracted from the world of the research that the answers (and the questions) seem ridiculous. The trance dancer, cut down to little more than a figure or moveable sign in the analysis, is suddenly and inexplicably given a moment to speak;
granted a “voice,” but a voice that is so robbed of context and particularity that it is barely audible. We can glean absolutely nothing of him, his world, or of what his performance may mean to him in the logic and language of his own training, skills, traditions, culture, opinions, background or relationships.

Granted, some of Schechner’s descriptions of the *Thovil* are evocative. In particular, his account captures the informality and spontaneity of the performance environment. The glaring “subtractions” from this ethnography, however, make clear that it is meant strictly to serve Schechner’s own theatrical experiments in America. While any ethnographic account is going to serve the ethnographer (and clearly this ethnography of the PTMTP serves my own practical and academic interests), Schechner’s ethnography is modernist in intercultural terms in just the same way that *The Mahabharata* was: it felt no ethical obligation to serve its subject and could therefore subtract whatever it wished. The event and its representation clearly satisfied Schechner, but it leaves me wanting to know a great deal more. The trance dancer cannot so easily subtract from his own world, and I am left wondering—just as I had in my analysis of *The Persians*: what would he think of Schechner’s representation? Would he equate his trance performance to evangelistic church spectacles of the American south? Just as it had been easier for Artaud and Mnouchkine to speak of the *figure* of the Balinese or Japanese performer than it had been to speak of a particular person, Schechner erases everything that impedes generalization. Schechner’s account of the *Thovil* executes what Donna Harraway calls the “God trick” (87); it claims authority and objectivity, obscures its location and inflected point of view, and imagines itself transcending to some higher register of universal representation. For the most part, my methodology has tried to be everything Schechner’s was not.  

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Qualities of a Postmodern Theatre Ethnography

What is odd is that while the theory and practice of ethnography itself has taken great strides toward postmodernism, the updates have largely failed to reach theatre studies (the significant exception to this is the field of drama-in-education, where ethnographic approaches to theatre work have continued to be developed and productively applied [for example, see Gallagher, Drama Education and Theatre of Urban; Jackson, Theatre; Nicholson]). Recent decades have scholars of anthropology and education interrogate the theory and methodology of ethnography from post-colonial (see Clifford, Predicament and Writing Culture; Clifford and Marcus; Geertz; Conquergood) and feminist perspectives (see Acker; Fine, “Working”; Lather, “Issues” and Troubling; Smith). According to James Clifford, this re-evaluation has been a “critique of the West’s most confident, characteristic discourses” (Clifford and Marcus 10). Semiotics, I would argue, is one such discourse. In my introduction I described the drift toward postmodernism in cultural anthropology that began with the work of Boas and Malinowski, and continued through to Stephen A. Tyler’s fatalistic conclusions about the end of methodology. Tyler seems to have been pre-emptive in his pronouncement, however, since a large body of scholarship about the methodology of postmodern ethnography has appeared in recent years.

Postmodern ethnography redirects the methodology of modernist ethnography in two ways. First, it revises the ontological status of identity and the self by shifting to a poststructural epistemology of culture. Where modernist ethnography imagined a continuous and essential self, a self that inherits and carries forward a nationalist or ethnic cultural tradition, contemporary ethnography attributes greater agency to the individual. In an essay entitled “Ethics: the failure of positivist science,” Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba refer
to modernist epistemology as “conventional.” They suggest that the positivist researcher’s search for truth—in the intercultural context, the codes and symbolic coherence of culture—requires “treating human research subjects as though they were objects” (224). They describe an emergent paradigm that they call “naturalistic.” Its first tenet is that “social realities are social constructions, selected, built, and embellished by social actors (individuals) from among the situations, stimuli, and events of their experience” (227). Similarly, influential ethnographer Dwight Conquergood notes that a major consequence of challenging the modernist paradigm “is a rethinking of identity and culture as constructed and relational, instead of ontologically given and essential” (359). Ethnographers of a previous generation that had flocked to the margins of “civilization” to analyze culture carried with them a Western notion of culture as bound and fixed. Contemporary ethnography sees identity as provisional and layered, in Conquergood’s words, “more like a performance in process than a postulate, premise, or originary principle” (359).

Second, postmodern ethnography dispenses with distanced critical objectivity in favour of situated knowledge and critical reflexivity. This leads to the second tenet of Lincoln and Guba’s naturalistic paradigm: the “rejec[tion of] the idea that the researcher-researched relationship ought to be objective and distanced” (227-228). The researcher’s own presence, situatedness within configurations of institutional authority, and epistemological frame of reference all factor into the observation of phenomena and their transformation into written texts. Ethnographers have discussed this issue with urgency. James Clifford’s 1983 essay “On ethnographic authority” was among the first in the field to deconstruct both the notion of researcher authority and the “textual embodiment of authority” (133). Since then, the authority of researcher/author has been critiqued from a number of angles, perhaps most
keenly by feminist scholars such as Sandra Acker, Michelle Fine, Donna Haraway and Patti Lather.

Postmodern ethnography *adds* that which Schechnerean ethnography *subtracts.* Because the individual is always revising their identity, performing it, in relation to their cultural, social and political context, they can only be (even partially) understood in relation to that context. I find guidance in this by returning again to Geertz. Though Geertz’s structuralist descriptions of culture as “webs of significance” (5) and “interworked systems of construable signs” (14) are modernist according to my definitions, he also gives early and eloquent expression to the issues that lead to a postmodern methodology. He argues, for example, against pursuing cultural laws as predictive “keys-to-the universe,” (4) instead advancing an *interpretive* science that is after best explanations (like Barba’s “bits of good advice”) rather than truths:

Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodiless landscape. (20)

Geertz’s ethnography has four principal characteristics: (i) it is interpretive, (ii) it interprets “the flow of social discourse, not structure,” (iii) it fixes the “said” of social discourse “in perusable terms,” and (iv) it is microscopic, “dealing with small matters with big significance” (20-21). Famously, Geertz distinguishes *thin* from *thick* description: thin being the phenomenological realm, that which can be photographed, and thick being creative, nuanced readings that try to sort out what phenomena may mean in relation to their context. While Geertz still thinks in terms of hierarchies of cultural codes and structures, he notes that “theoretical formulations hover so low over the interpretations they govern that they don’t make much sense or hold much interest apart from them” (25). In an elegant...
passage, Geertz identifies what I am calling the difference between the modernist ethnography that theorizes/patterns, and the postmodernist ethnography that interprets/describes:

If anthropological interpretation is constructing a reading of what happens, then to divorce it from what happens—from what, in this time or that place, specific people say, what they do, what is done to them, from the whole vast business of the world—is to divorce it from its applications and render it vacant. A good interpretation of anything—a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation. When it does not do that, but leads us instead somewhere else—into an admiration of its own elegance, of its author’s cleverness, or of the beauties of Euclidean order—it may have its intrinsic charms; but it is something else than what the task at hand [...] calls for. (18)

Following Geertz, I see interpretations as “better guesses” meant to better interpret intercultural performance in process, that place where its operations are most difficult to sort out.

My methodology attends, therefore, to the methodological deficiencies of modernist ethnography, the postmodern revisions to cultural analysis, and to the sort of interpretive work outlined by Geertz. Synthesizing it all, I propose that a postmodern ethnography of the theatre should:

(i) de-naturalize its own way of seeing by attending to the implications of its research strategies

(ii) pursue interpretations of social discourse throughout all dimensions of theatre work (as opposed to explanations of meaning)

(iii) ground the discussion of concepts in “small matters of big significance”;

(iv) draw on narratives of first-hand experience, creatively exploring whatever context and circumstances—of the researcher or the subject—contribute to building richer interpretations;

(v) consider aspects of aesthetic experience beyond the visual-spatial, such as the affective, intuitive, embodied, ethical and personal; and
(vi) foreground the dialectics of process (in research or creative work) as much as product (scholarship, published text, public performance).

These methodological considerations, and this preliminary, rough list of postmodern ethnography’s aims still do not tell us anything about method—about how the research that subscribes to all of this gets carried out and used. It is my belief that epistemic change—of the kind I have articulated here between intercultural modernism and postmodernism—does not occur with a philosophical shift, no matter how fundamental; the change truly happens when a philosophical shift changes what it is that we do.

About Praxis

In my introduction, I spoke of the necessity of maintaining a distinction between practice and theory for the first part of this study, because there were a number of difficult issues to work through that could not be approached piecemeal. I will now begin to profitably stitch together my theoretical and methodological considerations with my experience. The structure of this chapter—which begins by pinpointing the switch between modern and postmodern ethnography in methodology and then moves to methods—might give the impression that the design of my qualitative research was the natural result of a careful historical review and definitional and theoretical considerations. It would lead one to believe that the methods I used were designed to instrumentalize a carefully considered methodology. For the most part, however, my qualitative research grew largely out of my experience in the theatre, and only later became enriched by these theoretical considerations about culture. The epigraphs at the start of the next section—the first of which I read recently in Denzin’s excellent survey of trends in contemporary ethnography (see Denzin Interpretive), and the second of which I
wrote using a metaphor recorded in my field notes—demonstrate the close relationship between the methodological and practical results of my research.

As I noted in my introduction, my research into intercultural theatre began before I thought it to be research at all. The progression of this research was complex: I experienced the PTMTP, reflected on my experience, did further reading, participated in the PTMTP again, theorized, designed a qualitative research study, participated a third time and carried out that study, did a comprehensive historical and theoretical review, and finally, only after several short papers and presentations, wrote this study. I say this because I think it helps to understand that the methods of my research made practical, intuitive sense to me before they made theoretical sense. Also, it helps to understand the dialectical nature of ethnographic fieldwork in which reflection, analysis, reading, and writing happen in parallel, and not in series. Of course this process had a beginning: I initially sought out methods that would make the sort of interesting experiences I had had available for further analysis. As I read more, the theoretical moment in which I found interculturalism—at the confluence of what I have described as crises of ethics and methodology—seemed more and more appropriate to the data I had collected.

In order to properly describe my research methods, I will now, finally, begin to relate some of the details of my case-study. I forego starting with a comprehensive description of the project here because, as I said in my introduction, my intention is to provide only so much information about the PTMTP as is relevant to my purposes here. While more information about the project’s collaborators, disparate contexts, and clashes of tradition and culture is necessary to my analysis (and will follow in Chapters Three and Four), no section of this study is purely meant to “document” the project. The next section identifies the
methods that may comprise a postmodern ethnography by beginning to tell the story of my experience with, research into, and reflections on the PTMTP.

Towards Method: “Out/Standing in the Field”

*The uncertain discursive field will open to a parallax of discordant voices, visions and feelings. [...] This discursive field will yield to a cacophony of voices demanding to be heard (and seen).*

— Norman Denzin, from *Interpretive Ethnography* (48)

*The ordered cultural harmony drowns out a discordant chorus of voices, all roughly following the conductor but each seeking the tune. It is my belief that this strange music is profoundly meaningful. What are its qualities, and how can it best be heard?*

— Barry Freeman, from “Cultural Meeting in Collaborative Intercultural Theatre” (218)

A few years ago, a friend told me a story about an experience she had while performing a small role in a film. Her only line in the film was in a courtroom scene, in which her character was to attest to another character’s expertise by saying that he was “outstanding in the field.” After my friend did the scene, the director called for a second take, noting that the momentary dramatic pause she had placed between “out” and “standing” had delivered the wrong message.

My lengthy exposition on the arguments and methodologies of intercultural modernism and postmodernism has been my attempt to speak from an informed and historically conscious point of view: to be “outstanding in the field.” What makes this study unique, however, is that I developed my concepts in tandem with my practical experience, during which—on very many occasions—I felt the isolation and bewilderment of someone out standing in a field. In 2005 I formally brought together these parallel pursuits. When it was determined that I would participate in the PTMTP for a third time, I saw an opportunity
to take advantage of my insider’s position on the project by doing a qualitative study. I carried out most of this research in May and June 2006 during the project’s run in Toronto, Prague and Wikwemikong. The experience, however, was significantly more challenging than I had expected—practically, personally, emotionally—and the limitations I experienced, coupled with the productive thinking that the experience inspired, meant that my techniques of the research had to evolve. Subsequently, my relationship to the research has changed; I have changed what it is, exactly, that I am *doing*. For this reason, I introduce my research methods as a story of how they came about; a fitting form in any case for a study sceptical of scientist abstraction in cultural analysis, but fitting also because my study did not begin with a hypothesis or theory to be proven, but with stories to be told and impressions that haunted.

**Making Research Failures Meaningful**

The stories in the Prelude to this thesis were presented as moments of epiphany—organized into narratives and no doubt embellished and romanticized in many retellings over the years, whereas the following impressions are scattered and unclear. They featured powerful moments of recognition, the strangeness of unfamiliar spaces, states of discomfort, confusion, unawareness and embarrassment. These preoccupations—each germane to both performance and interculturalism—were clear to me when I chose my methods, even if I had not yet put them into words. What was also clear to me was where I needed to look for these things: my own experience, the stories of others, the complex arena of rehearsals, and even in spaces outside of the theatre. Further reading was placing new and newer frames around my experience, and I knew that my experience of the forthcoming 2006 project—the third I had participated in and the first in which I was not a performer onstage—would be different than the others. I knew that it would be challenging to be both an insider with creative input and
an outsider with research interests, but I hoped that the challenge would prove rewarding. I wanted my methods to take advantage of my position by productively transgressing the boundaries between practical and scholarly work in the theatre. I was not looking for a way to illustrate poststructural theories of culture and I was not writing a postmodern ethnography; I did not yet know what these were. I was looking for a way to talk about the issues that I thought mattered.

In my 2006 ethics proposal for my qualitative research, I identified three research methods:

(i) **Interviews.** A series of three interviews with participants from each side of the project; one to be conducted before the project, another during, and a third some time later.

(ii) **Journals.** Participants would keep a journal of their experience, and would share it with me once the project had ended.

(iii) **Dialogue Journals.** A dialogical journal on paper between the project’s participants and myself.

At that stage, my methodology involved *supplementing* a materialist/social semiotic analysis with qualitative fieldwork. The character of the qualitative research was data collection: assembling further texts from the field that could be analyzed alongside performance texts. Methodologically, it exhibited a postmodern concern with process and the fraught politics of cultural collaboration across political and economic barriers. But there was also a “closet modernism”—in Keir Elam’s sense of a “closet semiotics” that obscures a “hidden semiological agenda” (195)—in its desire to substantiate messy experience and ongoing processes into cultural artifacts for analysis.

This was my design, but the field had its own designs on me. By the time I had finished my qualitative research, I had conducted twelve interviews but had solicited only...
one journal. The reason for this was simple: the unavailability of time in the busy itinerary of the project. I had not expected this to be a problem because we were only scheduled to rehearse for four hours per day. Also, I could not have anticipated how challenging the work would be for the participants—how creatively and emotionally overwhelmed they were by their experience, and how this would mean that it was difficult to ask for their time and attention outside of this for journal writing or interviews, tasks that were additionally taxing on their energy. Those interviews I conducted during the project all had an exasperated feeling of being on time stolen away from enjoying the project’s simpler pleasures, such as playing soccer outside the theatre, or having a drink before the evening’s campfire.

I first experienced this as an acute failure: that I was not pushing people hard enough to reflect on their experience; that I was not adequately extricating myself from my own difficult experience; that I would be left with too little material to analyze. Exposure to work in the methodology of ethnography, however, has made me realize that “failures” of this sort happen all the time, and that the most interesting work turns research obstacles into opportunities to learn substantive and methodological lessons. The qualitative researcher that is properly tuned to their subject in their field should be open to the deficiency of methods prepared “in a lab,” so to speak, and should be open to new methods. That my methods were built on assumptions I didn’t know I was making meant that their failure could be made meaningful. For example, I came to realize that participants were probably disinterested in journals not because they did not care about the meaning of their experience, but because the prospect of converting such difficult, emotionally intense and deeply physical experience into words on a page on a daily basis was probably unattractive—or, at least, not something to which they were willing to commit. The simple, joyful intercultural encounter of singing...
folk songs around a campfire had much more to offer than journal writing by lamplight. The resistance I faced opened an important question for me: was participants’ reluctance to reflect a natural aversion to an impossible task on their part, or some telling strategy of avoidance? In this way, my experience with my research methods—and not just the “data” they offer—enters the investigation.

As much as I experienced my partly thwarted research efforts as a failure, I was at the same time, quite instinctively, adapting to my situation and finding another way. What was not an original part of my research design was what has become a central element to it: reflection on my own experience. Nowhere in my ethics proposal did I explicitly note the value of my own experience in my research, and nowhere did I even mention taking field notes, yet I recorded my experience wherever I could: on paper, with my laptop, and using a portable digital recorder as I traveled around with the project. Of course, I had always meant to take notes, to situate myself in the research, but this became more central than I had anticipated.

While practical matters were changing the nature of the research, so too was further reading that offered a different, richer critical frame to place around the whole project—that of ethnography. This re-framing changed my methodology as well as my methods, altering both what I was doing and how I could describe what had been done. Constructing my investigation as an ethnography of theatre means that I would now present my research methods quite differently than I had in 2005. Though “changing” the methods during an investigation might offend the spirit of scientific study, it is perfectly in keeping with the open, reflexive spirit of a postmodern ethnography of intercultural theatre as I have proposed it. In fact, the methods are not so changed; interviews and journal writing still figure
prominently, and those methods that I “add” are actually post facto acknowledgements of fieldwork that I did and had always planned to do. In other words, I was doing ethnography without really knowing it.

Research Methods

Let me then say that this study uses four ethnographic research methods: participative inquiry, auto-ethnography, interviews, and immersion. I will now outline three of these in brief, identify the material or experiential data that each offers, and suggest why each is used.

(i) Participative Inquiry. The first of my research methods is participative inquiry: the participation being the fact of my involvement in the PTMTP, and the inquiry comprising my initial and ongoing reflections on that participation. My original research design took my own presence largely for granted, referring frequently of “my proximity to the work” and my “close vantage point,” as though the value of my participation in the PTMTP was specifically, and only, in the access it offered to other participants’ experience. In retrospect, I see that this was a curious compromise on my part between the critical stance of the distanced, objective academic and that of the qualitative researcher who must be “in the midst.” In the field, the reality and force of my own presence and implication in what I was doing was not incidental, not merely a “consideration” that one might add to an analysis, but rather a central, determining condition of what the research was and could be. For the most part, this study focuses on my participation in the 2006 incarnation of the PTMTP (The Art of Living) rather than the 1999 (Man and Woman), or 2004 (The Myths that Unite Us) projects. While I will draw from these earlier projects at points, my formal, concerted research in 2006 makes that project the best site of analysis.
Materially, participative inquiry produced a set of field notes (the majority of which were recorded during the first phase of the collaboration in Prague in May, 2006), along with an assortment of other items from the field, such as photos, programs, itineraries, etc. Experientially, my participation offered me a conflicted position during the collaboration between the different creative and political viewpoints and interests of the groups, as well as between facilitator and researcher roles. In “Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research,” Michelle Fine argues that occupying a position between Self and Other, between Researcher and Researched, provides an opportunity to explore the very “structures of Othering” (72). For Fine, to “work the hyphen,” means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, “happening between,” within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence. (72)

More recently, Fine has spoken of the “weight” of the hyphen, referring to the complex ambivalences, emotions, and embodied experiences of living in the interstitial space of the hyphen, between identities or subject positions (Fine, Salah and Zaal 174-75) as well as the hyphen between one’s sense of local and global identity, considering those “who live intimate lives on the fault lines of global conflict” (Fine and Sirlin 164). Each of these hyphenations describes the in-between spaces of my qualitative research.

Participative inquiry placed me “on the hyphen,” where I could experience epiphanic moments in the creative process, watch others navigate difficult compromises, and work with creative ideas toward a theatrical performance. Throughout, I observed and recorded what was happening around me. That my reflection began, quite literally, while I was participating, meant that I often had to execute difficult “inward” and “outward” turns of focus. The research frame I had built around my involvement meant that I had double vision
in the rehearsal room, trying to contribute positively to the artistic process while at the same time mentally recording impressions and considering what I was seeing and doing “on the fly”; doing a good job of the former often meant suppressing the latter by quickly “filing away” impressions and questions for later reflection. Subsequent chapters of this study will extend this process by further conjuring and considering impressions and events from my notes and experience, a process that I consider to constitute the next method.

(ii) Auto-ethnography. In Interpretive Ethnography, prolific author on the subject of qualitative methods Norman K. Denzin describes auto-ethnography as “a turning of the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur” (227). Auto-ethnography understands writing itself to be a method of inquiry, as opposed to merely as means of “reporting” from the field. In Writing Culture, James Clifford notes that the ideology behind the understanding of ethnographic writing strictly as “keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, ‘writing up results’” has “crumbled” (2). In “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” Laurel Richardson makes a strong argument for writing as a process of analysis: “Although we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis” (516). Richardson points to a class of experimental ethnographic writing that she calls “evocative representations,” which “deploy literary devices to re-create lived experience and evoke emotional responses” (521). This writing is self-consciously imaginative and creative, “allow[ing] the field-worker to exaggerate, swagger, entertain, make a point without tedious documentation [...] and say what might be unsayable in other circumstances” (521). Similarly, Carolyn Ellis describes a
method she calls “evocative ethnography,” the analysis of one’s experience through creative writing, and she notes the challenge of narrating one’s own story of the research while still saying something substantive about the subject at hand. Like Ellis, I too wish to avoid deconstructing my experience and subjectivity to no avail, failing, in the process, to “get something said,” but like her I see this process as being “closer to telling an evocative and dramatic story and farther away from trying to get all the ethnographic details ‘right,’” showing the reader how interaction works “so that the reader might participate more fully in the emotional process, not just observe the resolution” (127). The text I began this section with was an evocative, autoethnographic text, of a sub-type that Richardson would call “a narrative of the self” (521). My case-study has put evocative auto-ethnographic writing into communication with other data to serve the discussion of pertinent creative, cultural and political issues.

(iii) Interviews. A crucial component of my qualitative research has always been interviews with participants of the PTMTP. I wanted to do interviews because I understood that the very different cultures and traditions of the constituent groups of the collaboration meant that individuals had very different perspectives not only on what the project was creating—the substance and nature of the performance—but also of the whole “gesture” or “performed act” of the project itself. Therefore, it was important that I interview participants from each group involved. I conducted twelve lengthy interviews: eight during the project in May 2006, two shortly thereafter, and two more the next year during my exchange to the Czech Republic. There were ten interviewees: four from UTSC, three from De-ba-jeh-mu-jig, and three from DAMU.
Doing interviews well is enormously challenging. Their simplicity in procedural terms—ask some questions, get some answers—disguises a minefield of hidden conditions, intentions, and relational dynamics. This was all the more true for me as an implicated researcher. I was not without guidance, however; a great deal has been written about the principles and techniques of interviewing in studies of human subjects (see Clandenin and Connelly; Chase, *Taking Narrative* and *Mothers and Children*; Fontana and Frey; Hoffman; Kvale; Mishler, *Research Interviewing*; Weiss) and I tried to glean as much as possible from this body of writing before I conducted my interviews. I mentioned earlier the difficulty I encountered getting interviews done owing to the unavailability of time, but a greater difficulty was one that I certainly had anticipated: the difficulty, given my involvement in the project as a facilitator, of getting participants to speak openly and honestly with me as a researcher. As I will illustrate in the next chapter, this sometimes literally meant asking them to express their criticism about decisions that I had myself made. I believe participants were remarkably frank about their discoveries and difficulties, their epiphanies and crises, but I must remind myself that all of their comments are inflected by the control they understood me to have in the rehearsal room (regardless of how partial that control may have been in reality), not to mention my friendship with the project’s other facilitators. I am confident that I achieved a good rapport with my interviewees, something I know I did in part by openly acknowledging my own challenges with the process. I tried to make it clear that despite having done the project twice before, and despite now having some creative input, that I recognized, and welcomed a discussion of any of its perceived successes or failures. This may seem like an obvious point to labour, but “open discussion” of the work was in this case not taken for granted. The structure and tight time-frame of the PTMTP did not allow
much room for reflection on “the bigger questions” about how the collaboration was functioning, or what the implications of what was being produced might be (we might well ask how unique it was in this respect). The interviews did not “carry over” conversations that one might have expected to happen among the group after a rehearsal. Excepting the kind of heated discussions that took place privately at the bar, the interviews created a unique space for reflection for myself and the participants.

(iv) Immersion. In an article entitled “Why Observing Matters,” Virginia Nightingale notes that the immersed researcher is “(1) often a member of the group, (2) authorized [...] by the group to undertake the research, and (3) pursues a research task that serves the interests the group has identified as important” (119). She distinguishes this from the embedded researcher, who “is in some way aligned with the research subjects, while not actually belonging to the group.” Drawing on Nightingale’s definition, I see my more extended research in the contexts of the PTMTP as immersion.

In nearly every interview I conducted, participants suggested that they wished they had more time to learn more about their co-participants and about the project’s other contexts. I shared their anxieties, which were for me greatly amplified by my intention to interpret the PTMTP in such a way that was properly sensitive to the different cultural perspectives at play. That I had participated in the project before did put me at an interpretive advantage over those who had not, but in fact I hadn’t spent a lot of time in each context: a four-day stay in Wikwemikong during May 2004, and two three-week stays in Prague in 1999 and 2004, all of which was during the itinerary of the projects. These brief and rushed experiences did not prepare me to do the kind of interpretive work that I wanted to do. I decided that I would try to learn more about the contexts of the project specifically outside of
the experience of the PTMTP by spending extra time in each. Since my relationship to each context was so different, and the valuable experiences one might discover in them were so unpredictable, I did not approach this immersion with a formal research agenda. I had some obvious interests: I wanted to see what happened “normally” at the different theatres (that is, outside the project); I wanted to see other theatre and art in each place; I wanted to see what sort of work the project’s participants usually did; and I wanted to network with other people unassociated with the project and learn about what they do. In Geertzian terms, I needed to “thicken” my descriptions with more information.

What was necessary and/or possible was different for each of the project’s three contexts. The UTSC context of the PTMTP was already very familiar to me: I had worked with many of the UTSC participants outside of the PTMTP, had attended UTSC for five years as an undergraduate drama student, I was and still am a friend to a number of the project’s UTSC supporters and facilitators, and I have throughout my research been based in Toronto. The other two contexts required more work. In the case of Ypsilon, I felt that I had more to learn about the Czech Republic’s politics and history, as well as its rich theatrical culture (and about the deeply complex relationship between these two). The changes I observed between my trips to the Czech 1999 and 2004 made it clear to me that this was a country in a state of incredible transition with profound political and social effects filtering down into everyone’s personal history and creating a special relationship there between generations. I knew language would be an obstacle to me in learning more about the culture, but by taking classes and teaching myself since 2004, I brought myself up to a basic level of comprehension and conversation in Czech. I was also quite “foreign” to Debaj’s context. Because Debaj had only joined the project in 2004, their context was the newest to me.
Before 2004, I had little direct experience with any Native Canadians and had only ever driven through a reservation. That Wikwemikong was only seven hours from Toronto didn’t make it seem any bit closer, culturally; I often felt that I shared more cultural, historical, mythological and religious points of reference with the Czechs. Intent on learning more about both contexts, then, I visited each on two more occasions:

July 2006: One week in Wikwemikong. Soon after the project, Debaj invited one of the Czech DAMU students to perform in their mainstage show, *Sunlight Woman* in August 2006. I met this actor at the airport, traveled with him to Wikwemikong, and spent the first week with him as he began rehearsals for the production. He and I both stayed with Wikwemikong community elder Audrey Debassige, and participated in cultural activities around town. Conducted 2 additional interviews.

December 2006: Two days in Wikwemikong. Again staying with Audrey Debassige, I met a number of new interns with the company. Conducted interviews of interns, as well as with Debaj Artistic Director and PTMTP participant Joseph Osawabine for an article published in *Canadian Theatre Review* (Freeman “Beyond Reaching Out”)

May 2007: Three weeks in the Czech Republic. Staying by myself in the centre of Prague, I explored the city and saw performances at Divadlo Ypsilon and elsewhere. I had planned on conducting more interviews, but unfortunately a tragic event kept me from doing so.¹⁵

August to December 2007: Four months in the Czech Republic. Sponsored by the Centre for Eurasian, Russian and European Studies at the University of Toronto, I spent a semester at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. While there, I took a Czech language course in immersion, as well as a course about Czech Theatre history at Charles’ University in Prague. I saw plenty of theatre, and made new Czech acquaintances working in other theatres in other cities.

What I was looking for in these contexts was always changing, and some of the most valuable experiences were unanticipated. For example, I spent the first two weeks of September 2007 in Brno without knowing anyone in the city. It was the only time in my life that I have spent any length of time in a new place without knowing anyone and without knowing the culture or the language. It was informative for me to experience that sense of alienation, and to then feel it slip away as I learned the city and made new friends. Other
experiences were equally surprising. In July 2006, I attended Canada Day celebrations on the reserve in Wikwemikong and spent a full day at a community pow-wow. Later that week, I visited Kwanjaa Lake—a secluded and sacred place on Manitoulin Island—and spent an evening with some members of Debaj swimming and enjoying the serenity (Debaj has been thinking of ways to use sound to somehow reproduce a soundscape-performance at, or of, Kwanjaa Lake). In Prague in May 2007, I was able to attend a book launch of the first anthology of Native Canadian plays in Czech—Čekání na Kojota (Waiting for Coyote; see Kolinská)—and see a cabaret performance by Thomson Highway in Ypsilon’s studio space (the same space we rehearsed in for the PTMTP). While on exchange later that year, I attended a conference of Eastern European scholars about representations of Canadianness, did a guest lecture at Charles’ University in Prague about theatre in Toronto, and met and talked with Canadian Ambassador to the Czech Republic Michael Calcott, Canadian Governor General Michaeelle Jean, Czech-English translator Paul Wilson, and Native playwright Drew Hayden Taylor. It is difficult to put the value of all this in material terms, but in experiential terms my immersion has provided me with a much broader understanding of these cultures and has allowed me to interpret the PTMTP while standing on more solid ground.

Friendship and the Limits of Participative Inquiry

To recall Michelle Fine’s phrase, “working the hyphen” between Researcher-Researched and Insider- Outsider throughout this study has been challenging. As I conducted this study and wrote up the results, I sometimes found myself at the limit of what was possible or appropriate to say about a project in which I was personally invested. Chief among my
investments were my friendships with many of the participants and facilitators of the
PTMTP. What story would these people—my friends and research subjects—want me to
tell? How would they react to my conclusions? I was especially concerned about my
investment in my relationship with Michal Schonberg, who remains a dear friend and
mentor. Would Michal, from whom I distance myself artificially by referring to him as
Schonberg, feel that I have represented the project fairly?

As long as I wrote about the PTMTP in neutral or flattering terms, I was not likely to
experience any pangs of conscience. But as will become clear later in this study, I began at
some point to think that it was the more troubling moments in rehearsal that were the most
important to discuss. In fact, it was the gap between intercultural theatre’s optimistic claims
and the much less resolveable individual experiences of the work that seemed to be most
fully addressed by my data and most worthy of analysis (and this will be a focus in Chapter
Four). The difficulty lay in discussing troubling moments without them being read as an
implicit negative judgment of individuals or of the whole project. It felt as though each
mention of an unsavory moment in or missed opportunity in rehearsal was a minor betrayal. I
wasn’t so concerned about this problem as I conducted the research—at that time
conversations about how confusing or difficult the PTMTP’s process was came with ease. It
was when I had to write through this experience and offer it up to public discourse that
difficulties came.

I had to accept these difficulties as acute. I have taken solace in the fact that other
researchers have faced the same difficulties. Relevant to this study is a thesis written by
Janice Hladki, who writes through her experience collaborating across racial boundaries with
a set of female artists including Monique Mojica, Djanet Sears and Kate Lushington. Hladki
notes that her personal investments in friendships with her research subjects “produce boundaries of what is sayable/unsayable” (127). Any researcher who adopts the participative, ethnographic methods that Hladki and myself have adopted will likely face the same challenges. In the end, I accept that my own investments in friendships through the PTMTP does place limits on what I can write, and openly acknowledge that my portrayal of the PTMTP can only ever be partial. That said, I believe I have taken some risks in presenting troubling moments, and for that I accept responsibility. I hope that I have portrayed everyone with the respect and fairness they deserve.

Process and Narrative in Research and Praxis

*Barter is an orchestrated performance in which the entire event is a socio-theatrical metaphor of its intentions, which are to induce contact and an exchange between cultures.*

— Ian Watson, from “The Dynamics of Barter” (100)

Having established some of the basic features and inherent challenges of the research methodology, I will now highlight two themes of the research that I believe are especially important to collaborative intercultural theatre: process and narrative. The seven-year duration of the PTMTP was a process for me on many levels: it was (and continues to be) a process for my development as a creator and a scholar; it was a process of incrementally understanding of other, complex and elusive cultures; and its work, even in performance, was to me always a demanding process of learning for everyone involved. These creative and personal processes seem to crystallize into stories that I found myself reflecting on and retelling. Some stories circulated until they lost their specificity—until it was the story itself that I was remembering, and not the original experience. Because these two constellations of meaning seem to figure prominently in both my qualitative research and my practical
experience, I offer here a brief consideration of each in relation to collaborative intercultural theatre.

**About the Project**

Since I began this study, I have had the intuitive sense that process is particularly important in intercultural theatre, even more so in collaborative intercultural theatre. Lo and Gilbert have remarked that collaborative intercultural theatre “tends to emphasize the processes and politics of exchange,” that it is “marked by tension and incommensurability,” and that it “may resist forced synthesis, revealing instead both the positive and negative aspects of the encounter” (39). Accessing and analyzing these qualities of the form has required me to find a methodology and methods that see theatrical creation and qualitative research as *process*, as verbs instead of nouns. I have taken my cue in this from the form itself.

Collaborative intercultural theatre work is very often called a *project*: Prague-Toronto-Manitoulin Theatre Project, the Sarajevo Project (Theatrefront), the Dialogues Project (Modern Times Stage Company). It is difficult to say where this convention began, but it suggests an association with social or developmental work initiated by government (think the Federal Theatre Project of the American Great Depression) and with popular or documentary theatre (think Moisés Kaufman’s Laramie Project). Whatever its origins, the idea of the project has taken on connotations that are interesting for my purposes. In their book *The Art of the Project*, Johnnie Gratton and Michael Sheringham critically engage with the concept of the “project” across artistic practices, and they offer the following inclusive description:

Projects offer instances of site-specific, or more broadly site-sensitive, cultural research that regularly shift our attention from art to life, from the aesthetic to the extra-aesthetic, and from the personal to the collective (in short, from the grand recit
[grand narrative] constituted by the modernist project of art to a more localised and more provocative art of the project). At the same time, in line with the figure of the ‘participant-observer’ propounded by contemporary ethnography, the writer or artists engaged in a project tends not simply to abandon the register of the personal, but rather to envisage the very practice of the project as blurring any neat distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, experience and experiment. (2)

I find this passage very relevant to my methodology and praxis. To begin with, the spirit of the project in this articulation aligns with that of ethnography. Though Gratton and Sheringham deal principally with contemporary French photography, their definition highlights a few elements of my own methodology and praxis: the significance of specificity, the need for an expanded understanding of what (and where) the aesthetic is, and the value of the implicated researcher/artist. They point to two more important features. The first is that the process or experiment does not respond to “the stirrings of inspiration, or meeting the demands of a finished product” (1), as much as to a “strong investigative impulse reflecting concerns of a sociological or anthropological nature” (2). “Indeed,” they write, “the ‘end-product’ may so strongly condone the energies of process that it figures itself as one more stage in the process” (2). Whereas “modernist” art first offers itself to interpretation within literary traditions and critical discourses, projects first offer themselves up to social or political imperatives. This leads to the second key feature of the project: “re-siting.”

According to Gratton and Sheringham, the sociological or anthropological thematic shift is concomitant with a shift in professional roles that re-site the subject outside of their usual disciplinary or even physical position. The researcher-as-artist-as-ethnographer, with his or her multiple perspectives and oscillating turns between reflection and practice, frequently and productively “re-sites.” Importantly for me, Gratton and Sheringham reveal that the spirit and intentions of collaborative intercultural theatre projects themselves also closely align with those of ethnography. I have never had the feeling that this form of theatre invites itself
to be taken up within a literary discourse, but rather that, on the contrary, it announces its “end-product” as part of a process that is trying to do something. Ethnography, therefore, is appropriate to theatre “projects” for one simple reason: it can evaluate them on their own terms. But to this I would add an important caveat: that theatre presenting itself as processual or instrumental will often also have literary inclinations and ambitions, that it exists as both and that none of these conceptual or ontological categories are ever precise or exclusive. While the “project” may be marked as processual, it also exists and circulates as product in a number of equally important ways, an ambivalence that is coded in the word project itself—both a “thing” and an “objective.”

What collaborative intercultural theatre is trying to do, in other words, is not so easily determined. Though it is surely important to question who sets those agendas of theatre work and with what implications, pursuing the intentionality of theatre work as a way of decoding any and all cultural discourse is incongruous with a poststructural methodology. In her book, *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*, Helen Nicholson looks at “applied” forms of theatre that “take place outside mainstream theatre spaces,” and are “specifically intended to benefit individuals” (2). Acknowledging the problematic blurriness and implications of these forms, Nicholson posits that perhaps their most defining feature is their intentionality—the “aspiration to use drama to improve the lives of individuals and create better societies” (3). This, Nicholson aligns with a number of historical theatrical traditions, such as popular agit-prop theatre, Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, and drama-in-education. As an educator, Nicholson inevitably values theatre for its power to transform on a social and personal level, but she balances her optimism with a healthy skepticism:

If applied drama is socially transformative, is it explicit what kind of society is envisioned? If the motive is individual or personal transformation, is this something
which is done to the participants, with them, or by them? Whose values and interest does the transformation serve? (12)

I believe Nicholson’s questions skirt around the edges of the crisis of ethics, and issue instead from within Jeyifo’s third discourse, and I like that they point to the intentionality of theatre without submitting to it in such a way that obliterates the agency of its participants. Nicholson unseats intentionality from the logocentric position of the artist, director or facilitator, and is instead considered a force—a more visible and therefore more powerful one, perhaps—that acts in concert with others. I share Nicholson’s scepticism about the intentionality of theatre work. There is no doubt that collaborative intercultural theatre projects often wear their intentions on their sleeves, and that even if they don’t, they are at least openly premised on the potential for people from different places in the world to benefit from working together. These projects do envision a particular “kind of society,” even if their facilitators do not begin with an experimental hypothesis (Barba excepted). Commonly, that vision is the same one shared by twentieth century interculturalists from Appia to Brecht, from Brook through to Ong Ken Sen: the world as a richly diverse global community, with people who are similar enough that they can understand one another but different enough that they can teach one another. This ubiquitous claim—with which few would disagree—is essentially an argument that intercultural theatre is educational, that it benefits its participants in a way beyond what we might expect of other theatrical forms. While that claim is rarely made outright, it is often implicitly present in the programs, websites, news reports and promotional materials of intercultural theatre projects. When I began this study, I thought to bring drama-in-education scholarship to bear on it because I wanted to understand how the claim is borne out in reality. As my analysis in Chapter Four will demonstrate, the process can be educational in ways that were not intended.
About the Story

Several of my research methods involve exchanging stories: auto-ethnographic stories from the field, stories told by interviewees, stories from my experience in immersion. Much of the creative process of the PTMTP itself involved sharing stories, either for the purpose of “getting to know one another,” or as a way to generate material for the performance. Within the PTMTP as within my research, stories became a way for me and my fellow participants to orient ourselves in what was otherwise a confusing and disordered experience. We used stories to understand one another, to impart information, or to give shape to a creative or cultural epiphany. Like everything else in the business of cultural study, however, stories do not exist in a vacuum: they are told within a specific situation and with submerged meanings and intentions. The meanings of stories always elude the teller and the listener; the story we think we are telling is only one of many. Therefore, though my case-study will “read” stories from the field using close textual analysis, it will also consider the performative dimension of stories. A story that imparts information or orders a specific experience also “performs” a relationship between teller and receiver, making it intriguing that collaborative intercultural projects are usually processually and dramaturgically structured around the exchange of stories.

This was especially true of one dramaturgical antecedent of collaborative intercultural theatre: Eugenio Barba’s “barters.” Barba first used the term “barter” in 1974 to describe a performance situation in which two groups meet to perform for each other. In barters, different forms of performance were exchanged, such as folk songs, dance, poems and stories. Barters were all unique, ranging from spontaneous performance exchanges to more orchestrated events of several hours, in which audiences were ushered around multiple
performance sites. Even the more orchestrated events, though, were typically followed by a period of unstructured dialogue between groups. This was very important because, in Barba’s opinion, the performance and the techniques, the products, were less significant in barter than the act of communicating across cultures itself. Writes Barba: “A man cannot meet another man if not through some thing, from this comes the paradox of the utility of apparently useless things […] The theatre as barter is connected to the utility of waste, of potlatch, of the dissipation of energies not used to produce things, but to produce relations” (Beyond 103). For Barba, such “useless” things as techniques and stories were only a pretence for the sharing of a temporary community. Barters were to cultural dialogue what phatic conversation is to everyday dialogue: they existed to establish or maintain social relationships rather than impart information. Ian Watson notes that the whole performance event of the barter, the intercultural “gesture” itself, became more important than any of its specific techniques or representations, and he coins the term “event-narrative” to point to the “story” that the whole event is “telling,” what Helen Nicholson calls its “vision of the world.” Watson’s observation, cited start of this section, that barter was effectively “a socio-theatrical metaphor of its intentions, which [were] to induce contact and an exchange between cultures” (100), underscores for me the sense in which the very structures of theatrical process tell a particular story. This counter-intuitive observation—that theatre may be a metaphor of its intentions and not the other way around—demonstrates for me the tricky interplay between process and story, vision and structure.

The centrality of story in mind, my methods stand to benefit from discussions in ethnography about how experience is “storied.” Postmodern reformulations of ethnography that have broken down positivist authority have only increased an interest in narrative, seeing
it as a natural human mechanism whereby we try to come to terms with—and without necessarily smoothing over—a disordered and difficult reality. “Narrative,” writes Donald Polkinghorne, “is the linguistic form that preserves the complexity of human action with its interrelationship of temporal sequence, human motivation, chance happenings, and changing interpersonal and environmental contexts” (7). Even after theatre work takes place, participants in collaborative intercultural theatre who story their experience are still engaged in the process of negotiating cultural identity—their own as well as that of others. They re-create cultural identities and orient themselves in configurations of cultural, social and political power. Kristin M. Langellier, who writes about the performance of identity, explains the emancipatory potential of personal narrative:

> Personal narrative situates us not only among marginalized and muted experiences but also among the mundane communication practices of ordinary people. Placed against the backdrop of disintegrating master narratives, personal narrative responds to the wreckage, the reclaiming, and the reflexivity of postmodern times. (442)

Langellier and other theorists of ethnographic work such as Susan E. Chase, Donald Polkinghorne and Dwight Conquergood make cases for the rich field of meaning available to those who study personal narrative closely. Throughout, their emphasis is on the agency of individuals to determine their relationship to the world. Langellier writes,

> The personal in personal narrative implies a performative struggle for agency rather than the expressive act of a pre-existing, autonomous, fixed, unified, or stable self which serves as the origin or accomplishment of experience. (446-47, emphasis in original)

Ethnography, then, offers a rich body of theory and methodology to support narrative inquiry that “seeks to locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data” (Polkinghorne 13).
Conclusion: Entangling in Methodology

In this chapter, I have outlined the theory behind a postmodern reformulation of ethnography that is appropriate to the analysis of collaborative intercultural theatre. The methods I found to match my methodology have evolved in the dialectical spirit of qualitative research that must be sensitive and attentive to a shifty and complex field of inquiry. I have presented this whole approach as a significant departure from the intercultural modernist tradition, but one may ask at this point: how unique is this approach? If auto-ethnography is merely reflection on personal experience, and immersion is just the requisite contextual knowledge that any responsible scholar needs to interpret his or her subject, does this really constitute a novel approach? Doesn’t contemporary theatre scholarship often use such methods as interviews, personal communications with playwrights or directors, or, certainly, participation in the creative process? Does this methodological shift, then, merely amount to a change in nomenclature or emphasis?

It is beyond my scope here to survey the state of methodologies presently in use throughout Canadian theatre scholarship, but my feeling is that many scholars in the discipline are presently using ethnographic methods. These may be naturalized, modernist, “to see is to know” strategies, or may come with a more postmodern consideration of their particular “ways of seeing.” A glance through the most recent issue of Theatre Research in Canada—issue 29.1, themed “Space and Subjectivity”—reveals that in addition to semiotic analyses and close readings, scholars are quite comfortably using methods that look exactly like what I have called participative inquiry and auto-ethnography. Kathleen Irwin’s article in that issue is especially ethnographic, drawing heavily on her experience creating a community art piece in Saskatoon called The Bus Project (its “applied” intentionality
signaled by the marker “project,” again). What makes Irwin’s methodology doubly interesting is her unusual degree of attentiveness to it: she makes a discussion out of the suitability of her research to its subject, noting that “The Bus Project illustrates the impossibility of foreseeing all possible outcomes in research driven by multiple agendas and cultural perspectives” (95), and that the project forced her and her co-researchers “to look beyond the initial research parameters and continually renegotiate [their] terms of reference” (96).

Irwin notwithstanding, however, my feeling is that ethnographic methods are often taken for granted in theatre studies at present. To twist Keir Elam’s pithy phrase, literary or social/materialist semiotic approaches to theatre are being supplemented with a “closet ethnography”: direct experience and field knowledge implicitly intended to offset the researcher’s critical distance by lending them a degree of “insider’s authority.” Most commonly, this takes the shape of a description of an experience in the theatre, but it may also include descriptions of performance environments, pedagogical or creative experiences in rehearsal, personal anecdote or history, interviews with playwrights or actors, etc. That such closet ethnography does not acknowledge itself is not as important to me as the fact that closeted research strategies come with equally closeted obligations and intentions. Following Clifford and Marcus, the discourse of ethnography has been deconstructing “insider’s authority” for decades, with significant implications for how research is carried out and how experience in the field is interpreted; that is, with implications for how and what we can “know.” To confront the implications of those strategies is not necessarily to expose insidious or negative aspects of the research or the subject; on the contrary, it is to benefit from a more careful consideration of the relationship between the two. It is to question our
own “ways of knowing” in ways that should illuminate—and not lead away from—the subject itself.

Theatre studies can benefit from both semiotic and ethnographic approaches, and promisingly, there are early signs of a specifically postmodern (re)connection between intercultural theatre studies and ethnography. In an article about Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen’s 2000 production of Desdemona, Australian theatre scholar Helena Grehan engages with but moves beyond negative critical reactions to the play. Grehan chooses instead to write of her own experience while watching rehearsals that she says “were breathtakingly beautiful as well as incredibly engaging” (117). Similarly, in a 2005 essay about the Journey to Con-Fusion project, Peter Eckersall productively analyzes representations in that project’s rehearsal exercises, taking into account the unique cultural positioning and perspectives of its collaborating companies. Grehan and Eckersall’s approach is perhaps more broadly semiotic than it is ethnographic, but the attention they give to process at least suggests an ethnographer’s interest in other experiential dimensions of theatrical creation.18

Meanwhile, semiotics continues to reconcile itself with poststructuralism. A recent issue of Semiotica concerning the present state of theatre semiotics features some discussion of how it might be further detached from a scientist or positivist tradition (see de Toro, Sidnell) together with suggestions for how it might be better used to open up communication across cultural difference (see Turner, Knowles). Ric Knowles, in fact, suggests that semiotics might profitably draw on “other disciplinary approaches to performance analysis, including those such as the feminist, materialist, ethnographic, anthropological and postcolonial” (“Vital signs” 236). I would add to this list approaches to performance in
education, where ethnography has always had purchase, and where the negotiation of identity in creative processes has always been at issue. Anthony Jackson’s recent book *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings*, for example, profitably balances semiotic and ethnographic approaches to examine in specific contexts the relationship “between theatre’s aesthetic dimension and [its] utilitarian or instrumental role” (1).

In my next chapters, I will explore the case-study of the PTMTP first by introducing its contexts and structures, and then by unpacking specific moments from the 2006 project *The Art of Living*. As I do so, I will begin to thread my discussion into the methodological, theoretical and practical issues that I believe are most relevant to collaborative intercultural theatre. As I go forward, I am conscious of ethnography’s own particular challenges. To begin with, I will have to balance the kind of individual voice and agency promoted in the ethnographic analysis with the more typically materialist/social data from the field, including information from the project’s sponsoring institutions, the artistic facilitators of the project, the written materials which announce and promote the work, the audience’s horizon of expectations, the historical circumstances of a participating culture and the situatedness of the particular participants within those circumstances, and so on. While I have argued for the inclusion of individual voice within the analysis, I must be careful to deconstruct any presumed “authority” that personal narratives will have within the context of my analysis. As Michelle Fine notes, a “risk lies in romanticizing of narratives and the concomitant retreat from analysis” (80).

There is a challenge, too, in not becoming “mired” in poststructural analysis. The move away from a modernist, logocentric methodology comes with a blanket suspicion of any interpretation, in which case reflexive research and poststructural kinds of concerns can
effectively prevent one from, as it were, “getting something said” about the subject at hand. This may be the most threatening “entanglement” of all. In an article about some of the methodological dilemmas of ethnographic research, Caroline Fusco observes in her own work a tension between “theoretical commitments to postmodernism and poststructuralism and saying something ‘true’ and ‘accurate’ about people's actual lives and the spaces they inhabit” (176). Interestingly, Fusco notes that the word “accurate” literally means “done with care” (163), a kind of “careful” or “best possible” truth not dissimilar from Geertz’s best guesses or Barba’s “bits of good advice.” Like any methodology, the one I am proposing will have blind spots to match its strengths. My hope is that a postmodern ethnographic approach will add to the available interpretive toolkit without claiming any greater “truth value” than others and without becoming slave to its own rigid theoretical formations, and that it may help productively navigate the sometimes messy and confusing machinations of intercultural theatre.

Notes to Chapter Two

1 However, the French school also went on to become foundational to cultural studies, notably through Claude Levi-Strauss, and to modern sociology, notably through Emile Durkheim. Thus, all of the distinctions in the early part of this chapter depend on some broad statements about the features of these heterogenous critical discussions.

2 Bogatyrev actually wrote about both folk performance and theatrical performance, and how such elements as characters, tropes and rhetorical strategies sometimes crossed over between the two. An interesting example is his 1923 essay, “Czech Puppet Theatre and Russian Folk Theatre,” recently translated into English and published in *The Drama Review*.

3 Emil Volek writes an interesting interpretation of Mukařovský aesthetics. He says Mukařovský distinguishes between poetics “on the outside” as autonomous and in isolation and poetics “on the inside” where the aesthetic value becomes “transparent,” such that “The work of art appears, in the final analysis, as an actual collection of extra-aesthetic values and nothing else” (34). If this insider position is something that “aesthetics has been looking for in these postmodern times,” as Volek puts
it (35), then my own methodology provides one possible path out of many.

4 Bogatyrev’s studies of Russian peasants are remarkable intercultural ethnographies that seem to pay great respect to their subjects, they also fit within the Eurocentric tradition that divides the world into “primitive man” and “educated European” (Bogatyrev 147-48).

5 The present vogue of the “cosmopolitan” paradigm (see Gilbert and Lo; Appiah Cosmopolitanism) is testament to the fact that cultural identities are increasingly taken to be multiple, changeable, and strategically articulated. Cosmopolitanism is a fraught paradigm: it nearly reinstates wholesale a transculturalism salvaged from the crisis of ethics and presumes more mobility and opportunity than the vast majority of people in the world have. That said, all scholars in the field must now come to terms with the fact that we live in a world of less geographically described cultures, that we often connect to more elusive virtual and diasporic communities.

6 In the first category is Susan Knutson’s recently published article about The Stevenson Noh Project: The Gull, a Japanese-Canadian collaborative intercultural theatre project “addressing the injustice and suffering that still surrounds the Japanese Canadian internment during World War II” (9). Methodologically, Knutson’s analysis consists of a run-down of the institutional partnerships at play, citations of the facilitators’ intentions, a close textual analysis of the script, and, finally, citations from two reviews. In lieu of other data, the reviews stand in as evidence of the project’s efficacy. Thought the project was implicated in a community process of “witnessing” painful stories, the analysis locates the performance’s meaning making in the interaction between the dramatic text and the critical reception, and not in the “community” of performance. In the second category is William Peterson’s analysis of Singaporean director Ong Keng Sen’s 2000 production of Desdamona. Frustrated at the audience’s “unforgiving” reaction to that production, Peterson wonders whether intercultural performance can ever result in anything more than an “alimentary” process of consuming other cultures (89).

7 Schechner uses Ceylon even though by the time the article was published, in 1973, the country had become Sri Lanka.

8 My study mostly uses “theatre” instead of “performance” because I am concerned with a formal type of theatre, but I like that it also serves to dissociate myself from Performance Studies and its association with Schechnerean interculturalism.

9 While I am approaching ethnography from a theatre studies background, it is interesting that ethnographers have been increasingly turning to such a “performance-inflected vocabulary,” reflecting their renewed interest in “process, improvisation, contingency, multiplex identities, and the embodied nature of fieldwork practice” (Conquergood 362).

10 Geertz borrows the idea of “the said” of social discourse from Paul Ricoeur, who defines it as “that intentional exteriorization constitutive of the aim of discourse thanks to which the sagen—the saying—wants to become Aus-sage—the enunciation, the enunciated. In short, what we write is the noema [“thought,” “content,” “gist”] of the speaking. It is the meaning of the speech event, not the event as event” (qtd. in Geertz 19). This is related to the performative aspect of the entire intercultural gesture that I later discuss in relation to Barba’s barters.

11 The large body of writing out there about qualitative methods in social and cultural research offers a number of closely related methods describing implicated researchers of human subjects. I considered and rejected a number of these. “Participant observation,” for example, is too clinical and
deattached to describe my research. More appropriate is “action inquiry,” a widely adopted and adapted model in qualitative social science inquiry that blurs the boundaries between researcher and practitioner and hopes to “open” research to multiple voices (see Torbert, Reason, English). According to William Torbert, within action inquiry, “the researcher’s activities are included within the field of observation and measurement, along with the study of other subjects,” and that material records such as recordings of meetings and field notes “allow participants or other interested persons to find post hoc clues about what else besides the defined variables and the pre-supposed explanations was going on in a specific situation” (147-49). Dick Allwright has adapted action inquiry with his “Exploratory practices,” hoping to switch the emphasis in action inquiry from organizational or systemic issues “to issues to do with relationships and quality of life” (360).

Ultimately, I found that the invented term “participative inquiry” more economically described the character of my involvement and analysis without presuming a corrective agenda.

12 In fact, the particular narrative I began with happens to look like Imagework, a psycho-suggestive qualitative approach developed by ethnographer Iain R. Edgar: an “imagination based research method” that involves the generating or remembering images for analysis whose significance is not immediately apparent (10).

13 The complete transcription of my conversations with PTMTP participants runs to over 200 pages.

14 Nightingale offers two examples of immersed researchers: an academic who is also a fan of a particular cultural phenomenon (pointing to how they speak “into” and “out of” that community), and the media activist conducting action-research that both examines and advocates for a particular cause. The simultaneous inward and outward perspective describes well my position within the PTMTP and its contexts.

15 While I was walking to meet the participants from the project on my second day in Prague, I received a phone call and was told that one of the participants in the 2004 project—a very close friend to all the Czech performers—had died the previous night in a traffic accident. When I met with them, I found a group stunned and devastated by the loss, and I knew my interviews would have to wait.

16 Nicholson’s reservations about the conceptual category of “applied” theatre resemble my own about emphasizing the qualitative experience of individuals in creative process over artistic product. She comments, for instance, that even utilitarian drama relies on “aesthetic engagement for [its] power and effectiveness” (6), and, conversely, that “traditional” kinds of literary drama can certainly offer “powerful social critique” (8).

17 In the field, methodologies (and historiography) were notably discussed in the 1992 issue of Theatre Research in Canada dedicated to Theory and Methodology that occasioned the journal’s name-change from Theatre History in Canada.

18 It is interesting that their (partially) ethnographic research strategies lead both Grehan and Eckersall to consider the ethics of representation, as I myself do in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER THREE

The PTMTP in Context

[It] is difficult for cultural products to maintain transcendency. Metaphysical entities are by nature and definition utterly transcendent of the physical. Cultures are not; they are, or at least may appear to be, composed of empirically inspectable and thus comprehensible parts, readily reducible to the ego’s “already known.” Artaud and Brecht were lucky: they never had to face having the numinousness stripped away. But, at the same time, they also never came to the awareness that it was really their own selves that they were embracing with such quasi-religious fervor.

— James Harbeck, from “The Transcendent Function of Interculturalism” (22)

Coming to Know

On an afternoon in November 1999, I arrived late to the first workshop for what we were calling “The Prague Project.” When I walked into the Leigha Lee Browne Theatre at UTSC, a group of my peers were seated around a man with a guitar. They were learning a folk song and recording its Czech lyrics phonetically in their notebooks. I took a seat and tried to catch up, scribbling in pencil something that looks like this under the heading “Czech song”:

meřvčick ni/v(ey)ziame
a ← spone nyako ↓ dobu
vyetchino vyetchino eh alt chas n(
scorro stale/i mnoho zh(i)eztume)

Beside which I wrote in English:

we all live
at least sometimes
most of the time
almost got up/many women

The musician was Jan Jiráň, one of two artists who were visiting from Prague and who were about to lead us through a workshop. I particularly remember the sounds of this first experience: those difficult sounds in Czech words, the diction and grammar of Czech-
accented English, the latin-flavoured music and rhythm of the songs, the soft qualities of Jiráň’s voice. It was all new; not having traveled anywhere and being quite new to theatre, I felt joyfully out of my element. I know I wasn’t just looking forward to doing theatre in some new way or for the chance to travel to Europe, but was also really looking forward to being in the company of people whose interests, vocabulary, and points of reference were unknown to me. What were their interests? What were their talents? What did they want from us?

I return to this experience and those I wrote about in the Preface because I think they reveal why it is that intercultural theatre work happens at all: the excitement of the encounter with the unfamiliar and strange. But re-telling these experiences after the fact, I am aware that they tend to gather a patina of “numinosity,” to use James Harbeck’s term from the epigram. That is, narratives of cultural encounter with the unfamiliar get told and re-told as catalytic events in the process of transformation or self-realization. The memorable, disorienting experiences I wrote about in the preface, for instance, probably could only have happened on my first trip to Prague; any insights I have into the character and culture of Prague on visits today are less numinous and more everyday. The temporalities of encounter, then, affect what “story” can be told. Given how brief collaborative intercultural theatre projects can be, this is worth considering. Recall the example of the early twentieth-century interculturalists like Brecht and Artaud, and how the insights that they derived from encounters with “foreign” performance actually depended on them not understanding the foreign on its own terms or within its own socio-cultural context. As Harbeck puts it, Brecht and Artaud’s contact with the foreign
was so brief (and fully numinous) that they did not even have the chance to realize that it could be otherwise.

By contrast, my “coming to know” the PTMTP was a decade-long process of experience and knowledge gathering that stripped away the numinousness. This chapter tells the story of this process, emerging at the other end with a fuller picture of the PTMTP. At stake in this chapter—and in my whole methodological framework by extension—is how the additional contextual knowledge available to an ethnographic approach to theatre work contributes to analysis and interpretation. As the last chapter made clear, I proceed here under the presumption that such contextual knowledge makes descriptions thicker and interpretations richer, adding, as I put it, what modernist theatre ethnography subtracted. Exactly what information thickens and enriches, however, is not easy to know. Clearly, making any account of the project intelligible requires knowing basic things about the project’s founders and history, but deciding what else to include or how to balance the information depends on what will be most beneficial to the analysis that follows. Chapters Three and Four of this study therefore evolved simultaneously as I made decisions about what issues were most worth teasing out of my qualitative data. For reasons that will become clear as I go along, this process made it clear that the Ypsilon/Czech context demanded an extra degree of attention.

Certainly, some contextual knowledge is needed for my case-study, but equally certainly, there are limits on what context can contribute to interpretation. While I understand the PTMTP a great deal more today than I did in 1999, it cannot ever be completely intelligible. In the first place, the highly selective nature of the memories and material records of theatre work limits what information is available post facto. But it is
also true that the complexity of the PTMTP was such that it was often unintelligible in its own moment. Returning, for instance, to those song lyrics I quoted above a decade after I had written them, I was moved to try to further decode that experience. I can now see that the “implausible translation” I recorded is in fact fairly accurate, but perhaps a more precise translation would reveal something salient about that numinous, first meeting. I wrote to my friend and co-participant Jiří Havelka in Prague to see if he could provide a clearer translation. He responded:

Barry, honestly, I have no idea what it could possibly mean, it doesn’t make any sense - I would guess that it’s about life and universe and other things like this.

I have no doubt that the lyrics of the song were mostly unintelligible to the Canadian students throughout that first project, even though the song went on to be a part of the public performance shown in Prague and Toronto. But Havelka’s response suggests that the song may have been equally unintelligible to the Czechs. Here, then, the written record of the first moment of my engagement with the PTMTP did not add much to my memory of it, save to illustrate the not insignificant point that for the participants of all the groups, a partial understanding of the content of the work often had to suffice.

**Misconceptions/Misperceptions**

Like Brecht and Artaud, my numinous early experiences may have depended on my limited knowledge of my working contexts. I had some wrong, or at least oversimplified, ideas about places and people involved in the project. Misconceptions—judgments formed prior to my experience—led to misperceptions—wrong perceptions in the (then) present. Dispelling some misperceptions took years.
I will address a few of these misconceptions in this Chapter, but I begin here with a misconception of the Czech Republic: my expectation that it was still in the grip of communism, despite having been officially democratic for a decade. In 1999, the idea I had of communism was a montage from childhood of television images from behind the iron curtain. I remember being especially tuned into this dimension of Prague on my first visit, and there was plenty to see. For that first PTMTP, the Canadian group stayed at the Hotel Krystal—a grey, unadorned communist-era hotel in the suburban Dejvická district of northwestern Prague. The outer reaches of Dejvická share with a ring of other Prague suburbs rows of nearly identical, grey, blocky apartment buildings that—to my Canadian eyes accustomed to neatly coiffed suburban landscapes—looked hostile to human existence. The Hotel itself was grey inside and out, and thin panel walls divided its rooms. Infrastructurally, the city appeared to be aging—the hotel, the metro, the trams, the highways, the bridges, everything was worn and roundly tagged with graffiti. The misconception led me to see what Prague had been rather than what it was becoming.

The reality is that then, as today, Czech society was undergoing rapid and fundamental shifts. Today, only ten years later, Prague seems to beam in bright colours. The Hotel Krystal is still there, as are the rows of apartment buildings that I now call by their Czech name, paneláky, but many of these buildings are now painted in arresting bright colours as if to answer back to a period of Czech life that some Czechs regard as bleak. This and many other things I see in my experience of the Czech Republic today are visual indicators of a much broader, slow social and political transition from communism to capitalism. A less subtle indicator is Palladium—a bright glass-interiored ultramodern shopping mall that opened in Prague’s Old Town in 2007.
Such signs of the Czech’s transition out of communism are available to any tourist, and it is easy to assume that they are manifestations of a fundamental cultural change. My ethnographic immersion in context has given me a fuller sense of the reach of economic and cultural change throughout the rest of the country. Over the last decade, I have visited and stayed in places that are very different than Prague, such as the Czech’s second largest city, Brno, towns such as Liberec, Plzeň, Olomouc and Uherské Hradiště, or villages such as Jemnice and Veselí nad Moravou. In the first place, these visits have revealed that the visual markers of Western capitalist influence—the appearance of Western franchises, the modernization of infrastructure, the beautifying of public space, or the restoration of old architecture—are unevenly distributed throughout the country. But my immersion has also made the more subtle social elements of the Czech’s transition more available. Getting to know many Czechs over the last decade, I’ve come to appreciate how the massive socio-political shift filters down to all levels of personal and professional life, affecting family relationships and professional attitudes. In families and in the theatre profession, I have seen generational tensions between an older generation whose life was defined by the climate and limitations of pre-revolution Czechoslovakia, and a younger generation whose country is the Czech Republic, people roughly my own age whose memory of the communist period is through the lens of an almost fond remembrance. It is interesting to see life under communism treated with a levity that feels like nostalgia in popular Czech films such as Pelíšky (1999), Vratné Lahve (2007), and Václav (2007). These films feature characters that resemble what Polish philosopher Josef Tichner calls the homo sovieticus, the sympathetic and pathetic
individual who may have wished for the downfall of the old regime but who also finds
themselves lost in the new (qtd. in Kozlowski 3).

My greatest misperception in 1999, however, and one that I know others shared,
was in seeing our experience in the theatre as representative of all Czech theatre. I will
unravel this misperception as I now describe the two co-founders of the PTMTP, Jan
Schmid and Michal Schonberg, and the schools with which they are affiliated.

**Jan Schmid and Studio Ypsilon**

Jan Schmid is a prominent artist, actor, director and professor based in Prague. Schmid
began teaching in 1971 at DAMU (*Divadelní fakulta Akademie múzických umění*, the
Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Musical Arts), which is the theatre school within
Prague’s Charles’ University. Schmid is known to Czechs as a film and television actor
and as the co-host of the Czech television literary revue program *Třistatřicettři* (333), but
is best known as a theatre artist, and in particular as the Artistic Director of Prague’s
Studio Ypsilon Theatre. Ypsilon (nicknamed “Ypsilonka” in Prague) was the Czech
“home” of the PTMTP.

In this chapter, I will devote more space to Ypsilon than to the other participant
groups. The reason for this is that despite being a tripartite collaboration, the PTMTP was
in part an outcome of the theatrical formula developed by Schmid at Ypsilon, as will
become clear throughout this and the next chapter. A secondary reason for a sustained
account of Ypsilon, though, is that little has been written about it so far in English.
Though Ypsilon is a successful, well-attended, state-supported theatre approaching its
fiftieth anniversary, the fact that it performs exclusively in Czech (and regrettably
without the surtitles that another popular theatre, Švandovo divadlo, now uses) and leans
heavily on humour of a Czech style and subject makes it less accessible to non-Czech audiences and scholars. Ypsilon also has a low profile within English-language accounts written by Czechs. For example, Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz’s 1979 book *The Silenced Theatre* never mentions Ypsilon or Schmid, and Jarka Burian’s 2000 book *Modern Czech Theatre* glosses Schmid and Ypsilon in a few pages. Most surprisingly, Ypsilon is almost entirely absent from the pages of the popular Czech-language theatre journal *Divadlo* (each issue of which, remarkably, is now completely translated into English and published under the title *Czech Theatre*).\(^1\) Of course more is available in Czech, but some of it was published by Ypsilon itself (for example, the immodestly titled *Legenda jménem Ypsilon*, or *Ypsilon: The Legend* published to mark its fortieth anniversary) or is otherwise uncritical (for example, *Jan Schmid: Režisér, principál, tvůrce slohu*, or *Jan Schmid: Director, leader, creator of style*, a 2006 book comprising pieces by Schmid’s colleagues and students.

Ypsilon was formed in 1963 in the North Bohemian town of Liberec by Jan Schmid, who chose the name Ypsilon as a response to the then Studio X in Brno. It began as a company of young theatre students under the auspices of the Severoceské Loutkové divadlo (North Bohemian Puppet Theatre) called Studio Ypsilon in 1963. SLD became the Naivní divadlo in 1968 and it still exists (it benefitted from a beautiful renovation in 2003). On the strength of its growing reputation, Ypsilon separated from Naivní divadlo in 1969 and made the move to Prague in 1978. In the 1980s and 1990s, Ypsilon developed into a successful repertory theatre with a company of about two dozen actors and with some productions that have been performed for decades. Ypsilon has cultivated
a full theatrical brand that saturates the productions, the marketing and even its physical theatre spaces. I will come back to this later.

Ypsilon is located just a minute’s walk from the city’s Old Town and is housed in a glass-and-steel building remodeled in 1925 by modernist architect Jaromír Krejčar to house the Olympic Department Store (Sayer 213). It shares the building with offices of the Insurance company ČSOB Pojišťovna, whose logo beams bright from above the busy commercial street. Immediately adjacent to the theatre is a popular Tesco grocery and department store, the Národní třída metro station and a transit hub where five tram lines converge, all of which make the theatre’s environs a bustling place at any hour. From the street, one first encounters Ypsilon’s box office and café/bar, at the back of which (as is typical of Czech theatres) is the public entrance to the theatre. Entering the theatre this way, one descends a stairwell lined with production photos and Jan Schmid’s artwork that ends at a mezzanine level where there are washrooms, a coat-check area, and Ypsilon’s administrative offices. From the mezzanine one can descend again into one of two spaces: a small, black, unadorned backspace that seats 140, or Ypsilon’s mainspace, a newer and larger art-deco theatre that seats 170. In the larger theatre, the rounded apron of the stage juts out into the house, and the bright, primary colours of the seats and walls create a playful, almost child-like atmosphere. In contrast, the claustrophobic darkness of the smaller studio space, and its location two levels below the street, lends it a clandestine feel.

There is a close relationship between DAMU and Ypsilon. Czech participants in the PTMTP were not repertory actors at Ypsilon (though a few have been), but rather students of Schmid’s at DAMU (for this reason, I will refer to them as being affiliated
with DAMU rather than Ypsilon). The theatre program at DAMU divides its students into “classical” and “alternative” curriculum streams, the former employing traditional text-based methods of psychological character development, and the latter employing a multifaceted training regimen that has students learning musicianship, puppetry, acrobatics and dance. Every Czech participant in the PTMTP was a student in the alternative stream at DAMU; at the time of their participation in the PTMTP they were either part way through or have completed their studies at DAMU. Some of these students had also been selected by Schmid to work at Ypsilon, for which purpose Schmid set up a young company, the Studio Studia Ypsilon (the “studio of the studio”). This group of students creates performances that have runs in Ypsilon’s backspace. The program for the third PTMTP described the Studio Studia Ypsilon this way:

The studio of the studio Ypsilon Theatre was from its very beginning, that is from the 1994/1995 season, conceived of as a specific creative platform, established as part of a professional theatre. It was an experimental undertaking, bringing together pedagogical, academic and practical theatrical activity. Consequently it exists as a kind of “ferry ship” sailing between [DAMU] and the Studio Ypsilon Theatre. (Program, Myths)²

A select few of students who have worked with the young company have sailed aboard the “ferry ship” at Ypsilon to become full-time repertory actors in its mainstage productions, and most of these have been participants in the PTMTP at some point.

A significant misperception that I (and others) held during my work on the PTMTP was that DAMU and Ypsilon were metonyms of all Czech theatre and training. The DAMU students who have worked on the PTMTP have been exceptionally skilled performers, who, with seemingly little preparation or effort, improvise cleverly and confidently, play a set of instruments, sing together, do acrobatics, puppetry, and so on. In their presence, myself and other UTSC students were quickly left feeling...
professionally surpassed. That they were skilled was not a misperception; the misperception was rather in taking these actors to be representative—as though Czech performers in any theatre in Prague or elsewhere in the country would have the same broad skill set. It was not until 2007 when I was living in Brno that I came to fully understand that these performers are, in fact, exceptional. I learned that Brno’s own university affiliated music and dramatic arts school JAMU (Janáčkova akademie muzických umění, the Janáček Academy of Musical Arts) is the smaller of only two programs in the Czech Republic of that calibre; the other is DAMU. Czech participants in the PTMTP, in other words, were the beneficiaries of the most prestigious training in the country. In one of my interviews, I asked Katja, a Czech participant in the PTMTP in 2006, about her training at DAMU:

Katja: To get in there it was quite hard because it was about three-hundred persons trying to get in, and they finally get to ten people, so it was quite hard for me. I was training with my father—my father prepared me for the exams. For me finally it was not so hard because I was there only two days, and after two days all the exams were done.

Barry: In both of the streams, the classical and alternative, are those people expected to be theatre professionals? Is that the idea?

Katja: I think it’s the expectation. It is the idea of the school. […] After school, they should be in the professional theatre. In the classical branch, the people are getting more work in the classic theatres in Prague. In our branch… (pause) The class is alternative so the people are alternative. Some of them are making alternative theatre. That means that they are making other things. Some people are trying to get in some theatre, or do some theatre, and then recognize that they don’t want it. […] I know some people who did study at DAMU, and they are not professionals. Not just professionals, but they are not actors, they don’t do theatre. (1 Dec 2007)

Though most students of this most prestigious program in the country go on to a career in the professional theatre, some use their skills to go into other professions. Which leads to a related misperception that I maintained for some time during my participation in the
PTMTP: that Czech actors make an easy living because they live in a theatre-saturated culture. That the Czech is a theatre-saturated culture is true; in a country of only 10 million people, the Czech boasted over 200 professional theatres as of 2002, 53 of which were repertory theatres (Simek 3). Prague itself has over 50 theatres in a city of only about one million. More remarkable still is that Czech theatres play to an average of 85% capacity (Simek 4). This saturation has made theatre an integral part of cultural life in Prague and the Czech Republic at large. I have met many Czechs over the years who are not themselves in the theatre, or even in the arts, but who nonetheless are familiar with Czech playwrights, directors, plays and theatres (no doubt a complex historical/cultural phenomenon that I will take up again later in this chapter). Still, all of this does not necessarily translate into easy work for actors. In a 2007 interview, I asked Katja:

   Barry: Can you explain why it is—I read somewhere recently that Prague has more theatres—this may not be true—but that it has more theatres than any other city in the Western world. So—

   Katja: I think it can be true. It’s like 50 theatres, even more.

   Barry: So how is it possible that it’s so hard to find work?

   Katja: Because the numbers of actors are even bigger! (1 Dec 2007)

Work is not easy to find. The present recession has also made matters worse for actors as theatres tighten their purses and simplify their activities. Ticket sales are down as well; the numbers show a 5% slide in attendance over the last six years (185 theatres operating in 2008 to an average capacity of 80% (“Czech Theatre in Numbers” 75)).

Taking DAMU students to be representative of all Czech performers was mistaken, then, but taking Ypsilon to be representative of all Czech theatre was even more mistaken. To first-time participants in the PTMTP (such as myself in 1999), it is
easy to get this impression. The enthusiasm with which its sold-out houses respond to its mainstage performances certainly make it seem like a vital theatrical voice in Prague. For one thing, recalling the moment from my Preface, curtain calls at Ypsilon’s performance go on for far longer than they do in any Canadian context. I later learned, however, that this is characteristic of theatre in many places in Europe, and also that Ypsilon occupies a particular theatrical niche in its city. Though performances at Ypsilon play to nearly full houses every night, I have met many Czech theatre artists who have not been to Ypsilon or who have not been interested in their productions for years. The reason for this is that Ypsilon has a very distinctive style—the same style in which the participants in the PTMTP worked. This style is applied so uniformly to Ypsilon’s productions that it constitutes what I will later discuss in this chapter as the Ypsilon “brand.”

**Michal Schonberg and UTSC**

Michal Schonberg was born to a British mother and a Slovak father in England but spent his youth in the north Bohemian towns of Most and Ústí nad Labem. He narrowly avoided the Prague Spring and “normalization” period by immigrating to Canada in 1966. In Canada, Schonberg went on to study and work in theatre, and became a dramaturge at the Stratford Festival during Robin Phillips’ tenure. Schonberg began teaching at the University of Toronto at Scarborough in the early 1970s, and actually founded the college’s drama program in 1971. During his time at UTSC, Schonberg has taught courses in theatre history, Asian theatre, and acting and directing and has directed senior drama students in a faculty production every other year.³ He has seen a great deal of change at the school. Channeling the ideas and spirit of Marshall McLuhan, UTSC was conceived as a technologically progressive college that would deliver recorded lectures to
students with a closed-circuit television system. The idea was hardly popular (students couldn’t bear watching pre-recorded lectures all day), and the TV studio with its roomfulls of 1960s-era television equipment was transformed into drama studio. The space underwent a second major renovation in 1989 that turned it into an intimate black-box style theatre with flexible seating for about 110 spectators. A third renovation in 2007 transformed the space again, this time mainly revitalizing the theatre’s backstage, front of house, and rehearsal spaces.

The drama program at UTSC has academic and practical components. Drama majors at the college take academic courses such as Shakespeare or Asian Theatre, and also have the opportunity to do practical courses in technical theatre, directing and acting. The program aims, in its own words, “to serve students who intend to major in Drama, students who intend to specialize in Visual and Performing Arts, and students who have a casual interest in drama and theatre” (“Calendar 2009-2010”). The program is not, therefore, aspiring to produce theatre professionals, and unlike the drama program at UTSC’s sister suburban campus the University of Toronto at Mississauga, it is not affiliated with a more theatre-oriented college (though the possibility is there now that Centennial College has built a large, new campus immediately adjacent to UTSC). Over the years, the majority of students in the drama program at UTSC have fallen into the category of those with a “casual interest” in drama and theatre, though recent changes to the program (i.e. a first-year gateway audition into the acting courses) have raised the standard of requisite commitment to the discipline. The UTSC participants in the PTMTP were selected by audition from the students in this program and they have been many of the most keenly committed of the program’s students. These students are in their early
twenties usually, making them the younger among the PTMTP’s participants. By my count, of these approximately fifty students, about ten have gone on to work as amateurs or semi-professionals in theatre or music, about six as secondary school drama teachers, about five as theatre administrators, and about five as working as professional actors. This contrasts with the PTMTP’s other participant groups, whose participants are nearly all working theatre professionals even at the time of their involvement in the project.

The first PTMTP: Man and Woman / Muž a Žena

Every collaboration needs a spiritual Godparent, someone who will look at what you are doing and then during a conversation casually suggest that you really should speak to his friend so and so because what you are doing is very interesting, but what you could be doing together might be even more interesting.

— Michal Schonberg (“Prague-Toronto”)

Every “numinous” encounter, perhaps, needs a “spiritual Godparent.” While a collaborative intercultural theatre project is usually made possible by a complex set of funding and administrative supports, they are usually initiated by a core group of artists that want to work together. Over the ten years that the PTMTP operated, it involved many institutional and private supporters, an evolving administrative structure, a long list of support staff from artistic collaborators to videographers, and about one hundred student performers. At its centre, however, was the friendship and collaboration of its two founders: Jan Schmid and Michal Schonberg. In this section I will convey a sense of the project’s basic features by describing how Schmid and Schonberg executed the first PTMTP (which again, was actually the PTTP in its first two incarnations). My purpose here is to explain the basic structures and timelines of the project, so I skip over many details of the artistic and cultural dynamics of the work.
The story of the PTMTP actually begins back at the dissolution of communist Czechoslovakia, when new political freedoms meant that new professional relationships could be formed between those of the Czech diaspora in North America and those who had stayed following the Prague Spring in 1968 (the invasion of Prague by Soviet forces that began a period of greater communist control). One of the first formal occasions for establishing such relationships was an event organized at New York University that was actually the confluence of two events: a “Conference on Czech Literature” at NYU, and a multimedia event called “Prague Spring 1990,” a “cultural multimedia event celebrating the new freedom and power of literature in Czechoslovakia” in the words of its producer, Susan Halsey (“Susan Halsey”). In an interview included in a DVD for the PTMTP, Michal Schonberg notes that this was an important event for the Czech intellectual diaspora in North America, attracting leading artists, teachers and politicians together to discuss the fundamental changes afoot in their home country (Myths DVD). It was a celebration for the Czechs as well; the country’s new president, playwright Václav Havel, sent one-hundred Czech intellectuals to the conference aboard his private jet. Michal Schonberg attended the event, and he met people there who would eventually connect him to Jan Schmid, albeit circuituously. First, Schonberg met faculty from Charles University in Prague, who invited him to come deliver a lecture there about Shakespeare. There, Schonberg met Jan Kolář, the then managing editor of the Czech language theatre journal Divadlo. Kolář felt that Schonberg would benefit from meeting Jan Schmid, and he introduced the two at Ypsilon in 1996.

The time seemed right for Schmid and Schonberg to collaborate. Both were in a later stage of successful professional careers and had at their disposal the resources of
two academic institutions and a professional theatre, not to mention a network of connections and resources in their respective contexts. The idea that emerged was that they could bring students in both contexts together to collectively create a new piece that would then be shown both in Prague and in Toronto. First, Schonberg would need to become more familiar with the Czech context, so Schmid invited him to work at the Studio Studia Ypsilon. In the spring of 1997, Schonberg workshopped Ben Johnson’s *The Alchemist* with the students, and the play developed into a full production in Ypsilon’s backspace, premiering 12 June 1997.

The project was going to be expensive. Given that the project would involve trans-Atlantic trips and hotel accommodations for as many as two-dozen participants, the project required significant financial and human capital. The basic financial agreement of the project was that Schmid would be responsible for organizing and paying for the Canadian visit to Prague, and Schonberg for the Czech visit to Canada. The two set up the project’s structures in 1997 and 1998. Resources came from a number of places. For Schmid, the funds would come from Ypsilon’s operating budget as well as the sponsorship of ČSOB Pojišťovna, the insurance company with whom they share the Olympic building. On the Czech side, administrative support came from Schmid’s staff at the theatre (a different “producer” was chosen each time). On the Canadian side, Schonberg had administrative support from Leah Takata, an administrator in the college’s Cultural Affairs Department who would go on to help organize all four of the projects (and who now lives in Prague). Raising the funds would be more difficult for Schonberg however, because, for the first and second PTMTP at least, UTSC provided only spiritual, rather than financial, support. Instead, Schonberg and Takata organized
fundraisers and solicited sponsorships from the University of Toronto’s Centre for Russian and East European Studies (the same department who sponsored my own exchange to Brno in 2007) and The Frastacky Foundation (a fund supporting projects related to the Czech and Slovak Republics) (“CERES”). Among the many individual contributors to the PTMTP on the Canadian side were two notable individuals who supported the project substantially throughout its ten years: Toronto theatre impresario David Mirvish, and the Czech-born, Toronto-based novelist Joseph Škvorecký. Even with all of this support, however, the PTMTP may not have been possible without the support of a key sponsor for both groups, Czech Airlines, whose discounted fares for the many flights over the years significantly reduced the project’s costs.

During this time, Schmid and Schonberg also each chose students to participate. Schmid selected those senior students of his at DAMU who were also working under the auspices of the Studio Studia Ypsilon—eight students in all (plus an accompanist). Schonberg invited senior students from the drama program at UTSC—a much larger group of sixteen students (also with an accompanyist) of which I was one. From the perspective of myself and my peers at the time, we did not know a lot then about what we were getting into. All we had at hand was the general theme that Schmid and Schonberg had chosen for the project: “Man and Woman.” In preparation for developing material on this theme, we were asked to respond to a number of initial questions such as:

- What is Man? What is Woman?
- What qualities do I like about the opposite sex? What qualities do I like about the same sex?
- How, and as a result of what, did you first become aware of the differences between the sexes?
Each of the twenty-four performers prepared answers that would provide material for the collaboration. In November of 1997, the first formal part of the project took place when Schmid traveled to Toronto to work with the students at UTSC. Accompanying him was Jan Jiráň, Schmid’s longtime musical collaborator at Ypsilon who composes original pieces for Ypsilon’s shows, directs the music, and performs. In the Czech program for what would become the product of the first collaboration, Man and Woman, the workshop is described this way:

…Schmid then worked with Schonberg’s students in Toronto. There, they carried out a workshop on the theme of synthetic theatre and theatre of authorship, which is basically what Schmid teaches at DAMU and uses in practice at Studio Ypsilon and at the Studio Studia Ypsilon. This was the foundation of the project [in Czech, spolecný autoský projekt, or collectively authored project], which was a workshop as well as a meeting of both schools with the possibility of comparing and collaborating. (Program, Muž a Žena, my translation)

The impression here is of an exploratory workshop meant to familiarize the UTSC students with Schmid’s style, and to some extent it was that. But rather than explain and illustrate these principles of synthesis and authorship in isolation, the workshop was immediately oriented around generating material for a performance. We created in a number of ways: by improvising simple situations based on the theme, by doing physical exercises, and by rehearsing music Jiráň had composed and to which the students were sometimes invited to write English lyrics (others had to be learned phonetically in Czech).

As I wrote in the introduction to this chapter, the workshop was an exhilarating encounter with a style of theatre that none of us had known. But even early on, the process was not without its confusing moments. For instance, I was surprised that the only sentence that was used from my four-pages of responses to those man-woman
questions—placed word-for-word in the script—was: “Although I remember where this happened and who with, I don’t remember the impact it had on me at the time.” I was referring to a childhood story recalling my earliest awareness of girls being physically different from boys. As we sequenced the different pieces being created during the workshop, my line was placed after a scene my peers had improvised depicting a young boy and girl playing “doctor” with one another. This manner of dramaturgical collage that had a footnote to my personal story become a footnote to someone else’s, was typical of the PTMTP’s process.4 Actors’ personal stories and reactions to ideas are used, but often altered in the service of the broader themes or relationships being explored. In this way, scenes came together amid more abstract physical or image-based compositions of Schmid’s direction, the scenes punctuated at points by song. For us, it was all exciting, strange and challenging.

But if the style of the work was challenging for the UTSC participants, what made it a more challenging was the fact that Schmid does not speak English at all. Schonberg had to translate Schmid’s ideas to the participants, and the participants’ ideas back to Schmid. This established a kind of rhythm of the work: Schmid would describe what he wanted, Schonberg would translate, we would work through it, Schmid would respond, Michal would translate and add his own ideas, and so on. From at least a logistical point of view, the problem was overcome easily enough; participants adjusted to the extra time and effort it took to translate, and given that over the life of the project more and more of the Czech students were capable in English, there were often multiple translators available. There were even benefits: always having to think about how to communicate and translate ideas attuned everyone to the subtleties of language and representation, and
the fact that those ideas were often best communicated physically led away from over-intellectualization. Schmid himself often had to resort to this kind of demonstrative way of communicating with the ensemble, as DAMU student Jiří Havelka and UTSC student Andrew Tyler note:

Schmid, who had been sitting in the house seats, immediately stood and came up onstage, and without using English, began talking to the young Canadian actors, leading them by the hand around the stage, demonstrating where to be and what to say, and then would continue on in Czech. (Havelka 175, my translation)

Jan Schmid’s got a terrific sense of how to get a scene from kind of—We’re struggling, we’re playing with ideas—And I found when we’re trying to improvise, everyone’s...Not arguing, but just locking horns on what to do next and where we can go with this. And that’s when [Schmid] will come physically onto stage and say, “OK, you do this, and you do that.” And even though we can’t understand Czech at all, we know exactly what he means. And we’ll say “OK, let’s do that. [snaps fingers]” That’s perfect. (Myths DVD)

What was “perfect” for Tyler, however, was difficult for some others. One can discern from this passage a potential problem: that participants would sometimes be led through representations without fully understanding them. This issue surfaced throughout my interviews. Although unquantifiable, I do wonder about the extent to which the simple fact of Schmid’s inability to communicate directly with participants was an acute problem within the collaboration.5

The workshop at UTSC culminated in a public presentation for an invited audience. The performance was a pastiche of thematic material rather than a single narrative. If there was an arc of development to the show it was the stages of human life, from scenes and images of birth and childhood to those to do with ageing and death.

There were eighteen UTSC students in the performance, most of whom sat visibly at the periphery of the stage when not a part of the scene. This configuration—the acting out of scenes in the middle of the semi-circle of actors seated casually onstage—was a motif.
that repeated throughout this and subsequent collaborations. Visually and conceptually recalling Eugenio Barba’s barters described in the previous chapter, this brought to the performances a feeling of playful cultural exchange between the participants. In Barba’s barters, performers would sit in a circle and step into the middle to offer their own theatrical response to an idea in the manner of some improvisatory games. We would often do this during PTMTP rehearsals, and many sequences in the public performances of all four PTMTPs literally re-staged these barters for the audience. For example, the very first scene in Muž a Žena was an abstract sequence in which the eighteen actors moved in slow motion to centre stage, as if wading through a primordial ooze. Coming together in a single, writhing group to the ethereal sound of a dissonant chord, all eighteen members then each suspended the group in a tableaux to make a statement about their idea of themselves, some of which were serious, some playful. From the script:

*Cast declares their individual lines*—lines are presented at the front of the group while facing the audience. While each individual speaks, group freezes. After each person says their lines, they return to the group as if sucked back in. Gradually, the time between each individual line should decrease but people are still moving in stylized movements.

Barry: I am trusting and dedicated, but because of this, I allow myself to be taken advantage of.

*Music: Sing first note.*

Kelly: I find it hard to open up, so I say nothing.

*Music: Sing second note.*

Erin: As a result of my sadness, I’ve been entertaining madness.

*Music: Sing third note.*

Susan: Because of my honesty, everyone thinks I’m mean and I really, really hate that.
This combination of stylized movement, atmospheric sound and personal interjection is representative of this and all the subsequent PTMTP performances.

The visual iconography Schmid worked out for *Muž a Žena* shares qualities with his other artwork: simple line drawings mixed with abstract figures, numbers, and historical or mythical iconography. The romantic and erotic doodles in the program for the show was matched by some onstage elements, such as a recurring focus on sexual discovery or situations, and in costume in the neutral-coloured pajamas or underwear that the Czech women of the ensemble wore in performance. The Czech men, on the other hand, wore street clothes, and the entire Canadian ensemble wore sports jerseys.⁶

After the November workshop performance in Toronto, Schmid and Jiráň headed back to Prague, and there was a general sense among everyone that the workshop had been enlightening and that the performance was well-received by the Toronto audience. The next phase of the project was then organized, but it would not be until the following September that the UTSC group would travel to Prague to meet and work with the Czech students. In addition to the work it did in the workshop, the UTSC ensemble also brought to Prague its performance of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the spring faculty production at UTSC that had intentionally been staged with the PTMTP participants so that it could be performed in Prague.

At 8am on 12 September 1999, the UTSC ensemble arrived in Prague and was rehearsing at Ypsilon by 2pm that afternoon. The Czech students (a group of only eight actors) had prepared material in response to the theme of “Man and Woman,” though their work had not been presented to the public as it had at UTSC. This first day was a show-and-tell, but in the subsequent week the full ensemble of twenty-six worked for six
hours per day under Schonberg and Schmid’s guidance to splice together the material into a performance. At points, this meant integrating into one another’s work, though for the most part the groups took turns presenting pieces they had themselves worked on. A sequence created by the Czech group became the new opening of the performance:

*Beginning: microphone.*

Honza: Testing – one, two, three…

Katka: What is man, what is woman? Man is potassium thiocyanite – KSN and woman is ferrous chloride – FeCl3. The combination of these two colourless compounds yields a beautiful orange-coloured liquid. But it is poisonous.

Honza: Foreign delegate.

Martina: Man and woman are two unrests ambiciously [sic] searching out their other half. Man chooses, woman selects. Both search. They seldom— if ever— find.

Katka: Man tolerates better both alcaline [sic] and acidic environment.

Honza: Man is at home everywhere.

Martin: Psychotherapy. Mental disturbances always begin in childhood.

Honza: I remember when we were playing at Germans and Russians. We also cooked soup from sand and grass and put in a dew worm for meat…while we were playing, I took a girl’s clothes off.

Martina: You played at being in love?

Renata: We also played at being in love, with my female cousin. We took turns playing the boy.

This—and all parts of the performance created by Schmid and the DAMU students—were performed exclusively in Czech during the visit to Prague but were translated into English during the Canadian leg of the project. The Czech contributions to the performance had the same flavour as the UTSC part (because Schmid had facilitated this work as well), with the introduction of scraps of memory or comic remarks and each
actor stepping out to interrupt the last, often with an associated or iconic gesture. That pattern would then be occasionally interrupted by one of Jiráň’s songs performed by members of one or both groups. In this first project, a few of the DAMU students spoke very little English, so participants on both sides had to learn lines and lyrics phonetically in one another’s language. After one week of work, most of which was spent splicing material together but some of which involved trying to create new work, the completed piece was performed on the mainstage at Ypsilon to a full house. The next day the group traveled to Liberec, where the group performed at the Naivní divadlo (the theatre where Ypsilon originated). The UTSC ensemble returned to Toronto on 23 September, and on 6 October they were joined by the traveling Czech group. Rehearsals at UTSC further edited and refined the performance, doing some more improvisation and translation for the Toronto audience. The final performances of the project took place at UTSC’s Leigha Lee Browne Theatre on 14 and 15 October, the Czech group departing on 16 October and bringing the project to an end.

Schonberg was pleased with the results of Man and Woman. A few months later, he wrote a piece for the Centre for Russian and Eastern European Studies’ newsletter:

Looking back at the project it seems futile to try and assign to any of its specific parts the greatest value. It is impossible to separate the pedagogic aspects from the importance of the social interactions or from the personal growth that its participants experienced during the long process of rehearsals and performances. The extra-ordinary effort that the students especially put into rehearsing, writing, organizing, and assisting in the fund-raising provided them with an experience that will stay with them forever. (“Prague-Toronto”)

Schonberg goes on to cite a passage from a note a UTSC student had sent him after the project:

For me, this memory defines the trip; it is a defining moment. At a monastery, in a room full of echoes, a group of strangers sang. I have never heard such a sound,
such fullness, such harmony. When we all lifted our voices together the entire project became clear to me. It was not about the play. It was about a group of individuals who had nothing or little in common, coming together to create something beautiful of themselves and of each other. We are not all the same, we didn’t always act in unison. It is true we are different voices, but I will never forget the harmony we made. (“Prague-Toronto”)

This was the same moment I described in my prelude, and it similarly invokes the numinous quality of the moment and constructs around it a transformation narrative. But the student also hints that the work was not without its difficulties, and in suggesting “it was not about the play,” specifically anticipates an issue that I will address later discussing the fourth project, The Art of Living.

Schmid and Schonberg did not create the PTMTP with the expectation that it would be organized a second time, let alone three more times. Yet, not long after Man and Woman, they began to lay the groundwork for a second project. What made the decision to re-create the project easier was that less work needed to be done; administrative structures had been set up, key sponsors were in place that had now seen the project bear fruit, there were a core of enthusiastic individual patrons of the project on the Canadian side, and organizational lessons had been learned. Thus with many of the same structures and ideas in place, the project was recreated throughout 2000 and 2001 again as a collaboration between only Schmid/DAMU and Schonber/UTSC. This time its theme was I and They (Já a Ostatnì) and it explored the relationship between the individual and his or her community (however defined). A few UTSC students participated for a second time, but otherwise a new group of students was involved. The timeframe of the project would be shorter this time: the workshop at UTSC took place in November 2000, and the Czech and Canadian exchange happened in May 2001. For
many who were involved at the time, this project was thought to be more “successful” than the first, as Schonberg notes in an interview,

The second [project] was generally more successful than the first in my opinion, because we were able to learn from the first and make the changes that we needed. (*Legenda Ypsilon* 289, my translation)

In particular, it was felt at the time that the performance produced by this second project was stronger than it had been with the first. This said, I will not write about *I and They* here, first because it structurally adopted most of the features of *Man and Woman* (with one exception being that the exchange trips took place in May-June, as they did in subsequent projects), and second, because it was the only of the four projects with which I was not involved.⁷

This student exchange and the fact that the PTMTP recreated itself is typical of a feature of collaborative intercultural theatre: that it has a way of perpetuating itself. I suspect it does this because there is such an imbalance between the amount of time and energy that goes into establishing them on the one hand, and the relative brevity of the actual theatre work on the other. In the case of the PTMTP it extended its lifespan, but but in its third incarnation it also extended its scope by including a new collaborating group.

**De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group**

By 2003, the administrative and financial foundations had been laid to run the project a third time. This time, Schmid and Schonberg invited De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre Group (Debaj) into the collaboration. Debaj is a Native theatre collective based on the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve on Manitoulin Island in Northern Ontario.⁸ The company evolved out of a youth theatre company called the West Bay Children’s Theatre
that Ojibwe artist Shirley Cheechoo had started in 1981. Cheechoo, finding that she needed a board of directors and non-for-profit status to be eligible for certain grants, transformed the company in 1984 into Debaj (the name is a half-Cree half-Ojibwe term meaning “storytellers” (Hengen 3)). I will not write too much about Debaj’s history because it has been well-covered in other publications (see Freeman “Beyond Reaching”; Haugo; Hengen “De-ba-jeh-mu-jig”, “First Tellers of Tales”, and Where Stories Meet; King-Odjig), but I will address those of its features that figure into understanding its place within the PTMTP.

First, Debaj has a unique relationship with its community. It is located in Wikwemikong, which is well-outside the urban loci of theatrical activity (the nearest is Toronto, a seven-hour drive away). It is located there because of the group’s desire—today and in its early days under Cheechoo’s direction—to serve the communities of Wikwemikong and its neighbouring communitues on Manitoulin Island. When Cheechoo operated the group with her partner Blake Debassige in the 1980s, the group conducted workshops around in the area, recruited and trained community members as artists, brought in collaborators from outside the community from whom to learn, and also performed their shows on tour. As the group evolved it added more structure to its activities in the community. In 1995, it formed the “Best Medicine Troupe”—a group that would conduct activities such as custom performances, training residencies, and intensive workshops in the community and also at other Native conferences and special events. The expressed goals of these activities were: to engage support and inspire Aboriginal youth; to share resources that could assist youth in overcoming the myriad challenges they face by building their self-esteem; to create positive youth groups; to
develop relationships with community members. ("Dbaajmaataadaa" 2). Today, Debaj
still does all of these things, but has expanded its operations in all directions. It does
outreach work in remote communities that are accessible only by plane, and it also
recruits young artists from Native communities across Canada. Despite this spreading of
reach, however, Debaj is still firmly committed to its home community. Its offices are
still located in Wikwemikong and its summer productions are staged at the Holy Cross
Mission Ruins in Wikwemikong (literally inside hollowed-out ruins of a former Jesuit
school). Today, the group works year round in the newly built 125-seat De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-
Jig Creation Centre in the neighbouring community of Manitowaning and has just seen
the first anthology of their work published (Haugo 27; Hengen Stories).

Closely related to its commitment to community service is its commitment to
education. Debaj is part professional theatre group and part theatre school, and these
activities are difficult to separate out. In many Canadian theatres, “education” or
“outreach” activities will be separated out from the theatre’s production activities, falling
under separate control and taking place at different times in different spaces. At Debaj,
such activities are likely to be carried out by a blend of community members, long-term
students with the group and its core artists (a group of about ten artists who have worked
with the company for a number of years after having originally been recruited from the
community themselves). In 2003, Debaj formalized its efforts to train young Natives by
creating the National Aboriginal Arts Animator Program (NAAAP). Among the unique
features of Debaj’s NAAAP is its three-year duration and the malleability of its
curriculum. Under the heading “What is the structure of the program?” the program’s
brochure indicates that it follows an “independent studies model” and that “after
receiving the foundation elements, each student decides their own curriculum based on their existing and desired skills” (“NAAAP” 9). After an eight-week “familiarization period,” NAAAP students sit down with a core member of the company to plan how the student’s goals and interests will be accommodated within Debaj’s many ongoing projects. In the first two years, the student has opportunities to perform, write, design, build and facilitate activities and workshops. The third year consists of an “arts animator internship,” during which the student “designs and produces a special project of their own with company resources to support them” (“NAAAP” 9). PTMTP participants from Debaj have been a mix of core members from the group and students at different stages of the NAAAP program. Ranging in age from about 19 to 35, Debaj participants have been at the high age-range of the PTMTP ensembles in the third and fourth project.

This will have already made another key characteristic of Debaj clear: it is a deeply collaborative group. They collectively create their shows and they frequently partner with other artists and groups. In my first interview with Malcolm of Debaj, I asked him to describe either the style or spirit of Debaj’s work, and he responded:

Collaboration, really. The spirit… We have a strong spirit of generosity with each other and with the other artists that we work with. We’re a creation company, so we’re always creating new works. And it’s using our collaborative process to develop the works. Collaborative meaning within the company, and also with the artists involved. (2 May 2006)

Debaj’s collaborative ethos is framed by the company as a reflection of the communal nature of Native society itself. Ron Berti describes it this way:

Within the cultural community, the expectation is that each individual is an integral part of the community, with the teachings of sharing and equality. The goal is to become one with, and a part of, the community. It is circular—all things are connected—and ultimately it is a quest for respect. (Hengen, Where Stories Meet 70)
To a large extent, the group is also administrated collectively in that all members are expected to contribute to planning and producing. The flexibility set up within the NAAAP program is knit into the administration of the company as well—every few years the core members renegotiate their responsibilities and change titles. Responsibilities overlap at Debaj, however, as Artistic Producer Ron Berti puts it, “for the most part, the terms we use to describe our roles in the organization are for the benefit of the outside world” (Hengen, Where Stories Meet 72). It was in this way that the group’s present Artistic Director, Joe Osawabine, stepped into the role at the age of twenty-five. Joe was one of those community members Cheechoo brought into the group; he worked on Debaj’s Lupi - The Great White Wolf when he was only twelve years old.9

For all these reasons, Debaj sees its work not in terms of aesthetics or recognition, but in terms of relationships—in the interpersonal rather than the institutional sense. All of the members of Debaj I interviewed independently cited the importance to them of building relationships prior to the work (more on this in Chapter Four). For them, people should know and understand one another before they work together. Of course this takes time, and it is for this reason that the NAAAP program was created to allow for a more sustained training experience.

All of the things I have explained about Debaj were unknown to me at that time I first encountered it in 2003. Not only did I know little about Debaj, I also had little experience with Natives or Native communities. Like many other “mainstream” Canadians (the term some Debaj members use to broadly describe non-native Canadian society), I had some negative preconceptions about the state of Native communities in Canada. If my organizing misperception of the Czech had to do with it crawling out from
under the yoke of communism, then my organizing misperception of Native Canadian culture had to do with it crawling out from under the legacy of colonization: social stigmatization, political marginalization, poor treatment by government, and abuse by the church. All that I ever really heard about Natives in Canada via mainstream media focused on the social issues they faced. I imagined these communities as insular—places that limited and trapped, and not places that one was welcomed into. These issues are of course real—there are many Native communities in Canada still coping with tragically high rates of suicide, alcoholism and poverty. The “2006 National Report Card” on poverty in Canada paints a bleak picture for Native youth: one in four children in Native communities lives in poverty, overcrowding is double the Canadian average, mould contaminates half of the houses and nearly one-hundred communities must still boil their water (“2006” 2).

Wikwemikong, however, has fared well relative to many other reserves (on several occasions I have heard residents speak of it as one of the most prosperous reserves in Canada). When I first visited it in June 2004 there was nearly nothing of the doom and gloom of my preconceptions to be seen. Driving through town, there is not a lot to distinguish it from any other small town in Ontario, the nearby non-reservation town of Manitowaning included. If anything, the condition of the town appears more upkept than those nearby. In fact, as you drive along Highway Six from Manitowaning to Wikwemikong, you know you have crossed the “border” onto the reservation when the pavement on the road improves dramatically. My first impression—as superficial as it may have been—was of a vibrant and healthy community that welcomed us with warmth and generosity—the same way it has welcomed me in each visit since. Since, I have
learned that the community of Wikwemikong has sought out ways to be more welcoming, and that Debaj has had a hand in this. As one member of Debaj described to me:

We [Debaj] partnered with the Development Commission and the Heritage organization to put up signs to make people know that they’re actually welcome to come to the reserve, and that it’s not private property... Debaj played a role in bringing together stakeholders to say, “Hey, let’s get some money and do some nice signage to let people know that they can come here!”... There’s big signs out on the highway now, highway 6 that say ‘Welcome to Wikwemikong.’ It didn’t occur to them before, but they didn’t understand that, for the most part, Canadians see reserves as private property. Or as scary, or dangerous, or many other things. So unless you know you’re welcome, and there’s something that states it, you just don’t go there. (David, 3 Jul 2006)

I had not expected to see the “scary” and “dangerous” in the community, but I had expected to see it in the kinds of stories being told in the theatre. I quickly discovered that the stories Debaj stages only occasionally address the negative history or the social problems facing Native Canadians. Instead, its creative energy lives in the mythology of the different tribes that constitute the community, and with Wikwemikong’s contemporary characters and places. Though as a group it has to deal with the unhealthy aspects of the community every day, it has always preferred to stage positive, sometimes even celebratory stories (a point to keep in mind as I discuss the Northwest Passage scene in Chapter Four).

**The Third PTMTP: The Myths that Unite Us**

By 2003, Schmid and Schonberg had once again set themselves up to produce the PTMTP. This time they invited Debaj to be a third collaborator.

The reason cited by Schmid and Schonberg for inviting Debaj into the
collaboration was that they felt Natives would have a lot to contribute to the chosen theme: myths. Schonberg stated in an interview,

At that point, I thought that if we’re in fact going to be doing myths that involve Canada, we should try to work with people from the First Nations. I had seen the Debaj group performing in Toronto at the Native Centre. I approached them, and they thought it was a good idea, that they’d like to work with us. (Myths DVD)

Schonberg similarly expressed it in the program for The Myths that Unite Us:

The participation of the First Nations theatre professionals provides us with an important guide in the search for myths that unite us. (“Program” Myths)

Though the “should” of Schonberg’s first comment there implies a sense of obligation, I believe the impulse to include Debaj arose out of a genuine respect for and interest in their work specifically. As well, Schmid and Schonberg probably wanted to bring Debaj in simply to refresh the energy of a collaboration they had by this point executed successfully twice using a similar model.

The moment of Debaj’s inclusion was also the moment of my own return to the PTMTP after my absence during the second project. Besides wanting to mix into the ensemble some repeat participants for the sake of continuity, Schonberg also invited me to be a performer in and Assistant Director of Myths because he wanted a Canadian participant to correspond to Jiří Havelka, who Schmid had given the same roles. Being an Assistant Director afforded me a new perspective on and investment in the project, and in January 2003 I sat in on a meeting in Toronto in which Schonberg was discussing the PTMTP with Debaj members Ron Berti (Artistic Producer), Joahanna Berti (Education and Community Outreach Co-ordinator) and Joe Osawabine (Artistic Director). I was struck at the time by the complexity of Debaj’s activities—they were developing productions for their home community, conducting workshops in a number of locations,
traveling to Toronto to perform, and, last but not least, fundraising desperately for the indoor facility they wanted to build (the one completed last year). Still, they were willing to add the PTMTP to their list of projects, and they seemed excited by the prospect of exposing their artists to different ways of working.

Debaj selected six of its artists to participate in the PTMTP: four core members and two of its interns (the NAAAP program was still being formalized at this point). Also accompanying the group would be Artistic Producer Ron Berti and Community Cultural Liaison Audrey Debassige. Schonberg also invited Delaware poet and playwright Daniel David Moses to be a part of the Debaj ensemble. Each of these additional ensemble members made both organizational and artistic contributions to the project. Berti helped the groups create and added his ideas as a facilitator during rehearsals (he was more active as a facilitator during the fourth PTMTP). Debassige served as a producer, helping organize the Czech group and organizing the ensemble’s stay in Wikwemikong. Moses would contribute poetry to the creative process, much of which would ultimately be used as song lyrics to Jan Jirán’s music.

Including Debaj seemed to be a fruitful move for Schmid and Schonberg, adding a unique cultural perspective to the mix. As was hoped, Debaj did make a substantial contribution on the subject of myths, including an extended scene half-way through the performance that had the Debaj and UTSC actors both playing out the Native American creation myth of “Turtle Island.” It was surprising to discover during this third project that Debaj and Ypsilon had more in common than they would seem to on the surface. Stylistically, both groups created theatre nearly exclusively through improvisation and both groups enjoyed direct contact with audiences that could lead to unique moments of
creative discovery during performances. This had a different source for the two groups: for Ypsilon it was a part of their cabaret aesthetic in which performers are always presenting “out” to the audience; for Debaj it came partly from the interactive dynamics of youth theatre and partly from their uniquely close relationship to the community in which they perform. When in 2004 Debaj performed its production of Tomson Highway’s *A Trickster Tale* in Prague in Ypsilon’s mainspace (as a part of the Zlomvaz, an annual showcase of work by acting schools in Prague, Brno and Bratislava), the performers’ playfulness with their roles and the audience, along with improvised moments alluding to their experiences in Prague, made Debaj seem like a natural fit for the Ypsilon audience.

More surprising was that some felt that the Debaj and Czech participants shared a kind of generational sympathy. Quickly cutting through the obviously problematic history of cultural relations between Europeans and Natives (I will address this in the next chapter) was a kind of identification among the young artists about the political positioning of their generation in their respective cultures. In the Czech, the young artists were dealing with the legacy of Communist normalization, and struggling to distinguish themselves from those artists whose careers were both limited and shaped by the conditions of that time. Some of the Debaj artists were dealing with how to put behind them the great suffering of previous generations who had been subject to cultural genocide and abuse. Malcolm, a Debaj participant in the PTMTP, put it this way to me:

[W]e’re pretty much the same generation—They just got out of Communism, which was not all that long ago […] And we’re coming out of five-hundred years of oppression, and we’re just starting to find our voice and our strength is growing as artists, and we’re finding new ways of using the theatre to express what’s important to us. But not so much from a political point of view. […] It’s not a political thing but more of a cultural thing in our case. But there’s a lot of
similarities and where we are at as artists with a new voice, being able to express it. (4 Jul 2006)

While the young artists were dealing with generational baggage that was hardly equal—perhaps not even comparable—what was the same was the feeling of having to crawl out from under a negative cultural legacy in order to build something new.

As much as Debaj made a dynamic addition to the PTMTP, however, their inclusion did not lead to significant structural change to the project. The Debaj group joined the UTSC ensemble for the workshop initially conducted by Schmid in Canada in November 2003, visited Prague in May 2004 along with the UTSC group for the bulk of the rehearsals in Prague, and then traveled to Toronto to host the Czech group in June 2004. The only significant change was that they, too, hosted the entire ensemble on Manitoulin Island. This brief trip—just a few days—occurred at the end of the third project and involved public performances of The Myths that Unite Us in Wikwemikong and West Bay. The performances were held at public schools for an audience of youth, which only added to the sense of the PTMTP’s radical and rapid shift of contexts at the time. Small though this structural change was, it was undoubtedly a highlight of the working on the third project. It was regrettable that the brevity of this part of the project afforded only an impression of Wikwemikong and Debaj’s own environment and ways of working.

**The Ypsilon Brand**

That Debaj’s inclusion did not much change the PTMTP’s structures, method of creation, or style of the public performance produced is a manifestation of a point worth underscoring: that the PTMTP’s processes and product were closely allied with Schmid
and Ypsilon. While the content of all the projects did arise from the creativity of the participants of all groups, the frame and styles of the PTMTP were a product of Schmid’s artistic intentions and inclinations. Schmid’s control over the whole “vision” played out by the PTMTP was an extension of his control at Ypsilon itself. That control is exceptional, even for Schmid’s own context. Jiří Lábus—a Czech film star and the most well-known performer at Ypsilon—puts it this way:

The whole thing is very original, it’s [Schmid’s] theatre, it’s his method, it was his idea to create the theatre, it’s his copyright. It’s similar to [founder of Prague’s Semafor Theatre and co-founder of Theatre on the Balustrade] Jiří Suchý. There are only two people like that in the country who have done “their own” theatre for so many years. (172, my translation)

It may be hyperbole on Lábus’s part (he is writing in a book focused on the work of his employer after all), but Lábus is correct in saying that Schmid’s own personality is expressed in every single aspect of the theatre’s activities. The PTMTP had to fit into this pre-existing artistic structure, and ultimately the performances produced by the PTMTP closely resembled what one sees nightly onstage at Ypsilon. Any work done during the Canadian phase of each of the projects mostly embellished, economized or translated what had already been created in rehearsals at Ypsilon. Though the PTMTP was performed in a number of other places, it was first calculated to appeal to the Ypsilon audience, and that audience had a very specific horizon of expectations. “Every theatre,” writes Jan Mukařovský, “especially a theatre of a pronounced artistic movement, has its own audience which knows the artistic stamp of this theatre, accompanies an actor from play to play, from role to role, and so on” (202). Ypsilon’s audience is a self-selected group to whom its style appeals and Schmid sculpted the performances produced by the PTMTP to fit within this horizon of expectations. I take an extra look at Ypsilon’s
“brand” of theatre here because understanding it was fundamental to my coming to understand the PTMTP in context.

The foundations of the Ypsilon brand were laid in the 1960s as Jan Schmid came of age as an artist. At the time, then Czechoslovakia was experiencing the same post-war cultural rejuvenation that was occurring elsewhere in the world. There was a renewal of political and artistic energy, as Marketa Goetz-Stankiewicz puts it (perhaps too grandly), “of renewed belief in human dignity together with the excitement of enjoying a growing freedom of artistic expression” (32). Though the country was communist at this time, there was a liberal political movement in 1960s that found a figurehead in Alexander Dubček, a reformist who famously pursued “socialism with a human face.” As elsewhere in the world, this political energy filtered into the theatre world in the founding of new independent, studio theatres: Divadlo na zábradlí (Theatre on the Balustrade, formed by influential director Jan Grossman and playwright Václav Havel in 1958), the Činoherní klub (Drama Club, 1965) and Divadlo Husa na Provázku in Brno (Goose on a String Theatre, 1967), all of which still exist today. Ypsilon was another, and its move to Prague in 1978 came at a difficult time: the decade that followed the Russian occupation of Prague in 1968—the Pražské jaro or Prague Spring. The Prague Spring was a political and cultural trauma that rescinded the reforms and dampened the spirit of the 1960s, ushering in a two-decade period of “normalization” in which the Communist Party aggressively promoted its socialist ideology.

It thus came to pass that Ypsilon had to refine its style (and find its niche in Prague) at a time when strict limits were being placed on free expression. It is tempting to read its style purely as a product of these limitations, a story that goes something like
this: the cultural climate gave the theatre something to oppose, and its strategies for eluding censure and skirting the attention of the authorities became, in time, virtuous qualities of the theatre’s distinct “brand.” But I want to be careful here not to adopt the historiographic bias of other English-language accounts of Czech theatre that implicate theatre in a populist-nationalist political movement stretching back to the nineteenth century (Goetz-Stankiewicz and Burian’s books both do this). It is true that Czech theatre has been deeply implicated in politics: the construction of Prague’s spectacular National Theatre in 1881, for example, was funded entirely by public donations (Sayer 102) and gave Czechs a prominent theatrical arena in a culture still strongly influenced by three centuries of Austro-Hungarian rule; a century later, theatres were literally the stages of the Velvet Revolution that saw the Czech secede from the crumbling USSR and form its own state. But as much as Czech theatres have been implicated in and even instruments of cultural and political nationalism, they also turned away from direct political confrontation during the latter decades of the twentieth-century (partly of necessity and partly of taste), such that Barbara Topolová, in a 2009 editorial in *Czech Theatre*, actually notes that “Czech theatre is gradually changing; it is starting to take an interest in political themes” (2). Yet like Alan Filewod, whose work has critiqued the nationalist leanings of early Canadian theatre historiography, I do not subscribe to an evolutionary historiography that inserts theatre into a narrative of cultural self-realization (see Filewod). In *The Coasts of Bohemia*, Derek Sayer also balks at this narrative, noting that “Czech history cannot be reduced to an orderly procession of presidency or a triumphal march from sea to shining sea. It is richer and more complicated than that, full of
inversions and erasures, miscegenations and ironies” (16). Inversion and irony, in fact, would become Ypsilon’s hallmarks.

A large component of the Ypsilon brand is its mode of theatrical creation, which Schmid often describes using both the Czech adjective syntetické (synthetic) and the noun autorství (authorship) (see Legenda 334; Nuska 36; “Program” Art of Living; “Program” Myths). By synthetic, he means that the style of the productions varies widely, but also that they switch rapidly and freely even within each performance. Ypsilon is recognized for this in Prague. The website maintained by the English-language Theatre Institute in Prague (responsible for “the promotion of Czech culture abroad”) notes about Ypsilon that it is a “synthetic theatre, combining drama, music theatre, opera, motion [physical] theatre, and musical into a single whole” (“Studio Y”). Counterintuitively, authorship refers to the fact that the authors of Ypsilon performances are the actors themselves, with any authored text or source material serving only as basic structure around which the performers improvise and devise their way to a new structure and script. While many other Czech studio theatres in the 1960s were doing text-based work, Schmid saw the personalities of the actors as the source of creative energy. My interviewee Václav described it this way:

All these small theatres which were founded in the 60s were in the 70s called ‘author’s theatres’. [...] Ypsilonka was the leader in this time. The other small stages and small studio theatres were doing also texts and plays, written plays, but Schmid came up with this author’s theatre based on the improvisations without text. (19 Dec 2007)

In English, Schmid’s method might be best described as “devising,” though that term refers to a wide range of practices, aesthetics and relationships (see Barton “Forewords”; “Introduction”). I would hesitate to use the term devising here, however, because some
of the connotations (or baggage) of that term may not befit the structures of either Ypsilon or the PTMTP. Creative processes (and their related structures of administrative or artistic control) necessarily address, as Barton puts it, “issues of ownership and agency—that is, power” (“Forewords” 2, emphasis in original), and the artistic egalitarianism that may be connoted by “devising” (as well as “autorství”) may disguise the fact that the improvisations and the mise-en-scene are completely guided and composed by Schmid.

So there is ambivalence within Schmid’s method about the place of the improviser-as-author. In an interview conducted by the PTMTP’s videographer in 2004 Schmid himself explains:

The improvisation which is what I do at Ypsilon theatre and at [DAMU] requires a complete person. I know that an idiot or a complete fool can’t improvise. Only a personality can improvise. The actor has to anticipate the period, have a clear picture of it. Then he can play something like Shakespeare but he plays it believing that Shakespeare’s ideas can come to life. Although they may be considered dead or purely academic they come to life because themes are found which were alive then and remain alive today and that can be discovered only through improvisation. (Myths DVD)

On the one hand Schmid is in complete control of the artistic vision, but on the other the performers are the source of creativity. But the key word here is “personality.” What Schmid cultivates in his repertory performers at Ypsilon is a distinctive stage personality (one that figures similarly into different productions and becomes recognizable to Ypsilon’s devoted audience). This should be distinguished from an interest in psychology. Recall that Schmid teaches in the “alternative” rather than the “classical” stream at DAMU because he does not use psychological approaches to character development. Speaking about Schmid’s pedagogy at DAMU, Jiří Havelka writes that for Schmid, “psychology in acting is absolutely uninteresting. Not in the theatre or in school.
For some actors this becomes a problem” (173, my translation). It is in this way that the Ypsilon brand rarely explores psychological dimensions of character. Instead, the personal is always presentational and the spectator rarely gets a deep portrait of anyone. Walking this line between the personal and presentational is difficult for students at DAMU, and it partly explains why it is that Schmid hand-picks particular students from DAMU to work on his productions at Ypsilon (and is perhaps also one of the reasons for Schmid’s high degree of artistic control).

That the performers are presentational ties into a second element of Ypsilon’s theatre: its stylistic irreverence and metatheatricality—nearly always comic—involving parody, adaptation, and direct address to the audience. Jarka Burian describes it this way:

[C]abaret, a spritely and at times consciously naive cabaret, but always a thinking person’s cabaret. Topicality, informal, even playful rapport with the audience, a strong element of music, an air of commedia-like improvisation, and a prevailing emphasis on good humor marked its productions. (161, emphasis in original)

The word “topicality” here hints at a politicization of Ypsilon’s brand, betraying Burian’s inclination to write Ypsilon into his cultural-evolutionary narrative. While Ypsilon’s productions may have had a political edge in the past, that was never really the source of their popularity, and it would be inaccurate to describe its work today as “thinking person’s cabaret” or “topical”. Ypsilon’s strength is parody and farcical irreverence rather than political satire; for the most part, its productions seem to disarm its audience, to ask that they just “enjoy the show.” Writing in Czech, Bohumil Nuska more accurately characterizes Ypsilon when he writes that it features “all sorts of inversion […], travesty, parody, paraphrasing, along with self-deprecation and self-caricature (autocaricature?), and also banter and analogy” (36, my translation). This irreverence intertwines with the presentational style of the performers to produce shows of a unique flavour known to
theatregoers in Prague and delightful to Ypsilon’s loyal audience. The PTMTP was very much in this style, and it has been interesting to see both performers and audiences who are unfamiliar with this style try and understand and appreciate it. Some enter into it instantly, others struggle through, and some reject it fully. I will trace some of these dynamics in the next chapter.

Another important aspect of Ypsilon worth mentioning here (one that Burian does not even mention) is its close and multileveled relationship with film. Theatre and film enjoy a generally close affinity in the Czech Republic. Actors and directors commonly work in both simultaneously, and the most successful of these crossover actors occupy a cultural position for which I feel there is no analogue in a Canadian context. The star actors Zdeněk Svěrák and Jiří Lábus, for example, appear in popular films while they perform in repertory productions several nights of the week. They are household names, and stories about their personal lives commonly appear in the Prague daily entertainment tabloid Blesk. It is appealing to spectators to be able to see these actors perform at a local theatre. At Ypsilon, the cachet of celebrity is clear even to the outsider. Several of its actors are well known film and television personalities, and onstage references to their other work fits into Ypsilon’s style and is not uncommon. But it is not just their presence onstage that is appealing for spectators, but also the accessibility of these artists within the experience of theatre-going. These actors usually stay after the performance in the café/bar to chat with interested members of the audience.10

The influence of film on Ypsilon’s theatre goes beyond its capitalization on celebrity to also affect the way it structures and conceptualizes its performances. The aforementioned “synthetic” nature of Ypsilon’s productions effectively staged a filmic
montage effect. In Ypsilon’s own description, “work is done on principle of montage and editing of ‘cuts.’ Montage is therefore a structuring principle. Very important building principle can be also seen in the ability to switch between different [sic] styles and levels of interpretation, even between the genres” (Legenda 334). Yet equally, Ypsilon productions are characterized by a unity of onstage visuals and paratheatrical materials.

Schmid is a multidisciplinary artist, having first been a sculptor and glazier, next a stage designer (with Alfréd Radok), and later through work as an actor and director in film. He continues to be a prolific visual artist, designing the marketing materials for all of Ypsilon’s productions (another aspect of production Schmid closely supervises). “I doodle a lot,” said Schmid in a 1999 interview, “or rather: I make artful visual notes to guide myself toward some insight” (qtd. in Dvořák 258, my translation). Schmid transfers his visual notes from his notebook to the theatre in a number of ways: into costume, into mise-en-scene and set pieces, and most obviously to a patron of Ypsilon into the doodles that literally line the walls of the theatre and its café/bar. Writing in Czech, Jan Dvořák calls this “total visual unity” (“Principál” 258, my translation) and in English, himself translating Schmid’s own description, “the visual of the theatre (theatrography)” (“Summary” 332).

All of these elements—method, style and filmic affiliations and aesthetic—have remained remarkably consistent throughout Ypsilon’s nearly fifty years, despite the great social and political changes that have taken place in its country. For the theatre’s loyal patrons, this consistency produces reliably entertaining productions that keep them coming back to the theatre. For critics, on the other hand, consistency is stagnancy, and Ypsilon has declined as a place of artistic interest. When Petr Christov, for instance,
refers to Ypsilon in a recent issue of *Czech Theatre*, he notes that it “has since the seventies been a leading representative of a playful approach to theatre, and in its time was the very contemporary expression of a generation” (40). This concurs with anecdotes I have heard from Ypsilon artists about its enormous success in early 1970s Prague, for example that when performances sold out, people would sometimes sit in the stairwell just to listen to the performance.

Ypsilon nonetheless remains popular, though its future is uncertain. On the one hand, it is as busy as ever developing new productions, staging cabarets and conducting artistic collaborations of all sorts. Though in his mid-70s, Schmid is still at the theatre every day (although he has somewhat scaled back his involvement in recent years, including his participation in the fourth PTMTP). A young generation of artists has moved into the company adding new personalities and energy to the mix. Standing out among these is Jiří Havelka, a protégé of Schmid’s at DAMU and also a three-time participant in the PTMTP. Following his studies at DAMU, Havelka has gone on to become a member of the Ypsilon company, co-founder of the first Czech television music station, a recognized TV personality, and a lauded young theatre director in Prague. He won the Alfréd Radok award in 2007 for best “Young Talent” (the award is based on an annual survey of theatre critics by the publication *Svět a Divadlo*) and has directed plays that are now in the repertory of some of the most respected theatres in the country such as Dejvické Divadlo and Divadlo Archa in Prague and HaDivadlo in Brno. Havelka has directed a few mainstage shows for Ypsilon (*Nadsamec Jarry* or *The Supermale Jarry*, a surreal, carnivalesque biography of Alfred Jarry; and *Drama v Kostce* or *Drama in a Nutshell*, a metatheatrical farce partly inspired by the Canadian cult film
Cube). On the other hand, Ypsilon is at a turning point as it nears its fiftieth-anniversary and faces large challenges. The generation of artists that built the company is retiring, and the younger generation sometimes struggles to find their own artistic voice within the theatrical brand, not least of all Havelka himself. What makes Ypsilon’s situation more precarious presently (and that of many other Czech theatre companies I imagine) is that this generational shift has been taking place in the context of fundamental reforms to the way Czech theatres are funded. In the Czech Republic as elsewhere in Europe, financing the arts sector has long been considered a state responsibility. For decades, Ypsilon and a set of other established Prague theatres such as Švandovo Divadlo, Divadlo v Dlouhé and Divadlo pod Palmovkou have prospered under guaranteed government subsidies (the majority of which come from municipal governments in the Czech Republic). This was a fortunate situation for the established theatres in particular; in a report about the financing of Prague theatres, Stepan S. Simek reports that in 2003, of the 200 or so theatre companies in Prague, the 53 repertory theatres received about 98% of the available public money (4). Transitioning to the market economy, however, has led the government to pursue a more private model for the cultural sector. Reforms have now been made that require even established companies to lobby for grants every two years, nominally on an equal playing field with independent companies. The system has been changing very slowly, and the reality is that the established theatres still enjoy a large—if shrinking—share of the public funds. There are potential trade-offs for the new uncertainty and bureaucracy such as increased artistic freedom, eagerness to experiment with new types of events and collaborations, and also the ability to apply for EU grants unavailable to fully state-funded companies (Simek 24). Ypsilon has had to rethink all of its activities in
the last decade to adapt to this model, and this decade covers exactly the lifespan of the PTMTP. In fact, this is a large part of the reason why it was never known whether the project would continue after each incarnation: though the Canadian producers would be fairly confident they could raise the money again, the financial situation at Ypsilon was uncertain. As theatre funding in the Czech Republic adopts what are actually more North American structures (the Czech government is working toward a system of regional arts councils like those in Canada), the future of the old repertory theatres remains uncertain.

Conclusion: The Context Problem

In a 2004 essay, Tracy C. Davis identifies what she calls “the context problem,” that is, the problem that “one scholar’s criterion for gestalt may be another’s idea of irrelevance” (203). Davis provides a useful analogy:

Let's imagine that I attend the theatre tonight. If "context" is what appeared in today's newspapers, the conditions of the roads that I travel to the event, and the ways in which the event's publicity established my horizon of expectations, and if it is also what the person next to me read in her newspaper, the conditions of her route, and her encounters with publicity, all slightly different from mine, does this help us understand the limits of our claims to knowledge about this performance? (203)

I interpret this to mean that if we turn the critical lens around temporally and imagine the present moment is the subject of a “contextual study”, we can quickly recognize how limited a selection of reality “context” must be. The advantage I have in this study is that, whereas Davis is remote from the historical subjects of her own research, I was actually personally implicated in my own. This means that I have been able to imagine what information would have changed my own understanding of the experience at the time. In fact, at points this was an act of remembering when and how new information changed my perspective, and I have alluded to some of these moments above.
In the next chapter, I will further draw on both memory and document to analyze material from the PTMTP’s fourth (and final) incarnation in 2006, *The Art of Living*. Here and in the next chapter, my accounts will be imperfect and selective, and neither document nor memory will fully recover or explain complex and embodied moments of experience. Memory and document, instead, “re-member” experience, in that literal sense of putting its pieces back together. In his book *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*, Matthew Reason considers the theoretical and methodological implications of how documents (writing, photography and video) shape what we “know, see and think” about performance “after the disappearance of the thing itself” (26). Responding to those who malign performance documents on the grounds that they fail to capture the “live” experience, Reason says that the document only fails if we expect it to “save,” “recover” or “re-member” in that literal sense of putting the limbs back on; reassembling the pieces together to create the whole. Like memory itself, however, the documents of live performance—the “detritus” in Reason’s terms—are always and only partial. Reason cites Eugenio Barba’s claim that live performance continues to have a kind of “life” in the evolving memories of those who witnessed it. This leads Barba to privilege memory over more calcified forms of documentation. Reason counters that the archive is as mutable as memory—the archive, too, imaginatively re-members (86).

That memory and document are imperfect does not make them any less valuable, and hopefully this chapter has successfully drawn out a longer “event-narrative” of intercultural encounter in the theatre by outlining the arc of my own process of “coming to know.” If I had known even half of the information in this chapter when I first
participated in 1999, my experience would have been different. Knowing more about the cultural and theatrical contexts of the PTMTP would have made the work more intelligible, logical on its own terms, easier, probably more artistically productive and probably more personally rewarding. More than anything, understanding the Ypsilon brand and that theatre’s special relationship with its audience would have made a lot more sense out of an artistic process that was sometimes confusing and frustrating. The way that Schmid draws out the personalities of the theatre’s celebrity repertory actors makes so much sense out of his tendency in the PTMTP to play out quirky tropes of character and call on participants’ unusual talents or physical skills. This sometimes seemed unjustified, trivial, and even embarassing, but in lieu of Ypsilon’s brand, it may still be all that, but at least it has a logic. Knowing such things may not have made the work more “successful” or even the experience “better” but it would have led to more understanding across the cultural divides of the project—an idea that I will analyze in detail in the next chapter.

Notes to Chapter Three

1 The translation and publication of Czech Theatre is carried out by the state-run Theatre Institute in Prague, the organization that founded the Prague Quadrennial in 1967.

2 The relationship between practice and theory established by the Studio Studia Ypsilon indicates that the pedagogical shift to which Baz Kershaw’s PARIP project responds was present in the Czech as well.

3 Schonberg is retiring from UTSC in 2009. His final production at UTSC—Stepping on Toes—was performed in March 2009 and was created by a former Czech participant in the PTMTP. This was one of several exchanges that took place as a result of the PTMTP.

4 Ypsilon’s style is widely interpreted in terms of collage, pastische or montage. See Hořínek; Nuska; Dvořák.

5 Because I learned some Czech throughout the last decade, my own connectedness to Schmid evolved slightly. I did not speak any Czech in 1999 and had only marginally improved in 2004, but by the third project in 2006 I had a basic vocabulary and would know the gist and tone of
what was being said. What struck me more than anything in 2006 was the polite, even formal
register of language in which Schmid and the Czech actors spoke to one another during rehearsal.
It was a surprise—Schmid’s emotive gestures and occasional outbursts of frustration had always
given me the impression that he was harsh and intolerant. When I visited Ypsilon in the Spring of
2007 my language had improved again, and I ran into Schmid in the Ypsilon cafe. We greeted
one another in Czech as we had always done, and as he looked around the room for a translator I
began to speak in Czech, getting by as best I could. We spoke for just a few minutes, but it was a
remarkable experience to have your first “conversation” with someone you have “known” for
almost ten years. Again, it made me wonder how much different the experience of the PTMTP
would have been had this central language barrier not been there.

6 I am not sure that it was ever fully understood why the jerseys were chosen in relation to the
themes being explored, beyond adding some bright colours to the mix (and making for an
intriguing photo in the Prague Czech daily newspaper Dnes) (Kolářová 3). It may have been used
to establish an optic of sports-like “competition” between the sexes, which was certainly a
narrative motif in the performance. It may have had the lesser effect of stoking nationalistic
affiliations among the ensemble of the sort associated with sports fandom.

7 That I was not involved is regrettable with regard to my purposes in this study since a unique
feature of this second project would have made it an especially interesting site of analysis. After
Man and Woman, Schmid invited two of the performers from UTSC to come to study at DAMU
and also take some small parts in Ypsilon’s backstage and mainstage shows. It was an incredible
opportunity taken up by UTSC students Keith Fernandes and Susan Locke, who ended up each
staying in Prague for a couple of years. What would have made the two particularly interesting
research subjects, though, is that they actually participated in I and They as members of the
DAMU ensemble rather than the UTSC ensemble.

8 “Unceded” means that the land on which Wikwemikong rests was never ceded to the Canadian
government as part of any treaty, and the land was legally set up as an Indian reservation.

9 The first line of Osawabine’s biography on Debaj’s website reads: “It can literally be said that
Joe Osawabine and Debaj have grown up together” (“Joe Osawabine”). Osawabine’s first
production, Lupi – The Great White Wolf was a remarkable production in Debaj’s history for
being performed entirely in Ojibwe (Hengen “Decolonizing”).

10 I found myself marveling at this when I had a drink with Jiří Labus after an Ypsilon show; I
had seen Labus in several films, including one in Toronto at the European film festival. It was
even more surprising to me when in 2006 Václav Havel attended a show at Ypsilon and stayed at
the bar chatting with people—myself included—after the show.
CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis and Discussion

How then am I so different from the first men through this way?
Like them, I left a settled life, I threw it all away.
To seek a Northwest Passage at the call of many men
To find there but the road back home again.

— Stan Rogers (“Northwest Passage”)

Reading Strategies

In this study I have used my ten years of participation in the PTMTP as research, but in this chapter I will engage more specifically with the formal qualitative research project I carried out during The Art of Living in 2006. This research added to my immersion in context and participatory experience an extensive material record of the work. With the contextual knowledge of Chapter Three in mind, I will now undertake a more intensive analysis of my research data.

In Chapter Two, I explained my methodology, outlined my research methods and proposed that narrative and process were two key themes of the research, but I did not provide any specific reading strategies for interpreting qualitative data such as interviews. What, exactly, could be the significance of this material? In the spirit of the “instrumental case-study,” I needed to use data instrumentally to discuss intercultural theatre in a productive way, an interpretive gesture that Benwell and Stokoe call “reaching above” data (160). I needed to do this while still being responsible to my research subjects. As I searched for guidance, I found a lot of strategies I did not want to use, so I built up a strategy partly by reduction.

I first sunk into the quagmire of titles generated by search terms such as
“intercultural,” “performance,” “communication,” “discourse,” etc. A representative search result is Helen Fitzgerald’s 2003 book *How Different Are We: Spoken Discourse in Intercultural Communication*. Oriented toward “educators, sociologists and business people,” Fitzgerald analyzes a large amount of interview material involving ESL student immigrants to Australia from a set of broadly delineated global regions: “Latin Americans,” “Eastern Europeans,” “Middle Easterners” etc. Analysis proceeds inductively, working toward general patterns by analyzing individuals’ syntax, rhetorical strategies, conversational turn-taking, tendencies to agree or disagree, and so on. At times it proceeds deductively, starting with statements such as “Arabs are said to have a strong belief in the persuasive power of dramatic, emotional or affective messages” (103), then proceeding to individual illustrations, to suggest finally that the “Arab” way of communicating may conflict with the way a “South Asian” communicates. Fitzgerald’s aim is to provide advice for anyone who is involved with facilitating intercultural dialogue. Studies such as this (and there are very many) were useful to review because they illustrated interpretive essentializing and generalizing that I wanted to avoid. Certainly it is true that deep cultural values are reflected in language and discourse (a connection which sometimes is un-made with enormous effort), but a category of analysis such as “Eastern European” ignores variations in the different histories and character of specific nations and regions (not to mention the remarkably under-discussed fact that the ESL students’ different languages lend ESL speakers unique rhetorical strategies in English).²

I found more theoretically sound work in the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Proceeding from the poststructural turn in cultural studies, CDA investigates how
language encodes our everyday performance of self: It asks: how do we, moment to moment, make sense of ourselves and our world using language, and how are researchers to observe others in this process? Rigorous work in the field of CDA does not take claims made within social discourse at face value, but takes on the formidable challenge of how claims can be assessed. In particular, narrative CDA seemed to be most relevant to my methodology. Narrative CDA proceeds from the belief that individuals construct their identity by organizing the world and themselves into narrative, and that one can read in the narratives they tell to arrive at a picture of the world as they see it. But narrative CDA seemed to have a variety of sub-types of its own. The most common of these could be called—following Vladimir Propp—narratological (see Benwell and Stokoe, Daiute and Lightfoot, Freeman *Rewriting*, Polkinghorne; Propp). Narratological analysis involves looking at a set of stories—as many as possible—to determine their structure in formal terms. Structures are organized into patterns that then may be connected to something larger, whether a cultural context, mythical narrative, or discursive tradition. These strategies overlap with those of the literary critic, and some narratological analysts explicitly draw on literary genre theory (see Benwell and Stokoe 131, Daiute, Freeman “Data”). A second sub-type of narrative CDA is psychoanalytic. It analyses psychological aspects of human interaction through the formal properties of language. It contrasts with narratological CDA in that it is premised on the idea that individuals cannot provide coherent accounts of their experience. The analyst’s role is to tease meaning out of their apparently random and free associations.

Neither of these strategies seemed appropriate to my methodology. While I have expressed an interest in the narratives at play in intercultural work (see end of Chapter
Two, narratological analysis interprets stories structurally and works best with data that has structurally comparable narratives within which common elements may be found. This would have required me in interviews to set up questions with an implicit temporal order of its clauses, for example: “When did you encounter a difficult moment during the artistic process, and what did it lead you to do?” Some of my questions had this structure, but the answers did not follow anything like a template that would yield patterns up to analysis. Psychoanalytic CDA seemed better suited to my freely-structured interview data, but the danger there seemed even greater. I am not keen on doing analysis that claims to peer into the minds of interview subjects, especially given the fact that I am working across significant linguistic and cultural barriers.  

I began to see that those strategies were better suited to longitudinal studies. Though it is true that my research design had been to conduct three interviews over a long period, my design changed (see Chapter 2), and even if it had not, the data would not at all have supported the kind of biographical analyses I was seeing in the CDA literature. More than this though, what I observed in these strategies was an analysis of subjectivity itself. For example, the two book-length studies I found that use CDA to analyze artistic activity: Mark Freeman’s *Finding the Muse: A sociopsychological inquiry into the conditions of artistic creativity* and Elliot G. Mishler’s *Storylines: Craftartists’ Narratives of Identity* each analyzes artists’ self-representation by analyzing the text of their speech and leads conclusions about the (in)coherence in artists’ accounts of themselves. I felt that not only would my data not support this kind of analysis, but that this was also a kind of analysis I was not interested in doing. For me, the purpose of my methodological investment in subjectivity was not to render coherent (or incoherent)
accounts of participants’ experience (and by extension coherent accounts of them), but to use their very incomplete accounts to open an alternative “way of seeing” intercultural theatre work itself.

A third sub-type of narrative CDA seemed more appropriate. This theory looks at how subjects position themselves within existing cultural narratives, as opposed to the structural elements of the stories themselves. “Positioning,” write Benwell and Stokoe, “refers to the process through which speakers adopt, resist and offer ‘subject positions’ that are made available in ‘master narratives’ or ‘discourses’” (139). The subject may take up a position with generally familiar (though culturally inflected) binaries, such as man-woman, father-son, teacher-student, nurse-patient, and so on, within other ontological categories of identity with generally understood qualities, or within generally familiar cultural narratives. Positioning CDA also considers how individuals evade and challenge available narratives on a micro-level. Positions may shift moment-to-moment because of a change of opinion, a new piece of information, or some shift in the actual situation of the interview. In other words, there is an ongoing interplay between available narratives that shape expression on the one hand and the creative potential to produce new positions within them.

As I outlined at the end of Chapter Two, my view of collaborative intercultural theatre is a complex field of narratives that issue forth from elsewhere within the performance text and the conditions of production and reception: the sponsoring institutions, the artistic facilitators of the project, the written materials which announce and promote the work, the audience’s horizon of expectations, the historical circumstances of a participating culture and the situatedness of the particular participants
within those circumstances and so on. Because positioning theory is specifically attuned to how individual subjects position themselves within wider narratives, it is a more suitable reading strategy. Halfway through this chapter, positioning theory leads me to consider a couple of particularly powerful narratives not just in the PTMTP, but I think in intercultural theatre more broadly, and how participants may be drawn to position themselves as the benefactors of these narratives, a tendency I call, after Helen Nicholson, “following the script.” I then trace this idea through the sustained analysis of the final example from the fourth PTMTP, *The Art of Living*.

**Data Inventory**

There are two principal sets of material data. The first is the interviews: twelve in total that I conducted of ten different participants in the PTMTP (three from each group) that translated into 155 pages of transcribed text. Most of them were conducted during the course of the fourth PTMTP, *The Art of Living*, but a few were conducted thereafter. They break down as follows (names are pseudonyms):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 May 2006</td>
<td>Prague, Czech Republic</td>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>Debaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 May 2006</td>
<td>Prague, Czech Republic</td>
<td>Garnet *</td>
<td>UTSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 May 2006</td>
<td>Prague, Czech Republic</td>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>UTSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 May 2006</td>
<td>Karlstejn, Czech Republic</td>
<td>Veronika</td>
<td>Ypsilon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jun 2006</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada</td>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Debaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jun 2006</td>
<td>Toronto, Canada</td>
<td>Melanie</td>
<td>UTSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Jun 2006</td>
<td>Wikwemikong, Canada</td>
<td>Simon &amp; Cynthia</td>
<td>UTSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Jun 2006</td>
<td>Kingston, Canada</td>
<td>Veronika</td>
<td>Ypsilon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Jul 2006</td>
<td>Wikwemikong, Canada</td>
<td>Malcolm</td>
<td>Debaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Jul 2006</td>
<td>Wikwemikong, Canada</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Debaj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Dec 2007</td>
<td>Brno, Czech Republic</td>
<td>Katja</td>
<td>Ypsilon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Dec 2007</td>
<td>Prague, Czech Republic</td>
<td>Václav</td>
<td>Ypsilon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* Garnet also provided a personal audio journal that he recorded while in Prague.

Participation in the interviews was voluntary. I spoke to the group openly about my research and its interests and invited anyone to be involved. The group of subjects this produced was not equally representative of the three participant groups, though, so I did select and invite a few other individuals to participate, which they happily did. Most of the interviews took place during the Canadian visit to the Czech Republic between 1 May and 17 May 2006 or else later during the Czech visit to Canada between 28 May and 11 June 2006. The two interviews in July of 2006 took place during a week-long stay in Wikwemikong, and the two interviews more than a year later took place at the end of my semester on exchange to the Czech Republic (this was outlined in Chapter Two).

The second set of data comprises the notes I recorded during my work on *The Art of Living*. Some of these were recorded directly into my laptop during breaks in the work, some at night after the day’s rehearsal, and others were audio recorded during breaks and later transcribed. All in all, these constitute twenty pages of notes, and are a valuable record of my more raw and unsorted reactions to the experience, serving now as a source of ideas for analysis and as a check on my memory.

**Freefalling into the Field**

My work on the fourth PTMTP, *The Art of Living*, was enormously challenging. My previous work with the PTMTP had been challenging too; having to collaborate with a set of facilitators and perform with two-dozen other actors in a shifting cultural context is not easy. But this time I had new responsibilities: I was only a facilitator and not a performer, and I added to this the task of being a researcher, soliciting data about the
work I was facilitating. Before these new roles presented an academic challenge they presented an interpersonal one, involving navigating a network of friendships with people amidst whose competing interests I was placed.

My difficulties began on the plane on the way to Prague when two members of the Debaj group—Artistic Director Joe Osawabine and Artistic Producer Ron Berti—asked me to sit with them for a chat. They shared with me their concern with two items the UTSC participants had put together in anticipation of the work in Prague (recall that participant groups would always prepare some material in advance of the first meeting to share and potentially use). The first was a sequence of movement and sound that ended with the UTSC students doing a Maori Haka dance. Briefly, a Haka dance is a traditional dance of the aboriginal Maori people of New Zealand that involves aggressive movements and threatening sounds. It is widely thought to be a war dance used to intimidate enemies, but its use in Maori traditions is actually more varied. One UTSC student knew this dance by way of its regular performance by New Zealand’s rugby team, the All-Blacks, who perform a version of the Haka dance at the start of matches in order to intimidate the opposing team (though the All Blacks consult the Maori when developing their dance, the practice remains controversial). For the student, the artfulness of the Haka connected to the project’s theme, and he wanted to choreograph it with the group. After some improvising that I facilitated myself, the student and I worked the dance into an episodic sequence of sound and movement that connected to the theme obliquely. The students worked hard on the sequence, and their performance of the Haka in particular was precise and striking. Having seen the students perform the sequence the previous day, Berti and Osawabine told me that they appreciated the students’
performance, but that they objected to the decontextualization of a traditional and sacred dance. Berti pointed out, as I paraphrased it in my notes, “that it must be learned and respected in a certain way.”

The second item they were concerned about was one that I had also helped to produce. In anticipation of the first meeting of all the groups involved in the PTMTP, each would rehearse some songs to showcase their vocal abilities (recalling the structure of Eugenio Barba’s barters from Chapter Two). Early on in the process, during the time I was working with the UTSC group only, the group’s musical director, Alexander Rappoport, had asked if there were an a cappella Canadian folk song we might sing. With nothing other than the fine musical qualities of the song in mind, I suggested Canadian folk-singer Stan Rogers’ “Northwest Passage.” The group worked out the harmonies and rehearsed the song, and once Debaj joined the group, they joined in as well. The song—a stark and harmonically gripping tale about Sir John Franklin’s ill-fated attempt to find the “Northwest Passage” to the “Orient”—was after some rehearsal nicely executed by the combined ensemble of UTSC and Debaj participants. During our conversation on the plane, Berti noted his own appreciation for the song, but pointed out how exclusive it is of the Native point of view. Indeed, the song’s portrayal of the north is of an empty place to be claimed and conquered by enterprising Europeans. I hadn’t thought of the story the song does not tell. “What of the Native guy,” I again paraphrased in my notes, “who gets some guy coming along in a big old boat asking how to get to China!”?

For me, these conversations set a tone that carried through my work on The Art of Living and in my interviews. Looking back, I am glad to have had the conversation. I see it as exactly the sort of experience that one might hope to follow from collaborative
intercultural work: the introduction of a new perspective on something familiar. It should have been a positive experience at the time. Berti and Osawabine presented their concerns as a hope rather than a reprimand, a hope that we would be open to what Debaj’s perspective might be on any story we tell in the work we were to do. Still, the conversation made my responsibilities to the project and my research heavier. As I pointed out to Berti and Osawabine at the time, I also wanted to see their perspective brought to the process as much as possible, but I also knew that the speed and artistic structure of the project placed strict limits on discussion. I began to feel something new that would carry all the way through my work on the project, my interviews and writing this study—the feeling of freefall in the gap between groups of people with different desires and understandings.

The Haka dance and the Northwest Passage song each had a different fate. Debaj’s concern about the Haka was appreciable and seemed non-negotiable to me, and the only thing to do was to abandon it along with the sequence into which it had been worked. I decided that the sequence—which the UTSC students had spent time rehearsing and which they were proud of—should not even be shown in Prague. Some students understood, but others, notably the student who had brought it to the table in the first place, was disappointed. The Northwest Passage song, on the other hand, had the opposite fate: I helped to incorporate the Debaj actors into its story and develop into a scene that was part of the public performance of The Art of Living. The pedigree of this scene was paradigmatic of many features of the PTMTP and perhaps to the dynamics of representation in intercultural performance more generally. I asked all of my interviewees about it, and I will discuss it in detail later in this chapter.
The “Suggestion Box”

I analyzed my qualitative data using NVivo 8, software that allows you to “code” your data and organize it into themes. I coded interview transcripts, my journal notes from *The Art of Living*, research notes, dramaturgical documents such as notes from early PTMTP workshops, and the script of *The Art of Living*. An issue immediately emerged. In a large portion of the interview text—which was by far the bulk of the data—participants discussed problems that seemed highly specific to the PTMTP. There were several reasons for this, not the least of which was that a few of my interview questions specifically asked participants about the problematic aspects of their experience:

Did anything disappoint you about the experience? What would you have liked to be different? Can you describe any moments when you felt particularly disconnected or alienated from the other participants?

These questions encouraged participants to explore negative or unsatisfying aspects of their work on the PTMTP. My objective had never been to dwell on the negative aspects of the work, but rather on the value, meaning or positive learning that could result. So, I also asked similar questions in the positive:

What part of the work has been most meaningful for you? Can you describe any moments when you felt particularly connected to other participants, when you felt you had something uniquely in common with them?

The questions that invited examples of positive learning outcomes did elicit some interesting responses, but they, too, often led back into a discussion of more difficult aspects of the work. Of course this happened simply because the experience was difficult for many participants. But it also happened because most of the interviews took place during the process, when participants were working hard to understand foreign ways of working and insert themselves productively into a new process. Being in the middle of a
process had the effect of amplifying difficulties participants were having. There was another important factor as well. CDA theorists Davies and Harre note that in discusive situations, the positions that subjects adopt can be highly interactive, that is, they emerge in the context of discussion (as distinguished from reflexive positions which have their source beyond the discursive context) (48). The fact that I did not feign an objective stance in my interviews occasioned some interactive positioning in that subjects were more inclined to express their frustrations out of sympathy than they would have been in a different interview situation. They could see the limits of my own influence in the project and were inclined to comiseration.

I feared that my analysis could easily become a discussion of what the PTMTP could have been, or that I would be placing myself in an apologetic position. I had an intuitively negative reaction to that prospect because I felt I knew what would it look like: mining the data for expressions of confusion about and anger with different features of the project from all sides of the collaboration, gripes which would seem to lead toward advice about how the project might be done differently in the future. But would this be the case? I checked my intuition. Certainly, the fact that the data might be unsavoury was not a good reason to avoid it, and certainly it seemed reasonable that the different nature of the perceived problems might highlight something of interest. While I have wanted to write an instrumental case-study that goes beyond the PTMTP’s own situation to talk about collaborative intercultural theatre more broadly, aren’t its perceived problems at least potentially revelatory of more general issues in intercultural theatre? If the PTMTP’s features are characteristic enough of collaborative intercultural theatre to fall within that category, does it not follow that its problems may also be characteristic?
Finding reasons to answer both yes and no to this question, the first node I created in NVivo (a node is a category to which you then ‘code,’ or attach, individual bits of evidence) was one which was to contain all references in the data which I deemed to be specific problems with the PTMTP. I called this the “suggestion box.” I sorted this data into themes, and it quickly became clear that the difficulties participants had on all three sides of the collaboration could be distilled down to two fundamental problems: too many people and too little time. It also quickly became clear that there were subtle differences in how these two problems were articulated among the three groups. Here, for example, is an example from a participant from each group articulating the perceived problem of there being too many people:

David [Debaj]: It’s a huge cast of people! [...] That makes it more difficult. [...] This whole project could have been done with far fewer people. And that probably would have made a big difference. Because with fewer people it would be easier to get sort of equitable voice from all three groups that are at the table. (3 Jul 2006)

Cynthia [UTSC]: I think there are too many people.
Simon [UTSC]: Yeah, yeah, definitely.
Cynthia: Because it’s really, really hard to get your idea in there. With all the other people trying to upstage, and like, jump in, you know, the competition you know, within your own group. And then you have two other groups to deal with [...] So you’re like, how do I get myself out there? (7 Jun 2006)

Katja [DAMU]: Jo, jo! [Yeah, yeah!] Less people. That’s the first thing. Less people. I don't know if they would choose really the good actors. There was a lot of people who was like—Wuuuhh, even I can’t go—I don’t really want to say that we are something great, our group of actors from DAMU—But there were a lot of people who were just there, and singing, but doing nothing. If there was like ten good Canadians, I think that we can like do something, together. Czech part, Canadian part, together we can do something. (1 Dec 2007)

With a cast of twenty-six (fourteen UTSC, seven DAMU, five Debaj) the cast of The Art of Living was larger than might be expected, and certainly larger than was strictly needed. Anyone with experience doing collaborative work would not be surprised that the size of
the ensemble was a challenge. That Katja pins the problem on the size of the UTSC group rather than the size of the whole ensemble is not entirely unfair, since the UTSC group was considerably larger than the other groups in each of the projects. There were several reasons for this. At UTSC, Michal Schonberg had a larger pool of students to draw on than did his collaborators. Also, because the UTSC participants had fewer professional obligations than those of the other groups (and because the second, third and fourth projects were scheduled after term’s end), more could free themselves to participate. An additional reason Schonberg often cited for this was that he wanted a large group with a broad spectrum of talents with music and movement and such—talents of the sort he knew Jan Schmid would recognize and use. I also wonder about the extent to which he simply wanted more people to have the experience, of the work, but also the experience of being exposed to the other cultures. Taking the comments above at face value, educational and aesthetic objectives may have ultimately been in conflict in the sense that the size of the ensemble was seen to be detrimental to the creative process. But thinking of the extra-theatrical learning that was taking place, there was an appreciable logic to wanting more students involved.

The comments cited suggest that the size of the ensemble may have been a problem for the groups, albeit for different reasons. For David, the number of people meant that the groups would not have equitable representation in the work, that some voices would not have a chance to be heard. Cynthia’s problem is similar but differently couched, expressing her anxiety about not being able to get her ideas into the creative process. Katja, perhaps less anxious about her own contribution, frames the size of the ensemble as an obstacle to creating good theatre. These three initial comments are
reasonably representative of the commentary in the suggestion box. The Debaj participants, as Native artists working with what they would call “mainstream” and European artists, were appreciably mindful of being equal contributing partners in the collaboration. The UTSC students, being the non-professional group, were often anxious of their abilities and assertive that they, too, had something to bring to the table. In contrast, the DAMU actors were confident in their abilities, but they detached themselves from the work and placed value on the project’s extra-theatrical dimensions. The real picture is of course more nuanced than this, as every participant struggled to be heard—and in a way they wished to be heard—among the crowd.

Differences also emerged among expressions of the second widely perceived problem: there being too little time. What there was too little time for overwhelmingly came down to a common thing: for relationships. For participants of all groups, the work suffered because there was too little time to build relationships among the participants and facilitators:

David [Debaj]: If we structured this project, we would have done something very different. We would have started off with the groups, and spent a week—or whatever amount of time—to really understand how the three groups for sure, and probably more within that—had different world views. And once we understood and accepted that we had different world views, then, you know, then you do what you want after that. Because the playing field’s equal at that point, or equal enough to be able to proceed. (4 Jul 2006)

Veronika [DAMU]: [T]he most important thing is that before you start rehearsing you must know these people. You must know the people you are on stage with. [...] So I think that like, before starting this whole thing, you should have like workshops bringing out the different things, the different ideas of the ‘art of living’ [...] ...and talking… Talking about what it should be about. And how it should all work. Like this? Like that? But first I would love to know people, that are on stage with me. That’s the most…like…important thing to me. How can I like, try to do something with these people I don’t really know? (10 Jun 2006)

Simon [UTSC]: You have to be able to get along with them, and hang out with
them before you can really really work together, to get the best work out of each other. (7 Jun 2006)

Of course the project was built on relationships that were carefully built by the core collaborators: Schonberg, Schmid and, later, the artists of Debaj. In addition to the initial meetings and exchanges between Schmid and Schonberg prior to the first project (these were described in Chapter 3) Schonberg also went on multiple trips to the other sites to speak to the other groups and become familiar with their ways of working. The facilitators also placed value on extending their own relationships to the participants prior to the first full-ensemble meeting in Prague. For the first three projects, the Czech facilitators traveled to Canada to conduct a workshop and begin devising the performance. This all said, the facilitators may have overestimated the degree to which these workshops extended relationships throughout members of the group (as examples later in this chapter will seem to illustrate). Exacerbating the problem in the case of *The Art of Living* was that circumstances prevented a Czech visit to Canada, such that only the Debaj and UTSC groups met for a preliminary workshop in February 2006. *The Art of Living* ensemble was thus at a disadvantage in that many participants would be meeting for the first time in Prague. While this fourth had more repeat participants (those who had participated in a previous project) than any of the others (two from UTSC, three from Debaj and all seven from DAMU), that still meant that fourteen of twenty-six performers would meet Jan Schmid for the first time in Prague and have to immediately adapt for a foreign context and way of working. That all three participants quoted above were repeat participants suggests that relationships continued to be important even for those who were already familiar with the other groups and contexts.

Is it significant that participants so widely cited the importance of relationships?
Would not relationships be cited as important to any collaborative endeavor, artistic or otherwise? Perhaps, but the prevalence of this theme in my data leads me to think that it has some special significance in relation to this form of theatre. Certainly the imperative to “get to know” one another prior to the work would probably be more important when the participants are unfamiliar with one another’s culture. But what do these participants mean, exactly, by “getting to know” one another? What constitutes the “world view” that David says the groups need to “understand” and “accept,” and, then, how does a “world view” translate into a dramaturgical process? Something that was widely desired was clearly missing, but precisely what it is, whether it is in fact common to all parties, and whether it is something that could in fact be “fixed” is unknown.

What is clear with regard to relationships and time is that there was a difference between the cultural frames of reference brought to the project by the Debaj and DAMU groups. All three Debaj partipants were impassioned when speaking to me about the pace at which they both build relationships and work:

David [Debaj]: We don’t follow that standard format of three weeks rehearsal, a certain number of hours per day—We don’t impose all those structures on the work in the same way. But at the same time, as you can see, sitting here [at a restaurant in Manitowaning, Ontario] we don’t leave our work and disappear as much as they do in other places. You socialize together, half of these artists are living together, you know, their free time is together, their work time is together. (4 Jul 2006)

Malcolm [Debaj]: Just go in and meet them and talk with them. And sit down and have dinner. Go out for a drink, and whatever. Just meet them. On a personal level. And try and just, you know, just find out what they’re about, right? So once you have that understanding, you know, you can start to shape how the collaborative relationship is going to unfold. But the first step all the time is, you know, you’ve got to meet the people. (3 Jul 2006)

Paula [Debaj]: It’s just… It takes… Years. And we have children, and have funerals. You know? There’s a different understanding of how to live together, it isn’t dropping in and out. You can’t, you know… There’s always “How are we
connecting? What’s changed, for you, for us? How do we come together now?”

kind of thing. And it’s years. Years and years. Summer Beaver is a community we’ve been working with for years, and it’s, every time, coming together, ‘OK, what’s the next phase of this, how do we relate to each other now? We lost some people, and there’s been suicides. (2 Jun 2006)

What I see in these comments is a profound value placed on mutual reciprocity on artistic and personal levels, and that time must be allowed for this exchange to happen. For these artists, it was unacceptable to have the work unfold faster than the relationships that were developing through it. A relationship is viewed as an ongoing negotiation instead of a pre-requisite to the work that can ever be completed. The need for time is observable in these comments on a micro level in David’s observation that the schedule of the rehearsals and work may fluidly overlap with other daily activities, and on the macro level in the long-arc of understanding identified by Paula. Anybody who has worked with Debaj will be familiar with the different pace at which their work unfolds. During my extended visit in July 2006, I sat in on rehearsals for their summer show, Bidassadegwe (Sunlight Woman), and wrote in my notes,

(Fieldnotes 4 Jul 2006) Most striking thing is the pace at which the work happens. There’s time for things to happen – suggestions are floated, and they sit there, nobody immediately decides anything. They’ll do a run through, not really change much, and run through again, and just let it sit. If no ideas come immediately, they move on. There’s no pressure to make things happen instantly. Lots of jokes… Smoke breaks. [...] It still moves—Definitely collaborative in the sense that ideas are always coming forward from the actors, and the director is still driving things forward. But it’s all patient, relaxed, explorative. (Freeman, Unpublished)

A company well outside of a major city in the small town is going to operate at a less hectic pace, but this is actually a privilege for which Debaj has had to fight. Growing into a successful, professional company has run them up against Actors’ Equity rules that place strict limits on Equity members who work with Debaj. Native actors who have
moved to Toronto for work and become members of the union have in the past found themselves less able to work in Wikwemikong on account of its less rigid scheduling and structures. That is a problem, particularly when it comes to the company’s outreach work in remote communities where the line between theatre work, community outreach and relationship building is not easy to draw. David’s comment above about having less rigid structures came out of a discussion about the company’s long struggle to attain certain exemptions from Actors’ Equity, which, he told me, they have been able to do because of their location on an Unceded Indian reserve. I responded:

Barry: It’s sounding like it’s job enough to partner with people here, before you start to partner with the Czech Republic.

David [Debaj]: Except that it’s easier. It’s easier. Because I was asking about the artists’ union in the Czech Republic. And they said ‘Yeah, we have one, but it has no meaning.’ You could be in it or not in it, it doesn’t matter. You could be hired in a show whether you’re in the union or not in the union. It’s a non-issue. Here it’s an issue. So it’s easier for us to collaborate with artists in the Czech Republic than artists from Toronto who are Equity members. (4 Jul 2006)

But whereas in terms of bureaucracy there may have been this ease to Debaj’s partnership with the Czech group, the pace of these groups clashed. The pace of Jan Schmid’s work with his own performers at Ypsilon is fast. For one thing, the Ypsilon brand does not lend itself to lengthy ruminations about motivation or theme; for another, his actors are nearly all also professional musicians, film actors, and artists with parallel careers and busy schedules whose rehearsal time is limited. This is also true of the younger performers at DAMU who were clearly accustomed to a fast, sometimes almost frenetic, pace of work. The attitudes expressed by some of the Czechs in my interviews, then, contrasted with those of the Debaj artists. For Václav, concentrating the work into a brief schedule could be better, and he said that a previous project, which had had less time to evolve, was the
better for it:

Václav [DAMU]: We had all of ten days, we were staying there for only ten days. And it was more powerful than all the other projects I think, because it was really pressed to a short time. (17 Dec 2007)

I am suggesting here that there was a collision between frames of reference that shaped the groups’ ways of working. As I wrote in Chapter Two, however, admitting qualitative data such as these interviews productively complicates such monolithic conceptions, introducing some of the other dimensions of representation that I will explore shortly. For instance, despite having more difficulties with the pace of the PTMTP than perhaps any other of my interviewees, Paula added that “in some ways I think we like the challenge” (2 Jun 2006), suggesting her willingness to adapt to a new way of working. Václav, for his part, offered the following:

Václav [DAMU]: I can agree with this argument that you should get to know people very good before you are being with them. [...] You can do a text, maybe do Shakespeare with people you don’t know much, but when you are trying to do with them something without text then you should get to know one another and then start working, it’s true. But then maybe the Debaj people would need half a year just to get to know people. (17 Dec 2007)

Sometimes more than half-a-year would be needed, according to Paula’s comment. So, while interviewees from all sides of the collaboration expressed frustration at the lack of time, there were culturally situated attitudes at play as well.

Interviewees expressed other difficulties with the work as well, but these were closely connected to these two prime problems. For example, some felt they had too little context for the work (not enough time spent in one another’s spaces), and most that they often did not understand the intentions behind the artistic decisions being made by the facilitators (creating a final product in Prague left little time to explain selections). Other difficulties may have been more inherent to the collaboration. For example, several
interviewees noted that explanations during the process or meanings of certain elements of the show were sometimes lost in translation:

Melanie [UTSC]: I actually don’t understand, literally, there are parts of the play that have never been translated to me, so I… If someone comes to me after the play and asks, “So what were they talking about?” I’ll say, “I don’t know.” (2 Jun 2006)

Paula [Debaj]: It’s hard. I mean there’s a language barrier, and the desire on both ends seems to be hesitant, you know. And I just kept saying, you know, it’s grace, you have to have grace with it. Because we don’t actually understand it. They don’t understand us. So what else is there to do but be graceful and go through it, and make the thing… [laughter] (2 Jun 2006)

Veronika [DAMU]: And I was also like doing the translate…translation… How do you say it? [Barry: “Translating.”] Translating, like from Schmid’s ideas. Which was also like, hard, sometimes difficult, because I didn’t get his idea in Czech, so it’s hard to translate into English. (10 Jun 2006)

A lot of translating did take place, of course, the responsibility for which mainly fell to Schonberg. Many parts of the show were translated depending on where the performance was taking place. Here the Czechs were at an interpretive advantage: all of the Czechs could speak English, whereas none of the North Americans could speak any Czech (Schonberg excluded, and myself limitedly excluded in 2006). As Veronika pointed out, however, the real difficulty was the language barrier between most of the ensemble and Jan Schmid, who had to communicate his ideas through Schonberg and otherwise physically demonstrate his meaning to the ensemble, a process that had the unfortunate effect of sometimes stripping an artistic idea down to a set of physical instructions (as I illustrated in Chapter 3).

I would—and did—agree with my interviewees that the creative work on the PTMTP was often hard, and our work on The Art of Living seemed more difficult than it had been on previous projects. Revisiting my interviews today, however, I see that these
criticisms rest on certain assumptions. For instance, while the criticism that there was too little time to form relationships seems reasonable enough on the surface, it assumes that more time would necessarily lead to stronger relationships, and, in turn, that stronger relationships will lead to better theatre making. It may be as Václav says—that a compressed schedule actually better focuses participants—and that more time would have only meant more time wasted. Time must not be the only nutrient necessary for the growth of relationships. Qualities of the structure of the cultural encounter itself must encourage or permit relationships to form; nothing will grow on sterile ground in any length of time. This is worth thinking about because the reality of collaborative intercultural theatre is that it usually has to be brief. Moving a group around the world to work and perform consumes immense resources, and while many collaborative intercultural theatre projects exhibit the PTMTP’s interest in incrementally building relationships (and often by conducting a similar series of workshop exchanges), a lack of resources will often force facilitators to expedite their process. But with what implications?

**Small Interventions of Big Significance**

By separating out commentary about the perceived problems from the participants’ point of view, I was able to evolve other ideas in my data using the NVivo software. Still, I had to choose material from the project to which I would attach these ideas. What moments or scenes from *The Art of Living* would best serve as touchstones in a discussion? I answered this question by letting my methodology guide me. If one of my objectives in this study was to consider what kinds of insight postmodern ethnography permits then my analysis clearly needed to follow through on the methodological promises of Chapter
Two.

I was reminded of Geertz’s four principles of ethnography: that (i) it is interpretive, (ii) it interprets “the flow of social discourse, not structure,” (iii) it fixes the “said” of social discourse “in perusable terms,” and (iv) it is microscopic, “dealing with small matters with big significance” (20-21). Geertz was careful about this last point. In interpreting small matters of big significance there were two potential pitfalls: that the “small matter” would be seen as directly correlative of the world at large (what he calls the “Jonesville-is-the-USA” or the “world in a teacup” fallacy) or else the “small matter” is regarded as an experiment with determinable variables and conclusive results (the “Easter-Island-is-a-test-case” or “cloud-chamber” fallacy) (22-24). I regard these as two erroneous ways to make this case-study “instrumental,” but still, fallacies notwithstanding, I was compelled by Geertz’s argument that “exceedingly extended acquaintances with extremely small matters” (21) provide the interpreter “bodied stuff on which to feed” (23).

I squared Geertz’s argument with an element of Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert’s model of “cross-cultural praxis” from the 2002 essay that inspired my early explorations of the PTMTP. After reviewing some of the history and discourse of twentieth century intercultural theatre in their essay (as I have done) Lo and Gilbert argue that scholars should look to “sites of intervention” in the theatre, which are “pathways into intercultural theatre that resist an unproblematized transfer of culture.” As to where intervention can be observed in theatre, they write:

If postcolonialism is to denaturalize the universalist vision of the more egregious kinds of interculturalism, it must bring into focus such aspects of theatre as language, space, the body, costume and spectatorship as ideologically laden sign systems as well as potential sites of hybridity. (46)
Their schema is semiotic, looking to “aspects” of theatrical signification for acts of “intervention,” but what would an “intervention” may look like to an ethnographer of theatre work?

In the rest of this chapter, I will analyze three moments from *The Art of Living* that I ask to be thought of as “small interventions of big significance.” The first two of these emerged quite naturally from my data because multiple interviewees expressed strong opinions about them. I identified the third moment myself while I was conducting the research, which allowed me to specifically solicit extra data about it. For that reason, the third will unfold into a more sustained discussion under the rubric of what I will articulate as the ethics of representation in the intercultural context.

**First Intervention: “My Body is My Tool”**

I will first examine two matters of big significance that were small indeed. They are two scenes in the performance which were developed within minutes in rehearsal. Each scene ran no more than thirty seconds as they appeared in the final performance. Both scenes deal with the body—culturally inscribed attitudes toward the body as well as the status of the body in theatrical creation. While these examples both bear out some of the problems cited by my interviewees, what sets them apart in my mind is that they occasioned a minor, albeit not insignificant, intervention in a problematic representation.

Curiously, a number of scenes and images in *The Art of Living* dealt with body image. One sequence mid-way through the performance depicted that clichéd exchange between a man and woman in which the woman asks, “Do I look fat in this?” In the scene that was improvised, the man returns three times with different answers, all of which
result in a slap on the arm and the woman saying, “Bastard!” In another sequence, all the men of the ensemble took off their shirts and followed exactly the movement of a body-builder type-figure downstage centre. This was curious because it was never really made clear how this issue connected to the theme of the project; it seemed to be more appropriate to either of the two first PTMTP projects, *Man and Woman* (in how we perceive and represent our bodies as male and female) or *I and They* (how our body figures into our relationship to others and social expectations). Reviewing notes from an early thematic discussion between the UTSC and Debaj groups—perhaps the only really open group discussion of significant duration to take place during the whole project—nothing resembling this theme appears to have come up. This theme seemed to come out of the void during the work in Prague, and the participants, again lacking the time or invitation to discuss and understand where it might be coming from, patiently worked these representations into entertaining fare for the audience.

At a couple of points during the process, however, participants were pushed to the limit of how willing they would be to display their bodies in the service of theatrical representation. The first came when a scene was created that had all the women of the ensemble, at the coercion of one ostensibly confident woman, forming a line across the apron of the stage and exposing their midriffs cautiously as if working up the courage to do so in the moment. As it is recorded in the script for the show, the sequence into which this was developed went like this:

Stefania [UTSC]: Succumbing to the demands of society! Fashion trends!

Jiřina [DAMU] (*coming DC*): Moda! (*all men back up*)

*Jiřína does an action, ending with showing her mid-riff. All of the women (incl. those offstage) move DS and eagerly show off their bellies – except*
Goldie [UTSC].

All women “Pow!” like Jirina and look at Goldie.

Czech women: Goldie, come on!

Goldie: Ya...

If anyone in the audience were thinking about it, they would probably take this to be a vague commentary on how commercial interests prey on human anxieties about body image. That a Czech participant, however, was displaying her body confidently might clue the audience into the layers of intercultural meaning behind this representation. In this case, that the women appeared to be working up the confidence to expose themselves in this way was not entirely a fiction—that was also how it evolved during rehearsal. This sequence was engineered by Jan Schmid, and on account of there being no direct explanation about its purpose, some of the women were confused and unhappy about it.

Melanie (speaking a month later) recalls her feelings in that moment:

Melanie [UTSC]: We don’t know how this is going to read to the audience. As far as we’re concerned, we’re a bunch of girls exposing our bellies to people for their titillation. Who knows. So… We all go up and we do that. Someone says—Jessica [of Debaj] said she was not comfortable with it, I kind of had my grumblings and mumblings about it… But no, everyone do it. And then, people were even sort of doing it at different scales of commitment, shall we say! (2 Jun 2006)

Jessica is one of the younger Debaj participants—in fact one of the youngest members of the whole ensemble. She is also of a large body type, and while she never gave any indication of having a problem with her self-image (on the contrary, she projected herself confidently onstage in all the work she was doing) it may be that others in this moment projected their own anxieties onto her and expected her, in particular, to object to displaying her body this way. But Melanie’s account—which came a month following...
the rehearsal—actually misses some important details. I recorded the following notes the day of the rehearsal:

(Fieldnotes, 5 May 2006) Interesting moment when we were doing that midriff thing. Only some of the women stepped forward, but Jan wanted all them out there, so they came out. While they were explaining what they should do, I hoped that they meant that the girls could demonstrate their pride of whatever physical feature they liked, but they seemed to want (why?) exposed midriffs. Some not OK with it. Then Jan [Schmid] was talking [in Czech] to Michal [Schonberg] about which of them would refuse to do it, and I thought he was pushing for Jessica. I was listening and watching them. Michal started asking in English, and Jessica did volunteer. I expected him to say, “OK,” but he didn’t, saying, “No, you shouldn’t do it, because it’s not about that, it isn’t about anything other than the representation of an idea.” In other words, I guess we weren’t trying to make a statement about Jessica’s specific image. (Freeman, Unpublished)

In Melanie’s account the facilitators seem quite unaware and insensitive to how the performers might think of or feel about the representation. My account has it that a small compromise may have been attempted. My notes have it that some of the women (among the UTSC and Debaj ensembles only) initially balked at the idea. Urged on, they relented, and someone suggested that the scene could feature one woman resisting the idea, only to be reluctantly coerced by the group. Schmid may have elected for Jessica to be this individual, either because of her body type or because she showed some real sign of disapproval onstage (or both). Schonberg, passing on the idea to the stage in English, polled for any volunteer to be the dissenting woman in the scene. Jessica volunteered, perhaps because she had, like myself, heard Schmid mention her name. Schonberg chose a different actor instead (Goldie).

I believe this example staged an intervention at the site of the body. Schonberg and the women onstage intervened in Schmid’s request in order to re-direct the representation toward the staging of an idea, rather than asking an actor to stage their own—imagined—anxieties. A representation was created, rejected by some, and then
altered slightly. The intervention came during rehearsal, but replayed—however unknowingly to the audience—during public performances. It was an intervention that those in the audience—perhaps even some in the rehearsal room—would have missed. In the end, Jessica had been involuntarily singled out anyhow, but at least she did not have to replay the moment in the public performances. Instead, she and several of the other women stepped to the front of the stage and as Melanie so nicely put it, did the gesture with “different [scale] of commitment,” expressing what was, I would guess, a mixture of real and performed anxiety.

If this moment should seem trivial, consider the multiple layers of cultural authority bearing down on the actors in this moment. The first was immediate: instructions coming from Jan Schmid, an elder artist whose building they were in, in whose home they were effectively a guest. There was also the disarming authority of the Ypsilon style of humour—that irreverent, playful improvisation—of and toward which the participants had differing levels of awareness and deference. Clearly, there was also a gender imbalance in authority; all of the creative facilitators, with the exception of the project’s producer, were men, and regardless of how myself or others may have felt about this representation, the women actors were being asked to expose their midriff for a public audience by a group of men. Moreover, there also seemed to be an unspoken idea about what one’s attitude should be about how the body is to be displayed onstage, not generally, but there, at Ypsilon, in Prague, in Europe, and so on. The Czech actors, after all, did not appear to object to the sequence at all, stepping forward confidently. Of course the context and relationships at play were very different for them, and it might be said that there was an expectation in their theatre that they should always be ready to
submit their bodies to any particular representation. The other actors in the ensemble didn’t have this relationship. For Melanie, the experience struck a nerve:

Melanie [UTSC]: I will do things like that, but I expect it to be my choice. Nobody controls my body except me. I don’t care who you are, and how famous you are, but I get to say. And that was definitely not granted to me. [...] As the one who’s resistant, my body’s my tool. But that’s kind of like ‘Use your tool!’ [...] So. (pause) So that was kind of a bad day. (2 Jun 2006)

At the very least, the moment seemed to have arisen as a result of a miscalculation on Schmid’s part of his trust and relationship with the actors of the other groups. For Melanie, the body also became a charged site of political intervention in a set of cultural forces; she refused to let her body be, in her perception, unjustifiably instrumentalized as a “tool.” Unfortunately, that intervention was more fully realized in our interview than it was in the rehearsal room. In the ‘diet drink’ scene, however, the intervention at the site of the body came in the rehearsal room.

**Second Intervention: The Diet Drink**

The day following the midriff episode, poor Jessica found herself in the middle of a different troubling sequence involving body image. Nobody in the room missed this one. Again, the scene originated with Schmid, and again it was not really apparent to many in the room (myself included) how the scene was thematically relevant. This time, Schmid specifically asked that Jessica be involved. As everyone looked on, Schmid seemed to be illustrating a typical infomercial for a diet drink, in which an image of an overweight person is followed by an image of the miraculous transformation in their body after using the product. Jessica, clearly chosen this time because of her body type, was selected to embody the ‘before’ image. The moment was described in this way by Melanie (again, a month later) and then by myself in my fieldnotes:
Melanie [UTSC]: I’m seeing on the side that they’re working on this commercial that’s going to be some kind of diet drink. And it seems to me that they’re just saying that we need a “before” and we need an “after.” And it really had the feel of “Come stand here, you [Jessica] be the before, and then you’re gonna stand over there and we’re gonna bring Bara [DAMU] out and she’ll be the after.” And I remember seeing Jessica’s face, and I just like… I don’t know whether it was after the scene, or between, working on it, but she just seemed so unhappy. Like she just—she looked unhappy. [...] And I remember it like—having to leave the theatre, like actually having to go into the upstairs to the lounge for a second, just to get a breath of fresh air. Because I just thought—I just can’t watch this girl, like, have that happen to her. And maybe it was my baggage that I was putting on it, because I wasn’t part of the scene, you know, so I like, you know have no idea how much miscommunication is going on. (2 Jun 2006)

(Fieldnotes 6 May 2006) Jessica was hauled in to a scene with Bara and Jiřina. Watched this whole thing go down. So they appeared to be putting together a mini-scene depicting a TV commercial. The host (Jiřina) asks each of two girls a question, then offers them a drink. The one girl (Bara) shows off her tummy. Not sure what’s being said in reference to the other girl in the scenario (Jessica). But the process here was crazy. They were setting it up, and Jiřina asked Jessica if she’d mind playing the other girl in the situation (without explaining what the scene was). Jessica agreed (put on the spot, she’s not about to protest or question). It looked to me like Jiřina just told her what to say (and may or may not have told her what the question was). So she was really pulled into this thing without there being any discussion as to its content as far as I could tell. (Freeman, Unpublished)

It was a miscommunication in the sense that the purposes of the scene were having been adequately communicated, but this again was the result of Schmid’s miscalculation of his relationship to the Debaj actor and expectation that they would go along with whatever representation was ostensibly needed. That he was asking a lot of an actor to put herself forward as an image of unhealthiness may have seemed innocent to Schmid—“your body is your ‘tool’”—but this was not so for the actor (or so we imagine). Also, as had been the case in the scene described above, a Czech actor was being staged as a representation of beauty and health, making it seem now as though the message was being produced that there is a European ideal of beauty to which a North American (in fact, a Native) body type should aspire. To my recollection, reactions in the room to this moment as it
unfolded were immediate and stunned, but like Jessica herself, the language barrier and layers of cultural authority prevented anyone from questioning Schmid’s choice directly. I immediately spoke to Ron Berti of Debaj, and he agreed that we ought to do something about it. In this case, even the Czech participant playing the “after girl” in the scene, Bara, was uncomfortable as well; David recalled her saying after rehearsal, “This is not working, I’m really sorry… This is not fair what we’re doing.” (David 3 July 2006).

After rehearsal, we staged a more conspicuous intervention by talking about and re-staging this scene, and indeed what we needed to make that happen was fewer people and more time. All five of the Debaj actors, myself, Czech Assistant Director Jiří Havelka, and the two Czech actors from the scene were involved. In this session, we were able to openly discuss what the idea could be and suggest theatrical solutions that represented all parties fairly. Most valuably, it was an opportunity to actually identify and speak to an important cultural difference behind the subject being represented. David tells the story this way:

David [Debaj]: [The] only directive we had was that Jan Schmid wanted to use a TV commercial around a weight product. And so that’s what we started to work with. [One] of [Jessica’s] strengths is her physical strength. And we knew that. We knew that from before, from other things she had done here. So that’s when we decided quite quickly that we could play off something to do with the fact that the aesthetic in the Native community is that, first of all, if you’re thin you’re unhealthy. Even in this Biidaasigekwe [Debaj’s summer 2006 mainstage production], there’s a line there where Biidaasigekwe is talking about her daughter, and the hard life she’s had, and now she works really hard, she cleans as good as white people clean, she looks after all her children, and she’s fat… It’s right there: she’s fat. And that means ‘she’s healthy’. She’ll be able to fight off disease and stuff. So that’s what we decided we needed to bring to the table, was something to do with… Something to do with Jessica, in the end, being the one who has the power, and the clear way to do it was with her physical strength. And she was fine with that, in the end. But it was a bit of a sensitive road to get to it. And probably just as sensitive on the other side, you know, even though we’re not aware of it, you know. The pressure for those artists over there to be fit, to be in shape, to be all of these different things, is probably, I’m sure, far greater than

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it is here in Canada. (4 Jul 2006)
That we could all speak the same language meant that we could communicate openly about the idea of the scene and how it might convey an idea while also representing everyone fairly. Adding the time on after rehearsal with a smaller group also gave everyone a chance to be heard in an open discussion. A number of ideas were floated, I recounted a few days later in my fieldnotes:

(Fieldnotes 8 May 2006) So after sifting through a pile of ideas (some about visiting a nutrition store, another about ordering food at McDonalds), [a Debaj participant] made the great suggestion about Jessica saying to Bara that with her little body she won’t be able to make it through the winter, or won’t be able to bear children. (Freeman, Unpublished)

The winning idea would have the scene reversed at the end such that differing ideas about what is “healthy” within the two cultures would be exposed. This was an instance of an understanding that was achieved during rehearsal that was actually featured in the final performance. The details of the scene were not recorded in The Art of Living’s script, but I created the following transcript by reviewing a video of the opening night performance at Ypsilon:


Jiřina: (doing action of clapping a slate and stepping aside) Action!

Jessica: (slouching, sluggishly) I get tired just reaching for the remote control.

Jiřina: (returning, speaks in Czech) We have a brand new diet drink that’ll strip away those calories! Try it! (Hands Jessica a drink. Jessica gobbles it down)

Jiřina: (in Czech) Before...

Bara steps DS of Jessica to be the “after girl.”

Jiřina: (in Czech) And after!
Bara: *(striking a pose, says in English)* I feel pretty!

Jiřina: *(clapping slate to end the commercial and exiting)* Yeah! Super!

*Bara faints. Jessica catches her and lifts her easily into her arms.*

Jessica: Oh you poor Czech thing. You would never survive a Canadian winter!

If the scene had been left as it was, it would have staged the familiar pop-cultural scenario without comment, effectively uncritically representing the thin figure as healthy and desirable (even if the scene’s mountebank figure added an air of quackery). By virtue of the participants chosen for the scene, this healthiness would have been associated with Bara (a very slim woman, incidentally, a gymnast and skilled acrobat), and, by extension through her and Jiřina, with a typical Czech woman. Contrasted to this, then, would have been the figure not just of a North American woman but a Native woman, who would have been taken to be unhealthy and presumably desiring of a different body type. The adjustment undercut (or at least tried to undercut) this representation by suggesting that different body types may be perceived differently in different cultures, and that size can also be a source of strength and endurance. As Melanie put it, “That scene ended up becoming something that was really very funny, and very respectful, and very collaborative, like, in appearance” (2 Jun 2006).

The ethnographic perspective on these micro-examples affords a window into the fraught micro-politics of representation. They were uncomfortable, but they also became the site of new understanding among the participants. My sense is that there were many moments like these, but that they were rarely identified and reflected upon. More often they passed as missed opportunities. Melanie certainly named the discomfort, but again, in my interview rather than in the rehearsal room where the structures and authorities—
perceived and very real—in place did not invite her to do so. Melanie was not a part of the session in which we adjusted the scene, so she narrates the moment as a failure that again casts Schmid in the role of artistic dictator, throwing participants unwittingly into compromising scenes. The language barrier between Schmid and most of the ensemble thwarted cultural dialogue. But as the Czechs often pointed out to me, they, too, often didn’t understand his ideas and how or why certain things came to be. I am inclined to believe that they did not object to these representations as much as the other groups because they understood their purpose better, but because they had tacitly accepted Schmid’s aesthetic, within which there wasn’t always an opportunity to ask, “why?”\textsuperscript{8} For members of the PTMTP’s large ensemble, the invitation to question representations at the level of differing cultural understandings or political investments was not there. For practical reasons, that responsibility fell to the facilitators, but, at least for myself, the pace of the work, the language barrier with Schmid, the differences in cultural frames of reference, didn’t make intervening in the work for this purpose much less difficult than it was for the performers.

These moments also point to the ethics of representation in the intercultural context. In each of these cases, a representation was identified as being “wrong”—something that had to be fixed. They expose a subtle collision of values—in culturally inscribed attitudes towards the body and in attitudes toward the body in representation on the Ypsilon stage. I do not think that there was any malicious intention behind these moments on the part of Schmid or Schonberg (and there was no malicious intent behind my own decisions as a facilitator). Beyond the barriers to opening a discussion about representation, it was also possible that certain attitudes and values were simply not
visible among the group across the cultural divide. The semiotician Juri Lotman spoke of
a culture’s internal organization of meaning as a discrete “semiosphere” with a boundary
beyond which that culture was unintelligible. For Lotman, those things beyond that
imagined boundary are either actively constructed as chaotic (internal “organization”
creates “external disorganization” (212)), or else “has no meaning, is not relevant, simply
does not exist” (128). This was not a purely theoretical problem for Lotman; as a
historian he identifies moments when a semiosphere renders everything beyond it
invisible (as was the case with the medieval courtier Andreas Capellanus who wrote a
well-known treatise on the noble virtues of courtship but “had no compunction in
violating a village-girl” (128)). In these examples, offence was taken and, at least, there
were some failures to understand one another across a cultural divide. I am interested in
how such collisions of values (or meetings of semiospheres) are dealt with (or not), and
in the next sections of this chapter I will consider them under the rubric of the ethics of
representation.

Ethics and Theatrical Representation

*To take the most basic problem in philosophy: What is ethics? Ethics is the capacity of
the individual to imagine the other.*

— John Raulston Saul on TVO’s *Big Ideas*, aired 26 Sept 2009

In the rest of this chapter, I hope to return to the discussion in Chapter One by using my
qualitative research in a discussion of the ethics of representation. Philosophers differ on
the definition of ethics, particularly on its distinction from other related concepts such as
morals and values. In working through my view of ethics, I have drawn on the work of
Canadian philosopher John Raulston Saul and Ghanian-American philosopher Kwame
Anthony Appiah. Saul draws a distinction between morals, an individual’s unique belief in what is right and wrong, and ethics, the ways in which we may co-exist and converse with one another and the forces that shape the conversation (“Big Ideas”). In an article called “The Case for Contamination,” Appiah similarly argues that ethics is not so much about reaching a consensus about what beliefs or practices are considered valid or just, but in an “exchange of perspectives” (37) that may allow us to “get used to one another” (52). Ethics, in other words, is about the processes of talking about what we understand and value. Appiah says, in fact, that ethical processes “usually take place at some distance from rules and rulers, in the conversations that occur across cultural boundaries” (37). To me, that sounds a great deal like what was most important to the PTMTP, and indeed most important to intercultural theatre. I see the PTMTP as this kind of ethical dialogue, but one conditioned by the craft and prerogatives of the theatre. For me, the ethics of representation concerns the dialogue about understandings and values across difference, and then about how that dialogue may be shaped by the demands of theatrical representation.

Ethics should be distinguished from morals. Some interculturalists continue to conflate these terms by using unethical to describe what they see as imperialistic, oppressive, self-interested, and so on. Used in this way, ethics is simply a less dogmatic sounding synonym of morals. A more accurate use of the term, however, and the one which I want to use here, has “unethical” meaning antithetical to conversation across a boundary about understandings and values. It is easy to regard that as immoral, indeed, but I hope the discussion below will complicate that judgment. To pose a counter-intuitive question: what if some features of collaborative intercultural theatre actually
challenge ethics, or, rather, make ethical engagement difficult? Does not the premise of collaborating across difference itself pose an obstacle? As Josette Féral asks, “Could we not say that studying this difference, far from freeing us and allowing a dialogue between cultures, ultimately results in the reinforcement of individualities and specificities that work against the cultural dialogues it attempts to establish?” (7) Ethics is not as easy and it is not the sum of everyone’s good intentions. In the discussion that follows here, I urge the reader to try to mentally extract the sense of immorality from the term unethical, to see it instead as referring to barriers to dialogue, encounter, and learning.

Scholarship about intercultural theatre has begun to talk about ethics, even if tentatively, and even if it does not specifically use the term. Peter Eckersall, for instance, has written several pieces about his work on the Japanese-Australian collaboration Journey to Con-fusion, speaking from an implicated perspective about that project’s dialogic complexities and ambivalences. Writes Eckersall, “Exchange in the majority of cases is unproblematised and a sense of ambiguity or a continued unwillingness to consider intercultural politics is evident” (“Trendiness” 52). Helena Grehan similarly writes about working on Singaporean intercultural auteur Ong Ken Sen’s 2000 production of Desdamonda, expressing the gap she sees between the rich experiential dimensions of the work (“The rehearsals were breathtakingly beautiful as well as extremely engaging” (117)) and the sorts of things being discussed in intercultural scholarship. Referencing the production I cited in Chapter One as a turning point in the intercultural discussion of ethics, Grehan expresses her concern that concepts such as identity and diaspora have ceded their subversive potential to a simplistic cultural politics, and wonders if “we should be looking at these concepts as points of connection,
exchange and dialogue that they may open up instead of viewing them with “Mahabharatian” anxiety” (115-16). Also relatable to my own experience was Viv Gardner’s 2005 article about her experience working on a Ugandan production of *Mother Courage and her Children.* Like the PTMTP, that production was principally designed to realize a public performance, but more interesting to Gardner were the tensions that surfaced among members of the ensemble as well as between the agencies which funded and hosted the production in Uganda, the UK and America. Gardner praises the production itself, saying that it “engaged masterfully and actively with issues of language and identity, of politics and image” (186), yet the article is entirely about her frustration at the failing internal dialogues and competing interests at play: “[A] strong sense of frustration with the imposed objectives emerged in exchanges among the company, as all parties struggled to meet the widely different imperatives […] Eventually, other projects—not least, earning a living, became a priority” (185). These scholars all evaluate theatre in terms of what kind of dialogue it enables across planes of difference, and all are concerned with how that dialogue can be extended to spectators. Grehan suggests that performances may “retain some kind of hook, that allows the spectator to participate in the process” (124), and that lacking such a “hook” could result in “the devaluation of performance into a pastiche of meaningless chatter” (124). Yet Grahan adds a rhetorical question: “If [a production] has provided a fertile ground for cultural exchange between the practitioners involved yet is considered unsuccessful by a Western theatre audience, is it a success or a failure?” (124)

In Chapter One I identified the crisis of ethics as a moment when a modernist tradition of intercultural theatre was having to defend itself against the critique that it was
wholesale unethical, that is, that it disabled conversations about cultural difference, partly because, it was said, its principal proponents embarked on projects more for their own artistic and material profit than a genuine interest in the Other. Parroting Biodun Jeyifo’s periodization, I referred to this as a second discourse, and included in it arguments forwarded by Rustom Bharucha, Gautam Dasgupta, Jacqueline Lo, Helen Gilbert, among others. My contention in Chapter One was that this was a discursive impasse, and that the only way forward was by finding a different methodology that would allow us to observe and interpret the work of collaborative intercultural theatre differently. It should not be surprising that the authors I cited above also deploy a non-traditional methodology by writing from an insider’s perspective on the work, but they each mostly take their methodology for granted. Here, I begin to capitalize on my methodology by reaching beyond the ethical impasse in which the scholarship seems to have been resting. I will do this by first addressing the inadequacies of a possible critique of PTMTP within the ‘second discourse,’ and then return to the examples I provided above to see what more they reveal about ethics.

The PTMTP at the Crisis of Ethics

To re-orient (as it were) myself in the discussion in Chapter One, I want to articulate a critique of the PTMTP within the second discourse, that is, within a post-colonial paradigm that looked for signs that the project exhibited an imbalance of power and was exploitative of the cultural Other. I made the case in Chapter One that some critics may have been more inclined to read intercultural work in this way simply because their semiotic approach did not admit evidence to the contrary. I would refine this argument at this point to say that an alternative methodology only offers the possibility of different
conclusions; it is not difficult to critique of the PTMTP in the manner of the second discourse that uses my ethnographic research. For the sake of argument, let me imagine what such a critique of the PTMTP would look like.

In the PTMTP’s case, the balance of power would certainly be weighted toward the Czech group, not just because postcolonial thought would have it that the ‘high-culture’ European group would have a superior artistic and cultural status to those of the ‘colonies,’ but also because, as I have described, the project was culturally and artistically dominated by Schmid and the Ypsilon brand. Just as Peter Brook was accused of effacing cultural particularity in India with the Mahabharata, this imbalance of authority had the potential to inhibit the project’s ability to fairly represent its participant groups and individuals. Like Brook and others before him, Schmid’s disinterest in the real, living culture of the participants with which he was working instead led him to populate the PTMTP projects with the most general of tropes and stories—creation myths, archetypes, pop cultural figures, etc.

I could argue that Schmid was involved purely out of self-interest. Large intercultural collaborations like the PTMTP, after all, bestow status on its creators and participants alike. As I have put it elsewhere, some will participate in this kind of work “strictly for their own material gain and in performance of their affluence and ability to do so” (Freeman, “Navigating” 76). Ric Knowles identifies something similar to this in his analysis of international theatre festivals in Reading the Material Theatre. Knowles notes that these festivals are not so much exchanges of culture as they are exchanges of cultural capital (181, original emphasis). Certainly, Ypsilon acquired cultural capital by presenting these groups from far away—and acquired more, one might say, by working
with a group so foreign to the Czech audience as Debaj. Cultural capital flowed behind the scenes as well. In the last chapter, I mentioned that at the time that Schonberg proposed the PTMTP to Schmid in the late 1990s, changes to theatre funding meant that new strings were being attached to the monies that Ypsilon received from the civic government. Now in competition with other established and independent theatre companies for money, Ypsilon, a theatre hardly known for its cosmopolitanism, was suddenly extending its horizons. In my interview with him, Václav pointed to the cultural capital to be gained through international collaborations within the new funding structure:

Václav [DAMU]: What I saw here, for example, in Prague, is that the international projects are about getting a good grant. You know, fundraising. Because this is a very supported thing. All the international cooperations, because we want to be a part of Europe, you know, and international projects bring something new into a theatre. Because this system is actually new—once in two years to do something international, otherwise you are nothing. (17 Dec 2007)

Specifically, Václav is referring to the fact that being freed from guaranteed state funding meant that theatres like Ypsilon were now eligible to apply for European Union money, and, recalling the “EU Year of Intercultural Dialogue” from the Introduction, interculturalism “sells” at the EU. Czechs, it seems, would have their own reasons for being suspicious of the PTMTP’s purposes.

Debaj had different reasons. David pointed out to me that if the Debaj participants in the project did not feel as though their distinct voice was really being heard, then they were left with the unattractive thought that they were purely there as an exoticized cultural Other:

David [Debaj]: If you’re not really challenging the artists from that cultural community to come up with meaningful contribution and therefore vested interest in what the piece is actually saying…Then you question why you’re there in the first place, and you start to doubt things, and you start to think that “We’re here for flavour, and we’re here for colour. Cultural ‘colour.’” And obviously that’s
the last thing that we want to have happen to our artists. They don’t need to be disempowered at this point. (4 Jul 2007)

David did not feel this about the PTMTP, but he did feel it was something of which he had to be aware. His comment usefully underscores the imbalance of the cultural capital equation—that Debaj felt more concerned than the other groups about being involved purely for others’ cultural capital gain. I recall a moment when my own concern was aroused. One evening during our stay in Prague, the whole PTMTP ensemble went to a mainstage evening performance at Ypsilon of Praha Stověžatá (Prague of a Hundred Spires). Because one of the actors was ill the performance was cancelled, but instead the cast simply came out and entertained the audience with jokes, skits and music. At the last minute, Schmid chose two pieces by Debaj from the PTMTP to add to the evening’s entertainment; two of Debaj’s actors came onstage and did a scene about excusing behavior on account of being drunk, then another actor came out and simply did her impression of a high-pitched ‘Snow White’ voice that she had playfully offered during rehearsal. There were many more substantial pieces Schmid might have chosen from our work, and that he chose these rather thin items (and two from Debaj only) left me, at least, with the feeling that what was really being presented to the audience was the actors themselves—that is, their bodies—adding to Ypsilon’s stage the “cultural colour” of David’s comment. To be fair, there was an appreciable reason for the inclusion: to encourage regular Ypsilon patrons to also attend the upcoming performance of the PTMTP. To my eyes, however, having the most culturally marked members of the ensemble perform a couple of silly pieces with little context was a bald ploy for cultural capital, and the experience chillingly echoed the spectatorial experience of the human zoos of the World Exhibitions.
We could fold other features of the project into this argument. For example, we could frame the brevity of the project—cited as a significant problem from the perspective of the participants—as indicative of its devaluing of deep and sustained intercultural learning, and its reaping, instead, of the cultural capital of encounter and travel. Indeed, participants’ accounts of their experience with the PTMTP sometimes told a story that resembled this. Melanie, in particular, was deeply sceptical of the process and the intentions of all parties. The processes’ problems as she perceived them were not simply design or dramaturgical oversights, but that she (and others) were part of a machine that specifically disallowed dialogue and churned out pre-determined messages. During my interview, Melanie effectively began to narrate the PTMTP as an exchange of cultural capital rather than an exchange of cultural understandings.

But just as all those criticisms of Brook and Mnouchkine depended on a highly selective view of their subjects, so too does Melanie’s take and this whole critique simplify the PTMTP’s ethics. The closer vantage point offered by the qualitative data here complicates the story.

The PTMTP was a source of cultural capital to be sure. The PTMTP did serve as a showpiece for Schmid/Ypsilon, keeping them, I imagine, at least in competition for status and monies with much more adventurous Prague companies such as Divadlo Archa. But cultural capital flowed in the other directions as well. All partnering institutions benefited from status bestowed simply by the fact of the collaboration. The same was true for individual project participants, and a few of them acknowledged this:

Václav [DAMU]: It was also good for me when I can write down that I did three times this Czech-Canadian-Indian project. (17 Dec 2007)

Katja [DAMU]: If I say this to Czech people that I was in Canada, they will say
like “How did you go there?? It’s very interesting!” […] So I explain that it was our theatre school, it was with Debaj and a theatre school in Toronto. Everybody is saying good things, saying that it can be a really good experience. (1 Dec 2007)

Melanie [UTSC]: [The Czechs] can put on their resume that they’ve worked with Jan Schmid in Prague and that means something. For us it’s just like, “Who?” and it won’t have any relevance for our career really. But the project itself will have that, sort of, political resume. (2 Jun 2006)

Debaj participants did not so openly express the cultural capital acquired by their participation, and I think they would disavow having anything like that agenda, as David’s comment above attests. Still, however, mention of the project in public and formal contexts (such as in an interview published in Shannon Hengen’s history of the company11) lends a status to the company, particularly given the “mainstream” perception that Debaj is isolated.12

As to the criticism that the Schmid/Ypsilon group was unaware and insensitive to the other groups’ cultures or desires, this presumes that this was their purpose in the first place. The purpose of the PTMTP was never formally established. I could collect together remarks made in interviews, programs, press releases, etc. to guess at purposes, but these statements are offered more as framing devices for the audience than organizing principles. For example, Jan Schmid explained his own motivations for creating the project in an interview produced for a DVD documentary of the third PTMTP:

I think what we are doing is more important than all kinds of political proclamations about symbiosis or mutual relationships. I think these are good proclamations, but if they are not accompanied by something practical then they remain only on paper. They may vote in all kinds of fine things and other projects but the personal experience is incredibly important. I think that is why we continue with these projects. (Myths DVD)

It is a remarkable statement for Schmid to have made, given that participants seemed to feel that more time was needed to develop relationships among the ensemble. On the
surface, Schmid’s scepticism about the claims made by intercultural work is not
dissimilar from my own. I do not doubt Schmid’s genuine interest in PTMTP participants
having a valuable personal experience through the project, but that he includes “mutual
relationships” among the “proclomations” as subordinate to “something practical” in
unsurprising in lieu of the feeling expressed by my interviewees that the work did not
give them the time to form the relationships they felt were important to doing meaningful
work. What is valuable “personal experience,” then, depends on one’s point of view.

The fundamental mistake of the second discourse is that it is actually about
morals and not ethics at all, and its blanket judgement places us once more at the impasse
that I identified in Chapter One in the debate between Bharucha and Schechner in Asian
Theatre Journal. Shifting from morals to ethics opens us to a more nuanced and fair
appraisal. In this case, it would in the first place make available the many successful
moments of learning that took place throughout the PTMTP. However many troubled
moments there may have been during the PTMTP’s process, however many moments of
failed dialogue and unfair representation there may have been, it also afforded plenty of
moments of positive and productive dialogue opened up between the participants. I asked
my participants directly about this. While I did not couch the question in terms of ethics
(I hadn’t landed on that framing term yet, and also the philosophical complexity of that
term may have been confusing for interviewees), I did ask them about where they “placed
value” on the experience. Sometimes I asked this question that openly, and other times I
partly closed it by asking them to choose between three aspects of the experience: the
extra-theatrical experience while on exchange, the process of working on the
performance, or the performance itself. Among the responses:
Paula [Debaj]: I love being in rehearsal. I love it. I love working with the artists. I love seeing what people are doing and coming up with. [...] to see other theatre and what people are doing in other parts of the world is mind expanding ... [...] [Also,] seeing other work, and seeing a different culture. (2 Jun 2006)

Malcolm [Debaj]: But I think for me, the most, as you say, viable experience, or important part of that project, was the relationships that were built outside of the rehearsal space, and outside of the performance. The time spent travelling on the bus, visiting each other’s communities, and learning about each other’s cultures. (2 May 2006)

David [Debaj]: [The] opportunity to work with that level of skilled musicians and musical director and stuff, and on kinds of music they would never approach here at all. So things like that were of value. Simply being in another country was of value. (4 Jul 2006)

Garnet [UTSC]: Maybe it didn't live up to all my expectations. But I definitely took the time to enjoy the moment, and allowed that expectation to become the reality, and just enjoy it. (3 May 2006)

Melanie [UTSC]: This was like educational because it was like going to a different culture... [...] It was more inspiring to go to a different city, see other theatre, and what you are observing on your own... (2 Jun 2006)

Simon [UTSC]: One of the most interesting things [...] is just to see an actual show. Because that’s one of the reasons why we came here too, right? To see what it’s like... To see what professional theatre is like in another part of the world. (9 May 2006)

Cynthia [UTSC]: I think it kind of gives me some more confidence maybe to look into the acting world, just because we’ve been hanging out with actors all the time, and just...Right into the industry really. In Prague, anyway. It just...It was neat. (7 Jun 2006)

Katja [DAMU]: I think the best thing I could take... I think from the whole trip, like seeing Canada. Yes, to see Canada, and to see how people are living there. [...] And you go to Manitoulin Island and you see these people how they are living, what they are doing. Which is very different from us, very different from Europeans. So this kind of exchange is very good. For the theatre? I think the experience for my acting is maybe that I am acting in English. (1 Dec 2007)

Veronika [DAMU]: For me, the performance is just 10% of the whole project. [...] What I really appreciate is all the people. Like, I’m sitting away and talking to someone that I didn’t expect I would talk to, and it brings me a lot of new ideas. (16 May 2006)
Václav [DAMU]: I liked it. It was different to everything else we did at school because we didn’t make any performance with Schmid til then. Well maybe one I think—but it was based on a book. But doing alternative theatre, only by having the name of the topic. […] It was not only meeting new people, but it was putting something together which must be understandable in Czech and in English also. (17 Dec 2007)

To the extent that we can take these statements at face value (more on this in a moment), participants were learning from their experience in ways that the broad ethical critique obscures. The first impulse I had to write about the PTMTP came precisely out of this point: that I saw participants in the work having valuable experiences that were not visible within present theoretical and methodological frameworks.

But to begin now to “reach above” the PTMTP and broaden this discussion, I should ask: are these experiences of learning really ethical experiences? If ethics involves dialogue among different people about values, I am not sure these experiences qualify. Few would argue that being exposed to foreign places, aesthetics and training traditions is valuable, but how much do such experiences really involve having to negotiate others’ understandings and values? Note that the comments seem mainly to index private rather than public experiences. Did they have anything to do with theatre? On the whole, my interviewees did not find the process of working on the PTMTP to be ethical as I am defining it here. While Paula, Malcolm, Melanie and Simon all place value on seeing other theatre, or ways of working, the comments above mostly place value on simply being somewhere else or being exposed to another culture, extra-theatrical experiences that one might have by simply traveling elsewhere. Only Paula and Václav places value on the creative process, and perhaps only Václav values the product of the collaboration itself.

In my view, the ethical process that may have taken place through the work was
mostly sublimated into the extra-theatrical experience of the PTMTP. Participants may not have found ethical engagement in what we might consider to be all the right places, but the comments above suggest that they were seeking them out. It is for this reason that the entire enterprise of second-discourse critique—a moral critique insofar as it is interested in a value-based judgment rather than an analysis of how discussion is enabled and structured—is inadequate. As Lo and Gilbert put it (echoing Patrice Pavis’ argument against cultural relativism):

Such moral critiques, while absolutely essential to the politicizing of Interculturalism, risk instigating a kind of paralysis insofar as they suggest that virtually no form of theatrical exchange can be ethical. This position is clearly untenable for a number of practitioners, especially those whose art is derived from (and aims to explore) experience of cultural hybridity. (41)

As the examples I have provided illustrate, theatre can—and in fact does find a way to be—ethical. In fact, if ethics concerns how we converse with one another about what we understand and value, theatre seems to be its natural home. Like all the arts, it enters into the intellectual discourses through which we define ourselves as individuals and as collectivities. Unlike all the arts, it is also deeply social and interactional, placing people in situations of dialogue whereby they must make sense of their circumstances. This must be particularly true of collaborative intercultural theatre. After all, its defining trait is that it brings people of different cultures—that is, of different understandings and values—into contact. Also, as a collaborative form, it demands that its participants co-create, to name and make sense of their difference. If any theatre should be ethical, this is it.

Does intercultural theatre have an obligation to be ethical? According to Emmanuel Levinas, the very encounter with the Other creates an unconditional responsibility to the Other. “Positively we will say,” writes Levinas in *Ethics and Infinity*,
“that since this Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having taken on responsibilities in his regard; his responsibility is incumbent on me” (qtd. in Burvill 234, original emphasis). Scholars such as Tom Burvill and Samuel Stedman have applied Levinasian ethics to theatrical spectatorship to consider the extent to which the event of theatre engenders ethical engagement (see Burvill; Stedman). Burvill argues that an audience does not assume responsibility because of an ideological argument but because of affect and shared embodied experience; theatre can be a form of “ethical practice” (234). That is an intriguing idea to me, that dialogue across difference could actually be facilitated, or augmented by plying emotion and embodying ideas rather than articulating them. If I take collaborative intercultural theatre to have an obligation to ethics, what can the PTMTP tell us about the obstacles to and possibilities of ethical engagement through theatre? Where do we locate ethics?

Given the broad definition I am using here, I would say that dialogue about understandings and values across difference takes place in conversations among the creators, in group discussion, in rehearsal, in performance, in subsequent conversation among spectators, in para-theatrical documents such as marketing materials, programs, reviews, interviews, and so on. It is worth considering what kind of ethics each of these discourses are, though perhaps beyond my purview here. In this study I set aside the most discussed of these—the ethics of spectatorship—in favour of looking at ethics as it is manifested in rehearsal, in extra-theatrical contexts, and in interviews. The reason for this goes back to Corbey’s “optical empiricism” from Chapter One: for too long intercultural discourse has biased the visual as a way of knowing, and in my experience, there are other sites of dialogue—as integral to what theatre is and does—that are worth
considering.

**Taking the Time**

Collaborative intercultural theatre projects are briefer than they seem. While the PTMTP existed for a decade, any one of its four incarnations took place over the course of about eight months. In turn, each incarnation consisted of workshops just a week or two in length. The amount of actual time spent together is less than even this. From the day of the first meeting of the entire ensemble to opening night, there was in fact only twelve days. If you consider just the basic facts of the collaboration: thirty-four artists from three collaborating groups of differing cultural backgrounds and training, and only twelve days, it is not surprising that a lack of time would become an issue. But the problem is not limited to the PTMTP—one would find the same brevity of actual meeting time in other theatre projects, including Toronto-based Theatrefront’s *Sarajevo* and *Cape Town* Projects and Modern Times’ *Dialogues Project* (see Footnote 2 in Introduction). Though it took years in the case of these projects to raise the funds and set up the requisite relationships, the time the artists spent together was similarly on the order of a few weeks. If you consider the other kinds of cultural encounter and hybridization that receive academic attention—diasporas, creolization, cultural pluralism—this kind of encounter is remarkably brief—nearly momentary. If theatre is to be the site of ethical engagement, it may have to happen quickly.

The trouble is that it cannot. Dialogue across difference about understandings and values take time. This is not to say (recalling a scepticism I had about some of my interviewees’ comments) that more time affords any guarantee of ethics. What is certain, though, is that a lack of time squeezes it out. In Chapter Three, I noted how the
misperceptions I myself had of the DAMU and Debaj groups (and contexts) were corrected only by way of a long process of coming to know them. Without time, these misperceptions could not get discussed and corrected. For that reason, it was not uncommon in interviews to hear statements that bespoke a failure to have understood the position of the other groups. For example:

David [Debaj]: I think if you are asking your artists to contribute, then it’s only fair to explain to them, or share with them why you may or may not use their piece, after doing it. But that is clearly not how they work in the Czech Republic. (4 Jul 2006)

To be fair, David was insightful about the other groups elsewhere in his comments. Still, this comment generalizes a characteristic of the PTMTP—Schmid’s failure to sufficiently explain his choices to the ensemble partly because of the language barrier and partly because of disinterest—to be a characteristic of Czech theatre more generally, which is of course not at all true. In this case, it is not only surprising that David did not demonstrate an appreciation of Ypsilon’s brand, but also that he failed to pick up from any of the Czech performers themselves the difficulties they had with Schmid’s style. Some other comments from interviewees also demonstrated a shortage of information about the project’s basic set up. In the audio journal that Garnet recorded for me, he records comments that demonstrate he really isn’t sure what is happening:

Garnet [UTSC]: One of the many reasons I’ve heard—that the Czech group is so much smaller in number than the Scarborough group is anything from being busy with other projects, happening, from conflicts of opinions with others, finances, whatever, various arrays… (4 May 2006)

None of these things were really the case—at six participants, the Czech group was large if anything. It was the UTSC group that was very large, making the Czech group seem small by comparison. There were many more statements to this effect in the interviews,
as participants, not having had the time to come to know one another’s frames of reference, did their best to draw frames around their still very fresh experience.

More significant for me is how the lack of time impacted the possibility of ethical dialogue on smaller scales. As I have said above, putting the show together in only twelve days, with about only five hours of rehearsal per day, meant that the structure of the project itself disallowed the possibility of lengthy discussion. This became a real obstacle to ethical encounter because it established a rapid working pace that participants felt uncomfortable interrupting with objections of any nature. The examples above from the PTMTP illustrate that taking the time to devote to small matters such as the Diet Drink scene could lead to a new understanding. That time opened up what I would call an ethical dialogue among a set of the participants, and comments from David and Melanie in particular bear out the fact that a new understanding (not the same thing as an “agreement”, more on this later) came about.

This all leads me to think of time as an additional site of intervention that was left out of Lo and Gilbert’s analysis. If, as I proposed in Chapter One, one of the things that is really at stake in intercultural theatre discourse is “how cultures should meet in and through the theatre,” then I think the PTMTP illustrates that this kind of cultural encounter must take time. Methodologically speaking, time has been left out of the discourse precisely because it is not “significant,” that is, in the semiotic sense of being rich with meaning, in the same way that space and the body are significant. Instead, it is part of the environment, part of the experiential ether in which such systems operate. But time is a site of intervention—it conditions whose opinions are heard, whose are not, and how opinions materialize in the creative process, if at all.
Following the Script

That the project was designed to produce a public performance meant that representations had to come together regardless of how poorly they may have been understood by the participants, or how poorly they understood one another while working on them. The PTMTP had a few examples of representations that were objectionable to some participants as in the examples above. These became sites of small interventions. Many other representations, while not objectionable, still developed out of a similarly unethical process that I want to focus on now. In these cases, a lack of dialogue about understandings and values across difference led participants to fall back on familiar positions within known narratives.

In her book *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre*, Helen Nicholson writes:

I have expressed some skepticism about claims that drama always transforms beliefs and attitudes for the better. This is based on the understanding that no social encounter—including drama workshops—is exempt from other social narratives and alternative perceptions of power. It is often difficult to gauge the social effects of drama immediately, and when I read that participants have expressed profound changes in attitudes I often wonder whether they have been complicit in following the script of the workshop, or whether their change of heart indicates a positive but temporary identification with a kindly practitioner whose point of view may not be actually expressed, but whose values are nonetheless clearly visible to them. (82)

Nicholson’s skepticism is specifically about the academic rhetoric of personal/social transformation within the discourse of applied theatre practices, but its insights obtain here. Nicholson reiterates a point I made in Chapter Two and at the start of this chapter: that the cultural narratives surrounding intercultural theatre actually give it structure and set its agenda. Also, participants in theatre work may not know, in the “heat of the moment,” how to make meaning out of their experience, and so they may have little
choice but to adopt those narratives that are readily available to them (in the interim if not permanently). Lastly, these narratives were never really ‘told’ by anyone in the room—they are just there, inherited from past practices and held in place by all the material forces shaping the work. Critical discourse analysis theorists Davies and Harre make a similar point. They note that at least up and until positions run against an undesirable conclusion or an immoral implication, subjects often casually, even unknowingly, adopt them:

Participants may not be aware of their assumptions nor the power of the images to invoke particular ways of being and may simply regard their words as ‘the way one talks’ on this sort of occasion. But the definition of the interaction being ‘of this sort’ and therefore one in which one speaks this way, is to have made it this sort of occasion. (49, emphasis in original)

I believe this is a powerful idea in relation to the PTMTP, and perhaps to collaborative intercultural theatre more broadly. I believe that such invisible narratives surround intercultural theatre and that participants sometimes position themselves within them without even being aware that they are doing so. Not only that, but in fact some fundamental practical challenges to the form—limited time, general unfamiliarity with context, general unfamiliarity with one another, and so on—make participants more likely to do so.

How do we observe “following the script” in the PTMTP? The first thing to say is that it was—as I have said elsewhere—a disorderly experience for both myself and the other participants. Disorder is an uncomfortable state to live in, and everyone was searching for a way to organize the experience into narrative. As I have described it in the past, interpreting participants’ (and my own) experience has been like listening to a discordant chorus of voices, all following the conductor, but each seeking the tune.
(Freeman “Cultural Meeting” 218). My interviews themselves amplified this effect. By asking participants to make meaning of their experience while they were still going through it was in fact to invite them to seek out and follow the script. For instance, consider two more comments that followed from my question about what participants “valued” about their experience (they are speaking in Wikwemikong, on the third-last day of the *Art of Living* project):

Simon [UTSC]: I have to say it’s like a collision course. A fast impact. Because it just kind of hits you [snaps fingers] and at the end of it, you’re just walking away, you’re changed, right? It’s definitely an experience that you’ve gone through, and the ramifications… It’s kind of like what you’re saying, you’re not going to feel it until like, later on…

Cynthia [UTSC]: I think it has just kind of emphasized how much everybody round the world is the same, essentially. Except for… I mean, there’s some cultural difference, but… I don’t know… It… (7 Jun 2006)

Transformation is at issue in Simon’s comment, but how does he feel about it? Simon is not saying he is transformed, but that he *expects to be*. Why? Perhaps it was the frame of intercultural theatre itself that created this expectation. Perhaps it was the frame of the interview itself, though the question I had asked him was about what he “valued” about his experience, which does not necessarily require a transformation narrative (and did not elicit many). Cynthia’s comment does not invoke a transformation narrative; on the contrary, the experience emphasized or perhaps confirmed something she already knew. But the something she already knew is something quite familiar, something known to everyone.

My contention is Simon and Cynthia are positioning themselves within known ‘scripts’ that are elusive and invisible, but nonetheless real. Benwell and Stokoe note that connecting moments in the field to wider narratives “appears to rely on the analyst’s
opinion of which gross, culturally familiar plotline might resonate at a particular moment” (159). Here, Simon and Cynthia’s comments resonate with two such plotlines: transformation and transculturalism. If we already expect theatre work to be transformative, intercultural work is the more so because it is premised on exposure to something foreign and new. As though he has a sense of this, Simon picks up the transformation narrative even while he finds himself not quite able to organize his experience into it. So it is also with Cynthia. The transcultural narrative to which her comment appeals is the one the PTMTP de-facto inherited from the whole of twentieth-century interculturalism: the story that “we are all the same” and that differences are but local idiosyncratic responses to universal human problems. That narrative was palpably present during the experience of the PTMTP. Though the projects were populated with quirky images and scenes trawled from participants’ personal experience, they would frequently be followed by full-ensemble scenes in the abstract, or else bracketed by aphoristic appeal to common experience:

The human being is an intelligent animal. That is why he is his own constant contradiction.

The biggest mistake is that mankind doesn’t learn from previous mistakes.

All the world’s troubles come from fools who are confident and the wise that are always self-conscious.

The content of the project lived in this symbolic, universal register, so Cynthia had to look no further into the history of interculturalism for it. But like Simon, Cynthia balks at purely following the script, equivocating over the project’s agenda vis-a-vis human sameness and difference.

But was it an absence of ethical dialogue that led to Simon and Cynthia’s
comments? Something is clearly absent. The comments suggest that neither of them has found a way to order/narrate their experience at that discursive moment, but that despite not having found the way, they are nonetheless aware of some familiar and apparently available narratives that they might use. Certainly the two may, as Nicholson suggested, still be unsure of the effect of the experience and thus still be unable to speak precisely about its effects. I suspect, however, that their comments would be less specific if I were to ask them again today, and the narratives they invoked—Simon’s transformation and Cynthia’s transculturalism—would probably be taken up with even greater certitude. In fact I do think it was the lack of ethical dialogue that led them to follow—or at least reference—the respective “scripts.” They each want a story, but do not have one at hand. Simon wants to be transformed, but has no specific experience to attach it to, nowhere to position himself within it. Cynthia wants to say whether it has made her feel that we are more the same or more different, but the experience has to that point been inconclusive. At these moments in the interview, neither is able to index any specific moments in the dialogue of the work on which to pin a narrative of their experience. What is missing, therefore, is not time, which is what both Simon and Cynthia say in the moments that precede and follow these comments, but in fact time for ethical dialogue.

While the context of the interview put a kind of discursive pressure on the interviewees to interpret their experience, it still permitted them the ambivalence that Simon and Cynthia demonstrated. In fact, I encouraged ambivalence by creating an atmosphere of openness that invited uncertainty. As such, I feel that the interviews themselves were the occasions of deeply ethical dialogue, but with one very important caveat: they were private, and not public. What is desirable or possible to say in a private
conversation—even one destined for analysis in academic discourse—is crucially different than what is desirable and possible in a public context such as a rehearsal or a public theatrical performance for multiple audiences. Therefore, I now want to apply the concepts of ethical engagement, positions and narratives to an example from the creative process of the PTMTP. In the creative process as in my interviews, there was a pressure to produce self-representations that slotted into an over-arching narrative. One important difference, though, was in the threshold of tolerable ambivalence in representation. Theatrical representation made choosing a position—or rather representing a position—within a narrative a necessity. How much was this process, and then the process of reflecting on the process in the interviews, ethical?

The Diet Drink example occasioned a conversation among members of all three participant groups about differing cultural ideas to do, in its case, with beauty and health. We then created, or altered, a representation that made something of that ethical exchange available to the audience. I held this up hopefully as an example of how collaborative intercultural theatre could be ethical. I want to now return to the example of the Northwest Passage scene that I alluded to at the start of this chapter to illustrate a process that was largely unethical, and that resulted in playing out the effect of following the script in a particular way. In its case, participants were charged with the challenge of negotiating multiple familiar, available positions to the best of their ability and knowledge in the moment of rehearsal. For some, the end result was disastrous, producing an artifact of cultural misunderstanding that they then had to replay during each performance of The Art of Living. For others, the scene was the site of intercultural engagement that produced something none of the groups could have created on their own.
For me it was both, and, as such, the scene encapsulated so many of my ambivalent feelings about the possibilities and hazards of collaborative intercultural theatre.

**Third Intervention: The Northwest Passage**

Despite the fact that the two “body” scenes described earlier in this chapter came out of uncomfortable moments in the rehearsal room, each of them appeared in performances of *The Art of Living* as playful skits that invited spectators to take them as lightly. Nearly all of the performance had this tone, in fact, in keeping with Schmid’s style and the Ypsilon brand. My reader may be getting the sense by this point that there is an overall disjuncture between the lightness of scenes from the PTMTP and the weight of the issues at stake in my earlier account of the twentieth-century intercultural theatre tradition. But this was something I felt during the work as well, and it should be remembered that the continuity I have established between intercultural antecedents and arguments and the PTMTP was understood by everyone involved by participants in the project during the work. In fact, the legacy of colonialism that one might expect to be background to a European-Native artistic collaboration was not discussed at any length.

Yet, somehow, that very legacy ended up being depicted in a decidedly more serious scene placed about halfway through *The Art of Living*. While this scene did retain some of the air of playfulness and levity as the rest of the show, it also depicted a violent encounter that culminated in an ambiguous moment. Sitting in the audience at Ypsilon Theatre in Prague on opening night, 14 May 2006, I saw a scene that depicted a first contact, ostensibly between North American Natives and Europeans, and scored by a chorus singing a re-arranged version of Canadian folksinger Stan Rogers’s song “Northwest Passage,” an anthem to the heroism of polar explorers. Debaj actors played...
the Natives, Ypsilon actors played the Europeans, and UTSC actors formed a chorus. The scene begins with the Natives entering the space to the pulse of a drum and wordlessly trading items that they happen to have in their pockets. Seemingly satisfied, they separate to the four corners of the stage. Next, the Europeans enter the scene upstage, behaving boorishly, evidently trying to decide where to go, and speaking gibberish that crescendos with the declaration “West!” As the chorus sings “Northwest Passage,” a scene plays out between the Natives and Europeans quickly and in broad farcical strokes supported by comic gestures. The Europeans form a line, miming a rowing action, and one seems to step out of the boat to ask (in English) what this land is called, to which the Native replies “Kanada,” playing out the familiar (and probably apocryphal) story of the misunderstanding between Jacques Cartier and the Iroquois that gave Canada its name. The Europeans continue to row, and a bloody war erupts between them (still using comic—at this point cartoonish—gestures) that leaves only one Native and one European standing at the end. The two survivors point their weapons at each other, not knowing what to do next, at which point the European leans in, kisses the Native, laughs and bolts offstage, leaving the Native to pass a rather blank look at the audience. The scene closes with everyone reentering to sing a final chorus of “Northwest Passage.”

This is how I saw the scene, but of course I had seen every step of its evolution and understood most of its historical references. I cannot say how it was understood by my fellow spectators that evening, but I imagine that most would have seen a broad, uncomplicated Eurocentric vision of the conquest of the New World. Consider the use of stage space: (i) the Debaj actors enter first and move slowly and comfortably around the stage until (ii) the Ypsilon actors enter into the strong space on the stage which they
occupy until the end of the scene, and (iii) the UTSC actors observe from the periphery throughout. All of this could be read as realizations in proxemics of a familiar story: a conquest narrative depicting the Natives as a single peaceful community ruined by European invaders who first misunderstand, then kill, then almost steal from their victims a kiss. Those who could understand the lyrics of the song would find a similar theme in its repeated lines “Tracing one warm line / Through a land so wild and savage.” A structuralist semiotic reading might look like this, building an interpretation out of the accumulating meaning of stage signs.

A social or materialist semiotic approach might then use that interpretation to comment on the broader intercultural collaboration between the companies and, by extension, on the historical/political relationships between their respective cultures. Perhaps, as an example, one might suggest that a parodic approach to the conquest narrative allowed the ensemble to playfully act-out an ill-fated story of cultural encounter, confronting and perhaps even exorcising some of the historical ghosts that haunted the collaboration. A more nuanced reading might further question how the scene may have been intended and received. Why would Debaj, for instance, choose to tell that story? The choice of language seems to suggest that the scene issues from their perspective: aside from the words “Kanada” and “West,” the only performers who speak are the Europeans, who do not charge forth with English or Czech (both of which these performers could have spoken) but in gibberish, as though the perspective on this story is that of the uncomprehending Natives. The choice to use gibberish, one might guess, followed from Ypsilon performers’ perception that this whole theatrical idea was, in fact, issuing from the Debaj/UTSC groups, and thus was effectively for them. The Czech
audience, after all, would not be familiar with the Stan Rogers song, nor the Canadian Heritage moment parodied, nor with the contemporary historiography that would challenge the image of Natives living in harmony prior to colonization, nor with the ins and outs of historical and geographical circumstance that the story effaces. For a Czech audience, the scene surely functioned in that aforementioned symbolic register, but as surely for the Native actors it was a story with specific and local resonance.

These readings do make available an “arch-narrative” at play in the PTMTP: the story of the historical European conquest over the New World. This was an “invisible” narrative in the sense that it was nothing anyone had reason to speak about. There would not be any particularly reason to think that addressing the theme of The Art of Living would involve dealing with that narrative. But perhaps there were other, related narratives that were more visible, such as that of European cultural sophistication. However visible they had been, the Northwest Passage scene suddenly exposed these narratives, allowing the historical ghosts that haunted this collaboration—of European conquest and superiority—a moment in the light. How would participants position themselves in relation to it?

The Northwest Passage: Perspectives

I watched the scene develop from start to finish, and in its specific case, had quite a bit of creative input. Its genesis had been months before the groups even met, when the UTSC group decided to sing “Northwest Passage” as a vocal warm-up. During a warm-up in Prague, director Jan Schmid heard the song, had it translated, and suggested it be expanded into a scene. Myself and some other facilitators set about combining the song with some other ideas that had come up. Despite being at its centre, however, the
aimlessness of the process left me with the feeling that I recorded in my journal of witnessing “a series of bizarre accidents” (Freeman “Unpublished”). Accidents perhaps, but accidents that I nonetheless was myself engineering by assembling pieces that suited different participants and (perceived) interests, but not knowing what whole those pieces were making. I knew someone else felt the same way when, during a rehearsal of the scene, one of the Debaj participants handed me a small piece of paper on which was written a line that he proposed should preface the scene: “We live our lives with a patchwork history of missing information and misunderstanding.” It was a poignant moment that immediately changed my own perspective of the work unfolding in front of me. I thought this scene provided an opportunity to consider a single piece of work from multiple perspectives, so I asked each one of my interviewees (with Garnet as the single exception): *What do you think of the Northwest Passage scene, either how it came about, or what you think it means?* Though I have heavily edited participants’ responses, I have included a lot of their text in the pages that follow, because I think it richly illustrates the kind of information available to ethnographic research about the mechanics and politics of intercultural representation. Most participants took up this question with a special enthusiasm and eagerness to figure out where they stood in relation to this complex theatrical moment.

Melanie [UTSC]: Stand over there and hum, because we’re going to get the Czechs to perform this—act this out. And the Natives going “This isn’t—wasn’t actually our history. We have no idea if this is how it really happened.” “Yeah, no, trust us.” And someone finally said, “You have to say that we don’t know that this is the history.” “Oh, OK.” *(laughter)* That’s the reality of it. How it’s presented, and how it would be spun by someone who knew what they were doing would be this beautiful collaborative and cultural blending moment….*I totally think that’s how it looks…I think that it’s a fiction. I think that it is theatre at its purest.* [...W]hen you look at that scene, like that Kanata moment, the Canadian heritage moment, like the irony of that is totally lost in Prague, but I wonder if [in
Canada]… See we haven’t actually taken enough time to reveal that there is a real slant in our Canadian heritage moment sort of thing that we’re presenting as our history. So, you don’t even know if it’s lost on this audience. You know what I mean? Maybe they’ll get it, or maybe they’ll just think “Oh it’s like the commercial! Ha ha ha!” […] And you know, that kiss at the end, I don’t even understand that. It’s like this weird Pocahontas moment, and I’m like, “she died of smallpox in a small town, after being impoverished for years!” Like, it’s really not as romantic as we want to present it as. But I don’t know […] what’s going on. That’s the funny part! (laughter) So how can the audience react? (2 Jun 2006)

Simon [UTSC]: That’s probably like the one scene where all of us work together, I’d have to say, like 100%. In comparison to a lot of other scenes in the play, I think that’s the one scene where all of us are kind of equally sharing the duties, and just sort of like, sharing the space together as a cast […]—In some ways to our greater potential, like showing off our greater potential. […] What it means? (pause) Like, actually, actually like what it means?! […] Well I didn’t know anything about it going into it. And… It’s… (pause) […] I hate to sound cliché or basic, but it’s finding that moment of unity, that—that moment where you can actually get past any cultural wall that’s being put up or anything. And I know Petr just kisses Jessica for a moment and then runs off afterwards, but it’s really all about that moment, right? It’s the fact that it happened. If that didn’t happen then you kind of lose… Like if you just killed Petr right there, it’s brutal. How could we go to comedy right after that, you know what I mean? So, at the end, it’s just that one moment, that one single moment is just sort of like the saving grace that allows us to keep going with the show […]It just shows that everybody is not going to fall into that same… That same pitfall of hostility, and of not being able to get along. (7 Jun 2006)

Cynthia [UTSC]: I think… It’s because there’s no real choice of what it is. […] You don’t know whether it’s funny or it’s very serious. It’s a serious topic, yeah. […] It doesn’t quite fit with the genre, I think that’s where it’s very confusing. But, I don’t know. I think it’s a very… It’s a really good idea, how it starts, where the Debaj group is trading things, like I really like that. But then it turns into the heritage commercial… Which I know people [in Canada] picked up. They started laughing, like, “I know yeah, it’s that commercial.” But, I don’t know. It is kind of confusing. […] It totally doesn’t fit. (7 Jun 2006)

Veronika [DAMU]: Ok, so I know the story. I know that the first part is about exchanging some… Like when the Debaj is on the stage, looking for a new place, exchanging some things. Actually I don’t know why. I know we were talking about it, but I forgot about it. Then also, it was probably that Czechs should be involved in some Canadian part of the play or something. So it’s like trying to… Uhh… Fit people in the Canadian part of the play. (16 May 2006)

Katja [DAMU]: It was like some Canadian, or some Native stuff. The first man who came to a Native place and killed some Natives, or not killed, and nobody
knows how was it, or if he was like a martyr, or hero. Nobody knows. And it was like, something important in Canadian history. That’s it. But I mean, like, Canadian stuff. [...] I didn’t really feel some nation proudness because it’s not my stuff. It’s your history, it’s Canadian history. But I could feel that it’s important for Canadians, for the Natives. It’s good to know. (1 Dec 2007)

Václav [DAMU]: I was really only thinking about it in a theatrical way, and I was trying to figure out how to make it most effective on the stage. But then someone [from Debaj] came to me [...] and said we have to change the end. There was some problem. Because I didn’t think about that it was something from their tradition, that it was something deep. [...] For them it was not about this, [the Europeans] were not brave, they were devils who came to their land. [...] We needed to advance it somehow that it was possible for both sides. [...] I was talking to Jan Schmid about this. [...] And then he came with this idea that Petr should do something just trying to kiss her [Jessica], you know, just to balance the two opinions, that no one won, and that no one was good, and no one was bad. Actually, maybe it was a stronger part than the others in the show. There was something—It was more emotional this part. (17 Dec 2007)

David [Debaj]: Personally, if only the UTSC group had sung the song initially, then it would have meant something totally different to me. But because [Debaj] sang it as well, it just made me go: “Do you [the Debaj participants] realize what you’re singing about, and do you realize the story you’re telling here, and that you’re telling their story, you’re not telling your story [...] And do you not have a responsibility to tell your story? And, if you do, you better find a way to tell it quick! [...] I remember talking to one of the UofT actors [it was Melanie], because I saw her getting all confused about what we were doing with the scene. She literally had confusion on her face. And I said, “Does this bother you what we’re doing with this scene now?” And she said, “Well I just don’t understand why we would be doing this, I mean this is a beautiful, nostalgic, romantic song about, you know, the landscape, and exploration.” I said, “Yeah, it is all that, written from a certain point-of-view, but that’s not the whole story of what happened, and one would assume that this is going to be in the show because this means something to us, and not just because it makes us feel warm and fuzzy.” [...] We still mixed all kinds of things together in there, you know…. I thought it was kind of neat how Europeans were represented, the way that mainstream Canadians were represented, and the way that Indigenous peoples were represented. And I think that we could have gone a lot farther with it too, but I think that was enough change from where it started for us to feel comfortable, you know? Ideally there would have been more priority around the roles of these different communities…. Well I think in terms of content, for me personally, it turned out to be the richest part of the show…. Because it brought the three distinct groups together in a meaningful way in one piece. (4 Jul 2006)

Paula [Debaj]: How does anybody decide what is going to be in the show? That
me is the big question…. So there’s a song…. But then I feel a little bit like so then we come in and because we’re the aboriginal group, then we have….

“There’s this beautiful song, but it’s not really inclusive to aboriginal people,” which is of course true…. But then I feel like we create this thing that is reactionary to something. [...] I don’t really understand how it relates to the theme anyway. So for me the whole thing is just “How did it get there?” [...] If you were to look at the actual, the art of the way people live on the [reservation]—You know, it’s different now. Yes, of course it’s true, our history is skipped over, in books, and for people, and people don’t think about that. And then you get into situations… (pause) I actually just—at the point that I’m at, I don’t want to react anymore to this. I don’t. It is what it is, you know? I don’t know. I really don’t understand. [...] It’s awful. Because I don’t think it serves either of the things. Like, the song, or the intention of [the project’s theme]—It doesn’t serve any of these things. (pause) And yet, there it is. (2 Jun 2006)

Malcolm [Debaj]: It’s not even our history, right? As Ojibwe people, or Odawa people, or people of the Three Fires from [Wikwemikong...]. But we were the closest thing to defending that point of view, I guess, right? Because we’ve recently had projects in the past few years with the Inuit people. [...] So we really responded in the moment to that song being in the show, and presented it to you about this idea of what all the slaughtering and everything that happened up there, and just cutting through Inuit territory, it’s just not a good thing. [...] So we had the European guys representing the Europeans people who came through, and us representing just, I guess, Pan-Aboriginal Inuit kinda group, right? [...But] this is the Northwest Passage, so we’re Inuit people, we’re Eskimos. So why the hell are we always looking up? There’s no trees! There’s nothing to look at, we’re in Inuit country, you know, we’d be like, scanning the land in the distance, you know, looking for inukshuk or something. But the instruction we were given [was,] “look around like this, and try to be more stooped out when you’re encountering the others.” And so, we’re like, “OK, I guess we can represent the Pan-Aboriginal, Metis point of view.” [...] Someone] of the Scarborough group was responding to it: “Why is this scene so violent? That’s not what this song is about at all. It’s about nature and beauty and exploration.” And [...] [David] was like, “Well, it's because that's what happened. That’s why it’s like that. We're not making anything up here really, that’s the way it happened.” But you know it was a chance. [...] If [Melanie] never asked the question she would have went through just wondering what that scene was all about. But she did ask. And [David] just responded to it. [...] So she understood it a bit more… (3 Jul 2006)

The Northwest Passage: Discussion

The comments open up a kaleidoscopic view into the processes of representation in an intercultural context. Amid the fragmented and partial views of a single, distant subject is
the plotline of a “gross, familiar” narrative: the European conquest of the New World. What is also clear is that the process had participants step into three broad cultural positions within that narrative: European, (Pan-)Native and North American. Being at the centre of this process of creation, no experience on the PTMTP made me more conscious of the hazards of working in its often abstracted, symbolic narrative register of representation. In fact, the insight that this register was a barrier to understanding between the groups occurred to me in the rehearsal room at this moment. The PTMTP’s fictional world was one of transcultural messages of universal virtue and vice; what was bewildering to participants, and fascinating for me, was that the NWP scene attempted a stylistic and narratological intervention in the PTMTP.

In their comments, participants differ completely about the “success” of the scene, with success ostensibly measured in either the degree of ethical engagement or the (perceived) theatrical efficacy of the scene in performance. These evaluations cut across the cultural groups. Those who felt the scene was theatrically effective were Simon (“showed off our greater potential”), David (“the richest part of the show”), Václav (“a stronger part than the others”), and those who felt it was theatrically ineffective (read: confusing) were Melanie (its multiple messages are “lost on the audience”) and Cynthia (“it’s kind of confusing,” and “it totally doesn’t fit”). There is some correlation between opinions about theatrical efficacy and views of the process as ethical engagement, but some differences as well. Those who regarded the process as an ethical engagement of some kind were again Simon (“interweaving,” “working together,” “equal sharing of duties”), David (“brought the three groups together meaningfully”) and Václav (“needed to advance it somehow that it was possible for both sides”), but also Malcolm, who
recognized a specific ethical moment in which Melanie asked Debaj about their perspective on the scene.

Several comments point to unethical engagement. Melanie and Paula are quite passionate about their not having understood the scene, but the source of their objection is different. Melanie sees ambivalences and ironies in the presentation that, because they went un-discussed, resulted in confusing representations for the audience. Paula isn’t concerned with subtlety, focusing instead on what was for her a clear conquest story to which she reacts. Their problems are different, but the cause is the same: a lack of dialogue that may have led to more nuanced understandings. Despite the ethical moment Malcolm cites, he notes that the process required Debaj to represent a culture that was foreign to them as well, and that even incorporating their limited knowledge of that culture into the representation was a challenge. Ethical dialogue might have brought this to light in rehearsal. Perhaps most interesting here is that the comments of all three DAMU participants frame the process purely as productive of a theatrical product, rather than as an ethical process oriented around an exchange of cultural ideas. Though Václav does suggest the need to reach a compromise between the groups as I noted above, the need was actually for a solution to a theatrical problem as much as one of ethics.

Veronika and Katja’s comments attest to the fact that the process was unethical by implication; neither speaks to the process of creating the scene, demonstrates any knowledge of the specific historical fragments on which it draws, or has much of an opinion about its perceived messages. In other respects their comments are quite different. Veronika “forgets” what was said about the scene even though it had been created only a couple of weeks previously, whereas Katja remembers it well even though
she is speaking about it more than a year later. Veronika first claims to know the “story,” but instead begins to offer a play-by-play of what happened in the scene without a narrative interpretation. She then cuts her account short, as though she had not considered it much before and was not sure what to make of it. Katja does identify the conquest narrative, but detaches herself from it (without a hint of irony) by guessing that it must have been “important for Canadians.” So, on the surface, it would seem that participants differed as to whether they framed their experience in terms of ethics at all. I say on the surface because, as comments in the “suggestion box” revealed, all participants sought out ethical experiences in the extra-theatrical contexts of the project. The difference here, particularly in Veronika and Katja’s case, was that working on the PTMTP was for them an exercise in creating effective theatre within the style and standards of Schmid and Ypsilon, rather than a place open to ethical possibilities.

I doubt Schmid suggested that we develop the NWP scene as an opportunity for ethical dialogue about the legacies of colonialism; I doubt he suspected that it would be much different than any of the other light-hearted musings that comprised The Art of Living (in the end, he may still have seen it this way). Two things changed its fate. The first was that this was clearly not a narrative that Debaj, in particular, could represent without being deeply conscious of what messages they were producing and what they were being asked to do. It called into the rehearsal room a fraught history to which each of their artists would have a very personal and political disposition. (The performance was to be shown in their home community of Wikwemikong, and what was the audience there going to think?) But the other thing that changed the fate of this scene was that—as chance had it—Schmid was absent from the room during its development. Schmid asked
that the song be developed into a scene, but it was myself and the other facilitators who tried to piece together this scene in Schmid’s absence, though again within a strict timeframe and with no guidance as to what, ultimately, the scene was trying to say. As we began to stage the scene, it was myself—recalling the conversation I had had with Ron Berti on the flight—who began to suggest ways of having the scene also represent “the other side” of the conquest narrative.15

Recall from Chapter Three that as a company, Debaj tends to avoid addressing stories to do with colonization and Native subjugation in favour of more positive and celebratory material. They would never have chosen to do the NWP scene. This was clear from all of my interviews with Debaj participants, but Malcolm put it most succinctly in describing the moment when he asked Daniel David Moses what he thought of the NWP scene (Moses sat in on all rehearsals and watched the scene develop from start to finish):

Malcolm [Debaj]: I said, “What do you think about that scene, sitting out there watching it?” He says, “Ahhh, I’m so tired of these kinds of scenes. Or talking about it in these types of forms. […] Bad relationships between the cultures or whatever.” Which is what I was talking about: the healing process, right? Even he is getting tired of it, and he is of that generation that is using his work as a healing thing. […] And then I explained to him how it came about, that we were just responding to that song being in the show. And that we never would have went there in a million years, from a creative, artistic choice. All we were doing was responding. It was reactionary to what was already—So we said, “OK, so that’s going to be in there, so we’ll have this point of view in there.” (3 Jul 2006)

“Yet,” as Paula put it, “there it was.” Debaj had to step into it in the moment, managing it both as theatre with an idea to communicate to an audience, and a deeply politicized representation about which they each evidently had a range of opinions. The “reactionary” (I use the term “reactive”) move described by Malcolm and Paula was necessary. Clearly, the NWP scene could not have been staged uncritically as Stan Roger’s story of heroic exploration; I am sure that if I had not suggested representing the
“other side” of the story, everyone, and not just the Debaj actors, would not have abided the glaring exclusion. But what is interesting here is that instead of an opportunity—perhaps the best one that the whole project provided—for an ethical engagement about different attitudes toward this story the process instead pounded forward in the direction of producing a piece of theatre, leaving the performers in a state of disjuncture between themselves as culturally situated subjects and the representations they were to offer audiences.

Should this be concerning? Are not performers often charged with the task of representing ideas and viewpoints other than their own? Is not the idea of acting in role defined by this act? Certainly that is true in some forms of theatre. This leads to an insight about ethics and representation in the intercultural context: that it may add an additional burden of responsibility. In many other forms of theatre, the veil of fictionality between performers and audience means that the performers are perceived to be interlocutors of others’ ideas, commonly those of a playwright. This was precisely the source of Levinas’s objection to art—that “substituting” an image for the Other actually prevents individuals from meeting “face-to-face” in a confrontation of subjectivities (see Burvill 235). Looking to Melanie’s comment, that substitution actually presents an image of harmony, but in her words, that image is a “fiction,” “theatre at its purest,” by which she means a deception that tricks the audience into thinking that there has been “a beautiful collaborative and cultural blending moment” (in Levinas’s terms, a real confrontation of subjectivities). Dealing with Levinas’s objection, Tom Burvill notes that theatre is not the frozen mimetic art that Levinas is thinking of, but a frozen mimetic object, but actually a complex confrontation of subjectivites through art (236). A
postmodern ethnography of theatre places the interpretive lens among that confrontation of subjectivities.

The burden of responsibility in collaborative intercultural theatre originates elsewhere. The form itself adds an extra expectation on the part of participants and spectators alike that participants are responsibly representing themselves—if not purely as their individual selves then at least as representatives of a cultural group. Participants are publicly presenting a vision of a collective identity back to their own community, holding up a mirror as it were. Moreover, if the work travels as the PTMTP did, participants are also representing a vision of themselves as they represented themselves to others. If, for instance, a group of performers create a play about Canadianness (I hope they don’t) but it is created in Canada for a Canadian audience, the interpretive question that will guide the reception is, “What does this say about how we see ourselves?” If the same group travels elsewhere in the world and offers the same view of Canadianness to a cultural Other, and then brings it home, the interpretive question becomes, “What are we telling the world about who we are?” In the case of The Art of Living, participants were quite literally staging themselves by telling “real” stories concerning their own families, the places they grew up, personal realizations they have come to, and so on. The audience would have every reason to expect that participants were responsibly representing themselves.

It is a curious thing to me that this responsibility was not evenly felt by everyone, and only at certain moments. Instead of a uniformly distributed burden, responsibility was rather something that called certain participants into action at key moments—several of which I have chosen to discuss in this chapter. This may have been because the sheer
size of the ensemble meant that the default feeling was that any individual could not be remotely responsible for the whole piece. In the perception of many, the performance itself was a product of Jan Schmid anyhow. But there were other factors. Some participants—the Czechs in particular—did not seem to feel a special responsibility toward what messages the project was producing. Maybe they did not expect a project situated at Ypsilon to seriously take up intellectual or political ideas. Maybe there were no representations of Czechs/Europeans to which they were moved to object. They might have; the NWP scene itself, for example, represented the European explorers as ignorant, bafoonish and exploitative. But of course the Czechs had not more reason to feel connected to the story of the Northwest Passage than the Ojibwe or Odawa people did. Those imperialistic sea-going nations that colonized the New World, after all, are thousands of miles from the Czech lands. It is for this reason, perhaps that Veronika and Katja both, independent of one another, suggested that this was a story that was relevant to Canadians—it certainly was not relevant to them (an ironic view in light of the detachment some of the Canadians felt from it).

To gather together these observations in relation to ethics, the NWP scene’s creation was unethical first because through no fault of their own (and through no single person’s fault, really), some participants did not understand the story and how others were reacting to it and second, because those who did have strong reactions to it were not able to bring that information into the process for the benefit of others’ understanding. Some participants experienced a heightened sense of responsibility when there was a divergence between what was being presented and how individuals wanted to present themselves. In other words, the process had the best possibility of being ethical when
things went “wrong.” For the most part, representations in a transcultural spirit that spoke aphoristically about the human condition were inoffensive enough that everyone could participate contentedly enough and work on making them effective theatre. Those sorts of representations did not actually necessitate ethical dialogue, and so participants did not engage ethically, saving that experience for the extra-theatrical contexts of the work. But even in those cases where it did go wrong, only partial compromises were reached. Broad—and in some cases undesirable—subject positions were made available by way of a purely reactive process, leaving participants to literally embody stories they did not want to tell. Paula, for example, was left playing a doomed victim of European conquest in the scene, and did not have the chance to position herself differently. Though for Paula the time had past for reactive anger and the time had come to work toward creative, positive change, she instead played out the ‘same old’ reflexive reaction to being excluded, even in front of an audience in her own community. There is a sadness and frustration in her comment that suggests that it is not the first time that she has been in the position of having to provide a token reaction to being excluded.

That said, David’s comment demonstrates how ethnographic interpretation resists easy conclusions. David’s optimistic (though qualified) endorsement of the scene in the last comment plays against several of the other perspectives. Note that David uses the pronoun—“We”—David seems to take up a responsibility for the scene that the others either don’t feel, don’t want, or both. It is unclear which “We” he invokes; I have the sense that it could have been both “We the participants in the PTMTP” as well as “We the two of us having a conversation” (Ie. in the interview). Like Paula and Melanie, David also focuses on the messages being delivered by the scene, but unlike them offers
the comment that it was “neat” how each group was represented (“neat” being a surprising word choice, suggesting an inclination to take the scene lightly, as, no doubt, Schmid had intended it). The contrast between David’s and Paula’s comments is informative. Paula is frustrated by having no available subject position other than to offer a simple reaction. With no available means to negotiate any new subject position in the perception of those she was working with, the only one available to her was one of reaction to the colonizer’s story that restaged and reinscribed a dialectic that she wished to leave behind. David, on the other hand, is pleased with the character (“the richest part of the show”) and extent (“it was enough of a change from where it started”) of the reaction. For David, the Northwest Passage scene was a meaningful (and therefore successful) meeting of the three groups that rendered its deficiencies forgivable.

For me, their different takes on the scene connect to a larger issue—that of how larger historical and official narratives effectively make some positions more available than others, and how participants can (and do) go about negotiating new ones that can then, in turn, revise the narratives. Identity is always calcifying, and while I suggested earlier that positivist epistemology threatens to efface individual agency in the negotiation of cultural identity, it seems that participants’ own misperceptions and lack of knowledge can just as easily contribute to the fixing of cultural identity. Even in these brief comments one can see the ease with which individuals consigned other groups to definable subject positions within the collaboration and within a dialogue about the collaboration. Predictably, when I asked about their own subject position within their own group and cultural community, definitions came with far less ease.

If there is a lesson to learn from all of this, then, it is that moments of
divergence—between a fixed position and individuals’ relationship to it—are precisely the wellspring of ethical contact in intercultural theatre. If my aim here is to look at how ethical cultural contact can best happen in intercultural theatre, the answer is that it needs not only to create such moments of disjuncture—which, in any case it will do whether it tries to or not, and the PTMTP is evidence of that—but it also then needs to name those moments and make use of them, either purely to create a conversation from which individuals may learn about one another’s understandings and values, or else to transform that understanding into theatre in order to transfer the possibility of new understanding to audiences. Furthermore, responsibility seems to be key to ethical encounter. This is not the reactive responsibility that was activated in this case, which is rather like dramaturgical damage control; neither is it a distributed responsibility in which good intentions are trusted to lead; it seems to be an individual responsibility that must be part of the set up of the work. Time is key, but so is respect—there needs to be something like an invitation to object, and then the time and space to follow through on that objection.

Notes to Chapter Four

1 Some sections of this chapter draw on ideas I have developed in three previous research outputs, see Freeman “Cultural Meeting,” “Time Out” and “Navigating the PTMTP” and “Reaching Out.” While a few passages of this chapter are lifted from these outputs, they are used differently here. For example, while the Northwest Passage scene is at the centre of the “Navigating the PTMTP” article, most of the analysis in this chapter is new.

2 That an unspecified number of Fitzgerald’s research subjects were from “Czechoslovakia,” a country which had then not existed for ten years, is indicative of Fitzgerald’s disinterest in achieving any greater empirical fidelity in the research, and that only four of Fitzgerald’s seventy-four research subjects were “Australian” suggests to me that a lack of fidelity was less tolerable within her more familiar cultural context. “Eastern European” only has any purchase when set against another equally generalized category such as “South Asian.” This is not to mention that this kind of interpretation also side-steps complexity of the individual, who not only has personal rhetorical strategies that could come from any number of sources, but who often will have a complex cultural ancestry that thwarts these categories of analysis. Perhaps worse of all is Fitzgerald’s tendency to take cultural claims at face value. A student who says that Australians are such and such a way is seen to be saying something ‘true,’ presumably because their
ostensible membership in that group gives them the authority to deliver ‘truths’ about it. More theoretically robust analyses than Fitzgerald’s will view such statements as strategic claims rather than self-evident truths. My view is that the strategies underpinning cultural claims are more worthy of consideration than their descriptive accuracy.

3 This said, psychoanalysis may have valuable things to contribute to thinking about the intercultural subject. For example, in a recent essay James Harbeck interprets the Western interest in the cultural ‘other’ as a psychological effect of the West’s rediscovery of more whole psyche, a rediscovery of elements of the repressed self (see Harbeck). Writ large in that way, Harbeck’s claim is outlandish and neocolonialist, but his observations about psychological transcendence in interculturalism, and how it is best effected in situations of the least cultural familiarity, are more useful applications of psychoanalysis.

4 A significant amount of which, it should be said, involves research in the social science in contexts where longitudinal studies are both more possible and more appropriate.

5 For example, PTMTP participant Jiří Havelka devised a performance with a group of DAMU students in January of 2006 called Člověče, zkus to! (Man, just try it!), which the group created from idea to opening night in exactly twelve days.

6 I could say more here about the way the body features on the Ypsilon stage under Schmid’s direction. Byplay to do with flirtation and sex—mostly heterosexual—figures prominently into Ypsilon’s brand of comedy, and I have found full and partial nudity to be more common at Ypsilon than at other theatres I have attended in the Czech Republic. I would hesitate to make any assumptions about how the Czech participants of the PTMTP think or feel about this, but I can say at least that they would have known it, that its surfacing—even in the arbitrary fashion that it did in this moment—would not have struck them as unusual or as specially objectionable.

7 I have approximated Jiřina’s line here; it is delivered too quickly and energetically in performance for me to translate precisely (and was not recorded exactly in the script).

8 I am reminded of a funny moment that happened while I was in Prague working on The Art of Living. Jiří Havelka took me to see a show at Dejvické Divadlo called Sendvice Reality (Sandwiches of Reality). I enjoyed the show, even though at that point I still understood Czech poorly. One word kept recurring in the performance, so often in fact that I had to ask Havelka after the show what it meant; the word was proč, which, he told me to our amusement, meant why. It wasn’t a word we often heard during our work at Ypsilon.

9 This was a touring production more than a piece of collaborative intercultural theatre, but since workshops and changes to the production were a part of the tour, the production did resemble a piece of collaborative intercultural theatre in its dramaturgical and cultural dynamics.

10 This was not unusual at Ypsilon, but I could not imagine the same scenario at a theatre in Toronto. It was telling of the kind of theatre community Ypsilon is that the audience seemed to be as delighted with the impromptu cabaret as they would have been with the show. The production, after all, had already been in repertory for six years (Legenda 49), so many in the audience would have already seen it.
In an interview with Shannon Hengen, Debaj’s Artistic Director Joe Osawabine cited the PTMTP as an example of how Debaj is ‘growing’:

Hengen: [Debaj] has really grown over the twenty years with all the new programs. Do you think it will continue to grow? How might it?
Osawabine: It’s growing continually faster than we can keep up with it. This project [Prague] is our first international project where we’re actually flying overseas. That’s a first for [Debaj]. We’ve been all across Canada and into the States but never overseas.

(Hengen Where Stories Meet 79)

12 This is a very incorrect perception. As I described in Chapter Three, Debaj travels frequently to remote communities to conduct workshops and train artists, and there are nearly always working across cultural barriers when they are doing so. In a very real way, the artists of Debaj had more intercultural “experience” than the other participant groups in the PTMTP.

13 I have written about this elsewhere as well. See Freeman “Geopolitics.”

14 One glaring effacement—exposed in my earlier field note—is that the Inuit who would have confronted Franklin in his search for the northwest passage were not at all the same people as the Iroquois who might have had the exchange about the name “Kanada.”

15 Given the kind of ethical engagement I am favouring in this study, I might have seized this opportunity to have a discussion about this narrative and bring out some different ideas about it. Of course, this was not possible: time was limited, there were thirty people in the ensemble, and there were other facilitators present with other agendas.
CONCLUSION

Making Sense of Each Other in the End

The problem of cross-cultural communication can seem immensely difficult in theory, when we are trying to imagine making sense of a stranger in the abstract. But the great lesson of anthropology is that when the stranger is no longer imaginary, but real and present, sharing a human social life, you may like or dislike him, you may agree or disagree; but, if it is what you both want, you can make sense of each other in the end.

— Kwame Anthony Appiah, from Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (99)

In conclusion, I hope that this study has demonstrated that a postmodern ethnography of theatre can produce a unique and worthwhile discussion. I also hope that, as challenging as the task was, that I successfully ‘instrumentalized’ my case-study by being sensitive to, but by also attempting to reach above, the PTMTP’s own unique set of challenges. Though I am pleased with the analysis enabled by my methods, I am aware that there are limitations on the usefulness of my approach to others in other contexts. To begin with, my approach depended on the kind of access to (and even implication in) its subject that I enjoyed with my work on the PTMTP. I do not contend that it can be applied to just any context either; it made particular sense for my own situation, and cannot be generalized, or as Maria Shevtsova has put it, “transferred holus-bolus” elsewhere (“Social Practice” 134). It is also not an approach that one can apply retroactively. But then again, if we accept a similarity in the research strategies of ethnography and social history, perhaps it is recognizable as something common: the constructing of a reality out of whatever shreds of material and circumstantial evidence that chance and circumstance make available. It may even be easier in some respects. Whereas making the case for an ethnographic perspective on present theatre work required me to justify not adopting one common focus, the performance text, there may be less of such a burden in historical
analyses because it is easier to accept that the historical performance events themselves are unavailable and unrecoverable. The reasons to interpret theatre ethnographically are not theoretical but practical—necessity becomes the mother of methodological invention.¹

I have tried to place the “crisis” in the intercultural discourse well in the past in this study because I think there is a need to see ourselves as being well beyond it. The crisis was clearly staged in the 1984 battle in the Asian Theatre Journal between Bharucha and Schechner and it was in full bloom in the 1980s. I am surprised, therefore, when I read articles today that speak as though we are still nearly hopelessly mired in this same debate. Josette Féral’s July 2009 article in Canadian Theatre Review, for example, is principally framed by Bharucha’s criticisms against interculturalism and globalism, and it centres on the same conflict at stake for Bharucha and Schechner: the desire for universalism pitted against the desire for respecting difference. In her title, Féral asks, “Is interculturalism still possible?” Since it is happening everyday, we know it is possible, but what Féral really means is, is it possible to do ethically. My view is that academics have been answering “yes” to this question for twenty-five years, and practitioners never answered otherwise, and that is because there are, in fact, very few people who ever believed that interculturalism was a hopelessly Occidental, imperialist enterprise. There have been deeply legitimate concerns, and those concerns are important. Nonetheless, we need to move on to learn how to write with greater precision about exactly what makes interculturalism “do” what we want it to, and, in turn, how we who discuss it can best observe and interpret it.
I hope that I have also begun to contribute to a discussion about ethics and representation because, in my view, working through ethics is important to dealing with serious present and future problems of geopolitical communication and understanding. Kwame Anthony Appiah’s book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* makes a persuasive argument for the need in our world to come to an understanding about ethics. For Appiah, ethics is “conversation between people from different ways of life” (xxi), and he notes that given that the world will be a lot more crowded in the coming century, conversations are becoming “inevitable” (xxi). My epigram for the Conclusion comes from the end of one of Appiah’s chapters in the book, and I found myself thinking about it as I tried to draw some conclusions about my experience. I recall that when I first read this book a few years ago, this passage struck me as hopeful but wrong. I took Appiah to be challenging academics who problematize intercultural encounter to the point of impossibility (like the fatalistic Stephen A. Tyler from the Introduction or the cultural relativists from Chapter One), and that he was contrasting this with his lived experience in which people were daily coping well with the complexities of cultural encounter and hybridization (this is his “cosmopolitanism”). He writes,

> The foreignness of foreigners, the strangeness of strangers: these things are real enough. It’s just that we’ve been encouraged, not least by well-meaning intellectuals, to exaggerate their significance by orders of magnitude. (xxi)

In other words: “have faith, it is easier than it seems.” I believe, however, that it is not so easy at all, or rather, only easy in the context of certain discussions. If we are talking about encounter simply as living in an environment of cultural pluralism, in a city, for example, in which one meets people from elsewhere and can eat foods from around the world, that is usually easy enough. But how much ethical contact is really involved in
that experience? How often does that experience call on us to truly understand different values or to object? There are other contexts that do demand this, and there, cultural encounter is more and not less difficult than it is in theory, or, perhaps, easy enough to do but much more difficult to do well. In those contexts I see no place for faith; one of the important realizations that came out of my experience is that noble intentions guarantee good will but not ethics.

The epigram also stimulated my thinking about what theatre can contribute to ethics. Appiah is also saying that physical, human presence in a room together itself somehow allows us to better “make sense of each other in the end.” That is a provocative idea in relation to theatre. Again, I think there is something flatly wrong about it; as Professor Stephen Johnson put it to me once, “your voice can be just as easily appropriated if you are standing in the room.” But trying to see past that objection, I wonder whether the embodied nature of cultural contact in the theatre is, in fact, one of the things that makes it an excellent—if fraught—site of ethical engagement. This again was Tom Burvill’s answer to Levinas’s objection to art: that theatre is the place of direct, embodied encounter with the cultural Other. Burvill wonders whether the efficacy of this encounter is “not necessarily so much about knowledge of the other, or information about their situation,” but perhaps “something more purely embodied than that [...M]oments or instances of performance in which the face of the other is not simply represented or imaged but where a relationship or connection with the other or perhaps with otherness as such is transitively created” (236). The idea is a more refined version of Appiah’s—that ethics is deeply embodied, that the sense of responsibility that Levinas says arises from the encounter with the Other actually arises purely by way of a confrontation of physical
presence and prior to ideas being offered or representations being staged. Before anything happens in the theatre, bodies meet first.

The body sometimes says things that are otherwise ineffable. It cannot be an accident that the body is actually the site of all the confrontations with ethics that I have chosen to describe in this chapter. It was less obvious in the case of the NWP scene but it was there as well; David says that he was only really moved to confront this representation because the Debaj actors were asked to sing the Stan Rogers song as well. Had only the UTSC participants sung the song, “it would have meant something totally different.” I would expect that David would be as likely to object to this representation merely on account of the fact that Debaj was involved in the collaboration—that they were there, and they could say something. No doubt that was true, but clearly having the Debaj actors literally embody this story changed the degree of responsibility that was felt for the representation, and a problem—as well as an opportunity for ethical engagement—arose. In the earlier examples, it was culturally encoded ideas about the body that became occasions to open up a dialogue across difference. I did not choose these examples in order to focus on the body, I chose them because they seemed to me to stir up the most pointed reactions, and to actually bring the contrasting perspectives of the participant groups to light. The reason for that is perhaps obvious—that the body is a profoundly significant site of cultural meaning. How the body is used, displayed, manipulated and beautified is complexly interwoven with cultural understandings and values, so it should not be surprising that the body became such a prime site of ethical engagement. Of course the body was the locus of significance for interculturalists down through the twentieth century for this reason (for Barba it is completely central), but the
discourse surrounding the body was social, cultural and aesthetic rather than ethical. This is changing, and a recently published study by Claudia Tatinge Nascimento is a revisionary take on these artists’ work (Barba in particular) through the lens of the body and ethics, undertaking “a serious analysis of the actors’ process of embodying performantive techniques,” that claims to “lead us to rethink the criterion used to determine what is ethical or unethical in cultural border crossing onstage” (7).³

So I can agree that being in the same room helps us make sense of one another, but the devil is very much in the details. Appiah’s rhetoric has him breezing through the part about “agreeing” and “disagreeing” in the sub-clause of a sentence, but that of course is where a simple embodied ethics becomes more complicated. Disagreement is an important element of ethics, and, to reverse Appiah’s rhetoric, if there is anything that is more difficult in practice than it is in theory it is disagreement. Disagreement happens when encounter reveals a difference in understandings or values that cannot, at least for the moment, be reconciled. Appiah would like us to see disagreement as an essential part of the process of simply “getting used to one another” (“Case for Contamintaion” 52). It is not a novel idea, perhaps even self-evident. Something resembling disagreement is often touted in disciplines across the Humanities as integral to healthy, critical discourse. Discourse in academic contexts and discourse among people in a room are different things, however, and in my experience, disagreement is a lot more difficult to manage in the moment, more difficult still when disagreement rests on deeply seated and potentially conflicting cultural values. Stories to this effect abound in my data from the PTMTP. Of the many strong opinions I solicited from PTMTP participants about particular moments, perhaps the strongest was Melanie’s reaction to watching Jessica be drawn into the Diet
Drink scene. But while the experience was profoundly “disagreeable” for her, Melanie’s reaction was to actually leave the room and go outside for air. Melanie cannot be blamed—the PTMTP’s process did not allow many opportunities to “go ethical” in these moments—but the fact that Melanie actually could not watch the scene and had to actually leave the room speaks to how difficult it can be to be—physically—involved in disagreement in this context. Even if there were a process in place for Melanie to have voiced her objection to this scene in the moment, it would still have been uncomfortable for her and probably everyone else in the room. Disagreeing with Appiah’s “real and present stranger” may not be so easy after all.

I wonder whether social and political ideologies of pluralism, and especially capital-M Multiculturalism, actually engender a rosy view of how ready and well-equipped we are to really disagree, particularly in public contexts. In a lecture delivered at the University of Toronto in October, 2008, the education scholar and curriculum theorist Madeline R. Grumet offered an anecdote that speaks to this issue (see “News/Events”). There had been an anti-Iraq war protest on her University of North Carolina’s campus one day, and Grumet used the occasion to open up a discussion about the war in an undergraduate seminar she was leading. To her surprise, her students were completely silent, and she had to move on to something else. Being a theorist of discourse, however, Grumet asked her students privately afterward about why they did not speak. She learned that the students didn’t feel comfortable speaking, that they were afraid to disagree with what they perceived her view to be, afraid to be attacked by others, and afraid that they didn’t have sufficient knowledge to defend their own point of view. At the next meeting, Grumet tried again, but this time she set rules in place for the
discussion that “protected” students against being attacked. Grumet said that it was an interesting exercise, but that she would not call it a “real dialogue.” We could probably defend these students somehow—maybe there were interpersonal tensions in the group, or maybe the discussion surprised them and they needed the time to form opinions—but again what is interesting to me is that pang of discomfort one feels when one is expecting to have to disagree.

Discomfort is not only about disagreeing, but about disagreeing there, at that moment, in that context, with those people. Would Grumet’s students be afraid to disagree in more private contexts, such as speaking with their friends or in a discussion forum on the internet? The consequences of disagreeing are different outside the public realm of the classroom. To bring this back to my research, one could draw a thick line between what was possible to say in the rehearsal room and what was possible to say in my interviews with participants. While my interviews were certainly “public”—my research subjects knew of course that they were contributing to a University-endorsed study, and that their words would be used in subsequent publications—it was the immediate context of the PTMTP that mattered most to them at that moment, and the conversation was perceived to be “private” in relation to the project. They perceived negligible consequences for expressing their thoughts within the interview—anonymity protected them personally, and besides, by the time I published anything their involvement with the project would have ended. As in Grumet’s classroom, few of the many disagreements, confusions and ambivalences about the PTMTP voiced in my interviews actually ever surfaced within the project itself. It seems actually quite unlikely and strange, but in the moment, there were real concerns about the consequences of
speaking up. Melanie offered,

I think when you try, outside of the group, like it’s always one of those like, when you’re talking to your friends and they’re like, “Why didn’t you just do this, and why didn’t you say that?” And it’s like—“You have to be there.” And you have to know that it’s just not appropriate. It’s not... It’s not going to achieve what you hope it’s going to achieve. It’s only going to rebound on you. I just—I firmly believe that.

For my part, I don’t think that an objection from Melanie would have “rebounded” on her negatively, but it is true that it may not have led anywhere at all. In any case, Melanie’s concern was real enough to extinguish the possibility of an ethical conversation.

Earlier in my work on this study I dealt with this disjuncture between the private and the public by effectively looking at all realms of theatre work as public. Having observed that participants in collaborative intercultural theatre placed an unusual value on the extra-theatrical contexts of the work, I used Ian Watson’s concept of the “event-narrative” to regard that realm of experience also as an additional “significant” site (in the semiotic sense) of social discourse of theatre worthy of analysis. In retrospect, I think that was a mistake. Paula and Melanie, who I interviewed on the same day, each independently offered a similar metaphor that helps to explain why:

Melanie [UTSC]: I think that a lot of our united moments came out of frustration from something else. As soon as you sort of get to those moments where you go... And all the moments seem to be behind a curtain.

Paula [Debaj]: There’s something to be said about all these conversations happening together in the background. And what happens if you put them at the start, together, so we’re all hearing everybody’s—You know what I’m saying? There’s a difference between whispering behind doors, and being able to say in a circle, “Ok, well, I understand that you—that this is what you’re bringing, and that this is what you feel about it, can we have some discussion?”

To be behind a metaphorical door or curtain was to find a small space at least for ethical engagement if not direct disagreement— a private room in a public house. But Paula’s
excellent point is that however necessary and important those conversations may be for those involved, they actually do not enter into the public discourse. By considering the extra-theatrical to be part of the “saying” or the “said” of theatrical discourse, then, I was implicitly saying that utterances in these different realms had equivalent social force. But if public disagreement has greater consequences, it can have a greater effect by the same logic. It would be worthwhile to further consider theatre as a site of particularly public disagreement, and given the multiple performance sites of the PTMTP it would make a logical extension of this study. It would, however, require an additional data set and would have to square itself with theories of spectatorship, social engagement, and public discourse. This would be worthwhile given the widespread observation that more ethically conscious theatre work is ambivalent about how that experience can (or should) be delivered to an audience in public performance (see Eckersall “Theatrical”; Grehan; Peterson). There are different parameters on public performance. How does dramaturgical form, style, convention and etiquette all shape how audiences experience ethical encounter in the theatre? Are audiences witness to encounter, or are they invited into it? What may be the special power of performance to extend a sense of responsibility to them?

**Ethics and Interculturalism in the Twenty-First Century**

These questions pertain to where intercultural theatre may be heading. As I write, Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberté has just executed one of the most extravagant intercultural spectacles to date, a performance event called *Moving Stars and Earth for Water* (see “One Drop”). The event was developed by Laliberté and others through Cirque’s One Drop Foundation, an organization that uses the performing arts to raise
awareness about global water issues. Billed as a “two-hour poetic happening,” *Moving Stars* involves simultaneously broadcast multidisciplinary performances on the theme of water conservation from artists around the world, and will also feature contributions from celebrities such as Al Gore, Peter Gabriel and Bono. The event would seem to be yet another of the recent reincarnations of the 1980s-era charity rock events, save for one distinguishing detail: that Laliberté orchestrated the event from 400 km in the air and while moving at nearly 30 000 km/h while aboard the International Space Station. Laliberté is Canada’s first private citizen to take advantage of new opportunities for so-called space-tourism, spending a reported thirty-five million dollars to spend twelve days orbiting the earth aboard the ISS (see Peritz). *Moving Stars* connects to the intercultural tradition most obviously because it features performances from fourteen different cities on every continent but Antarctica, but also familiar should be its orientation around a single artistic auteur in Laliberté, its narrative invocations of ancient myth and archetype, and its aggressively transcultural ethos. What may distinguish *Moving Stars* from this tradition is its overtly ethical agenda: delivering on the One Drop Foundation’s mandate, the performance asks its viewers to think about the global problem of the depletion of fresh water. With a “cast” of literally thousands of people, *Moving Stars* must have had the potential to establish engagement among its participants, but its explicit objective is to engender an ethical engagement on the part of its spectators. Granted, *Moving Stars* is more like *Live Aid* than *The Mahabharata*, and the performance may be dramaturgically and educationally thin, but it does draw heavily on theatre for raw visceral and affective impact, for its power; the power, as Artaud saw it, to “appeal to the senses instead [of] the mind” (93). Might there be a renewed role for intercultural theatre to play in
consciousness-raising about pressing issues of global implication and urgency? Does transculturalism have new life in the era of *An Inconvenient Truth*? Richard Schechner, who again brought the term intercultural into theatre, wonders the same; in his October 2009 address at the Cairo International Festival for Experimental theatre, he wondered whether today’s “intercultural avante-garde” has “new ideas” about global problems such as poverty, exploitation, and environmental degradation (Schechner “Antara”). In other words, there are still new arguments to be made for old work, which is why an account of the old work—intercultural performance down through the twentieth century—was necessary background to my analysis here. As I said in the Introduction, while I have periodized the discourse by placing my critical framework after the crisis of ethics, I remain aware that this periodization is only a useful fiction. It is not difficult to find contemporary analogues, even literally similar, versions of all the traditions of performance I outlined in Chapter One. Both *Moving Stars* and the PTMTP demonstrate that ethnographic performance—of the sort that would not have been out of place at the World Exhibitions—is alive and well.

*Moving Stars* is also illustrative of the fact that intercultural performance is becoming more moveable and available than ever before. Just as technology spurred developments in intercultural theatre in the twentieth century (association of ethnographic performance with technological modernism in the context of World Exhibitions, the influence on intercultural auteurs of being able to travel around the world, the fact that *The Mahabharata*’s film distribution contributed to the controversy), so too will changes in how performance is transmitted reshape intercultural theatre in the future. This may be cause for concern and hope. On the one hand, intercultural efforts would have to benefit
from the fact that we are all simply more and more able to communicate quickly and clearly with people from elsewhere (privileges that extend to more and more developing countries even if they remain unevenly distributed in the world). If future intercultural theatre collaborations require fewer institutional resources, projects may have to rely less on powerful institutions with their own agendas and expectations of results. That is not an insignificant possibility with regard to what kind of messages intercultural collaborations are expected to produce. If interculturalism is susceptible to Raymond Corbey’s problem of “optical empiricism” (that to see is to know), then the ease with which image and video can now be transmitted and the ever-increasing availability and affordability of the technology that enables it, should be a more pressing concern than ever. While online environments may comprise multiple ways of knowing and it need not be used to transmit performance in a contextual vacuum, at the same time it is worth asking how much its appeal is fundamentally visual, and how much it will further privilege visually oriented methodologies. Here, too, is an opportunity to ask ethical questions: What kind of dialogue about representation is enabled? What kinds of knowledge do new ways of transmitting performance favour? Do new forms of transmission that digitally render the performing body actually serve to underscore the importance of corporal presence to ethical engagement? I see these questions as critical, and I hope this study will have served as the conceptual basis on which I can begin to address them.

Notes to Conclusion

1 A fine illustration of this is in Christopher R. Balme’s study of Samoan ethnographic performances in German world exhibitions at the turn of the twentieth century. While Balme does think about them in terms of Germany’s performance of its own colonial power, his thorough research also uncovers some instances of “interventions” of the kind I sought out in my case-study of the PTMTP: “A close examination of the [Samoan] troupes will show that, far from
being mere passive objects of commercial exchange and the exoticist gaze, the performers were in continual contact with family and leaders at home who monitored progress and reception and even intervened with German officials when necessary” (Balme, *Pacific* 127)

2 Burvill’s argument makes me realize that my analysis in this study has been logocentric in articulating ethical engagement using metaphors “conversation” and “dialogue.” But then again, this study enters into a logocentric discourse, and any textual accounts of theatre work have to accept this as an inevitable deficiency.

3 Though Nascimento’s book is a valuable reconsideration of the work of these artists, it does suffer from the perhaps gravitational pull back toward the crisis of ethics. It gets mired in discussions about East-West polarities that I have argued have long been unproductive, and the book would ultimately have offered more if it had distinguished between morals and ethics, and refocused its critical lens on the latter.

4 Lo and Gilbert distinguish between *multiculturalism* and *Multiculturalism* (*multi* meaning several). Small ‘*m*’ multiculturalism involves assembling cultures in such a way that does not call attention to the politics of cultural meeting or representation. Capital “*M*” Multiculturalism, on the other hand, specifically calls attention to the politics of diversity and marginality and is most associated with the official cultural policies of western democracies like Canada (arguably the first), Britain, and Australia (different in each of these contexts).

5 How spectators engage ethically with performance is worthy of theoretical exploration. Some have begun to do this (see Gluhovic; Nicholson “On ethics”) and I hope to build on a piece that I published about my ethical engagement as a spectator to a Toronto production of Ahmed Ghazali’s *The Sheep and the Whale* (see Freeman, “Geopolitics”).

6 Schechner, always keen to categorize, believes there are five distinct avant-gardes: the historical, the forward-looking, the tradition-seeking, the intercultural, and the current (see Schechner, “Theatre into the Twenty-First Century”), the last of which, confusingly enough, contains the previous three (see Schechner, “Antara”).
REFERENCES


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