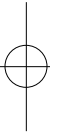
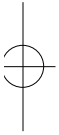
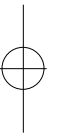


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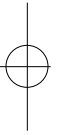


Playing for Life

Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS

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Professor, Communication and Performance Studies
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Durham, North Carolina

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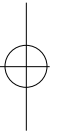
Back Cover: (top) Scene from “Free Birds,” a joint South-African and Dutch AIDS play. Photo courtesy of the author.

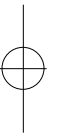
(bottom) Ethiopian Children. Photo courtesy of David Schein, Awassa Children’s Project.

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This volume is dedicated to
the memory of the 19 million Africans
who have died of AIDS.





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List of Multi-Media Clips Appearing on Compact Disk



System Requirements for Operating Compact Disk

Microsoft® Windows® 95 or higher	Macintosh G-3 or higher
QuickTime 3.0 or higher	Operating System OS8
233MHz	QuickTime 3.0 or higher
16MB of RAM	400MHz
256-color video display adapter (millions recommended)	64MB of RAM
CD-ROM Drive	256-color video display adapter (millions recommended)

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Foreword

by Dr. Gilbert Doho

For the last 20 years, Theatre for Social Change, alternately known as People's Theatre or Theatre for Development, has had a tremendous impact on theatre practitioners in the developing world and on the organization and funding of political and social development projects. The goal of this movement, as outlined by Ross Kidd and Martin Byram, is to bring theatre to the people to raise their consciousness and to facilitate human and economic development (Eyoh 1994). People's Theatre has contributed a great deal in the empowerment of the disadvantaged rural and urban masses in the last 20 years. It has denounced corrupt national and international money mongers who have monopolized the knowledge, power, and wealth of the African continent. People's Theatre has led the marginalized masses in Africa to the reappropriation of their political and social rights. Indeed, Theatre for Social Change has been at the forefront of the people's struggle against man-made and natural catastrophes such as war, corruption, famine, hunger, environmental destruction, and deadly diseases such as AIDS.

Today, People's Theatre is changing hands. What began as theatrical experimentation by expatriates and alienated African intellectuals, is today being taken over by the masses. The prostitutes of Bamako, the street boys of Harare, the pygmies in the Central African rainforest, and the inhabitants of the remotest villages in Africa are all using performance to empower themselves and to castigate Africa's unaccountable kleptocratic classes.

Performances of People's Theatre raise daring and paradoxical questions. Why has Africa, so rich in natural resources, become a continent of misery? Why have so many Africans had their lives disrupted by war and genocide? Why do African leaders choose military solutions over peaceful ones? And what must Africans do to build countries where poverty, pandemic diseases, and early death are things of the past?

There is a substantial literature on Theatre for Social Change. But much of this material tends to be narrow in scope, consisting mainly of reports of People's Theatre workshops and experiments. The preponderance of this literature falls loosely into the category of the case study and is thus limited in time and space. The South African experiences by Zakes Mda (1993), the Kammiriithu odyssey by Ross Kidd (1983), the Cameroonian "Hammocks to bridges dream" by Hansel Ndumbe Eyoh (1986), or the Hausa women's struggle in Nigeria (Eyoh 1986) are essentially different versions of the same experience.

Louise M. Bourgault's *Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS* goes beyond the existing literature on Theatre for Social Change to encompass other genres of performance: oral narratives, songs and chants, dance, and

of course, drama. Her book draws upon pre-existing African performance practices, arguing that these are the true foundations for social change. Her work urges African performers and scholars to delve into their own performance roots to create genuinely transformative genres. She goes so far as to posit that ritual is the foundation of a practice that can induce changes in African society. She develops an argument that relates performance to ritual in the African context. In her approach, the people take the place of ritual specialists, create roles, and act for themselves. *Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS* is a post-modern work that is holistic in its approach and continental in its relevance.

It is not surprising that Louise Bourgault is publishing a valuable work on formal and informal tools of communication. She is neither a newcomer to the field of communication nor a neophyte in Theatre for Social Change. (See Bourgault 1991). She posited long ago that the media are revolutionary weapons that can reshape power relationships and may even contribute to the redistribution of wealth on the African continent. She was among the first scholars to inspire sons and daughters of Africa to see the potential of the mass media in the emancipation of the continent (Bourgault 1995). She teaches that the media can advance the liberation of the African continent from imperialist and neo-colonial chains. But she maintains that genuine democracy in Africa cannot be sustained without the development of free and responsible print and electronic media. An informed Africa citizenry, Bourgault argues, must be the backbone of economic, political, and social development in Africa.

Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS is an ambitious and informative work, one that synthesizes concepts of Theatre for Social Change from performance and drama studies with concepts of edutainment from media studies and social marketing. Bourgault draws from the theoretical works of Schechner and Turner and then analyzes performances from other literature and from her extensive experience in Africa. She develops a theory of social change based in performance. The practice, she argues, functions like ritual.

As an African, I view performance for social change as ritual in what Westerners would call a post-modern sense. By this I mean that the fundamental purpose of ritual is to effect change in the lives of the people for whom it is performed. Theatre for Social Change functions in a similar manner and has a similar purpose. It proposes to enact a change in the lives of the people. This change must ultimately result in a redistribution of power, from top down to bottom up.

When I visit my native village of Fu'nda in the Grassfields of Cameroon every year to offer a fowl to my ancestors (i.e., to perform a ritual), I fully expect the ancestors to meet my needs. When the Bali Nyonga of Cameroon perform the annual Leila every December, they clearly expect the ritual to result in good fortune for the year to come. The blood of the animal that is sacrificed during these performances fertilizes the earth so that good things will befall the ritual enactors. To perform ritual is to anticipate for oneself and the community a fruitful harvest from the ancestors, the benefactors of our society. Theatre for Social Change, argues Bourgault, walks along the same path!

For the last 10 years, I have been witness to the miracles that theater can perform. In the politically charged atmosphere of Cameroon of the early 1990s, I observed the ability of theatre to convince the Bafounda people to destroy cof-

fee plantations and replant the agribusiness estates with subsistence crops. In the same village, I saw a group of women succeed in opposing the sale of their secret and sacred forest to loggers and to local industrial developers. And I have even seen theatre, in Muyuka in South West Province of Cameroon, tear down ethnocentric governance. Theatre for Social Change helped a mother to denounce her own son, an unscrupulous, corrupt, and tainted politician. Within the fiction of a People's Theatre performance this mother/judge condemned the corrupt mayor of an imaginary town. When the woman later emerged from the performance arena, she stood up before the community and denounced its mismanagement by its corrupt mayor, her son. The performance and the mother's public denunciation occasioned this compromised individual to step down from office. Just a few months after the play was performed, justice took over from fiction! This incident is a prime post-modern example of both art imitating life and life imitating art. It is also a testimony to the tremendous power of Theatre for Social Change.

The author of *Playing for Life: Performance in the Age of AIDS*, Louise Bourgault is a friend of Africa. By this I do not mean she is an Africanist of the armchair variety. Nor do I mean she is a mere occasional traveler who, having visited one or a handful of countries, dares to talk about a continent with thousands of languages and cultures, a continent almost three times the size of the United States of America. Bourgault has traveled all over Africa. She has lived and worked in many African countries. She has trained journalists, helped to establish radio stations, lectured university students, evaluated development projects, and even monitored elections. She has lived the realities of the continent from Dakar to Mombassa, from Cairo to Cape Town. She has shared the *Tsuya* and *Kose* of the Nigerians, the *Achu* of the Cameroonians, the *Atkeke-poisson* of the Ivorians, and the mealies of the Southern Africans. She has interviewed people from all walks of African life from ministers and government officials, to traditional chiefs and title-holders, to ordinary people, even the marginalized. She tackles the issue of AIDS with the depth of an anthropologist and the curiosity of a journalist. She has chosen to enlighten her readers on the paradox of Africa through the lens of the AIDS pandemic. What are the past and present causes of the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa? How can theatre help to halt the development of this deadly disease? The agony of the present day, one that translates into millions dead and millions more orphaned, spreads in all directions and cries out to all fields—virology, epidemiology, medicine, economics, politics, culture, communication, and even history and geography, for an explanation.

Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS presents Africa in a diachronic and well as a synchronic perspective. This is a broad-based work with an interdisciplinary focus that delivers historical, geographical, and cultural information about the African continent. Bourgault's intention is to explore the present so as to build a future that is firmly rooted deep in African cultures of the past. The fight against AIDS must take account of the cultural context of the epidemic. Bourgault therefore draws from pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Africa to explain its present day problems. She also posits that mankind is largely responsible for the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Bourgault assesses the role enacted by every actor in the gruesome life-drama taking place in Africa. Although colonial and neocolonial regimes carry the heaviest responsibility for creating African "mal-development," the majority of the

ruled are not blameless. Traditional customs and mores see women's primary role as that of reproduction. This turns females, the more numerous gender group in most societies, into both targets and victims of HIV/AIDS. For to foster upon society the belief that girls are born to be nothing more than reproductive machines is as heinous as to bleed the national coffers dry when holding political office. Such vile positions and actions lead to the spread of poverty that both creates and justifies the sex market in most African countries. And where else can profuse sexuality lead if not to AIDS?

Bourgault is not an Afro-pessimist. *Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS* is designed to help equip Africans (and friends of Africa) for the struggle against the AIDS pandemic. Bourgault's book offers a new approach for waging a modern war against the epidemic through the use of performance for social change. The approach focuses on prevention because at least for the time being, prevention is the most efficient means to fight against the disease. The volume reviews various forms of edutainment and acknowledges their effectiveness in carrying of messages warning to potential targets of HIV/AIDS. And *Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS* is also designed to show students in the Western world what Africans are doing with performance so as to mobilize Western students to use performance effectively in their own struggle against HIV/AIDS.

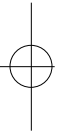
Playing for Life salutes AIDS activists and is a call for action to those who doze while Africa is dying. This call summons Africans and Americans, and all people of goodwill to combat this deadly epidemic. For we are living in the "Age of AIDS." Indeed it would be self-deception to think that HIV/AIDS is only an African disease. US citizens have no cause to be complacent about HIV. The disease is on the rise in the USA as well as in Africa. This is why Bourgault also takes it upon herself to bring AIDS performance artists from Africa, such as Eager Artists of Durban, South Africa, to exhibit their preventive techniques in the United States. She hopes to disseminate performance-based approaches to combating the HIV epidemic. She hopes to bring about the world-wide movement of AIDS activists, both to demonstrate their talents and their techniques, and to issue warnings to diverse publics about the grave dangers of HIV/AIDS. We live in dangerous times. No part of this planet is safe. The spread of infectious disease is another aspect of globalization. HIV needs no visa to cross national boundaries!

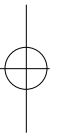
These were our thoughts as Bourgault, a group of students, and I set out to create a piece of AIDS Theatre for Social Change in Marquette, Michigan in March 2001. The play, which came to be called *Phambili* (in Zulu, "Let Us Unite") drew from the energies and talents of Northern Michigan University undergraduates. The powerful message these young people created went straight to the hearts of audience members, both young and old. The post-performance discussion raised an important question many of us would prefer not to face, "Have you been tested?"

Until all the citizens of the world can be shown to be free of HIV/AIDS, the struggle against the pandemic implicates every one of us. This is in fact the final message of *Playing for Life: Performance in the Age of AIDS*. The author summons each and every one of us, the living, the dying, the deceased, the spirits of

the gods, and of the ancestors, to join in the ultimate ritual combat of this planetary pandemic.

Gilbert Doho, *Doctorat d'état*
February 2002





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Note: A 20 minute video tape summary of *Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS* is available from two sources.

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Introduction

The AIDS pandemic was one of the most heart-wrenching crises of the 20th century. By the beginning of 2000, AIDS had killed an estimated 17 million people worldwide. And it had orphaned more than 11 million children. Two years into the new millennium the catastrophic AIDS figures only seem to get grimmer. AIDS has killed another three million people and has left another three million orphans. The AIDS catastrophe is expected to generate one-hundred million cases of HIV/AIDS on this planet by 2005 as the epidemic, presently centered on the African continent, takes hold of populations in Eastern Europe, India, China and elsewhere. Perhaps these regions will be luckier than Africa. Perhaps a vaccine will be discovered to prevent the development of HIV, or perhaps science will come up with a cure for this most dreaded of afflictions. Maybe we will one day look back with curiosity and some bewilderment at all our agonies and all our efforts at HIV/AIDS prevention. I know when that day comes it will be important to know how Africans tried to cope with the epidemic at the end of the 20th century. For Africa is fighting a war of attrition against the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. The HIV/AIDS conflagration is being waged on the prevention battlefield. It is largely a war of symbols, of information, education, and communication, barely the only weapons available to the African people. And because performance figures so prominently as a mode of communication in Africa, performance is a major combatant in the African HIV/AIDS campaigns.

When I first traveled to South Africa in 1997, I was impressed with the grassroots response to the tackling the AIDS epidemic. I was struck by the conviction of ordinary people that their actions could make a difference in the AIDS struggle. And I was delighted by the originality of approaches people were using to fight the AIDS epidemic. I was particularly edified by the outpouring of performative artistic talent attacking the AIDS problem. South Africans were adapting folkways—recitation, song, dance, dramatic styles, and so on, that had moved them in the past, to the information needs of AIDS prevention. A year later I had the opportunity to work in Mali training community radio broadcasters. Once again, I found artists, this time, Malian musicians and storytellers, adapting time-tested folk genres to the problems of HIV prevention. At that point, I made up my mind to return to the African continent to further study the performance techniques Africans were using for AIDS awareness. I wanted to learn more about how Africans were harnessing the performing arts to fight the terrible scourge of HIV/AIDS. And I wanted to share with readers the impressive community efforts Africans were making to save their people.

Five years later the results of my explorations have produced *Playing For Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS*. The *Playing for Life* project includes a basic text, an accompanying CD, and a video documentary. While the digital video provides moving illustrations of specific points in the book, the doc-

umentary, "AIDS and the ARTS in AFRICA," is a meta-commentary or visual summary of the book. (It also exists as a unit in its own right).

The aim of *Playing for Life* is threefold. First, I hope to provide an introduction to the study of Africa through performance suitable for undergraduate students. Second, I have attempted to supply a sampling of Africa's rich performative resources. And third, I have tried to show how Africans are working to harness the energy of performance to help solve this most terrible of contemporary problems, the AIDS pandemic.

Because the continent is so vast, I thought it best to focus chiefly on the AIDS epidemic in two countries. Out of more than 45 countries I might have chosen, I selected the countries of South Africa and Mali. The choice reflected my desire to provide at least two different case views of African performance and African performative response to the AIDS crisis. The countries, so divergent from one another by most social indicators—economy, religion, geography and climate, colonial history, pre-colonial history, and nature and severity of the AIDS epidemic seemed to offer sufficient contrasts appropriate for this work. They could amply justify my desire to seize fortuitous opportunities for research that emerged in my academic career in the late 1990s.

The book is organized in the following way. Part I contains four overview chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction to the African continent. Chapter 2 provides a review of the AIDS crisis in Africa. Chapter 3 provides thumbnail sketches of two African countries, South Africa and Mali. Chapter 4 provides a survey of performance theory and is designed to help readers consider theory as they read through the performance chapters.

Part II of *Playing for Life* contains four genre chapters and a final chapter. Chapter 5 provides a continental survey of oral narratives. Chapter 6 provides a survey of African songs and chants. Chapter 7 examines the African world of dance. Chapter 8 covers the world of African drama. Chapter 9, the concluding chapter, returns to the level of theory and attempts to create a theory of ritual, performance, and social change suitable for explaining how performance can work to shift attitudes in behaviors surrounding HIV/AIDS. In so doing, it returns to two issues that promise to be of continuing concern for much of this century: the question of gender, and the subject of globalization.

Because art in Africa is by its very nature group-oriented, African artists have produced communal responses to the terrible sickness within their communities. This response is interesting and noteworthy in its own right. African performance art, while adhering to basic conventions of genre, has always been responsive to historical process. I wanted to show how AIDS performances arise out of existing genres. This accounts for the structure of the performance chapters in Part II that start with genre surveys and end with AIDS performances.

Just as African artists are working within genre conventions, so too are they bound up within the larger socio-historical processes of their continent, their individual country of origin, and its place within the global economic order. This order has consequences in terms of the spread of the AIDS epidemic, and the resources available to counter it. And the modalities of response to the AIDS crisis exist within a geo-political and a globalizing contest. It is equally important to understand these. Besides providing a general introduction for undergraduate

students, Part I of the volume serves to provide a social, political, historical and epidemiological background into which the performances fit.

In addition to maps, charts, and photographs sprinkled throughout the volume, the genre chapters have been illustrated with audio and video clips featured on the accompanying compact disk (CD). These illustrations are intended to help readers to get a feel for some of the performances about which they are reading. And because the content of some of these performances has not been exhaustively discussed in the text, the clips featured in the CD should pique the curiosity of interested readers, and stir them to seek additional information on the subjects presented.

Throughout the creation of these three interrelated projects, the text, the CD, and the video, I have also felt a good deal of open-endedness about these works. In these days of Internet resources and constantly updated databases, one never experiences the satisfying feeling academics once had of having thoroughly researched the field. Even in the time that passes between completing the writing and the appearance of the book, the field becomes ever more fluid, and with it the search for truth more elusive. This is probably even truer of the AIDS field than most because study of the AIDS pandemic, so vast in scope, so paradoxical in nature, cuts across so many disciplines. Indeed minute by minute developments in several areas of inquiry make a work of this kind outdated almost as soon as an analysis is on paper. Some of these fields include epidemiology, behavioral science, medical anthropology, virology, human geography, pharmacology, public policy, foreign policy, popular culture, theatre, mass and interpersonal communication and so on. There seems hardly an academic discipline (with the possible exception of astronomy), untouched by this pandemic.

Playing for Life: Performance in Africa in the Age of AIDS has been enriched with the inclusion of a Foreword provided by the gifted Cameroonian playwright, social activist, and friend, Dr. Gilbert Doho.

While the greatest care has been taken to ensure that all of the facts and figures presented in this work are accurate and up to date, I take full responsibility for any errors that do appear.

Louise M. Bourgault, Ph.D.
Marquette, Michigan August 16, 2002

