

# INTRODUCTION: MINORITY THEATRE IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

MADELENA GONZALEZ

All over the world, in the most varied contexts, postcolonial or otherwise, contemporary theatre is a rich source for increasing the visibility of communities generally perceived by others as minorities, or those who see themselves as such. Whether of a linguistic, ethnic, political, social, cultural or sexual nature, the claims of minorities enjoy a privileged medium in theatre. Perhaps it is because theatre itself is linked to the notions of centre and periphery, conformism and marginality, domination and subjugation, notions that minority theatre constantly examines by staging them, that it is so sensitive to the issues of troubled and conflicted identity and able to give them a universal resonance.

Among the questions raised by this volume, is that of the relationship between the particular and the more general aims of this type of theatre. How is it possible to speak to everyone, or at least to the majority, when one is representing the voice of the few? How can the majority be reached in the name of the minority? Beyond such considerations, urgent critical examination of the functions and aims of minority theatre is needed. What are the conditions in which a type of drama that is necessarily taken up with the daily existence of a rigidly defined group can circulate in the wider community? To what kind of public is such drama addressed? Does it have an exemplary nature? In other words, how is it possible to avoid the pitfalls and the dead end of ghettoization?

Certain types of audience-specific theatre are examined in this context, as, for example, children's theatre, theatre as therapy, theatre as an educational tool, gay theatre. More generally, particular attention is paid to the claims of minorities within culturally and economically dominant western countries. Many regional theatrical events try to avoid the clichés sometimes inherent in folk theatre. As for those who are victims of social exclusion, racism and discrimination, they may attempt in various ways to recreate the utopian vision of an authentically public form of dramatic art, addressed to the common wo/man.

These are some of the avenues explored by this volume which aims to answer such fundamental questions as: What is minority theatre and why does theatre, a supposedly bourgeois, if not to say elitist, art form, have such affinity with the margins? What if, particularly in contemporary society, the theatre as a form were merely playing out its fundamentally marginal status? The authors of these essays show how different forms of minority theatre can challenge cultural consensus and homogenization, while also aspiring to universality.

They also address the central question of the place and status of apparently marginal forms of theatre in the epoch of globalization and, in doing so, re-examine theatre itself as a genre. Not only do they illustrate how minority theatre can challenge the dominant paradigms that govern society, but they also suggest their own more flexible and challenging frameworks for theatrical activity. The experimental and ephemeral nature of theatre means that it cannot easily be reproduced and packaged as a commodity and is far from constituting an unproblematic cultural product to be sold on the world market. Theatre's specificity augments its potential for political and artistic subversion in relation to a literary genre, such as the novel. As novelist and playwright, Susan Yankowitz states, "Writing a novel requires solitude and introspection: it also allows for total control over the creative process and outcome. What it lacks is the collaborative, democratic, tumultuous, live atmosphere of the theatre" (qtd. in Svich 2003, 133). Unlike the novel, theatre is provisional and has the potential to situate itself outside the dominant models that obtain in society, while also interacting with them and commenting on them. Thanks to its public and collective dimension, one might even say that theatre resists the very act and process of consumption as defined by consumer society where the drive towards individual materialism threatens to eclipse the élan of communal exchange.

Unlike electronic images or even the cinema, theatre, because of its marginal status outside the media continuum, is in a good position to denaturalize the representation of reality and defamiliarize the status quo and, in so doing, to question consensus, whether it be aesthetic, social or political. In a context in which globalization is more often than not synonymous with homogenization in the domain of culture, theatre can be a vector for resisting the media-controlled model of public opinion fabricated by cybernetic capitalism, and for reinstating cultural specificity. Thanks to its experiential authenticity, it can also provide a temporary relief from intangibility in an epoch dominated by theories of the simulacrum and what Slavoj Žižek has dubbed the "desert of the real". Indeed, the essential and unique component of theatre in relation to the

novel or the cinema, for example, is its “liveness”. Live performance helps to problematize the mechanisms of consumption in a digital age, for lived culture can re-establish depth and significance in a global order which prefers to trade in signifiers and surface. The complex creative processes of theatre and its specific conditions of representation protect it from the dehumanizing speed of technological change and prevent it from being sucked into the flow of fast capitalism. Its slower, collaborative mechanisms enable it to reinstate the human at the very core of the artistic experience, as well as staging the tension between humanity and technology, thanks to the use of metatheatrical techniques and references. Above all, theatre provides a direct, authentically human and lived experience in a collective space, and as such is very different from the detached consumption of words or images that characterize our interaction with the ubiquitous screens that now surround us, as Susan Yankowitz reminds us,

The screen, be it computer or television, is a tangible intervention that inevitably distances the viewer. There may be times when one wants to play with that artifice [...] technology can be artfully employed for such effects. For me, though, those are best used as adjuncts to what is at the centre of our theatre and our humanity: living bodies and voices making contact in the same time and space. (qtd. in Svich 2003, 135)

In other words, the liveness of theatre is a metaphor for living itself.

Theatre, particularly when it stems from the so-called margins or a minority group, can provide a challenge to the paradigms of western hegemonic culture, simply by staging alterity and particularity. In the context of the cultural homogenization attendant on globalization, it can create a space for freedom, difference and cultural specificity, while also possessing a universal dimension or resonance by speaking through and about the collectivity to the wider community, whether that community be regional, national or international. Even if minority theatre often stems from a specific cultural, linguistic or political situation, and the need to affirm or reclaim that specificity, in many cases it can speak to the majority about the minority and thus open up important new cultural dialogues between the margins and the mainstream.

However, whether elitist or popular, or an eclectic postmodern marriage of both, theatre today is often seen as a possessing marginal or minority status as a genre, as Amelia Howe Kritzer’s analysis of its place in contemporary culture makes clear:

Even at its most mainstream and serious, theatre does not occupy a position of power in Britain or other contemporary societies. It exists

outside the central structures of government and industry, and occupies only a minor place in the institutions of business, education, and religion. Theatre's position within contemporary culture is marginal compared to commercial television and film. (Howe Kritzer 2008, 14)

At this point it is worth examining the concept of minor literature in some detail. In his 1975 work, co-authored with Félix Guattari, Gilles Deleuze proposed a definition of minor literature in three points, based on his study of the novels of Franz Kafka. Many of the plays taken as examples for study in this volume could indeed be seen as conforming in some measure to his model, thanks firstly to their articulation of a collective consciousness, secondly to their political concerns, and lastly, to an aesthetics of deterritorialization and defamiliarization through the minor usage of a major language, a process Deleuze describes as becoming "a stranger *within* one's own language" (Deleuze 1986, 26). However, it is the French thinker's subsequent analysis of the work of Carmelo Bene, one of the most important figures in contemporary Italian drama, that is perhaps even more appropriate to the fluid nature of the theatre discussed in this volume.

In "One Less Manifesto" then, Deleuze proposes a more flexible and open framework for his definition of the minority, summarized in two main points:

First of all, minority denotes a state of rule, that is to say, the situation of a group that, whatever its size, is excluded from the majority, or even included, but as a subordinate fraction in relation to the standard of measure that regulates the law and establishes the majority. In this context we can say that women, children, the South, the third world, etc., are still minorities, as numerous as they are. But then, let us take this first meaning literally. There follows a second meaning: minority no longer denotes a state of rule, but a becoming in which one enlists. (Deleuze 1997, 255)

The insistence on this notion of "becoming" as the main characteristic of the minority is particularly relevant to the examples discussed here, for it is precisely theatre's provisional nature, its constant and on-going poetics of process which enables it to question and to challenge fixed aesthetic, social, linguistic and political paradigms so effectively. This fluidity rests on a principle of what Deleuze calls "continuous variation" as a way of escaping from the system of power enshrined in the majority and its usage of language and art. For theatre to free itself from the dominant and to speak for the minority, it must: "transmit everything through continuous variation as on a creative vanishing line that constitutes a minor tongue in language, a minor character on the stage, a

set of minor transformations in relation to dominant forms and subjects” (Deleuze 1997, 251-252). Thanks to its constitutive instability and heterogeneity, minority theatre seems ideally situated to “deduct the elements of power or majority” (Deleuze 1997, 247) and provide a potential variable to mastery or to what Deleuze calls “the power or despotism of the invariant” (1997, 254), as many of the examples analysed here indeed show.

## I

Major dramatists, aware of the subversive potential of dramatic art, have chosen to encode their resistance to normalization and assimilation by the dominant paradigms of power in plays which, by giving space to marginal presences, raise questions of ethics linked to minority status. Arnaud Maïsetti explains how the contemporary French playwright Bernard-Marie Koltès (1948-1989) always used the presence of the so-called marginal body to make his plays effective, consistently arguing for the aesthetic, metaphysical, political, as well as poetical, significance of this marginal presence. In his play, *Quay West*, he proposes a marginal paradigm to replace the dominant one, thanks to the character Abad, who remains mute. However, Abad is not a mere photographic negative within the play, but on the contrary, it is the play which becomes the negative of the Black character. According to Maïsetti, Koltès never tried to usurp minority voices and speak in their stead, but used aesthetics to displace the majority so that the minority could reclaim history and reality independently.

Jean Genet also takes particular care in his plays to deconstruct ironically the certainties and the hierarchical cultural order that produce exclusion in society. By staging Blacks and homosexuals, he destabilizes the cultural and social foundations that specifically define such communities as being as marginal. According to Nathanaël Waddled, this may explain why Genet’s plays are rarely staged, for the implicit criticism of the hierarchy that produces and assigns to the minority a subordinate role is not easily acceptable to such a hierarchy. Genet’s theatre is thus less spectacular than his novels or than a theatre affirming the rights of stigmatized minorities, for it does not denounce inequality outright. However, Waddled suggests that it represents a deeper form of subversion encapsulated in the alternative aesthetic of ironic uneasiness, the “white laugh” which is a rallying cry for those who can see the emptiness behind socially constructed appearances.

This subtle subversion of the dominant is also present in the work of Spanish playwright, Juan Mayorga, as Claire Spooner explains. Staging the Holocaust, or the Spanish Civil War, involves a series of ethical and historical issues, which lead the playwright to question whether it is legitimate to give a voice to those who never had one when they were alive, especially in view of Walter Benjamin's affirmation that history is written by the winners. Instead, Mayorga chooses to amplify silence on stage so that minority voices are only perceptible in the gaps left by language and representation, in what is hidden beneath words. For Spooner, this aesthetics of silence also represents the underside of dominant speech and thus a way of contesting power. She sees it as the silence of the forgotten, an echo that spreads out on stage in between words, bodies and shadows, turning theatre into a disturbing question mark and a critical look at the past, the present and the self.

For Brazilian playwright, Plinio Marcos, the challenge was quite the opposite: to find a voice for the excluded, and to allow the most marginalized individuals to be seen and heard on the national stage in a period of censorship imposed by the military dictatorship which lasted from 1964 until 1984 in Brazil. Claudia Braga shows how Marcos focused on forbidden themes and sensitive subjects as vehicles for political and social criticism. His portrayal of various social outcasts—ex-convicts, prostitutes, pimps, homosexuals and the denunciation of the cruelty and mistreatment such human beings had to endure in their daily lives—created a metaphorical link with the frustrations and trials of the country's bourgeois majority under the yoke of dictatorship. By moving marginal presences to centre stage he was able to reach the majority in the name of the minority, according to Braga.

## II

If institutionalized national theatre is often considered a bourgeois art form, addressed to an elite, rather than a popular audience, this is even more the case for opera. However, lyrical art can also be a way to speak out, either openly or covertly, against the prevailing consensus, to question totalitarian and totalizing discourses and thus act as an effective ideological tool. Paola Gomes Ribeiro shows how the composer, Luciano Berio and the writer Italo Calvino's two-act opera *La Vera Storia* (1977-1978), contests the dramaturgical stereotypes and ideology of the operatic tradition and challenges "classic" epistemology. Taking as a model *Il Trovatore* by Giuseppe Verdi, an example of the conventions of 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois Italian opera, they observe and deconstruct this

paradigm, rejecting the domination of narrative teleology and defying the dominant rhetoric of the genre. What emerges is a hybrid musical theatrical object, which questions the discourses of power embodied in the canons of this traditionally elitist and strictly codified genre, thanks to critique and deconstruction and the recourse to different materials, styles and practices from different cultural sources. The use of a hybrid poetics allows Berio and Calvino to challenge the status quo enshrined in the traditional expectations of the opera-going public.

It was precisely the subtle, coded nature of the operatic genre that enabled Dimitri Shostakovich, to transform Nikolai Leskov's classic naturalist short story, *Lady Macbeth of the Mtzensk District*, into a manifesto against Stalin's policy of extermination in the Russian gulags. Jean-Louis Vidalenc reveals how dissidents were able to decode the performance and to enjoy a communion of thought for three hours without expressing in words incriminating comments against the regime. Subtle camouflaged references enabled a significant proportion of those present to understand other messages than those conveyed by a naïve reading of the libretto. In this way an apparently "neutral" text was transformed into a political time bomb, for the same messages were also decoded by the authorities. The result was a visceral reaction from the state press, the banning of the opera and the denunciation of its composer.

### III

A less overtly political, but nevertheless recognizable strategy of commitment is at play today in the struggle of peripheral identities against linguistic and cultural homogenization on the global stage. For those on the edges of the francophone world, theatre can constitute a means of reclaiming minority language, culture and tradition and asserting specificity. Hélène Laplace-Claverie examines the status of one such regional form of theatre. The Pastorale from the Soule region in France (one of the seven Basque provinces), which is still performed today, has an affinity with the mystery plays of the Middle Ages but is neither a folk attraction nor the vector for political demands. Composed of poetical, musical and choreographed elements, this theatrical genre, which is the fruit of the collective effort of a whole village community, has enjoyed a spectacular renaissance since the Second World War, thanks in large measure, to its roots in the culture and history of the Basque people and the desire for this inheritance not to be forgotten. Laplace-Claverie asks if these "plays", written in a local dialect within the non French-speaking Basque region, can be considered as a manifestation of a specifically

Basque form of theatre or whether they constitute some other form of minority theatre within an already marginal entity.

The assertion of cultural and linguistic specificity is frequently a key component in the aesthetics chosen by minority art, as Lydie Toran shows in her examination of the Flemish dramatist, Michel de Ghelderode. Not only does the playwright have recourse to French/Flemish bilingualism, but he also creates a specific mythic, cultural territory, “Bruegelland”, which he uses as a backdrop to wallow in folk clichés. However, this strong regional identity, anchored in a minority context, did not prevent his plays from appealing to a Parisian audience at the height of his career in the 40s and 50s. Today, however, his work seems to have returned to oblivion and Toran wonders whether minority theatre is doomed to a perpetual movement between isolation and recognition and to an instability from which classical canonical theatre is immune. She asks whether the utopian aspirations of this type of theatre can speak to the ideal of international humanism rather than merely remaining confined to issues connected to a specific regional identity.

In some contexts, the survival of a specific form of minority theatre in a minority language can provide a key to preserving an endangered identity. The Kurds represent the largest ethnic minority in the world and their country, divided up between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, is a theatre of hostilities. Literature, in the form of poetry and storytelling, has been a means of differentiating and protecting them from the dominant cultures for centuries. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional Kurdish theatre made way for “western-style” theatre, based on written texts and focusing on issues concerning identity. It has since become one of the ramparts protecting the Kurdish language and identity from disappearing, as Shwan Jaffar explains. In a context in which the Kurds are still an oppressed minority, theatre provides a space for reviving and reclaiming their specific heritage.

The struggle against forgetting is at the heart of Esfandiar Esfandi’s study of Iranian cabaret, named “Ghahveh-khaneh” after the cafés in which it is staged. A total theatre composed of speech, music and paintings, it contains both popular and elitist elements. Its principal characteristic is its reliance on narrative, gestural and pictorial grandiloquence. This pre-Islamic genre, which, according to Esfandi, is essential to the maintenance of a truly Iranian national identity, is in danger of being replaced by more recent Islamic forms of drama. The only reason that it has not been completely marginalized or has not disappeared altogether is the striking visibility, generated by heightened stage effects and its grandiloquent

aesthetics, both of which have succeeded in saving it from oblivion thus far.

The importance of collective cultural memory informs Erika Thomas's examination of the theatre performed by the Umutina Indians of Brazil. Although their native tongue is no longer spoken and their ethnic group now only consists of about 445 individuals, the "Nacao Nativa Umutina" troupe, made up of younger members of the community, stage the tribe's history in order to preserve their culture and open up a dialogue with non-indigenous people. However, in the context of the Indian ethnocide, which is still not fully recognized as part of the reality of Brazilian identity, the theatrical experience, provided by the Umutina, takes on a deeper emblematic significance, explained by Thomas. Indeed by staging the return of the repressed, it performs a crucial therapeutic function and participates in the struggle against forgetting.

The need to affirm cultural independence from a marginal position within the context of colonial subjugation and to reclaim lost, forgotten or suppressed histories can be seen through the theme of Jacobitism, used as a rebellious trope in many contemporary Scottish plays. Refusing the minority label within the United Kingdom, the Scots have developed and maintained vernacular languages (Scots and Gaelic) and literature. The creation of the Scottish National Theatre has also played an important role in upholding the idea of a specific national culture. Jean Berton shows how Jacobitism is at the core of a series of historically- and politically-minded plays that, by reclaiming Scottish identity, currently question the hegemony of the English language and culture.

*Saint Ambrose and the Invention of Milan* (2009), a recent play, written and staged by Dario Fo, also questions dominant versions of history by taking its audience back in time in order to revisit in a provocative manner some important dates in Italy's past. Edoardo Esposito shows how the career of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Bishop Ambrose, future patron saint of a city of Milan built on marginalization, injustice and exclusion, furnishes a polemical allegory for the situation of ethnic, religious or economic minorities in present-day Italy, to which Fo's politically committed stance gives universal resonance.

## IV

The desire to assert cultural specificity is increasingly accompanied by a yearning for the universal, the aspiration to explore the translocal possibilities of minority theatre and to open up new cultural dialogues. Indeed the translocal can be a means of breaking out of a cultural ghetto

while escaping both an elitist cosmopolitan paradigm and the facility of the global popular, in order to reach for a more authentic internationalism.<sup>1</sup> The recent development of Catalanian theatre illustrates this dialectic between cultural specificity and the desire for universality. According to Antonia Amo Sánchez and Fabrice Corrons, in theory, Catalanian theatre should be hampered by the phenomenon of cultural globalization, due to the fact that it is steeped in a minority language and culture. What then explains its paradoxical success abroad? Sánchez and Corrons ask whether its yearning for universality has finally led it to deal with wider topics, without specific referential foundations, or on the contrary, whether it is because it has succeeded in somehow being universal, that it is now poised to win over new audiences and enter into new cultural dialogues.

The richness of diverse cultural encounters is opposed to the conformity of globalization in Paola Ranzini's study of contemporary Italian theatre. In the hands of Eugenio Barba's international troupe, *Odin Teatret*, influenced by a wide range of cultures, from South America to Asia, from Oslo to Bali, from the Amazon to Holstebro in Denmark where the troupe is based, Marco Polo's mythical voyage to the East becomes a trajectory of differences, as the stage makes room for a multitude of peoples, races, language and traditions, throwing into crisis the concepts of "tradition" and the "minority". In Marco Paolini's play on the same subject, *Il Milione: Quaderno Veneziano* (1997), Marco Polo's voyage stops in Venice where he discovers a culture and civilisation on the verge of extinction. The peasant farmers and the tradesmen who made Venice great are marginalized in relation to the cultural homogenization provoked by globalization whose effects are particularly noticeable in the north east of Italy. However, as Ranzini explains, the two playwrights have very contrasting attitudes to the status of contemporary theatre on the global stage. While Barba refuses the minority label, affirming that theatre is theatre and cannot be qualified by an adjective, Paolini, on the contrary, affirms that all theatre is minority theatre.

In another example from Italy, Ève Duca examines the decision by Italian director and actor, Pino Petruzelli to stage a series of plays created from witness accounts collected from encounters with Roma in Italy, Bulgaria, Albania, France, Turkey and the country formerly known as Yugoslavia. *Zingari, l'olocausto dimenticato* (2004) and *L'olocausto di Yuri* (2006) which deal with the extermination of gypsies in Nazi concentration camps and *Non chiamarmi Zingaro/Don't call me Gypsy* (2009) which depicts Roma life nowadays, offer a platform to this marginalized group and present Italians with an opportunity to discover a minority without the stereotypes and clichés usually attached to them. For Duca, these plays, which have been on tour throughout Italy, and one of which has been

shown on television, provide an opportunity to speak to the majority about the minority and thus to bring taboos out into the open and educate the audience about a different culture. The fundamental question posed by Petruzelli's experiment is whether minority theatre can reach beyond the scope of its original context and how it can effectively break out of the ghetto in which it is frequently confined.

Wajdi Mouawad, a Lebanese playwright working in Quebec, is also confronted with the problem of ghettoization. Often taken as a representative of the category of "migrant writing", a label that has now become fashionable in Quebecois literature, Mouawad feels that this appellation threatens to marginalize him on both the aesthetical and personal level. Nicoletta Armentano shows how the playwright strives to escape from categorization and to bestow on his plays a kind of universality, for example by the use of personal pronouns as a way of speaking to the collectivity, but also by the reduction of autobiographical elements in his plays. Her reading of Mouawad's work proposes a dynamic reconfiguration of the migrant label as multi-directional cultural traffic rather than the gridlocked binaries of here versus there.

The dynamic potential of cross-cultural dialogue and encounters in the context of globalization is a key theme in the startling performance novel of Puerto Rico's premier poet and novelist Giannina Braschi. *United States of Banana* (2011) brings together Hamlet, Zarathustra, and Giannina herself who embark on a quest to free Segismundo, the hero of Calderón de la Barca's 17th-century play, from the dungeon of the Statue of Liberty where he is being held prisoner. Staged in a surreal post 9/11 New York and written in a defamiliarized Spanglish, it quickly becomes clear that the journey is a politically-charged metaphor for the fall of the US empire and the collapse of the World Trade Centre as well as a plea for subject minorities to free themselves from the yoke of domination by the majority, whether it be economic, linguistic or ideological. Stuttering and stammering in a hybrid tongue that contrasts with that of the well-spoken majority, Braschi uses language to travel along new and always unexpected pathways, making her work an intercultural explosion capable of breaking the bonds that constrain the minority. By creating her own foreign language, she illustrates Deleuze's theory of continuous variation and the process of becoming "a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language" (Deleuze 1986, 19), which, for him, epitomizes the concept of the minority and eliminates the elements of power and authority that are sources of oppression in the hands of the majority.

## V

The oppression experienced by sexual minorities is at the heart of their ongoing search for visibility. However, the frequent confusion of the personal and the political makes their perspective a paradoxical and uneasy one, positioned between recognition and resistance. Jonathan Harvey's *Canary*, whose title is a quote from UK gay activist, Peter Tatchell: "We're the litmus test of whether a society respects human rights. We're the canaries in the mine", illustrates this complex position, according to Jean-Pierre Simard. Tragi-comic, with hints of the fantastic, Harvey's play explores the changes in attitudes from the social and cultural turbulence of the 60s to the present day and examines over three generations how the attitude to this minority has evolved. The popular aesthetics adopted by the playwright who also writes for television, aim to give a national or even universal resonance to the malaise of the minority and question the exemplary aims of minority theatre in the current contrasted and paradoxical climate of banalized homosexuality and growing homophobia.

The New York experimental performance troupe, the Wooster Group, helps to question further the meaning of minority performance through its version of one of Tennessee Williams's supposedly more minor plays, *Vieux Carré*. Xavier Lemoine examines the way in which technology is used to mobilize a multitude of minority perspectives in a play that combines Williams's writing universe, his relation to the gay liberation movement of the 1970s and the Wooster Group's own position as a major postmodern theatre group today. Echoing the promise of more life and more artistic creativity, represented by the movement, the director Elisabeth LeCompte shows the actors' bodies struggling to break free from the restrictive rules and regulations defining them. According to Lemoine's analysis, The Wooster Group's *Vieux Carré* suggests new ways to understand the interaction between binary categories such as minority and mainstream theatre, homosexuality and heterosexuality and points to the notion that the minority perspective consists in defending an adamant yet humane ideal, perceptible only through art.

In her study of Rebecca Lenkiewicz's *Her Naked Skin*, written and produced at London's National Theatre in July 2008, Eleanor Stewart shows a mainstream stage being used to air minority issues. Lenkiewicz's play is, shockingly, the first original work by a woman to be produced in the Olivier, the National's main auditorium, and aptly deals with the suffrage movement. Stewart invites us to consider the presence on a mainstream stage of a play about the feminist movement that brings

“minority” issues to a wider majority. The playwright’s main objective was to put the lives of ordinary suffragettes centre stage, thus rendering visible forgotten figures of the suffrage campaign and, initially, the play sets itself up as a docudrama about the woman’s movement. However, Stewart’s essay explores the tension between the political expectations surrounding the play and its main narrative: a cross-class lesbian relationship between two suffragettes. She suggests that the staging of the lesbian narrative, rather than adding to the politics of the drama, de-politicizes a potentially political work and wonders whether this strategy can be explained by a tendency of third-wave feminism to focus on the individual and the personal or whether it is the inevitable consequence of producing a play about feminist issues in a mainstream theatrical space. These issues are also discussed in a brief interview with the author, which Stewart adds as an appendix to her article.

The lack of visibility of plays by women, is explored by Rocío González Naranjo in her study of two female dramatists Halma Angélico (1888-1952) from Spain and Elisabeth Porquerol (1905-2008) from Nîmes. The large number of plays written by women during the 1920s and the 1930s in Spain is in striking contrast to the difficulty these women experienced in gaining access to the theatre world, while in France, during the period between the two wars, the number of women writing plays was very limited. Despite this unfavourable climate, Porquerol decided to follow in the footsteps of her Spanish counterpart, Halma Angélico. González Naranjo asks why these women, who were well known as novelists and essayists, did not become famous as playwrights. She wonders what role they can be seen as occupying in their respective national theatres at the time at which they were writing and why, still today, their plays are rarely staged.

## VI

Other types of theatre which lack visibility but which address important issues concerning the construction of the minority, due to the processes of exclusion and difference which they illustrate, are those addressed to children, young people, immigrants and those suffering from physical or mental illness. The therapeutic function of theatre as a way of treating disease and confronting unease is at the heart of such marginalized theatrical forms. Pierre-Louis Fort uses the plays of Jean-Claude Grumberg, targeted at children, as the basis for exploring the issues of the representation of minorities and the unease felt by them in relation to a supposed or imposed identity. This Parisian playwright, whose father and

grandparents were deported to concentration camps during the German occupation of France, creates dramatic and comic effects which decentre the minority, reaching beyond it in order to ask questions about the very nature and essence of humanity. The plays studied by Fort show how Grumberg uses elements of the fantastic and the fairy tale to raise issues of resistance and commitment in comedies of power that offer a form of catharsis, thanks to their burlesque representation of our common fears and obsessions.

The transformative potential of theatre in the lives of young people is the focus for Stéphanie Clerc's study of an educational project conducted with teenage immigrants, newly enrolled in a French middle school in Avignon, France. The aim of the scheme is to write and stage a collective text centred on the theme of immigration and difference, co-constructed through the oral exchange of individual stories and their subsequent scriptural interweaving, both of which then go to make up a collective history. Clerc explains how the theatre offers a public space for this minority to express itself and may lead, perhaps, to a better integration in the host country. The collective artistic process of telling and listening, writing, staging and performing triggers both individual and communal adaptation to the difficulties faced by immigrants forced to construct a new identity; it also has remarkable effects on the group and its cohesion.

The therapeutic potential of theatre for a specific audience is examined by Monique Martinez, Marine Duffau and Julien Béthencourt in their study of dramatic interventions by clowns in hospitals. The clown, who is usually a marginal figure in the theatre, becomes an important vehicle for treating physically or mentally ill children. Duffau, Martinez and Béthencourt examine some of the key practical aspects and constraints which condition this unusual dramatic form, based on a two-way relationship in a confined and intimate space. Taking examples from both France and Spain, they show how this form of theatre is a mixture of drama and psychotherapy.

Drama as a way of treating disease is also the focus of Jean-Marc Peiffer's study of theatrical workshops in psychiatric units. A Stanislavskian approach to the actor's work, resting on identification between the actor and his part, may serve as a link between the psychotic's fantasy and the reality that surrounds him, while Brecht's alienation effect is employed to avoid the patient becoming overwhelmed by his imagination. Peiffer shows how drama therapy allows patients to express violent emotions and impulses, such as the desire to harm another actor, in a peaceful manner within a protected environment, and thus to avoid the extremes of either depression or hysteria.

The multiple perspectives on minority theatre examined in this volume help us to understand its place on the global stage. Not only do the authors prove that there is a space for popular, regional, local, committed theatre that has not been filled by institutional mainstream theatre, but the plays studied here show the potential of minority theatre for representing the universal at the same time as reclaiming the specific. The theatrical genre and minority theatre in particular possess the means to resist cultural homogenization, to problematize consensus and to challenge the dominant paradigms of globalization by substituting alternative aesthetics and ethics which, nevertheless, have a wider resonance. The identity of minority theatre, as discussed in this study, is collaborative and desired rather than imposed and assigned, and its frequent staging of the opposition between the dominant and the subordinate can provide a cathartic emancipation from the oppressive power structures of the majority, reinstating agency at the heart of the creative process and its reception, thanks to the recourse to specific histories, languages and cultural memories.

Following Deleuze, such types of theatre can trigger a process of consciousness-raising by helping to create, “a minority consciousness as a universal-becoming” (Deleuze 1997, 256), a dynamic impetus for change as opposed to the authoritarian stasis that characterizes the majority. In a public world increasingly dominated by the virtual, the impersonal and the technological, the struggle for visibility, recognition and remembrance of the marginal presences and peripheral identities of minority theatre liberates a space for the temporary intersection of art and life in the community. Not only does this reinstate an active mode of connection within the alienating, dislocated technologized space of contemporary society, but it also substitutes collective idealist aspirations and energy for the ersatz utopia of individual consumption. As Peter Sellars points out, “Theatre is about having a conversation that society is not having” (qtd. in Svich 2003, 174), a conversation that is particularly relevant in the context of the emancipatory, committed ethics of minority theatre. If, as Michael Kustow avers, theatre constitutes both “an art and ... a model for living together” (2001, xv), minority theatre implicates its performers, participants and audiences in a transformative experience of exchange and dialogue across borders, while maintaining specificity and reaffirming identity. Above all, it stages different ways of being human, offering its challenging marginal paradigm of becoming as an alternative to dominant cultural models that threaten to reinforce a global order premised on homogenization and normalization of difference for commercial purposes.

## Bibliography

- Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari, 1986 (1975), *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Translated by Dana Polan. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, 1997 (1979), “One Less Manifesto.” Translated by Timothy Murray. In *Mimesis, Masochism and Mime. The Politics of Theatricality in Contemporary French Thought*, edited by Timothy Murray, 239-258. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- During, Simon, 1992, “Postcolonialism and Globalization.” *Meanjin* 2 (Winter): 339-353.
- Howe Kritzer, Amelia, 2008, *Political Theatre in Post-Thatcher Britain. New Writing: 1995-2005*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kustow, Michael, 2001, *theatre@risk*. London: Methuen.
- Svich, Caridad, ed. 2003, *Trans-global Readings. Crossing Theatrical Boundaries*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj, 2002, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. London: Verso.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Simon During defines the global popular in the following manner : “Eating a Big Mac, being amazed by the way Michael Jackson moves his body, reaching for a Coke, or, given more middlebrow tastes, dancing to the Mahotella Queens, grooving along to Bob Marley or even U2—these all contain that little ‘family of man’ or ‘we are the world’ charge. It seems as if almost everyone, almost everywhere, loves the global popular and sometimes consumes it: it produces a mood in which exoticism, normality and transworld sharedness combine, and in which consumption warmly grows” (During 1992, 342).