



**T. C.  
YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**TOWARDS AN INTERCULTURAL THEATRE: ARIANE MNOUCHKINE AND  
THE THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL'S SHAKESPEARE PRODUCTIONS (1981-1984)**

**by**

**Sevgi TOSUNER**

**Submitted to the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of English Literature**

**ISTANBUL**

**HAZİRAN 2011**



**T. C.  
YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**TOWARDS AN INTERCULTURAL THEATRE: ARIANE MNOUCHKINE AND  
THE THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL'S SHAKESPEARE PRODUCTIONS (1981-1984)**

**by**

**Sevgi TOSUNER**

**Supervisor  
Prof. Dr. Aysin CANDAN**

**Submitted to the Graduate Institute of Social Sciences  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of English Literature**

**ISTANBUL**

**HAZİRAN 2011**

**TOWARDS AN INTERCULTURAL THEATRE: ARIANE MNOUCHKINE AND  
THE THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL'S SHAKESPEARE PRODUCTIONS (1981-1984)**

by

**Sevgi TOSUNER**

Approved by:

Prof. Dr. Aysin CANDAN .....  
(Supervisor)

Prof. Dr. Cevat ÇAPAN .....

Prof. Dr. Süheyla ARTEMEL .....

Date of Approval by the Administrative Council of the Institute  
13.10.2011

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vi
ÖZET .....	vii
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. THE BEGINNING.....</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 Mnouchkine's Influences.....	4
2.2 The Théâtre du Soleil: People's Theatre.....	7
2.2.1 First Productions.....	8
2.2.2 Collective Creation.....	13
2.2.3 Theatre and Society.....	19
2.2.4 After Shakespeare: Hélène Cixous's <i>Norodom Sihanouk and L'indiade</i> .....	20
2.3 Working Methods: Setting up an Identity.....	26
2.4 The Cartoucherie.....	29
<b>3. INTERCULTURAL THEATRE: DEFINITIONS.....</b>	<b>30</b>
3.1 Historical Development of Intercultural Theatre.....	34
3.2 Intercultural Reflections in Contemporary Theatre.....	37
3.3 Overall Reception of Intercultural Theatre.....	39
3.4 Criticisms and New Models.....	40
<b>4. THE SHAKESPEARE CYCLE.....</b>	<b>45</b>
4.1 Richard II.....	48
4.2 Twelfth Night (La Nuit des rois).....	53
4.3 Henry VI.....	57
4.4 Is Shakespeare Our Contemporary?.....	60
4.5 The Theatre Is Oriental.....	62
4.6 Intercultural Shakespeare.....	65

**5. CONCLUSION: THE UNIQUE POSITION OF THE THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL  
WITHIN THE THEATRICAL LANDSCAPE OF INTERCULTURALISM.....67**

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.....70**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Ayşın Candan, who is the main inspiration for this study. Her constant encouragement has made this process easier and enjoyable. All the years I have spent at Yeditepe University, she kindled the love for theatre in me, directed me towards the field and become the sole reason for my continual interest. This study has become possible due to her immeasurable contributions. If I couldn't have found the opportunity to collaborate with her, this study would not have come to this successful end. I sincerely thank her for being my biggest supporter from the time we have met.

I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Cevat Çapan for all the help and advice he has given me whenever I needed, past and present, especially during the realization of this study. His presence, as an erudite figure, deeply inspired me to study in the field of theatre.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank my family for always being there for me and for giving me their endless support throughout my whole life.

## ABSTRACT

As the contemporary stage directors sought new ways and forms to produce plays as the central organizing member for the performance event, the theatre practitioners in Europe could not be indifferent to the impact of Asian theatre forms that had been on the rise since the beginning of the century, given the rapid changes and easiness in communication. Besides, as traditional Asian troupes began touring in Europe and America in 1920s and 30s, Western attitudes toward Asian theatre developed as they got the chance to see and hear Chinese opera, Japanese kabuki and Balinese dance. Thus, contemporary European theatre directors saw the influence of Asian theatre forms in their own approach with intercultural and international encounters.

Within this context, the work of Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil stands out with their unique way of producing plays and understanding of theatre. This study aims at first examining the historical development of this collective theatre company along with Mnouchkine's way of approaching theatre. Since their work cannot be separated from intercultural debates, the second part of the study focuses on what intercultural theatre means and reflects in contemporary theatre, defining the term with others that come with it such as intracultural, multicultural or crosscultural and showing its historical development with some examples from both western point of view as well as the methods of artists such as Peter Brook and from non-western perspectives and the voices of artists from African, Japanese and Indian cultures.

The overall purpose is to analyze Mnouchkine's and her company's collaborative and intercultural productions and approaches which admirably explore the legacies of European and Russian theatre practitioners as well as recuperates "other" techniques and traditions from Asian theatres by focusing specifically on the company's Shakespeare adaptations, which composes the main goal of this study, finally situating the company's productions in intercultural theatre.

Key words: intercultural theatre, Ariane Mnouchkine, Théâtre du Soleil, the Shakespeare cycle, orientalism

## ÖZET

Performans sanatının temel ögesi olan çağdaş tiyatro yönetmenleri, sahneye koyacakları oyunlar için yeni bir yöntem arayışı içinde olduklarından, Avrupalı tiyatrocular hızla ilerleyen ve kolaylaşan iletişim sayesinde yüzyılın başından beri yükselmekte olan Asya'ya ait tiyatro yöntemlerinin etkisine kayıtsız kalamamışlardır. Bunun yanı sıra Asyalı kumpanyalar 1920li ve 30lu yıllarda Avrupa'da ve Amerika'da turneye çıkınca Çin operası, Japon Kabuki tiyatrosu ve Bali dans tiyatrosunu izleme şansı bulan batının Asya tiyatrosuna karşı tavrı gelişmiştir. Böylelikle Avrupalı çağdaş yönetmenler kültürlerarası ve uluslararası karşılaşmalar sayesinde kendi yapıtlarında Asya tiyatrosunun etkisini görebilmişlerdir.

Bu bağlamda Ariane Mnouchkine ve Théâtre du Soleil'in yapıtları, özgün sahnelemeleri ve tiyatro anlayışları ile öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışma ilk olarak kolektif bir topluluk olan Théâtre du Soleil'in tarihsel gelişimi ile yönetmen Mnouchkine'in tiyatroya olan yaklaşımını incelemektedir. Yapıtları kültürlerarası tartışmalardan ayrı tutulamayacağı için, çalışmanın ikinci kısmında kültürlerarası tiyatronun tanımı ile bu kavram ile birlikte ortaya çıkan kültürel geçiş ve çok kültürlülük gibi kavramların tanımına ve kültürlerarası tiyatronun çağdaş tiyatrodaki ne ifade ettiğine odaklanılmıştır. Bunun için hem batılı tiyatrocuların- mesela Peter Brook gibi yönetmenlerin- bakış açısına ve yöntemlerine, hem de batılı olmayan Afrika, Japon ve Hint kültürlerine ait yaklaşımlara yer verilmiştir.

Çalışmanın temel amacı Mnouchkine ve tiyatro kumpanyasının bilhassa Shakespeare uyarlamalarına odaklanarak, Avrupalı tiyatrocuların miraslarını başarılı bir biçimde devam ettiren ve Asyaya ait "diğer" teknikleri ve gelenekleri canlandıran işbirlikçi ve kültürlerarası yapıtlarını incelemektir. En son bölümde kumpanyanın kültürlerarası tiyatrodaki yeri anlatılarak çalışma sonlandırılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kültürlerarası tiyatro, Ariane Mnouchkine, Théâtre du Soleil, Shakespeare oyunları, oryantalizm, şarkiyatçılık

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The function and the importance of the director have been on the rise since the beginning of the twentieth century. Director's work and role in theatre production, his relationship with the writer, the actors and the audience have been and still are discussed due to the lack of reliable information about individual directors and because the definition of director's work has been quite vague.<sup>1</sup> Directors, other than providing dramatic models for playwrights, created new performance conditions, formulated different styles, generated new and influential ideas on acting, wrote plays to correspond with their theory, created their own script to work experimentally with his actors and combined different cultures and traditions on the stage. Those directors' contributions to "modern" and "postmodern" theatre have been widely acclaimed as well as criticized. Within this context, the work of Ariane Mnouchkine can be seen to be significant in many ways; she has been acclaimed as influential, experimental and innovative and being a challenging director, she has been considered a female pioneer in this largely male-dominated profession.

Innovative and experimental as she is, Mnouchkine founded the Théâtre du Soleil in 1964, a formal and legal workers' cooperative. Over the past forty years, the Théâtre du Soleil has become one of the most celebrated theatre companies in Europe. Their determination to privilege formal innovation, theatricality and a notion of theatre as social practice led them to explore and reassess the legacies of Artaud, Meyerhold, Copeau, Jovet, Dullin and Vilar. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the works of the Théâtre du Soleil is that they could not be indifferent to the impact of Asian theatre forms that had been on the rise since the beginning of the century, given the rapid changes and easiness in communication. The impact of Asian theatre forms in contemporary theatre, along with the company's special interest in it brought new perspectives to intercultural debates which can easily be associated with their works.

To analyze the development of the Théâtre du Soleil, it is important first to allocate intercultural approaches in contemporary theatre since the work of Ariane Mnouchkine is considered to be intercultural. Studies in intercultural theatre have been extensive especially in the past few decades, focusing on the westerners' productions and approaches along with stressing their inability to understand and/or reflect Asian theatre to the audiences. Whether

---

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Innes quoted in Adrian Kiermader's *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*

they were able to produce Asian theatre on stage – if they ever had such an intention- or whether they despised East by making such productions and emphasizing the superiority of West has also been discussed and analyzed by for example Rustom Bharucha and Gautam Dasgupta among many others. The adaptation and the appropriation of Asian theatre in West have been studied either from a Western point of view or Eastern; the approach has been made through a single or two directors' perspective or through a few specific productions. Of course, there have been few different attempts to formulate a comprehensive model of intercultural exchange; Marvin Carlson offered a scale consisting of seven categories of cross-cultural influence based on “possible relationships between the culturally familiar and the culturally foreign”; Erica Fischer-Lichte focused on the adaptation process; Patrice Pavis suggested an hourglass model, and in his ‘The Intercultural Performance Reader’ closely examined the two point-of-views of intercultural performance.

Among the debates of intercultural theatre, the work of Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil has been influential and raised new topics and approaches as they created performances which were unlike anything else which had been seen at the time. The clearest example of this was the Shakespeare cycle in the early 1980s, which was heavily influenced by a variety of Asian theatre forms. Of course Mnouchkine is far from being the first director in history to have combined Shakespeare with Asian theatre traditions, but as is typical with Mnouchkine, she pushed the application of this idea to an extreme which made the results seem original and revolutionary.

Mnouchkine's and the Théâtre du Soleil's retreat into theatre history along with their endless desire to formulate new ideas and generate new forms is not only theatrical in itself, but is considered a part of ongoing research project looking for new ways forward for contemporary European theatre, and new forms which can confront controversial contemporary topics.

## **2. THE BEGINNING**

Ariane Mnouchkine was born in March 3, 1939 into an artistic household. Her father, Alexandre Mnouchkine was a Russian post-war film producer and her mother was an actress. Although Mnouchkine speaks rarely of her mother, it is known that her father has an immense influence on her personal and artistic development.

In the late 1950s, there was a renewal of interest in theatre especially among the young French intellectuals, and many theatre groups were being formed. One of them was ATEP (L'Association Théâtrale des Etudiants Parisiens) and it was formed in 1959 under the patronage of Roger Planchon and Mnouchkine was one of the founders and she was still a student of psychology in Sorbonne at the time. Ariane Mnouchkine was one of the most experienced among the group; she had studied at Oxford where she had joined a student theatre company and worked with both Kenneth Loach and John McGrath.<sup>2</sup> This theatre group (ATEP) would later form the core of Théâtre du Soleil and their second production –the first one was Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, for which Mnouchkine had worked as a designer and administrator- *Genghis Khan* by the Belgian playwright Henry Bauchau showed many signs of what were to become distinguishable features of the Théâtre du Soleil. The script dealt with a political figure and its setting was in Medieval Asia, which allowed Mnouchkine to make use of oriental spectacle in staging. On the other hand, one aspect of this production was different from the work of the Théâtre du Soleil; Mnouchkine's way of working as a director for this play was pretty traditional. The method she used was also used by Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre; she plotted the entire production meticulously even before the rehearsals took place. After this production ATEP lapsed and Mnouchkine took a trip to Asia between the years 1962-63 while she was just 23 years old. Her interest in east and eastern theatre already existed; in the late 1950s, she had seen Pirandello's *Giants of the Mountain*, directed by Giorgio Strehler eleven times<sup>3</sup> and this was her first encounter with kathakali theatre, but this trip was her first real encounter with Asia and its theatre. It was profoundly influential on her life and work. When she returned to France after this trip, she played a big part in founding a new theatre company which included several former members of ATEP in late 1963. The company, with a conscious unconventionalism, was established as workers' co-operative<sup>4</sup> and they decided not to use acronyms as a title, but to call themselves the Théâtre du Soleil.

---

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.45

<sup>3</sup> Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine*, p.5

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.47

## 2.1 MNOUCHKINE'S INFLUENCES

Mnouchkine has had little formal education in theatre; she became a director by directing. What she has read and seen have been deeply influential on her directing. Her experiences during her trip to Asia, her encounter with Bunraku, Japanese Noh and kabuki among other performance styles have had a profound effect on her. Apart from these, of course, her contemporary stage directors have also had an important impact on Mnouchkine and her approach.

Among these contemporary directors, Peter Brook stands as an important familiar figure to Mnouchkine. There is a mutual admiration between the two directors and companies; during the rehearsals of Mnouchkine's *Norodom Sihanouk* the actors of the Théâtre du Soleil were eagerly waiting for the premiere of Brook's *Mahabharata*.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the 1960s, both companies produced Shakespeare plays; the Théâtre du Soleil's *Le Songe d'une nuit d'été* (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*) (1968), had a strong association with Brook's *The Tempest* that was staged in the same year.

Though Mnouchkine prefers to keep a distance from the work of other directors, claiming that she rarely goes to theatre,<sup>6</sup> Brook's and Mnouchkine's interest in intercultural theatre and the fact that both are influenced by Artaud obviously links the two directors.

Stanislavsky, who is an influential force on young directors even today, has also influenced Mnouchkine in her early years, but soon Mnouchkine abandoned Stanislavsky's method and moved towards a more theatrical point of view, which is associated with Meyerhold. This acknowledgment of the theatre as a performance rather than the imitation of everyday life<sup>7</sup> have been one of the enabling visions for Mnouchkine.

Brecht can be thought as an influence on Mnouchkine's work, but their similarity is actually very little. Mnouchkine is cautious about Brecht's role in twentieth century theatre; she has never mentioned Brecht as primary inspiration for her work.

---

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p.2

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p.3

At the beginning we were “leftish,” we knew we were, but we were not Brechtian nor communist. We were just looking for progress, freedom, and justice. We didn’t have an ideology as such. But we were idealists. That means that we were not taken very seriously because we did not pretend to have a very strict Maoist, Trotskyite or Stalinist ideology. We were not leftists, just “de gauche,” and we still are. We never obeyed any dogma.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the Théâtre du Soleil’s political context of the plays they perform draws a parallel between Mnouchkine and Brecht.

One of the most important influences on Mnouchkine was the now legendary teacher Jacques Lecoq with whom Mnouchkine had actually worked with during the time of the Théâtre du Soleil. She credits him with being a major influence.

More than anyone else, Lecoq understood what a body was all about. Before he taught in France, very many [theatre] people still believed that an actor’s only instruments were memory, voice, and words.<sup>9</sup>

Mnouchkine adopted a training vocabulary that she uses in her workshops and rehearsals<sup>10</sup> and also his passion for mask work. Though Mnouchkine has never used neutral masks in training her actors like Lecoq did, she found out later, from her studies with Lecoq in 1960s, that *commedia dell’arte* or Balinese forms were more approximate for the modern human comedy that she sought.<sup>11</sup>

Other than the names mentioned above, the French names have been associated with Mnouchkine are Jacques Copeau, Jean Vilar and Antonin Artaud. Copeau is particularly important in his similarities with Mnouchkine’s work, although there are some differences, too. For example Copeau rejected the idea of financial aid from the government and believed that making the simplest of staging was important, whereas Mnouchkine’s company is one of the most heavily funded private companies in France.

Nevertheless, both Copeau’s and Mnouchkine’s vision of theatre is based on an ideal of collective company whose members work equally over a long period of time, collaborating jointly in the creation of performances. Both directors have some kind of a parental role in

---

<sup>8</sup> Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine*, p.11

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

their companies and they regard their companies as a school for its members; so they hire actors who are not professional but dedicated, idealistic and young.

Copeau's writings were also influential on the Théâtre du Soleil and when those were collected and printed; the Théâtre du Soleil was engaged in devising a "collectively scripted and created production".<sup>12</sup> Copeau's aim to revitalize the techniques of improvised theatre and also his interest in the traditions like *commedia dell'arte* and clowning can be called the basics of the Théâtre du Soleil.

Another influence on Mnouchkine was Jean Vilar, little known to the English-speaking world, head of Théâtre National Populaire in 1951 and creator of Avignon Festival. Vilar devoted himself to bring theatre to the working class of France; he reduced prices, cooperated with union-affiliated programs, served inexpensive meals in the theatre. The Théâtre du Soleil's definition of themselves as people's theatre makes Vilar's and Mnouchkine's vision of theatre a very similar one.

Vilar himself was a supporter of Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, and invited them to perform at Avignon.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, Mnouchkine had always admired Vilar.<sup>14</sup> They both from time to time revisited classics of western theatre and also made use of a vast, empty space that could be the place for all possibilities in their settings, just like Jacques Copeau.

Antonin Artaud is another great influence on Mnouchkine, although she never claimed him as a source.<sup>15</sup> Artaud was also deeply impressed by Asian theatre; when a Balinese dance company visited Paris in 1931, he regarded physical aspect of theatre as more prevailing than the verbal aspect of it. His famous statement "The theatre is oriental" has been quoted by Mnouchkine like many others, though it was misunderstood by many. Artaud's concept of "affective athleticism" also applied to the Théâtre du Soleil: Artaud's idea that the actor should be an athlete of emotions and his emphasis on moving away from the text and focusing on gesture and sound influenced Mnouchkine and the actors of the Théâtre du Soleil, especially Georges Bigot.

---

<sup>12</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.14

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6

<sup>14</sup> Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine*, p.21

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17

## 2.2 THE THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL: PEOPLE'S THEATRE

Remember that the [theatre] director has already achieved the greatest degree of power he has ever had in history. And our aim is to move beyond that situation by creating a form of theatre where it will be possible for everyone to collaborate without there being directors, technicians, and so on, in the old sense.

**Ariane Mnouchkine**

Ariane Mnouchkine founded the Théâtre du Soleil in 1964, including some former members of ATEP, and this new company's structure was a formal and legal workers' cooperative. Ten members were at present at the time [Gérard Hardy (actor), Martine Franck (photographer), Françoise Tournafond (costume designer), Georges Donzenac (physical training), Myrrha Donzenac (actor), Ariane Mnouchkine (director), Jean-Claude Penchenat (actor, administrator), Jean-Pierre Tailhade (actor) and Phillippe Léotard (actor) and Roberto Moscoso (designer)] and they all contributed nine hundred francs each to its establishment. The main idea to establish a new company arose from the need and reaction to theatre's loss of ability to move and instruct audiences.

Over the years, the Théâtre du Soleil has grown gradually from the original ten members to a company of more than sixty full-time members and of course, this gradual development resulted in some changes. Though the company started out as workers' cooperative, several of the early cooperative members keep their legal status with the company, while many other current members are not legally members of the cooperative.

On the other hand, the fact that all the members participate collectively in helping build the set, as well as cooking and maintaining the theatre, is no longer true: the company includes a number of people who do not perform on stage but have duties in backstage or in administrative areas. However, it is true that everyone in the company, including Mnouchkine herself fulfill duties in many areas of the company to minimize the distinction between actors and other members. Actors take part in many activities besides rehearsals; they are responsible for preparing the food to be sold during the intervals and Mnouchkine welcomes the audience while the actors get ready for performance. She herself serves food during intervals and talks to people from the audience who are willing to stay after the performance.

Though everyone works collectively, it is Mnouchkine who makes the major decisions and the initial propositions for the choice of plays.

I propose an idea for production. If it doesn't enthuse everyone I rework it. If it still doesn't please people, we abandon it. The usual practice [elsewhere] is to get a majority vote, but here we discuss things until there is no more disagreement.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.2.1 FIRST PRODUCTIONS

The company's first production, *Les Petits Bourgeois*, which premiered in 1964, was somewhat unusual for the company. Gorki's play about the middle-class family life which was also familiar to the actors of the Théâtre du Soleil who were products of middle-class families and the picture Gorki presented was very familiar to them, was unemotionally naturalistic and in the tradition of "plays in rooms".<sup>17</sup> The rehearsal for this production took place in Stanislavskian method which is also unusual regarding the subsequent theatrical methods adopted by the company. Nevertheless, some naturalistic elements recurred in company's productions, like *The Kitchen (La Cuisine)* in 1967 and *Méphisto* in 1977.<sup>18</sup>

Mnouchkine's second production with the Théâtre du Soleil was Théophile Gautier's *Le Capitaine Fracasse* which premiered in 1965, a novel well-known in France and was adapted for the theatre by Phillippe Léotard. This production was important in a way that it was the company's first encounter with what has become one of their most significant recurrent themes: theatre within theatre – at one point the actors stood on the stage facing the backcloth which represented another auditorium behind stage and this image was recreated almost fourteen years later in *Méphisto*.<sup>19</sup>

Mnouchkine's dealing with theatre for its own sake and with its relation to and role in the society is one of her recognizable characteristics as a director. The idea of art for art's sake in theatre stands as an opposing idea for a left-wing or community-based theatre practitioners like Mnouchkine herself and she frequently sought the relationship between the society and theatre. Therefore, the slight investigation of the relationship between theatre and society in Gautier's *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, which deals with the travels and blind chances of a group of French actors in the late sixteenth century, hints that the company was aware of the importance of this issue.

---

<sup>16</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.11

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p.47

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, p.49

Another significant point regarding the play is that since the company revitalized a sixteenth century troupe on stage, an experiment with explicit theatrical styles of performance was necessary. The troupe described in Gautier's novel which is similar to Molière's *Illustre Théâtre*<sup>20</sup> and which performed in variety of places, improvised plays and have the features of *commedia dell'arte*. All of these have been the features of Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil's work and *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, for this reason can be seen as a development.

During the rehearsals of this play financial troubles broke out and the actors had to work in other jobs during the day to earn money, so they were only able to rehearse at night. The rehearsals took place in the east of Paris, in rooms that they shared with the members of a local judo club.<sup>21</sup> Luckily the culture minister of the time, André Malroux, helped the company – the government had an exceptional interest in theatre so in 1967 the company received money from the government.

After the production of *Le Capitaine Fracasse*, the company staged an adaptation by Phillippe Léotard of Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen* in 1967 and it was company's the first success. The production style was basically naturalistic and the rehearsals took a very long time; a period of total eighteen months. During this time the actors devoted themselves to a detailed study of the characters they were about to portray and some of them even worked in real restaurant kitchens to get a close idea and knowledge of the world that they would recreate on the stage.

The long period of rehearsals was partly necessary because the company was once again having financial problems, so the actors had to work during the day and rehearse at night. Ariane Mnouchkine was still partly supported by her father so she did not have such a problem. This enabled her to attend theatre classes of Jacque Lecoq and at night during the rehearsals she passed on what she had learned from the famous teacher to the company's actors. Jacque Lecoq's concentration on the awareness of body and physical expression of emotion was a major influence on them and on the company's emphasis on theatre as a physical rather a verbal medium.

The naturalistic style of *La Cuisine* was heightened by the set; the designer Roberto Moscoso made use of real restaurant equipment – ovens, benches and other utensils were borrowed from a restaurant that was being rebuilt at the time. Swing doors for rapid entrances and exits,

---

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p.49

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p.50

plain clear plastic sheets which looked white under the lights along with the kitchen utensils created a sterile and cold atmosphere on the stage. It was kind of a symbol which showed the cruel conditions of life with its whiteness and coldness. Though the décor and the production overall was naturalistic, some elements contradicted with the naturalistic part of the production. The kitchen equipment was real but the food was all mimed. This miming was so successfully fulfilled by the actors that it was hard to recognize whether they were miming or not. To give this impression, Mnouchkine trained the actors with her special exercise methods she developed.

Everyone knew that the spoons were greasy, the pots hot, the knives sharp. We improvised on the feeling of greasiness, of heat. In the middle of the winter, five below zero, in an unheated room, we did improvisations on heat... We always worked 'in the situation'; to warm up at the beginning, I did exercises: for example I had a pile of plates which I would break; I threw them at the girls, saying to them, 'It's burning hot' or 'It's cracked, you've cut yourself.' The girls became finally almost jugglers.<sup>22</sup>

There was a deliberate exaggeration of the daily routines of the restaurant especially while recreating the lunchtime rush-hour and then the evening. This gave the play a rhythm of a gentle beginning, a speeding up, followed by an explosion and then slowing down again. The play, which deals with the organization and structure of a dehumanizing workplace links with the company's own working conditions, own organizational structure which sought to avoid such destructiveness in the play.

During this time the company had a hard time finding a place to perform their productions. After some research and negotiation, the company decided on an unconventional setting, a disused circus venue in Montmartre. After the first performance at the Cirque Medrano in April 1967, the production gained great success, winning a number of awards and getting attraction from a wide audience. Many of those people were involved in restaurant industry. When they were forced to move out from the Cirque, the company took a tour in France, to Villeurbanne, Marseilles and Bourges. They also performed in striking and occupied French factories.

The next production Mnouchkine and the company decided on was Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, - *Le Songe d'un nuit d'été* - adapted and translated by Phillippe Léotard. Mnouchkine did not like the existing translations of the play, finding them too

---

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.53-55

literary and elaborate. The style of the production was deliberately anti-traditional, the influence of Polish critic and theoretician of the theatre Jan Kott's book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* was evident in the violent approach to the action. Artaud's influence is also present in the production. Mnouchkine described the play as

The most savage, the most violent play that you could dream of. A fabulous bestiary with depths which concern nothing less than the 'savage god' which sleeps in the heart of men. Everything in it is direct, brutal, 'natural'. No faery, nothing pretty, but everything that is fantastic and everything that is associated with the fantastic; corrosive anguish, terror...It is also the accidental, the unexpected, the breakdown of the natural order of things, the transgressing of taboos.<sup>23</sup>

The company did not want to fall into prettiness; this was also one of the reasons for not liking the existing translations, so the attempt to follow an anti-traditional approach was a difficult task. Titania's lullaby was replaced by a dance performance to avoid prettiness. They wanted to eliminate the color green from sets and costumes and use only blacks and greys. After getting ready a whole set of costumes, the idea was abandoned for the reason that it did not match with the production as it was developing. The designer Roberto Moscoso described this painful process:

For the stage floor, I worked on the idea of the ground in movement – moss which breathed – wild animal skin which breathed. I worked out how to do it, and I made a model with some simple machinery. Ariane Mnouchkine wanted something gentler, more sensual. Suddenly, in October (after days of despair when Ariane Mnouchkine was prepared to give up the Dream if we couldn't find something which coincided deeply with what we were thinking), the idea of animal skins came up: would we have the money for it? 1,200 beige goat skins with brown markings wouldn't cost us more than a good carpet. To achieve the idea of clearing (the idea of light filtering through trees), I showed Ariane Mnouchkine some planks scoured by sea water which I had suspended; they hung, knocking against each other. Ariane Mnouchkine said to me, 'That's it.'<sup>24</sup>

The influence of Asia was already present in this production. The actors wore plain trousers and white tunics which made them look like Indians. The fairies were played by masked men wearing purple robes and they looked like African magicians. There was an athletic and acrobating performance of Puck who ran and tumbled on the goatskin slope, shouting out at the top of his voice. Mnouchkine found this scene very difficult and it took three months to rehearse before the right tone which didn't sound like a stereotype comic business and lacked

---

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p.59

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.59-60

gags was found. Also the music, composed by Jacque Lasry was mainly percussion and had oriental as well as modern elements. It was performed by musicians dressed in Indian costumes and placed in view of the audience.<sup>25</sup>

The production opened in Cirque Medrano in 1968 and it was a great success. Now a fully-established company, the Théâtre du Soleil made some significant changes such as abandoning the principle that all the members of the company were to be paid equally. Another innovation was that for the first time the company mounted a full production by a director other than Ariane Mnouchkine. A children's play called *Jérome et la tortue* (Jerome and the Tortoise) written by children at the primary school in Sartrouville was directed by Catherine Dasté and they used members of the Théâtre du Soleil who were not involved in *Le Songe d'un nuit d'été*.

With the production of *Le Songe*, the company had now become famous in Paris and also abroad, and received many requests for tours in and outside the country. However, the plans to continue with *Le Songe* had to stop because the May 68 movement broke out. A period of strikes, rebellions, and riots had started and student demonstrations and workers' strikes were taking place all over the country. Of course, the Théâtre du Soleil couldn't remain indifferent to this situation. They took part in mass meetings at the Sorbonne and the Odéon Theatre. In the midst of this movement, the Théâtre du Soleil tried to decide whether to continue supporting the general strike like many others or to keep on performing and encouraging the striking workers by taking the theatre to them. After all the Théâtre du Soleil was not engaged in an employer-employee relationship with a management. Moreover, with *La Cuisine*, they dealt directly with the kind of issues that were at stake during the time of industrial and political unrest.<sup>26</sup>

The Théâtre du Soleil decided to continue with the tour, but instead of proceeding with the scheduled continuation of *Le Songe* at the Cirque Medrano, they were to perform *La Cuisine*. Even after the season of *Le Songe*, the company continued to perform *La Cuisine*, well into 1970. Apart from these, the May 68 movement had a significant effect on company's financial situation. They couldn't cover the expensive production of *Le Songe*, though it would have been probable given the likelihood of a successful season. The interruption made this impossible, and soon the Théâtre du Soleil found themselves in financial trouble again.

---

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p.60

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p.63

When Cirque Medrano demanded a full rental, the company decided to accept an invitation from the Conseil Général of the Department of Doubs<sup>27</sup> to spend two months at Arc-de-Senans, a former salt factory and an example of eighteenth century utopian architecture. In this place, the company lived and worked together, examining clown work, *commedia dell'arte*, classical choruses, the works of Elizabethan playwrights and Chekhov. Towards the end of these two months, the company improvised a collective performance with the local people making use of masks and *commedia dell'arte*. This collective creation enables the audience to abandon the routine of first watching then commenting on the play. This experience with the local encouraged the company to decide that *Le Songe*, for the meantime, would be their last performance based on a standard text.

## 2.2.2 COLLECTIVE CREATION

Collective means that everybody is concerned with everything. This had been ignored a little over the years, and everyone had more or less ended up looking after his own little area. Things had become established in a way that made me fear the worst. But with the Shakespeare project we began to work collectively again: the actors have started to work on the sets under the supervision of the technicians; and so on...I do not evade my responsibilities. I assume and I have never denied it, the direction of the troupe and the function of stage director (*metteur en scène*). But that does not mean that I make decisions alone. Everything which involves the future of the company, all the choices, to produce Shakespeare or not, for example, are taken collectively in general meetings. I only have the job afterwards of executing the decisions. And the principles. There are several fundamental principles at the Théâtre du Soleil. Because we pay attention to our responsibility: people leave us happy if things have been good, disappointed and sad if it has been bad. So we have to do all we can to make the production good: respecting the audience by preparing two hours before the performance has become one of our rules. The ethic of the company includes several other elementary principles: punctuality, equality of salaries, no smoking during rehearsals, sobriety...I am responsible for making sure these are respected. This sometimes provokes conflicts, obviously.<sup>28</sup>

When the company returned to Paris, they received an invitation from Jean Vilar to perform at Avignon Festival next summer. Mnouchkine wanted to find a more theatrical language for their next production, and she wanted to liberate the imagination and creation of the actors by using techniques such as clowning, masks and *commedia dell'arte*. The events of May 68, the experience at Arc-de-Senans and the desire to oppose to the perceived limitations of a classic

---

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p.65

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p.12

like *Le Songe*, directed the company to explore a form of theatre which is far away from the norm. They wanted to abandon traditional themes and investigate more fundamental problems. So their next production was *Les Clowns* (1969), a play of their own, on which Mnouchkine said:

Our work on *The Clowns* is first of all an attempt to strengthen our abilities as actors, to free us from psychological acting, to get rid of naturalism and everything is us which is too every day. It is also a first step in that experience which we are undertaking as a collective to find a new form, directly accessible to our contemporaries. A spectacular form which should be 'popular', that is to say simple, and beautiful and which speaks to the audience of things experienced directly: love, death, the desire for power, despair, cunning, and so on... In brief, everything which gives the social individual of today his positive or negative aspects.<sup>29</sup>

The method Mnouchkine used in this production was basically different from that of *Le Songe*. Previously, she would make a personal statement through the production, moving towards a more traditional directorial role but now the function had changed. She put herself in the place of an audience, instead of seeing herself as the creative artist of the production. She made suggestions and observations based on what she saw on stage.

The characters in the play were of course derived from the circus, but the actors did not work directly with professional clowns or imitated them. They re-invented the concept of clown for themselves. Jean-Claude Penchenat, a member of the Théâtre du Soleil since their beginning said: "We have found out on our own how they stylize their gestures and deform their voices and how they take words literally in their most prosaic sense. We are not playing clowns at the circus, but clowns at the theatre."<sup>30</sup> He also said:

What is a clown today? It is a man who has been uprooted, dressed up ridiculously, and who, made inadequate, becomes a laughing stock, a comic, a grotesque in disguise, an idiot, a dummy, a buffoon. Let us imagine a whole heap of clowns who decide to play 'If I were...' or 'I'd like to be...' These themes are very close to children's games. They soon begin to play cops and robbers, mother and father, on a desert island, at school, at church, getting married, in others words, life.<sup>31</sup>

While still not having a fixed place for themselves, the production of *Les Clowns* opened in Aubervilliers in April 1969 and then, as planned, was taken to Avignon Festival. Rather than

---

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p.65

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p.67

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

performing in the Cour d'Honneur of the Papal Palace, they decided to perform in five less-prestigious venues in and around Avignon. They wanted to do so because rather than performing for festival-goers from Paris and abroad, they wanted to perform for local people. In order to facilitate this decision, the company arrived at Avignon a month before the Festival opened to establish close connection with the local working-class people.

The production received mixed reactions and some attacks from French critics, who disapproved their new form of theatre not based on a written text. It was the first time after a while that the company's reception of a new production had received less admiration. After creating something out of nothing, performing and touring in Avignon the actors were exhausted. Though Mnouchkine was as tired as the rest of the company, she had already been thinking about their next production. What she had in mind was Brecht's *Baal*, and she suggested that to the group. The rehearsals for *Baal* started while the performances of *Les Clowns* continued at Aubervilliers. Play's theme, the place of the artist in society was something Mnouchkine constantly returned to. After two months' intensive rehearsals the project was abandoned. One reason for this was that returning to scripted play would have stopped the company from learning and developing and another was that the play was based on few major roles, which contrasted with the company's idea of equality.

Though the company was once again having difficult times financially and hardship at finding home base, the search for the next production continued. Mnouchkine briefly thought of staging folk tales or popular legends, but the idea was rejected because the folk tales were seen as being "no longer a living part of popular culture, but romanticized, aestheticized cultural museum-pieces."<sup>32</sup> Mnouchkine then thought of a popular heritage common to anyone in France, the French Revolution of 1789. The public knowledge of the revolution enabled the company to cast light on well-known events but Mnouchkine was determined to go beyond and behind the official histories.<sup>33</sup>

Preparing for the production was innovative; every evening there was a two-hour lecture on the historical events from 1788 until the fall of Robespierre. The company read about the historical accounts of the period and soon after, the rehearsals began in 1970 in the Palais des Sports at the Porte de Versailles. The rehearsals were in shape of improvisations of themes which came out of the research. Though the rehearsals were excitingly progressing, financial

---

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p.71

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

situations were troublous again. Money was lent or donated by wealthy supporters, but the bigger problem was to find a new rehearsal space because rehearsing at the Palais des Sports gradually became impossible. Finally, a Paris city-councilor suggested that the Cartoucherie, an abandoned former cartridge factory in the Bois de Vincennes can be given over to the company on a temporary basis.<sup>34</sup> Though there was no water or electricity in the building, they managed to create a workable space and everything was moved there, so the rehearsals continued in the Bois de Vincennes. In the meantime, the production was given a subtitle: *La Révolution doit s'arrêter à la perfection du bonheur* (The revolution must stop at the perfection of happiness), a quote from Antoine Saint-Just, a revolutionary leader closely associated with Robespierre.<sup>35</sup>

The company was rehearsing at the Cartoucherie but the place was not in condition to host the actual performance. No established Paris theatre company was prepared to host such a production. Finally an invitation came from Paolo Grassi, director of Piccolo Teatro in Milan, where the company had performed *La Cuisine* in 1968. He suggested that they perform *1789* in Milan Palazzo Lido, a huge sports stadium capable of holding 2,000 spectators.<sup>36</sup> The season in Milan from 12-15 November 1970 was incredibly successful. Even though the language was a problem and the content of the play was unfamiliar to the Italian, the stadium was full every night, even causing an international basketball game to be postponed to open room for additional performance.

Nevertheless, there was still no invitation from Paris to perform *1789*. Finally the company decided to perform at the Cartoucherie despite of its risks: It was unknown to the public, had no history of performance, and difficult to get to. The company worked for weeks to transform the Cartoucherie into a performable place, and in December 1970, the season, which turned the Cartoucherie into a well-known Paris theatre venue and brought international attention to Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, began. The production brought enormous success to the company also in France.

In the production of *1789*, the company rejected naturalism. The relationship between the audience and the actors was immensely important to make the impact as directly as possible. The audience themselves had a part to play. One of the Théâtre du Soleil's original theatre

---

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p.75

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p.76

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

practices originated in this period: the habit of getting dress and putting make up in front of the audience while they were entering the room.

By the end of 1971, the fame of *1789* had spread internationally, and the company had toured in Berlin, Belgrade and London. The actors did not stop their daily training routines which were mostly improvisational throughout the tours; they took up *commedia dell'arte* again, as well as short Brecht plays.

When they got back to the Cartoucherie in November 1971, they began to rehearse for their next production, a sequel to *1789*, called *1793*, subtitled: *La Cité révolutionnaire est de ce monde* (The City of the Revolution is of this world) and it dealt with both political events as well as incident illustrating the daily lives as problems of the people, covering the years from 1792 to 1794. The company rejected the idea of event-based history and Mnouchkine even wrote a part of Robespierre's dialogue herself on the basis of his writings.<sup>37</sup> *1793* premiered in 1972 and was staged until the end of that season though it never achieved the success of the previous production.

The following production was also a collective creation of the company just like *1789* and *1793*. The company was incredibly famous and successful now, and they had to uphold their reputation. Ariane Mnouchkine said:

Success with a capital S is hanging over our heads. We have to forget the Théâtre du Soleil and its image not worry about what those people who like us a lot will think.<sup>38</sup>

They wanted to produce something that was closer to present day, influenced by the idea of “popular theatre” practiced by Jean Vilar and the touring of Berliner Ensemble in France in 1954.<sup>39</sup> The role of theatre in society was questioned by the company; they wished to change the conditions they live in, rather than making a statement. They experimented with *commedia dell'arte* again, this time adding to it Chinese theatre to avoid the naturalistic styles. However, Mnouchkine turned primarily to *commedia dell'arte* – not a revival but a reinvention of *commedia* was taking place.

---

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p.82

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p.88

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

We are not resuscitating past theatrical forms, *commedia dell'arte* or traditional Chinese theatre. We want to reinvent the rules of the game which reveal daily reality, showing it not to be familiar and immutable but astonishing and transformable.<sup>40</sup>

Mnouchkine wanted to use masks for their next production, so she invited Erhard Stiefel, a truly gifted, experienced mask-maker who studied Noh theatre and attended courses of Jacques Lecoq like Mnouchkine. Thus, a very long rehearsal period began. Erhard Stiefel made a series of masks, some similar to the traditional masks of *commedia dell'arte*, some quite new in form. The actors worked with these masks and eventually they became their own private property when their character was fully created. The company kept on working on their rehearsals and trainings, in 1974, they decided to take some time off to revive their spirits and spent a week in the countryside to meet people who do not know them and get their ideas and suggestions. The themes that the local people gave them constituted their improvisation subjects and this experience was of great help to them. When they returned to Paris, they continued to work with groups who were not a part of the company and who provided ideas and themes for them. In addition to these, the group worked with scripted theatre, especially with the Greek tragedies such as *Antigone*. The rehearsal period had been long enough and enormous amount of material was created. The problem was how to use it, and finally in March 1975, a performance called *L'Age d'or, Première ébauche* (The Golden Age, First Draft) was created.

Christopher D. Kirkland describes what the play deals with in detail and he says:

Topics for the play's episodes originate in a published chronology of events,<sup>4</sup> dating from the 1973 cholera epidemic in Naples to the December 1974 deaths of forty-two coal miners in northern France. It includes specific instances of strikes, workers' solidarity, factory occupation, injury and fatality in industry and commerce, prison brutality, military indignity, individual rights, over-crowded low-income housing, price fixing, government repression, bribery, favoritism and racism. The actors approach socio-political events and issues with the techniques of improvisation and the character-types of the three theatrical styles in which they have been working intensively over the last eighteen months: *commedia dell'arte*, ancient Chinese theatre and circus.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p.89

<sup>41</sup> David Williams, *Collaborative Theatre, The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, 43-44

### 2.2.3 THEATRE AND SOCIETY

After the rehearsal, production, staging and touring period of *L'Age d'or*, the company was reluctant and too tired to continue with another collective creation. Thus, their next step was different completely; a film based on the life of Molière. Mnouchkine both wrote the script and directed the film and many of the actors of the Théâtre du Soleil took part in the project. It was a period where Mnouchkine and all the actors took a break from live theatre; to think and to rest. The film investigated Molière's life as a writer and an actor, his society and his relationship with political power residing in the forms of Louis XIV and other members of democracy.<sup>42</sup>

The film in some ways has similarities with Mnouchkine's theatre productions. It focuses on theatre as a subject matter, refers to popular historical theatrical styles. Molière's theatre aimed at entertaining people from a wide range of cultures and backgrounds; from the poor to the rich, from the nobles living in châteaux to the peasants in the village. This style is similar to *commedia dell'arte* which was influential at the time.

After filming the life of Molière, they returned to live stage again and chose to stage Klaus Mann's novel *Mephisto*, which deals with the theatre world in Germany in 1920s and shows the historical events through the eyes of people working in theatre.<sup>43</sup> The idea of adapting the novel to the stage was as usual suggested by Mnouchkine, and she did the adaptation herself. Of course, collective as they are, the whole company was involved in this process; the actors read Mnouchkine's work as it progressed and discussed it. They also travelled to Germany and saw as many Nazi films as they could find. Typical of the company's work, the production related the historical events to the present. However, untypically, they used a naturalistic style of performance after a very long time except for some sequences where they used less naturalistic acting style. Mnouchkine later criticized their way of approaching to the production, claiming that she would attempt a greater degree of theatricality if they were to stage it again.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, the setting for the production was non-naturalistic; two stages were constructed at the opposite ends of the performing area. One stage was the representative of the official, conservative theatre, heavily decorated with huge chandeliers and a red curtain. The other one

---

<sup>42</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.98

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.101

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

represented political cabaret; small, intimate and painted in a bright fairground style. The two completely different stages symbolized political and artistic opposition. The audience was seated in between these two stages, always turning their backs at one of them. When the action moved from one to another they had to stand up and turn around, which drew their attention to the differences between two theatrical worlds.<sup>45</sup>

*Méphisto* opened at the Cartoucherie in May 1979 and the company had already been invited to perform at Avignon Festival in July. Once again they did not want to perform in the festival's principal venue. Instead, the performances took place in a covered market-place in the center of the town. *Méphisto*, after the performances in Avignon, toured widely in many parts of France, then in Berlin, Munich and Rome, finally closing at the Cartoucherie in mid-1980.

#### **2.2.4 AFTER SHAKESPEARE: HÉLÈNE CIXOUS'S *NORODOM SIHANOUK* AND *L'INDIADE***

It was around 1979-80 that Mnouchkine started experimenting with the idea of what was to become *Norodom Sihanouk*. She had actually wanted to write a script on the theme of genocide in Cambodia. However, she found the results unsatisfactory, thinking that she was too didactic and began investigating Shakespeare to see how he handled the problem of presenting political events on stage. Part of the reason for choosing Shakespeare was that French theatre had never produced a lasting body of plays interrogating French history in the way that Shakespeare did for England.<sup>46</sup> When Mnouchkine felt that they have learned enough, she wanted to move on. During this time Philippe Hottier had left the company and Hélène Cixous had come into close contact with the company. When Hottier left, Cixous had already begun working on a script about Cambodia. Thus, *L'Histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk, roi du Cambodge* (The Awesome but Unfinished History of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia) was written and premiered in September 1985.

Cixous's script of *Norodom Sihanouk* made a number of explicit references to the Shakespeare plays. For example, Sihanouk used direct quotations from John of Gaunt's description of England ('this other Eden, demi-paradise...') to express his feelings about his

---

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p.102

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, p.29

own country. The introduction of 'low-life' characters, the constant implication that political events are dictated more by the personalities and emotions of the decision-makers than by cold hearted rational decisions, and the scope of the play which rejects the notion of unity of time and place are also other aspects of the play in which Shakespeare's influences can be seen. Mnouchkine's desire to recreate a form of theatre which is not aimed at one small section of the community but which appeals and speaks to the whole of the society is another level which can be assumed as a Shakespearean influence.<sup>47</sup>

On the Shakespeare influence, writer of the play H  l  ne Cixous says:

I wrote Sihanouk under the sign of Shakespeare, I worked across and through Shakespeare in order to write it. The textuality of Sihanouk can be said to be worked by a Shakespearean symbolicity. His influence in my text has to do with the kind of political gestures across history which his texts exhibit. In a fundamental and founding way, it's true that Shakespeare is like the ground for my text. It's more like the ground on which I walk than like a tableau which I would try to decipher. I have an originary biographic rapport to Shakespeare. Shakespeare is for me like the Bible. It's one of the most ancient texts in my memory. I'll say that right away, before any reflection: I have always read Shakespeare. I don't remember a time when I didn't read him, in the same way that there are other texts which make memory for me, which make ground for me: for example, Greek as well as Germanic and Sumerian epics, and then the Bible. These are my 'bibles', my invisible organisers, so incorporated in my memory that I no longer distinguish them from myself. They're there, these bibles, when I need them, unconsciously. I'm conscious after the fact for instance, but not during the work, that the *Indiade* is inspired not by Shakespeare but by the *Iliad* and the Bible, whereas Sihanouk is nourished by, is rooted in Shakespeare. [...] For me, Shakespeare comes before everything, he is always already there before any writing, be it fictional or theatrical. After which comes the situation of my theatrical enterprise, and in particular the fact that I started to write plays which sought to recount contemporary history. At which time it seemed to me that all historical theatre, which Shakespeare called Historical Plays, is inevitably in direct descent from and ancestral relation to Shakespeare. For me, as soon as one attempts to do historical drama, one is in a Shakespearean space. Shakespeare and no one else is synonymous with historical drama. So there is in my work a return to Shakespeare, a call-back to and across him, in the way in which I play with contemporary history—that is to say, in the same way the text of Shakespeare used to play with history.<sup>48</sup>

*Norodom Sihanouk* deals with the events leading up to the political upheavals in Cambodia during the period of 1955 to the early 1980s. The production was long – it took two evenings more than four hours each. *Norodom Sihanouk* also highlighted one preoccupation which has concerned Mnouchkine since her first production, *Genghis Khan* in 1961: a fascination with Asia, its histories, its people and its theatre styles. *Genghis Khan*, *Norodom Sihanouk* and

---

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, p.30-31

<sup>48</sup> David Williams, *Collaborative Theatre, The Th   tre du Soleil Sourcebook*, p.152

*L'Indiade* have used scripts explicitly set in Asia, but her all Shakespeare productions including the early staging of *Le Songe d'un nuit d'été* (A Midsummer Night's Dream) have made references to Asian style of performance.

There was a large, open performance space and it has three raised platforms. One was the main stage occupying a quarter of the area. This place was put in place only a couple of days before the premiere and was found to be unsatisfactory. It was dangerously slippery for the actors, who made many entrances and exits running at high speed. Since the time was limited, along with a couple of actors, Mnouchkine stripped off the varnish to avert slippage. Towards the back of the stage was a simple saffron-colored silk curtain hung. This was a practical stage device allowing large numbers of characters to gather out of sight and then to be revealed on stage simultaneously. However, this was also an explicit reference to Asian theatre forms, such as the Indian Kathakali which uses similar curtains for entrances and exits. In addition, the saffron color was a further reference to Buddhism which dominated Cambodia until the Pol Pot regime took power.<sup>49</sup> A second raised area was a performance space for the musicians who accompanied the action throughout; a feature of the company since *Les Clowns* in 1969. For this production, the instruments mainly comprised of percussions, which can be considered as another Asian influence. A third raised area was kind of a semi private area where the actors prepared themselves for the performance; dressing, putting make-up in partial view of audience. This is also another common feature of the company. The Théâtre du Soleil never tries to hide the fact that actors are performing.

The acting style used by the company for this production was different – the aim of this project was not just to create a new play by making use of Shakespeare's historical techniques. Mnouchkine also wanted to form a theatrical style which would be appropriate to a script expressing familiar characters from real world. She believed that acting is not and cannot be real life; if it pretends to be so, it denies its identity as theatre. For her, acting is a skill by which a performer finds way of expressing or representing reality using the tools of the craft. All great acting, according to Mnouchkine, is a necessary transformation of life, not a pale imitation of its more predictable moments.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.34

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p.36

Theatre is seeming, it is art, chemistry, illusion, metaphor. If it is realist it dies. The theatre's only chance of survival is theatre...If actors speak as in life, they are acting wrongly.<sup>51</sup>

Mnouchkine believed that the actor's role is more than just speaking the lines, playing the words; the actor's function is to look beyond the words in order to discover the ways of playing the totality of the character in the situation. Mnouchkine referred to this as "maximum interiority combined with maximum exteriority".<sup>52</sup>The actor has to discover the physical, mental and emotional state of the character and then look for the ways to express it externally so that the audience can receive its theatricality. This situation was evident in Georges Bigot's portrayal of the main character, *Sihanouk*. It was especially difficult since Norodom Sihanouk was at the time in France and was familiar in the country.

Bigot abandoned the idea that he should be studying the real Sihanouk for a great portrayal since he was not aiming at an external imitation of the man. His main task was to realize the character in Cixous's script as fully as possible. Therefore, his focus was based on the text of the play, trying to find theatrical ways of composing the important moments for the character as vivid as possible for the audience.



Georges Bigot as Norodom Sihanouk

---

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

*Norodom Sihanouk* marked the Théâtre du Soleil's history and after this, the company used the style they had found for *Norodom Sihanouk* in their next production *L'Indiade*, after which Mnouchkine once again wanted to return to earlier theatre forms, producing a cycle of Greek tragedies.

The next production was again written by H  l  ne Cixous and it began at Mnouchkine's suggestion as a study of the life of Indira Gandhi, but this idea was later abandoned. So the project turned into a treatment of the history of the Indian independence movement. The production is entitled *L'Indiade, ou l'Inde de leurs r  ves* (The Indiade, or the India of their Dreams) and reveals once again Mnouchkine's recurrent preoccupation with Asia. It premiered in the Cartoucherie in 1985.

The play roughly follows the historical period from 1937 to 1948 and depicts the liberation and also dismembering of Britain's former colony despite the dreams of unity of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawarharlal Nehru and their Congress Party. All these politicians dream a different India and they do so in debates among themselves and with the British colonial rulers. Also, as Judith G. Miller suggests, more colorful arguments about "India" from untouchable rickshaw drivers, ordinary soldiers, and peasants are evident in the play. "India" is also imagined in the lyrical musings of Gandhi, the theoretician of nonviolence, and in the pithy commentary of the Bengali pilgrim Haridasi, who bridges all the dreamers by her wandering.<sup>53</sup>

Cixous travelled to India, immersing herself in Indian culture, literature and history and this process helped her decide that Mnouchkine's first idea of creating a play about the leadership of Indira Gandhi would not work. She felt that the story of the first female leader of India could not capture the passion of the new nations emerging and taking shape: Indira Gandhi did not speak to the passage from colonial to postcolonial with all its complexities. So she took on the ritualized form that existed in *Richard III*. She wanted to create on stage the multilayered universe of Shakespearean drama, with its potential for helping make sense of reality and with its capacity to include characters from every aspect of life. Gandhi – with his generosity and acceptance of the other – represented for Cixous a choice maternal figure, a Solomonic good mother in keeping with the Cixousian definition of "the feminine."<sup>54</sup> His ability to partner the world, to give unselfishly of himself, and to metamorphose, if necessary,

---

<sup>53</sup> Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine*, p.85

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p.86

in order to make space for a fuller community also merged with Cixous' notion of what theater should be and with what she saw Mnouchkine's theater work and Mnouchkine herself incarnating.

Both in *Norodom Sihanouk* and *L'Indiade*, great effort was made to change the traditional alignment, to create an atmosphere where Asia is normal and to encourage the audience to identify with a world which was unknown for most of them. For *NorodomSihanouk*, a huge world map was centered on the Asian-style decorated stage and for both productions the stage was filled with the smells of Asian markets from the food on sale, creating a totally Asian atmosphere surrounding the audience.<sup>55</sup> The set for *L'Indiade* was similar to that for *NorodomSihanouk*: again a raised performance area was there and it was built out of bricks with a large central area paved in a grey marble. The ceiling was hung with strips of silk.<sup>56</sup> Also the play's duration was similar to *NorodomSihanouk*; it lasted for more than four hours.

It should be noted that though *L'Indiade* attracted thousands of spectators and received positive reviews, it also attracted much critical attention. Since the representation of Asia in European theatre is a part of the process of orientalisation as described by Edward Said, Mnouchkine's play was accused of orientalism. Of course Mnouchkine's representation of Asia or the 'other' is primarily a formal and professional kind, rather than being driven by an ethnological respect for an authenticity of reproductions. Marvin Carlson places *L'Indiade* as belonging to one of the seven stages he suggested for the relationship between culturally familiar and culturally foreign, which is: "Foreign elements are assimilated into the tradition and absorbed by it. The audience can be interested, entertained or stimulated by these elements, but they are not challenged by them. Often they do not even recognize them as foreign."<sup>57</sup>

At this point, one may have the urge to ask the reason why Mnouchkine chose Asia. For Mnouchkine, ever since her first production in 1959, Asia has been a theatrical destination and since the production of *L'Aged'or* in 1975, the company talked about another production which would deal with the theme of genocide in a small country in south-east Asia. But to get a better answer, we can remember Artaud's famous line 'Theatre is Oriental.' which has been

---

<sup>55</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.125

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.82

quoted by Mnouchkine many times. Mnouchkine has always been looking for a new form in theatre and Asia or Asian theatre has been an answer.

I discovered in Asia such beauty in things, in gestures, a simple ceremonial which seems to me indispensable in theatre. In Asia every act is perpetually formalized. The everyday aggressiveness in the West, especially in France and above all in Paris, comes from a total loss of any formalization of relationships. It is true that at the Théâtre du Soleil we attempt something along those lines.<sup>58</sup>

Towards the end of the season of *L'Indiade*, in May 1988, the company took the production to Israel and then after performing in the Festival of Jerusalem they returned to the Cartoucherie and performed until the end of July. After disbanding the company for two years, they returned with a cycle of Greek tragedies in 1990.

The series of four classical Greek tragedies collectively titled as *Les Atrides* (The House of Atreus), consisted of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* and Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* (both premiered in 1990), *The Choephoroi* (1991) and *The Eumenides* (1992). This retreat of history was designed to explore a Western ritualistic theatre form which includes music and dance as an integral part of its fabric.

*La Ville perjure, ou le réveil des Erinyes* (The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies) followed the cycle of Greek tragedies in 1994-5. This was also written by Hélène Cixous. In 1995 Molière's *Le Tartuffe* was staged and was followed by *Et soudain des nuits d'éveil* in 1997, *Tambours sur la digue* in 1999, *Le Dernier Caravansérail* in 2003 and *Les Ephémères* in 2006.

### **2.3 WORKING METHODS: SETTING UP AN IDENTITY**

Mnouchkine's approach to directing is different from many other directors in the sense that she does not have a fixed method; instead hers is a constantly changing process of exploring the work. The actors in the Théâtre du Soleil enter the company with very little formal training, and their success is a result of a systemized exercises and regular training. Georges Bigot explained:

---

<sup>58</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.131

Most of us are very young when we arrive here, or inexperienced, or else we arrive already corrupted by something else. Here you learn the opposite. In the theatre industry it is said of a so-called actor that he is 'a good technician', as if there were set of rules. But there aren't.<sup>59</sup>

The exercises that actors do while preparing for a production are drawn widely from different theatre styles from around the world, depending on the production. For example the physical preparation for *Richard II* was highly gymnastic, whereas for *Norodom Sihanouk* the work consisted of quieter stretching exercises.

As Adrian Kiernander had the chance to work with the company during *Norodom Sihanouk's* rehearsal period, he clearly explains how the actors prepare for productions. As he puts it:

During rehearsal periods, the entire company has to arrive at the Cartoucherie at 9.00 a.m. for a daily meeting where duties for the day are shared out. Members then spend most of the morning completing their tasks; cleaning, maintenance, or working on the preparation of the physical aspects of the production – sets, costumes, props and so on. Towards the end of the morning the actors will normally take time off to prepare for the afternoon's rehearsal, painstakingly applying very detailed make-ups and experimenting with costume. Then, after lunch, the company divides, the actors moving into the rehearsal space while the rest continue work in the other areas. Rehearsals will frequently last well into the evening, with a break for dinner whenever the work permits.

This pattern continues until the last minute. On the day before the opening night of *Norodom Sihanouk*, several of the actors came down to lunch with their faces black with grease from the roof where they had been rigging cables for the lighting. Others had spent the morning on 5m ladders hanging blinds around the dressing area. This kind of work continued through the afternoon, and the dress rehearsal did not begin until after 9.00 p.m. It finished several hours into the next morning. The company was then called at midday on the day of the opening, and the afternoon was spent completing the audience seating. This work was finished with the audience waiting outside in the foyer, Mnouchkine herself vacuum-cleaning the floors as the actors left to start dressing.<sup>60</sup>

Mnouchkine and the company describe their work as a journey to the unknown and thus the rehearsal period starts in a state of acknowledged ignorance. There usually is a script as a starting point and Mnouchkine also provides visual images, books and photographs.

Sometimes the actors watch films depending on the production that they are getting ready for,

---

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p.20

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p.21

to fully understand for example the history of the play/events/characters they are about to portray.

Every aspect – even the casting- is done throughout the rehearsal period; everything gradually develops with many alterations. All actors are present at rehearsals and usually a workshop takes place for a couple of weeks where the scenes and characters are explored. At this stage, no exact decisions are made about the rehearsal period until one suggests working on a particular scene. If this happens, an improvised rehearsal takes place, with the text in hand. Mnouchkine, in the meantime, watches the actors, commenting, interrupting, encouraging. The main aim is to search for ‘the theatre’, to find theatrical potential in the performance.

I believe that what feeds the work of the theatre is first of all the theatre itself. It is discovery, adventure. It is ‘looking for’ the theatre. In the history of the theatre, what nourishes me is the questioning, the discoveries, the illuminations of the people of the theatre who have preceded us, their desires...In the case of Copeau, for example, it is his desire which is very interesting, and very beautiful, more so certainly than what he was in fact able to achieve...Is it really the countryside which fed Monet’s poppyfield, or is it really painting which discovers, which truly reveals the field of poppies? In the process of rehearsal I look for the theatre, second by second, and when it appears, truly appears, it is undeniable.<sup>61</sup>

Mnouchkine’s role as the director is far from a regular director. She is not concerned with the positioning or movement of the characters on the stage. As a group, they all try to find the essential thing in a scene, rather than looking for good ideas.

I do not ‘direct’ anything for months. Until the month of the opening, everything can be reworked. I never say to an actor, ‘Sit there, move...’ and so on. Sometimes I simply ask, ‘Are you sure that you should get up at that moment?’ When one starts as a director, one confuses directing with positioning. When I began, I had tin soldiers, and I thought that it would be good if this one did that, if that one entered like that...But directing has nothing to do with positioning; it has to do with opening the soul. You have to manage the crack the souls of the actors and the characters like a coconut so that you can see what is inside.<sup>62</sup>

The main aim of the company is constantly to reinvent theatre which presents a series of metaphors for the world. These metaphors have connections with the outside world but the relationship is not one of imitation or illusion. What is essential is that to find out how to transform something based on the outside world into theatrical form.

---

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, p.23

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p.24

The theatre consists of metaphor, metaphor of gesture, metaphor of words, and what is wonderful in the theatre is when an actor transforms an emotion, a memory, a state or a passion. Passion in its pure state is not visible if the actor doesn't transform it into performance, that is, into a sign, into a gesture... Theatre begins when one says of an actor that it's as if he's dying but he isn't really dying, it's as if he's walking but he isn't walking. Because if he walked in the same way in real life and on the stage, it would look as if he were ambling.<sup>63</sup>

Mnouchkine used the word 'state' to explain the search for metaphorical transformation of daily life into the theatre. When an actor finds the right 'state' it means that every part of the characterization falls into place emotionally, physically and vocally. This concept of the 'state' explains Mnouchkine's and the Théâtre du Soleil's opposition to what they call 'psychological theatre', in which the actor's tendency is to conceal strong emotion in order to make the character look more 'natural'.<sup>64</sup>

You have to take the passion of the character at face value. When he says 'I'm in pain', you have to show that pain totally. If you work in a psychological way, you act the sub-text: 'I'm in pain but I'm not going to show it; I resist the internal pain.' In psychological performance, you also look for a gradation: 'I'm beginning to be in pain, I suffer more and more...', whereas in Shakespeare there are successive distinct states, sudden and separate: 'I'm in pain/I'm no longer in pain.' To transpose this succession of strong states, of primary passions, you can't remain in an everyday, naturalistic, psychological register.<sup>65</sup>

## 2.4 THE CARTOUCHERIE

Since 1970, the company's home is the Cartoucherie, a former ammunition factory, in the Bois de Vincennes on the outskirts of central Paris. When they found it while they were desperately looking for a place to rehearse and perform, it had been abandoned for some time. It has now become a major Paris theatre center, with four other theatre companies moving in.

The company owns four adjacent hangars and also a warehouse separate from these. The hangars are very far away from the main entrance and the furthest of them is devoted to administrative offices and the main workshop. The Cartoucherie is in a very isolated location, too far to walk from nearby residential places and a very different choice for the company since they have always presented themselves as the theatre for the people. Of course, now there is a shuttle bus from the metro station in nearby Vincennes,<sup>66</sup> provided by the company.

---

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p.25

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p.26

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, p.71

The isolated location also has advantages: the company is never distracted or is interfered from the outside world. The isolation and the rural setting of the Cartoucherie are ways of recreating the conditions of the countryside within the city.

As Kiernander has observed, the door to the rehearsal space is in the most inaccessible part of the Cartoucherie, and its windows are securely boarded up. Mnouchkine believes that certain privacy is essential for the actors to freely engage in the intensely personal investigations.

The essential nourishment (for the actor) is himself. To demand an actor or an actress to confront him or herself, to dare to descend into their own souls, into their hearts, into their subconscious, into their past, into their unknown, into their repressions, and to hold onto the two reins of the team: maximum interiority and maximum exteriority...that finally seems to me to be the work of every artist: to be a deep-sea diver into the human soul. Unfortunately when he comes up to the surface it is not enough to bring back the treasures or the precious stones which he has found at the bottom; he still has to fashion them so that one can see that they are precious. I believe that that is exactly what an actor does. Of course he is helped by the text, but he must have made that journey; descend, move about, navigate, discover, surface, discard, so that it can be transmitted.<sup>67</sup>

### 3. INTERCULTURAL THEATRE: DEFINITIONS

Studies in intercultural theatre have been extensive especially in the past few decades, and the term found its place in contemporary theatre studies. Still, the expression “intercultural theatre” sounds rather different to Western ears; the critics are still uncertain whether this new ‘genre’ will be wholly recognized. Thus, as Patrice Pavis suggests, it would be wise to speak of “intercultural exchanges within theatre practice rather than of the constitution of a new genre emerging from the synthesis of heterogeneous traditions.”<sup>68</sup> Of course different points of views emerge when talking about intercultural theatre, such as a Western point of view with which we associate Peter Brook’s dramatized adaptation of the epic the *Mahabharata* which employs Western performance techniques. Eugenio Barba’s rereading of *Faust* for Japanese or Indian dancers can also be called intercultural. The other perspective is non-Western, or the ‘other’, in which we can count the Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki’s staging of Shakespeare or Greek tragedy using traditional Japanese forms. But what first comes to mind is how to grasp the term ‘intercultural’, when ‘cultural’ itself is already a challenge? Before analyzing intercultural theatre, we must first try to understand the definition of cultural, intercultural and

---

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19

<sup>68</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.1

the other ones that come along with these; transcultural, ultracultural, precultural, metacultural, intracultural and multicultural. According to Clifford Geertz, cultural is

a system of symbols thanks to which human beings confer a meaning on their own experience. Systems of symbols, created by people, shared, conventional, ordered and obviously learned, furnish them with an intelligible setting for orienting themselves in relation to others or in relation to a living work and to themselves.<sup>69</sup>

As Camille Camilleri defines it, culture “is a kind of shaping, of specific ‘inflections’ which mark our representations, feelings, activity – in short, and in a general manner, every aspect of our mental life and even of our biological organism under the influence of the group.”

Similarly, every aspect of the theatre production is affected by the same inflections. Every text goes through a process of experiences and re-forms into a new text. Also, the body of the actor is moulded by techniques proper to his/her own culture and tradition. Actors reveal the culture of the community where they lived and where they have learned.

Camilleri goes on and says, “Culture is transmitted by what has been called ‘social heredity’, that is, by a certain number of techniques through which each generation interiorizes for the next the communal inflexion of the psyche and the organism which culture comprises.”<sup>70</sup> This is noticeable in theatre where the actors make use of some techniques that are both vocal and physical. As Pavis suggests, the parents pass movements on to their children, thus making it a physical apprenticeship. Both in the West and in the East, the actors interiorize rules of behavior, habits of acting according to their culture.<sup>71</sup>

In order to understand the idea of the ‘intercultural’, it must be first distinguished from other concepts which are often associated with it. It should be also noted that, as Schechner has stated, there is no pure culture not influenced by others.<sup>72</sup>

The *intracultural*, according to James R. Brandon, refers to the search for national traditions which are often forgotten or repressed and to understand more deeply the origins and the transformation of its own culture. The term actually belongs to Rustom Bharucha, who defines it as cultural encounters between and across specific communities and regions within

---

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p.2

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p.4

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Richard Schechner, *Intercultural Themes*, *Performing Arts Journal*, p.151

the nation-state. More specifically, his sense of intracultural has similarities to the multicultural:

insofar as they assume either the interaction or the coexistence of regional and local cultures within the larger framework of the nation-state. However, while the "intra" prioritizes the interactivity and translation of diverse cultures, the "multi" upholds a notion of cohesiveness.<sup>73</sup>

The *transcultural*, as Pavis suggests, “transcends particular cultures on behalf of a universality of the human condition.”<sup>74</sup> Directors interested in transcultural are often concerned with what they have in common between two cultures; with the particularities and traditions that are not reducible to a specific culture. In other words, transcultural theatre aims to transcend culture-specific codification in order to reach a more universal human condition. For example, in the case of Peter Brook, transcendence of the particular is a necessary part of the mythic quest for origins and Western theatre’s supposed loss of purity.<sup>75</sup> This return to sources and the appropriation of primitive languages is a quest for a truth that holds everywhere, independent from cultural and traditional differences. However, Patrice Pavis places this mythic quest for the origins in the term the *ultracultural*, saying that such directors involved in this quest assumed the existence of a common human “substratum”, no matter which cultural elements have been imposed upon it.<sup>76</sup>

The *pre-cultural* should be distinguished from the ultracultural or the transcultural since it doesn’t search for the common origins of cultures and theatrical forms but points out what is common today between Eastern and Western theatre practitioners before they become individualized in particular traditions or techniques of performance.

The *metacultural*, defines Pavis, is a “postculturalism which recognized that its nature and strategy is not that of coming after but above, in a superimposed position in relation to other cultural givens. As soon as one culture comments upon another, to explain or to justify it, this develops a critical commentary on a meta-textual level and becomes an interpretive meta-language.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, when a director directs his actor to make forms different to his own tradition, and when inscribes this onto his stage, he places himself in a metacultural situation.

---

<sup>73</sup> Helen Gilbert, Jacqueline Lo, *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis*, p.38

<sup>74</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.6

<sup>75</sup> Helen Gilbert, Jacqueline Lo, *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis*, p.37

<sup>76</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.6

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7

To be more precise with –isms, multicultural theatre and post cultural theatre must be mentioned. Multicultural theatre, according to Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo carries site-specific meanings, but without entering there, the two major types of multicultural theatre must be explained: small “m” multicultural theatre and big “m” multicultural theatre.<sup>78</sup>

Small “m” multicultural theatre refers to theatre works which include mixed casts from different races that do not specifically draw attention to cultural differences among performers. An important feature of this kind of theatre is to use nontraditional casting to emphasize cultural pluralism.

Big “m” multicultural theatre is generally aims to promote cultural diversity, access to cultural expression, and participation in the symbolic space of national narrative.<sup>79</sup> Several types of theatre such as ghetto theatre, migrant theatre and community theatre fall in the categories of big “m” multicultural theatre. Generally speaking, multicultural theatre is the cross-influences between various ethnic groups in multicultural societies.

The term postcolonial theatre is used for performances expressing any kind of political resistance concerning race, class or gender oppression, and the term refers to a range of texts that emerged from cultures subjected to Western imperialism. Postcolonial theatre derives from indigenous groups in areas formerly colonized by European and/or American cultures, though some settler theatre in such regions is included into this category.<sup>80</sup> Postcolonial theatre usually involves cross-cultural references because of the historical contact between cultures. While not all postcolonial theatre is necessarily cross-cultural, it wouldn't be wrong to assume some kind of encounter emerge between different cultural groups. All in all, postcolonial theatre takes the elements of home culture and employs them with its perspective; offering a mixture of languages and performance processes. Though postcolonial theatre has been theorized as a category, some critics dealing with intercultural theatre such as Patrice Pavis, dismisses this field in their studies.

However, for intercultural theatre, Pavis suggests five cases of interaction. First one of them is “denial of cultural anchoring”, which simply says that certain artists deny their relationship to any specific culture and explain their creation as ‘influences’ thus suggesting that their work is the result of their own imagination. Second is the “rapprochement” between two cultural

---

<sup>78</sup> Helen Gilbert, Jacqueline Lo, *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis*, p.33

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, p.34

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, p.35

areas or contexts which is made easier by the investigation of common elements such as characters, forms and structural elements. Pavis suggests that to bring cultures together so as to place them in dialogue and to show this despite whatever universality may exist is thus normal.<sup>81</sup> Third one is “seduction, imitation, exchanges” and Pavis suggests that this works both ways – between East and West. In this interaction, each partner preserves his/her autonomy and identity without assimilating the other. Fourth one is “renewed betrayal” or “productive misinterpretation” which means to guarantee communication and to illuminate the unknown by the known. The fifth and the last one is “appropriation”, reduces everything to the point of view of the target culture thus turning the alien culture to its own ends.<sup>82</sup> For this matter, Pavis quotes Erica Fischer-Lichte, who says:

The starting point for intercultural staging is thus not primarily an interest in the foreign – the foreign theatre or the foreign culture from which it is taken – but rather a situation completely specific within its own culture or a completely specific problem having its original within its own theatre.<sup>83</sup>

### 3.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL THEATRE

The development of intercultural theatre can be easily observed worldwide from the 1970s onwards, though the roots go way back. As Erica Fischer-Lichte claims, the association of one culture with another – a foreign one – reaches as far back as antiquity.<sup>84</sup> She suggests that when Goethe said “National literature means little nowadays, the era of the world literature is at hand, and each of us now must help to hasten its arrival”,<sup>85</sup> the need to associate one culture with another became more conscious. She justifies her claim by suggesting that Goethe developed a repertoire for his own theatre in Weimar which encompassed the most important dramas of European theatre history such as Sophocle’s *Antigone*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, *Henry IV*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Othello*, Calderon’s *Life is a Dream* and *The Constant Prince*, Molière’s *Miser* and tragedies by Voltaire and Lessing, thus making theatre an agency of mediation between his own and culture and the foreign.<sup>86</sup> Goethe, in this sense, made alterations in the texts, replacing or omitting some scenes according to the expectations of the small Weimar audience. Through this, he brought the works of a foreign

---

<sup>81</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.10

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.28

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

culture to his audience and made them a strong feature of the theatre of his time. Other than the European dramatic works, he read and was greatly influenced by the drama *Sakuntala* by the Indian poet Kalidassa; and he used the idea of “prelude in the theatre” from Indian drama in his *Faust*. However, he abandoned the idea of adapting and decided “that our sensibilities, customs and ways of thinking have developed so differently from those in this Eastern nation that even an important work such as this...can have little success here.”<sup>87</sup>

According to James Brandon the earliest knowledge Europeans had of Asian theatre came through publication, in European languages, of translations and then adaptations of Asian plays.<sup>88</sup> He mentions two of the very early translations of Chinese opera into French and Voltaire’s rewriting of the translation by Jesuit Father de Prémare, respectively in 1736 and 1755. Brandon reminds us that in the following century it became common to rewrite and adapt Chinese, Indian and Japanese plays, finally pointing out the aforesaid reference to *Sakuntala* by Goethe.

In the middle of nineteenth century, descriptions of various Asian theatre forms began to be written in European languages. The authors of such writings, who were diplomats, merchants, advisors to Asian governments, were not connected to theatre work in their home countries. The books Brandon mentions are *The Chinese Drama From Earliest Times Until Today* by Lewis Arlington (1930), *The Kathakali* by Emily G. Hatch (1934), *Kabuki, the Popular Stage of Japan* by Zoe Kincaid (1925) and *Dance and Drama in Bali* by Walter Spies (1938). Of course these books were personal descriptions of the writers who were eagerly attending theatre performances. Their position was somewhat different – they were always Western observers, they were not theatre practitioners and were above Asian cultures.<sup>89</sup> This, on the other hand brings to mind whether the European critics or theatre practitioners today hold a different position than these mentioned people.)

The obvious and more acceptable influence of Asian theatre in West started when traditional Asian troupes began touring in Europe, America and even Russia in 1920s and 30s. This allowed Western theatre practitioners, directors and actors to see Chinese opera, Japanese kabuki and Balinese dance. Meyerhold and Brecht were deeply impressed by these new theatre forms. Though clothing and decorative objects of all kinds belonging to the Orient had

---

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, p.29

<sup>88</sup> James Brandon, *A New World: Asian Theatre in the West Today*, p.28

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, p.29

long been popular and had influenced painters such as Manet, Pissaro or the sculptor Rodin; the European interest in Asia was or in Asian theatre cannot escape certain points. Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht, for this matter, whose interest in Asian theatre was as great as anyone else's, saw few kinds of performances limited to few times.<sup>90</sup> It is true that they read extensively on the subject, they never actually visited Asia to see the performances in their true settings. This left them not feeling the true actor-audience relationship. Brecht's Chinese plays such as *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Good Person of Szechuan* are not examples of Chinese theatre per se; they do not in any way describe China. His essay on "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting" is also not a source material to understand Chinese opera. It is true that he was deeply affected by Chinese theatre, but he did not have the knowledge to explain what Chinese theatre was.

As for Artaud, he did see the classical Cambodian and Balinese dance in France in 1922 and 1931 and was greatly inspired by them. However, these only validated what he was thinking already. Of course some of his observations were remarkable:

One of the reasons for our delight in this faultless performance lies precisely in the use these actors make of an exact quantity of specific gestures, of well-trieved mime at a given point, and above all in the prevailing spiritual tone, the deep and subtle study that has presided at the elaboration of these plays of expression, these powerful signs which give us the impression that their power has not weakened during thousands of years.<sup>91</sup>

However, he had no way of knowing the details of Balinese performance – though he probably did not have such an intention to prove his knowledge on the subject but rather to project his own beliefs and expectations. But it should be noted that we read *Theatre and Its Double* to understand Artaud, not Balinese theatre. It can be said that both Artaud and Brecht unconsciously and subtly revealed a sense of cultural superiority, suggesting a "western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient."<sup>92</sup> It is also fair to say that European theatre professionals were influenced by Asian theatre to a degree where they saw it as a source of inspiration. They used their "Asian experience" as an element into their work to strengthen their own creativity.

---

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, p.31

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, p.3

To give other examples of the adaptation or appropriation in the history of intercultural theatre, we must mention other names such as Edward Gordon Craig who made use of masks as he observed them in African and Asian theatres. Max Reinhardt experimented with the Japanese *banamichi*; Meyerhold also turned to Japanese theatre, seeing it as a model in which he wanted to set up a theatre of illusion with its representations of reality. All in all, the first decades of twentieth century appears to be a productive encounter with theatre forms and traditions of foreign cultures.

Coincidental as it is, the same time European artists adopted elements from Eastern theatre, a new form and approach emerged in Japan which was based on Western realistic theatre.<sup>93</sup> The process followed an encounter with Western theatre in a series of Shakespeare plays. His *Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet* were produced in style of kabuki and then in style of Western approach respectively. By the 1920s, a new form (Shingeki) was established. Osanai Kaoru, founder of the “Literary Society” and “Tsukiji Little Theatre” in 1924 took the realistic Western theatre as their form.<sup>94</sup> In this new form, Ibsen and Chekhov were favored and Stanislavsky’s style was considered to be the main directing style. The members believed that traditional forms such as Noh and Kabuki were outdated and thus they wanted to turn to European origin to contribute the development of modern Japanese theatre.<sup>95</sup>

### **3.2 INTERCULTURAL REFLECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY THEATRE**

The phenomena of intercultural theatre in contemporary stage have been on the rise especially since the past few decades. The evident examples are seen in the works of directors such as Eugenio Barba, Robert Wilson, Ariane Mnouchkine and Peter Brook. At the same time, Eastern contemporary theatre practitioners like Suzuki Tadashi and Wole Soyinka dominated contemporary theatre with their approaches.

Robert Wilson for example, uses elements derived from different contexts that actually show a random juxtaposition of cultural fragments<sup>96</sup> and these are made up of bits of information, preventing the meaning of production. Everything that happens on stage – actor’s body, the objects, language, sound and music are not offered to make any sense, to represent something

---

<sup>93</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.30

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.31

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32

but rather to reflect their own very “objectness”.<sup>97</sup> His project *The CIVIL warS* was staged in many foreign stages; and he picked out the dominant elements of history in every section of the production. The section devised in Tokyo for example, contains elements taken from Japanese theatre, particularly Noh and Bunraku.

Peter Brook also works with different elements derived from various cultures. He attempts to sort out elements of theatre between members of different cultures.<sup>98</sup> But his most acclaimed as well as criticized production is the dramatization of the Indian epic the *Mahabharata*, which traditionally represents many different forms of Indian theatre. Brook believes that every theatrical tradition is composed of elements which can be employed in the context of other traditions. He attempts to formulate a theatre in which the elements comprising it – no matter which culture they are driven from – can be understood in any chosen culture. Both Wilson and Brook are working towards a universal language of theatre.

As the new “avant-garde” approach was being established in the Western theatre, a new movement called “Little Theatre Movement” was also blossoming in Japan. This movement wanted to grasp the forgotten traditions and they rejected Shingeki which was formed in the early twentieth century. The Western model Shingeki adopted was now considered to be the Westernization of Japanese society.<sup>99</sup> The search towards the forgotten traditions led them to explore Noh and Kabuki theatre once again, also allowing them to establish an own cultural identity. Of course this did not mean to truly exclude Western culture. Suzuki Tadashi, representative of this new phenomenon, after producing contemporary Japanese dramas, turned to Greek tragedies and Shakespeare. He simply interprets Western texts with performance techniques driven from traditional Japanese culture. He sees the Western theatre as more developed in the sense of linguistic power and believes in the physical powers of Eastern forms. His combination of both cultures and traditions reforms the language and body into a universal expression. Thus, he also develops a new language for theatre.

As for the case Wole Soyinka, he ties the elements of Western culture to elements of African culture – themes and characters of Yoruba history and religion. So he combines the elements of European and African tradition but unlike many African writers, he does not employ elements of his own culture to “romanticize pre-colonial history and the tradition of that

---

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*, p.33

era.”<sup>100</sup> He believes that the task of theatre is to keep a vision of mankind that is shaped by different culturally determined ideals and to make them clear. He is not only interested in providing African culture with an African theatre but rather with a European one.

These examples show us that the main aim in using intercultural elements in contemporary theatre is to create a universal language as well as to mobilize communication among different cultures. The use of foreign elements is a cultural transformation in its basic sense.

### **3.3 OVERALL RECEPTION OF INTERCULTURAL THEATRE**

Intercultural theatre has latitude to explore alternative forms of citizenship and identity across and beyond national boundaries; it is derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions. It can be said that intercultural theatre primarily a Western-based tradition; the work of directors such as Meyerhold, Tairov, Brecht, Artaud and Grotowski being the evidence for such a claim. More recently, intercultural theatre has been associated with the works of Richard Schechner, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Ariane Mnouchkine, Robert Wilson and Tadashi Suzuki.

Every director or theatre practitioner has their own way of understanding of intercultural theatre. In this sense we can say that this is the reason for not being able to come up with a certain, definite perspective about the subject. Schechner for example, locates mixing or leveling cultures as the principal characteristic of any cultural fact. Grotowski, when he began his Theatre of Sources, in which he wanted to go back, wanted to master performers and master practitioners of different cultures and see what they had in common – this led to Objective Drama. Peter Brook with and after the *Mahabharata* has been doing intercultural work – to start with, being an English-speaking director he placed his theatre in Paris and then he constituted a company including English-speaking, French-speaking actors, people from Africa, people from Asia. Though, of course it should be noted that intercultural theatre does not simply mean the gathering of artists of different nationalities.

Interculturalism, beyond doubt, has been a dominant mode in twentieth century, as Pavis suggests: “Never before has the western stage contemplated and manipulated the various cultures of the world to such a degree, but never before has it been at such a loss as to what to

---

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, p.35

make of their inexhaustible babble, their explosive mix, the inextricable collage of their languages.”<sup>101</sup> Interculturalism and performance, as Singleton suggests, is “perhaps the most talked about and controversial cultural practice of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries at best by a sharing and mutual borrowing of the manifestation of one theatre practice by another.”<sup>102</sup> Since there is no definite or even sufficient theorization other than personal suggestions, the boundary between interculturalism and cultural imperialism can be easily mixed. Thus the intercultural debate brought cultural equality issues with it.

Though the intercultural theorists, such as Pavis, attempted to define interculturalism as an equal exchange between cultures and suggested that intercultural theatre is not yet a new version of orientalism,<sup>103</sup> Bharucha’s critique of Western intercultural practitioners including Artaud, Craig, Grotowski, Barba, Schechner and Brook for their misinterpretation of non-Western performance aims to prove this idea wrong, suggesting that there has to be a fairer exchange between two parts.

### 3.4 CRITICISMS AND NEW MODELS

It is not surprising that new critical and theoretical approaches emerged within the development of intercultural theatre. One of the most important critiques was Rustom Bharucha’s review of Peter Brook’s noted production, the *Mahabharata*. Bharucha believes that Brook’s production is an appropriation of non-western material within an orientalist framework of thought and action, which has been specifically designed for the international market. For the Indians, the *Mahabharata* is a very sacred text; and Bharucha believes that Brook takes their commodities and textiles and transforms them into costumes and props. Bharucha claims that Brook decontextualized the text in order to ‘sell’ it to the audiences in West. To make his point clear, he mentions the money spent on Brook’s tour which is said to have cost more than the annual cultural budget made available to all performing artists and groups in India.<sup>104</sup> The play was performed in Europe and America, so Bharucha in this sense does not hesitate to ask the question: what did people in India receive from a theatre production they never got to see?

---

<sup>101</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, p.1

<sup>102</sup> Brian Singleton, *Interculturalism*, in Dennis Kennedy, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre & Performance*, p. 628

<sup>103</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.4

<sup>104</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *Theatre and the World, Performance and the politics of culture*, p.70

His criticism is not limited to where the production was performed or how much money was spent for it, but more importantly, it reaches to the point where Bharucha looks for answers about the transform of the text itself. Brook's western assumption of the epic, according to Bharucha minimizes its importance. For the Indians, the *Mahabharata* is not merely a great narrative poem; it is their fundamental source of knowledge of their literature, dance, painting, sculpture, theology, sociology, and economy – in short, their history in all its details and density, Bharucha argues. He also believes that Brook excludes or trivializes the Indian culture, so he suggests that this stems from the misunderstanding that the *Mahabharata* is universal – he says the Mahabharata is universal *because* it is Indian; one cannot separate the text from its culture. Apart from these, Bharucha, quoting Brook, suggests that he separates Hindu philosophy from the production and therefore he says that the *Mahabharata* is nothing without the Hindu philosophy. The way Brook displayed the characters and told the stories are all misleading and absent, as Bharucha argues. Another point he criticizes is that Brook's cast includes people from around the world – from England, France, Turkey, Japan, Iran, Poland, Italy, South Africa, Senegal, Indonesia and India. Bharucha seems to have a difficult time understanding the reason why Brook created such a 'cultural salad'<sup>105</sup> of which he is the unacknowledged chef.<sup>106</sup> Overall, Bharucha harshly criticized Brook's so called intercultural exchange, emphasizing the word exchange italics.<sup>107</sup>

Of course it was not only Rustom Bharucha who criticized Brook's famous production. Gautam Dasgupta was another critic who thought that Brook, with his intercultural approach, actually set forth an orientalist discourse. Dasgupta quotes Edward Said, and reminds us what Said proposed – the Orient cannot represent itself, but rather had to be represented. With his international cast of actors, employment of diverse acting styles and variety of theatrical modes of representation, Brook, as the Occident, actually re-presents the Orient, according to Dasgupta. He believes that Brook read the text as a "compendium of martial legends, of revenge, valor and bravura."<sup>108</sup> He goes on and suggests that Brook failed to emphasize the true feeling of the epic by staging predominantly its major incidents and its philosophical precepts.

---

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87

<sup>108</sup> Gautam Dasgupta, *The Mahabharata: Peter Brook's "Orientalism"*, p.11

Nevertheless, Bharucha's criticism resulted in suggesting a new model for intercultural studies. He used the word *intracultural*, as mentioned before, to refer to encounters between cultures within the nation state rather than between nations, destabilizing the problematic identification of culture with nation. In his famous book *Theatre and the World*, Bharucha describes and analyses intracultural projects within India to set out to rescue interculturalism from the stalemates of neo-colonialism, address or redress power imbalances in intercultural exchange<sup>109</sup> and incorporate "detailed analysis of the social processes determining everyday life in other cultures."<sup>110</sup> He questions the equal exchange between cultures and takes into account gender as well as race, class and position within the theatre as institution. Most importantly, he asks the question of what intercultural or intracultural performance contributes to the lives and material realities of its local sources and audiences. As he says early in his book, "my interculturalism has brought me home."<sup>111</sup>

Christopher Balme in his 1999 book *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*, tries to contribute to the understanding of the theatrical or performative response to imperialism, colonization and decolonization, referring to wide range of different performances around the colonized world with the framework of the western notion of theatre and focuses on "the process whereby culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together."<sup>112</sup> Balme is concerned with the meaning, therefore his focus is textual, but his version of semiotics is different from that of Pavis in which he focuses on cultural texts as carriers of meaning that are fully understandable only in the culture that produces and uses them. He focuses on what happens when indigenous performance elements are mixed with Western tendency to homogenize, to exclude, and to privilege formal, stylistic, racial, or cultural 'purity'.<sup>113</sup>

Patrice Pavis suggests an hourglass model for interculturalism. He explains the model:

in the upper bowl is the foreign culture, the source culture, which is more or less codified and solidified in diverse anthropological, sociocultural or artistic modelizations. In order to reach us, this culture must pass through a narrow neck. If the grains of culture or their conglomerate are sufficiently fine, they will flow through without any trouble, however slowly, into the lower bowl, that of the target culture, from which point we observe this slow flow; The grains will rearrange themselves in a

---

<sup>109</sup> Ric Knowles, *Theatre & Interculturalism*, p.32-33

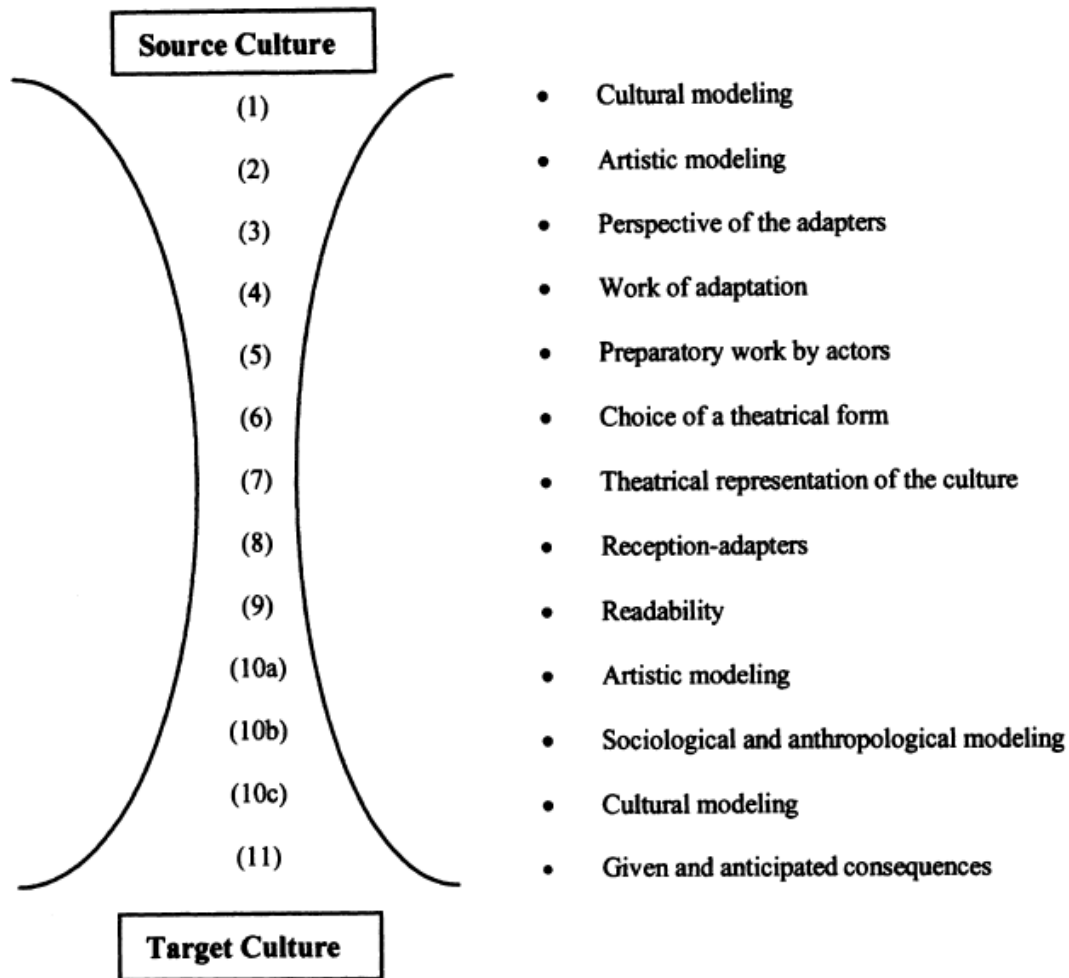
<sup>110</sup> Rustom Bharucha, *Theatre and the World, Performance and the politics of culture*, p.5

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p.9

<sup>112</sup> Christopher Balme, *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*, p.1

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8

way which appears random, but which is partly regulated by their passage through some dozen filters put in place by the target culture and the observer.<sup>114</sup>



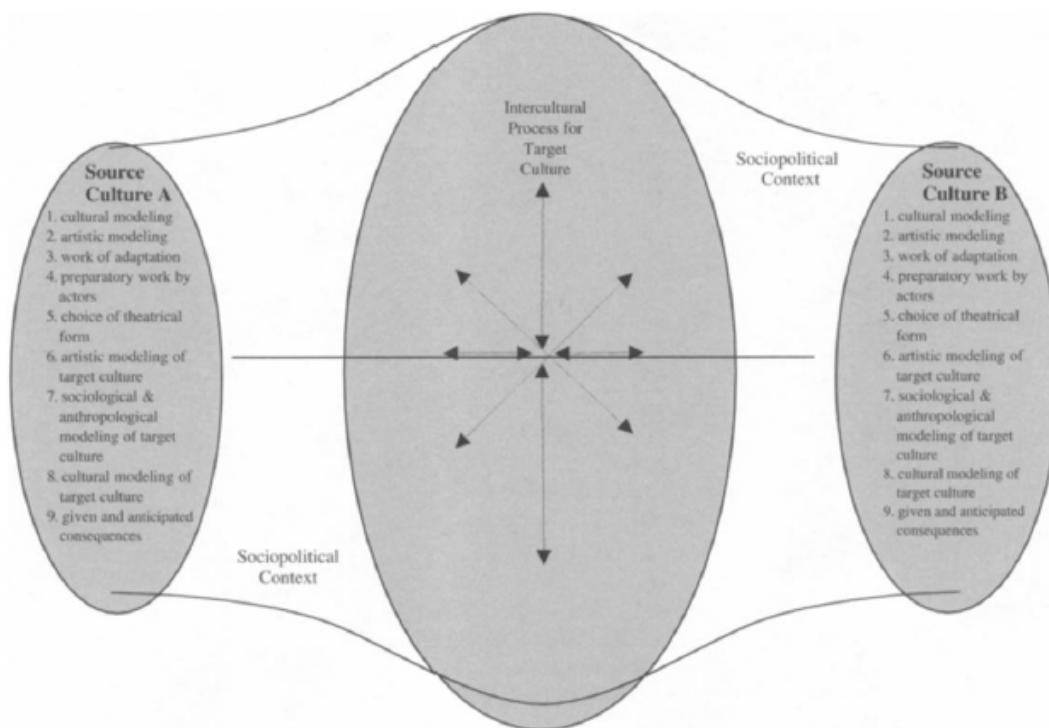
-Pavis's hourglass Model of Intercultural Theatre

The model, as Pavis suggests includes a semiotic model of the production and reception of the performance in which one can particularly study the reception of a performance and the transfer from one culture to the other.

Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, in their article *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis* offer an alternative model to Pavis's hourglass model, returning to Pavis in its use of 'cross-cultural' and locate subcategories such as the multicultural, postcolonial, and intercultural. Their purpose is less to survey the practices that constitute cross-cultural theatre than to schematize and to explore "the possibilities for cross-cultural theatre to radicalize and

<sup>114</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, p.11

intervene in hegemonic arts practices.”<sup>115</sup> They divide the field of intercultural practice into three categories: the transcultural, the intracultural (borrowed from Bharucha) and the extracultural. They mainly criticize Pavis’s hourglass model and propose an alternative to it. Their critique is based on two things: Pavis’s central image of distillation, in which elements of the source culture are made manageable by the target culture by a process of boiling down, a reduction that can easily be absorbed. Their model, however, functions as a kind of horizontal hourglass and the intercultural exchange is represented as a two-way flow. Both sides are considered cultural sources while the target culture is positioned along the continuum between them.<sup>116</sup> The location of the target culture, in their model, is not fixed: its position remains fluid and depending on where and how the exchange takes place, it shifts along.



-Proposed Model for Interculturalism

Other than these attempts to formulate a new model of intercultural exchange, Marvin Carlson also has offered a scale consisting of seven categories of cross-cultural influence based on

<sup>115</sup> Helen Gilbert, Jacqueline Lo, *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis*, p.32

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44

“possible relationships between the culturally familiar and the culturally foreign.”<sup>117</sup> Erica Fischer-Lichte, taking a different track, focuses specifically on the adaptation process, which follows a model “productive reception” rather than one of translation.<sup>118</sup>

#### 4. THE SHAKESPEARE CYCLE

‘If there is one place where one can  
be a little international, it’s the theatre.’  
**Ariane Mnouchkine**<sup>119</sup>

After the production of *Méphisto*, the company began to investigate Shakespeare’s texts; his treatment of English history and they started with *Richard II*, which is one of the best known texts in France since Jean Vilar staged it at Avignon Festival. This investigation turned out to be very exciting; so Mnouchkine decided to produce an entire cycle of Shakespeare plays. The original plan was to produce ten plays by the famous playwright, but this was later reduced to six, and finally only three of them were actually realized. The most ambitious aspect of the project was that Mnouchkine approached the productions in a more different way than other contemporary Shakespeare productions; avoiding from a basically natural and modern, such as the productions of Royal Shakespeare Company which projects Shakespeare as familiar as possible without becoming too mundane. But Mnouchkine’s intention was different from this; she was seeking to formulate a new theatre form which would focus on the deliberate artificiality of Shakespeare’s language and dramatic structure. As Kiernander puts it, “she wanted a style of theatre in which movement, vocal delivery, gesture, set and costumes were as heightened as blank verse.”<sup>120</sup> Her view, typically, was extreme:

All these characters are without psychology. Richard has no psychology. A fortiori, there is no psychology in the case of the nobles. A character like Northumberland, for example, has no characteristics except those which the actor playing the role lends him. There are no psychological mechanisms hidden underneath. These characters are above all receptacles, for Shakespeare as for the audience, who sometimes recognize themselves and at other times realize how different they are. It is because there are works of this kind that theatre is not dead. If there were nothing but realistic-psychological works, the theatre would have been swept aside by the cinema within

---

<sup>117</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Peter Brook's The Mahabharata and Ariane Mnouchkine's L'Indiade as Examples of Contemporary Cross-cultural Theatre*, in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, ed., Erika Fischer-Lichte, Michael Gissen-wehrer, and Josephine Riley, p.50

<sup>118</sup> Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective*, pp.154-155

<sup>119</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.98

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109

ten years. Our survival depends on putting into the theatre that which can only exist within the theatre.<sup>121</sup>

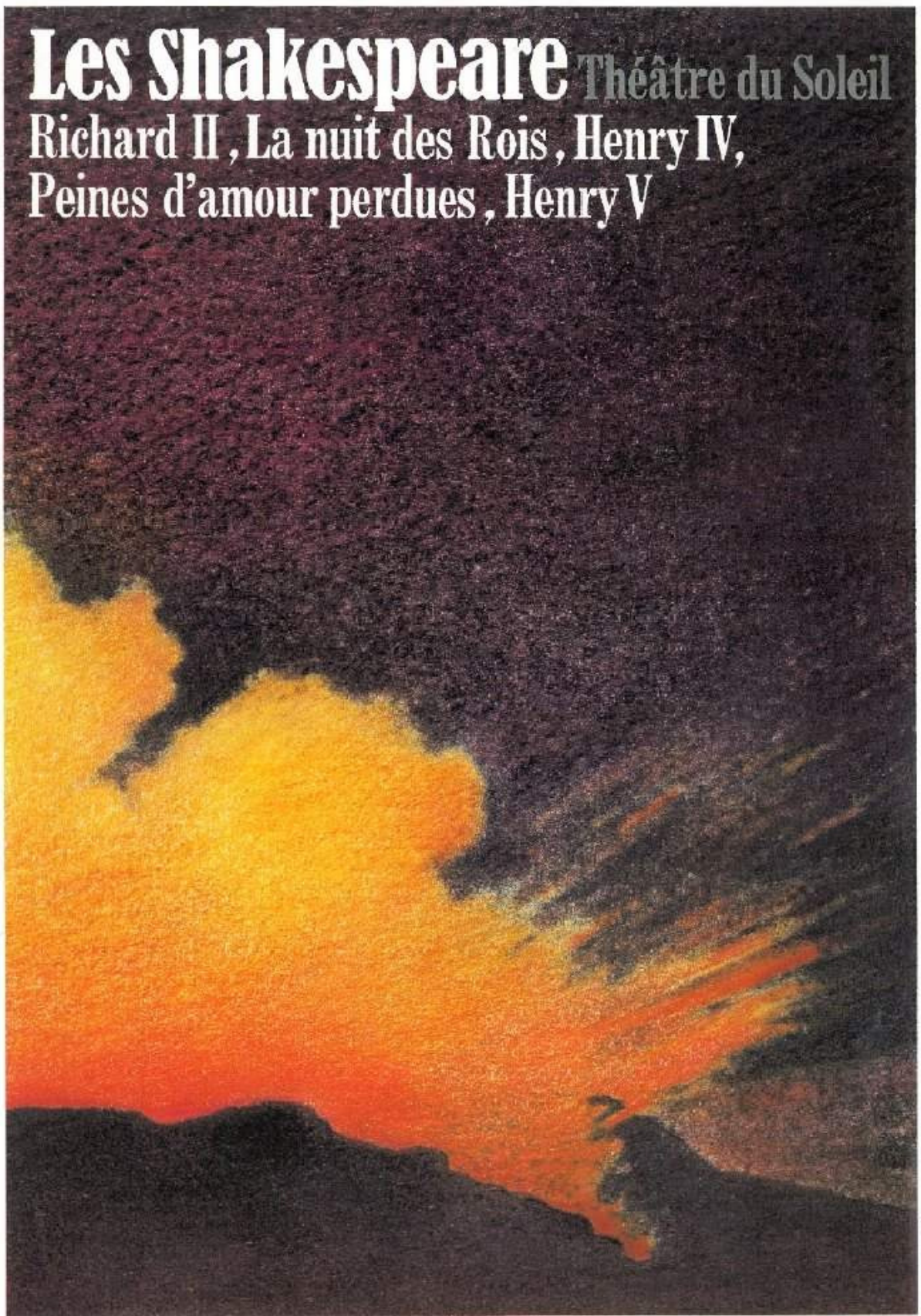
The reason for the company to choose Shakespeare plays, as they explain in the published program notes for the production of *Richard II*, is that Shakespeare is an expert who knows the tools that are most apt and fitting for narratives of the passions and destinies of human beings. Mnouchkine wanted to investigate a culture that she was deprived of, saying that Shakespeare takes her back to that culture. Other than these, she wanted to build a strong dramatic universe in which certain gestures and character types appearing from one play to the next. Their choice of Shakespeare also stems from the fact that Mnouchkine wanted to reread Shakespeare as she was having difficulty with writing wholly contemporary characters.<sup>122</sup> Mnouchkine, for this reason, wanted to ‘go back to school’, to investigate Shakespeare who is, in her words, the source of everything. Mnouchkine, believing that theatre should represent the world, thought that Shakespeare doesn’t only represent the world, but also adds himself to it; participates in it and transforms the vision of evil into a lesson in good.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, p.159

<sup>122</sup> David Williams, *Collaborative Theatre, The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, p.98

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, p.102



-The poster for the Shakespeare Cycle

The form Mnouchkine eventually chose was Asian theatre forms; particularly kabuki, Noh and Balinese dance. Accordingly, she had the actors study samurai films and set up a schedule where the actors run five miles a day and paid close attention to their diets. The result was a reinvention of traditional Asian forms. Mnouchkine explains why they chose the forms of the ‘orient’:

Why the Orient? Because of theatre, quite simply! The West has shown itself to be impoverished, and has only produced three kinds: the theatre of antiquity, about which we know very little, the *commedia dell’arte* which in fact comes from the Orient, and realistic theatre which is a form based on language and not on the body. On the other hand the Orient offers forms of performance, disciplines which give the actor tools of communication, which strip him naked. The great theatre forms – I don’t want to call them Oriental anymore – allow one to depict a world which is not that of the everyday but one which is magic, divine, which relates to the interior universe.

There are forms which, however beautiful they are, close doors behind them (Chekhov for example); and others which open them wide.

In the Elizabethan theatre there is no form, only an architecture. We wanted to escape from a realist interpretation – tankards of beer, smoked ham and ruffians – which destroys all poetry in the language, which Shakespeare certainly would not have wanted. Besides, his plays are much too big to be played psychologically.<sup>124</sup>

Mnouchkine talked about the confrontation with Japanese theatre as one which demanded ‘the linkage of an extreme truthfulness with an extreme artifice which might be called hyper-real’.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, the cycle of three plays by Shakespeare brought the company immense recognition in the English-speaking world.

#### 4.1 RICHARD II

The first play to be staged was *Richard II*, which was not performed until December 1981, eighteen months after the last performance of *Méphisto*, and this long period was spent rehearsing for the production. The play was written by Shakespeare in 1595, as a part of four-play-cycle known as the ‘Henriad’, which also includes *Henry IV Part I*, *Part II* and *Henry V*. The play begins after the scandalous murder of the Duke of Gloucester, the king’s own uncle, in 1398. The play then summarizes events leading to Richard’s downfall: the banishment of

---

<sup>124</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.106

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, p.110

Bolingbroke and seizure of his lands, John of Gaunt's death, Richard's Irish campaign and Bolingbroke's revolt.

The production had references to Japanese theatre; though Mnouchkine thought that there were several misunderstandings about this. She said there was no exclusive reference to Japan, though they made use of Asian theatre (Noh, kabuki), but also Balinese theatre and Kathakali, etc. The production's ritual style was defended by Mnouchkine; she said the whole play is ritual and these elements were only a trace rather than a mould for the production. Mnouchkine explained the misunderstandings about the costumes – some critics had referred to them as being very Japanese – by saying that the costumes were a mix of typically Elizabethan doublets, ruffs which date from a slightly earlier period, skirts of the kind one finds in certain costumes from the middle ages and then over the top of cloaks which, she accepted at this point, suggest kimonos. She emphasized that there was only an *influence* Asian theatre forms; adding that it was nothing new either in the history of the Théâtre du Soleil, who made use of mask before, or in the history of theatre where practitioners like Brecht, Meyerhold searched for forms and that there has always been a search and voyage towards Asia since everything is there.<sup>126</sup>

We looked for a theatrical form perfectly capable of showing the sacred and the ritualistic aspects which are in Richard II. This reference to Asia is useful for the three historical plays, and especially for this one. It was not a question of referring uniquely to Japan, but trying to work on some raw material. It is a project which is about theatre, and we are trying to show (hi)story by means of theatre. Whereas one might envisage other ways of confronting these texts, from a social and political point of view.<sup>127</sup>

Inevitably, there were some Japanese influences apparent in the production. To start with, the final set design for the production consisted of a large, open, flat, rectangular space covered in the thick golden-brown carpet which was laid in wide strips running from the front to the back of the stage. The walls of the stage were also painted gold and at the back of the stage there were eleven enormous silk backcloths in red, grey, gold and silver, subtly suggestive of suns and moons. These silk cloths were pulled by the actors, each revealing another one behind it. Mnouchkine said that she believed that an actor needs a magnificent empty space and that she worked on the concept of the empty space like Peter Brook. The playing area was flanked

---

<sup>126</sup> David Williams, *Collaborative Theatre, The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, p.91

<sup>127</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.96

by two runways from which the actors could rush on and off, as in kabuki and Noh. Its emptiness conjured up a world both past and present. For this production, to one side of the stage was the area for the musicians, who were in full view and who had mainly percussion instruments and muffled when accompanying the dialogue but sounded in a high volume when there were entrances, exits or moments of action. Some verbal climaxes were emphasized by a sound of a gong and for some intimate scenes, a double bass was used. These gave the production a sense of excitement and a rapid pace, though it was originally very slow and measured.<sup>128</sup> Another important and obvious influence of Japanese theatre was the use of masks and also the costumes – though Mnouchkine stated that only kimonos were suggestive of a Japanese influence. However, the evolution of the costumes never stopped and the final ones were similar to those of kabuki. Each costume also communicated something of the temperament or position of the character. Richard was all in white, Bolingbroke, on the way to the king-ship, threw his black and gold raiment for one of white and gold. Younger characters had a white-face make up with red shadings under eyes as in Noh and the older characters (Gaunt, York, Lady Gloucester) wore kabuki inspired masks.<sup>129</sup>



*Richard II*. The court, with Richard (Georges Bigot) at the centre. Photo: Martine Franck/Magnum

---

<sup>128</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.111

<sup>129</sup> Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine*, p.80



*Richard II.* ‘A great epic form’ (Moscoso): the deposition of King Richard; to the left, Bolingbroke (Cyrille Bosc) with the crown. Photo: Martine Franck/Magnum

The production began with the courtiers running suddenly to make a horizontal line, equally spaced. Richard, holding something like a samurai sword came on the stage and sat his legs-crossed on a low table which represented the throne the whole time. The courtiers, remaining in the line across the stage throughout most of the scene, acted as chorus and moved their heads simultaneously to emphasize the important movements.<sup>130</sup>

The text was Mnouchkine’s own translation and the lines were delivered in high voice rather than just spoken. It was actually addressed directly to the audience, as if they were making a public announcement. Mnouchkine believed that the traditional means of Western theatre, particularly the ‘fourth wall’ was more than inadequate, in fact deadly, in representing Shakespeare.

In rehearsal every time the actors found themselves talking to each other, it didn’t work. I said to them, ‘Tell it to the audience.’ It’s the secret one must never lose. Having said that, it’s extremely difficult for the actor. When the ‘state’, the passion that he must express in relation to the character, is not sufficiently clear there’s always a tendency to take refuge in a psychological relationship with one’s partner on-stage. The psychological venom has been injected deep inside us—by cinema and television—and the actors have been deformed by it. But I’m convinced that Shakespeare’s text was made to be spoken in this way. As soon as you begin to modulate, to refine, to make it subtle, you water it down.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.112-3

<sup>131</sup> David Williams, *Collaborative Theatre, The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, p.91

A sense of urgency was evident in the first part of the play, especially in the conflict between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, in which the two actors spit their lines aggressively and swooned with high emotion. Both Bolingbroke and Norfolk provided a dumb show-like commentary on their actions; they took refuge at Richard's feet and crawled under the table-throne and between the legs of Marshal sometimes, slapped each other, pulled each other's trousers by the crutch. This type of comedy added a kind of hysterical intensity to the scene. The stylization of the play permitted some simplification in the staging; the attendants carried props and furniture onto the stage. The castle where Richard is confronted by the returning Bolingbroke for the first time was represented by a light tower carried on stage in which Richard clambered and from which he made his historic descent. A similar construction was also made for his prison. In his farewell to the Queen, he was brought on stage attached by long ropes, leaving him trapped and helpless. Moreover, with a technique borrowed from Chinese opera, the long dialogues in some scenes were enacted urgently; from the waist down the actors portrayed the horses, pacing and stamping impatiently as the scene progressed, keeping their multi-colored skirts in constant movement. Some ritualistic elements were also highlighted in the production. At the beginning, Richard's costume consisted of multi-layered series of vestments in white, red and gold; and after the legalities of the abdication were complete, black-robed attendants helped him strip the appearance of his royal status and he gradually became a tiny figure dressed only in loincloth.<sup>132</sup>

The production was first performed at the Cartoucherie with outstanding success. It was highly acclaimed by the critics and won the Grand Prix du Théâtre prize in 1982. The company was once again invited to perform at the Avignon, along with the very next production *Twelfth Night (La Nuit des rois)* which was to be premiered there. Untypically, the company this time agreed to perform in the prestigious space, the Cour d'Honneur of the Palais des Papes.

---

<sup>132</sup> Adrian Kiernander, *Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*, p.113-5

## 4.2 TWELFTH NIGHT (LA NUIT DES ROIS)

The next production of the cycle was *Twelfth Night (La Nuit des rois)* which was much less formal than *Richard II*. The first production had a ritualistic element, but in this one a livelier and less obviously structured performance style was chosen. The Japanese influence of the first production was replaced by Indian and Persian visual images. Mnouchkine explained the difference as “that between a world of remote demigod-heroes and a world of polychrome deity figures from a more popular tradition.”<sup>133</sup>

*Twelfth Night* was written in 1601-02, and it is Shakespeare’s one of the most popular comedies. As in the *Comedy of Errors*, Roman comedy again provides Shakespeare’s main plot device: identical twins separated by misfortune. But here the identical twins are brother and sister, requiring the audience to accept the improbable premise that Viola and Sebastian could be mistaken for one another. The play is set in Illyria, a fictional kingdom on the Adriatic Sea. As the play opens, two deaths shape the plot: Olivia grieves over the loss of her brother, whom she has sworn to mourn for seven years before laying eyes on another man; and Viola fears that her twin brother, Sebastian, has perished in the same storm that wrecked her on the shore of Illyria. The main action of the play resolves this dual loss. A sub-plot focuses on Malvolio, the butler to Olivia, who is tricked into thinking that the lady he serves is secretly in love with him.

George Bigot, who played Orsino, was dressed in white with a simple gold turban, his make-up was pale, and across his forehead were red dots to emphasize the huge dark eyes; red lips and a huge white handkerchief which reached down to the floor illustrated the attitude of the production towards the passions of self-indulgent characters. Initially, Mnouchkine wanted the play to be performed entirely by women but this idea was later abandoned since she believed that it might destroy the subtle balance of the play which depended so heavily on transvestism and on the explicit differentiation between male and female.

The difference between *Richard II* and *La Nuit des rois* was apparent in the costumes. The second had wider range of colors and the formal robes used in *Richard II* were replaced by doublets and baggy trousers which represented a more light-hearted and a more comical society. The doublets without a doubt represented the Elizabethan period, but the overall

---

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, p.116

visual impression was of exotic, oriental luxury.<sup>134</sup> The style of acting was also lighter, faster and more spontaneous. The make-up was more natural and the delivery of the text was quicker and closer to the normal speech patterns, though there was still a hint of stylization in the performance when compared with Western productions. The gestures used by the actors were similar to the ones in Kathakali. In addition, the text was given some freedom in the production by adding some sequences where the script was abandoned for a moment. The length of such sequences shows the reason why, despite the apparent quickness of the play, the all three Shakespeare productions took four or five hours in performance.<sup>135</sup>

Another different aspect of the production when compared to *Richard II* is that the usage of silk backcloths, which were painted in more lighter and pastel colors. For *La Nuit des rois*, they used huge silk parasols carried by the servants for the main characters. However, there were also some similarities between the two productions; the same carpeted stage was used in both of them and there were intertextual references such as Richard's gaol doing double service for Malvolio's prison scene. And again, *La Nuit des rois* was stylized; the actor playing Malvolio was free to leave the white cage he was in (as a prisoner) but still remaining 'imprisoned' throughout the whole scene.<sup>136</sup>

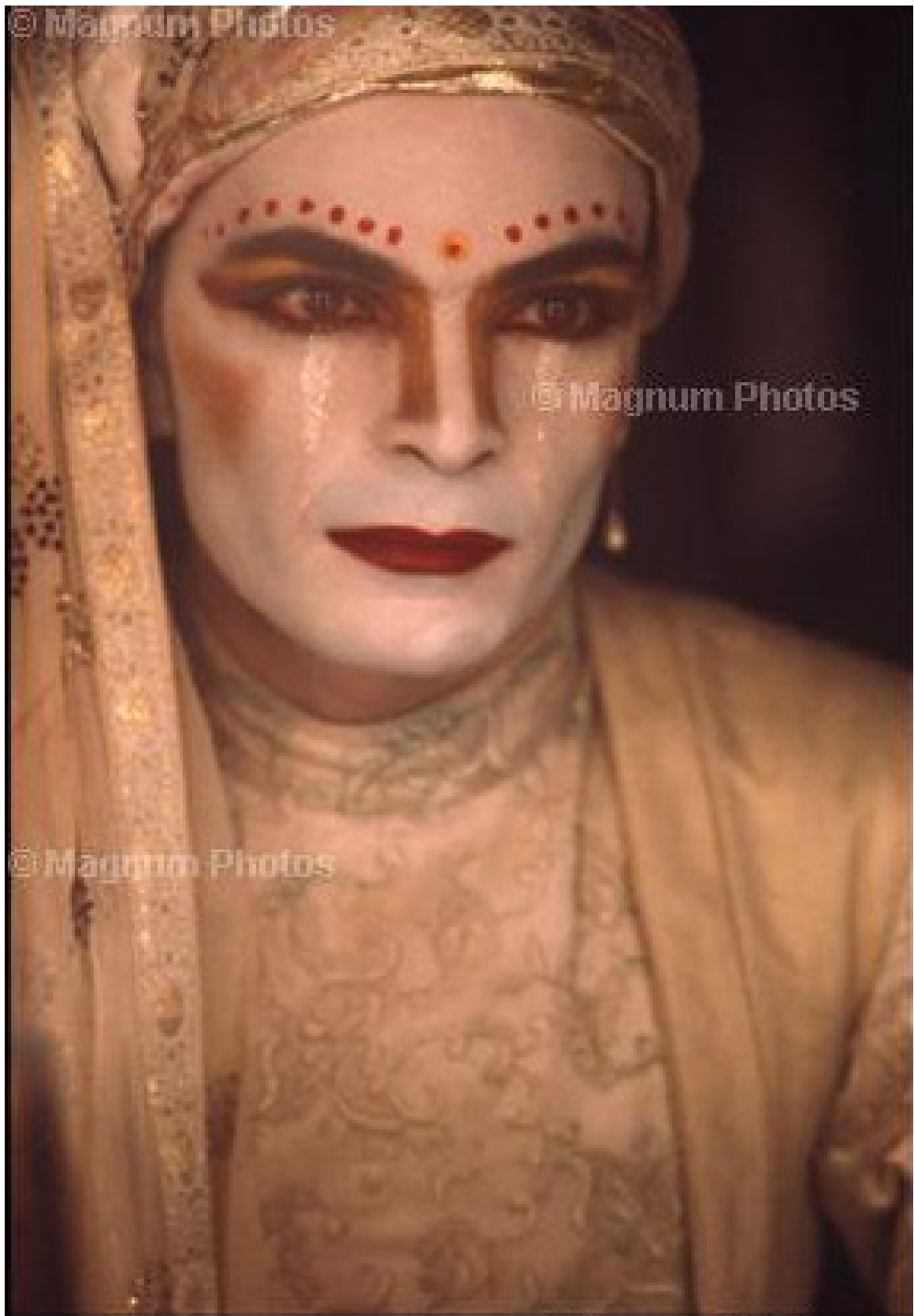


---

<sup>134</sup>*Ibid.*, p.117

<sup>135</sup>*Ibid.*, p.118

<sup>136</sup>*Ibid.*



Georges Bigot as Duke Orsino



Georges Bigot as Fabien and Clémentine Yelnik as Sir André Augecheek

After the premiere of *La Nuit des rois* at the Avignon, the company returned to Paris and performed both plays until the very end of 1983 season. During this time, they also performed in Munich. After some pause, they continued with their third production of the cycle, *Henry IV*, which premiered in January 1984. Mnouchkine believed that the pause was necessary for them as performing and rehearsing at the same time was overwhelming; they occasionally performed on Sundays to cover up the costs and also because there was an enormous demand for tickets.<sup>137</sup>

### 4.3 HENRY VI

The play, written around 1596-1597, starts with the English victory over the Scots in 1402, includes the Welsh revolt led by Owen Glendower and ends with Henry's victory over Hotspur. The play introduces one of Shakespeare's greatest characters, Sir John Falstaff, the dissolute, witty and calculating mentor to the young Prince Hal. The play also touches on darker objects, such as Hotspur's challenge to Henry IV's legitimacy and the king's remorse over the murder of Richard II.

With the production of *Henry VI*, the company returned to a more Japanese-influenced staging again; though it was looser and less ritualistic than *Richard II*. However, it was still highly stylized, which was even more apparent in the battle sequences. The warriors in the play fought in a highly acrobatic manner, taking big leaps into the air and again, showing the opulence of their costumes. Also, when a character was killed, the actor instead of lying on the ground, simply sit or kneel on the stage with his head bowed onto his chest. One of the most popular aspects of the production was the character of Falstaff, played by Philippe Hottier who previously played Sir Toby in *La Nuit des rois*, who wore a colorful costume flying with ribbons. The production, as usual, was very popular at the time and attracted many audiences.<sup>138</sup>

From early 1984, the three productions were being performed in repertoire. The company toured to the Olympic Arts Festival in Los Angeles with major theatre companies from around the world and proved to be the major attraction. The company was again invited to perform the whole cycle at the Avignon Festival and also in Berlin. By the middle of 1984,

---

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, p.119

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*

the company showed some signs of weariness, and Philippe Hottier, who was irreplaceable in the roles of Falstaff and Sir Toby, announced that he wanted to leave the company. Mnouchkine and the company then decided to move on from Shakespeare.



Georges Bigot as Prince Hall



'Hostel' Peto (Helene Cinque), Bardolph (Fabio Gargiulo) Poins (Arnold John), Prince Hall (Georges Bigot), Falstaff (Philippe Hottier)



Battle: Georges Bigot as Prince Hall and Arnold John as King Henry IV

The kabuki style that Mnouchkine used in Shakespeare productions, especially in *Richard II*, offered a proper visual metaphor for the society in Shakespeare's play; and the samurai was a natural symbolic sign for an English lord. The massive subversion of the iconic code was thus justified by specific thematic resemblances. Jean Alter explains the reason why it was undertaken at all: "It was needed, according to Mnouchkine, to regenerate the worn-out staging conventions of the West through the injection of new forms. The kabuki was to rejuvenate the Shakespearean tradition."<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> Jean Alter, *Decoding Mnouchkine's Shakespeare (A Grammar of Stage Signs)*, in *Performing Texts*, Ed., Issacharoff, Michael and Jones, F. Robin, p.79

#### 4.4 IS SHAKESPEARE OUR CONTEMPORARY?

In 1961 Jan Kott, a professor of literature, published a collection of critical essays which became best known under its English name, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*. This work has influenced many directors such as Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine. Kott suggested that Shakespeare's world offers many close parallels to our own. He sees Shakespeare's characters as modern man, facing the difficulties and despairs known to the contemporary reader/audience. Kott encouraged us to look at the similarities between Shakespeare's time and our own, or better say Kott's time then. He describes the claim that gave the book its name:

But what do we mean here by 'contemporary'? I think it's obvious. It is some kind of relationship between two times, one on the stage and the other off it. One is the time inhabited by the actors, the other is the time inhabited by the audience. The relationship between those two times is what finally establishes whether Shakespeare is considered to be a contemporary or not. When the two times are closely connected, then Shakespeare is our contemporary.

Let me quote from Hamlet's speech to Polonius about the actors. 'Let them be well-used, for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time.' The most important word here is time. What time? Shakespeare was the personal contemporary of his audiences at the Globe and Blackfriars, not so far from here. He was, for the first time, a contemporary, because he was living at the same time. He shopped in the same market place as his audiences shopped. He wrote his plays for audiences from that market place. He shared their images of the city, the carnivals and the folk lore. That is the first and primary sense in which Shakespeare was a contemporary.

But when we use this interesting little cliché, Shakespeare our contemporary, we do not mean it in this sense. We mean that Shakespeare has become a contemporary to our changing times and that these times have affected our perception of Shakespeare. Everybody knows that Victor Hugo influenced all the other Romantics in his attachment to Shakespeare, but Shakespeare was also influenced by Hugo and his generation. Shakespeare has always been influenced by those who interpret him, from Hugo to Brecht and Beckett. We have a kind of double dialectical relationship—the changing times and the changing images of Shakespeare.<sup>140</sup>

Mnouchkine was one of the theatre practitioners to be influenced by this idea, and this was apparent in her Shakespeare's productions. Essentially, the influence of Kott on Mnouchkine was more evident in her 1968 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and by the time of *Richard II*, Mnouchkine moved towards a more physical theatre. She was intrigued by social and political systems, repulsed by psychological realism that explores psychological motives

---

<sup>140</sup> Elsom, John, *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?*, p.12

of characters.<sup>141</sup> She mainly saw Richard II as a series of confrontations in which feudal aristocrats plot against each other.

She herself did the translation and adaptation of the text, clarifying the Shakespearian language in free unrhymed verse that communicates easily the negotiations of the courtiers and the strategies of Richard, Bolingbroke, and their supporters. She also frequently cut what might be considered redundant lines or moments (e.g. the Welsh encampment II: 4) to strengthen and intensify Bolingbroke's drive toward destruction-tinged victory. She eliminated almost entirely the subplot of Aumerle's family drama, omitting the scene in which his father, the Duke of York, angrily discovers the latest scheme against Bolingbroke, now the new King Henry IV. By cutting also the sentimental groom who visits Richard in his last prison, Mnouchkine focused attention in the last moments of the production on Bolingbroke's reaction to the assassinated King Richard, setting up a parallel between their two destinies.<sup>142</sup>

Though Mnouchkine was influenced by Kott, she dismissed the idea that Shakespeare is our contemporary. While it is true that she chose to produce Shakespeare's plays to create wholly contemporary characters and said that it is the aim of the Théâtre du Soleil to tell the story of their times,<sup>143</sup> she said that Shakespeare is *not* our contemporary and should not be treated as such. Shakespeare, in her words, is far from us as our own profoundest depths are far from us.

On the other hand, Kott regarded Mnouchkine's Shakespeare cycle as "fake Japanese and fake Shakespeare".<sup>144</sup> He said that Shakespeare at the time when he wrote his book was his contemporary in a different way, as well as a different contemporary of Peter Hall's and Peter Brook's.

We could see that contemporary quality not only in Hamlet but also in the complex ambiguities of sexual relationships in Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare seen through the eyes of Jean Genet and Genet seen through the eyes of Shakespeare. We could play Shakespeare simply and directly because he meant a lot to us. But that was a long time ago, and even leaving behind my metaphor of the opposition between Wittenberg and Elsinore, I would like to stress that plays have to be seen within some definite context, some specific time, some specific place.<sup>145</sup>

---

<sup>141</sup> Judith G. Miller, *Ariane Mnouchkine*, p.78

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79

<sup>143</sup> David Williams, *Collaborative Theatre, The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, p.98

<sup>144</sup> Elsom, John, *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?*, p.33

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

Recently, he regarded Shakespeare as placed in no time and no particular place. He suggested that Mnouchkine's Shakespeare productions are quite different from actual Shakespearean productions in Japan, the exact opposite of the work of Kurosawa, whose films deeply influenced Mnouchkine. Kott suggested that Kurosawa found a new historical place for Shakespeare. What was contemporary in Shakespeare for Kurosawa was "terror, the terror of King Lear and the terror of The Throne in Blood"<sup>146</sup> He added that Kurosawa's *Lear* was like the *King Lear* of Peter Brook, timeless but contemporary. For Kott, the one Shakespeare who is not our contemporary is the Shakespeare of nowhere and no time.

In this sense, Mnouchkine's productions were placed by influential Kott as belonging to nowhere and no time, which eventually justifies Mnouchkine's own claim that Shakespeare is not our contemporary.

#### 4.5 THE THEATRE IS ORIENTAL

Audiences for the Shakespeare cycle were c. 253,000. Though it was highly acclaimed by critics and the audience, it was also highly criticized. One of them was Gautam Dasgupta, who thought the productions (*Richard II and La Nuit des rois*) "suffered from an over-abundance of exoticism, an over-indulgence in grandiosity, and a tiresome superfluity of declamatory pronouncements that overpower the viewer into blind submission."<sup>147</sup> He added that the "lavish displays of costume, stunning *mis en scene* and avant-garde iconoclasm combine to elicit easy applause from the audience."<sup>148</sup> He also questioned the "intercultural" side of the productions, stating that the "borrowed techniques" should not be considered wholly as the other culture it signifies. He considered the Avignon stages hardly as "cultural artifacts", calling them at best avant-garde museum pieces.

Of course, since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the practice of referring to Asian theatre forms, which is actually nothing new in Western theatre, has become increasingly controversial and been accused of cultural imperialism and even covert racism. Peter Brook's production of *Mahabharata* is one of the obvious examples regarding this situation. Mnouchkine's Shakespeare productions where she makes use of Asian theatre

---

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Gautam Dasgupta, *Review: [untitled]*, *Performing Arts Journal*, p.84

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*

forms have also been subject to such accusations. But Mnouchkine's productions are far from stereotyping or showing east as a mystic and exotic place to entertain Western audiences. Other than Gautam Dasgupta mentioned above, some French critics suggested that the style is merely a kind of exoticism inappropriate for the Western scripts she dealt with. Mnouchkine justifies her use of Asian theatre on the grounds that in her case it is not so much of purloining of the other traditions, but being influenced by them and using them just as a tool. She rejects the idea that she is performing Asian theatre on stage; she is not recreating any traditional theatre forms, which are Kabuki, Kathakali or Noh, rather her work is drawn from the films of directors like Kurasawa.

What interests me in the Asian tradition is that the actor there is a creator of metaphors. His art consists of putting passion on display, of narrating the interior of the human being...and also stories, of course. I once made a trip to Japan, a bit hippie-style. Seeing the theatre there I said to myself, 'It's like Shakespeare', even though I understood nothing of the themes or the language. And it was because the actors were wonderful. There I sensed that the goal of the actor should be to open up a man like a grenade. Not so as to put his guts on display, but to depict them, to transform them into signs, forms, movements, rhythms. Whereas in the West actors are more often taught to grit their teeth and not show what's happening.<sup>149</sup>

Why did Mnouchkine choose to use an oriental form as a metaphor for her Shakespearian productions? She had decided that she was not interested in fourteenth-century England or in Shakespeare's time. She wanted to respond to Shakespeare's game with times and places, his projections and reflections. She wanted to make Shakespeare less comfortable and stranger again, and so bring out the fundamental fury, terror, and emotion, which proceed from Shakespeare's dramatic use of 'suddenness'.<sup>150</sup>

Mnouchkine's use of Asian theatre as a technical device enables her to set free from naturalism. The actors get the chance to work on almost ancient texts to confront concerns which would be excluded by a superficially realist theatrical style.<sup>151</sup> It also permits a theatre which not only refers but also incorporates the sacred, the ritualistic. With Shakespeare's history plays, it emphasizes not only the similarities with the present but also differences between medieval and twentieth century social and political structures. For Mnouchkine the desired combination of theatricality, spectacle and the metaphorical distance from everyday

---

<sup>149</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.95

<sup>150</sup> Elsom, John, *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?*, p.34

<sup>151</sup> Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, p.94

world can be found in Asian theatre forms though she also experimented these from time to time via traditions like clowning, cabaret and *commedia dell'arte*. But she insists that standard Western naturalism is inadequate for staging Shakespeare plays. She believed that west only created 'realist' forms and that Shakespeare is not realist. For the actors who want to be explorers, she suggested they take Asian theatre forms as a basis to their studies since the very origin of theatrical form is there. The word 'form' itself, according to Mnouchkine brings Asia to mind. Asian theatre forms, she believed, are the core, the source, the origin of theatre:

We have taken Asian theatre forms of theatre as a base to work from because the very origin of theatrical form is there. And as soon as we adopted a very expressive way of performing, where the actors often play with masks and move a lot, the diction had to change: it was impossible to speak as in ordinary life. Shakespeare's text is itself masked in any case: it is not a conversation in a sitting room or a café. It is not realism but poetry. Theatre is art, and life is something different. More and more we want to perform what can only be told in the theatre. For me the theatre should be as theatrical as possible. Otherwise the cinema would beat us every time. Besides, the great cinema is theatrical.<sup>152</sup>



Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil at the Cartoucherie de Vincennes during the run of *The Shakespeare Cycle*, 1981

---

<sup>152</sup>*Ibid.*, p.97

#### 4.6 INTERCULTURAL SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare is perhaps the most staged and one of the most analyzed playwrights of all times, but Shakespeare in intercultural discourse beyond doubt deserves a closer analysis. Non-western Shakespeare productions often advertise themselves as intercultural, though it should be noted that not all non-western productions are intercultural. Yeeyon Im suggests that studies in this case have mainly developed in two directions: either focusing on the part on non-Western cultural elements in the cultural exchange, about which the studies focus mainly on the comparison of traditional Japanese/Asian theatre and Elizabethan stage, discovering the similarities between them,<sup>153</sup> or relating Shakespeare to the phenomenon of globalization. Im suggests that both approaches do not address Shakespeare as specific cultural product of his own time, but rather contribute to the mystification of Shakespeare as universal performative force.<sup>154</sup>

In most intercultural Shakespeare productions, the basic approach is the combination of the content by Shakespeare and the form by non-Western theatrical traditions – which is also the case with the Théâtre du Soleil's productions. Moreover, some productions also dominate the staging with Western realist theatre, employing foreign theatrical elements merely to decorate the production. Since interculturalism is defined as an equal exchange between cultures, the expected thing is to employ both cultures in the production. Tadashi Suzuki's and Robert Wilson's Shakespeare productions, the former cutting, rearranging and mixing the text with fragments from other classics and abandoning the idea that the director should present the aspects he is interested in, the latter shaping the text to come to its own hearing and seeing, are good examples for such an approach.

Shakespeare survived endless transformations, both in his home country England and abroad. His texts have been adapted to fit the time's interest and needs along with material conditions and aesthetics. However, what remain of him after all these adaptations is his language. Changes are allowed for visuals, acting and stage business, but not for words. Though the text itself goes through a change – at least there is the fact of translation – the meaning or better say, the feeling stays the same.

---

<sup>153</sup> Here, Yeeyon Im refers to the works such as *Shakespeare East and West*, edited by Fujita and Pronko (1996), *New Sites for Shakespeare: Theatre, the Audience and Asia* by John Russell Brown (1999) and his essays, "Shakespeare's International Currency" in *Shakespeare Survey* 51 (1998): 193-203 and "Asian Theatres and European Shakespeares" in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 138 (2002): 11-22.

<sup>154</sup> Yeeyon Im, *The Lure of Intercultural Shakespeare*, p.238

It can be said that Shakespeare is regarded not as a part of specific culture. His universality forms the basis for most intercultural productions. In other words, Shakespeare takes part in intercultural encounter, not as an Elizabethan culture, but as a playwright who delivers universal themes.

When we look at the classical example of Natum Tate's eighteenth century version of King Lear, we see that the adaptation was a rewriting of scenes and changing endings to correspond to the ethos of the age. Brecht's *Coriolanus* (1952) or Edward Bond's *Lear* (1972) reflected political issues going on at the time, while Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* expressed the existential philosophy fashionable in the early 1960s. These adaptations either offered some kind of a relation to the original or by altering the perspective created an opposition between their themes and Shakespeare's vision.<sup>155</sup>

Some adapters also opposed to the general romanticization of Shakespeare, stating that he has to be rewritten so as to use the play for ourselves, for our society, for our time and for our problems. In this case, it can be said that the most obvious reason for adapting Shakespeare's plays is to modernize them, to adapt it to our era.

Especially after 1960s, a whole series of adaptations which instead of modernizing Shakespeare emphasized the mythic elements emerged. So, in this sense, a new avant-garde and intercultural movement began in adapting Shakespeare. Peter Brook's Artaudian interpretation of *The Tempest* is a good example. Though it is Brook's *Macbeth*, which Jan Kott had defined as the "archetypal modern tragedy" in his famous *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*,<sup>156</sup> which became an avant-garde trademark.

In the case of Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil, the initial force to produce a Shakespeare cycle was to form a model to dramatize political events.

---

<sup>155</sup> Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892–1992*, p.193

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p.194

## 5. CONCLUSION: THE UNIQUE POSITION OF THE THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL WITHIN THE THEATRICAL LANDSCAPE OF INTERCULTURALISM

Broadly speaking, intercultural theatre is a theatrical attempt to bridge cultures through performance, to bring different cultures into productive dialogue with one another on the stage and with the audience as well. It is an urgent topic in the twenty-first century; as human traffic between nations and cultures both willingly and unwillingly increases, as merging of forms become highly characteristic of cultural production everywhere and as nineteenth century nationalism is replaced by twenty-first century *transnationalism*, the bounding of cultures all around the world is unavoidable. As interculturalism developed widely in this process, its reverberations in contemporary theatre has showed itself in many theatre practitioners' works, one of them being Ariane Mnouchkine and her collective theatre company, the Théâtre du Soleil.

The company's motive, right from the start have been to find a theatrical form that can be developed and improved constantly; they have always aimed at being political and popular in the sense of being 'people's theatre', and they used different forms all along: mask work, clowning, *commedia dell'arte*, puppetry, traditional Asian forms such as Japanese Kabuki and Bunraku, Beijing Opera, Indian Kathakali and Balinese dance. Mnouchkine has always dealt with experimental and innovative styles, bringing a new voice and soul to the theatre. Her trip to Asia deeply affected and changed her perspective towards theatre, and this desire to find new forms and new approaches in theatre gave resulted in intercultural productions; not only in style but also with the treatment of texts. Political as she is, Mnouchkine has never been indifferent to the events going on all around the world and she dealt with the texts, or wrote or has them written about the countries in East, not caring if Westerners cared much about the events that happen in a country they know little about.

The company's interest in Asia and Asian theatre forms reaches as far back as their first productions; the most evident example is the 1968 production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, to which Mnouchkine chose to approach anti-traditionally, stripping the text off from its prettiness and reflecting the Asian influence with the costumes and music, using Indian-like dressings and percussion instruments. Their next production, *LesClowns*, showed the departure from naturalism and moved towards a more theatrical way of representing, which can be associated with intercultural approach in the sense that they were looking for a

new form and making use of masks and *commedia dell'arte*. It was during this time that the company focused on a theatre not based on a written text.

In the search of a new form in theatre, other than using Western elements such as mask work, and *commediadell'arte*, the company's particular interest in Asian theatre forms stands out. First of all, the use of Asian theatre as a technical device enables them to set free from naturalism, a movement which no longer can be associated with contemporary theatre and which, for Mnouchkine, is inadequate for staging classical productions. Just as Grotowski's urge to go back to sources, Mnouchkine wanted to discover and apply the origin of theatre into her works, which is according to her exists only in Asian theatre forms, which narrate the interior of human-being, which gives the actor the tools of communication, and which allows one to depict a world that does not belong to everyday but is magic divine and relates to the interior universe.

As mentioned before, the company's interest in Asia is not limited to the forms only; especially Mnouchkine was very influenced by its history, its people, its literature and its political events. In their productions such as *Genghis Khan* (1961), *Norodom Sihanouk* (1985) and *L'Indiade* (1987), they used scripts explicitly set in Asia, dealt with Asian history or events in addition to references to Asian theatre forms – Kabuki-like stage settings, oriental instruments mainly consisting of percussions and even filling the stage with the smell of Asian markets as well as placing a map on the stage. These productions were subject to the accusations of orientalism, which is all alone solid evidence that they were engaging in an intercultural theatre since intercultural theatre raises the questions of cultural imperialism, appropriation and even colonization. These concepts in fact go hand in hand.

Of course it has been argued how much the Théâtre du Soleil managed to find its place in intercultural theatre, as it is defined as an equal exchange between cultures, which is also still an arguable claim. Perhaps this can be answered by noting that the company immersed themselves in Asian theatre forms since the very beginning and believed that the things that are indispensable in theatre such as gestures, formalization of relationships, alternative ways of projecting the characters, reflecting the physical rather than the verbal and close audience-actor relationship are all evident in Asian forms. This notion led them towards an intercultural approach which is basically making use of other cultures - not reflecting or recreating other cultures on stage completely per se, but using them as a tool to create a better theatre and bringing it to their own audience as well as to others – not only Easterners in this sense but

other people in the world such as other European countries - thus completing the cycle of equal sharing. It should also be noted that in this day and age where we can travel easily and quickly to wherever we want – we should be the ones pursuing the theatre, just like Mnouchkine or other theatre practitioners made trips to far-away countries to get the true sense of theatre.

It is true that Mnouchkine's fascination with Asia is a commitment that experiments with de-familiarizing forms and her experimentation with Noh, Kabuki, Bunraku and Kathakali is a participation in a more generalized intercultural turn. The theatre of Mnouchkine, or better say, of the Théâtre du Soleil is not ethnological, folkloric or 'touristic'; it constitutes a genre that is hybrid by its very nature. Although some critics raised the question whether the Asian theatre and Western theatre can be successfully fused together while keeping the essence of both, but it should be remembered that this is – or an equal exchange- is still discussed and surely, the chances of attaining it are small.

No matter what, Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil has brought a new perspective to contemporary theatre with their innovative and constantly improving styles and found themselves in the 'movement' of intercultural theatre. The discussions should not make us forget what is essential: the appreciation of the theatrical quality of the Mnouchkine's and the company's work.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Alter, Jean, *Decoding Mnouchkine's Shakespeare (A Grammar of Stage Signs)*, in *Performing Texts*, Ed., Issacharoff, Michael and Jones, F. Robin, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988

Balme, Christopher, *Decolonizing The Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*, Oxford University Press, 1999

Barba, Eugenio and Fowler, Richard, Eurasian Theatre, TDR, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), pp. 126-130, The MIT Press, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145910>

Bharucha, Rustom, *Theatre and the World, Performance and the politics of culture*, Routledge, 1990

----*Peter Brook's Mahabharata: A View From India*, in *Theatre and the World, Performance and the politics of culture*, Routledge, 1990

----*Negotiating the "River": Intercultural Interactions and Interventions*, TDR, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Autumn, 1997), pp. 31-38, The MIT Press, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146607>

Brandon, James R., *A New World: Asian Theatre in the West Today*, TDR, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer, 1989), pp. 25-50, The MIT Press, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145923>

Carlson, Marvin, *Peter Brook's The Mahabharata and Ariane Mnouchkine's L'Indiade as Examples of Contemporary Cross-cultural Theatre*, in *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, ed., Erika Fischer-Lichte, Michael Gissen-wehrer, and Josephine Riley, 49-56. Tübingen: Narr, 1990

Carlson, Marvin, *Brook and Mnouchkine Passages To India?*, in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Patrice Pavis, Routledge, 1996

Dasgupta, Gautam, *The Mahabharata: Peter Brook's "Orientalism"*, *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1987), pp. 9-16, *Performing Arts Journal, Inc.*, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245448>

Dasgupta, Gautam, *Review: [untitled]*, *Performing Arts Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1982), pp. 81-86, *Performing Arts Journal, Inc.*, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245277>

Drain, Richard, *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook*, Routledge, 1995

Dunton-Downer, Leslie and Riding, Alan, Ed. Wyse Elizabeth, *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*, DK Publishing (Dorling Kindersley), 2004

Elsom, John, *Is Shakespeare Still Our Contemporary?*, Routledge, 1989

Féral, Josette and Husemoller, Anna, *Mnouchkine's Workshop at the Soleil: A Lesson in Theatre*, TDR (1988-), Vol. 33, No. 4 (Winter, 1989), pp. 77-87, The MIT Press, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145967>

Fischer-Lichte, Erika, Gissen-wehrer, Michael and Riley, Josephine, *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, G. Narr, 1990

- Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective*, University of Iowa Press, 1997
- Fischer-Lichte, Erika, *Interculturalism In Contemporary Theatre*, in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Patrice, Pavis, Routledge, 1996
- Im, Yeeyon, *The Lure Of Intercultural Shakespeare*<http://hompi.sogang.ac.kr/anthony/mesak/mes151/YeeYonIm.pdf>
- Innes, Christopher, *Avant Garde Theatre: 1892–1992*, Routledge, 1993
- Kiernander, Adrian, *Ariane Mnouchkine and The Théâtre du Soleil*, Cambridge University Press, 1993
- Knowles, Ric. 2010. *Theatre & Interculturalism*, Palgrave, 2010
- Kott, Jan, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, Methuen, 1965
- Latrell, Craig, *After Appropriation*, TDR, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Winter, 2000), pp. 44-55, The MIT Press, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146861>
- Lo, Jacqueline and Gilbert, Helen, *Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis*: TDR, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Autumn, 2002), pp. 31-53 The MIT Press, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146995>
- Marranca, Bonnie and Dasgupta, Gautam, *Interculturalism and Performance* (PAJ Books), PAJ Publications, 2001
- Miller, G. Judith, *Ariane Mnouchkine*, Routledge, 2007
- Mnouchkine, Ariane, *The Theatre Is Oriental*, in *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Patrice, Pavis, Routledge, 1996
- Pavis, Patrice, *Theatre at The Crossroads of Culture*, Routledge, 1992
- Pavis, Patrice, *The Intercultural Performance Reader*, Routledge, 1996
- Richardson, E. Helen, *Ariane Mnouchkine and The Théâtre du Soleil: Theatricalising History; The Theatre As Metaphor; The Actor As Signifier*, in *Actor Training*, Second Edition, ed. Hodge, Alison, Routledge, 2010
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, Penguin Classics, 2003
- Schechner, R. and Appel, W. *By means of performance – intercultural studies of theatre and ritual*, Cambridge University Press, 1990
- Schechner, Richard, *Intercultural Themes*, Performing Arts Journal, Vol. 11/12, Vol. 11, no. 3 - Vol. 12, no. 1, The Interculturalism Issue (1989), pp. 151-162, Performing Arts Journal, Inc., Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3245433>
- Schechner, Richard, *Between Theatre and Anthropology*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985

Singleton, Brian, *Interculturalism*, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre & Performance*,  
Kennedy, Dennis, Routledge, 2003

Williams, David, (Ed.), *Collaborative Theatre, The Théâtre du Soleil Sourcebook*, Routledge,  
1999