

GOAL ORIENTED THEATRE IN THE WINTERVELD

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A Report of a Workshop held at the De Wildt Catholic Mission from 26 November 1979 culminating in a performance at the Roman Catholic Church at Klipgat on Sunday 2 December 1979.

In non-literate societies the performance of rituals provided a means of reinforcing traditional beliefs, social stability and transmitting successful patterns of behaviour necessary for the survival or welfare of the group. It functioned as an awareness and information centre for those who lived without the benefits of the Caxton or Gutenberg inventions. This was the function of theatre in most societies until the intervention of technology and major socio-economic shifts which resulted in the development of the information and entertainment media.

Today in Third World countries or those which exhibit certain third world characteristics or problems, such as South Africa, drama or theatre may be used in the dissemination of new cultural and political concepts, in the introduction of new living patterns and attitudes. It may be used as a technique for initiating non-literate, semi-literate or newly-emerging industrial societies to the benefits of Western technology, especially in the fields of education, health, agriculture, social interaction and responsibility. It is able to raise levels of self and social awareness and to provide the individual with insights into the actual conditions of his life and the environment in which he finds himself. In this way it is hoped to open up initiative for independent thought and action and to motivate change and development.

This theatre is specifically goal-orientated and to be successful it must operate within the cultural parameters of the people for whom it is intended. The aim is not to impose outside ideas or attitudes on the group but to stimulate individual perception and progress and to discover ways of communicating these insights to fellow-members within the vernacular of their own language and cultural experience.

The most profound and meaningful theatrical event is that which reaches the individual at the most accurate and authentic levels of his personal and social sensibilities: the truths he knows and recognises. Aesthetics are irrelevant: social involvement and interaction are paramount.

The workshop conducted in BophutaTswana arose out of the circumstances, deprivations and needs of a specific community, that of the Winterveld. This is an area of some 225 km² which lies about 35 km north of Pretoria, within the borders of BophutaTswana. It has a population in excess of 500 000 people or possibly as many estimate, in the region of 750 000. Approximately 80% of the population live in the Stakaneng (shanty town) area which covers only 12% of the total area (Benso, 1978).

The land was originally zoned for agricultural small-holdings of 12ha and 25ha plots which were bought by black landowners from as far back as 1938. The agricultural nature of the area was radically changed in the early 1960's by the culmination of a number of factors: the inauguration of border industries within a 20 km radius of Winterveld; the displacement of nearly two million farm labourers due to increased farm mechanisation; the abolition of black labour tenancies and black squatters from white farms; the demolition of and removal of inhabitants from black townships outside Pretoria, such as Eastwood and Lady Selbourne, with insufficient alternative accommodation. These factors combined to cause an enormous influx of 'squatters' who crowded onto the 12ha small-holdings, renting land on which to erect houses from the original landowners.

The South African influx control laws do not operate in the Winterveld and thus it has been fairly easy for people to move there when they have been endorsed out of other areas. Furthermore Winterveld is attractive because of its fairly close proximity to employment possibilities; the alternative of Bronkhorstspuit offers far more limited opportunities for work. All tenants who arrived after 1970 however, are considered illegal and are subject to continual police harassment.

The 'squating problem' in Winterveld was regarded by the South African Government as temporary, and no attempt was made to develop a suburban infrastructure apart from a well-constructed main road and an efficient bus service which bears testimony to the large numbers of commuters who daily travel to work in Pretoria, Johannesburg and other Reef towns. There are a few essential telephone connections but no electricity, sewerage or water systems. Water must be purchased at landowners' boreholes for 4c or 5c a litre. Pit-latrines often exist in close proximity to the boreholes and this leads to serious contamination of the water supply. The diseases which accompany poverty and unhygienic living conditions are prevalent: dysentery, gastro-enteritis, kwashiorkor, bronchitis, bilharzia and measles. Ten private doctors, two clinics and a hospital at Ga-Rankuwa serve the needs of the community of over 500 000 people (Matsetela, 1979).

Unemployment, seen as a direct result of the government's policy of restricted registration for work permits, is the root cause of much of the dissatisfaction. Since the declaration of the independence of BophutaTswana in 1978, only registered Tswana nationals are entitled to legal employment, housing and schooling. This issue is further complicated by the presence of many more non-Tswanas than Tswanas in the area and by the reluctance of the non-Tswanas to forfeit work opportunities in the Republic (there is insufficient work available in the homeland) or their own tribal identity, such as Ndebele or Shangaan, and suffer the indignities and restriction of carrying a BophutaTswana passport.

Although the Winterveld was a heritage from the South African Government, it now falls under the jurisdiction of BophutaTswana which has initiated removal programmes of its own to alleviate the overcrowded slum conditions. 'Illegal' inhabitants are 'removed' further into an underdeveloped wasteland with even less viable living conditions than those under which they presently live. Thus problems of indentification and insecurity (they can be forced with removal at any moment) are paramount. There is, therefore, great suspicion and fear about open discussion and protest amongst the majority of the inhabitants.

The initial impetus for the workshop came from a headmaster at a school in the area of Klipgat: he had requested a pump and a generator from the Church

Council to provide electricity for nightclasses and to bring the borehole on his property into efficient operation. The original idea was to structure a workshop and performance around the conditions of that particular area and to highlight the advantages that could accrue if people combined their energies to promote progress within their own communities.

The workshop was directed by Barney Simon, a South African writer and theatre director, who has conducted many similar projects in the Transkei, Zululand and in Mafeking, Bophuthatswana. The Reverend Jimmy Palos, a Methodist Minister, initiated the programme after hearing Mr Simon discuss his work at a symposium on malnutrition, held at the Medical School in Johannesburg. Mr Simon suggested that the workshop deal with the actual circumstances, deprivations and needs of the specific community of Winterveld. The participants all shared a common knowledge and understanding of the community, and were committed to devising a course of action which would at least help the community workers and their communities to a greater awareness of the nature of their problems and to a strategy for dealing with them. The work was to be organic to the lives of the people who participated in the workshop and who created the final programme: the material and the content of their lives structured the work.

A significant aspect of Simon's approach is his refusal to superimpose his own solutions and attitudes on the work. His main function is to act as a catalyst and to make the participants of his workshops aware of the existence of other possibilities which they are then encouraged to take up and explore in terms of their own experience and situation, to stimulate them to discover actions which could be potent in improving the qualities of their lives.

Simon describes his method as sensitivity training directed 'toward opening participants' minds to the realities of communication. The ignorance of a student or patient exists as the responsibility of the teacher until it ends.

The patient who seems stupid, for example, might only be tired because he has walked 20 miles to the hospital. If the nurse understands this, she will be more patient and he more receptive to her message.

Essential to this work are some basic attitudes which not only dictate the process but also influence the approach with which the graduates are urged to apply their discoveries to action in the larger community. The first is that the work must occur within the cultural parameters of the people for whom it is intended. People must be approached and spoken to in a vocabulary which is meaningful for them and applicable to their conditions of existence. It is senseless advising a community to grow vegetables to combat malnutrition if there is insufficient water available in the area. One has to confront the real issues first, namely that of the water insufficiency.

This attitude was expressed in the work programme by encouraging and valuing expression in the participant's own language and by urging them to formulate the content of the work out of their own experience. They were also encouraged to use traditional rhythms (to which lyrics were created) and dances to make the material familiar and easier to assimilate.

The second prerequisite for the work is trust. The workshop as a whole could be considered an exercise in trust. Mr Simon put it this way:

"Initially trust in me is essential and then it spreads. As an understanding grows a leadership emerges and I can fade. In fact, most of the work and discussion happens at my instigation in a

vernacular which I don't have."

The necessity for trust in the practical application of the work he expressed thus:

"You can have the best pills in the world for curing TB, but unless the patient trusts you, it is useless because he will flush it down the toilet or throw it out the window and your treatment will be useless."

The trust develops with the sensitivity and awareness exercises as the participants gain insight and develop confidence to initiate their own ideas and actions. It arrives with an excitement of their individual potency.

The participants were composed as follows: 5 scholars (2 girls and 3 youths) from the high school which was situated on the grounds of the Mission where the workshop was held: 2 health educators, 2 nutrition educators, 2 nursing sisters, 2 youth workers, 5 'Bible women', a priest who was deeply involved in the community work, a psychologist with an MA degree who was involved with research and teaching at the Medical University in the area, a nurse who came from Soweto who was involved with medical research, social work and who served on the organising committees of a number of community orientated organisations in Soweto.

The group was composed of 6 males and the rest females and the ages ranged from 17 to 51. The Bible women were generally older than the others who were in their twenties or early thirties. Thus although all the members were involved in community work of one sort or another, there were strong discrepancies between attitudes, educational levels and intellectual grasp - which ranged from the MA psychologist to the Bible women who lacked specific skills - their main activity was home-visiting, sick-caring and evangelising.

Most of the group felt a lack of satisfactory communication with their patients or the people amongst whom they worked. The main reason given for wanting to attend the course was the desire to learn guidelines in order to improve these communications: they wanted to achieve additional skills which they could then re-invest in their own community work. Some of the participants had been sent by superiors and were uncertain what to expect; others, especially the nurses, had heard of Mr Simon's previous work and were eager to participate in a similar programme; the scholars had been selected by their schools.

Many participants arrived with note-books and pencils indicating their expectation of formal lectures and were unprepared for the methods that Mr Simon used. It took time for them to adapt and to understand that the programme was aimed at learning through self-discovery and self-realisation. The obvious advantage of the latter procedure is that it encourages the development of initiative and insight through the actual experience whilst formal learning concentrates on the dissemination of facts.

A member of the group expressed this difficulty as the result of the indoctrination techniques of Black education where individuals were schooled to accept what was given them materially, spiritually and educationally: they rarely questioned for themselves and were reticent in using their own initiative. This attitude was especially evident in the Bible women who belonged to an older and more subservient generation, they were less educated and very Church orientated and dominated: all questions were solved in terms of religious dogma or prayer. Their treatment of specific situations was idealistic in a community whose problems are so much closer to survival level and whose inhabitants were more in need of practical advice and help.

The effect of the workshop can be seen in the remarks of one of the Bible women, who said that the work had made her realise that there were many different ways of seeing a problem and, as necessary as prayer was, she understood that practical and positive solutions were essential. However, in general it seemed as if the Bible women were more closed and did not gain as much benefit or as clear an insight into the processes as did the others.

This lack of homogeneity caused an imbalance in the work although the more sophisticated members of the group showed respect and tolerance towards the Bible women during discussions. This was probably due to the standard religious background of the group: each member participated fully in prayers which were led by the Bible women to start and conclude the day.

A description of the day-to-day activities follows in order to show the exact process of the work and to give an insight into the progress.

DAY ONE

Everyone introduced themselves by giving their name, marital status, occupation, address and reasons for coming to the group. Mr Simon gave a description of his background, and the work he had done in this field and stressed the importance of trust and careful communication with the people with whom one came into contact. He defined the aims of the group as exploring direct methods of communication, rather than merely describing or talking about communication through formal lectures.

Simon told the well-known story of a nurse who gave a lecture on infection to an unsophisticated audience. She had placed a magnified diagram of a fly behind her to illustrate her points. At the end of the talk an old woman in the audience thanked her for her efforts and offered special thanks to God that flies of that size did not exist in her area. In such a community it was necessary to pass flies around in matchboxes to be seen. The group responded well to the story, showing how the sharing of personal information, stories and jokes is a method for breaking down reserve and building up intimacies and trust.

From the outset it was important that the group learnt to understand and co-operate with each other by defining common interests and aims. All the trust exercises which occurred later were intended to foster feelings of togetherness and stress the need for co-operation of mutual energies in discussion and practical work.

The sensitivity exercises commenced with the 'Orange Workshop'. The aim of this is "to discover and look at the multiple reality of all things and to understand that nothing is simply one thing." (Barney Simon)

Each person is given an orange and asked to observe it carefully in a number of different ways: as a flat disc, a sphere in space, in changing perspective as one moves it about. One investigates the markings on its skin, bruises etc in order to discover the history of that particular fruit; one plays with it using it as a toy, a ball, a headrest: one watches it falling through space, rolling across the floor. One smells it and then tastes it; as one eats through the skin one is urged to become conscious of the changing taste from the first bitter outer bite to the juicy globules contained in each segment: one considers an orange very carefully before making any conclusive judgements about its nature.

The general reaction was one of surprise that they had been asked to 'play

with an orange.' This was followed by the realisation that superficial judgments were often meaningless and misguided: it was essential to examine everything patiently to discover the truth or reality of that object. Many of the facts about an orange had not been considered or understood before - it was insufficient to describe an orange as 'round', 'yellow' or 'sweet'. Some participants drew social metaphors from the exercise, such as that everything is made up of a number of things which need to be united in order to form one effective whole.

At the end of the discussion Simon pointed out that nobody could have experienced each aspect of the orange in exactly the same way. Therefore the word 'orange' in that room meant at least twenty participants multiplied by fifty possibilities which equals 1 000 possibilities for an orange. He urged the group to consider the possibilities between one man and one patient in this way.

An important result of the exercise was that it brought the group together in a relaxed, informal, playful situation and the individuals related to each other unselfconsciously as they sat on the floor together and easily followed the instructions to complete the exercise.

The success of any sensitivity or awareness programme depends on a number of arbitrary factors: the exercises may be more or less successful depending on the effectiveness of the group leader to inspire or stimulate the work, the quality of the interaction between the different members of the group, and the openness or readiness of the group to respond to the work. However, the mutual participation and co-operation encouraged by the performing of certain tasks and exercises together, usually builds up stronger and more considerate group interaction which is necessary if the group is to co-operate in the creation of a new project, programme or play. Here, the process of sensitivity training was aimed at fortifying the opening vision of the participants through the creation of a play, which would call on them to assess and communicate their new knowledge.

The second exercise worked on was the 'Mirror Exercise'. This is a concentration, co-operation and communication exercise. The group forms into partners. The first member of the partnership initiates an action which the second one mirrors as exactly as possible. The success of this exercise depends on both members of the partnership co-operating closely. If one partner tries to be too clever and outsmart her partner, then the exercise fails.

'Blind leading' is a trust exercise. Once again the group forms partners. A is blindfolded; B leads A out into the garden and is responsible for A's well-being and describes the physical environment to allow A to avoid possible dangers: information received through all the sense perceptions must be included. The exercise encourages a sense of sharing and mutual interdependence. The person leading, by struggling to extend the perceptions of the blind person, discovers that she also increases her own awareness and sensitivity to her partner and the environment.

These exercises were followed by a discussion of the problems that the participants considered most serious in the areas in which they worked. These were alcoholism and the attendant problem of the breakdown of family life; the shortage of accommodation and overcrowding in bad slum conditions; a lack of employment; hygiene; crime and a lack of privacy. People did not resist anything that happened to them because they feared losing what they already had: they felt impotent and depressed. There was a serious lack of water and strong resentment that poorer tenants were forced to buy water

from landowners who were better off and who could therefore afford to sink and operate their own boreholes.

Mr Simon explained the approach and procedure of his work: it was to encourage each member of the group to discover within himself the potential for independent creative thought and action. This knowledge and confidence was the tool which would allow the individual to assess, consider and finally act on problems that confronted him.

The process is represented by the following diagram:

1. A man with his hand held so close to his face that he cannot see nor consider anything except matters relating to day-to-day survival. This represents ignorant and repressed populations or individuals who are so overwhelmed by their poverty or circumstances that they see no alternatives and thus are unable to act to alter their situation.
2. A man who has now extended his hand to a foot away from his face. The man is now able to look around and consider his situation. He understands it was his ignorance blocking his view. His new knowledge allows him an insight and he understands that misfortune is not fate but a problem about which he is able to do something.
3. The man's arm is now fully extended and he can see his hand: his fingers are free for movement and thus his hand becomes a weapon. His hands, instead of limiting and blocking out his vision are now freed for action. This is the result of an educated awareness; he has developed the wherewithal for coping with his situation.

Simon explained it to the group further: a baby has a running stomach. It dies. Therefore when the child next door gets a running stomach its mother expects death. But the running stomach is diarrhoea, not death. It can be cured with two pills. When the mother understand this, the fact that diarrhoea can be cured, she becomes aware of other possibilities. An awareness of possibilities becomes a weapon in her life. Practically, socially, politically.

DAY TWO

The day began with a warm-up in which the group improvised dances to the music of a Black musical 'Phiri' which Mr Simon had created some years previously. This was followed by a ten-minute meditation and then relaxation exercises. Each day began with a similar programme and usually included a prayer or a hymn conducted by one of the Bible women. It was a method of allowing everyone to come together and to focus on the work.

There was further discussion of the problem areas. From the outset it was impossible to separate the medical and health problems from the total lack of basic facilities such as water, electricity, sewerage and inadequate employment and schooling. The political nature of these problems was apparent and it was necessary to deal with the prevailing circumstances with a deep questioning of the policies which were responsible for them and which were, at that stage, doing very little to alleviate them. The situation was explosive and compounded by a general feeling of insecurity and lack of clear-cut identity - who were these people and where did they belong?

Mr Simon urged the group not to deal with hypotheses but to consider the real facts of the situation. Rents were considered but discarded as not being too severe, especially in comparison with those in Soweto. It was felt that we

... concerning ourselves with affects and not dealing with the source of the problems which was the existing laws and political system. Change was needed ... this was where the contents of the programme should be centred: what were the causes, the manifestations and what could be done to improve or change them? One of the schoolboys put it thus: "It is useless mopping up the water when your house floods, it is necessary to find the source of the ... and switch that off."

In improvisation was suggested: two groups were selected - three members were to represent the landlords of Winterveld and four the tenants. Each group discussed their own situation and attitudes separately and then confronted each other with their grievances to see how the hardships of the tenants could be alleviated. Discussion widened perspectives and a line of action evolved in which the tenants hired a lawyer and took the landowners to court. This possibility had not been considered previously. Two groups were sent in to interrupt the improvisation at different stages: two policemen and a group of Bible women. The interaction that occurred was indicative of the tensions that existed between the various groups represented by the actors. As the discussion was in vernacular it was difficult to understand the details of the argument but the antagonisms and fears that existed between the groups was evident - people tried to hide away as soon as the 'police' entered.

After the improvisation the ideas and suggestions that had occurred were discussed. It was decided to try to sensitise the landowners to the plight of their tenants and show them how mutual co-operation and positive effort would improve living conditions and benefit all; health conditions would improve and the crime rate would diminish. It was felt that the authorities should be approached to alleviate the most critical needs of a water supply and a sewerage system.

The session ended with listening to the record of 'Phiri' to show how songs and lyrics could express the attitudes and essential elements of a situation and carry a message. 'Phiri' dealt with the attitudes and problems connected with money in the townships.

DAY THREE

The usual warm-up, in which each individual was free to explore his own movements, emerged into a group song and dance, was followed by sensitivity exercises which stressed careful and accurate observation: the most important of which was LOOKING AT PAULINE. One of the schoolgirls, Pauline, stood in the centre of the room and others sat in a semi-circle around her. Each member of the group had to describe what he/she saw - only those facts which were visible to their eyes. Thus for some people Pauline had a face but no back, a profile, or a 3/4 view. For each person, it was noticed, she presented a different view, a different reality.

This exercise became a key programme and it seemed to have the greatest impact on the group. During later discussions it was often referred to as clear evidence that one had to examine what one saw very carefully in order to establish all the realities that belonged to that situation and that one should not be misled into thinking that one's point of view was exclusive and superior.

This exercise, followed by an excursion into the Setakeng area, provided the participants with a clear understanding of how to approach the exercise of observing the conditions in the area in order to understand as much of the total reality as they could. Although most of the group lived and worked in

the Winterveld, many of them had not visited the Stakaneng area and were startled by the severity of the poverty. Everyone was obliged to report back on what they had observed.

For example:

We visited an Ndebele school, which consisted of some poorly erected tin shanties, with no windows, weatherproofing, proper ventilation or light source, floors or ceilings. There were no blackboards, chalk, books, pens, desks, chairs or tables. Nine semi-qualified teachers taught fifteen hundred schoolchildren in oppressively hot and constricted spaces. The parents of the children who attended the school were non-Tswana and they desired that their children be educated in their home language: as there is no government support for such schools they had to be privately operated. The conditions at this school are typical of all such enterprises. A significant disadvantage was that the achievement certificates awarded by these schools were not valid for secondary school enrolment: the parents and children thus wasted time and money on an education which had no consequence. It was felt that it was important to draw the attention of the inhabitants to these facts.

On arrival at the outskirts of the slums we divided into groups of two or three so as to be less conspicuous and arouse less suspicion as we moved through the area talking to the inhabitants and observing their living conditions and life-styles. The general impression was one of depressing poverty. The large numbers of men, women and children seen at home or in the streets bore witness to the lack of employment and school attendance.

Each member of the group brought back detailed evidence of the lives of the inhabitants. The following report, Ivy's story, is representative of the information collected and the observations made. I have selected it because it appeared in the final programme and it is significant to see how it was used and developed.

Ivy had spoken to one of the landowners who she described as having "fat children and a fat dog and eight-foot high fence around her property". She was unsympathetic and had refused to allow Ivy and her friends to come into her house as she feared they "would dirty her floor". At first she had been suspicious and reticent but had finally revealed that her tenants paid her R4,50 monthly. She complained bitterly of tenants who abandoned their houses in the middle of the night because they were unable to pay this installment. The group understood the desperation of this action in relation to the monthly busfare of R3 that the schoolchildren in the group paid. The families of these children coped on a single wage of a Pretoria chemist's deliveryman's salary - an income which could hardly be considered extravagant. The differences in living conditions and attitudes between the landowner's demands and the tenants' suffering was clearly revealed in Ivy's story.

In some houses Ivy noted that the tenants must be employed because of the number of newly-purchase objects in the house. In other houses the poor quality of the possessions indicated that no one was employed. Some tenants brewed beer or ran shebeens in order to supplement income. The tenants were dependent on the landowners to obtain permits from the tribal authorities to enable them to work. This dependency caused further grievances. Washing drying outside the houses indicated the quality of the occupier's standard of living, although in some cases this could be deceptive as certain women took in washing from wealthier families and one could not always be certain to

whom the washing belonged.

The group's observations formed the material out of which the performance was structured.

Remarks after the visit testified to the application of the insight of not generalising about a situation and the importance of examining a situation carefully for oneself. The participants felt that they had received a clear image of what they had previously discussed and they felt committed to a precise reality.

The visit also focussed on the content of what the performance was to express, namely the nature and scope of the problems at Winterveld, with specific reference to the Stakaneng area. From this point Mr Simon said he could understand what form the work was to take very clearly. He suggested that the group should work on the story of a man who had originally come from Winterveld and who returns after being away for a number of years to discover many changes. His response to these changes and his attitude and advice on what could be achieved to alleviate the stresses and inadequacies which he finds would form the central discussion of the performance.

The third day of the workshop had contained an important transition. Mr Simon described it as follows:

"It had to do with a lot of things: it related to the exercise of 'Looking at Pauline'. Through the sensitivity exercises the group opened themselves to a new way of looking so that they knew how to go about looking at Winterveld. They had also developed the confidence that whatever they came up with was valuable and relevant, that nothing was unimportant and that everything had a story to tell.

They learnt to value their own observations and assessments. It was also important for them to understand that communication is not information but the PROPER COMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION. They had understood a new way of seeing and communicating knowledge."

From here on the work could proceed very rapidly.

He formulated the following basic rules for approaching the stories with a view to including the information they contained into scenarios:

1. What do you see happening?
2. Why is it happening?
3. What are the problems related to it?
4. Could it be happening to you?
5. What can be done about it?

He further emphasised that the message had to make sense to the person with whom one wished to communicate.

"You have to reach the audience with words which make sense to them - you can't talk nutrition to people who have no food. It is difficult to talk faith when people have their stomachs empty."

He also warned against facile and 'clever' answers or methods of approach.

DAY FOUR

After the usual prayers by the Bible women, the group began to work on an

introductory travelling song. Mr Simon suggested that this should not be a blues but something that the audience would easily recognise and thus be able to join in. He suggested the rhythms of travelling and journeying. A theme was found and the group began to look for information to script the song.

The following material was decided on: "I have been working far away for many years and now they've sent me back to Winterveld, the place where I was a child. The place has changed very much." Specific changes were then referred to.

The group divided up into four smaller groups to work on different versions of the song. The work on the song allowed them to sense a method for creating the remainder of the work. The students were especially interested in music and made an important contribution to all the songs and musical items.

Simon advised the groups not to be too concerned to be too perfect at the beginning but to start with something rough and then work on it and cut it down. He stressed that all material for the show should have both funny and sad elements - "it should be something that the audience can drink up."

The first draft included five separate scenarios and a group was assigned to work on each. They were as follows:

Scenario 1: The landlady, tenant and dog. This scene was intended to deal with the tensions and problems of the land tenure and rental system. The traveller returns home and requests a place to stay from the tenant who is unable to help him. She explains her position to him and suggests he approach the landowner. During their meeting the landlady expresses her attitudes. The contrasts between the landlady and the tenant are emphasised by their children: the tenant's daughter is considerate and kind to the traveller while the landowner's child is rude and disinterested. Other contrasts to work on were that the tenants were hungry while the landlady's dog was fat and well-fed. This scene was to be structured on a specific experience with a landowner during the visit to Setakeng.

Scenario 2: The importance of nutrition. The basic action involved a mother whose child was suffering from kwashiorkor; her husband was away and there was no food in the house. A nutrition expert visits her and advises her on what foods to give her baby. In this scene the traveller, who was acted by a young priest who had been involved with establishing vegetables at the Catholic Church in Klipgat, was to give a practical demonstration on how to grow vegetables in an old box or bath using all discarded waste products, except tins and bottles, to enrich the soil.

Scenario 3: To show the desperate need for a clinic. The action was left to the initiative of the group: it was to include a strong request to the authorities for the establishment of sufficient and accessible medical facilities in the area.

Scenario 4: To discuss unemployment, drunkenness and crime. The characters suggested were to include a Shebeen Queen, a tsotsi and the action was to revolve around a robbery in which someone was to be assaulted and thus need a clinic. A narrative link-up could thus be established between scenario 3 and 4.

Scenario 5: To include all the problems of being non-Tswana and the attendant difficulties of obtaining valid permits for housing, education and jobs. In the final performance only the problems of education remained. This was probably due to the fact that we have experienced the desperation of the

education system at the Ndebele school and thus could relate to the actual situation more easily.

Each person was to tell their own story including their reasons for acting as they did. These were usually socially motivated; for example, the Shebeen Queen sold liquor in order to enable her to pay for her children's education at a private school; the tsotsi dealt with his inability to find employment as a cause for his delinquency. The social hardships which caused individuals to act the ways they did were to be shown and the situation which had caused these conditions was to be investigated. The thrust of the play was to show that there WERE ways of using initiative to combat or alleviate certain of these factors.

While considering their scenario the students came up with the following diagram which they had structured and which formed the basis of the second draft. This was seen as an important contribution to the success of the workshop in that they had used their own initiative and had made a positive decision to influence what was to happen. This was the attitude that the work was intended to foster both in the awareness-raising exercises of the workshop and in the performance. It showed a real understanding of what the work was about and insight into the procedure and methods required for potent results.

Second draft: THE STUDENT'S DIAGRAM

1. Social Set-Up - Landlord etc
 1. conditions under which the tenant has to live
 2. history (how the situation developed)
 3. police raids.
2. Education
 1. the Government reaction
 2. conditions
 3. school-leavers - why children leave school.
3. Unemployment
 1. cause - Government
 2. alcoholism and shebeens
 3. delinquency and crime (this was linked to school-leavers in the second scenario)
 4. need for recreational facilities.
4. Nutrition
 1. cause - migrant labour
 2. malnutrition - child
5. Need for medical facilities
 1. wounded man - nurse - death - nurse's speech.
6. Unhealthy conditions
 1. sanitation, water, etc.

This diagram was to be used as a new basis for the structure of the play. Connections linking different points were made to build a narrative structure. The following characters were to appear in each scene; this made it easier to allocate roles and improvise.

In the social set-up the characters were to remain the traveller, tenant and daughter; the landlady and her daughter and dog, a policeman. In the education scene the students, teacher and traveller were to appear. The Shebeen Queen, three unemployed men and the traveller were to discuss the unemployment crisis. In the scene of nutrition there was the mother, child, nutrition expert and the traveller; and a wounded man, nurse and traveller were to deal with the need for a clinic. These characters were not strictly adhered to but served as a basis for improvisation.

Each scene was then roughly enacted. Discussion followed: it was felt that there should be more humour; too much emphasis was placed on the adult's point of view to the detriment of what the children felt, especially in the scene which showed the students gambling.

DAY FIVE

The final scenario was decided on. This was reached through the combination of the earlier drafts and the actual improvisations which had fleshed out the situations with many interesting and humorous details. The role of the traveller was a unifying one and was able, with interconnections already existing between the later scenes, to provide a strong narrative thread throughout the performance.

1st SCENE: THE TRAVELLER'S ARRIVAL AND DANCE. The traveller arrives and greets those who come to welcome him home. He wears a hat and has a bag. He sings about having travelled far and describes how he has lost his job on the mines and has now been "sent back to the place where he was born." He describes how different everything is: the face of Winterveld had changed from pleasant countryside into a slum. He dances with the tenant woman and her daughter into the next scene while the others move off.

2nd SCENE: TRAVELLER, TENANT AND HER PREGNANT DAUGHTER. The traveller asks for accommodation. The tenant asks why he wants to live under such depressing conditions like pigs - people are continually harassed by the police, they have no security, water is not easily available and must be paid for. She describes the living conditions, rental system, water tariffs etc. She suggests that the traveller asks the landowner for accommodation. As the daughter, who is polite in contrast with landowner's daughter who is arrogant and rude, is about to show the traveller the landlady's house, the police arrive and ask him for his pass which he shows them. They are very aggressive and begin to question the tenant. They arrest her for being a squatter with no rights to remain in the area. The traveller argues with them and suggests that instead of persecuting the woman they should be protecting her. The police take the woman to prison.

3rd SCENE: THE LANDOWNER'S HOUSE. The landlady boasts about her high security fence. She refuses the traveller entry into her house and her daughter ungraciously brings chairs outside the home for them to sit and talk. Her dog, played by a woman in the group, growls at the traveller while receiving favourable attention from the daughter.

The landlady tells the traveller how she deals with the tenants: they are responsible for erecting their own houses and have to pay for water. She complains about the tenants who cannot afford the R4,50 rental and who flit

off in the middle of the night. The traveller urges her to be more reasonable in her dealings with the tenants: he advises her to incorporate the water charges into the rental. Through group co-operation he suggests that better living conditions could be obtained for all and a more hygienic and safer environment could be established. The landlady weeps with regret and sings a song in which she berates herself for being so stingy with her water. The daughter then asks the audience whether they consider the lives of their tenants - "if you possess as much land as the landowner would you treat your tenants any better?" She requests that everyone should consider each other and work together for a better environment which they can share.

4th SCENE: THE HOME OF THE MIGRANT WORKER AND HIS WIFE. The wife is feeding her baby coca-cola and shows her baby very proudly to the health educator who arrives. The health educator points out that even though her baby looks plump and healthy she is in fact suffering from kwashiorkor because she is not receiving the right nourishment. Nutrition is discussed and the right foods for the child are suggested. The health educator advises the migrant worker to be supportive to his family even while he is away. The traveller enters and shows the family how to create a garden enriched from waste products in an old basin or box, taking these items from the bag he has been carrying. In this way, he says, one can grow all vegetables. The health educator sings her advice while she dances. This took the form of a game which could be played by children.

5th SCENE: A HOUSE. Two women complain about the difficulty of providing schooling for their children. As they are non-Tswanas they are prevented from sending their children to the government subsidised school and they prefer that the children receive education in their own language. A third woman enters and they decide to call a meeting of the community. The meeting is held: it begins with a hymn and is followed by a discussion and then a concluding prayer. The parents decide to form a private, communal school.

6th SCENE: THE PRIVATE SCHOOL. The teacher presents the successful candidates with certificates. Some children have failed either because their work was not up to standard or because they have been unable to pay their school fees. The successful children sing a song of jubilation.

7th SCENE: THE SECONDARY SCHOOL AT MAMELODI. The successful scholars try to gain admission to secondary school and are refused because their certificates have been issued by a private school and are not valid. The teacher is appalled at the waste and advises the parents in the audience to get together to try to find a solution for their problem.

8th SCENE: A STREET SCENE. The children who have failed school are shown gambling. The children who have failed to gain admission to high school return disappointed. The traveller enters and they discuss their problems and the lack of recreational outlets available to them. The students sing a song demanding a better education system as they will be the future leaders of their nation.

9th SCENE: IN THE SHEBEEN. The shebeen queen is a mother of one of the pupils and decided to start a shebeen in order to raise money for her children's schooling. She interviews people for jobs at the shebeen: she has become brassy and aggressive in order to survive. Many people, including the traveller, come to the shebeen. After lively drinking and laughing a discussion develops in which the traveller expresses what he feels could be achieved if key people get together and approach the authorities to improve the educational situation.

A girl and her drunk companion leave the shebeen and are confronted by two thugs. She runs away in fear while the thugs bait, rob and finally kill her companion. His cries attract the attention of passersby who discover him dead. The traveller and the schoolboys chase the thugs away. The traveller asks for a doctor, a nurse, the police, a clinic, a telephone, in turn. To each request the schoolboy answers, "There is none, there is none." To the request for police he cynically answers that one cannot rely on the police for help.

The schoolboy then sings the song 'Rafano', in which he states that "We are here, don't forget us, remember that we are here. Our greatest lack is that we are not recognised as being here." With great anger he lists all the facilities that are needed in Winterveld, and tells the people to gather forces. The people lift up the dead body and depart singing 'Rafano'.

10th SCENE: THE FINALE in which the second song of the traveller, summarising all the needs of the community, is sung.

After the improvisations, Mr Simon gave the following advice to the actors, as they were inclined to ramble on and dispel the dramatic intensity of the scenes: Avoid self-pity, go for the conciseness of a telegram. Be sure that you have a message, something to say in terms of what the people will understand. Emphasise one fact at a time and go for the others later so as not to clutter the statement. The actors should be heard, seen and should deliver their statements directly to the audience. The songs should be very lively and animated.

Mr Simon had become very excited at the contribution of the schoolboys and this influenced the performance in that he allocated to them major responsibility for deciding and creating the contents of the scenes. Thus the final performance dealt to a great extent with youth perspectives of the problems.

It was interesting to note that the actors performed all their discussions with each person seated on a chair: they were therefore very static and contrasted with the more energetic dance and song sequences.

DAY SIX

Saturday was intended to settle the action sequence of each scene and to polish the performance. The transitions between each scene were to be clarified. Performance was never 'fixed' but the contents of each scene were to remain consistent, each scene had an intention which had to be executed.

DAY SEVEN

The day of the performance.

Everyone arrived early to revise the links between the scenes and the intention of each scene. The group then travelled in convoy to the church in Klipgat where the performance was to be held. When we arrived at the church there were very few members of the audience. Those responsible for advertising the event had been inefficient: the few posters that had been put up had been torn down within a few hours of appearing. Suggestions to move into Setakeng were discouraged because of inevitable police harassment. Two members of the group travelled around the area in a truck with a loudspeaker to broadcast that a concert was to be held in the church. The other performers moved to an empty adjacent plot and began dancing and singing and very soon a reasonable crowd assembled and followed the actors into the church. The performance

began three hours later than scheduled.

The audience in the church sat on benches which had been moved away from the altar to form a circle which defined the acting area. Many people arrived during the performance and either sat or stood around watching. There was a strong informality amongst the audience and they responded to the scenes uninhibitedly - laughing, talking and agreeing amongst themselves: they changed positions or moved about freely.

In performance the work came together in a moving and powerful way through a strong sense of commitment and desire to communicate. It was difficult to assess the ultimate effectiveness of the performance on the audience but from the attention they gave and their involvement and response it seemed to have a successful impact.

A member of the audience told me afterwards that she had refrained from laughing when the others did because she understood that these were very serious things and that they should not be taken so lightly. The scenes that induced most hilarity were those in the shebeen and those in which the police appeared, the scenes most open to broad caricature. In general there was a great sense of a community event, of sharing and recognition.

The people involved with initiating the programme attended the final performance and expressed delight at the results that they had witnessed: for them the work was exciting and successful and they were amazed at what had been accomplished in the week.

After the performance there was a short meeting with the group in which each individual was asked to express what they had learnt or discovered by participating in the programme. The answers referred to the personal sense of creativity which they had discovered; the understanding of the necessity to have a total and accurate vision before commencing work; the knowledge that one required patience and the vocabulary of those one wished to communicate with, and that one had to look carefully and see what was contained in a situation and what was possible, before any conclusions were arrived at.

CONCLUSION

Although the work in BophutaTswana cannot strictly be regarded as THEATRE, it involved a very similar procedure to the rehearsal of a play for performance. A group comes together to form a small community in order to work on a specific project, certain ideas are introduced regarding the intentions of the work and these are discussed and sometimes explored through the process of improvisation, and the cross-fertilisation of ideas; all these discoveries are used to shape the final product. Awareness and sensitivity exercises are often done in order to prepare the actor for work.

This project was ritualistic in that it followed this defined pattern and developed out of community needs and concerns and attempted to serve these needs. It took on the characteristic of a special event in that each person who partook in the process testified to a change in perceptions and attitudes in understanding the realities of their lives. It was also a ritualised way of strangers coming together and learning to appreciate and understand other points of view with which they had very little contact previously: it is a way of increasing understanding and sympathy for different attitudes and concerns which are essential for a large group or nation to foster for its ultimate well-being. This was especially true for me as a white: this experience allowed me a communication with Black people in a situation and on

a level which would normally be denied to me - it provided an opportunity to discover and share insights and friendships which have enriched my experience of living and understanding conditions and events in this country.

References

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Footnote

It is interesting to note that the sensitivity exercises used in the project are used in the training of actors to develop observational, perceptive, concentration, awareness and co-operative skills.



THE CENTRE FOR S.A. THEATRE (CESAT)

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