My concern in this article is not with the kind of theatre that attempts to bring theatrical techniques into the classroom in the service of specific educational objectives. This kind of theatre, known as “Theatre in Education,” attempts to use theatre as a method in the dissemination of knowledge in various fields such as English language, mathematics, literature, etc. It is used also in some programmes to equip students with literacy and numeracy skills. There have been many projects in South Africa, particularly in the Cape Town area, whose objective is to promote drama as an educational tool.¹ In some cases the curriculum in the drama or in education departments of some tertiary education will include Theatre in Education.

I want to look briefly at what is happening in South Africa in the development of that theatre which should form part of the cultural pattern of the children in that country. It is a well-known fact that South African theatre is rich and varied. Throughout the country, performances are held every day both at amateur and professional levels. Different types of theatre exist side-by-side ranging from “popular theatre” to “art theatre.” Indeed, even some pre-colonial forms – indigenous modes – are still to be found in rural South Africa. In the urban areas there is the melodramatic Township Theatre, for instance, that is based on sensational themes such as rape, infidelity, prostitution, etc. Township Theatre companies travel throughout the country, even in the smallest towns, performing plays that are highly dependent on music and dance. There is the erudite Town Theatre which is based in city purpose-built venues, is created by both black


and white intermediate classes, and is usually of the protest tradition. There is the Theatre for Resistance that is performed with the objective of rallying and mobilizing the people to find ways and means of fighting against political oppression and economic exploitation, and used to be performed a lot at weddings and funerals, at political rallies and lately mostly in the city purpose-built venues. There is also the Organic Workers’ Theatre, which is created and performed by the workers themselves, and which serves to discuss shopfloor issues for a worker audience, or on a larger scale for a community audience to make the connection between the work-place and the community.

Most of this theatre is urban-based, and is seen a lot in overseas venues, including the commercial world of Broadway and the West End. But none of this theatre is ever seen by rural audiences in South Africa, both adults and children. Worse still, very few of these accomplished theatre practitioners, whose work has received so much international recognition, ever create theatre either for the children or with the children. South African theatre is almost exclusively adult-centred.

Although in South Africa theatre is not yet an elitist activity as it has long become in the Western world, and in its various modes all classes of people are involved in its production and/or enjoyment, a large percentage of the South African population is deprived of theatre. This is the population composed of children of all ages – both in the urban and rural areas.

Yet we are at a stage where theatre is even more relevant than ever before. Until recently, we were in a war situation, and our children lost their childhood at a very early age. At six they were already in the streets throwing stones at the armoured vehicles of the police and army. They stopped bullets with dustbin lids. At nine, they were in detention. At fourteen they already led youth formations and were involved in one way or the other in what they call Umzabalazo – the struggle. The world of fantasy, the formative age of all creativity, was snatched away from them never to be recovered again.

Adults create theatre to deal with the adult world, to get further insights into their situation, and rally one another to deal with it. Children are left to wallow in a quagmire of ignorance and stunted