

Radical Acting Techniques in Zimbabwean Street Theatre: Implications on Audience Criticality

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Abstract

Drawing on Brechtian and traditional African theoretical frameworks, this paper examines nonrealistic acting techniques and fluid manipulation of space in Zimbabwean street theatre as forms of radical innovations in performance aesthetics. Focus is on how these radical innovations are implicated in engendering, sustaining and stimulating an alert and critical audience.

Introduction

This paper interrogates how street theatre practice creates an audience with critical spirit through alienation. We argue for the need to give sufficient critical attention to street theatre which, surprisingly, has been left out of critical academic discourses on theatre. Street theatre is such a significant socializing agent, it is a subaltern discourse, that has surprisingly remained outside the canon of theatre and/as resistance (Chivandikwa, 2012; Seda, 2011, 2013) While others forms of radical and decolonizing theatre seem to have been co-opted by neoliberal agendas and western bourgeois forms of theatrical production, street theater seems to have remained an exception in affirming the 'purity' of radicalism in the theatre of decolonisation. Through a combination of Brecht and other African aesthetics, the paper interrogates **how** the use of techniques and fluid use of space help in suspending belief as theatre is conceived as a tool for social engineering and a laboratory for change (Seda, 2005). This critical distance allows the audience to reflect and challenge not only the characters in the world of the fiction, but also the creators of that world of fiction. The paper starts by examining street theatre acting techniques, analyzing how they are critical in creating an audience with the capacity for reflexive action. The section examines acting techniques arguing how they dispel the illusion of reality. The next section examines the use of song and dance, investigating how such practice is significant in dispelling a falsified picture of reality. The paper concludes with an analysis of how the use of fluid spaces liberates the spectator into a critical mode of spectatorship.

Bertolt Brecht and the Theory of Alienation

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Brecht's theory of epic theatre demonstrates how orthodox theatre was designed to disarm audiences' critical ability. Willet (1959), states that Brecht believed that orthodox theatre was thoroughly designed to prevent audiences from using their head. This is mainly because the audience, as he believed, would be drawn into the dramatic plot and unconsciously coerced in identifying themselves with the presented characters.

Brecht rallied against the idea of trying to imitate life onstage. He thus sought, through his theory of alienation to destroy conventional illusions and in so doing create a spectator who is able to critique what he sees on stage. Brecht's theory is fundamental in the interrogation of street theatre as it not only offers a resistive framework from which he, as a theorist sought to subvert realist hegemony which sought to legitimize whatever was depicted onstage but also helps in approaching performance dynamics in street theatre practice. The theory assists in analyzing performance. It offers a framework through which street theatre can be studied through respectable lens as most of what Brecht believed theatre should be coincides and fits well with street theatre practice. Brecht sought to disarticulate realism mainly because he believed that a realist approach in theatre weakened the audiences' critical response owing to its ability to entrench the mind into accepting the same fate as the characters onstage. In terms of achieving the alienation effect, he believed that the actor has a simple task, which is to distance himself from the character he is portraying and the situation he is involved in so as to arouse a critical thinking, enquiring response from the spectators. This offers a clear deviation from the Stanislavski model which requires the actor to be submerged into role and try as much as possible to resemble traits of the character he/she is playing. This theoretical inclination is crucial in examining performance in a Zimbabwean context where ironically many actors affirm Stanislavsky's dicta (see Ravengai, 2012). It is in genres such as community and street theatre that one sometimes comes across actors who adopt *avant garde* techniques. Unlike Stanislavski, Brecht believes the actor is merely a demonstrator of events. The actor/demonstrator is not required to give a perfect imitation of events or of those who were involved nor, is he required to cast a spell over the audience. As mentioned earlier, his duty is that of reporting the incident with no illusion of reality expected.

Traditions in African Performance

With some of the above outlined strategies, Brecht sought to do away with illusion onstage for the sole purpose that the Aristotelian dicta weakened man's reason and ability to critique his surroundings. Such a theoretical stance resonates with African performance aesthetics which seem to 'pre-date' Brechtian theories (Abubaka, 2009). Abubaka analyses the use of epic theory in creating a crit-

ical audience that is detached from dramatic action in modern African theatre. His argument is based on the assumption that modern African theatre mainly focuses on audiences in making them critical throughout the theatrical experience. He assesses audience/actor interaction in modern African theatre, analysing how the theatre distances audiences from dramatic action. Abubaka argues that the traditional African performance has strong alienation effects which to a large extent resemble Brechtian dicta. However, Abubaka argues that the use of alienation methods such as song and dance is used to reinforce audience understanding of events whereas this paper argues that such technique is utilised without any effort to try and interpret dramatic action.

Seda (2005) presents a comparative analysis of Epic theatre and traditional storytelling, which in his argument, is the root of African performances. Seda is of the view that the epic theory of Brecht has similarities with African performance tradition. He goes at length to establish the similarities between African performance tradition and Brecht's theories, posting that both practices were largely concerned with the utilitarian function to teach. This paper builds from Seda (2005) and Abubaka's (2009) contribution in examining how the effect of 'Epic' methods on the audience and how street theatre denounces bourgeoisie aesthetics in favor of African related forms. Seda notes how traditional African storytelling makes use of staging technicalities such as presentational styles, minimum stage properties, non-illusionistic sets and costumes in a way that reminds the audience that what they are witnessing is indeed a performance, with the sole aim of teaching and arousing audience critical engagement.

Ravengai (2011) contends that the psychological system of acting, largely drawn from European realism is not favorable for the African actor. He draws his arguments from the various theories which view the body as a carrier of culture and individuals' surroundings, and thus, the African body, cannot be effective in communicating a Western theory. The argument here is Western realism is different from the African experience, thus African actors, who are not exposed to European lifestyles may find it hard to express themselves using a Western realistic style of acting. Ravengai's submissions are critical in theorising a subaltern urban theatrical practice. This paper argues that street theatre rejects elite aesthetics by making use of alienation methods which help in encoding the performer's experiences. Finnegan (as cited in Ravengai, 2011) observes that the African performer exudes more energy and movement and this style of presentation is not generally in vogue in Western art performance aesthetics (2011, p. 48). Ravengai's findings help in situating street theatre as a radical and resistant practice. Whereas Ravengai analysed University of Zimbabwe acting class students, this paper seeks to use his findings in examining how street theatre subverts dominant art which

largely borrows from realism, and how this process is implicated in fostering a critical audience. While there is an element of resistance, most university productions and professional theatre groups have generally failed to dispense with realist techniques, street theatre therefore, becomes an interesting point of departure in the discourse of acting, performance aesthetics and radicalism.

Exaggeration and movement in Street theater Acting

Dominant theatre insists in the creation of believable actions and movement. (McGaw *et al.*, 2004) postulates that the fundamental responsibility of the actor to the audience is to induce their belief in actions and movements portrayed on stage. According to this school of thought acting and movement is a matter of make believe. Action in this practice is derived from the given circumstances and action should be 'logical' in depicting situational reactions.

However, in street theatre, we are faced with actions and characters that do not seem to logically tally with given circumstances. There is use of exaggerated actions and movements and according to Mason (1992), exaggeration is critical in street theatre as it helps in retaining audiences at performances. Characters in street theatre do not seem to make an effort in constructing realistic reactions. Movement and action is not geared at impersonating character and such techniques attacks familiar conventions of our daily expressions, violating audience expectations of dramatic forms and comfortable expectations about movement and action (see Wabvuta, 2014).

'Tinopesana'

This play which was performed by Vahombe theatre productions at Copa cabana focuses on the escapades of a mischievous cigarette vendor. The play does not have a linear plot through which it narrates events. The play is characterised by a series of scenarios and events through which it traces the roguish nature of the vendor. *Tinopesana* was first acted in 2010 and has been one of the group's most recycled plays. The play hinges around the exploits of the notorious vendor, Ghetto, who tries to lure Comrade (Henceforth Cde), a beautiful and voluptuous woman.

Actors deploy amplified movements which do not reflect character's inner state. Rather, gestures and movements were aimed at evoking a comic effect. The play opens with the vendor pacing up and down the stage and at times he moves within audiences, marketing his cigarettes. Onstage, there is no property or spectacle to suggest the vocation of the character. This production exemplifies Brecht's (1964) use of limited properties as the acting space is left bare allowing audiences to focus on the story being narrated. Ghetto, who plays the cigarette vendor starts touting for custom-

ers whilst offstage, and this draws the attention of the audience. The actor appears from the audience through a vomitory entry; an inconsistent and unspecified entrance point. As he gets onstage, he narrates his business of the day, introducing himself and his profession. He remarks:

“nhasi kune kachando saka fodya yangu ichatengwa yese”

(Today is a little bit cold thus I should be able to sell all my cigarettes).

As Ghetto proceeds to look for customers, he paces the whole acting space at a fast speed, at the same time interacting with audiences as he lures them to buy his products. He assumes a military gait and posture. The pace at which he moves does not seem to communicate the character's intentions or state of mind. His speed even makes it impossible for any willing buyer to purchase his product. The character does not attempt to make connection with possible clientele. Rather, it seems the movement is meant to stir up comic effect from audiences. At the same time, one can argue that Ghetto's movements mimic how life has become so fast and yet in trying to catch up, we achieve nothing. Coupled with fast movements, the character assumes an animal like figure leaving audiences in stitches. He walks with his head tilted upwards and his jeans are buckled way above the waistline-resembling an animal figure.

With the use of amplified body configurations and movements, street theater disrupts dominant acting styles which sought to depict and resurrect realism onstage. At one point Ghetto displays a feigned desperation to sell his cigarettes through repeated thoughtless verbal or visual gags, for comic effects. Ghetto repeatedly motioned at a lady in the audience asking her if she was interested in purchasing cigarettes. However, the hand signal was not in sync with the dialogue. Bizarrely, the gesture seemed romantic. Such gestures are in no way meant to make audience believe that action onstage is real.

After about two minutes of the 'dramatic sale', a woman appears from another vomit entry from within the audience. This character is named Cde. Cde walks across the stage slowly and intentionally swinging her bum from side to side in a seductive manner. Her entrance and movement at once draw a loud roar from the spectators. She exaggerates hip movements placing emphasis on isolating her bum in the process. In response Ghetto is numbed at the sight of this goddess of beauty. At this stage, the male audience members are excited at the entrance of Cde. It should be noted that the female body is regarded in high esteem and is a sensitive subject in Zimbabwean society (see Demhe, 2010). Yet, the female body is expected to be covered at all times, worn in clothing that do not reveal huge chunks of flesh or garments that are not too tight so as to reveal the frame of the body.

Any form of exposure which parallels the above situates that given body in a space where the woman is deemed loose, or rather craving for sexual intercourse. At Cde's entrance, women in the audiences were divided in their reactions as others laughed at the male audiences' response, whereas the other section seem irked at the 'provocative' portrayal of the female figure. The once energetic salesman comes to a halt, freezes, holds his mouth with eyes opened wide and holds his genitals as a sign of 'disguising' an erection. Within a few seconds, Ghetto falls to the ground flat.

The external and exuberant acting style prevents the audience from being drawn into the illusion of reality and serves to awaken audience critical awareness. This acting style resists a falsified picture of reality (Ravengai, 2011; Willet, 1959, p. 166) and through the use of exaggerated movements and gestures audiences are not hypnotised by action onstage.

As the scene progresses Cde drops a coin, which she slowly proceeds to pick. By this time, Ghetto is on the ground drooling with lust. He dramatically jumps up and runs up behind her as if to attend a customer adjacent to Cde. In this instance, the female audience members laugh at the seemingly exaggerated actions as they can be heard randomly protesting the overplaying of character. Such response from the female audience members proves that the audiences are aware of the performance event, thus making them able to critically engage action on set. Ghetto, on the other hand, fallaciously communicates with the imaginary customer and in the process gets very close to Cde's buttocks. All the while, Cde is aware of what is happening behind her and she slowly gets up, turns around and smiles at Ghetto who, at the time, believes the gods have smiled on him. Ghetto puts a huge smile and with eyes shut, he leans forward for a kiss. His facials are exaggerated with protruding lips, ready for the kiss. He leans forward for a kiss which never comes only to be awakened by a rowdy clap on the cheek and a fight erupts. For once it seems the whole stage is overwhelmed by the energy of the two actors. Such is the rapidness of their movements, jumping, running and leaping as they warm up for the fight that Ghetto calls for time out to rest before they brawl.

After a while, two characters appear onstage and restrain the fighters. Such is the heightened 'confusion' onstage that communication at this juncture becomes impossible. Everyone is shouting and screaming without listening. Cde throws her arms everywhere and makes animal like facials in protest. On the other hand, Ghetto grins and periodically sits on the ground, in anger. The movements and gestures are externalised, and they are detached from the character's inner life.

The use of externalised movements serves to remind the audience of the theatre event as there is no effort to make believe action on stage. As actors continue dodging the fight, audiences can be heard shouting and urging the actors to get on with action. One female audience member shouted in disgust:

Une shuwa kurwa nemukadzi?

(Are you sure to fight with a woman?)

To which sections of the male audiences could be heard laughing as they shouted back:

Handiti mukadzi wacho ibhuru

(The woman thinks she is tough)

The above scenario reflects audience interaction with the play, an element which encourages critical participation from audience members. Audiences are not passive but critical recipients of messages embedded within the given text. These techniques, rooted in traditional African aesthetics, emanate from the philosophy that theatre is an active and critical space for sharing ideas, contestation and human communion (Abubaka, 2009).

Use of split/bifurcated characters

Split characters according to Castagno (2001) are characters that are able to transform into other characters or objects as opposed to constant or fixed characters found in realist tradition. The use of split characters is usually associated with *avant garde* movements. The use of split characters rejects realist bourgeoisie tradition which seeks to reproduce reality on set (Ravengai, 2001; Brecht, 1964; Boal, 1985). Ravengai (2001) that the use of split characters expresses the true complexities of life and according to Chikonzo (2011), fixed characters limit the exploration of possible conflicts within the given text.

The use of split characters in street theatre signifies deviance from existing acting traditions. Interestingly, supposedly radical political protest plays mostly relied on the use of fixed characters, (Chivandikwa, 2012; Chikonzo, 2011), and the extent to which street theatre makes use of this technique is beyond doubt unprecedented. The technique of split characters functions to intensify both conflict and comic effects. The technique is further used as a platform through which performers showcase their talents. Street theatre actor Ghetto, (2014 Interview) states that,

theatre ndeyekuratidza zvatinogona kuvanhu

(Theatre is meant to showcase our talents to the people)

This is in sync with Brecht's (1964) findings where he states that, in acting there should be no identification of actor with character but enjoyment of skill and sensual impact.

In the play *'Tinopesana'* (there will be trouble), Ghetto transforms into a talking police dog. Hysterically, Ghetto says, *"ndakumboita imbwa"* (I am transforming into a dog). Aesthetically, the statement disrupts dominant theatrical presentation style. In the dominant realist tradition, theatre actors are not expected to narrate their action but rather act them out. Ghetto then transforms and becomes a talking dog and he hysterically exhausts the whole stage barking loudly. Periodically, the dog speaks to the audience asking whether and whom it should bite. The playing out of this particular scene is so comic and always gets the audience laughing, yet amid this laughing, audience criticality is still maintained. In one instance, one man from the audience shouted, *"iwe ita munhu ubate bhebhi iro"* (transform into a human and smooch that girl). To which a female audience member replied in protest saying that such behavior was abusive as men take advantage of women. This intervention was critical as it addressed current debates on the social scene where women activists are protesting against dress related abuse by men in Harare. The above reveals the intricate levels of audience participation in the presentation of these stories and confirms audience critical participation.

After a few minutes of barking and running round the stage, Ghetto stands up, cleans himself and assumes a human character in full view of the audience. He then says, *"zvekuita imbwa zvinonetsa"* (it is hard being a dog). After cleaning himself he quickly joins the fight onstage. In this case, character preparation is done in full view of the audience. In traditional African theatrical performances, there are no strict restrictions to both the performer and the spectator, and this liberates them to flexibly improvise in ways that call upon the inventiveness of both the actor and the spectator (Abubaka, 2009).

As soon as Ghetto joins the fight, Penzura remarks, *"iwe imbwa ibva pano"* (you dog get away from here) to which Ghetto replies, *"wakamboona imbwa inomira nemakumbo two"* (have you ever seen a dog on two feet). This remark by Penzura escalates into a physical fight and this fight has no specific psychological motivation. It is a 'mere' spectacular event within the narrative.

In the play *'Mwana wangu Yogie'*, performed at Copa cabana, Aphiri plays the character of a bewitched neighbor and in the same play he plays the husband of mai Yogie, the witch. All these character transformations take place without changes in terms of actor outlook or design. There is no effort to alter actor outlook in justifying their new state. Such a setting thus forces audiences to follow stories being told rather than believe as reality action portrayed on stage. Chinweizu, in Ravengai (2001), states that the African universe is vast and limitless, and therefore, African performers do not labor to induce believability. Actors just appear in the same costume and make up,

with the same vocal intonation and body configuration and claim to be a different character and audiences are automatically engaging with a different scenario without drastic make believe steps.

In one scene, Aphiri accuses mai Yogie of bewitching him because she is jealous of his success in life:

Amai Yogie vakandimakira imba yangu yandikuvaka, mukadzi wangu akanaka nevana vangu.

(The woman hates me because of my new house under construction, my beautiful wife and my children)

In this scene, character relationships are clearly specified with the neighbors, mai Yogie and Aphiri all onstage at the same time and are at loggerheads over a suspected witchcraft act. The scene ends with Marabha exiting the stage leaving Aphiri and mai Yogie alone. At this point the actors acquire new roles and a new relationship. Aphiri says:

"Mukadzi wangu handei kunorara"

(My wife lets go and sleep).

This line is the transition marker as it signifies character shift. It becomes apparent from the line that actors have acquired a new state of being. Audiences seem shell shocked at the sudden and unannounced character changes. Audiences are dumbfounded at the new relationships that characters assume without any technical or design justification. The once estranged neighbors have suddenly become a couple who live together authenticating that the absurd world is a land of possibilities. Here, we argue that street theatre transcends Brecht's epic theatre in that Brecht's audiences ended up emotionally attached to the dramatic action against Brecht's intentions (see Eslin, 1959). It should be noted that street theatre's radical approach leaves little room for audiences to emotionally attach to action on stage. By making use of techniques that out rightly shock audience members, street theatre achieves high levels of audience detachment from the spell of illusion, thus prompting a critical approach. In this instant, the use of split characters also helps in exploring multiple contexts; a task seemingly impossible if they would utilise fixed characters.

Character-actor relationship

This section serves to examine actors' empathic distance to character. It serves to interrogate how the idea of character is treated in street theater. The section will make use of the play *Mwana wangu Yogie* which was acted out on the 12th May 2014 corner Robert Mugabe Street and Leopold Takawira Street. *Mwana wangu Yogie* is a play performed by Yambiro Theatre productions. The play focuses on the evils of Mai Yogie who plays an abusive mother to her young daughter and at one point plays witch to her neighbors and husband. Through this character, the play manages to focus

on various themes such as child abuse, religion and social relations within society. The performance was staged in an arena setting, with audiences standing throughout the duration of the show and demarcating the performance space.

According to Keuris (1996), the actor character relationship can be differentiated between actor and character, where focus, in realism is accorded to the fictional character. The actor is the one who presents the character. However, according to Brecht (1964), the actor should be alienated from the action he is presenting onstage. Brecht, through his alienation theory rejects complete conversion of the actor into a character. According to him, the actor should not impersonate but rather his duty is to narrate a story. In traditional African acting, criticism of a role by the actor is actually mandatory (Abubaka, 2009).

Equally in street theatre, actors do not identify nor seek to truthfully resemble characters they are presenting. Actors keep themselves free from the 'trance' and actors do not burden themselves with trying to portray emotions but rather they only demonstrate human relations. The inner life of the character is deemed less important and the story becomes the main point of interest. The actor character relationship is broken, with the actor detached from character.

The relaxed atmosphere allows audiences to participate without mental barricades as they are allowed to interfere with action. Acting becomes stylized where gestures and voice are divorced from supposed emotions. What remains thus is the story which provides the point of interest and not characters (see Basuki, 2002).

This approach creates an audience that can reflect on life and are equipped to act on their world. In the second scene, two neighbors find a goblin in Mai Yogie's field and it becomes interesting to note how the supposed victims do not seem frightened by the witchcraft act. Whereas the Stanislavski model demands truthful reaction in given circumstances, street theatre dispels the playing out of truthful reactions in the dramatic situation. In the play, Mai Yogie's witchcraft act is a cause of major concern. However, in portraying reactions in the given situation, Aphiri and Marabha distance themselves from inner emotions. In their dialogue, actors make clear the fact that goblins are dangerous and could easily inflict harm on the intended victims. This, however, is not reflected in their external reactions. When Aphiri and Marabha find the goblin they stare at the audience, whilst making strange and funny faces. Marabha cajoles the goblin and plays with it as if handling a baby. Marabha says, "*unoziya kuti chidhoma chinouraya?*" (Do you know that a goblin can kill you?). Marabha smiles

to reveal his missing three teeth-thus drawing a loud cheer from audience. This allows audiences to focus on the presentation of the story rather than empathizing with character. Marabha in this instance makes use of his missing teeth to aid spectator detachment from the text. The result is that the events being staged gain eminence over dramatic characters, fostering and engaging the audience to awaken to the reality of the issues being dramatised.

At times actors transform into spectators. In *'Mwana wangu yogie*, actors do not impersonate character. Whereas realist tradition demands that actors stay in character for the duration of the production, in this play however, actors await for their cues to come into action. When actors are not in action, they join audience members in a liminal state. As they stand as actors/audiences, they watch the play, emotionally detaching themselves from the action onstage. They also engage with audiences on action on set. As Aphiri visits mai Yogie, the prophetess, Marabha who is standing in the audience warns Aphiri. Audiences in turn join in proffering suggestions/warnings. However, most audiences warn Marabha of the dangers of engaging self-styled prophets. They warn him that he is only bound to lose his money to the prophetess/trickster. This is interesting considering the wave of stories that made headlines involving deceitful practices from self-styled prophets. On the other hand, it is also interesting to note how the subaltern rejects abuse of spiritual power from his subaltern counterpart, as self-styled prophets are mainly familiar with the subaltern. This fosters and enhances interplay between cast and audiences.

In *Tinopesana* Penzura, Cde and Ghetto are involved in a physical brawl. Moments into the fight, Ghetto withdraws from the fight citing that he is tired. He thus retires to being an audience member and follows action from the sidelines. After he retires to the sidelines, he becomes the most vocal audience member as he cheers on the rest of the cast who are still fighting. This practice clearly disrupts dominant practice as actors freely walk in and out of character. This is a radical understanding of performance practice. Whereas Brecht opts for the actor who presents a character, street theatre practice presents the actor who presents a character and also transforms into an audience member. At times actors onstage are not engaged with the action and they stare at the actors in action awaiting their cue to participate in the proceedings. At one point, in a play entitled *'Mabasa'* by Kapfupi (performed at First Street), actors would even laugh at some of the cast's improvisations. Kapfupi approaches a bald headed man in the audience and he says, *"baba ava vane musoro unenge tsapfu yako Marabha"* (this man's head is like Marabha's calf). This comment drew a lot of laughter in the audiences who then started shouting, *usadaro madzibaba vane mari yekuchengeta mhuri dzedu* (do not do that to the religious man as he has enough money to take care of our families). This contribu-

tion was interesting as it stimulated amongst other things, religious debate as the apostolic sect (madzibaba) is famous amongst other things for allowing polygamy. Through comedy and satire, the above was a commentary on the polygamous nature of the apostolic sect, also known as white garment churches. This raised interesting debate and questions such as, is polygamy an evil in Africa? It should be noted that as much as Western liberalism seems to tolerate divorce and other forms of 'problematic' marriages, African polygamy, is not as evil as implied by Eurocentric discourses. (See Shurtleff & Goddard, 2005). In this instance, audiences were directly confronting not only Western belief systems with regard to polygamy, but they also challenged spiritual imperialism perpetuated through Pentecostal churches and mainline churches whose headquarters and doctrines are directly and indirectly rooted in Western ideology. Through radical performance tactics, the play gives impetus to engage conventional beliefs through critical audience interaction. Some audience members challenged subtle spiritual imperialism that was embedded in the performance text.

Song and Dance

Traditional African performance has always included song and dance. Song and dance have always played an integral part in African performances these are used as tools to further the plot and involve audiences into the narratives (Abubaka, 2009; Chivandikwa, 2003, Chifunye, 1994). Song and dance serve as a catalyst for collective participation as much as to entertain.

However, it is interesting to note how song and dance is incorporated in street theatre practice. Whereas song and dance has largely been incorporated in Zimbabwean theatre, they have been included to aid the dramatic action. Protest theatre plays such as *Rituals* and *The Coup* have incorporated song and dance in such way so as to aid the dramatic plot, with movements and lyrics assisting in exploring and commenting on the dramatic situation.

In street theatre, song and dance is incorporated to achieve an alienation effect. Street theatre, as in absurd tradition (Ravengai, 2001), includes independent texts such as songs and dance within a theatrical text. However, the inclusion of such texts does not aide the dramatic plot as the texts do not depict or aid dramatic situations (see Esslin, 1959, p. 122), therefore alienating the audience from the illusion of reality.

Huya uone, a play performed by Vahombe Arts Productions, is punctuated by the use of music and dance which seems irrelevant to the dramatic situation. Song and dance become important in that they help in retaining audiences as they allow for high energy displays from the cast. Audience num-

bers always grow as songs are performed accompanied by strong drumming, percussion, vocals and dancing. Sometimes, it is difficult to ascertain the meaning behind the songs as performers make use of fewer lyrics and concentrate more on dances and acrobatic displays. In most cases, music and dance is used to start the theatre event. This is because street theatre plays do not operate on a strict time table and thereby do not use the traditional marketing tools such as poster and brochures. Rather, they rely on the use of music and loud sounds to signal the start of a show (see Mason, 1992; Chiwanza, 2003; Mtetwa, 2003).

In the third scene, Ghetto and Hotsoup are about to take part in a boxing match which is interrupted by Cde's appearance. The troupe, led by Penzura, takes to the stage to perform a song '*madhidhi*'. The song is delivered in gibberish and this always keeps audiences asking and wondering what the song is all about. The gibberish lyrics are sung over two bars and the rest of the performance erupts into a dance session accompanied by strong drumming and acrobatics. Tension is dissolved as the cast unites to excite audience members. The lyrics, dance movements and spatial considerations do not depict the dramatic tension or follow through with the themes of the play. Such practice, we argue, gives audiences time to reflect on what has been previously dramatised and also prevents actors from identifying themselves with the characters they are presenting.

In the first scene when Ghetto scores against Hot soup, the actor, in celebration sings, "*Ndakabva naye kure kure kwamurambinda, kuuya Harare ndichiti ndamuwana*" (I came with her all the way from Murmbinda, brought her to Harare thinking I have found my love). Interestingly this song is a famous old school love song released in the early 90s. The song has no attachment to action on-stage. However, when Ghetto scores the controversial goal, actors relinquish dramatic tension and take to the stage in song. In this instance, a section of the audience joined to sing the famous song. The performers then went about handpicking audiences to join in the dance on to create rapport between audiences and cast. In this instance, audience direct involvement in the text is critical as it creates a relaxed atmosphere which allows audiences to freely participate in the text. The song was performed for close to three minutes and actors reverted back to the dramatic situation. In reverting back to the acting, actors chased away the audiences who had joined them, taunting and chiding them for 'intruding' into the performance space, much to the delight of the rest of the spectators. Here it is critical to note how song and dance best reflect the complex ways in which performance space is conceived. It is simultaneously revered and subverted. In the last section we briefly examine one aspect of spatiality in street theatre.

Fluid use of space

We focus on how street theatre resorts to fluid use of performance spaces. Mason (1992) calls such performances, journeys. Journeys are characterised by different theatrical events staged in a series of different locations. The beauty about such performances is that performance space is not fixed and according to Mason, the use of different locations provides stimulates audiences according to changing environments. This concept has the ability to reach an unsuspecting audience. Journeys demand that audiences move along in order to see the show. To some extent, such shows are characterised by interspersed static scenes.

We briefly refer to an interesting point when actors made use of the new environment as performance navigated through space. In one instance, action moved through the terminus where there is a green vegetable market. Aphiri then disguised to buy tomatoes so as to quench Mai Yogie's anger. He went behind the vending stall and used the stall as an obstacle so as to avoid Mai Yogie. At this stage, action revolved around the vending stall until Mai Yogie caught up with Aphiri. The use of this space allowed audiences to follow action critically as they were consciously aware of the performance event. Audiences could be heard laughing and one of them signaled that the actors had to pay for the tomatoes since no one would want to buy them after they had touched them with 'unsanitized' hands. Interestingly, we see how an 'awakened' audience alerted performers on the ethical implications of their play because of the way it negatively impacted on a real life situation. It has to be noted that street theatre's concept of the journey is not hinged on using predetermined environment. Whereas Mason's concept of the journey is cite specific and predetermined, street theatre in Zimbabwe adopts a radical approach in which events dictate the ordering of the drama as opposed to actors determining where action will be situated. The use of unspecified location within the mobile drama allows for audiences mixing with real life events. This use of random spaces jerks audiences out of illusion.

Conclusion

We hope to have demonstrated how Zimbabwean Street theatre resonates with, while simultaneously transcending Euro-American *avant garde* theatre, which is credited for its stylistic and thematic radicalism. Our focus has been on how innovative approaches to acting and the fluid use of space are implicated in engendering a critical audience that challenges events and characters in the fictional world, the context that gave rise to that world, as well as the creators of that fictional context. We hold that these innovations constitute immense radicalism in non-realist performance aesthetics that deserve serious academic respect and attention.

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