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Columbia College Chicago

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Fall 2006

Columbia College Chicago Theater Center

Dialogue



create...
change

Columbia 
COLLEGE CHICAGO

Dialogue



Cover image by Molly Plunk. Oil pastel.

This year our essays, plays and monologues revolve around the theme of identity—claiming it, naming it and growing into it. Again this year *Dialogue* features work by faculty and students, and is reflective of the range of ideas, teaching theory and theater dramaturgy that exists within the department.



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create...
change

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Gravity and the Voice

By Nana Shineflug

Of the four forces (the strong, the weak, the electromagnetic and gravity) gravity is the only one that we human beings need to deeply understand so that we can be physical objects acting authentically in the gravitational field. It is not possible for the planets, galaxies and other objects in the universe to disregard the law of gravity; but it is possible for humans not to display gravitational obedience. I am not completely sure why this is true. I know, with regards to physical action, that it has to do with the fact that we have stood on two legs rather than remaining on four. This change enables us to get through life without moving our Center of Gravity correctly in relationship to the Center of Gravity of the Earth. Gravitational authenticity requires the Center of Gravity to bounce. It needs to acknowledge the four parts of gravitational fall and recovery:

Acceleration during the fall

Compression at the bottom—of a kind that necessitates rebound

Deceleration during the rise

Suspension—passing through zero gravity at the top

Gravity acts in an elliptical shape, and as we speak we need to tract the picture of gravitational fall and recovery with the right side of the brain. We need to see the picture.

But seemingly because we can walk in a flat manner, frequently without compression and suspension that lack of authenticity seems to spread throughout our other functions—especially speech.

From my point of view, the words we speak are really said with our whole energetic field. They emerge from the belly (Lower Dantien—Center of Gravity) and the energetic wave goes out in all directions. One of those is up through the Central Channel in the core of the body where it interacts with the vocal cords and translates into sound. But words should activate the entire body, sending out waves that impact the eyes and body of the observer (kinesthetic response) as well as the ears. And each word should exhibit gravitational authenticity.

One of the beauties of the English language is that a great deal of it was devised by grunting Anglo-Saxons who were physical workers. I think that most of the action words came about from people trying to describe with sound some desired action. For example, if you say “jump” without articulating with the mouth, you make a sound description of the action of jumping. That is starting on the ground, lofting into the air going up and over, and then

landing and doing it quickly. Then after a time, the sound description took on a more sophisticated aspect and the *j* and *p* were added to further clarify the description. The same is true of “fall,” “rise,” “sit,” “stop,” “go,” and on and on and on. And the gravitational aspect of the word is important for it to have power. If it is said in a flat manner (without its gravitational aspects) the speaker does not communicate effectively.

And what is true of words is also true of sentences. The sentences need to have gravitational authenticity (acceleration, compression, deceleration and suspension) in order to be effective; and the *whole body* needs to participate in the creation of the waves that will make the sound that most people identify as the sentence. For example if one says: “What do you mean?” each of the words needs to pass through the gravitational cycle. “what,” falls, compresses, decelerates, and suspends. This also happens to the word “do,” “you” and “mean”. Thus there are four connected elliptical patterns to the sentence. And each one of these patterns passes through the whole body, and needs to be tracked visually by the mind. Of course,

this requires a good mind-body connection, which is another matter. You can bunch a number of words together, such as “what do you” and use only one pattern for the three words. This slurs the sentence and it becomes unclear.

A good practice to start with is to over-do things. That is slowly say each word and sentence with exaggerated *whole body* gravitational action. After a time, it gets easier and a more natural pace can be effected.

Building gravitational authenticity into words and sentences makes for effective speaking and acting. And best of all, if it is done with the *whole body* the results are very broad ranged (this process also engages the feelings) and powerful.



Hollywood Daze

Seven Students. One City. Several Things Worth Remembering.

by Mary Kroeck

The week begins like this: seven students who have traded in their actual spring break for an opportunity to learn something about the acting business, sit around a table in a makeshift classroom on the CBS Studio Lot in Hollywood, California. A few long tables, relatively comfortable chairs, a chalkboard, and not much else make up the room in our little corner of the Columbia College bungalow. The previous day had been filled with a series of mini adventures, including a late night drive to eat at Mel's Diner, a little restaurant on Sunset Boulevard that could easily make anyone feel like they've just walked onto the set of *Happy Days* and within moments the Fonz will come out of his "office" and walk across the room with that all too familiar stride. In just a day, we've learned the value of a car in this city. It'd be great to be walking down Sunset Boulevard now, looking around with a childlike curiosity that you can only have when you're walking on unfamiliar territory for the first time, wanting everything around you to instantly turn into a Polaroid that will forever be implanted into your mind. Yet, that's not where we are. We are here, in the bungalow.

The student actors on the trip are Echo Cianchetti, Jon Sharlow, Brian Parenti, Amy Kline, Julianne Rencher, Sylwia Wiczorkiewicz, and me. Harrise Davidson, teacher at Columbia College and former agent, is our instructor for the class.

A recent Columbia College graduate, Kevin Williamson, comes in to speak to us. He's an actor, like the rest of us, just trying to figure it all out.

"You have to keep your passion alive," says Kevin. "At the end of the day, it's gonna-be you that keeps you going." Words of wisdom. I take them to heart, knowing beyond any doubt that he's right. He tells us that we should take time to get to know the city if we end up moving out here before we start auditioning, so we know where we're going, more or less. Lesson number one comes from Kevin: "Believe in yourself, even when no one else does."



We meet with the student writers, briefly, to perform our monologues. We go for lunch on the lot. We have a Studio Lot Tour. The most interesting part of this little excursion is seeing the remnants of *Gilligan's Island*, a small pond, no more than 10 feet round, with some fish swimming around inside it. Covering this little hole in the sidewalk is a small white bridge that is now seemingly useless because one can easily walk around the pond. It's a tiny patch of the lot that is probably nothing more than a novelty to most now, but was once a part of Hollywood history.

The best part of our tour happens by accident. Jeremy Ratchford, of the television show *Cold Case*, is in the middle of an audio dub recording session. He's a pro at this. It's completely evident in the fact that in most instances he only has to do a take once for it to be right. After his session, Jeremy is gracious enough to come and talk to us for a few minutes. He shows us a book of pictures of his child and speaks like a proud parent about his little one. Then he tells us something interesting about the industry. "[Auditions] are a one leg monkey dance," says Jeremy. "They're like a blind date, kind of like *Survivor* more or less." We know what he means by this—being a part of the industry epitomizes survival of the fittest, only no one knows exactly who the process of evolution will eliminate.

Jason Buyer, who created a course called "Marketing the Actor," and is also a Columbia College graduate comes in to talk to us the following day. The number one lesson we learn from him is we all have a long road ahead of us and the best thing to do is choose a direction. "Head shots are a snap judgment," says Jason. "You want to sell three things, not 30. Learn to stereotype yourself three different ways, three specific types you can be cast as—the bookworm, the college student, the person next door. Getting too specific can hurt you. Get specific without going to the extreme." He also tells us that we should try to get SAG eligible before we leave Chicago. It could make our lives a lot easier. Good advice, we take note.

Then comes Garth Ancier. This is the man who essentially started the Fox and W.B. networks as well as worked for NBC in Los Angeles. "I've really loved starting television networks," says Garth. "It's really interesting . . . The highlight of my career comes from running three networks and starting two from scratch when everyone thought you were going to fail. Then the shows you created, like *Felicity*, *Dawson's Creek*, *21 Jumpstreet*, *The Simpsons*, *Married with Children*, were successful.



"It's a tortuous process for young actors," adds Garth. "It's a really tough process to go through all this rejection. I think casting is one of the most important things you do in the business . . . Josh Jackson, who played Pacey on *Dawson's Creek*, originally came in to read for the part of Dawson. Sarah Michelle Gellar, who was Buffy on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, originally came in to read for Charisma Carpenter's role [Cordelia]."

Chicago actors Kara Zediker and Rich Wharton come in and talk to us about reels, their importance, why we should have one, etc. It is during this session that we are introduced to speed reels, which are reels that are about one minute in length and can be submitted electronically to an agent or casting director. "They're a valuable tool," says Rich. "They can help you get an agent or a manager." They also note that having representation before leaving Chicago is a good idea.

We go to a taping of a pilot titled, *The Class*, which stars actor Jason Ritter. It isn't bad. It is a good experience for all of us. We are the troublemakers and we're proud of that. Sylwia and Jon keep messing around with the comedian. Jon gets up in the aisle to dance for a t-shirt, Sylwia speaks in one of the several languages she knows after Jon told the comedian that she knew how to say something like "thanks for coming to the show," in German to catch his attention. I think by the end of the taping we all end up with a t-shirt for something or another. The following day is one of field trips—to the SAG offices, to AFTRA, to Lifetime, to the Columbia alumni office. Our minds are full of information by the end of the day and yet tomorrow is the last time we meet up for a class.

Today consists of being introduced to the L.A. theater scene. Jeff Perry, one of the founders of Steppenwolf in Chicago, tells us about Steppenwolf West, which is a training center and theater for actors in L.A. Others come in after Jeff, including representatives from the Geffen Playhouse, Word Space, Windy City Players, and Actor's Gang. "You always want to get to that next step and always need to listen to your voice," says Carmen Mormino, an actor from Chicago who helped to found Windy City Players. "If you're out here promoting your dream, if you get in the car and drive out here, that's a success."

Orion Barnes, a Columbia graduate who also happens to be Carmen's agent, comes in to talk to us when the other companies have left and while Carmen goes out to an audition for *Grey's Anatomy*. "You're more than a trick or a gimmick," says Orion. "Learn to market yourself . . . Do your thing and the right people will find you." Carmen calls while Orion was talking to us and says he'll try to make it back after the audition to talk to us some more. We want him to get the part. After all, he's one of us—a Chicagoan, an actor.

We wrap things up with Orion and say good-bye to our makeshift classroom and those left in the bungalow. Echo and Julianne have other plans and left before Carmen got back. Once Carmen returns, Amy, Jon, Brian, Sylwia, Harrise, Carmen, and I walk over to what remains of *Gillian's Island* and we talk about why we're there, why we came to L.A., why we're pursuing acting. We go around the circle we've made and give our answers. Some were blunt, like "I want my mom to turn on the TV and see me." Others are more realistic, like "I want to be known before I die." As we go around the circle, it's like we're seeing and hearing each other's dreams for the first time all week. We were getting to the root of why we're all there, why we chose this for ourselves, why we want to be a part of the "industry." Just as the last person finishes giving their reason and Carmen is telling us how we all remind him of himself at our age, remind him why he got into the business in the first place, he gets a phone call. It's Orion. Trying to stay cool, but obviously excited, he talks for a bit then hangs up. We want to know as much as he is bursting with the anxiety to tell us. He booked it. He booked it and we're there to hear the news. Talk about surreal. With this news, we feel like our week has been complete. That's what we're there for, to see someone who has worked hard see a little bit of the work pay off.

Harrise says her good-byes at the CBS lot and the rest of us decide to end our week the same way we started it, walking down Sunset Boulevard. This time, we go inside the Viper Room, going in just as Dave Grohl of the Foo Fighters/ Nirvana/ Queens of the Stone Age, is coming out. I can't believe it. Neither can the rest of us, but no one other than Sylwia and myself seem too impressed. Inside the club, the sounds of Oasis and Jet greet us from the stereo as a band is getting ready to play. Nothing about the entire experience has completely sunk in yet. We make a point of enjoying our last night in Los Angeles, knowing that the next day, we'll be back in 30-degree weather.

Mary is a theater/journalism major at Columbia College Chicago who is scheduled to graduate in spring of 2007.



Faux Glass

By Leslie Adelina Bradshaw



CHARACTERS

ATTICUS*: City bird, Younger brother to DEAN.

DEAN*: City bird, Older brother to ATTICUS.

TOM: Lawyer-like professional.

*Birds should stay in bird character at all times. Pecking at the floor, bobbing their heads. They are birds with wings and everything.

(Lights up on a wall next to a building, a park bench sits nearby. On the ledge a bird bottle sits, inside it a liquid. At rise a bird, ATTICUS, is sitting staring at the bottle with intensity. We don't know how long he has been sitting staring, but it's assumed it has been a while. The sound of traffic and birds is heard. After proper time, ATTICUS, goes over to the bottle. Puffs out his chest, trying to make the bottle impressed. Starts flirting with the bottle. Begins to whistle a song, "Come Fly with Me" or something similar. DEAN, also a bird, creeps up behind him and watches.)

DEAN

Got a new girlfriend?

ATTICUS

What? No.

DEAN: Yeah, Uh-huh, Sure.

ATTICUS: Why are you here?

DEAN: (starting to inspect the bird) Ah, the eternal question.

ATTICUS: Dean...

DEAN: Yes, Love?

ATTICUS: What do you want?

DEAN: (gesturing around) Lunch, baby brother, lunch.

ATTICUS: You could go over to the park, there are always more people there...

DEAN: Yes, I could.

(ATTICUS and DEAN hold a brief stare-down. ATTICUS looks away first and goes back to staring at the bottle.)

DEAN: Where'd it come from?

ATTICUS: I don't know.

DEAN: What is it?

ATTICUS: I don't know.

DEAN: Is it breathing?

ATTICUS: I don't know.

DEAN: Has it moved?

ATTICUS: No!

DEAN: Touchy. Touchy.

ATTICUS: This is where I eat lunch. You can't be here.

DEAN: It's a big planet man. I can be wherever I want to.

ATTICUS: I don't think you can.

(DEAN laughs and whistles while walking around inspecting things. Tom, a yuppie man, enters. He is carrying a briefcase with a lunch inside. He has a cell phone up to his ear, possibly a head set. DEAN and ATTICUS stop to watch. They cannot understand what he says.)

TOM: (on cell phone) Yes. Yes. I understand. Saturday. Yes. Well, I can try. But we will see first if the monkey will be able to make an appearance. (pause) Well, the judge won't let the trial go on without it. (pause) No I have to disagree, I think the monkey is crucial to the case. Well, yes, I assume the monkey will be wearing pants... Yes Mr. Yellow Hat. Yes. Well, I'm going to eat my lunch now. (pause) Yes, I am allowed lunches. (pause) I suppose the monkeys are too. (pause) Yes, well, Yes, uh-huh. Goodbye.

(TOM begins to set out his lunch. Chips, sandwich, a beverage. He is sitting on the bench. He starts to eat his chips and the birds began to "circle." The birds dart closer when food is dropped and then back off. TOM notices the attention from the birds but disregards it.)

DEAN: Drrrop it. Drrrop it. Drrrop it.

ATTICUS: I don't think chanting helps any. He'll drop it when he drops it.

DEAN: Oh shut up. That smart mouth was what got you kicked out the nest.

ATTICUS: I got kicked out of the nest because they needed the extra room.

DEAN: Yeah, needed the extra room for hatchlings they liked more.

(ATTICUS takes a swing at DEAN. DEAN ducks. They start to wrestle as birds when Tom gets another call. "Son of a bitch," "I'm going to kill you," etc are thrown around during the brotherly fight.)

TOM: 'ello? Yeah. Hi. Eating lunch. (pause) Outside (pause) Well I like the outdoors. Fresh air. (gestures. Watches the fight for a bit) the wildlife....
Yeah, I'm here.

(TOM is eating chips but not being the cleanest about it.)

TOM: Shoo! Shoo!

(Forgetting the fight they were just in for a moment.)

DEAN: What? Is he trying to talk to us?

ATTICUS: What a strange man.

(Start to fight again. The fight moves to the bench and into TOM.)

TOM (swatting)

Oh for the love of God! What is wrong with you! (to phone) Oh no honey, I wasn't talking to you. No.

(TOM starts to throw things (predominantly food) at the birds. They get excited and get closer. Feeling more threatened he starts to take his office objects and throw them at the birds. He picks up the bird bottle about to toss it. Thinks against it because its glass. Takes the head off and begins to throw the liquid at them. ATTICUS and DEAN grab each other with high-pitched, girlish screams.)

DEAN (overlapping)

Why did you do that?!

ATTICUS (overlapping)

He killed her!

TOM: It's a bottle! It's not alive!

(A pause descends as they realize they understand each other. DEAN and ATTICUS are stilling holding on to each other.)

DEAN: Did he just talk to us?

ATTICUS: I think so.

DEAN: Why is he looking at us like that? (beat)

TOM: Hello.

ATTICUS: Hello. (pause)

ATTICUS: Atticus.

TOM: Tom.

DEAN: Dean!

ATTICUS: That's my—brother...

TOM: I have a brother too.

DEAN: (fascinated with the food and not the conversation.)
Are you going to eat that?

TOM: (nods no.)
He's older.

ATTICUS: Older?

TOM: Yeah.

ATTICUS: Mine too...how long do you live?

TOM: Uh, 70, 80, even 90 years.

DEAN: Mmmm...Kettle Chips...

ATTICUS: What if someone snapped your head off?

TOM: Well, then less. But some people say you go to Heaven when you die.

(ATTICUS glares at TOM)

DEAN: Heaven! We've been there! Its in the sky over Malibu.

TOM: Yes, it's in the sky. And some people believe you come back as someone or something else.

DEAN: Like a pigeon?

TOM: Uh, sure.

ATTICUS: So we could be related?

TOM: Sure, I suppose.

(The two parties size the other up, looking for similarities.)

TOM: You have...nice...feathers.

ATTICUS: *(going to touch Tom's coat)* Thanks? You have nice...plumage...

TOM: Coat.

ATTICUS: Coat.

TOM: Thanks.

DEAN: This...is...getting too weird. I'm... *(he walks away and grabs the sandwich in his mouth as he is leaving)*

TOM: I'm sorry about your—

ATTICUS: It's not mine.

TOM: Oh.

(beat)

ATTICUS: Is she dead?

TOM: She's glass—She was never alive.

ATTICUS: Oh.

TOM: I have to go.

(TOM places the head back in place and hands ATTICUS the bottle. ATTICUS won't accept it.

TOM places it on the bench. Grabs his suitcase, brushes himself off and walks away.

As soon as he walks off ATTICUS pets the bird gently then grabs it and cradles it tight in his arms. Sings "Blackbird" by The Beatles. Lights down.)



A Texas native, Leslie Adelina Bradshaw now studies playwrighting and creative non-fiction in her senior year at Columbia. She also has been named a Liberace Scholar for 2006. This play was part of this year's 2006 10-Minute Play Festival.

Precursor

Solo Performance Piece by Kyle Kratky

I am the triply-great grandson of the late Oscar Wilde: I am charming and witty and clever and erudite and I sit drinking tea, eating cucumber sandwiches, writing witty quips and poetry, and generally being suggestive about the many things Victorian society says I cannot be. I sit like this, with my legs crossed like this, keeping my eyes open like this, never blinking, and looking at others like this. I part my hair like this, I wear a three-piece suit like this one, and I wear immaculate white gloves like this. I develop fictions around which my life can function, around which I can grow and climb. I find America grotesque, as it is the only country to go from barbarism to decadence while completely skipping civilisation, and I wholeheartedly believe that when telling the truth, you must make people or laugh, or they will kill you.



On May 25, 1895, my triply-great grandfather the late Oscar Wilde was convicted of gross indecency, of sexual acts with another man. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment and hard labour at Reading Gaol. While imprisoned, he suffered an ear infection that was never properly treated, and he died in November of 1900 of cerebral meningitis, three years after his release from prison. The meningitis developed because of the untreated ear infection. Wilde died penniless and alone, the man for whom he went to prison, Lord Alfred Douglas, having left him for someone younger. Two years after Wilde's death, Wilde was the most widely read English author in the world after Shakespeare.

From Wilde's poem, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," the poem he wrote while in prison:

*"Yet each man kills the thing he loves, by each let this be heard
Some do it with a bitter look, some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss, the brave man with a sword
Every prison that men build is built with bricks of shame,
And bound with bars lest Christ should see how men their brothers maim.
For he who lives more lives than one more deaths than one must die."*

I am the triply-great grandson of the late Oscar Wilde: I am charming and witty and clever, and I am alone and dying slowly of something minor and invisible. Like an ear infection.



Kyle Kratky is the Co-Founder and Co-Artistic Director of the Immediacy Theatre Project. He jetssets between Chicago and Belleville, and he produces and hosts the "Words on My Tongue Podcast."

I burn pastilles and not incense, I drink chilled champagne against my doctor's orders, and I never did anything with those children, despite what people say. They only came over for cakes and fireworks, nothing more. There were costumes, there were flowers, there were insects perched on dewy leaves, poised to steal pollen from concealed stamens, indeed, but all beautiful buds of lilies returned to their homes intact and untouched: purity is something I value.

Corruption is something I rather admire. I sit and watch the rowing teams go back and forth, the men with sinewy arms and seamless necks and sun-baked forearms. There is verse in their strokes, rhyme in the undulation of their backs, and venom in their eyes. They are feasting tigers, poised chimeras, many-headed beasts with many-headed appetites and it's all one can do to make oneself pretty enough to be appetising.

I am the triply-great grandson of the late Oscar Wilde: except for when I trip unexpectedly. Or when I am wearing a soiled shirt. Or when my mother calls me, then I'm an uncultured rough. And I rarely sit and watch anyone row, no one really rows anymore, do they? And I've never owned pastilles or drank chilled champagne. It's mostly cheap vodka and strong tequila for me. But it's true that I admire corruption. And that I develop fictions around which my life can function. But it is not true that I have ever worn a three-piece suit or white, immaculate gloves.

Playing Hermione in “The Winter’s Tale”

An interview with Barbara Robertson, July 1, 2006

by Caroline Dodge Latta

PREAMBLE: *This interview with Barbara Robertson concerning her portrayal of the role of Hermione in Michael Bogdanov’s production of Shakespeare’s A Winter’s Tale at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater in April 2003 was conducted with the intention of adding to the small but growing collection of actor analysis of specific Shakespearean roles. The academic community is beginning to credit these analyses and reflections as genuine scholarship, capable of producing significant insights. Jonathan Holmes declares in Merely Players: Actors Accounts of Performing Shakespeare that actors’ investigations of roles is a “hitherto neglected area of Performance Studies: the discussion of Shakespeare performance by the performer.” What written analyses that exist are predominantly by British actors found in such resources as the six volumes of Players of Shakespeare, Carol Rutter’s Clamorous Voices, Antony Sher’s Year of the King, etc. This interview (the first in an intended series) begins to address the paucity of American actors’ written perspectives on playing Shakespeare and more specifically focuses on the insights that Chicago actors can bring to Shakespearean characterization.*

In addition, the article is a my response as a teacher to a specific assignment in the Acting III Styles: Shakespeare class at the Columbia College Theater Department, in which students are required to pick a Shakespearean role and research two different actors’ approaches to it. The assignment is given both to make students aware of the history of Shakespearean acting where specific actors’ approaches are known, having been passed down from actor to actor and from generation to generation, and also to illustrate the acting concept of choice so that students are exposed to different but equally legitimate choices for the same moment in a role.

The *Winter’s Tale*, one of Shakespeare’s late plays, tells the story of Leontes, ruler of Sicilia, and his lovely Queen Hermione. Leontes, in a fit of unreasoning jealousy, accuses Hermione of adultery. During her imprisonment, her son dies of grief and her infant daughter is taken from her, transported to Bohemia, and exposed to the elements. Although Hermione’s innocence is ultimately validated by the Delphic oracle, she collapses, and her death is reported by her loyal retainer Paulina. Seventeen years elapse. Perdita, the daughter who was presumed lost, is reunited with her repentant father. Paulina then unveils a statue of the Queen; miraculously the statue comes to life as mother, husband and daughter face an uncertain future.



Barbara Robertson is a consummate Chicago actor whose work in Shakespeare is as exciting as her roles on film and in contemporary work at theaters around the city. Barbara teaches Professional Survival and How to Audition at Columbia. Michael Bogdanov has directed multiple productions for the Royal Shakespeare Company, and was Associate Director of the National Theatre, as well as Joint Artistic Director of the English Shakespeare Company and has directed productions at the Abbey in Dublin, La Scala, Stratford Festival in Canada and the Old Vic, among others. It was quite a coup for Barbara to have the opportunity to work with him.

THE INTERVIEW:

Barbara, you’ve had the opportunity to play many Shakespearean roles. Was Hermione a role you sought?

It was a role I’ve always wanted to play, but I began to fear that it might not become available to me. I perceived that most Chicago directors would be reluctant to cast me because of my age. I was delighted when Michael Bogdanov’s arrival gave me the opportunity to audition. In fact he auditioned me for both Hermione and Paulina and then gave me a choice—which role would I rather play? What an embarrassment of riches!

How did you decide? Each role has its attractions.

The decision was an easy one! Hermione! Her story grabbed me. My heart was closer to her story, the mother and the wronged woman. Maybe it had something to do with having played another of history’s wronged women, Medea. Then again I felt that the role of Paulina could come again as it is often played by an older actress. Paulina’s age is not as circumscribed; she doesn’t have to be fertile.

It's interesting that you highlight this aspect of Hermione. Gemma Jones who played Hermione in Richard Eyre's 1981 production at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford also mentions the importance of Hermione's fertility. Jones rationalizes that "If Hermione is in a state of maternity, this can embrace not only the child that she has and the child that she carries but also her husband and his friend in an entirely chaste and compassionate love," thereby plausibly motivating the ardor with which she attempts to do her husband's bidding and change Polixines' mind to yet again delay his departure.

Yes. I think that her maternal instincts encompass her husband and her extended family. There is also that element of playfulness that defines her relationship with her family, her "exasperation" with her son and her bantering with Polixines.

Many Shakespearean actresses speak of a difficult relationship particularly with a male director. What was your relationship with Michael Bogdanov?

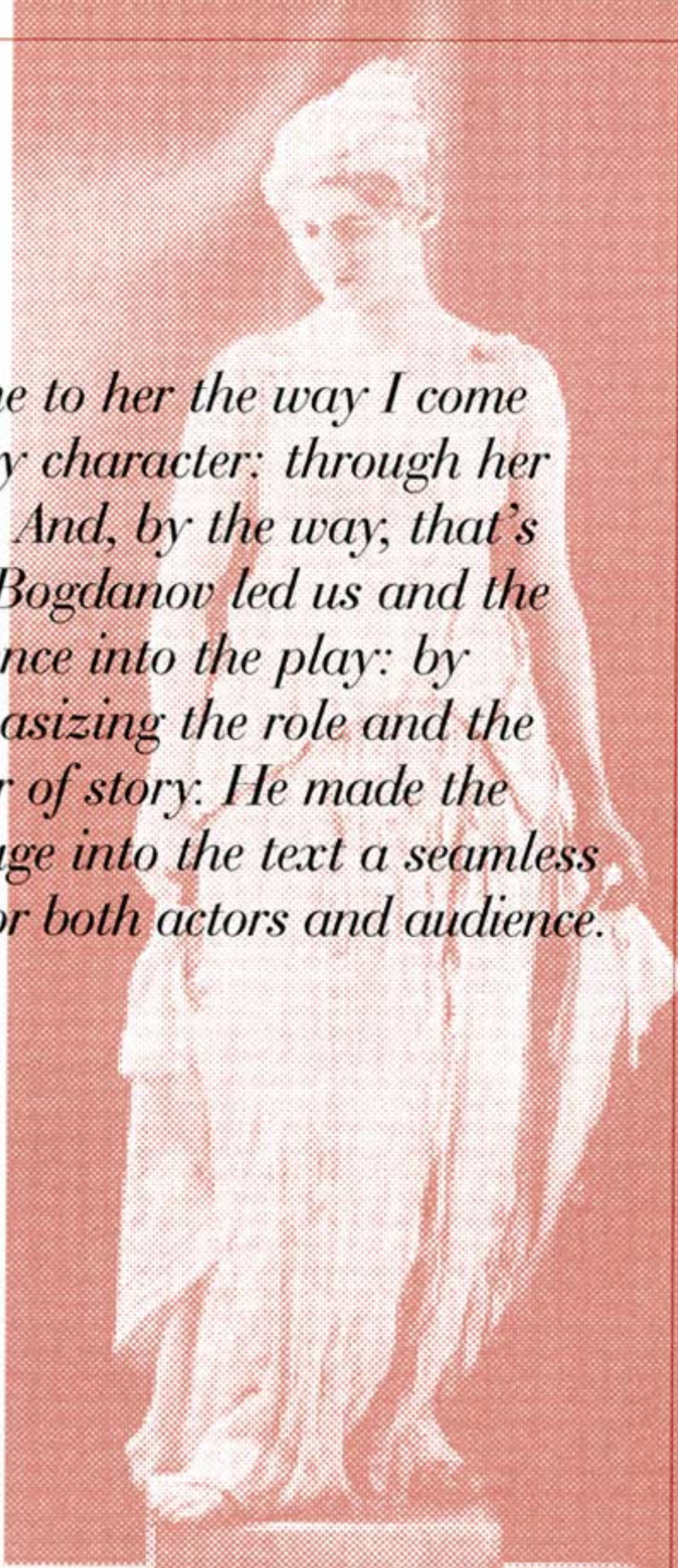
He was a delight to work with. He gave us all a great deal of freedom.

For example, by giving me the opportunity to play Hermione, I think he saw my age as an asset, not a liability, that he grasped that Leontes' accusations force Hermione becoming into a woman mature far beyond her years and that therefore my age would very quickly work in my favor. He also made what I consider a brilliant decision when he cast Paulina (Susan Hart) as Hermione's peer rather than as a mother figure. It helped cement the two women's relationship because, as you know, we (Hermione and Paulina) have no actual conversations together, but if she is my age, then she becomes my confidante, a "girlfriend," who is a vital part of my extended family.

Michael was so trusting. Late in the rehearsal period he came to each of us and said, "The play is too long. Please find 10–12 lines you can cut out of your speeches." By that time, of course, we were all heavily invested in every one of our lines! But his willingness to let us decide which lines to remove involved us even more in our characters as we struggled to weigh every word and pare away the most nonessential. I remember the stage manager saying, "Oh no Barb, you can't cut that line!" By shifting the responsibility to our shoulders, he demonstrated his trust in us, and we were invested and on board and the production was well served.

How did you find Hermione? Through researching the part as it has been portrayed? Through reliance on the text?

I came to her the way I come to any character: through her story. And, by the way, that's how Bogdanov led us and the audience into the play: by emphasizing the role and the power of story. He made the passage into the text a seamless one for both actors and audience. I always like to participate in a company warm-up even though I realize that an individual warm-up is necessary as well. But a company warm-up creates an ensemble that is invaluable to creating the world of the play. Bogdanov found a way to celebrate the warm-up experience and use it as a way to enter that world. He drew actors



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on stage in the beginning with the cast assembling from every direction, each one adding his/her voice to the singing of "In the Deep Mid Winter." As our voices joined, we slipped from actors into characters. The singing wafted out into the auditorium, embracing the audience, enveloping them in the magic of the story Shakespeare was about to unfold. Every night it was a magical experience.

And, of course, I came to her through the text using the Folio method.

Note: The Folio method entails the actor's reliance upon the punctuation, capitalization, and spelling of Shakespeare's First Folio for acting clues. The script of the First Folio, adherents believe, records the way the Shakespeare's actors breathed, spoke, and emphasized the language provided by the playwright. Subsequent editors edited for the eye, for the reader, not the listener, and, therefore, obscure or change Shakespeare's original intention.

Can you cite some specific moments where the text "spoke" to you, where Shakespeare and his word choice, his phrasing, his punctuation, his spelling gave you acting insights. Let's look particularly at the famous trial scene in Act III.

Yes, of course, the scene where I wrestled with what to cut!

Well first of all: I had to remember at all times that the text must be kept moving, but that it must not be propelled by anger; if only anger is driving the text, Hermione's eloquence diminishes and is replaced by shrillness. And then I paid special attention to midstops (strong medial punctuation in the middle of a line: periods, question marks, and exclamation points). These were the places where I had to push on with a new thought. I kept reminding myself that the midstops indicate that Hermione is not about to give Leontes time to speak, that she is saying to him in effect, "Don't you dare talk yet!" And there were other lines that were end-stopped with question marks where Hermione waits for Leontes to reply. When no reply is forthcoming, I used his silence as fuel for the next idea. And, yes, I found my way through the paralysis of the famous monologue "Sir, spare your Threats . . ." by noticing that the order of Hermione's list of wrongs concluded rather than began with the fact that she had been brought "before I have got strength of limit." This ordering, when indeed her exhaustion is at its peak, aided me with my portrayal of Hermione's inherent dignity and the overwhelming sense of degradation, violation and loss she is experiencing.

Flora Robson, who played Paulina in Peter Brook's 1951 production, wrote of the connections she found between Hermione's speeches in court and the records of Anne Boleyn's statements at her own trial. Were you conscious of such a connection and that, in fact Henry VIII was written almost contemporaneously with The Winter's Tale?

No. I didn't do any research per se on how the role had been played although I had seen the play once before and don't have any problem in looking and, if appropriate, borrowing other actresses' choices. But it is far more important to

me to find my own way in by personalizing the text, examining the clues the Folio offers and relating the character's most important traits to my own experiences. Again we circle back to the importance of being able to comprehend her love for her husband and her children and her belief that she will be vindicated.

Gemma Jones echoes your insight. She states, "she (Hermione) is innocent and she knows it . . . she has faith. As Joan of Arc heard her voices, so does Hermione believe."

Yes, Hermione has that Joan of Arc quality. Throughout the trial I felt that Hermione never gives up hope that Leontes will say something to amend what has happened/is happening and that too fueled the scene. I had to keep finding a way in to reach him, to draw him out of his madness. My surety in my own innocence gave me the strength to persevere.

The final scene of the play has always provided fodder for different interpretations. How is the statue scene played? When does the decision to come back to life occur? For example, John Barton in Exploring a Character, part of the 1984 RSC Playing Shakespeare videotape series, talks of the necessity for keeping decisions as late in a scene as possible so that the scene stays active.

Yes! I certainly relate to Barton's advice. I remember standing immobilized as the statue having not yet completely decided whether I would move, not yet sure if I am ready or willing to give up my hermitage and return to the world that treated so cruelly me and from which I have been divorced to these sixteen years. It was only upon hearing my daughter's voice that I made the decision to bring myself to life, that indeed at that moment no other decision seemed possible.

Critics and Shakespearean actresses also speak of the silence of women at critical points in the canon and whether that silence is crippling or empowering. Witness Rosalind at the end of As You Like It or Helena in All's Well. How did the lack of language affect your performance?

I found it freeing. My silence allowed me to concentrate on others, to realize I did not want to see Leontes suffer anymore and to really hear my daughter. Many nights her voice moved me to tears. And perhaps just as importantly the silence was necessary because to me the statue is real. Part of me has turned to stone. There was never any feigning on my part, no attempt to manipulate the audience, to manufacture a clever trick. My character is part stone and stones do not speak until water—my tears—wears them away.

But does reconciliation between Hermione and Leontes occur? Polixines speaks of her embracing Leontes and hanging on his neck and Paulina redirects Hermione's attention to Perdita. Is this indication of staging enough to satisfy an audience's perception that a true reconciliation has come about? If such reconciliation is possible, how did you choose to show it? For instance, how did you leave the stage?

I exited with Perdita, leaving Leontes on stage alone to follow after. But during the curtain call Leontes and I exited hand in hand, a conscious choice by Michael and John Reeger (Leontes) and myself to signify the remaking of a family, the resurrection the family bond. I believe Hermione has decided to start afresh, to rise out of, above and beyond her pain, grief, anger, and to begin anew. This rebirth creates the play's magic which enraptures audiences as they too revel in the possibility of a second chance at life.

Finally was it hard to leave her (the character of Hermione)? Was there something left undone? David Suchet in the Playing Shakespeare video series says that while playing Shylock, he never got the scene between himself and Jessica right and if he does the play again, it will be to revisit that moment and relationship.

Well, I've certainly had times where I felt I didn't quite finish the role I was playing. When I was playing Helena in *Midsummer*, director Michael Maggio (the late Associate Artistic Director of the Goodman Theatre and freelance director) became ill during the rehearsal process and the play and my role felt unfinished. And also times where I felt I didn't even come close to scratching the surface of the role—I'd love to play Cleopatra again. But with Hermione I was satisfied with my performance, and so grateful that I had connected with her on so many levels.

For me both the role and production will always remain highlights in my performance career.

Thank you, Barbara, for your insightful comments. They not only illumine your pathway but also further our own understanding of Hermione's journey.



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Transcendent Unity: Race, Creativity and Performance

by Catherine Slade

Every generation of actors must discover for itself that theater is none of the trappings, not neon and notoriety, not box-office records or stardom, not the trim bodies or the money. What radiates from the stage is the full and authentic expression of our unique and universal humanity that encompasses but always transcends our personal experience.

Theatrical meeting points of diverse cultures have and will always be enormously enriching. The individual artist sees something inspiring in a new way of working and often transfers that experience into her own work. Cross-cultural theater is not one style, not one point of view; it is rather a dynamic process of meeting, integrating, adapting and generating new and relevant works for the theater. As long as people and cultures interface they will generate new ideas, creativity and alternative ways of communicating.

My own voyage as an actress began in 1968 when America was ablaze with revolutionary fires ignited by the flames of civil rights and political struggles, feminism, the Democratic Convention, Vietnam War protests, animal rights, gay rights, ecological activism, and assassinations—first Martin Luther King, then Bobby Kennedy—sexual liberation, free music and even rock 'n roll. These fundamental events set the stage for a revolutionary movement in the American theater.

I enrolled in Columbia College and switched my major from music to theater. There a vanguard of cutting-edge artists explored new expressive forms. Their performance aesthetics were based on the belief that meaningful and competent art can only be achieved by study, continuous contact with the body politic, and with other artists.

Artists-in-Residence like poet Arnold Weinstein and Paul Sills, founder of the Story Theater Workshop and the Merlin of storytelling, taught us that acting was a way of being, a way of discovering the timeless inner Self rather than projecting the fragilities of personal ego. The appeal of the work was irresistible. Through improvisation applied to world myths and fairytales, we entered a non-ordinary reality beyond time and space. We discovered the true Self was an amalgamation of everything around us. The stories had hidden in them fragments of our own lives with visions of power animals, spirit guides and nature. Paul turned us into birds and sea creatures, owls and foxes, peasants, farmers, millers, and maidens so that we could expand our concept of theater and see how the actor/storyteller responds to many worlds.

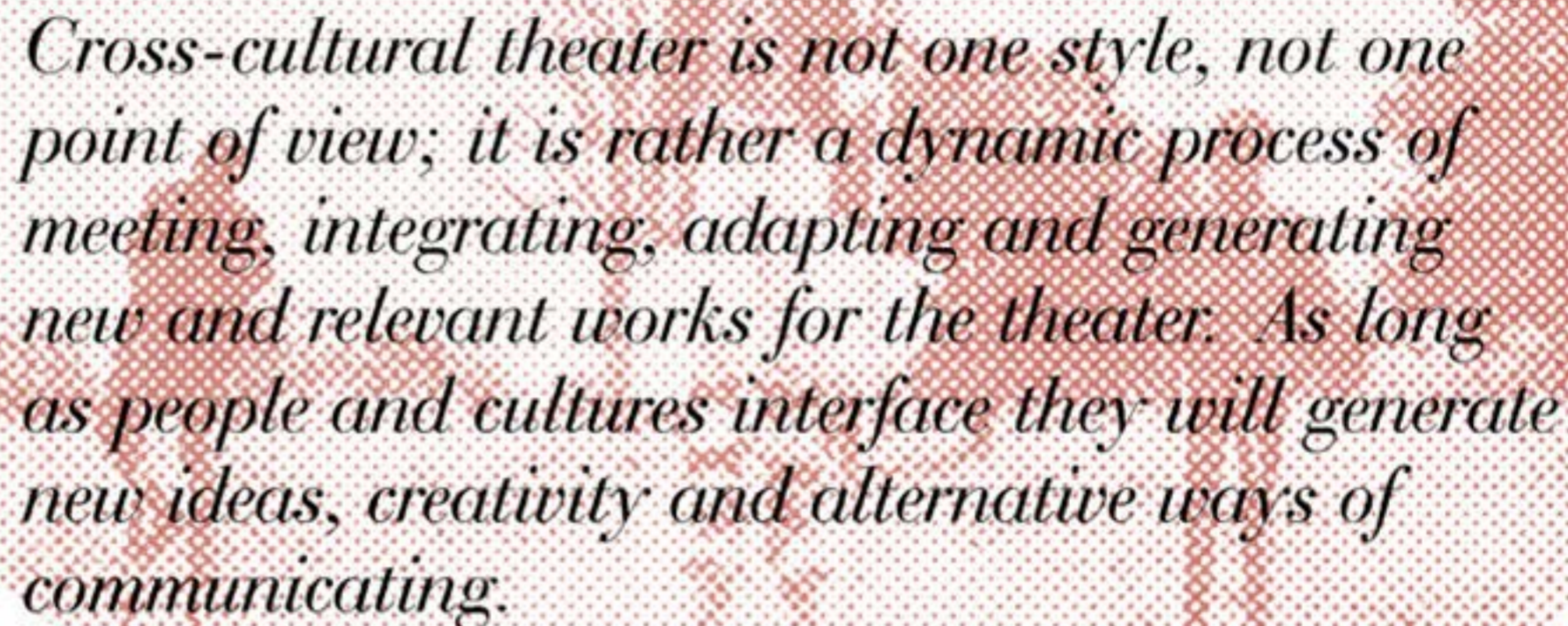
Ronnie Davis of the San Francisco Mime Troupe followed. He was another director-auteur who tapped into the sacred vessel of stories, applying performance techniques of Hopi Indians and Asian performance styles. Through ancient breath patterns, movement and rhythms that impact the brain, we began to see with our senses rather than our eyes.

The 60s introduced a new generation of experimental geniuses whose thoughts and passions created an aesthetic paradise. Busting through every limitation, fed up with the staid social status quo, these artists modeled the capacity to allow a variety of differing viewpoints, cultures and worldviews to creatively coexist. The dramatic experience was used to impact cultural and political awareness, understanding, passion and respect.

The Muse of the earlier 20th century seminal theater-makers was definitely ethnocentric. In fact, one could venture to say that these innovators explored other cultures looking for alternative approaches outside of the traditional Western dramatic form. They sought inspiration from other cultures to redefine and rescue their theater from the perceived European cul-de-sac. It cannot be denied that in the past century many important theater artists evolved expressive forms reflective of the realities of non-European experience.

Some of them—Artaud's revelations on seeing Balinese theater, Brecht's deep and lasting impressions of the Mei-Lan Fang's Opera company; Grotowski's studies of Kathakali exercises; Peter Brook's multicultural performance troupe; and Robert Lepage use of Bunraku; Berkoff and Kabuki and Ariane Mnouchkine's beautiful productions inspired by her fascination with Asian ritual—showed that Western theater practitioners experimented various styles and themes to transform into new works of art. This adaptive process continues to forge endless new forms of expression and includes performers from all ethnic backgrounds.

Afterwards I graduated from Columbia I moved to New York and worked with several innovative theater teachers, directors and groups: Kristin Linklater, my mentor, Joe Chaikin, Ludwig Flazen, Andre Serban and Lee Breuer head my list of theater alchemists. Actors were asked to work on new or classical texts with conviction, sincerity and precision and develop technical mastery in performance on a level that was previously unknown to us. So, how was that achieved? Absolute total trust and surrender to the process. Sometimes our rehearsal were like Apache war dancing, or an unstructured acting improvisation, brainstorming on classical text or a spontaneous writing workshop, or group therapy, or a primal scream party or endless hours of movement, breathing and intonement of a transcendental mantra.



Cross-cultural theater is not one style, not one point of view; it is rather a dynamic process of meeting, integrating, adapting and generating new and relevant works for the theater. As long as people and cultures interface they will generate new ideas, creativity and alternative ways of communicating.

We had complete confidence to abandon ourselves, to be ourselves unselfishly, knowing it would contribute to the whole. Themes and focuses evolved and shifted, some agreed-upon roadmap was explored or abandoned, actors commanded or relinquished center stage, there was no hierarchical relationship, and yet everything remained focused and fascinating. The work was most expressive and compelling for what it left unspoken, or more precisely for what it expressed non-verbally.

Integral to the massive 60s cultural movements was the development of alternative and community theater. During the past thirty years, America has witnessed an explosion of ethnic talent development including playwrights, performers and new cultural institutions. From the 1960s to the present, such theater companies have brought new light to the ethnic American experience. These authors have heightened the degree of public awareness to the social and ethnic issues of our time. Ethnic playwrights have led the way in identifying issues in need of political or cultural attention; prison reform, AIDS in ethnic communities, women's rights, discriminatory immigration policies, homophobic rage, conflicting intergenerational values of indigenous and immigrant communities—the list goes on.

Playwrights, whether Broadway-bound like August Wilson (*Fences*) and David Henry Hwang (*M. Butterfly*) or the cutting-edge of theatrical experimentation like Suzan-Lori Parks (*American Play*), have established a distinguished place in the American theater. They are no longer standing on the sidelines of dramatic efforts. They have established ethnic theater as a vast and vital genre invigorating the all too familiar repertoires of the Eurocentric mainstream.

I had a chance to get a student's perspective on becoming theater artist in the era of globalization. When speaking with David Harewood, President of Columbia College's Black Actors Guild, I asked, "Do you think that Generation X-ers artists share the utopian ideals of the postmodern era—the dreams of equality, unity and love that so many of Americans have since abandoned as naïve or nearly impossible to fulfill?"

David responded:

"In a recent interview Bob Dylan said that an artist should always be at a becoming point. What we ultimately become isn't mapped for us. How we become is the thing that is important. As artists we are constantly on the edge of what Dylan has called us out to do.

"I think the last century's central problem was that of the color line. There were closely defined parameters. There were countless numbers of clear and present problems that we all wanted to fix. There were constant reminders of how you needed to become something new in order to fix them.



Photo: Xavier Lambours

"Those problems were resolved in great part. It's no longer odd to see people of different ethnicities walking on the same stage or sitting in the same restaurants. But we're not yet sure what our next step should be.

"We need to acknowledge that the movement of the 60s shaped us collectively, as selves, as artists, as a country. But let's not be so blind as to assume that we have the right to be complacent. As theater innovators we have a whole new series of challenges before us now that we need to collectively and individually become in order to face them. We have to 'become' those things we don't know, and since we've already figured out that other cultures exist within the country, we are challenged to do something new," David concluded.

I agree with David's thoughts. Actors of each generation are challenged to become something new, more representative and inclusive, something greater. This is the way of the actor to apply language, the gift bestowed on everyone by nature to express the universality of our life and times. From childhood to old age, by telling or re-telling the simplest things, containing the most complex problems, we express mankind's collective dramatic story.



Catherine Slade is an actress and producer and full-time faculty member in the theater department.