

Homecoming: Finding a place for shamanic practice in  
the creation of post colonial theatre

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Sue Kiel 2010

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## ABSTRACT

At the centre of my research, in the light of my homecoming and notions of home, there is a question: might I find a place where dimensions of shamanism might intersect with modes of performance, in the creation of theatre for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? In this liminal hybrid moment, a place between the present and the future, I suggest that art is actually necessary and that it is essential for artists to build a counter-narrative, both locally and globally, to terror, suffering and denial. Art and social change can be a trend for certain nations, societies, even artists and theorists. In my view, however, which is my point of departure, it is particularly in an era of self reference, modernity, post modern and post colonial rupture and fragmentation that an informed coherence between the inexplicable terror of unsettling major social upheaval and the individual, may be able to be sketched once again and with certainty, by and through art and performance; if not actual transformation; then a witnessing, an acknowledgement and an end to the pain of denial.

This explication begins with an overview of current socio-political dilemmas, and looks at the role of theatre in impacting change. My exploration continues with an examination of the role of shamanism as a tool to assist the theatre maker, the actor and even the audience in the pursuit of a transforming experience where one might initiate a shift in perceptions, thought and consciousness. In my observation of current theatre makers in South Africa, I am finding that this is already taking place.

The object of this paper is to frame and make more specific, the role of shamanism as it connects to interdisciplinary techniques and technologies for performance. In my practical research, which will include my culminating production, *Passages* (provisional title), I attempt to tease out these methodologies in order to expand my work and be a part of the development of theory and practice in theatre making in these significant and urgent times, for my 21<sup>st</sup> Century homes.

The primary theorists that I have referenced, contained in my theoretical framework, are Ashraf Jamal, Sarah Nuttall, Achille Mbembe, Homi Bhabha, Breyten Breytenbach, Iain Chambers and Hamid Naficy. In my research for my praxis, I have worked predominantly with the findings of Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, Antonin Artaud, Peter Sellars, Jerzy Grotowski, Alison Oddey and Rachel Karafistan.

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## Homecoming: Finding a place for shamanic practice in the creation of post colonial theatre

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

#### Critical Homecoming

##### 1.1 home #1: united states / la – signalling through the flames

'I do feel very, very happy to be alive at a moment where almost for the first time ... art is actually necessary. The social collapse is so extreme, the political collapse is so extreme that actually people do need ways to communicate. People do not know how to articulate what they are now feeling in this society. The absence of articulation is what creates violence ... The ability to move against violence is the ability to create forms of expression where nobody has to be killed in order to say something.' (Sellars 2009: 131)

In this article, from the book *Theatre In Crisis*, Peter Sellars refers to the fact that he comes from Los Angeles, a city in which, in 1992, an uprising occurred. I too was living in Los Angeles when people in South Central L A, in a rage of powerlessness, set fire to their own neighborhoods. We 'know what it is for people to set fire to their own city,' a gesture Antonin Artaud would call 'signalling through the flames.' (Artaud 1938: preface). Sellars compares this revolutionary gesture to the Buddhist monks who immolated themselves in protest against the Vietnam War. He suggests that most of our cities are in flames; we just cannot see them. 'You have to look with the eyes of a great prophet and suddenly you see a ring of flame around you. Can you sense those flames? Art, of course, is the ability to articulate that which is invisible ....' (Sellars in Delgado & Switch 2009: 131). He proposes that artists are essential to the world because they understand the question of visionary prophetic engagement. Artaud suggests that it is our 'artistic dallying with forms' that keeps us from becoming 'like victims burnt at the stake.' In the preface to *The Theatre and its Double*<sup>1</sup>, he states that we must believe in the possibility of theatre to renew life and that this sense of life occurs when 'man makes himself master' of what does not yet exist, and brings it into being. He insists that everything that has not yet been born can still be brought to life as long as we are dissatisfied with remaining 'mere recording organisms' (Artaud 1938: preface). In the context of visionary prophetic engagement Artaud adds that in the theatre, similarly as in culture, it remains a question of

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<sup>1</sup> The preface to *The Theatre and its Double* by Antonin Artaud (1938) was located online, in *The Theatre and Culture* and not within the confines of the book referenced. Translated by M.C. Richards. 1958. New York. Grove Press Inc.



'naming and directing' shadows (Ibid.). I regard this as his interpretation of visionary prophetic engagement and it serves to illuminate my interrogation around the necessity of art ('art is actually necessary'), and the mandate we have as artists to somehow find ways to articulate that which is invisible. In Paul Verilio's words 'I became a specialist of the tropism since I had taken on the goal of making visible the invisible' (Verilio 2005: 33). Artaud might well have been referring to the Rodney King incident, which was the precursor to the Los Angeles Uprising, when he suggested that 'every real effigy has a shadow which is its double.' Let us make sure to keep alert, to be watchful and to interpret the signs that are being indicated in our environment. An example of a modern day cartographer of hidden realms, Daniel Pinchbeck, in his book *2012 The Return of Quetzalcoatl*, questions the path of ever-increasing acceleration in our civilization and wonders what we are running toward? He speaks of multiplying levels of anxiety, a disintegrating environment, heat rising as the ozone layer thins, Jihad 'facing off against McWorld in senseless wars and televised atrocities. Populations are displaced as cities disappear beneath toxic flood tides. Rogue nations stockpile nuclear arsenals' (Pinchbeck 2006: 1). He suggests that wars, economic recessions and natural disasters are self-evident phenomena that can be acknowledged by anyone but posits that a change in our way of thinking could transform the world once again. Approaching this subject he says, would require, to borrow a phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche, 'uninhibited fingers for the unfathomable'. In seeking to define a change in the nature of consciousness, he adds, there is only one medium in which the change can be registered and that is within consciousness itself. He calls it 'the mercurial domain of our subjective and personal experience – the ground of all experience' (Ibid: 3).

## 1.2 home #2: south africa – birth, becoming and reclamation

My personal journey of training and study with medicine people, shamans and teachers (inner and outer world guides) across varying disciplines began, decades earlier, with an initiation at the age of eleven in a tribe in Tzaneen, in the North Eastern Transvaal, an area now called Mpumalanga. This event, following a 'near death' bout with meningitis and subsequently chased by a severe nervous breakdown, served as a foundation to an inquiry that has become a lifelong quest; I wanted to discover the deeper secrets of the multidimensional self and the multidimensional 'other'. Traveling between worlds (in my shamanic work), between continents and between the multifaceted disciplines of my work as actor/artist/writer/producer/teacher and simple life experience, I became aware of a

perspective that comes with being able to metamorphose and shed skins, in order to see oneself from the vantage point of differing social, spiritual and political paradigms; myself and the world ... my being-ness within the world. In order to support this thesis, ephemeral as it may seem, I turn to Jung, who, after a journey to Africa, became ever more clear about his hypothesis that 'the world is humanity's home and humanity is the vehicle through which the world comes to know itself' (Romanyshyn in Saayman 1990: 74). He experiences this not as an idea, it is something which he sees, which is given through the landscape. Commenting on the early morning light of the African landscape, he wrote, 'the longing for light is the longing for consciousness' (Jung 1961: 269). He concluded that we live in the realm of metaphor, within which the world is the soul's landscape; its ways of incarnating. The dawning light; that moment of radiant luminosity, speaks to an awakening of consciousness; the soul awakening through and as a world (Romanyshyn in Saayman 1990: 74).

The world comes with shapes, colors, atmospheres, textures--- a display of self-presenting forms. All things show faces, the world is not only a coded signature to be read for meaning, but a physiognomy to be faced. As expressive forms, things speak; they show the shape they are in. They announce themselves, bear witness to their presence: 'Look, here we are.' ... This imaginative claim of attention bespeaks a world ensouled (Hillman 1982: 77-78 in Saayman 1990: 74).

From a Jungian perspective, in which light and darkness are understood symbolically, the 'real' meaning of development is internal. If individuation points to becoming a 'separate, indivisible unity, or 'whole' (Jung 1939: 275), then projections must be withdrawn 'in order to restore them to the individual who has involuntarily lost them by projecting them outside himself' (Jung 1938: 84). The call of the light of consciousness became, for Jung, the goal of human life (Brooke in Saayman 1990: 82-83).

In this paper I will attempt to address this multidimensional landscape (both 'self' and 'the world'), which will include an examination of liminality, paradigm shifts, the 'hybrid moment' (Bhabha) and the entanglements inherent in the intricate overlaps that mark this moment in time. Sellars suggests that culture is by definition multiplicitous because we as humans are, by definition, multiplicitous and multifarious; all of us representing many cultures much of the time (Sellars in Delgado & Svich 2009: 128). 'Multi is the definition of being a human being and surviving on the planet, and not only surviving but doing better than that' (Ibid: 127).

Despite a state of 'homesickness' that has been ever present in my time away from the land of my birth, my perspective on returning brought with it a degree of revelation:

It is now time to go home. But, then again, it may be that there is no home, no fixed abode waiting for us. There is the sensation of having exited from the old house of language and of now being lost. This is to experience Heidegger's *Unheimlichkeit*, literally 'to-not-be-at-home'. We can never go home, return to the primal scene, to the forgotten moments of our beginnings and 'authenticity', for there is always something else in between (Chambers 1990: 103).

In the liminality of this 'in between', South Africa has revealed herself slowly, the layers peeling back like the layers of an onion, like an intricate story woven by a master storyteller. I realise now, my naiveté on arrival, despite the fact that I had visited the country on a more or less annual basis for years. I was now to become embedded: my intention, to become immersed and to reclaim my place as a citizen living, working and studying in my original home. However, the job of undertaking a Masters degree in Theatre Making and Performance, has within it an inherent qualification which is that one is going to be studying, watching intently and researching in order to locate specificities that will inform and clarify the place in which one can find one's own voice and vision so as to interpret and unearth material for performance. In this regard both disciplines require a certain degree of awareness and an ability to syncretise aspects of the cultural and political climate, in this particular case, South Africa 2009/2010. Like a love affair that becomes more real with the movement of months and years and with the revelation of apparent truths, habits and idiosyncrasies, so the complex relationship within this so called 'rainbow nation' and the scar tissue from South Africa's violent past began to become more apparent and I was able to concretise and distil my own theories around theatre and it's imperative to continue becoming a tool for healing, transformation and change. In an interview in 2005, Mark Fleishman stressed the importance of transformation as an idea that is key to our entire society. The ways in which we see each other and engage with one another 'constantly need to be challenged and changed and we need to strive towards a kind of utopia of a better society, through action, through doing. And doing theatre is one of those ways' (Fleishman in SATJ 2006: 104). Fleishman calls this 'radical participatory democracy' and suggests it is much needed in a country starved of its voice for so long (Ibid: 103).

In terms of my own 'return' to my birthplace I am also fascinated by the possibilities of mining the places of my 'becoming' and the spaces of my potential reclamation (which was the underlying theme of my 'one-person show', *Crossing ...* conceived and performed in March, 2010). As Jeanette Winterson states in *Re-Framing the Theatrical*, 'cities are living things ... they are not simply a collection of buildings inhabited by people. They have

their own energy, energy which lasts across time, which doesn't simply disappear. It becomes layered like a coal seam' (Winterson in Oddey 2007: 54). And, she suggests, you can mine it and unlock past energy, tap into this repository from the past, as the mind is such that it travels, dimensionally and can unpack and open up lives, histories, moments collected and shaped by others, ancestors and ourselves. In *Crossing ...*, which I will explore at greater depth in Chapter 4, by virtue of its nature as a piece of auto-ethnography, I was afforded the ability to unpack notions of place and my own phenomenology as a critical underpinning of this homecoming. The exact nature of this Masters degree has served to force a process of mapping, from the binary perspectives of theory and practice, a chart or a course of action and re-action, so as to push myself as an artist and to hone and clarify my determination to bring voice to my query.

### 1.3 two homes and two continents

Having homes on two continents has its advantages and its disadvantages. There is the presence of a certain degree of fragmentation in flying backwards and forwards between these two continents but there is also a degree of insight that might emerge from the objectivity and subjectivity (objectivism and subjectivism in Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus') within the process. The question then becomes, what am I observing from these binary perspectives? And how is this observation going to affect and inhabit my work as a theatre maker and performer? 'It is all very well to go traveling, but one of the inescapable consequences of letting go or getting lost is that you can never really go home as the same "someone" that you were before ... ' (Kobena Mercer 2001: 79).

Habitus (objectivism and subjectivism) can be defined as a 'system of dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception, thought and action). The individual agent develops these dispositions in response to the objective conditions it encounters' (Unknown 2010: 9). I am fascinated, too, by Pierre Bourdieu's investigative frameworks around the notion of symbolic capital and symbolic violence. These concepts aid in contextualizing a framework within which I am able to filter my own observations of these two countries and the ways in which they are received and encountered on a global level (Bourdieu's work is vast, hence I will merely be using it as a springboard for my hypothesis and my praxis). Symbolic capital, in Bourdieu's view (ie. prestige, honor, attention) is a crucial source of power that is perceived through classificatory schemes inculcated in society. Symbolic violence is the imposition of categories of thought and perception upon dominated 'social agents' who then take the social order to be just. It is the incorporation of unconscious structures that tend to

perpetuate structures of action of the 'dominant'. The dominated then mistakenly take their position to be 'right'. This symbolic violence can become dangerous, giving legitimacy to a social order by virtue of the fact that it becomes embedded in the very modes of action and structures of cognition in the 'dominated' individuals (Ibid: 12).

In 2009, as I began this Masters degree, I had just borne witness, in the US, to an event that appeared to be a miracle. Barack Obama had just won the election and the day prior to my departure for South Africa, had been inaugurated as the first 'person of color' to be elected President of the United States. The world watched as a black family broke new ground and moved into the White House, a major moment of symbolic capital and one that might have seemed impossible, following in the wake of eight years of empire building during the reign of George Bush and Dick Cheney. These latter two, joined by the Republican Party, took advantage of a moment of symbolic violence; '9/11', as it has come to be known, the horrifying terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and attempted to turn it into a moment of symbolic capital. This image, a metaphor of staggering semiotic significance, which played over and over on our TV screens across the planet to the horror of almost everyone, seemed to give the Bush Administration free reign to begin ruling through fear. This resulted in the invasion of Iraq, an event the government called the War on Terror (and the creation of the Patriot Act); a war fought on the basis of erroneous information. This 9/11 metaphor; two of the worlds tallest buildings, monolithic and phallic, crumbling and collapsing into dust and rubble before our eyes became an event of extreme theatricality (acknowledging of course the very real pain and grief caused by the loss of lives). It did not escape our notice that this metaphor might also represent the symbolic collapse of something greater than just the two buildings. Was this a challenge to the patriarchy? Could we, from the position of seeing with 'the eyes of prophets', be witnessing the metaphoric collapse of structures that had held true and fast for centuries? Not too long after, came Hurricane Katrina and again the world watched as New Orleans transformed from a so-called 'first world' city to 'third world' before our very eyes. Then it was the collapse of Wall Street, banks and the stock market, saved, in the nick of time, by a massive government bail out. Barack Obama's campaign with the slogan the 'Audacity of Hope' had come at a moment when the country had just about reached boiling point. The power of art to impact the direction of choice making, played out in the simplest of ways. will.i.am (lower-case intentional), a member of the band Black Eyed Peas, created and directed a video which was released on YouTube on February 2, 2008, which spread like wildfire. He used musicians and celebrities to 'riff' on Obama's voice and text from one of his speech's and

this 'spoken word' piece/music video, 'Yes We Can', succeeded in galvanizing the youth vote, which tipped the scales in favor of Obama. By July 22, 2008 the video had been watched over 21 million times on YouTube and other sites. It was honored with the first-ever Emmy Award for Best New Approaches in Daytime Entertainment and will.i.am received an 'Artist of the Year', Webby Award. The term 'Yes We Can' became a secondary slogan for the Obama campaign.

Life transcends all structures, and there are new  
rules of conduct for the soul. The seed sprouts  
anywhere; all ideas are exotic; we wait for  
enormous changes every day; we live through  
the mutation of human order avidly; spring is rebellious. (Neruda)

South Africa, more so than most countries, is rich in symbolic capital. Nelson Mandela's walk from Victor Verster prison in 1990, is a case in point, followed by his speech from the balcony at Cape Town's City Hall, to 'a boundless sea of people'. The long awaited democratic elections in April 1994 gave the world searing images of 'great lines of patient people snaking through the dirt roads and streets .... Old women who had waited half a century to cast their first vote ... saying they felt like human beings for the first time in their lives' (Mandela 2001: 199). Nelson Mandela becoming president of the country after 27 years of incarceration; and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which offered a 'macro scale' model to the world regarding responsibility and forgiveness.

#### 1.4 conversations about love – when thought slips its casing

My reflection, in this homecoming is about the post apartheid present, a moment which Sarah Nuttall calls 'a condition of entanglement,' a notion I will explore in the following chapter of this paper. My observation is that we are living in a liminal moment on the planet. Old systems are crumbling and it is our responsibility as artists to be part of the midwifery of a new paradigm. South Africa, after the paradigm shift from apartheid to a democracy is now, sixteen years later, going through her own multilayered changes. After an event with the impact and magnitude of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, does it behoove us, particularly as artists, to be watchful and open? Antjie Krog said after the Commission, 'it is mine. I belong to that continent. My gaze, my eyes are one with the thousands of others ... Ours. Mine. Yes, I would die for this .... It is the commission alone that has brought me to this' (Krog in Nuttall 2009: 68). In the 1970's, Eduard Glissant wrote on the issue of race, identity and belonging in the Carribean, using the term

entanglement in reference to a 'point of difficulty' in creolized beginnings. 'We must return,' he wrote. 'to the point from which we started ... a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away; ... or perish' (Glissant in Nuttall 2009: 9). Given the national stage on which so many dramas of race unfold both in South Africa and the United States and globally for that matter, it warrants us to continue taking readings of racial groups across these areas. In recent literary scholarship in South Africa, according to Nuttall, there has been an insistence on race in order to deconstruct it. She sites Distiller & Steyn's book, *Under construction: 'Race' and Identity in South Africa Today*, as a piece of cultural scholarship which addresses the need for a vocabulary of race in South Africa today. In the book the authors challenge the artificiality of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' and explore the implications of policing these boundaries and borders (Nuttall 2009: 11). Achille Mbembe, in his paper *Passages to Freedom: The Politics of Racial Reconciliation in South Africa*, describes the multiple and systemic transitions that South Africa is going through, at differing paces and rhythms, and suggests that the country is involved in 'one of the few contemporary global experiments with a view of creating the first credible nonracial society on the planet.' (2008: 5). This is an exciting proposition. And the recent FIFA World Cup became yet another semiotic moment in which South Africa's capital across the globe became enhanced. In the States, it was a beautiful and proud moment to walk as a South African. South Africa was on everyone's lips as she received praise and much admiration. There was a sense that South Africans, out of a sense of pride and belonging, had fallen in love with their country and emerging from that came the possibility, for a brief period of time, to 'see the other' through the eyes of love. Looking back over decades one recognises the moments when one could hold one's head high on behalf of one's country or, as most of us travelers with our multiple identities and localities recognise, there have been times when one has had to hang one's head in shame. It is our responsibility as artists to continue to take action, to not leave everything in the hands of our leaders. Now, more than ever, with access to the Internet and YouTube and performance spreading into site-specificity with more regularity, we are able to reach into the population to infiltrate new ideas and ways of thinking and being. An example of this is *Infecting The City*<sup>2</sup>, a 'Public Arts' Festival in Cape Town, which exhibits thought provoking and boundary breaking work, free and accessible to everybody, in communal spaces

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<sup>2</sup> *Infecting The City*, presented by Africa Centre as part of the Spier Public Arts Festival from 13 – 20 Feb, 2010. Founded in 2005, the Africa Centre creates a platform for exploring contemporary Pan-African artistic practice as a catalyst for social change.

across the Central Business District. It positions the arts literally and figuratively at the centre of society. In this way the urban terrain is redefined as a space of creativity, which has inherent within it, the power to effect social enrichment and transformation. Brett Bailey, the curator of the festival for 2010, with its theme, *Human Rite*, requested of the artists commissioned from diverse backgrounds, to respond to the theme of the title by looking deeply at the living organism of Cape Town and ask: 'What cries out for transformation or healing? Who needs to be included in the social fabric of the City? And how do we amplify and liberate the energy of the CBD?' (Bailey 2010: 6).

I am also of the opinion that it is time for us to have conversations about love, this numinous and luminous emotion that tends to be avoided, generally speaking, in academia. In Jamal's book *Predicaments of Culture*, his inquiry sets some challenges, one of them being how to 'rethink the human in South Africa'. A constitutive part of the process, he believes, is to restore the capacity for love. He talks about the possibility of bypassing a received position, 'perceiving at a glance, and *at every turn* allowing for the reflexive moment when one catches oneself .... In the instant *when thought slips its casing* (my italics) and becomes other to itself.' (Jamal 2005: 29) It is in this way that we are able to open up to and enrich the question of what it means to be, create and think in South Africa in the present.

## CHAPTER 2: THE POST COLONY

Only with a burning patience can we conquer the splendid city which will give light, justice and dignity to all mankind. (Rimbaud)

### 2.1 a liminal moment

'... we have to keep on imagining ourselves. The world – our world – has existed since all times, and every day we have to create it anew' (Breytenbach 2009: 93). Breyten Breytenbach suggests that every generation lives in the fullness of its own limitations but adds, and I would concur, that we also have to transcend our limitations and should 'cling to the notion of a utopia as a justification and motivation for keeping on moving and making a noise' (Ibid: 92), (see Fleishman in previous chapter). The world we live in at present, with its speed, technologies, materialism, rampant consumerism and globalization, is filled with complexity and violence and seems at times more dangerous than in the past, but this is not necessarily so. Yet we attempt to put into practice modules of metamorphosis so as to shape perception, in our search for understanding and interpreting this world of ours – as Breytenbach calls it, 'an ancient and ongoing form of



poetry' (Ibid: 92). And this is the necessity for us as 'change agents' within the liminal moment, the place between two paradigms. As Turner describes it, a no-man's-land betwixt-and between 'in the subjunctive mood of culture, the mood of maybe, might-be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire' which contains within it a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness and a storehouse of possibilities; by no means a random assemblage, he suggests, but rather a striving after new forms and structure (Turner 1990: 11-12). It could be a radical place of freedom or alternatively, one of anarchy and chaos. This idea of chaos is often erroneously understood in the consensus as disorganisation and it tends to bring up fear. In fact, chaos is pure source energy that is as yet unformed. Therefore the manner in which we observe it and interact with it, will create the form, i.e. quantum physics. It is the liminal, full of potential and opportunity and it is enormously potent. In simple terms the past falls away and the future is yet to be created. In Lagaay's words, 'a ritualized move into liminality' becomes a site where one might discover a cultural creativity and a cultural authority to formulate personal and artistic 'new models, symbols and paradigms' (Lagaay 2001: 31).

## 2.2 post post anti – speaking across the silences

That said, I am also clear that in this 'post anti' moment, as Ashraf Jamal calls it, it is essential for us to begin speaking across the silences. It is this disquiet, this strange adherence to politeness, political correctness (often embedded in fundamentalism and nationalism) and an avoidance of confrontation, both of which do not counterbalance the fact that this silence forms ultimately into an 'infectious wound', like a boil needing to be lanced, that can so easily and often does, lead to violence; in Sellars words, '... where nobody has to be killed in order to say something.' (2009: 131). In *Predicaments of Culture*, Jamal refers often to Albie Sachs's work in which he invokes the possibility of 'a society that could imagine itself otherwise, that could through the creative act, restore the ability to dream, think, and taste the deferred promise of freedom' (Sachs in Jamal 2005: 17), knowing that a promise of this nature requires acts that might not recognize themselves as the freedom that is sought or in Neruda's words, 'new rules of conduct for the soul'. Loren Kruger describes this 'post-anti-apartheid period' as postcolonial uneven development, which suggests that the radicality of transformation has for the moment been diverted. Jamal suggests, within this timeframe which he calls a 'culture of the posthumous' that it is precisely the hyphenated instant 'between', which might be the means by which to sustain Sachs's vision:

'What is it within the South African cultural imaginary that compromises the imagination and displaces the fructification of a new consciousness? In the most general and inclusive sense, the root of the problem lies in colonialism and its surrogate, apartheid.' (Jamal 2005: 19)

.... in other words, the 'scars of the past'. The question Jamal poses then is how we would rethink the human in South Africa and restore the capacity for love, and how we would divert the psychic and epistemic constraints that cause the unspeakable and unthinkable to be repressed while allowing this emergent 'otherness' to be the harbinger of 'an ethically revisionary project' (Jamal 2005: 20)? In his opinion art and truth are not exclusive but 'interdependent *urgencies* caught in the interstices of their expression and interpretation ... ceaselessly subject to revision.' In *The Postcolonial and the Postmodern : The Question of Agency*, Homi Bhabha calls this revisionary ethic, 'part dream, part analysis ... not quite experience, not yet concept' (Bhabha 1994: 181) ... situated in a not quite, not yet ... a hesitancy and a stammer that Bhabha names the 'hybrid moment' (Ibid.). And it is in this ever shifting moment in which subjectivity and objectivity are eluded by thinking, that they become 'neither signifier nor signified' (Ibid.). Bhabha's logic suggests, according to Jamal, that it is only by passing through the ambivalence of the post-anti --- 'the after-shock of a prior and delimited contestation of absolutes' – that the displaced and radically transforming agency which Sachs regards as vital to the sustenance of culture, will be reinvigorated (Jamal 2005: 21).

The very language of cultural community needs to be rethought from a post colonial perspective, in a move similar to the profound shift in the language of sexuality, the self and cultural community, effected by feminists in the 1970's and the gay community in the 1980's. Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity - between art and politics, past and present, the public and the private – as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation. (Bhabha 1994: 251)

From these narrative positions we are able to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension to the postcolonial prerogative, within the margins of nation-space and between nations and people across boundaries. In this way Bhabha has attempted to rename the postmodern from a postcolonial position (Ibid: 251 – 252). Later in this paper, I will discuss the term 'remodernism' and will attempt to take this enquiry into a more expanded location.

### 2.3 facing the shadow - entanglements

From the perspective of my shamanic approach, which calls forth a determination to face the darkest aspects of our past, our his-her-stories and our present, the question of race cannot be avoided. This might be viewed as my own personal need to 'speak across the silences', for within this exploration there must needs be an examination of my own 'whiteness'. On July 25<sup>th</sup> 2010, in the New York Times political section in an article carrying a banner headline that read *RACE: Still Too Hot to Touch*, Matt Bai wrote about the firing of Ms. Shirley Sherrod, an African-American bureaucrat in the Georgian office of the Department of Agriculture. In a speech that had been circulated virally, in edited form, by a conservative blogger, Sherrod explained the evolution of her attitudes on race. After the furor at the hands of conservatives, she was fired from her job by the White House and then unfired. Bai wrote that in many ways her ordeal followed a depressingly familiar pattern in American life, a pattern in which anyone who even tries to talk about race risks public outrage and humiliation (Bai 2010: 1). In Achille Mbembe's words: 'Today, the dominant claim in America is that racism is dead. America has solved its race problem and we can now be "color-blind"' (2008: 8). Sarah Nuttall, in her book *Entanglement: Literary and cultural reflections on post-apartheid*, also talks about the nature of racial hegemony in the contemporary world particularly as it applies to the United States. Her focus, however, rests mainly on South Africa at a time when this society is looking for 'ways of moving away from an apartheid optic in relation to race' (Nuttall 2009: 155). Her definition of entanglement goes beyond the condition of being twisted together or entwined, in a tangle, ensnared or complicated, toward an implication of human foldedness. Deleuze and Guittari refer to the concept of folding or foldedness, too, in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*; folding being the way reality can encompass all, through the layering of meaning (1987). Nuttall, considers that the word entanglement 'might speak with a tongue more fertile than one could ever have imagined, with nuances often uncaught or left latent in what may constitute a critical underneath, or sub-terrain' (Nuttall 2009: 2). In a South African context the term carries for her its most profound possibilities in relation to race - racial entanglement - though it clearly carries with it too, other registers.

Paul Gilroy, (like Fanon and Said before him) 'has argued for a humanism conceived explicitly as a response to the sufferings that racism and racial thinking have wrought' (Nuttall 2009: 9). Gilroy argues for a re-articulation of an anti-racist vision as a response to 21<sup>st</sup> century race politics and anti-racist laws, which, he insists, have not created an equal society. In Mbembe's words, 'the defeat of legalized white supremacy

has not ended the struggle for racial equality' (Mbembe 2008: 6). He talks about the 'dirty little secret' of prejudice that keeps breaking open often in the guise of debates that seem to have nothing to do with race such as crime, corruption, HIV-AIDS, sports, language or even regarding the name-changing of roads, boulevards, public spaces, airports and cities (Ibid). He speaks about the words 'transformation' and 'empowerment' (both policies designed by the government and private sector to redress past discriminations) as epitomizing the current difficulties inherent in overcoming post-apartheid issues of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' (Ibid). 'It is as if South Africa is unable to face up to race at the very moment when the walls of racism, while still in place, are nevertheless tumbling' (Mbembe 2008: 7). He contemplates the possibility that it is the persistent denial of white privilege that partly explains the ongoing controversy. 'They are reluctant to wash their hands of the privileges they accumulated over three and a half centuries' (Mbembe 2008; 9). He adds though that the drive to assert a form of black identity predicated on the idea of victimhood might add to the problem. From this Mbembe extrapolates that the issue of race and racial identity has never before been more complex or ambiguous and suggests that the categories 'black', 'Afrikaner', 'white', 'colored', and 'Asian', are no longer pre-fixed but seem to be migrating into the realm of privately held beliefs (Mbembe 2008: 6). The risk becomes that of a reversion of times – 'the disjointed times of black and white South Africans curving uncertainly toward each other, moving apart once again, reverting, and once again taking up segregated paths' (Ibid: 17).

#### 2.4 we have all been uprooted

'Perhaps the reason why immigrants worry settled people so much is that they expose the relative nature of certainties inscribed in the soil' (Auge 1995: 119). And so it is that postcolonial theory (contrary to colonial discourse which privileged the figure of the explorer, the voyager, the traveler as the centre of the discourse), has depicted the figure of the nomad, the diasporic, the hybrid, the exile, the immigrant as the destabilizer of fixed centers. As boundaries are inherent in the definition of house, home and homeland (whether we're talking about a fence, wall or border), so are the metaphors of fluidity in diaspora and postcolonial discourse expressing the critique of a fixed notion of identity (Naficy 1999: 225):

The migrants sense of being rootless, of living between worlds, between a lost past and a nonintegrated present, is perhaps the most fitting metaphor of this (post) modern condition. This underlines the theme of diaspora, not only black,

also Jewish, Indian, Islamic, Palestinian, and draws us into the process whereby the previous margins now fold into the centre (Peffer 2003: 29).

It seems to me that rather than looking at space as sanctuary or refuge, it could instead be viewed as a place of metamorphosis. Performance artist and writer, Guillermo Gomez-Pena in his book *The New World Border*, tells us that the border for him is no longer located at any fixed geopolitical site, but rather it is something he carries with him ... 'and I find new borders wherever I go.' (Gomez-Pena 1996: 5). His America is a continent not defined by standard maps – North, West South and East are 'mere nostalgic abstractions' that seem to have slipped into their own mythical spaces. The multiracial neighborhoods in most of the larger cities seem more and more like Third World micro-republics than part of a western democracy (Ibid.). On visiting Los Angeles and San Francisco one might think one is in Latin America or Asia. 'Los Angeles, like Mexico City, Tijuana, Miami, Chicago and New York, is practically a hybrid nation/city in itself ... Here we are all potential border-crossers & cultural exiles. We have all been uprooted to different degrees & for different reasons' (Ibid: 6). Likewise, Johannesburg, is defined more and more as a 'city as metropolis', shifting as it is from a racial city to a metropolitan form. This city, built as it was on a brutal history, seems to be emerging into a new form of modernity, which might even surpass the definitions usually utilised in a post colonial framework. There is a social velocity at work here within which one recognises the power of the unforeseen and the unfolding. Here is a city that clearly thrives on diversity, difference, democracy, a culture of global consumerism. It speaks of 'a version of citiness made up of simultaneity, speed, rapid alterations, and striking levels of mutability and change' (Nuttall 2009: 156).

In this way the emergence of the self and I would suggest, the artist, within these constantly mutating environments does crucial imaginative work for a society in transition. Nuttall suggests that it carries the capacity to scramble the codes at a macro and micro level; decoding modes of functioning but also recalibrating the self as a place where diverse stories, both autobiographies and fictions of the self, 'become wider cultural modes of expression in society' (Nuttall 2009: 157). In Foucault's words 'a work of the self on the self, an elaboration of the self by the self, a progressive transformation of the self by the self' (Foucault 2005: 16), and through this, by imagining another system, being able to expand ones participation in the present system. So it is, within the theatre and performance genres applicable to this paper. In this context then, artists take on responsibility, as 'mapmakers' and 'edge-dwellers', to blaze the trail into unknown territories from the place of their own expansion and enlightenment, using their newfound

understanding and clarity to make maps for others, in order to ignite and awaken consciousness, on micro and macro levels, decoding old modalities of functioning and thinking and re-encoding possibilities for emerging futures. In this way, reflexively, we speak across our own silences as well as the silences that we observe, objectively, in society and culture at large. The primary focus then becomes a determination to expose areas where denial is dominant and 'hiding' has become a normal 'mode of being'. In Artaud's words, 'true theatre ... continues to stir up shadows where life has never ceased to grope its way' (Artaud 1938: preface).

## 2.5 language, dialogue, difference

What in the end guards us is our being without protection - Martin Heidegger

We are condemned to wander – critically, emotionally, politically ... passionately – in a world characterized by an excess of sense, which, while offering the chance of meaning continues to flee ahead of us. This is our world, our responsibility, our only chance (Chambers 1990: 12).

Whether we are here or there, in South Africa or the United States, we are talking about a phenomenon currently called 'worlds in movement'; a diasporic movement that has two sides to it, one of dispersion and another of immersion. It is a history of colliding cultures that have been caught in 'the maelstrom of war, invasion, migration, intermarriage, a history of various religions,' and exchange of technologies and goods' (Mbembe 2007: 27). With regards to Africa, the cultural history can only be understood within the paradigm of itinerancy, mobility and displacement. In South Africa, the relationship between the various diasporas and their societies and cultures of origin are complex. Much of the population see themselves as fully-fledged Africans, despite their 'belonging' elsewhere. And what exactly is 'belonging'? In this ever-changing and mutating world is it not possible that in certain circumstances it is 'our bodies that are lived as our permanent if mutable address, as our primary if self-displacing abode, as --- our quintessential mobile home' (Sobchack in Naficy 1999: 46)? In this case, the safety that has become synonymous with the notion of 'home' or city or borders becomes mutable and transparent as it is no longer this material or factual boundary upon which one can rely. Being at home in the world involves finding ourselves in a wider, ever shifting, more flexible framework in which 'our mothers and fathers, bonds and traditions, the myths we know to be myths yet continue to cling to ... exist alongside other stories, other fragments of memory and traces ...' (Chambers 1990: 104). From a personal perspective, as I now become more aware of my limits, I am

able to become more situated and self-conscious, more sensitised to my place in this differentiated world. I no longer need to speak in the name of 'the other', to assume that I understand his/her voices or experiences, or sense a need to reduce her/his-stories to mine and therefore am able to transform a prior monologue into the diverse possibilities of dialogue. Within this worldly exchange, uncertain as it is, any assumed intellectual unity is shattered against the complex structures, cultures or networks in which different voices, histories and languages may now seek connection, sense, hope, an existence and a future (Chambers 1990: 104). Re-organizing thought around these differences represents a vital effort to escape 'a monolithic and repressive language that has perpetuated so much tyranny and horror, so much fear' (Chambers 1990: 106). In my work I am exploring these other voices, often in the margins, found in the displaced matters of women, race, slavery, hybrid cultures and historically found in cross-cultural myths, ancestry and identity. My hope is that sense might emerge from the weaving of an interconnectedness in the stories, languages, differences and bodies in which we are caught, not in a forced manner but rather, ambiguously, from the 'differences in sex, ethnicity, tongue, time and place, that propose the unique horizon before which we can construct a dialogue of meaning' (Chambers 1990: 111).

Language is what allows access to the open-ended. For language is something that is structured but not foreseeable. In conversing with somebody, with an entity that lies beyond myself, discourse, intercourse and ethics combine in the encounter with alterity, in a responsibility for the dialogue and the difference (Chambers 1990: 108).

From the diversity of this language, which is open and receptive, dialogical and aconceptual, we break away from the rigid, allowing ourselves to occupy a speaking position in which it becomes imperative to listen, opening out onto a possibility of a reply. There is a potential syncretism here, too, in the recognition of the power that lies in the silences; the spaces between or outside of language. Further on in the paper I will discuss certain interdisciplinary performances that embody this paradox.

## 2.6 the other of itself ...

In terms of South Africa, the notion of 'the other of itself' and the forging of a new identity, it seems possible that the recent hosting of the FIFA World Cup has brought about a new and reinvigorated sense of pride and confidence in the country itself. In the *Los Angeles Times* on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 in the World section, Archbishop Tutu was quoted, at the kickoff concert, as saying 'I'm dreaming, I'm dreaming. It's so beautiful. Wake me

up!' We want to say to the world: 'Thank you for helping this ugly, ugly worm, or caterpillar which we were, to become a beautiful, beautiful butterfly!' (Unknown 2010). Is it possible that with the extraordinary and spectacular event that was South Africa's hosting of the FIFA World Cup, South Africa was able to forge yet another fresh identity? I would argue that momentarily, in terms of Bhabha's notion of third space, South Africa has been able to elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the other of itself (Bhabha 1994: 39):

It is this translocative and non-positional shift which affords an other embrace -- the embrace not only of otherness, but the embrace of others -- which I posit as the surest means, within the ever-shifting present, through which to recover a past and promote a future freed from the spectre of colonialism' (Jamal 2005: 40).

We are witnessing the potentiality of this luminous moment as the country reintegrates itself after being a host 'to the world' with much of the world having watched on television and alternative media. As I imagine and extrapolate possibilities from this interstitial moment I wonder whether Ashraf Jamal might decode this as 'the host is the body of South Africa .... It is a body we have failed to love .... It is the body of freedom that remains unfree ... this body is 'struggling to give birth to itself'' (Jamal 2005: 41). And with him I offer a wager 'that for the imagination to liberate itself, for freedom to become realizable, thought must resist closure *in the name of love*' (Ibid: 24). In Nietzschean terms this world, this day-dream, is actually our home, therefore how, with the perpetual tension between present and potential, do we make it 'ours' as well as habitable (Chambers 1990: 62)?

### CHAPTER 3: THEATRE AS A PLACE FOR CHANGE

#### 3.1 performance as a particular way of knowing

'The work of the artist is to force open the matrix of reality to introduce unsuspected possibilities. Artists and writers are currently involved in the redefinition of our continental topography' (Gomez-Pena 1996: 6). In referring to this 'redefinition of our ... topography' it is clear that certain artists, writers and theatre makers will therefore be engaged in a measure of 'visionary prophetic engagement' and they are the ones who, in Albie Sachs's words, 'more than anyone, can help us discover ourselves. Culture in the broad sense is our vision of ourselves and our world' and he suggests that this is the huge task facing writers, dancers, musicians, painters, film and theatre makers. 'It is something that goes well beyond mobilizing people for this or that activity, important though mobilization might be' (Sachs in Jamal 2005: 3). Theatre has always had the ability to



come up with the unexpected and the forms and scope of that unexpectedness are important to explore. D.E.R George suggests that performance ought to be investigated as a 'particular kind of knowledge' or 'an actual way of knowing' and that it offers 'other ways to look at Time, Space, Person, Knowledge and Experience, which might be closer to contemporary scientific research (quantum theory, chaos, complexity) and contemporary philosophical inquiry (cognitive science, process philosophy)' (George in Yarrow 2007: 15). The task here is to take the receiver out of the ordinary, not just by presenting extraordinary material, but rather by more radically and fundamentally opening up the capacity for re-visioning and seeing anew, even offering an understanding of the way things put themselves together. Again then, we are talking about a liminal space, a place almost 'before' preconceptions, which might even be a place prior to language, empty and devoid of boundaries, which is why we often find ourselves affected and touched by performances without specific narratives, texts or a language we understand; where something primal and out of the ordinary seems to have been activated.

Mark Fleishman speaks of the phenomenon of theatre as a disappearing thing, a form that is intangible. He experiences it as existing only in the moment of interaction between performer and spectator, essentially 'other' to more permanent art forms such as film, fine art, sculpture and other media. Its essence and strength lies in its intangibility (Francis in SATJ 2006: 123). In *Theatre in Crisis*, Matthew Maguire speaks of the death of theatre as 'an ongoing process subject to the laws of entropy; it will not be brief, but it will be exciting' (Maguire in Delgado & Svich 2009: 197). He suggests that theatre has always been in crisis as a result of its evanescence. Mark Fleishman believes that in South Africa, 'in our pluralistic and diversified culture, there can, and should be, no autonomous forms, no pure genres, only transformations, mutations, and contaminations' (Fleishman 1997: 9). Shock may be one result of the process (finding oneself outside of 'oneself' and the known world); loss or abjection (a revelation of the emptiness of role and identity) another; or it might be a gasp of amazement (Yarrow 2007: 15); a moment of being 'entrance-d'.

In addition, theatre might be one of the primary sites for the activation of the sacred. It is sometimes described as the moment or motion of levitation, the epoche, an 'eventing', an unmaking, a realization 'that we are not only our everyday selves bounded, confined, cribb'd by ... limits of logic and language and the constructs of psychosocial preservation-mentality' (Yarrow 2007: 18), but more specifically it is 'the moment at which all that flies out of the window or perhaps becomes the window out of which we fly' (Ibid:

14). It necessitates abandoning whatever concepts about one's own boundaries one might have tended to fall back on prior to the event that is the 'theatre'. Peter Sellars says: 'The practice of theatre is ... connected to spiritual practice (which is concerned with how to sustain the instant of realization). Theatre is concerned with how you put that in your body' (Sellars 2005: 50). 'It is giving people permission to take back their own society, their own lifelines, their own lifetimes, not as spectators but as actively engaged participants' (Sellars in Delgado & Svich 2002: 132). Art, he insists, is about elevating the power of prayer. It changes lives. He adds, 'it is a good deal more powerful than people who have armies or giant marketing plans' (Ibid: 133). Brett Bailey says, 'that which I know, and which is again confirmed, is that my art and my spirituality are inextricably linked' (Bailey 2003: 24). And is it not theatre that we have found, in its most numinous and sublime moments, to be the place where, in Rudolf Otto's description of 'mysterium tremendum', 'it may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of – whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures' (Otto 1959: 13). In this conversation about sublimity and numinosity, one might add Ashraf Jamal's thoughts on the subject, from an interview in 2006 in which Russel Brownlee enquired about his statement 'a constitutive part of the process is to restore the capacity for love'? Jamal replied that after years of researching the sublime he has found that it is the 'ineluctable that matters'. It is about *being torn apart in the moment of insight*. He adds that most leading South African artists are quite cautious and 'terribly' secular, but sites Brett Bailey, amongst the very few to have the capacity to attain a radical sublimity. He feels that this country could do with a lot more of Bailey's energy, with all the vulnerability that 'accompanies such artistic courage', in order to access the numenal and 'arrive at a more dynamic sense of being. We are caught (as nouns not verbs) in a wondrous and endless process of 'becoming''. Love, he suggests, is such a verb and such a process of becoming (Brownlee 2006: 3). Mandla Mbothwe's work seems to me to contain similar threads of sublimity, vision and numinosity. In a paper entitled *An African Dream Play: Isivuno Sama Phupha* he suggests that theatre needs to appeal to the emotions, to the hearts of people. It needs to aspire to spiritual transformation. It needs to interpret and address the social and cultural modalities prevalent in the communities in which it is created and performed. If it fails to do this, he offers, it will always remain 'a marginal pursuit, a dry and superficial purveyor of information unheard by those who most need to hear' (Mbothwe 2007: 42). His work is also about love. In it he strives to reconstruct the spirit of *ubuntu*, a form of moral and spiritual regeneration, which contains

within it an affirmation that a human is only human through other humans (Ibid: 7). Is this not love?

Transformation is generally described as a major and lasting change in structure, appearance, character or function but when we speak of consciousness and mean 'an altered state of consciousness', we are referring rather to a new perception of the self or one's socio/political world. In this instance we are more likely to be talking about a conversion in awareness, belief, sentiment, knowledge or understanding ...'a revised and enduring emergent state of mind' (Myerhoff in Schechner & Appel 1990: 245). And then there is the ineffability of the more powerful 'altered' states that are implied when one speaks of transformation; states such as trance, ecstasy, possession, obsession and conversion. These states, similar to dream states, are fundamentally non-linear, non-discursive, non-linguistic and often regarded as esoteric. But in more recent studies it is now suggested that this 'ineffability' might be due to the dominance of right brain activity.

### 3.2 redefining the continental topography – practitioners

In his book, *Notes from the Middle World*, Breyten Breytenbach talks about movement preceding thinking. He elucidates, that movement initiates and opens a thinking process through which we then court the possible advent of the unknown. He adds that we put ourselves in a humble learning relationship to the knowledge and experience of others. 'We bring, we test, we transmit, but we also change and allow ourselves to be changed. Artistic creativity is the movement of perceptions ... projecting future shapes ... helping to shape the future' (Breytenbach 2009: 6). In a statement written to the planning committee for a series of conferences on 'ritual and theatre', Victor Turner said, 'cultures are most fully expressed in and made conscious of themselves in their ritual and theatrical performances'<sup>3</sup> (Turner 1981). He added, 'we will know each other better by entering one another's performances and learning their grammars and vocabularies' (Schechner 1990: 4).

In my own homecoming (#2) I am finding a theatre that transforms and awakens, and speaks to the soul. In the days of apartheid, when I was a working actor in South Africa, prior to my departure for the States, theatre had a crucial role to play in society, limited though it was in the context of the political climate. Theatre makers, playwrights and most actors approached the craft with a responsibility and seriousness and an acute

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<sup>3</sup> Victor Turner's statement, written to the planning committee for a series of conferences on 'ritual and theatre', which were to be held in 1981 and 1982, in Arizona and New York.

awareness of the power inherent in theatre, to transform. With this as a backdrop and certainly as the 'raison d'etre' in my work, in the space of my own liminality between what was and what is becoming, I am recognizing a hybridity that has emerged in my practice, which connects with certain performance styles observed in this 'return'. In relation to this I have chosen to focus briefly on certain theatre makers whom I believe use their work to 'redefine the topography'; they are Brett Bailey, Sandra Temmingh, Jay Pather, Mandla Mbothwe and Mwenya Kabwe. I will also refer, in the next chapters, to my own practical work for this thesis. In some cases, these practitioners work, with certain regularity, in the context of the University of Cape Town Drama Department. I am specifically choosing to focus on them as I am using the 'space' of UCT Drama School as a laboratory of sorts, a place where cutting edge work occurs away from the mainstream 'commercial' theatre and where directors and theatre makers, out of necessity and choice, address the issues of multiculturalism and hybridity as well as the reality of diverse languages, dialects, accents and cultures; a microcosm, if you will, of the macrocosm comprising the larger scope of the city. In some instances, I will allude to interviews I have conducted with these theatre makers over the course of several months, from early to mid-2010.

One such piece, created and directed by Sandra Temmingh, has most embodied for me the concept of 'foldedness' and Nuttall's notion of entanglement. The piece, *Ukufa*<sup>4</sup>, an epic Xhosa poem about death and dying, translated by Antjie Krog, involved the merging of two languages, isiXhosa and Afrikaans, combined in translation in a choral verse presentation/performance. The underpinning or subterranean layers of this performance, which might not have been obvious to all in the audience to the same degree, was that in the past these two languages would have been considered the languages of sworn enemies; the oppressor and the oppressed. This fact, combined with the theme of death and dying, now generated a type of overlay and an underscore and a possibility for multiple interpretations and meanings; a true embodiment of the word 'entanglement' particularly in the context described in the previous chapter. The ritual itself was powerful with the performers dressed in mourning, standing in an ancient open courtyard in a natural drizzle of rain, under a light grey sky, behind crosses representing graves. The combination of the languages, guttural and musical as they are, and the actors; Afrikaans speaking students and those who speak isiXhosa; combined with ululating and even some song, brought with it memories of another time, a time when it

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<sup>4</sup> *Ukufa*: Xhosa poem. Transl. Antjie Krog, directed by Sandra Temmingh. An examination piece with Performer II's, performed at U.C.T. Drama Department, March 2009.

was highly unlikely that these two cultures would have layered their languages, nor would they have mourned together. An indication of a new paradigm, a magical subversive filtering of new possibilities, alive in liminal space, with an underpinning of the old – the Praise Singer leading the way in a ritual for both cultures. However, all was not exactly what it seemed to be on the surface and the journey toward achieving this result had been fraught with complexity, as I found in an interview with the director, Ms. Temmingh<sup>5</sup>.

It is to the director's credit that she was able to understand and utilize the differences between the Xhosa students and the Afrikaans speaking ones. In our interview, she described the awkwardness that the performers felt in rehearsal, particularly when doing vocal warm-ups in the language of 'the other'. It was apparently easier for students speaking isiXhosa, as most of them had a modicum of Afrikaans in their background, through their particular systems of education and their exposure to the language in everyday life. The Afrikaans actors however, generally speaking, had very little knowledge of isiXhosa and went through a period of feeling marginalized and embarrassed by their own lack of expertise. Part of the intricacy and the fascination within the process, for Sandra, became this struggle embodied in the very beings and bodies of the cast. The shift would occur for them, she realized, if she could assist them in finding the respect they needed, for each other's culture. Inherent in this she found an integral piece of the journey. This then became the meta-text and it created a place for true imbrication, yet another subterranean layer within an already powerful construct which had existed from the inception of the idea.

Another practitioner, Brett Bailey, speaks about his idea of drama, like ritual, having the power to affect everybody present at profound levels of consciousness, 'impelling subliminal currents to flow amongst us'. He insists that drama has the potential to be extremely powerful, able to stimulate the senses, intellect, emotions and the spirit; to achieve collective access to deep realms of the psyche (Bailey 2003: 19). But it is the 'personal process of picking through the red threads of racism and fear' that seems to be his main drive. In this vein, he created a performance piece, (using 'promenade theatre') called *Blood Diamonds*, for the 2009 Grahamstown Festival of the Arts. He used an abandoned station for this site-specific work, which he identified as 'the fault line between two different worlds. Between colony and savage hinterland. Between wealth and poverty. Between opportunity and hopelessness'<sup>6</sup> (Bailey 2009). 'The settings he chooses are

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<sup>5</sup> Interview conducted with Sandra Temmingh on May 21, 2010 at U.C.T. Drama Dept.

<sup>6</sup> These quotes are from the program notes for *Blood Diamonds*, created by Brett Bailey.

always in the hope of evoking memories, as well as making historical associations' (Blase 2009: 1). He feels that people are neutralized to the dynamics in society and his aim is to provoke a response. More recently, in May 2010, he created *Exhibit A: A Deauttsch-Sudwestafrika* ... a meditation on the dark history of European racism in relation to South West Africa/ Namibia, to rave reviews in Vienna's Hofburg Palace:

A thin membrane separates our mundane lives from this realm, unfathomably deep and wide. A realm – spoken of in myth, glimpsed in dream and meditation – which spews its magma out to astonish or burn us in moments of intensity: in trance, ritual, ecstasy, trauma, revolution, orgasm, panic. These eruptions .... enthrall me. I want the theatre I make to be such a phenomenon ( Bailey 2003: 19).

### 3.3 how newness enters the world – will it change me?

'Newness' can enter the world through a variety of avenues (politics, philosophy, literature, to name a few), but theatre is definitively a sphere in which sites once thought of as separate – identities, spaces, histories – might intersect in thought provoking, unexpected and challenging ways. This requires, in Derridian terms, breaking down structures of resistance that speak not only to breaching the ramparts which bolster systems of containment and categorization, but also concerns modifying the limits in order to transform the unknown or forbidden (metaphorical borderlands) into habitable and productive spaces for working, writing and creating, in other words: pushing one's work beyond the borderlines. In a conversation with Mwenya Kabwe<sup>7</sup> (academic, actor, theatre maker and curator) we discussed the need for discourse and critical engagement around important issues in South African theatre. Frustrations are rarely articulated and the culture of critique is sadly missing, which, in Ms. Kabwe's opinion, needs to become a more public conversation. It is the lack of conversation that can lead to a build up in tension particularly acute in this country where the entanglements speak to histories that are complex and often painful, but where dialogue could potentially bring liberation and change.

In an interview, Mwenya Kabwe and I discussed the notion of 'theatre today' particularly as it pertains to the culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, dominated as it is by film and television, where TV antennae's are attached to almost every home, cave, shack, tent or igloo on the planet. Mwenya suggested that theatre is vital for our survival. 'It is an urban ritual, a ritualized space, a sacred space and within that space you enter a different world, even if you're standing on the side of the street (in site-specific performative genres). It's

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mwenya Kabwe conducted on May 19, 2010 at U.C.T. Drama Department.

the 'event-ness' of the thing.' The space is manufactured so that you can enter a particular life or a particular world. It is one of the few places where people can be in the same space and experience different things, person to person. 'It is the most immediate media there is for bringing people together. Literally. There is nothing getting in the way of people communicating through the air. No screens. No changing channels' (Kabwe 2010). Theatre is able to fill the gap where there is a chasm of unspoken detritis and so we as artists continue to forge this area where the unspoken gets spoken. 'It's about survival' (Ibid.). Kabwe's insight is that visual artists are turning to performance because they are realizing that the immediacy of the body, one body in space, is extremely powerful and it does something that a static object cannot do. 'You cannot see it the same way over and over again. You are feeling it now so you must feel it now and deal with your feelings about it NOW' (Ibid.). This also addresses the power of the liminal space between performer and spectator which, in shamanic terms, is an energetic field that is alive and vibrating; what jumps borders are the 'rasas', the 'universal target emotions' because it is in the performance of theatre, dance, music and ritual, by the very nature of their existence as behavior, that we are given our best examples for the intercultural study of human communication (Schechner 1990: 42). I was witness first hand, to an experience of theatre as 'change agent', by virtue of my position as an academic tutor of 1<sup>st</sup> year Drama students, through observing the impact *Ukhozi Olumaphiko*, directed by Mandla Mbothwe and Mwenya Kabwe, was to have on the students. The epic journey of Mfazwe, told in song, movement and spoken text, who survives against almost insurmountable odds as he confronts situations which one recognizes from South Africa's brutal past, was performed in isiXhosa, interspersed with colloquialisms and 'vernac'. Projected onto the back wall were occasional, large, black and white images of the cast in 'present time', commenting on the political situation today, speaking their feelings in English, about race and the ongoing impact it has upon them. My students, including those who did not understand the language, were deeply impacted by the production. I was able to see tangible results in their work, both in essays and conversations, as they absorbed and assimilated images from their mutual histories, particularly as it pertained to apartheid and the struggle years; material they might have preferred to ignore in the past. A blind state of denial is the issue at stake here and it is work such as this that can shift the metaphoric tectonic plates lying just beneath the skin of the city.

### 3.4 remodernism – towards a new spirituality in art

In finding the term Remodernism, a 21<sup>st</sup> Century art movement created by Billy Childish and Charles Thomson, who call themselves the 'Stuckists', I felt that I had found a 'home'. 'Being a spiritual artist means addressing unflinchingly our projections, good and bad, the attractive and the grotesque, our strengths as well as our delusions, in order to know ourselves and thereby our true relationship with others ...' (Childish & Thomson 1999). Remodernism is an attempt to incorporate ideas from modernism, avante-gardism and post modernism, synthesizing issues such as multiculturalism, irony, the sublime and identity in an alternative and real time contemporary approach to art. Childish and Thomson describe Remodernism as the rebirth of spiritual art. It has also been described as art for a new paradigm. In their *Remodernist Manifesto* they state: 'Spiritual art is not fairyland. It is about taking hold of the rough texture of life. It is about addressing the shadow and making friends with wild dogs' (Childish & Thomson 1999). They insist that spiritual art is not religion but rather humanity's quest to understand itself and find its symbology through the clarity and integrity of its artists. In my conversation with Mwenya Kabwe (referred to in the previous section), we discussed her thesis and numerous articles she has written on Afropolitanism: 'I enjoy the term because I feel like it includes me, but I also have issues with the term because it is a label. In the same way that it is inclusive, it obviously is also exclusive' (Kabwe 2010). She went on to talk about how this can be problematic as it creates an 'in-group' and an 'out-group', and as a 'catch all' it becomes difficult to unpack and harder to problematize. The same may be said of Remodernism, however, in terms of my thesis and this paper, it has emerged as an idea that might be considered an appropriate label for my work, and a destination that gives me a sense of placement even as I am aware of the problems inherent within the stereotype.

## CHAPTER 4: SHAMANIC PRACTICE/ MY WORK/ PRODUCTIONS

### 4.1 shamanism, trance, surrendering form - intersecting notions of the shaman and the actor

The shaman, a mystical, priestly and political figure emerging during the Upper Paleolithic period but likely going back even further, can be described as a specialist in the human soul but also as a generalist whose spiritual and social functions cover a wide range of activities. Shamans are healers, seers and visionaries who are able to master



death. They are in communication with gods and spirits. They are dancers, poets, singers and they create works of art. They are the repositories of knowledge of the cultures sacred and secular history and are, more often than not, familiar with the ways of plants, animals, the elements, and cosmic as well as physical geography (Halifax 1979: 3). There are numerous descriptions of the shaman and his/her practices: the stimulator of the collective imagination; a call to acknowledge the 'vertical' dimension in life, the dimension of the soul; an ability to enter altered states of consciousness and control them, communicating with spirits while in trance; having learned to escape the limited physical plane of human existence, the shaman can experience magical flight or move by physical (and metaphysical) means from one plane to another. 'The shaman visits the underworld, paradise, and the past and explores the future while in ecstatic trance. Evil and death become less frightening ... thus placed in a more human context' (Eliade 1989: 508). The shaman works within a tradition of myth and ritual that specifies the means and ends of ecstatic experience. They are technicians of the sacred and masters of ecstasy. Their objective becomes 'to establish communication with the paradisiacal world of pre-lapsarian humanity where the secrets of a healthy, authentic existence can be found' (Karampetsos 1995: 108).

In my ongoing exploration of shamanism and my work with various shamans and medicine people, I have experienced that the 'features epitomizing the call of the shaman ... are integral (subliminal) to the intensity of an engaging, powerful, and ultimately transformative theatrical performance' (Karafistan 2003: 151). There are similarities, I have found, between my shamanic training and my training and experiences as an actor (particularly in the theatre). My theatre training has informed my shamanic practice, and I have discovered many areas in which there are aspects of cross-pollination. The word *shaman* is suggested as a transliteration of the Tungustic word *saman* or *hamman*, which means 'one who is excited, moved, raised'; as a verb it means 'to know in an ecstatic manner'. Gloria Flaherty, in her book *Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century*, describes how the shaman develops the power to transmit his/her 'creative' trance to his/her audience so that they might be transported away from their everyday realities and into regions where they are able to experience 'the profound mysteries of birth, death, life and regeneration' (Flaherty 1992: 3). Dele Layiwola says about the audience, which is the receiver in this relationship: 'Nowhere is the life of modern man more ritualized than in the theatre where he surrenders at the box office besides the theatre entrance, his prejudices, doctrines and beliefs theretofore to encounter a new image fired and mediated by others'

(2000: 128). The actor is often described as a performer, priest(ess), mediator and dancer; a magician and a warrior. Grotowski, too, has described the performer as a man of action; a dancer, a priest and a warrior and someone outside 'aesthetic genres'. He speaks of ritual as performance:

I don't want to discover something new but something forgotten ... Discovering in yourself an ancient corporality to which you are bound by a strong ancestral relation ... of someone known, and then more and more distant, the corporality of the unknown one, the ancestor ... as if you recall Performer of the primal ritual ... With the breakthrough - as in the return of an exile - one can touch something which is no longer linked to origins but – if I dare say – to the origin? I believe so. (Grotowski 1988: 36-40; in Schechner 1993: 254)

This breakthrough or 'break-through in plane' as Eugene Ionesco called it, comes from the tradition of the shaman. In this paper I approach the idea of theatre and shamanism from the perspective of performer, receiver (audience) and theatre maker. My task with this idea of 'practice as research' has become, to attempt to reconcile aspects of my training in both acting and shamanism, against a backdrop of my homecoming, layered upon my observations of South Africa in the present in an attempt to bring to it some cohesion and a measure of my experience. In other words, what can this theatre deliver? How is it delivered? What are its effects in terms of being and knowing (function, self/other/world; psychology, community) and how does it relate contextually to the political, aesthetic, cultural and psycho-spiritual? I am finding that my thinking about this has become much broader and more expanded as the process of research and praxis has matured. I treat aspects of shamanism and my findings, more exhaustively, in the following chapter.

#### 4.2 walking backwards in time to find us now

I regard my Minor Project as a beginning; a proposal, a first step, a placing of my toes in the river, if you will. I chose in the work to step away from areas of familiarity; aspects of the theatre that might feel safe or comfortable and instead chose to venture into a liminal place that felt unfamiliar and new. In the piece we used a hybrid mix of dance, movement, voice and sound utilizing several different languages in order to create a deconstructed textual collage from existing texts, pieces written by the cast and improvisation. In the book *Performing Hybridity*, Jennifer Natalya Fink writes that 'the in-between, interstitial position of hybridity garners its power through rearticulating and inventing particularized narratives of origin, place, displacement, arrival, culture, transit, identity ... It is often one that is compelled rather than chosen' (Joseph & Fink 1999: 251).

In the program notes I wrote: 'In this homecoming, there is an attempt to tease out, that which is buried and obscured. In this in-between place, this place of stillness, is there a possibility for healing and re-integration?'

My choice, within the work process, was to take the actors as far back as they could venture, into the past, to search for their ancestry. The actor playing the Young Man was able to connect with his Khoi San history (heretofore relatively ignored) and he emerged with some powerful writing from his Namibian (South West African) heritage, which we used in the piece. Other performers had similar experiences. I played myself, as a Woman Between Time, part 'Turner-like' anthropologist, part shaman-in-training and was able to address my recurring themes of 'loss of wildness' through habits of domestication, the necessity to face the shadow and ritual. In this work I began my exploration of site specificity with the adaptation of a classroom in the Rosedale building at Hiddingh Hall, into a place of ritual, a place suspended in time and space, with video images of wolves stalking and howling, across the walls. In exploring 'the shadow' as a step toward future productions, I utilized the following as my final words before leading the Young Woman onto the window ledge ... 'the window out of which we fly' (see Chapter 3, 3.1), prior to taking flight:

Today near eventime I did lead the girl who has no seeing a little way into the forest where it was darkness and where shadows were. I led her toward a shadow that was coming our way. It did touch her cheek with its velvety fingers. And now she too does have likings for shadows. And her fear that was is gone (Whitely in Pinkola Estes 1992: 458).

#### 4.3 blood beneath the water

##### **a) new ways of seeing – devising & collaborating**

'One can never make it clear enough how genuinely lost one is at the start of creation' (Warner in Oddey 2007: 27). Jeanette Winterson in the book *Re-Framing the Theatrical* speaks about the 21<sup>st</sup> Century being an age of multi-media and cross-platform art forms. She suggests that old theatrical forms are collapsing and that the interesting work is being done 'amidst the rubble of this collapse' (Winterson in Oddey 2007: 22). This shift is in collaborating, devising, new technologies and digital modernism and these are the cross-art forms, the 'crossing over' and 'in-between's' that I am finding most interesting in my own theatrical excavations. In *Blood Beneath the Water* I interwove, not always successfully I was to find out, the inter-textuality of ritual, dance, music, film and text; adapting text and using non-theatre text in an exploration or imaginative quest for a personal new theatre form. Prior to beginning, I often find myself haunted in my night

dreams and daytime visions, with images that will not leave my head. Over the course of the year and a half of this degree, I have begun to trust these images and have allowed them to 'speak' as guides and pieces of illumination along the way; for example, with this work, the idea of blood beneath the water, which related to the space itself and its historicity. In this piece, I chose to use an episodic form, filled with separate stories interlinked in subtle ways, trusting that each audience member would make sense of the partial, fragmented half-narratives to create their own interpretations. The space, the Arena Courtyard on the Hiddingh Hall campus, was specifically chosen for its epic proportions, its multi levels, columns and crevices and the 'slave' history of the site itself. The cast was introduced to my research of the buildings and Cape Town, in the time of slavery. In addition, we made use of the Playroom, as a site for the 'prologue' of the piece. This particular building had, as its origin, been a holding space for slaves, after they had been purchased downtown. The idea of blood beneath the water had come from a dream; this resonated for me and ultimately for the cast, too, as a fitting metaphor for the labor and indentured servility implicit in the creation of the stone floors, columns and walls of the site. This work resulted in one of the more successful scenes of the piece, the 'slave seller' scene, which emerged as a macabre piece of dark tragi-comedy with modern overtones, indicating its applicability in this present day.

My work process with the cast in rehearsal began with a ritual in which I created a sacred space for 'speaking across the silences' using the Aboriginal technique of 'council', which I have been using in my work for almost two decades. This 'council' process is sometimes called Agape, 'a Greek word for love in its unerotic sense' (Weinberg 2006: 49). The person who holds the stick is deeply respected, the other participants are silent, in concentrated heart listening or in agreement using a short, but specific, sound. In this rehearsal process, the council work served to create a feeling of ritual and safety, and enhanced the intimacy and trust in the group within the short space of time allotted for the rehearsal period. This serves the 'collaboration' and helps to take the exercises and improvisations into a deeper more meaningful place by accelerating the pace and depth of the work. 'The reflexive and therapeutic character of theatre, as essentially a child of the redressive phase of social drama, has to draw on power sources often inhibited ... or constrained in the cultural life of society's 'indicative' mood' (Turner in Schechner 1990: 12). Turner adds that in the deliberate creation of a detached, almost-sacred liminal space, one might search for such sources. Another source, he suggests, of this excessive 'meta'-power, is the liberated and disciplined body itself (Ibid.). In rehearsal the cast worked

through intense physical warm ups and movement improvisations. Through a process of guided meditations and other unconscious processes, 'such as may be released in trance foreshadowed by some of Antonin Artaud's theories' (Ibid.), they were able to find stories in their own mythologies that served the theme and my intentions for the piece. 'If a way to the better there be, it exacts a full look at the worst' (Thomas Hardy).

Will transformation. Oh be inspired for the flame  
In which a Thing disappears and bursts into something else;  
The spirit of recreation which masters this earthly form  
Loves most the pivoting point where you are no longer yourself. (Rilke)

In my previous work as Creative Director of CityKids<sup>8</sup>, Los Angeles, I explored the use of ritual in the 'leadership training' and pedagogical aspects of the work and in the creating of individual, original, devised 'works' for the repertory company. In *The Spectrum of Ritual* cited in Turner's *Are there universals of performance in myth, ritual and drama?*, Turner shows how Lex, in considering the neurobiology of the brain, 'shows how the 'driving techniques of ritual (including sonic driving ..) facilitate right hemisphere dominance, resulting in Gestalt, timeless non-verbal experiences, differentiated and unique when compared with left hemisphere functioning or ... alternation' (Lex 1979: 125) / (Turner in Schechner 1990: 13). My aim is to continually quest for that moment of 'heightened vitality' that is the experience of theatre, which at its height, might signify complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events (Ibid.); encouraging a brief state of ecstasy and union which might last only a second, sometimes described as a momentary shiver running down the spine (Ibid.).

#### **b) political correctness – hindsight 20/20 & doubt**

Stuart Hall, the British cultural studies analyst tells us, '... dangers are not places you run away from but places you go towards' (Hall 1992: 285). I would argue that we, as artists and teachers of art, must be willing to push the 'edges of the envelope' and therefore have to continually challenge our own notions of transgression, our own willingness to contest what we might think of as 'safety' and our own boundaries. In raising the issues of what is at stake, Min-ha writes that, in crossing boundaries or working 'on the edges', in particular where it pertains to being 'safe' and 'unsafe' we should be reminded that borderland inhabitants are often considered transgressors, even aliens. In Min-ha's words, 'to push one's work as far as one can go: to the borderlines' (Min-ha 1991: 218),

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<sup>8</sup> The CityKids Foundation, a non-profit, multicultural, youth organization, was established in New York City in 1985, by Laurie Meadoff. The Los Angeles chapter of CityKids opened in 1991.

often this artist will inhabit or be located on the cusp of two or more domains (geographical, gender, culture, genre or discipline).

In the case of 'feedback' and the critique of my work, I have been cognizant of the fact that there is much for me to learn from the expertise and experience of both the staff and my fellow research students. Doubt, which my Peruvian teacher in shamanism describes as a transgression on faith, has been my ever-present friend throughout this process. In my preferred style of delving into auto-ethnography and identity from the perspective of the previously mentioned tools and techniques derived from shamanism and my years of extensive theatre training and training in other modalities, I was relatively trusting of the process of 'unpacking' deep emotional material from our histories. There was a concern expressed, however, that I had presented too close a representation of certain sacred cultural rituals outside of my tradition, overstepping the boundaries of privacy and potentially risking being seen as an interloper. In this regard I can see the fine line between presenting oneself in the position of artist and theatre maker and where the boundary could appear to blur into the realm of anthropology. It was suggested that I take my work deeper into the realm of metaphor and that in this way the poetry remains in tact and the work becomes more layered and dense. As I tend toward the political, crossed with the personal in my work, I see this as a strong lesson, particularly when devising theatre from an empty stage and an empty page. In embracing the 'problematics of tradition' as an area of my own archaeology, I recognize now the maturity in 'doubt' and the way in which a doubtful hesitancy might serve as an antidote to the youthful impetuosity of the students with whom I have chosen to work. I resonate with Brett Bailey's mission to fuse ritual and theatre in some way, 'to make drama which would transport performers and spectators the way I myself had been transported by the ceremonies I attended ...' (Bailey 2003: 15), a journey closer to the ones we take in dreams 'that leave us haunted, enchanted and disturbed' (Ibid.). He clearly is willing to risk everything for his 'art' at the risk of being accused of appropriation. In referring to South African artists, Jamal says, 'I've very rarely encountered the ability or the courage to grasp the unthinkable; to shift the axis away from the tedium of polarization, as though our minds and imaginations were transfixed by the Manichean dialectic and ... little else' (Jamal 2006: internet).

### c. influences, inspirations and the muse

Mandla Mbothwe, in his mystical and beautiful work, is a 'theatre maker as muse' for me, in that through observing his work and 'collaborations', in particular, pieces like *Ingcwaba Lendoda Lise Cankwe Ndlela (The Grave of the Man Is Next Door to the Road)*, I am inspired to understand and trust my own vision of a theatre that might embody the shadow, spirit and love. He is able to be brazenly political and yet not brash and amid the delicacy of his dreamscapes I am reminded of Clarissa Pinkola Estes's words as she recalls the dream-woman speaking about the way it was supposed to be: 'The nurture for telling stories comes from those who have gone before. Telling or hearing stories draws its power from a towering column of humanity joined one to the other across time and space ... bursting with life still being lived' (Pinkola Estes 1992: 19). In yet another collaboration with Mwenya Kabwe, Mbothwe created the award winning, *27 Windows, 4 Doors & 2 Taps*, for the Out The Box Festival,<sup>9</sup> 2010. In a live sound, movement installation and 'image feast' that explored the notion of suspension, a community grappled with their sense of rootlessness. In this production, image as metaphor, was given full reign to flourish and one found oneself suspended in a dream-like atmosphere challenged by human art installations that seemed to speak a thousand words. Pather, too, is able to take the social and the political and merge them in a movement language that requires few words and yet is able to speak volumes. I have been influenced by pieces like *Kitchen* (2004), *Qaphela Caesar* (2009), which I was able to observe 'in process' through to its completion, and *Body of Evidence* (2009). In 2010, Jay Pather created a new incarnation of his interdisciplinary contemporary adaptation of *Qaphela Caesar* (translated as *Beware Caesar*), which took place at the Cape Town City Hall. The 2009 proposal for the work became a platform from which to continue his exploration, and the re-working of the production in this historic sight became particularly relevant with the themes, extracted from the original Shakespearean text of *Julius Caesar*, of political betrayal, power and prophesy. In an article in the Cape Argus, Pather is quoted as saying, 'We are interdisciplinary in the way we process information. Our art needs to reflect that.' He adds, 'The colonised of Africa are the most post-modern in the world because we have had to deal with someone else's way of thinking. Our sense of 'the other' and the concept of hybrid started 400 years ago' (Pather in Smith 2010: 1). These theatre makers embody the ideas that I have referred to in this paper. There is a syncretism in their work, which

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<sup>9</sup> The Out The Box Festival is presented by UNIMA SA, the South African Association of Puppetry and Visual Performance. The ten day international theatre and film festival took place on 20 – 28 March, 2010.

includes, in my terminology, 'the shadow', the 'speech across silence', the cross-over art forms, the 'post post anti', the entanglements, the newness and a certain ancient heterogeneity that speaks to the soul. In Jungian terms the work might be called, 'ensouled'.

#### 4.4 crossing ...

##### **a) the personal as political – auto-ethnography**

In our progression from yesterday to today what might be proposed is ...

'a putative shift or movement that is not beyond and away from the past but rather involves a circling back on it, a return, a stepping back down into its details, earlier silences and margins, into its previously 'blank' spaces and hidden networks, in order to extract from it a more extensive sense of the possible. (Chambers 1990: 9)

In my one person show, *Crossing ...* and the journey of auto-ethnography explicit in the task, I was able to find a personal response to the political, using a radical reflexivity. In the mapping of my ancestry I could no longer deny the diasporic journeys of the Jews in my family and it was their consistent and ghostly knocking on the door of my rehearsal space, while I made vain attempts to keep them out of my piece, that forced me out of denial and into a place of acknowledgment and admission. These ancestors had left their homes in Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Ireland and England as a result of genocide, and I had begun to feel, in rehearsal, the way in which they lived in my bones. My own wanderlust was becoming an issue and words like wanderer, nomad, stranger, foreigner, exile, adventurer, emigrant, immigrant, traveler, tourist and voyeur began to play against words like homeland, native, aboriginal, settler, colonist, pilgrim and pioneer. 'It is when one leaves home that the imaginary as well as the political contributions to the semantic range of home .... become clearer' (Morse in Naficy 1999: 70). In the beginning of a folktale (in Propp's model), there should be a disequilibrium of some kind. The hero needs to leave home before the story can progress. Thereafter, the point of the story becomes about 'getting home again', or marrying the princess of another kingdom. 'Home is the beginning and the end, the 'long' or 'last' home (Ibid.). In Joseph Campbell's mythology regarding heroes, the hero's journey was important because it conveyed universal truths about one's personal self-discovery and self-transcendence, one's role in society and the relation between the two.



## **b) reclamation, death & rebirth**

My own homecoming, which was referenced in *Crossing ...* was predicated on a deep desire to return to the land of my birth out of a profound feeling of 'homesickness', but also out of a desire to break the bounds of prior habits of domestication. In a previous paper, I had written, 'I have watched the safety of home, habit and domestication working its spell on me as I attempted to live my life as an artist, mother, wife of an artist and career woman'. The prisons were prisons of my own making, in Eugene Ionesco's words, 'paralysis bred by habit'. This performance was to be a journey of reclamation, a shamanic attempt to re-birth myself into someone more whole, closer to my wildness as a woman (which speaks to my continued use of Pinkola Estes's words and ethos in my work). In my studies with Native American medicine people one would often hear the expression: 'Today is a good day to die'. They interpret this as a methodology for 'dying to the old self' or allowing an old system that might be seen as a prison, to fall away and be replaced by 'rebirth' or a new way of being. Jung's interpretation of the death-rebirth archetype is that it is a symbolic expression of a process representing a return of the ego to the unconscious, a type of temporary death of ego, and it's re-emergence or rebirth out of the unconscious (Segal 1998: 4); a creation out of destruction matrix. bell hooks, in *Art On My Mind: Visual Politics*, writes that the discourses of death and dying, 'do not lay claim to the word transgress .. death is the silent witness, waiting to see if any of us want to love fully, want to be so fiercely alive that we will not deny death. To refuse denial is to transgress' (hooks 1995: 134). Thus, in the piece, I ended by immersing myself in a large pool in a quasi-baptism in order to emerge reborn, renewed, like a baby from the womb of the mother. During the last half of the performance a house, in a large projected image, was ravaged by fire. It had been reduced to cinders in time for my re-emergence into life. A camera caressing an object can, I believe, offer 'a haptic vision that is also a tactile epistemology' (Morse in Naficy 1999: 72). Sense knowledge, which is represented in intercultural contexts, might offer a potential shattering of variant forms of perception. And it is this nausea, this feeling of loss of balance, which feels almost like an embodied knowledge, that may then become less a comfort or a recognizable sense of familiarity, and more of a provocateur (Ibid.).

In the process of this praxis, as I allowed myself to live and relive the experiences themselves, I found myself coming face to face with my emotional inheritance. As the body took over it became the catalyst for a new and different process of writing; 'I began to write internally' (Gabriel in Naficy 1999: 78). My hunch that the memory of a lived experience

was anything but fixed, became confirmed (Ibid). Now one could only hope, that the images created on stage might experientially offer the audience a referent for their own memories, lived experience, dreams and the unseen realm of myths and spirits that hover in the interstitial spaces between it all (Ibid: 79).

### **c) text draining & acupuncture**

My power object for *Crossing ...* was my laptop computer, my invaluable MacBook Pro, which was a hidden presence representing 'my traveling office' or treasure chest / traveling trunk; a repository for precious photographs, music, correspondence, writings, filing systems, video research, googling, storage of academic research and mostly a very important 'means with which to communicate'.

I learned through this process and the critique that followed, that I must trust my images to speak for me. Coming as I do, from a text-based tradition, I realize the essentiality of a 'less is more' approach, allowing myself the opportunity to drain the 'text as a necessity' and to allow my presence, in concert with powerful stark images, to be enough. The metaphor of acupuncture seems apt, as it requires an acute knowledge of the exact position in which to place the needles, in order to activate the appropriate energy meridians to maximize the healing process.

## CHAPTER 5: GAME CHANGE

### 5.1 homecoming / finding a place / culmination

In my title I make reference to 'finding a place' for shamanic practice in the creation of postcolonial theatre and it is now revealing itself, toward the end of this Masters degree, as a challenge that seemed to have had the qualities of a zen koan<sup>10</sup> or shamanic riddle. This notion of shamanism is something I have interrogated purposefully in my work and it has found particular purchase in unexpected forms as I proceeded with this investigation. In the early stage of the enquiry, soon after delivering my first paper and as I was beginning rehearsals for my Minor project, concerns were expressed regarding my use of ritual in my praxis and my methodologies. A certain concern was expressed, too, that I might endanger the young actors by putting them into trance. Understandably, when one speaks of shamanism and arrives at it from a place of preconceptions or misconceptions, it might be expected that one might be dabbling in certain forms of 'primitive' ritual or working with techniques that might be considered esoteric, unusual or even dangerous.

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<sup>10</sup> koan, *n.* a riddle used in Zen Buddhism to demonstrate the inadequacy of logical reasoning.

This was never my intention. In fact, these queries served to validate what I was doing within the very closed environment of rehearsals and I became hyper-aware of the safety of my methodologies and process. It has been my experience in my decades of work with these modalities, that I have consistently approached my work with young people with a concerted responsibility, both emotionally and physically, regarding their safety.

I am beginning to understand, now, as the riddle unravels its meanings, that it is in the process of breaking narratives, eschewing and challenging narratives, welcoming slippages, playing with disparate fragments and deconstruction, that the notion of post colonial and post modern theatre can emerge as something imbued with its own electricity. Therefore, ones definition of shamanism does not necessarily change, but it gets bigger; it expands. Shamanic practice in the theatre, then, is about staying close to the electricity of the truth and opening the doors of perception. In my own praxis, with the perspective of hindsight, I am able to see, now, how certain powerful images were able to electrify, by virtue of the fragments they followed. The point is, it is in these fragmented forms, that archetypal awareness might be activated and these symbolic experiences then resonate as a version of an actual experience. Within this, as the subconscious and unconscious minds are activated beyond the conscious belief systems, lies the possibility that the doorways to new ideas, gestalts and perceptions might be opened. The way of the shaman is to guide the initiate in seeing his or her way to illumination and this illumination might be described as 'the electricity of the truth'; in animation we might call this, the 'light bulb' effect; expressed in cartoons, comic books and illustrations as a light bulb turning on above the head. In actuality, the moment of awareness is occurring at a deep internal level; the level of the subconscious or unconscious mind. This is where transformation takes place. I am recognizing, too, that my work and the work of the practitioners that I have sited, is not about putting people into trance, but rather about initiating a state of being *en-trance-d* and *illuminate-d*. I will refer to this process, again, in an attempt to further clarify, in the next few sections of this chapter.

#### **a) site & concept**

For my final project my central ideas form around the re-imagining of a conventional theatrical space as a vehicle to contain my notions of the liminal, entanglements, ineffability, slippery surfaces and the mining of histories, identities and ancestry. Using the Little Theatre on the University of Cape Town, Hiddingh Hall campus,

which was my first 'theatrical' home, as the site for this culminating production, brings with it a stark contrast between the 'then' and 'now' of the socio-political landscape; with the potential of exploring a notion that the future might create the present against a backdrop of the past.

In re-envisioning the theatre from the point of view of its epistemological value as a site and layering that over my subjective memories and the 'ghosts' of the building, I will attempt to take the audience on a very different journey in this production than I might have any time in the past. The experience will begin from the moment of entrance through the outer front doors of the theatre into the first installation, the Baggage Room. Part airport security terminal, part art installation, part room between worlds, this space should create a feeling for the audience that they have entered a liminal realm, a place between worlds where dreams, waking, imagination and memories, the 'real' and the 'unreal' imbricate. The next site will likely be the foyer, which will be re-configured through lighting, visual images and set design into a space that lures the audience into a slightly seductive state of confusion. It will present a paradox; perhaps it might feel like the beginning of a cocktail party, or it might provoke a sense of being a voyeur? This space will provisionally be called, the Battlefield.

.... crashing through the larger landscapes of memory and experience and knowledge, trying to get a fix on where we are in a multitude of landscapes that together compose the grander scheme of things. Orienting begins with geography, but it reflects a need of the conscious, self-aware organism for a kind of transcendent orientation that asks not just where am I, but where do I fit into this landscape? Where have I been? Where shall I go, and what values will I pack for the trip .... and what pattern, what grid of wisdom, can I impose on my accumulated, idiosyncratic geographies? (Hall 2004: 15)

The audience will be led through the main red doors of the theatre by two characters, in the midst of a journey. One is on a journey from the past and another will be in present time. On entering the Place of Mists the audience will be able to sit or stand as they watch scenes being played on three old wrought iron beds, across a large ramp, which will stretch across the centre of the auditorium. These scenes will blur the boundaries between what was and what is and will introduce the sub-theme of love and relationship, both as it pertains to self and other. A character from my minor project, the Wise Healer Woman, (played by the same actor, in an expanded role), will be seen for the first time, as will the Young Girl and both these characters will serve as iconographic, archetypal figures throughout the piece. At this point, the audience will be led to seats on

the stage and the main body of the work will unfold from this point, introduced through a ritual dance that will inject the piece with a layer of rhythm and hypnotic repetition.

Of course, I am writing this description of the project, and this thesis, in the throes of conceptualization, within a department that is immersed in final practical examinations. I understand that I am entering the process with a range of ideas that might become re-contextualized, deconstructed or reconfigured once the rehearsal phase begins. Given that the work will be devised with the cast and will involve interdisciplinary collaboration, this section can merely serve to outline the conceptual maps of the production and their performative interpretations, as envisioned at the time of submission of this explication.

### **b) form**

It is my intention that this production (*Passage*), encapsulate this enquiry in a performance that speaks to the cross-art forms mentioned earlier in this paper. The work will include mixed media, movement and dance, spoken text and poetry, multiple languages and some song. The image making, which will take place through the language of the body, costumes, stark images on video installations and through occasional props and a minimal use of set, becomes a definitive aspect of the narrative, assisting in the telling of stories, which will roll out in a disconnected, episodic form. My hope is that the amalgamation of these elements might result in a theatrical experience where a dialogue can be articulated that goes beyond the text being spoken on stage.

Part of my intention in stalking the notion of shamanism as it relates to the theatre, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, is that I believe that the dialogue between these forms might provoke a shift in perceptions and attitudes in the spectator, just as it might do in the initiate during a shamanic journey. The images and the physical language speak a type of meta-text that is able, I believe, to touch on archetypal patterns in the unconscious and conscious minds of those who bare witness and receive the material, giving it depth and truth. In this way the audience is able to bypass the received position (as mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 4) and reach that moment when 'thought slips its casing and becomes other to itself' (Jamal 2005: 29).

These processes of devising and collaborating, force a redefinition of the theatre for me, and bring with them challenges, difficulties and possibilities. The director becomes an explorer in the collaborative process, attempting to make maps for his or her co-creators at the same time as having to function like a conductor of a symphony orchestra. 'The theatre, not confined to a fixed language and form, not only destroys false shadows

but prepares the way for a new generation of shadows, around which assembles the true spectacle of life' (Artaud 1958: 13).

### **c) content**

The Stuart Hall quote in the earlier section of this chapter speaks to an orientation requiring a level of transcendent awareness that asks a variety of questions: Where am I and where do I fit into this landscape? Where have I been and where am I going? What values will I pack for the trip, what can I leave behind, and 'what grid of wisdom can I impose on my accumulated, idiosyncratic geographies' (Hall 2004: 15)? These are queries that relate directly to my work and they form a type of underpinning to the work process that I will bring to the cast. I will be working diligently with these students, to bring them to this 'meta' state of awareness in the hope of generating material which addresses these archetypal issues.

Within the context of various scenes, temporarily given titles such as the Place of Lost Language; the Room of Hiding; Domestication and a Place of Shadows (amongst others), we will be exploring various themes from this paper and will cull proposals from the previous three devised performances, which have dealt directly with my thesis enquiry. I have extracted pertinent pieces from my thesis and will use the particular issues addressed as foundations for improvisation exercises, devising and text creation as well as for the meta-text in the creation of dance. We will explore notions of home, homeland and homesickness remembering the Chambers quote: 'There is the sensation of having exited from the old house of language and of now being lost' (Chambers 1990: 103). We will examine the notion of our bodies as our 'quintessential mobile home' and look at boundaries and borders ultimately as places of our own creation and 'space' as a place of potential metamorphosis. We will explore cities and places as living things, which hold their own energy, layered like a coal seam. From this perspective we will mine our ancestry, identities and our particular histories keeping in mind the issue of 'entanglements' with a focus on how that ultimately plays out in the post apartheid present. My intention in the rehearsal process is for us to 'come out of hiding' with a willingness to expose the areas of our denial and to explore denial and hiding as it lives in our world. As mentioned previously in this paper, I am interested in the voices found on the margins, in the displaced matters of women, race and slavery.

I would like the rehearsal process to be a place where we are able to scramble the codes at a micro and macro level, using Sarah Nuttall's theory mentioned earlier, so that I

am basically assisting the cast in identifying prevalent modes of functioning both personally and politically, with a view to decoding and recalibrating 'the self'. In the end, we will attempt to create a glimpse of a possible utopian future and we will seek a place of and for love. In my praxis, I hope to bring an acute aliveness to the performance and a quality of mystery and magic to the narrative threads of the piece. The cast will work consistently, during the rehearsal process, on an awareness of the energy fields between them and the audience. These spectators will not be perceived as a body of mere passive 'receivers' but will be acknowledged, in the moment to moment passage of the piece, as a 'body' that is alive, vibrating and potentially open to mutation and change.

#### **d) process & methodologies**

As with my previous productions for this degree, I will again supply the cast, at the beginning of the rehearsal process, with notebooks in order that they may map their progress and record their creative writing whilst in the process of this excavation. At first we will have conversations about the subject matter and we will then sit in 'council' in order to mine places where the material might intersect and resonate with the 'personal'. Each session will begin with intense physical and vocal warm-ups in order to prime the bodies for the work ahead. We will do exercises, for building focus and trust in the group dynamic, and I will attempt to share some of my ideas about the more ephemeral aspects of the energy fields at play between them, and later the audience, and the nature of the unconscious, conscious and archetypal realms. We will also begin the work, which is experimental for me, too, of mining the possibilities of turning images and character into iconography. This will only occur however after much improvisation work and scene and text generating, which will issue, at times, from guided meditations and/or working with specific music as an impulse for emotional depth and diving. Rehearsal rituals will be forged. I will hopefully write chorus pieces based on this work and the material they generate, and together, we will work on ideas and placements for music and the dance. There will be collaboration, between myself and one of the actors who is a dancer by profession, and he will become our guide in the language of movement.

In Richard Schechner and Willa Appel's book, *By Means of Performance: Intercultural studies of theatre and ritual*, it is suggested that the student, on entering the workshop or rehearsal phase as a fixed 'already made being', is consistently put through a process of 'breaking down' or being rendered psychophysically malleable. Quite literally, the performer-in-training goes through a process of being taken apart, deconstructed into

bits – a bit being a molecule of action. These bits, once freed from their attachment to larger schemes of action, almost as one might rearrange frames of a film in the editing process, might in this rearrangement become new action (Schechner 1990: 41). In the case of these students, who have been in an intense year-long process of work and training, it is my belief that they will arrive at rehearsals primed and strong in both technique and physicality. My job therefore becomes bringing them into the material, without allowing ‘burn out’ or exhaustion to intrude on their focus and concentration. In the construction / deconstruction / reconstruction work of rehearsals, which is my fascination (given the short time-frame), I am hoping that I might be able to emerge with something simple, ineluctable and sublime.

It is difficult for me to extrapolate or describe the experiences I have had in the course of my shamanic practice and training. Colin Turnbull calls the state, the supra-rational; one that lies beyond definition and therefore beyond description. The Mbuti, he says, would describe those who do not recognize Spirit as merely having forgotten how to reach it. ‘They do not know how to sing’ (Turnbull in Schechner and Appel 1990: 71). My task then becomes finding ways to bring elements of this subjective disembodied knowledge to my cast in a process of osmosis and sharing. Metaphorically speaking, I will be ‘braille’ing’ and intuiting my way to the work. In Turnbull’s description, liminality is often spoken of as a subjective experience of the external world, an ‘other’ condition of being, coexistent with the state of being of which we are normally conscious. In this way it can be seen as a timeless state of being, a state of ‘holiness’ that lies parallel to ones ‘normal’ state of being or perhaps is superimposed upon it or coincides or coexists, with it (Ibid: 80). In shamanism and trance states the initiate does not only move from one state to another, but might also become something else. This is called shape shifting, and it is achieved, more often than not, through a process of intense preparation and purification. Armand Bytton<sup>11</sup>, a Peruvian shaman with whom I currently study, describes consciousness as the force that shapes awareness giving it its many expressions. He compares the shamanic technique of ‘stalking’, with acting:

Acting to me is an extrapolation of the shamanic technique of stalking. It is the way that ‘seeing’ takes place. Stalking is the ability to fully surrender form and become other. It involves deep physical sensations that allow for essence to remain, while shape shifting into anything. (Bytton 2009)

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<sup>11</sup> Armand Bytton, a shaman, born in Peru, is recognized around the world for his shamanic teachings and trainings. I have studied with him for the past five years. His words have been used, often, in my praxis.



In the world of theatre the concepts of transformation, of penetration, of making visible that which is invisible, are familiar. They may not be easy to deal with but they are central to the theatrical process and certainly they are aspects of the theatre, which I am eager to explore in this enquiry. Transformation has been described as occurring when symbol and object appear to fuse and are then experienced as a perfectly undifferentiated whole. Symbols fire the imagination and bring forth insight, new beliefs and emotion, altering our conceptions in an instant. One could therefore consider it to be a multidimensional alteration of the ordinary state of mind, which can overcome barriers between thought, action, knowledge and emotion. Schechner differentiates between 'transformation' and 'transportation' when discussing performance. He insists that the performer maintain a measure of control and awareness when performing, not becoming utterly 'lost' or obliterated in his/her portrayal. He admits that most acting involves temporary transformation (Meyerhoff in Schechner 1990: 246). In this regard, and as it pertains to my inquiry, the actor and the shaman are both trained in the development and utilization of altered states of 'trance' at differing levels, for performance. One might even assume that it is possibly mastery of just such a state that is vital to the perception of truth within a performance. In other words, with both the actor and the shaman, the technique contains a binary, which has within it a paradox; two opposing states are occurring simultaneously; subjectivity and immersion, counterbalanced by objectivity and awareness. There is an aspect of both the actor and the shaman that remain objective during the 'journey', so as to better guide the performance or the initiate. These questions and theories hold much weight and depth for me. At the same time, however, in a slight contradiction, one can read the notes written by Zbigniew Cynkutis (1938 – 1987)<sup>12</sup>, one of Grotowski's original actors and administrator of their theatre company, who died ahead of his time, but left behind extensive data about his work with the Laboratory Theatre. In these notes he describes the 'state of being' of the actor in a state of immersion, beginning with the most sensitive 'awakening of the sense' (e.g., touch and smell), thereafter to succeed in separating oneself from all that is outside, resulting in a feeling that he describes as 'a sucking into the interior .... a funnel down the sloping sides of which I begin to slide somewhere – the bottom of which cannot be seen ... I don't resist this, rather succeed in giving myself totally ... at this point we are utterly naked in relation to the self ..' (Karafistan 2003: 164). He describes the aim of such physical exercises as not

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<sup>12</sup> Note provided by kind permission of Jola Cynkutis, Zbigniew's widow. She has been editing and translating the notes into a book since 1987, in collaboration with Khalid Tyabji (Karafistan 2003: 168).

being to build muscles or strength but rather to lead one's body to a state in which it is 'efficient to a maximal degree' in the realization of demands and able to exaggerate 'in order that it may fly' (Ibid.).

He might well be describing a shamanic journey. And it is in this context that I am able to explore the notion of an interconnection between the shaman and the actor, realizing at the same time, that it would take years of training and discipline to achieve these states of being. I can only hope, in this upcoming production, that the various techniques and methodologies described above might lead to a sense of having been able to, at the very least, dip our toes in the water. Perhaps what I am seeking is a state of 'flow'; a state where action and awareness merge, destroying a dualistic perspective. In this state the performer might become aware of his actions but not of the awareness itself (Myerhoff in Schechner 1990: 247). Or, if we are fortunate and the work proceeds well, perhaps we might be able to find our own ways to 'fly'?

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 restoring the capacity for love – rethinking being human

In Jamal's book, *Predicaments of Culture*, he quotes Albie Sachs as saying, 'the secrets of culture's future are a reflection of the very secrets of the human spirit' (Sachs in Jamal 2005: 6). The question becomes, if the dark past of apartheid has 'closed our society, stifled its voice, prevented the people from speaking' then it is all the more the vocation of cultural expression to serve as the 'harbinger of freedom of conscience, debate and opinion' (Ibid: 10). It is suggested that the ghetto and the gulag do not disappear when one announces an age of freedom, it is conditional and all the more difficult to achieve today, given a national and global tendency towards fear and compromise. It is essential then 'to build a counter-narrative to terror and suffering' (Ibid.). In Maguire's terms, he posits that chaos is bad for business and that we have sold our freedom for the myth of order. This myth tends to have 'a perfect surface, and we are beguiled by surfaces', which get slicker and slicker with time (Maguire in Delgado & Svich 2002: 197). If we leave the populace without a counter-narrative they are, more often than not, seduced or numbed by television, video games, cell phones, computers and alternative media into a state of submission. Nevertheless we attempt, in Neruda's words, to 'live through the mutation of human order avidly'; we are reminded that 'spring is rebellious', I would hope that we are, too.

Ashraf Jamal, continues the dialogue about love: ‘... it is love that moves me most. Over and above the barbarism and the fallibility of human beings, it is their capacity for love that matters and that ... can conquer the psychic disfigurement that is our sorry inheritance’<sup>13</sup> (Jamal 2006). There is a possibility that South Africa has been shaped by ‘a very lack of love, a lack so profound and damaging’ that it might be difficult to remedy it through any retrospective project of healing (Jamal 2005: 24). Ever the optimist, which he must needs be if this is his *raison d’être*, he remains hopeful.

Sarah Nuttall, in the conclusion of *Entanglements*, suggests that South Africa, at the moment, is alive. I have spoken of this aliveness in the earlier sections of this paper. Despite what it has suffered, it is now more fully in touch with its human potential, than ever. Yet, Nuttall is determined (as is Kabwe) that now, more than ever, it needs ‘a reconstituted public intellectual space in which to make our world speak – as word, body, self – charged with all its luminous and disturbing powers’ (Nuttall 2009: 159). We must constantly however, contest our own misdemeanors and give people a reason to listen (Ibid.).

Breyten Breytenbach might argue that for us, art is perhaps a way to lose possession of useless certainties (Breytenbach 2009: 17). It is through our artistic efforts that the central equations of conditions like the ones we have in South Africa, which is also true for the Americas and, increasingly, for Europe, might be approached, digested and transformed. These are: the acceptance and accommodation of our ‘multiple and discrete identities, individually and collectively’; recognizing the importance of memory and extrapolating what to do about it; ‘integrating the imperative of exercising responsibility for one another’; acknowledging that the ache for social and economic justice will not diminish or be forgotten (Ibid: 176); and finally recognizing that ‘we are who and what we are only in becoming’ (Ibid: 30). Mahmoud Darwish, the recently deceased Palestinian poet said, from the West Bank:

.... All search for sense is a search for the essence which confounds itself with our questioning of the intimate and the universal, that interrogation which makes poetry possible and indispensable, that questioning which has as consequence that the search for sense is also a search for freedom (Darwish in Breytenbach 2009: 37).

## 6.2 performance – resisting commodification

Will theatre ‘always seem to be dying? Always’ (Maguire in Delgado and Svich 2002: 197). As mentioned before, theatre, with its evanescence, has always been in crisis.

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<sup>13</sup> ABSA Chain: Russel Brownlee in conversation with Ashraf Jamal, August 9, 2006. See reference list.

'It resists commodification in its bones, bones lighter than air. Because it is always vanishing in the moment, it is simple to see it as endangered, but its fragility is an illusion ... it is not solid ... it is an illusion' (Ibid.). In spite of a history of censorship, we see that theatre is infinitely renewable; the more it has been attacked the more it has grown or moved underground, refusing to be eclipsed, preferring to settle in its 'fertile womb' (Ibid.). It is our sacred space, our temple and we continue to be like the phoenix rising out of the ashes, determined to have a life and a form. Erik Ehn, head of Drama at Brown University, suggests that, freed from Theatre, we will find it 'as it lives in nature. Theatre's true and secret soul will come upon us when we stop bullying it from the sidelines' (Ehn in Delgado & Svich 1002: 194). We as theatre practitioners must work the margins, step back and reflect, and from this position visualize an evolutionary move. With the new poetics of cross-art forms the director becomes conductor and collaborator as he/she tells stories, with the weaving of the inter-textuality of dance, music, video, film and art. The director is metamorphosing too, shifting forms as the creative process shifts direction, depending on the hybrid forms being created and the collaborations taking place.

Sellars, in discussing education, theorizes that an education of an artist needs to be interdisciplinary and intercultural these days: poets need to know music, musicians should have to learn dance; filmmakers must know literature. Whatever it is that is being studied needs to cross borders and we have to enter every conversation, he suggests, not with what we know but rather with what we don't know. We have to start with what we do not understand and we have to give students the ability to cope with a world filled with question marks, where everything has to be re-examined and the first step might be to acknowledge our ignorance (Sellars in Delgado & Svich 2002: 137). 'It's about trying to live in a mode on this planet where there are no more enemies lists' (Ibid: 136).

The conditions of performance are simple. When we draw a circle on the ground and mutually agree that everything within that circle will have resonance, we have created an opportunity for performance. 'The circle is like the stretched skin of a drum. Actions within the circle resound like the striking of the drum. Performance is culture's strategy to create performances that resound' (Maguire in Ibid: 204).

### 6.3 we shall not cease from exploration

Pinchbeck argues that the quantum jump into a new context, which I have been suggesting as a possibility throughout this paper, when viewed from a certain perspective, has been carefully prepared by our history. Our active engagement is required in order to

make the leap possible. As we observe, look, see and recognize what is at stake, each of us, individually, will choose whether or not to take the jump across the divide (Pinchbeck 2006: 2). In the words of the Hopi Elders, 'We Are the Ones We've Been Waiting For. Now you must go back and tell the people that this is The Hour,' (The Elders Oraibi – Arizona Hopi Nation).

In my exploration, during this intense period of research and practice, I have embraced the cross-art forms of a new visual culture with its mixed media and interdisciplinary approach, aware all the while, that it is colonization which has ensured that we think in these ways. But with society still in crisis, my question remains, can we as artists use this work toward shamanic ends which are essentially about healing, transformation and assisting in opening the doors of perception? I conclude with the words of T.S. Eliot, which I used in my proposal for this degree and have utilized on stage a few times, since:

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling  
We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

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