

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

BHARUCHA, RUSTOM. *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1993. ix-xii + 253 pages. Approximately US\$17.95 (for exact price write to the publisher). Paper ISBN 0-415-09216-7. Cloth 0-415-09215-9.

Theatre and the World is a collection of essays on the moral and political repercussions of intercultural dramatic performance. In the first third of the book Rustom Bharucha quite pointedly attacks what he feels are misappropriations or maladaptations of narrative and performance forms, taking as an example the film in which Brook "blatantly trivializes" the *Mahābhārata*. In the chapter entitled "Collision of Cultures" Bharucha identifies very straightforwardly the "ethics of representation in post-colonial cross-cultural exchange" and the approaches he judges ethnocentric, exploitative, commercial, and disrespectful. He objects to the dehistoricizing and co-optation of art forms and performers by interculturalists who sever theater forms, rituals, learning techniques, and narratives from their contexts.

The second section of the book presents an alternative to this disconnected and insensitive approach with a detailed description of the readaptation and restaging of a European play in an Indian urban environment. The play, originally written for a German audience, is about a day in the life of a woman: her concerns, her typical activities, and her inner reality. Transposing the play to Indian urban settings involved not only recreating the specifics of a life that women in the cities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras would recognize and identify with, but also working with such culturally specific forms as dance, pantomime, and speech. Through his description of the processes of discovering the appropriate modes and forms of representation, Bharucha reveals his understanding of the covenant among playwrights, performers, and the audience. It is of paramount importance to Bharucha in deciding how to represent behavior or cultural norms to say to those whom the woman on the stage is meant to represent, "We see you and you are important." Bharucha wants the reader to pay attention to a deeper level in the "re-invention" of the lives of other people and to appreciate the responsibility one has not to depersonalize, misrepresent, or use others through performance forms. This is, of course, his objection to interculturalists who believe they are exchanging traditions, but who are actually playing the role of a colonial power by harvesting cultural forms with no real regard for the source. His comments are not only about dramatization, abstraction, and the creation of meaning, but also about the power and presumption of those less than fully aware of the wholeness of the people and the context of the borrowed performance forms.

The last portion of the book focuses on styles of representation in Indian traditional theater, and on how these traditions and their meanings are portrayed in verbal descriptions. In the essay on the Krishnattam theater of Kerala he states that his goal is to give the reader a sense of the tangibility of the performance — a "taste" of the experience — and to draw the reader by means of language into the sensate world of a traditional theater performance context. Again, Bharucha stresses ethical issues related to the power of performance

to affect what we see and to create meaning.

Bharucha's style of rhetoric is vivid and polemical; he has a talent with language, and he plays his audience. One criticism that might be leveled at the first section of the book is that he narrows his focus to cases of excess, ignoring less exploitative examples of cultural exchange or cross-fertilization. Self-conscious borrowing and the adoption of others' traditions have, after all, been fertile ways of creating new forms for millenia. Also, as Bharucha himself mentions, there are within Indian society those exponents of tradition who cast horrified eyes at what Indian artists themselves are doing with traditional forms. Experimentation in the arts sometimes creates monstrosities and sometimes creates classics. Bharucha's concern with the traditional arts in the expanding electronic, commercially oriented world echoes the worries that older generations have always had about how the young are living. We see the same thing in many Asian countries, such as Bali and Java. This does not, of course, justify the colonial appropriation of performance forms, or even bits and pieces of them. Bharucha is right in his criticism of decontextualization, reformulation, and segmentation, in which a technologically superior partner does injustice to the sources (he calls the supposed two-way street a "dead-end street"). Even so, his view should not be taken as the whole story, and room for both conservatism and for sensitive, respectful exploration should be maintained. Bharucha cites exchanges of theatrical forms between nonliterate cultures, such as those of Karnataka and Africa, as an example of a two-way street in which the partners are closer in their forms of communication.

Mary Jo Meg GENTES
University of Texas
Austin, Texas

EPSKAMP, KEES. *Learning by Performing Arts: From Indigenous to Endogenous Cultural Development*. CESO Paperback 16. The Hague: CESO, 1992. 290 pages. Illustrations, maps, figures, bibliography, appendices. Paper Dfl. 25.—, US\$12.50; ISBN 90-6443-110-8.

BOEREN, AD and KEES EPSKAMP, editors. *The Empowerment of Culture: Development, Communications and Popular Media*. CESO Paperback 17. The Hague: CESO, 1992. 247 pages. Figures, illustrations. Paper Dfl. 25.—, US\$12.50; ISBN 90-6443-120-5.

The Centre for the Study of Education in Developing Countries (CESO) is a research institute in The Hague that contributes to the study of education in the Third World. The CESO also offers consulting services in the areas of education and training. In line with its objectives, the CESO has undertaken extensive studies on "indigenous and endogenous didactic processes, in which learning is a creative process of ad-hoc problem solving" (EPSKAMP, 1).

The two books under review, *Learning by Performing Arts* and *The Empowerment of Culture*, are the results of these studies. They examine the important roles that the performing arts and the popular media are playing in education and development processes in the Third World.

In *Learning by Performing Arts*, Epskamp focuses on the theory and practice of "theater for development." In the last two decades, governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in various countries have used this theater in nonformal adult education, literacy drives, and community development programs. In theater for development, workshops are employed for problem solving, awareness-raising, and collective action, and are seen as creative learning processes. Central to the workshops is the pedagogical principal of