

All the stage's a world

The organization of international, multicultural, and global theater companies in the US

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When in 1979 Roberta Uno founded the Third World Theater (later renamed New WORLD Theater) on the campus of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, the emphasis on the “world,” was both deliberate and specific. At a time when most of the new theater companies in the US focused on regional identities and repertoires, Uno’s group began with an ambitious mission aimed at creating a different, better world. In the context of theater history, there are many examples of using the “world” as an abstract concept to describe a theater company’s mission. Numerous variations of the Latin idea of *theatrum mundi* (“All the World’s a Stage”) have inspired theater artists throughout history to connect the world to theater. As in the case of the Globe Theater of the English Renaissance, the theater space has often been promoted as a microcosm of the “world.” Stage settings, costumes, props, and actors’ bodies have functioned as tropes to project what the audience might imagine as the “world.”¹ In each incidence, however, the specific ways in which “world” was defined and used differed. This chapter examines the New WORLD Theater in comparison to two other theater companies in the US that have also used the framework of the world to explain the main purpose of their artistic mission in the second half of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. The two companies are: La MaMa Experimental Theater Club (New York City) and Silk Road Rising (Chicago, IL; originally named Silk Road Theater Project). The three companies serve in this chapter as case studies for examining how the concept of the world has been incorporated and contested in American theater.²

The three companies selected for this study are examined comparatively in order to provide an interpretative history of how the idea of the world has been defined by theater artists as both a cause for celebration and a call for change in contemporary U.S. theater history. At the same time, the primary lens through which the comparison is made in this chapter is Asian American theater. All three companies have had an extensive influence in all sectors of American theater, but Asian American theater provides a unique focal advantage. Asian American theater is often situated in the blind spots of widely used conceptions of “world theater,” “intercultural theater,” or “American theater.” Artists of Asian American theater have had to negotiate what Karen Shimakawa calls “national

abjection” against the desire to be unequivocally accepted as part of American theater.³ Asian American theater has traversed the cultural landscapes of both international and domestic and as well as intercultural and multicultural. How the three companies examined in this chapter have dealt with Asian American theater, therefore, raises questions that can expose the potentials, contradictions, and fault lines in using the idea of the world as a way to define their mission.

The International: La MaMa Experimental Theater Club

Ellen Stewart founded La MaMa ETC in 1961 in lower Manhattan’s East Village in New York City in a one-room basement café with the goal to promote international theater. For Stewart, the term international was the vocabulary of choice to explain her approach to the intersection of theater and the world. In a 1989 interview, Stewart stated, “[C]ross-pollination is something I’ve believed in strongly for a long time. It relates to internationalism, and La Mama has been international from its very beginnings.”⁴ As an African American woman leading an off-off Broadway theater, Stewart was unlike any other in American theater. Especially after her death in early 2011, her legacy as a pioneer of internationalization of American theater has been wisely accepted, and the *New York Times* describes her in the obituary as a “theatrical missionary, scouting new talent abroad and planting La MaMa seeds wherever she went.”⁵ According to Stewart, the initial motivation to promote international theater was practical. She wanted to get playwrights produced at La MaMa, published, and their plays reviewed by critics.⁶ The location of New York City also aided in the internationalization of the company. Before the company’s first trip to Europe, Stewart had worked in New York City with artists from Colombia, Korea, France, Japan, India, Peru, Finland, and Poland.

Ellen Stewart deserves the credit that she has received for internationalizing American theater, and if it was not for her, many influential theater artists may have never found an opportunity in New York City and elsewhere. However, what Stewart meant by international theater was not as original as what she did with it. The term “international theater” can be traced back to the early twentieth century, but the way Stewart used it specifically has its roots in 1948 when UNESCO’s sub-committee on Arts and Letters created the International Theater Institute (ITI).⁷ According to the ITI website’s description, it did not take long for the sub-committee to realize that Theater was one of the best ways to promote the goals of UNESCO, which came into being in 1946. A sub-committee on Arts and Letters, which included distinguished writers and dramatists, met at its First General Conference. It soon became clear that there was a need for an international clearing-house for theater arts, a non-political, non-commercial association in which theater artists and administrators of all countries could work out a practical program to facilitate exchange and circulation of play scripts, current theater information, performing companies, and young artists. The first ITI Congress met

in Prague in June 1948, with twelve centers in operation: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, China, Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, Poland, Switzerland, UK and USA.⁸ Since 1948, the ITI has grown to be the world's largest performing arts organization for theater and dance with over 100 centers around the globe.⁹ In 1961, the year La MaMa was founded, the term "international theater" was already being widely used, and various forms of artistic and educational exchanges involving the performing arts were occurring in both governmental and non-profit sectors.

Like the ITI, La MaMa celebrated the artistic synergy that occurred when theater artists around the world encountered theatrical forms that were different from theirs. The approach to international theater sought by both the ITI and La MaMa emphasized the commonalities amongst theatrical cultures. Despite the vast differences between Japanese Kabuki and Shakespeare, for instance, the promoters of international theater in the 1960s argued, "Theater does indeed serve international understanding."¹⁰ Theater, as part of a larger spectrum of cultural expression, was seen as a tool to achieve the UN's goal of world peace, and the ITI's emphasis was on what was common amongst all forms of theater around the world. Ellen Stewart speaks about international theater in basically the same way. In defending the need for diversity in American theater, Stewart states: "[T]he key to art in the Theater is universality. There may be opposite styles of working, but each has the possibility of universality: how you express and explore is your individual art form."¹¹

The most universal elements in theater, for Stewart, were non-verbal actions. More specifically, she believed that physical movements, dance, music, gestures, and images were more effective and entertaining onstage than spoken dramas. Such form of performance has now become La MaMa's signature style, the influence of which can be seen in works by Robert Wilson, Lee Breuer, Philip Glass, and many others who found artistic home in Downtown New York in the 1960s and the 1970s. While La MaMa's goal was aesthetic experimentation and the ITI's ultimate purpose was political, both organizations saw international theater as a utopic space for the world. ITI provided Ellen Stewart a definition of international theater as well as frequent opportunities for collaboration on productions, exchange of artists, and organization of international theater festivals.

While La MaMa's international outlook has had a profound impact on domestic theater, its push for an international vision of theater garnered opposition in unexpected places. According to Stewart in an interview with Alvin Eng, both The Negro Ensemble and the Black Panthers found her and La MaMa suspicious and downright antagonistic to "blacks" as they defined the racial group because her company was not a black theater. Stewart herself rejects what she calls "a Black box," a label that limits who she is as a person:

Some people keep trying to put me in a "Black box" and I tell them, "you can't put me in a 'Black box.'" I told them that a thousand times. It's very racist, I think. The only people, who I guess you could say, wanted to put me in a box were people who have nothing to do with La MaMa.¹²

When asked by Alvin Eng, who is Asian American, why The Negro Ensemble and the Black Panthers would be against what she was doing, Stewart answered, "It was because of you," meaning that helping non-blacks was perceived as betraying the black cause.¹³ Ellen Stewart's inclusive view of theater may have been rejected by some in the black theater community, but it was welcomed by those who, like Stewart, disagreed with the black and white binary stipulation of theater in the US.

Stewart's international vision directly benefitted Native American, Latina/o, and Asian American theater. The artists and groups she supported domestically were those who did not fit into the niches of white-dominated mainstream theater nor the hyper-masculine black theater of the late 1960s. She rightly claimed that she started Asian American theater in New York City by supporting Tisa Chang (who founded Pan Asian Repertory, the first self-described Asian American theater company in New York City) and Ping Chong (who is one of the most prolific Asian American theater artists).¹⁴ Many Asian American theater artists were made aesthetically and culturally legible in the US through Stewart's efforts toward international theater. Conversely, La MaMa found domestic support from minority artists who had to navigate the racially volatile yet artistically exciting period in lower Manhattan in the 1960s. Stewart's international vision of theater translated to a multicultural one in the US, and Asian American theater benefitted from the new cultural identifier in terms of funding and audience base.

The multicultural: New WORLD Theater

One of the many theater artists Ellen Stewart inspired and influenced was Roberta Uno, who founded the New WORLD Theater (NWT) on the campus of University of Massachusetts in Amherst in 1979. NWT started at the closing of the decade that saw the founding of many minority theater companies in the US such as the Asian American Theater Company (San Francisco), the Negro Ensemble (New York City), and El Teatro Campesino (San Juan Bautista). Most of these companies specialized in one racial or ethnic group, and there were very few companies that focused on multiracial and multiethnic topics. Growing up in Los Angeles, Uno was exposed to a cultural environment that included Asian Americans, African Americans, and Chicanos, and she wanted to see them represented onstage.¹⁵ At the same time, she encountered student protests at the University of Massachusetts where students of color made up only 5 percent of the student population. Many students demanded diversity on campus, and Uno believed that a theater program for students of color could play a key role in helping to make diversity materialize.

Uno and other members of the new group saw themselves as part of the Third World Movement that called for the end of apartheid in South Africa and the war in Vietnam. Locally, they fought for desegregation and racial equality. The theater group was initially called Third World Theater, and the first production was a play by a South African playwright.¹⁶ Describing themselves as "very political" with a

“global perspective,” participants of the new group used theater to align themselves with the larger political changes that were occurring both in the US and around the world. The Third World movement sought liberation of Third World countries and minorities from western domination in all sectors of society, including the arts. Uno did not want to organize a theater company that only focused on domestic U.S. issues; rather, what was happening in the US was seen as part of a worldwide struggle for equality and justice. The “world” represented by the New WORLD Theater in its beginning was defined racially and culturally in the Third World movement context.

In the early 1980s, the name of the company was changed to New WORLD Theater as a way to signal a move away from the rhetoric of the Third World movement and to suggest a more inclusive and hopeful connotation. According to its mission statement in 2009:

New WORLD Theater has presented seasons of innovative, contemporary theater by artists of color in order to foster creative communities that exist at the intersection of artistic practice, community engagement, scholarship and education; and to promote cultural equity and the vision of a “new world”—one that embraces diverse cultural backgrounds, interdisciplinary approaches, widespread geographic roots, and a commitment to justice.¹⁷

The language promoting a “new world” that embraces diversity and interdisciplinary approaches echo the mission of the International Theater Institute (ITI) and La MaMa ETC, but at the same time, the focus on social justice and racial equality in the statement emphasizes the company’s roots in the Third World movement of the 1970s. Moreover, the use of the phrase “artist of color” also reflects the company’s acknowledgement of the minority theater movement in the US.

Writing in 1989, ten years after the founding of NWT, Roberta Uno describes NWT as part of “the multicultural theater movement,” which she traces back to the very beginning of American theater history and defines as having “revitalized the American theater” in the 1980s.¹⁸ The way she describes the first ten years reveals much about how broadly she envisions multicultural theater:

Ten years of New WORLD Theater have been marked by nearly 100 productions of the theater of the African diaspora, Asian America, Native America and Latin America presented side by side. They are often unified by themes, but more often strikingly disparate in their range of artistic styles, aesthetic sensibilities, and social concerns. The New WORLD Theater’s artistic vision has included a wide spectrum of dramatic styles and structures—melodrama to performance art, drama to Yoruban folk opera, comedy improvisation to dance theater. The Theater has sought to present each cultural expression as distinct, emerging from separate cultural traditions—leaving the audience to make comparative analysis and draw thematic and cultural relationships.¹⁹

Uno’s inclusive and celebratory language referencing the world is similar to that of Ellen Stewart and the ITI, but there is one crucial difference between NWT and the other two entities. Because NWT was founded on a state university campus, its productions were seen by many—especially the campus administrators—through the lens of multicultural education in an academic context. The way Uno defined multiculturalism was broad, historical, and anti-racist but the campus used the concept more narrowly befitting the political rhetoric of the 1980s and 1990s.

In those two decades, multiculturalism connoted both a sense of universal need for equality and what Charles Taylor calls “the politics of recognition.”²⁰ The two paradoxical agendas—one toward demand for equal worth of all cultures and another toward special recognition of each culture—led Taylor to describe multiculturalism as having severe problems. The most critical problem for Taylor is deciding which standard to make judgments about equal recognition. He warns, “even if one could demand it of them, the last thing one wants at this stage from Eurocentered intellectuals is positive judgments of the worth of cultures that they have not intensively studied.”²¹ Others have also identified liberal politics that promote multiculturalism as perpetuating Eurocentric views of culture in ways that are damaging and sinister. Taylor rhetorically asks whether there is a “mid-way between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition or equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards, on the other.”²² Is there a way to define multiculturalism without using Eurocentric definitions of culture and without perpetuating balkanization of individual ethnic and racial groups?

Roberta Uno, in writing about New WORLD Theater, addresses Taylor’s inquiry with what she calls three different kinds of contexts. The first context, for Uno, is illustrated by those companies that bring “color” to their productions by using multiracial casting in European or Euro-American plays. The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis produced in 1991 a production of *Death of a Salesman* directed by Sheldon Epps with black actors in main roles. With the production, the Guthrie claimed to promote multiculturalism and diversity through color-blind casting.²³ As Charles Taylor warns, however, the production’s measure of standard was Eurocentric judgment of worth valorized, in this case, by Arthur Miller’s play. For Uno, such practice necessitates the reactive definition of “minority cultures” as different from the “dominant culture,” which is assumed as the norm. Needless to say, Uno rejects the assumption that minorities need to find standards in reaction to the dominant culture. The second context Uno identifies is an ethnically and racially specific definition of multicultural theater in which African American, Native American, Chicano, and Asian American theaters work separately. At its worst, separate minority theaters would resist anything that challenges the way they narrowly define themselves. Some black theater artists, for instance, would reject multiracial or queer topics in their repertory and claim that such topics do not represent the black experience. At its best, on the other hand, the separation of minority theaters allows the rare opportunity for specific ethnic or racial actors to be represented onstage and share with the audience a strong

sense of cultural bonding and common story. No one can deny the fact that the East West Players in Los Angeles catered to predominately Nisei (second generation Japanese Americans) in the 1980s and provided a profoundly positive cultural resource to the community.

Roberta Uno does not deny the advantages of separate minority theaters, but she wants to work beyond the limitations of cultural separatism. Uno prefers a third context and feels “compelled by how the nature of theater has changed and how the world is changing.”²⁴ The world, for Uno, is heading towards the year 2050, the projected time in which Caucasians will become a minority in the United States. What is predicted to happen in the US will have ramifications around the world with increased globalization and migration across nations and cultures. The demographic change has already occurred in major cities in the US, and the national change may come earlier than 2050. The undeniable fact is that the racial and ethnic composition in the country is growing more complex and diverse, and some of the categories will become irrelevant in a few decades. Uno uses the projected view of the US to explain her artistic vision of the New WORLD Theater and her political vision of the world. It is the projected future of the world that defines her agenda and the third context. According to Uno, the third context creates a place of desegregation and dialogue.²⁵

The New WORLD Theater aimed to promote the kind of multiculturalism that would avoid the “politics of recognition” that Charles Taylor identified by supporting initiatives, festivals, and conferences to encourage innovation and conversation. Instead of advocating for a project that celebrates cultures as discrete, homogenous, units, NWT created mechanisms that fostered intercultural exchanges. A key term used by the company throughout the 1990s was “intersections,” and a number of events were created to support various forms of artistic, cultural, and political intersections. Participants of the events included artists, scholars, and community members who explored new forms of performance and community outreach. The anthology Roberta Uno edited with Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns entitled *The Color of Theater: Race, Culture, and Contemporary Performance* is a culmination of the conversations New WORLD Theater has led since its beginning. Uno ends her introduction to the anthology with an invitation to enter “an immense space, the unrecognized” to continue the exchange and learning of the unfamiliar. Again, it is her vision of the unknown future that provides the foundation for her definition of the world and her vision of theater in the US.

The anthology features a solo performance piece entitled *bodies between us* by thúy lê, a Vietnamese American writer and performer, and Uno showcases it as a representative form of performance for her company. The piece provokes a new narrative of migration and displacement, and its author embodies the new face of U.S. demography. Instead of promoting lê as a new Asian American artist, which would have been the case for Asian American theater companies or regional theater companies, the New WORLD Theater described her as an unlabeled writer and performer who can complicate the conversations and interactions between

artists. A new artist such as lê is not forced into a niche but put into the center of what Uno calls “an extraordinarily raw, complicated, honest, and revealing” interaction between artists of different backgrounds.²⁶

As it has been widely reported in the theater community, the New WORLD Theater was forced to suspend its operations in 2009 by the administrative leaders of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. In suspending the company, the University of Massachusetts cited the economic recession and budget problems, but many have wondered why the decision had to be made quickly without any consultation with the management team of the company. It may be that the resignation of Roberta Uno from the position of artistic director in 2002 was the beginning of the end. Many theater companies often shut down after the charismatic founding leader steps down. The closing may have also been caused by campus politics or mismanagement. Most likely, a combination of many reasons led to the closing of the company. However, questions remain unanswered about the sudden suspension and why the campus leaders did not think that NWT belonged to the future of the university.

Many colleges and universities in the US are actively promoting global education befitting the twenty-first century, and the University of Massachusetts cites “international reputation” as a core value in the twenty-first century.²⁷ Why, then, would the campus not support an organization that strived to make the campus more international? The suspension can partly be seen as a result of how Charles Taylor’s notion of “politics of recognition” was played out on the campus. Taylor’s warnings about the paradoxical agendas of multiculturalism built up over thirty years despite the efforts of Uno and others to transcend them. The NWT attempted to redefine the “world” through theater by approaching it as part of the university’s education on multiculturalism, and for many years, the campus and the company mostly agreed on how best to diversify the student experience and the curriculum. But ultimately, the university controlled how it would define multiculturalism, and the NWT depended on the agenda of whoever was in charge of the campus. To borrow Taylor’s description, the NWT was founded with the support of “Eurocentered intellectuals” who had “positive judgments of the worth of cultures that they have not intensively studied.”²⁸ As an organization, the NWT had an advantage in receiving support from the university, but it also had a disadvantage because the support could be pulled literally overnight, as was the case in 2009. While Uno’s vision of multiculturalism was historical and progressive, the University of Massachusetts administrators saw it pragmatically and reactively.

In the late 1990s and the early twenty-first century, multiculturalism as an academic agenda began to lose appeal and urgency, and globalization replaced it as part of many universities’ strategic planning. It is quite clear that the University of Massachusetts’s vision of the “world” is inconsistent with the NWT’s use of the term. While the NWT continued to focus on social justice and equality, leaders of higher education in general moved towards envisioning a world in which commercial globalization led by technological innovation, free markets,

and entrepreneurship would be a major component of educating future world citizens. The value of the NWT's agenda was no longer consistent with the university's standards for higher education. Or, perhaps, the university gave "positive judgments of the worth" to the mission of the company as long as it could fit its multicultural education goals. Instead of giving the company the opportunity to reformulate their agenda to fit the university's vision, it was unfortunately dismissed as an organization that would not belong in the twenty-first century, at least in Amherst. It must be emphasized that Robert Uno rejects the university's narrow definition of multiculturalism that promoted a balkanized and apolitical education model. Instead, Uno's vision of multiculturalism was foremost anti-racist, and she wanted to broaden the very definition of multicultural theater. Under her leadership and beyond, the two different views of multiculturalism often clashed, but the legacy of the New WORLD Theater could not have been possible without the strategically symbiotic relationship between the campus and the company.

The global: Silk Road Project

Silk Road Theater Project in Chicago was founded in 2002 with the goal to become "Global Theater for Global City." The co-founders, Malik Gillani and Jamil Khoury, have cited the attacks of September 11, 2001 as the "spark" that led them to start the theater company.

[Gillani and Khoury] felt galvanized to respond to the anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments that swept the US in the aftermath of the attacks, and to challenge arguments surmising a "clash of civilizations." Their hope was to counter negative representation of Middle Eastern and Muslim peoples with representation that was authentic, multi-faceted, and grounded in human experience. That theater would be the medium in which they'd "create change" was a given.²⁹

The initial idea led them to include a much larger geographical location, beyond the Middle East, to the diasporic communities of the Silk Road region. According to Gillani and Khoury, there are over 1.5 million diasporic people from the Silk Road territories in the Chicago metropolitan area and yet they are rarely represented in Chicago's theater. They claim that the company became the "nation's first ever Theater company dedicated to representing such a diverse grouping of peoples and cultures."³⁰

In some sense, the Silk Road Rising began with a mission similar to that of the New WORLD Theater. Both companies were explicit about their commitment to social justice and equity, and diversity and outreach functioned as the core values in reimagining the cartography of the world in American theater. However, there is one major difference between the two companies. New WORLD Theater focused on supporting individual artists and groups by bringing them to Amherst

for the company's established audiences, but Silk Road Rising's main goal has been to increase Chicago's theater audience base. In fact, Silk Road's mission statement states that the company aims to "expand the theater community's discourse on race and ethnicity."³¹ It seems that for the Silk Road Rising, the expansion involves both the re-defining of race and ethnicity and the active reaching out to all Chicagoan theatergoers.

As an example of the goal, in the 2010 season, the company produced *The DNA Trail: A Genealogy of Short Plays about Ancestry, Identity, and Utter Confusion*. The description of the production reads:

Theater meets science when a diverse group of playwrights each agree to take a genealogical DNA test and revisit their assumptions about identity, politics and the perennial "who am I" question. Self, family, community, and ethnicity are all up for grabs.³²

The playwrights who participated in the DNA test were Asian Americans: Elizabeth Wong, Velina Hasu Houston, Lina Patel, Jamil Khoury, Shishir Kurup, David Henry Hwang, and Philip Kan Gotada. Each short play dealt with identity issues that have become overly familiar in ethnic theaters, but the premise of the production, with its focus on "scientific" DNA test, generated interest amongst general Chicagoan theatergoers.³³ The company also made a decision early on to support playwrights. Whereas La MaMa ETC and New WORLD Theater commissioned many performance artists and alternative theater groups, Silk Road's production history demonstrates preference for a much more conventional theater with written plays performed by Equity actors. Perhaps because Jamil Khoury is himself a playwright, the company's choices have been relatively well-known plays produced at regional theater companies in the US. One of the first plays the company produced was *Tea* by Velina Hasu Houston, which is one of the most revived Asian American plays. In the 2011 season, the company produced *Yellow Face* by David Henry Hwang. The production was co-produced with the Goodman Theater, the most visible theater in Chicago.

The production history of Silk Road resembles those of Asian American theater companies such as the East West Players with plays by Philip Kan Gotanda, Julia Cho, Shishir Kurup, and David Henry Hwang. One major difference is that Silk Road has also produced plays about the Middle East with plays such as *Pangs of the Messiah* by Motti Lerner in 2009. Chicago has been home to a few of ethnic-specific companies targeting Asian or Asian American themes. Pintig Cultural Group has focused on Filipino American themes while Rasaka Theater Company has been described as the first South Asian American theater group in Chicago. In the 1990s, Angel Island Theater was the primary company that produced Asian American works in Chicago, but it did so intermittently. When Silk Road was founded in 2002, there was no active theater company that regularly produced Asian American plays. As the "second city" in the US with a major

theater community, the lack of Asian American representation was an obvious void. If Asian American theater is a niche in American theater, the co-founders of Silk Road could have filled it by calling itself an Asian American theater company. Moreover, many Asian American theater companies founded in the 1990s focused on specific ethnicities: Ma-Yi Theater (New York City) started out as a company for Filipino Americans and Lodestone Theater (Los Angeles) was founded by Korean Americans in Los Angeles. Moving against the trend, the founders of Silk Road Rising decided against emphasizing "Asian" as a descriptor for their company. They have destabilized the geographical term "Asia." The decision, instead, to call the company by the historical trading route that connected Asia to Mediterranean and European regions signaled new connections and possibilities.

It remains to be seen whether the company will indeed expand discussions of race and ethnicity and find a wider audience for plays about what the company calls "Silk Road people." Thus far, it has succeeded in introducing major Asian American playwrights to Chicagoan audiences. The 2011 season's co-production of *Yellow Face* with the Goodman Theater was part of what was advertised as "Summer of David Henry Hwang: One Great Playwright, Three Great Plays" in Chicago. The Goodman Theater's production *Chinglish* received extensive media attention as a play that was Broadway-bound. It also remains to be seen how the broad use of "Silk Road" as an epistemological category will affect Asian American and other ethnic theaters in the US. Is the company paving a path towards a new form of cosmopolitan and global theater? Or is it reiterating a familiar success model by showcasing such writers as David Henry Hwang, who is still the only Asian American playwright to have been produced on Broadway? What does a "global theater for a global city" look like?

The company's name change in 2011 to Silk Road Rising provides an answer to the questions especially in the way it wishes to grow as an organization in the future. In explaining the change, Gillani and Khoury see the Internet and global multimedia communication as a way to expand both what they do and how they do it. They use the term "polyculture" to articulate their vision of interconnected cultures, and the Internet becomes an essential method to expand both form and content. Moreover, by not limiting itself to live performance and written plays, they have changed the very definition of a theater company. The newly created website for Silk Road Rising describes the company as an organization that "creates live Theater and online videos that tell stories through primarily Asian American and Middle Eastern American lenses." The mission statement continues, "In representing communities that intersect and overlap, we advance a polycultural worldview."³⁴ In echoing Vijay Prashad and Robin Kelley, Gillani and Khoury use the term "polycultural" to move beyond the balkanized model of multiculturalism toward overlapping and interrelated view of cultures.³⁵

Conclusion

The three companies examined in this chapter began in response to the realities of different historical moments: Ellen Stewart founded La MaMa ETC in 1961 because opportunities lacked for minority artists in both New York City and international venues; Roberta Uno founded New WORLD Theater in 1979 as a way to protest racial and social inequality in higher education; and the Silk Road Rising was founded at the beginning of the twenty-first century in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks and to expand the audience base of the Chicagoan Theater. The responses necessitated the envisioning of theater as a critical site to connect with different cultures, and the concept of the world was reimagined in the process of articulating and advocating each company's defining mission. While the three case studies have been presented in a chronological order, this is not to suggest an evolutionary model or superior efficacy of one theater company. Rather, all three interpretations of the world have co-existed and have influenced all sectors of theater in the US. The three companies have exemplified different ways to use the stage as a real space of representation and exploration of the world.

Notes

- 1 For an overview of *theatrum mundi*, see the Introduction in Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., *Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 2 It should be acknowledged that there are a number of other companies that could have been included in this study. Pangea World Theater in Minneapolis, for instance, was founded in 1995 with the goal to address the "fundamental paradigm of diversity in our world," <http://pangeaworldtheater.org/about>, accessed May 30, 2012. Mo'lelo in San Diego is another example that deserves a study in further exploring the relationship between the concept of the world and theater.
- 3 See Karen Shimakwa, *National Abjection* (Chapel Hill, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Shimakawa uses Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection to explain how Asian Americanness has been made "not-American" and uses examples from theater and performance to illustrate the process of abjection. According to Shimakawa, "if [paraphrasing Kristeva] the nation must abject itself within the same motion through which it claims to establish itself, it does so by abjecting Asian Americanness, by making it other, foreign, abnormal, *not-American*" (17).
- 4 Bev Ostroska, "Interview with Ellen Stewart of LaMama Experimental Theater Club, Dec. 9, 1989," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Fall 1991), 100.
- 5 Mel Gussow and Bruce Weber, "Ellen Stewart, Off Off Broadway Pioneer, Dies at 91," *The New York Times*, January 13, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/14/theater/14stewart.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&sq=ellen%20stewart&st=cse&scp=1, accessed February 24, 2012.
- 6 Ostroska, "Interview with Ellen Stewart," 100.
- 7 One of the first uses of the term "international theater" can be traced to the 1931 International Festival/Conference of Worker's theaters in Russia. See Valleri J. Hohman, *Russian Culture and Theatrical Performance in America, 1891-1933* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- 8 International Theater Institute, Organization for the Performing Arts, "History of the ITI," <http://www.iti-worldwide.org/history.php>, accessed February 27, 2012.

- 9 For a discussion on ITI, see Charlotte Canning, "'In the Interest of the State': A Cold War National Theater for the United States," *Theater Journal* 61 (2009): 417, and "Teaching Theater as Diplomacy: A U.S. Hamlet in the European Court," *Theater Topics* 21.2 (2011): 151–163.
- 10 Rosamond Gilder, "The Theatre and the International Theatre Institute," *Educational Theatre Journal* 14.2 (1962): 113–119, 115.
- 11 Ostroska, "Interview with Ellen Stewart," 105.
- 12 Alvin Eng, "Some Place to Be Somebody: La MaMa's Ellen Stewart," in *The Color of Theater: Race, Culture, and Contemporary Performance*, ed. Roberta Uno with Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns (London and New York: Continuum, 2002), 137.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 138.
- 14 Stewart also gave artistic home to Cecile Guidote and Filipino American theater during the Marcos dictatorship. Others she supported include SLANT and Mia Yoo, a Korean American who became her successor. Many thanks to Roberta Uno for pointing out these facts.
- 15 Information on Roberta Uno is based on an interview conducted by the author on June 27, 2000. Also see Uno's Introduction in *The Color of Theater*.
- 16 For details on New WORLD Theater, see *A History of Asian American Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97–101.
- 17 The NWT website is no longer available, but this mission statement can be found in the press release for the company's thirtieth anniversary exhibit on February 12, 2009 at the University of Massachusetts Amherst library, <http://www.library.umass.edu/about-the-libraries/news/press-releases-2/new-world-theater-s-30th-anniversary-a-retrospective-exhibit/>, accessed May 31, 2012.
- 18 Roberta Uno, "Preliminaries," *MELUS* 16 no. 3 (1989): 1.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 70.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 70.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 23 For a discussion of the production, see William Sonnega, "Beyond a Liberal Audience," *African American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*, ed. Harry J. Elam Jr. and David Krasner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 88–93.
- 24 Uno, *The Color of Theater*, 6.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 4.
- 27 <http://www.umass.edu/umhome/about/history.html>, accessed May 30, 2012.
- 28 Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*, 70.
- 29 <http://www.srtp.org/aboutus.html>, accessed May 30, 2012.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 <http://www.silkroadrising.org/about>, accessed August 17, 2016.
- 32 <http://www.srtp.org/history/productions/dnatrail.html>, accessed May 31, 2012.
- 33 In the production I saw, which was a matinee, the vast majority of attendees were non-Asian Americans.
- 34 <http://www.silkroadrising.org/about>, accessed May 31, 2012.
- 35 For discussions of polyculturalism, see Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002); Robin Kelley, "People in Me," *ZSpace* (July 5, 2003), <https://zcomm.org/znetarticle/people-in-me-by-robin-kelley/>.