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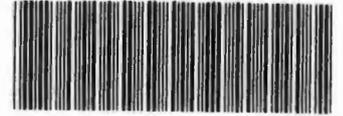
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**Title**

MISE-EN-SCENE AS (PRE)TEXT; an insistence on a negotiated space for the creating of new theatre works.

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploration is to reflect on the activity of writing for performance, with the focus specifically on the generation of the dramatic text, and to further the notion of *mise en scène* as prescribed by Pavis. (Pavis,1983:25) This is in relation to the making of a new South African play entitled **Reach**, written by myself, Lara Foot Newton and directed by Clare Stopford. The exploration looks at a model of theatre making where the writer is present during the rehearsal phase.

I propose that there is a pre-*mise en scène*, which exists as pre(text) for the dramatic and performance texts. This pre-*mise en scène* pre-figures or alludes to the possible "object of knowledge" (Pavis,1983:25) before its manifestation. This pre-*mise en scène* is the first encounter with the negotiated space of writing for theatre; of writing the dramatic text; of a first writing of the performance.

The exploration is divided into three parts:

Part 1.

Mise en scène as (pre)text.

A network of associations which are negotiated into the dramatic text.

With reference to Pavis ((Pavis,1983:25) and Brook (Brook,1993:52)

Part 2:

Mise en scène as (pre)text and the dramatic text.

The co-dependent relationship which exists between *mise en scène* as (pre)text and the writing of the dramatic text within a negotiated space.

With reference to Harold Pinter, in his Nobel prize lecture in 2005 entitled **Art, Truth and Politics** where he describes how sound, light and dialogue collude to give birth to character in relation to his two plays **The Homecoming and Old Times**)

Part 3:

Mise en scène as (pre)text, the dramatic text and the performance text.

The relationship which exists between *mise en scène* as (pre)text and the dramatic text, and *mise en scène* in relation to possible meaning and interpretation within the performance text. With reference to the notion of dramaturgy(Meyrick,2006:281) and to workshopped plays by director Barney Simon.

MISE-EN-SCENE AS (PRE)TEXT; an insistence on a negotiated space for the creating of new theatre works.

The context of the project.

Since 1989, I have been involved in the process of collectively creating new theatrical works. Initially I functioned primarily as a workshop director, where together with a number of actors, I would create a new work. I would commit this work to paper during the rehearsal process of the play. As director, I was not completely satisfied with the performance texts of these plays. The plays lacked dramaturgical attention and required the focus of an individual writer. In 2002 I wrote my first play **Tshepang**,¹ which I directed. The question I asked myself after having directed **Tshepang** was whether it would have been more beneficial to the production, if someone else had directed the text. Further I questioned whether I might be able to develop into a better writer if I focused exclusively on the writing.

In 2006, I was commissioned to create a new work for the **Festival Theaterformen**² in Germany. The production would open in Hanover and tour nationally in South Africa performing in three major centers; The Grahamstown festival, The Baxter Theatre and The Market Theatre. I decided to use this opportunity to focus, as sole writer, on the dramatic text, and have another director direct the play. This was a deliberate choice to concentrate exclusively on the dramatic text. The production **Reach**³ was created for the **Festival Theaterformen** Concurrently I embarked on an exploration of the role of myself as writer in relation to the dramatic text.

¹ Foot Newton, L,2005. **Tshepang**. London . Oberon Books. First draft written in 2003.

² **Festival Theaterformen**, 22 June 2007, The festival hosts fourteen productions from all continents. Artistic director – Stefan Schmidtke. Theme of the festival - Culture as a weapon.

³ Foot Newton,L,2006. **Reach**. First Draft originally entitled Solomon and Marion.

Introduction.

As a director/writer and maker of new work, this reflective exploration is an attempt to make the process of writing a play, self-evident to myself. The exploration does not aim to present a new theory or critically evaluate the writing process. Rather, it attempts to make aspects of my own practice apparent to myself. It questions the writer/director dilemma within myself as theatre practitioner. It is an experiential exploration, which is not finite but rather forms part of a journey in relation to a particular and personal creative process.

During the exploration, a number of concerns were raised. Some were answered and others opened up new questions about myself as writer.

The purpose of this exploration is to reflect on the activity of writing for performance, with the focus specifically on the generation of the dramatic text, and to further the notion of *mise en scène* as prescribed by Pavis:

It is the confrontation of all signifying systems, in particular the utterance of the dramatic text in performance. *Mise en scène* is not an empirical object, the haphazard assembling of materials, the ill-defined activity of the director and stage team prior to performance. It is an object of knowledge a network of associations or relationships uniting the different stage materials into signifying systems, created both by production (the actors, the director, the stage in general) and reception (the spectators.) (Pavis, 1983:25)

Stemming from the French term *mise en scène* literally means "putting into the scene" or "setting the scene" ⁴

I concur with Pavis that the *mise en scène* lies in the "uniting of different stage materials into signifying systems." These materials consist of elements of design, direction, lighting and performance, and include the audience response. They unite in a "network of relationships" which culminates in a performance text and presentation - "the object of knowledge."

This assembling into "a network of associations" conventionally takes place after the completion of a written text, or at least after the presentation of

⁴ Webster's French English Dictionary, 230, Nelmens, J, 425. **An introduction to film studies.** Defines *mise en scène* - "putting into the scene"

a concept for a workshop or collaborative production.

But what of a "uniting of materials" which takes place before the emergence of the dramatic text? I pose that there is an earlier process of associations, relationships and other signifying systems. These are the genesis or foreshadowing of the dramatic text to become the performance text; Pavis's understanding of *mise en scène*, his 'object of knowledge'. I suggest that there is a pre-*mise en scène*, which exists as pre(text) for the dramatic and performance texts. This pre-*mise en scène* pre-figures or alludes to the possible "object of knowledge" before its manifestation. This pre-*mise en scène* is the first encounter with the negotiated space of writing for theatre; of writing the dramatic text; of a first writing of the performance (the creation of a *mise en scène* to be realised as the object of knowledge); of writing the performance in the presence of the audience (Pavis's object of knowledge).

During the creative process - the phase in which the director, performers and designer work the dramatic text into a performance text or object of knowledge - the associations, relationships and signifying systems of the pre-text phase can be present beyond their manifestation in the dramatic text through the inclusion of the writer in the creative process.

Conventionally, a director, together with a designer and cast interpret a script and create a *mise en scène* which takes shape during rehearsals. However, this is where the writer of the text is not present. Either the writer is deceased or the writer is not involved in the process. On the other hand, as suggested, when the writer or originator of the play is present in the rehearsal process, a new set of negotiations are required between the writer, director, designer and actors. Having suggested a pre-*mise en scène* or pre-text phase which I will call the *mise en scène* as (pre)text, the question arises: What is the role of the *mise en scène* as (pre)text in this negotiated space?

There are a number of approaches to any given creative process. This research examines an approach where the writer is present and in negotiation with the director and actors in order to make visible the signifying systems of the

pretext; or, as I have suggested, the *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

I will argue that the *mise en scène* in embryo form begins to take shape before the writer has a literal understanding of his or her personal intention. The text is in the writing long before the writing is in the text.

Further I will explore the co-dependent relationship which exists between *mise en scène* as (pre)text and the dramatic text and *mise en scène* in relation to possible meaning and interpretation within the performance text.

By examining the creative process which took place during the making of the production, **Reach**,⁵ from (pre)text to page to stage, I aim to propose the importance of a negotiated space in the creation of new theatre works.

⁵ **Reach** a play written by Lara Foot Newton, 2006.

Part 1.

Mise en scène as (pre)text.

A network of associations which are negotiated into the dramatic text.

Inherent in the initial creative impulse of a play, lies the genetic structure of the *mise en scène* as pre(text).

The *mise en scène* as pre(text) consists of a range of impulses, dreamscapes, images, emotional responses, light, colour, smell, image, intellectual debate, social analyses, dialogue and hallucinatory landscapes; they are the basis of the materials which pre-figure the dramatic text and become the object of knowledge within the dramatic text. The assembling of these associations is located in what Peter Brook refers to as the "hunch" and which I will refer to as an intuition or feeling. "When I begin to work on a play, I start with a deep, formless hunch which is like a smell, a colour, a shadow." (Brook, 1987:4)

The "hunch" then is the pretext to the *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

There is no limit to the virtual forms that are present in a great text. A mediocre text may only give birth to a few forms, whereas a great text, a great piece of music, a great opera score are true knots of energy. Like electricity, like all sources of energy, energy itself does not have a form, but it has direction and power. (Brook, 1993:52)

The challenge then for the writer is to draw these "knots of energy" into a dramatic text.

In relation to the first draft of **Reach**.

In May of 2006 I began work on the first draft of a play, which was originally titled, **Solomon and Marion**.

It is impossible to say with any certainty where the text began. I started writing in response to a feeling, and as an artist I wanted to illuminate specific social issues. These issues arose in response to, and were emphasized by, the murder of security workers by fellow colleagues for

attempting to ignore a strike.⁶ The negativity around crime and instability in the country was made more intense with the recent murder of colleague and actor Brett Goldin⁷.

Within this social context, the germination of the *mise en scène* as (pre)text began. The pre(text) began with an intuition or "deep hunch" (Peter Brooks's "deep hunch"). The source material became the beginning of a subconscious, dream-like *mise en scène* ignited by an emotional reaction to the events. It combined news headlines, radio reports, images of naked bodies on the front pages of newspapers, conversations about grieving mothers, families and friends, a continual outpouring of empathy and confusion, colours of black and white, sounds of heartache and anger and responses of outrage, depression and desperation. It stirred within my own being a sense of extreme isolation. These were the beginnings of a network of associations which combined to form the *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

The empathy that I felt for Brett Goldin's mother invoked in me a feeling, which sparked an intuition, which led me towards a character, which I named Marion Banning. I saw a flash of a woman, ten years after her son's death. I saw her sitting in a chair, a blanket over her legs, paralyzed by aloneness.

Isolation was to become a central theme in the play. "Setting the scene" for this theme became the foreshadow of a *mise en scène* as (pre)text. I imagined a family house, once full of inhabitants, and images of day-to-day life. Now it was empty - silent. Within this silence, Marion waits. Into her life walks a young boy named Solomon Xaba. Solomon carries with him a message from Marion's son Jonathan. The message is, " Tell my mother I wasn't scared." The core of the play was a mother-son relationship between Solomon and Marion.

The collision of these facets of life, this network of associations, these responses were in some way the germ of the initial and possible *mise en scène* as (pre)text. I say possible, because as I will describe later in this exploration; the *mise en scène* as (pre)text which develops into the final *mise en scène* as performance text, is dependent on the negotiated space.

⁶ IOL, www.iol.co.za, **Daily News**, May 17 2006. Violence flares up again in Cape Town.

⁷ IOL, www.iol.co.za. **The Star**, April 18 2006. Double murder leaves arts community in tears.

To take this notion of *mise en scène* as (pre)text further, I will briefly refer to Harold Pinter, in his Nobel prize lecture in 2005 entitled **Art, Truth and Politics**⁸ where he describes how sound, light and dialogue collude to give birth to character.

I have often been asked how my plays come about. I cannot say. Nor can I ever sum up my plays, except to say that this is what happened. That is what they said. That is what they did. Most of the plays are engendered by a line, a word or an image. The given word is often shortly followed by the image. I shall give two examples of two lines which came right out of the blue into my head, followed by an image, followed by me." (Pinter, 2005)

It is interesting to note the chronology, "into my head, followed by an image, followed by me." (Pinter, 2005) This suggests a pre-text, made up of signifying systems, which pre-figure or foreshadow the dramatic text.

The plays are **The Homecoming**⁹ and **Old Times**¹⁰. The first line of **The Homecoming** is 'What have you done with the scissors?' The first line of **Old Times** is 'Dark.' In each case I had no further information. In the first case someone was obviously looking for a pair of scissors and was demanding their whereabouts of someone else he suspected had probably stolen them. But I somehow knew that the person addressed didn't give a damn about the scissors or about the questioner either, for that matter. 'Dark' I took to be a description of someone's hair, the hair of a woman, and was the answer to a question. In each case I found myself compelled to pursue the matter. (Pinter, 2005)

"Compelled to pursue the matter." It is this compulsion which interests me. A compulsion in this instance, is what I mean by *mise en scène* as (pre)text and as pretext.

It is clear from Pinter's description that image, word and light collide simultaneously in his imagination and I would argue that the *mise en scène* as (pre)text has begun to evolve, long before Pinter has any literary understanding of his personal intention. The text is in the writing before the writing is in the text.

⁸ <http://nobelprize.org/nobel>. 2005, Nobel prize in literature. Harold Pinter.

⁹ Pinter, H, 1965. **The Homecoming**. London. Eyre Methuen.

¹⁰ Pinter, H, 1971. **Old Times**. London. Eyre Methuen.

This happened visually, a very slow fade, through shadow into light.
(Pinter,2005)

A further aspect of *mise en scène* already in the making. The beginnings of a lighting design. Pinter continues:

I always start a play by calling the characters A, B and C. In the play that became **The Homecoming** I saw a man enter a stark room and ask his question of a younger man sitting on an ugly sofa reading a racing paper. I somehow suspected that A was a father and that B was his son, but I had no proof.

Whose play is this? Who is writing it? Here is the possible scenario where the writer is serving the emerging *mise en scène*, serving his compulsion, hunch or intuition. Are the characters writing themselves?

So since B calls A 'Dad' it seemed to me reasonable to assume that they were father and son. A was also clearly the cook and his cooking did not seem to be held in high regard. Did this mean that there was no mother? I didn't know. But, as I told myself at the time, our beginnings never know our ends. (Pinter,2005)

Here *mise en scène* as a continuum is evident, "Our beginnings never know our ends" Pinter is being driven by a hunch which pre-figures his text. The *mise en scène* as (pre)text is uniting in a "network of associations" which pre-determine his dramatic text. As author, I am able to liken my first image of Marion Banning to Pinter's A. And then into her stillness walks Solomon Xaba.

Marion
I have been waiting for you.

This first line from Marion suggested a number of possibilities. The *mise en scène* as (pre)text had already begun to evolve in the initial "deep hunch" and was now working it's way into the dramatic text.

Due to this compulsive line from Marion, a number of issues were up for debate later on in the process. The first question I posed to myself as author, and also of the character was, "Has Solomon been watching Marion, and for how long?" Why had she been, "waiting for him?" Solomon had obviously been lurking about for some time.

*Solomon is surprised, but is also a determined messenger; He watches her carefully.
Silence.*

You have been lurking about my house for days now.
If you are here to murder me, just hurry up and get on
with it. I can't wait forever you know.

Slowly she turns to face the intruder.

And?
What do you want?

Pause

Why didn't you knock? Where are your manners?

*Constantly being aware of her but then also trying not
to look at her.*

Solomon
Do you not remember me?

Marion
No, should I?

Solomon
I am Solomon Xaba.¹¹

To continue with Pinter's description,

Dark.' A large window. Evening sky. A man, A (later to
become Deeley), and a woman, B (later to become Kate),
sitting with drinks. 'Fat or thin?' the man asks. Who
are they talking about? But I then see, standing at the
window, a woman, C (later to become Anna), in another
condition of light, her back to them, her hair dark.
(Pinter, 2005)

Again one can see the progression of the *mise en scène* into a possible scenic
design, with textures and colours and lighting.

It's a strange moment, the moment of creating
characters who up to that moment have had no existence.
What follows is fitful, uncertain, even hallucinatory,
although sometimes it can be an unstoppable avalanche.
The author's position is an odd one. (Pinter, 2005)

Pinter's use of the word "hallucinatory" is useful for the notion of *mise en*

¹¹ Extract from **Reach**. 2006.

scène as pretext, and is pertinent as it suggests a compulsive rambling of nonsensical images and sounds. The germ or seed for "setting the scene" or "putting into the scene" The *mise en scène* as suggestion or innuendo, as pretext as well as (pre)text.

To summarise, the alleged reason or pretext for a dramatic text is motivated by a hunch, the hunch is fuelled by an embryonic or evolving *mise en scène* as (pre)text which exists prior to the text. It is necessary in the development of the dramatic text and the performance text, to create an environment that feeds this hunch or impulse and makes the "invisible visible."

(Brook,1969,:47)The *mise en scène* as (pre)text in embryo form begins to take shape long before the writer has a literal understanding of his or her personal intention. Therefore the text is in the writing before the writing is in the text.

Part 2:

Mise en scène as (pre)text and the dramatic text.

The co-dependent relationship which exists between *mise en scène* as (pre)text and the writing of the dramatic text within a negotiated space.

The negotiated space in this instance occurs in two phases. The first phase is the writer negotiating his or her *mise en scène* as (pre)text into the dramatic text. Making the intangible concrete is a challenge for any writer. Peter Brook speaks of "The Theatre of the Invisible Made Visible" (Brook, 1969:47) This is a similar concept. A hunch or intuition evolves into form and shape. The writer of the dramatic text is required to unite these associations into a dramatic text.

The negotiation here is about weighing up possibilities. Questions are posed by the writer, to the writer, about what choices to make with regard to metaphor, structure, form and narrative. These choices are not necessarily conscious, but can be propelled as in Pinter's compulsion. The negotiation here is an assembly of associations a weighing-up of source material. This is in order to fashion the *mise en scène* as pre(text) into a dramatic text. The *mise en scène* as (pre)text has no shape or form but the dramatic text is required to have both.

In an attempt as a writer, to bring clarity and shape to the *mise en scène* as (pre)text as part of my research, I spoke to psychotherapist Tony Hamburger about the theme of isolation.

Mr Hamburger posed the question, "What do we do about isolation?" and "When do you not feel isolated?" My answer I felt had something to do with belonging; and feeling a part of things only when the activity that I was engaged in at the time, had its roots in a cross cultural experience. I wondered whether Marion Banning and Solomon Xaba could find a sense of belonging, within one another. The story was about the possibilities of an unlikely relationship bringing a sense of belonging and healing. The characters would be driven by a mutual need and longing for a meaningful relationship.

As writer, I began to collate my *mise en scène* as (pre)text into a formal written text - the dramatic text. The moment the writer engages with the

(pre)text and begins to make concrete the *mise en scène* as (pre)text, there is the question of form.

The negotiation that now takes place, is the writer in dialogue with him or herself. The writer is required to give shape to the pretext. Further, the writer has to choose a style, which will best portray the *mise en scène* as (pre)text. This again is part of the writer's negotiated space. "All good dramatists have a style that is personal to them. A precise style expressed by an individual voice." (Hall:2000,14)

"A precise style" is part of the negotiation. The style needs in some way to reflect the *mise en scène* as (pre)text. If the *mise en scène* as (pre)text includes the metaphorical dimension and the layering of associations, then an appropriate style is required from the writer. Word, image, form, style and narrative collide in the negotiated space of networks, associations and signifying systems created by the writer. What was previously sub-conscious and intangible, becomes concrete in the form of a dramatic text.

The first draft of what later became **Reach**, was sixty pages of interaction between the two characters. The setting, which, represented isolation, became a lonely old family house somewhere in the Eastern Cape. The biography of Marion was relatively clear. Based partly on an old school teacher and partly on myself projected into a world twenty years from now.

It was a given that Marion had lost a child to senseless violence and that her grief was endless. Because of her inability to reach out, she had become desperately isolated. As writer I could imagine her, her shape, her form, the sound and rhythm of her voice. Solomon was less specific. He carried a message from Marion's son Jonathan, "Tell my mother I wasn't scared"

On reflection, it is possible to state that to a certain degree Solomon's *mise en scène* as (pre)text was limited by my choice to set the play in Marion's home. The world of Solomon was therefore not given space within the setting. This led to a constant searching for more detail and complexity around the character of Solomon. Had I as writer chosen to include a setting which sometimes encompassed his world, I would have been able to include more of the *mise en scène* as (pre)text, connected to his character, into the dramatic text.

Further the sound of his voice and the rhythm of his dialogue were less clear to me than that of Marion's. Creating dialogue for a character from a different cultural background to that of your own, can be particularly challenging for a dramatist.¹² During the rehearsal process this issue was negotiated.

The second phase of the negotiated space includes the director, actors and designer and is in relation to the development of the second draft of the dramatic text. In December 2006, I went into a script-development week, with the Director, Clare Stopford¹³ and the two actors chosen for the roles, Aletta Bezuidenhout¹⁴ and Mbulelo Grootboom.¹⁵

The first draft of the dramatic text was exposed to the company for the first time. The director and both actors as well as the designer would now bring to this dramatic text, his or her own *mise en scène* as (pre)text. They would each have an immediate response to the relationship and the story. They would begin to formulate images, sounds and emotions within their very own *mise en scène* as (pre)texts. The space of negotiation at this stage becomes a lot broader and more complex because it involves more people. The negotiation includes, ideas and impulses from the entire company, which filter into the next draft of the dramatic text, and later into the performance text and "object of knowledge" (Pavis, 1983) It is at this stage that the *mise en scène* as (pre)text is in danger of being overshadowed by the complexity of responses to the dramatic text.

Here I will make brief mention of the text named **Karoo Moose**,¹⁶ which I wrote and directed after having written **Reach**. The play was originally written as a film script called **No Fathers**.¹⁷ The film script was inspired by a hunch, which led to the *mise en scène* as (pre)text as in the case of **Reach**. However, a film script requires that the writer carefully describe the

¹² Solomon's character was from a Xhosa background, where the writer was from an English background.

¹³ Clare Stopford, well known South African director. UCT drama graduate.

¹⁴ Aletta Bezuidenhout, actress, director, playwright. UCT graduate

¹⁵ Mbulelo Grootboom, young actor. UCT graduate.

¹⁶ Foot Newton, L 2007. **Karoo Moose**. Directed by Lara Foot Newton for the Aardklop Festival and The Baxter Theatre.

¹⁷ Foot Newton, L, 2003. **No fathers**. Written towards an MA.degree at the University of The Witwatersrand.

visuals of each and every scene. The *mise en scène* is spelled out by the writer. The "setting the scene" or "putting into the scene" is written into the text in a way that specifies the visuals, the sound, the emotion, and the scenography.

When adapting **No Fathers** into a play I retained all of these visual and metaphorical descriptions within the dramatic text of **Karoo Moose**.

The result of retaining the descriptive filmic *mise en scène* within the dramatic text was illuminating. It led to a clarity or a certainty from myself as director, which was helpful during the rehearsal process. Since the *mise en scène* had been spelled out, it was relatively easy for me as director, and for the cast members, to relate directly to the initial hunch or impulse of the play. This is in contrast to the first reading by the actors of **Reach** where I experienced some confusion. The relationship I had conceived of and the *mise en scène* as (pre)text which I had imagined, were not being clearly reflected in the read through, and therefore I presume in hindsight, that the *mise en scène* as (pre)text was not written clearly into the dramatic text.

There is no right or wrong at this stage, it is simply the beginning of a journey through a negotiated space towards a dramatic text, which finally becomes a performance text. It is interesting to note that the director had chosen an actress, who in my mind was completely wrong for the part. She did not look or sound like the Marion I imagined. I did not think that she was a part of my *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

When I questioned the director on her choice of actress, she was convinced about her decision. This was then the director's own *mise en scène*, her response to the dramatic text, her vision, her picture. It was important then, that I as writer should manipulate my vision slightly to concur with the director. This was a decision, which I was later very grateful for. This decision was part of the negotiation of image, of feel, of interpretation, of associations.

The performance as realized by director and actress, was directly related to the character that I had imagined. Although in my eyes the actress did not look the part, she entirely embraced the initial feeling or hunch that I had

concerning the emotional context of the character. She embraced the pain and isolation. During rehearsals Aletta Bezuidenhout asked me a number of questions regarding the character and how I had conceived of her. In this way she was getting me to speak my *mise en scène* as (pre)text. This is the advantage of the writer being present during rehearsals.

The actor chosen to play Solomon was interesting to me because he had a sensual and delicate side, which proved useful. It was impossible to say whether he was right for Solomon Xaba, because Solomon was not yet a strong enough character on paper. However, during the development week, the actors' own personal sensitivity was influential, and this brought some clarity to the second draft of the play. This sensitive side of Solomon manifested in his personal thoughts and concerns being confided to the audience in a series of monologues.

I can argue that because of the history of apartheid, writers might feel insecure in writing characters from cultural groups other than their own. This was a good reason to workshop plays in the past. The writer /director could use improvisation to create dialogue which sounded authentic cross-culturally and could use the life experience of the actors to inform the narrative. Thus plays like **Sizwe Banzi is Dead**¹⁸ and **The Island** were collective collaborations between Athol Fugard, John Kani and Winston Ntshona.

Questions were posed by the director, Clare Stopford, during the process which continually sought clarification around Solomon's actions. Why did he take so long to deliver the message? Why did he watch her for so long before speaking to her? What was his motivation for visiting her so often? Who is he? How does he exist, who does he stay with?

During the week of development no solutions or answers were provided, but enough questions were asked to provoke a serious re-write of this character's emotional arc. It was clear that Solomon needed more complex layering. As an exercise, I wrote a draft of the play from Solomon's point of view. The story seen through his eyes. This led to both a structural change in the text as well as the introduction of a more poetic voice in Solomon. This clearly shifted the play from a naturalistic style into a slightly poetic style. The

form of writing therefore came into question.

A new draft was written. In this draft Solomon speaks directly to the audience in a series of monologues. He tells the audience about his needs and fears and about how he feels about Marion. The style of writing includes metaphor and lyricism. This was an attempt at an insistence from me as writer on a complex character with a need for a mother figure in his relationship with Marion. It also suggested a more poetic and dream-like quality within the form. The *mise en scène* and writing of the text evolved here into an interdependent relationship.

In discussion of this draft, this is what the director and I wrote in a series of emails: I would argue that whilst the negotiation seems sentimental, it includes an active negotiation. The positivity expressed in the communication is simply a type of negotiation.

Looking good! I really think it adds a powerful tension. I find his inner voice visceral & buy it without reserve. Actually one grows hungry for it. I hope there is more.

Love Clare¹⁹

.....

Hi Clare

Do we need it all the way through or do we think that as he gets more and more taken by her, he is unable to be as reflective?

Lara

I definitely think you have to sustain it - because it's not just about an inner voice - it defines the style of the piece and I think losing it means we sink into a more realistic style which we don't want. The new voice contains a promise to the listeners of something fresh and unique theatrically - and I think one should fulfil that promise. He invites the audience into complicity, into being inside his unique inner landscape, we will feel cheated if he abandons us.

Clare

Clare's instinct and reaction here is significant. She says " it defines the style of the piece, and "I think losing it means it will sink into a more

¹⁸ Fugard, A, Kani, J, Ntshona, W, 1976. *Sizwe Banzi is Dead and The Island*. America. Viking Press.

¹⁹ A series of emails between director and writer concerning the second draft of *Reach*.

realistic style" What is crucial here is that whilst the nature of the character of Solomon had changed and developed, the nature of the setting or style did not reflect this change. The naturalistic lounge, kitchen etc were not altered. Months later, after watching the first run through, I realised that my setting and stage directions, were in many instances contradicting the stylized more poetic *mise en scène* as (pre)text. The naturalistic stage directions were blurring the initial impulse or hunch. Thus the dramatic text was not insisting strongly enough on the incorporation of or realization of the *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

The juxtaposition of these two worlds on stage feels magical, it feels like a gift. Because it carries a wonderful tension. As he gets sucked into her we are wondering - how is he going to talk about things now? seeing that he had such visceral feelings about this whole situation before.

Clare

The "juxtaposition" which Clare speaks of, is the juxtaposition of their personal lives. But the juxtaposition in styles is what later became problematic. The naturalistic setting and presentation, which came from her material world, did not blend in with the poetic style of writing in the monologues.

As the director, I need the non-realistic element to sustain - so I can sustain the fundamental approach of the theatre making. I start getting confused if I think my stylistic approach is going to thin out and disappear.

Clare

This comment from Clare, was unfortunately forgotten by both of us, and only through much trial and error did we go back to her instinct and remember her comment, "I need the non-realistic element."

To summarize. The co-dependent relationship between the *mise en scène* as (pre)text and the writing of the dramatic text within a negotiated space during the creative process of **Reach**, occurred in two phases. The first phase was the writer negotiating her *mise en scène* as (pre)text into the dramatic text. The second phase of the negotiated space was the writer negotiating her *mise en scène* as (pre)text into the second draft of the dramatic text after

having input from the actors and director. This was in order to advance the dramatic text towards a performance text.

Part 3:

Mise en scène as (pre)text, the dramatic text and the performance text.

The relationship which exists between *mise en scène* as (pre)text and the dramatic text, and *mise en scène* in relation to possible meaning and interpretation within the performance text.

It is only through a negotiated space that these initial imprints or etchings of the *mise en scène* as (pre)text can develop and grow in a cohesive manner, and this negotiated space is created entirely to serve this original impulse or hunch.

There is more to theatre than the problem of play texts, there is more to theatre than literary values. The pyramid model of a play production that puts the writer at the pinnacle of meaning and relegates all other artists to mere `interpreters` of a pre-given work is a view of stage creation lacking in finesse, sensitivity, and penetration and, in the end credibility.....In place of the pyramid model one might imagine another set of dramaturgical shapes - flatter, more egalitarian, probably just as self-regarding, but more robust because responsibility is shared in a more fruitful way. The shift to what some in the field call `a relationship building model' is one where the playwright becomes a ubiquitous rather than a heroic part of the theatre making process. (Meyrick, 2006:281)

"A relationship building mode" or the negotiated space is what is necessary for the *mise en scène* as pre-text to become visible in the performance text.

The negotiated space, is a space which allows the collaborative company to respond intuitively to the writers' initial impulse and dramatic text. The word "space" here is more important than the word "negotiated." Space implies the liberty of assembly. It allows biographies and perceptions of the various individuals to contribute to the performance text and ultimate *mise en scène*. This negotiated space therefore demands that the writer be open to the possibilities put forward by the company but also demands that the writer be faithful to the *mise en scène* as (pre)text. The danger with a negotiated space is that with too many opinions the original impulse can become lost. The original *mise en scène* as (pre)text should be seen as a seed, which contains all the potential and possibilities needed to create the "object of knowledge"

Towards the end of the third week of the rehearsals of **Reach**, I as writer, was invited to a run-through. I had been present from time to time but had not yet seen a proper presentation of what was on paper. There were three major areas in the presentation, which were not working. As an audience member I was not drawn into the play. The complexity of the relationship was not apparent and the text seemed stodgy.

The first problem was the interpretation of Solomon's character. The second was the use of language, or misuse-use of language. The actor playing Solomon, was ignoring the form and rhythm of the character's speech. And the third was less definable, but had to do with the core tone, or style, or manner in which the play was being delivered to the audience. Finally the play was far too long and repetitive.

After the run-through as writer, I expressed my concerns to director Clare Stopford. A series of negotiations followed. The negotiations involved the weighing up of choices. It is necessary to look at each of these choices in order to understand the importance of the negotiated space with regard to *mise en scène* as (pre)text, and interpretation and meaning.

Clare Stopford had interpreted Solomon as a kind of 'tsotsie' or gangster. He wore a woolen hat pulled over one eye and had a particular gangster type swagger. He was aggressive and unfriendly. Her reason for this was that she felt that in order to create dramatic tension between the characters Solomon needed to be threatening. The company had forgotten about the initial reaction to the story, which they had had during the development week. The sensitivity of the character had been forgotten about, the characters' need had been over-shadowed by a new look or shape which altered the *mise en scène* and meaning as a whole.

This interpretation was not necessarily wrong, but it did not allow for that original impulse of a mother / son connection between the two characters. The actors seemed to be from such different worlds that they could not find any kind of connection. Further because we had decided, in the fourth draft, that Solomon's monologues to the audience should be partly improvised in Xhosa, the form of the writing was completely lost, and there was no sense of the poetic or the mysterious; this was something that I had been aiming for as a writer.

Sir Peter Hall in **Exposed By The Mask** says of a dramatist,

His words are making dialogue for other people. We must add to these words an understanding of how they operate when spoken aloud, and what their form, shape and rhythm contribute to the meaning of the character who is speaking them. We must also be aware of what the dramatist was asking of the actor- indeed what kind of acting is required by the text. For it must be imagined in living terms. (Hall,2000:14)

As I mentioned earlier, it is difficult for a writer to write dialogue for a character from another culture. This insecurity led me as writer to ask actor Mbulelo Grootboom to translate parts of his monologues into isiXhosa. However, these monologues had been written with a "form, shape and rhythm" which contributed to the meaning and also reflected the *mise en scène* (pre)text. By mixing English and isiXhosa in a haphazard fashion, the form, shape, rhythm and meaning were lost and the *mise en scène* as (pre)text was over-shadowed.

When discussing the issues of language and interpretation of character with the director she was immediately in agreement. She stated that perhaps her own preconceptions and life experience of having been attacked in her house by a gang of criminals had led her to interpret the character incorrectly. She also conceded that her decision to play him as a gangster, did not make sense to the script. The dramatic text asked for the character to wear formal clothes. This is required by Xhosa tradition of men after their initiation on the mountain.

In collaboration with the actor and the designer Solomon's costume was changed to the one prescribed by the text and tradition. On wearing these new clothes, the actor's interpretation of the character became more sensitive, softer and immediately closer to what I had originally felt Solomon should be. This did not solve Clare's need for more tension at the beginning of the play, and it might be accurate to say that this need has, as yet, not been entirely met.

Significantly, the discussion about sensitivity and poetry in the text with regard to form, gave rise to what we believed was a major break through. Once we had gone back to the English version of the text and prevailed upon the actor to pay heed to the rhythm and specifics of the language; the poetry of

the text shone through. Here is an example of where the dramatic text was serving the *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

The shift in certain aspects of the *mise en scène* led director Stopford to re-examine her staging and use of space. The text had asked for a naturalistic presentation of the space, entrances, exits and a normal kitchen / lounge set up. However again this seemed to break the flow of the production and distracted from the emotional and metaphorical layering in the relationship.

Stopford, in a meeting with me, then proposed a more poetic space. An open stage with furniture piled against the walls, covered with a sheet. Here is an example of where the negotiations between director and writer were possibly serving the *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

The change of space and breaking away from definite naturalistic entrances and exits contributed a great deal to the meaning of the play. By allowing for a more metaphorical flowing and sensual delivery of the performance, the relationship became meaningful and complex. The *mise en scène* had completely shifted and seemed to reflect more accurately the *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

It is interesting that it was the director who was unveiling the *mise en scène* as (pre)text located in the writer's first hunch or impulse. The director was searching for a way to make the "invisible visible." (Brook's "invisible visible") The writer had, in an attempt to make the text appear formal and structured, clouded the *mise en scène* as (pre)text in accepted naturalistic conventions. The initial network of associations based in the hallucinatory dream like space, had become literal, and did not convey the essence of the *mise en scène* as (pre)text.

To concur with Meyrick that " There is more to theatre than the problem of play texts, there is more to theatre than literary values" It was through a series of negotiations during the creative process, that the final presentation of the play was brought closer to the initial hunch of the originator.

" A relationship building model" is one where the playwright becomes ubiquitous rather than a heroic part of the theatre making process" (Meyrick,2006:281) Again I concur with this statement, but would add that

within the "relationship building model," or the negotiated space, it is vital to locate the impulse and the initial hunch in order to make visible the *mise en scène* as (pre)text. This (pre)text has to be located within either the writer or originator of the production. This is not to say that the writer is "heroic" or the "pinnacle of the pyramid," but it is important to unveil the initial impulse and to protect this hunch at all costs in order to present the core creative concerns within the production. Yes the writer is only one of many contributors within a company, but I would propose that the writer's hunch is imperative to any new work because it ignites the *mise en scène* as (pre)text and evolves along a continuum into the "object of knowledge." It should be protected and nurtured by the entire company and ironically, it should even be protected from the writer him or her self.

It is important at this stage to mention the actors' contribution to the *mise en scène* as (pre)text within the negotiated space. To expand on this subject, I will briefly observe some aspects of workshop theatre as created by the late Barney Simon,²⁰ the artistic director and co-founder of The Market Theatre in Johannesburg.

His best work, he felt, began with a director, a group of actors and a blank sheet of paper and the workshopped play became his trademark.
(Schwartz, P 1997:15, Intro to **Born In The RSA.**)

Barney Simon's hunch or intuition would be provoked by a theme or character or event or story that he had heard. He would assemble a group of actors who he believed would help him to create a performance text. The *mise en scène* as (pre)text would not be insisted upon in the dramatic text as there was no formal text written prior to performance. This is in contrast to the process of **Reach** where a formal text in many drafts was written before the first performance. However, the similarity is in the making of a new South African play, which draws from social situations and is influenced by a negotiated space.

He would send his cast out into the streets of Johannesburg and Soweto, to law courts, the railway stations, the cafes the parks (once, even to the abattoir), to listen and interview and return, to report on what they had seen and heard. Then the

²⁰ Barney Simon 1932-1995.

writing would begin.....Simon would direct them as writers as well as actors, by writing with them." (Schwartz,1997:15)

Simon would put the actors together in a series of improvisations in order to create dialogue which would grow into scenes, which would grow into stories and finally into the presentation of a play. Sometimes, after the play was complete, the stage manager would have the whole script written out, and it was these documents, which were later published as plays. The *mise en scène* as (pre)text was not recorded in the dramatic text but rather in the performance text. I would argue that the *mise en scène* as (pre)text was carried within the actors.

Actress Vanessa Cooke speaks of the process during the rehearsals for "Cincinnati."²¹

We worked mostly in twos to improvise. We did dialogues using tape recorders. A monologue is very difficult to improvise. So that was mostly written and then given to him. Then there were chats and chats and chats. Then according to what he had given you, you'd either write or re-write. Some people couldn't write, so he would write finally. (Cooke,V,1997: Interview in **The Word In an Orange.**)

Simon was fascinated by what he called "Biographies coming together" "Drama," he said, " is people doing things to one another."²² These biographies often formed the heart of his productions. Structure and narrative were not part of his general vocabulary.

Biography, memoir, life story, and history were the basis of all his characters, and his characters were the fabric of all his plays. However, when reading his plays on paper, it can be argued that the biographies, life stories, complexities and nuances which contributed to the final *mise en scène* as performance text, are not as textured as they seemed on stage. What was on stage, is not on paper.

A possible explanation for this would be that the biographies of the characters existed primarily in the actors. The actors would carry with them

²¹ **Cincinnati**, By Barney Simon and the cast, 1979

²² **Starbrites** Rehearsal notes by Barney Simon. Lara Foot Newton was assistant to the director and kept a diary

their own personal history and narrative, as all people do. They would then be sent out into the street where they would meet people whom they found fascinating and whom they would like to portray.

The actors would be affected by these people and their stories. Then they would carry back into the rehearsal room, their own personal relationships with these characters as well as a certain intrigue, an empathy and their own subconscious sense of themselves as this other person. Thus the character that we observed on stage, was a combination of an actor and his or her own biography, as well as their interpretation of a character whom they had met.

This is different to the outcome of how actors work on scripted texts, not necessarily in the way that the actors research characters, but in the way that a written text and dialogue emerge. In this case the dialogue and *mise en scène* as pre(text)exists within the actor - the actor has no need to interpret the dialogue of the writer.

Simon, described the actors as the 'filter' through which the story passed, 'We work for the discovery not display, and that usually involves the elimination of lies and clichés...to me there's something stunningly beautiful about people coming together and discovering the gestures, the sounds and silences.' (Schwartz, P, 1997. Intro to **Born In The RSA**,)

If the actor is the filter through which "discovery" emerges, then it is the actor here that is interesting in relation to the written text. Since what was recorded for publication was the dialogue and story but very little of the biography or look, feel, texture, setting, atmosphere and ultimately *mise en scène*. It is the actors' particular understanding and empathy for the real person whom they met on the street, which might have not been recorded in Simon's published plays. And thus one may argue that often workshopped publications, in the Simon tradition, as we have them recorded, fall short of well-constructed written plays on paper.

In the published play **The Outers**²³ by Barney Simon and Nicky Rebelo workshopped with the cast, there is no description of character. The play simply starts:

Richard is sitting on a bench. Hennie strolls past and sits next to Richard.

HENNIE (Looking up)

RICHARD: What's the matter?

HENNIE : Kyk net.

RICHARD : Do you think it is going to rain?

HENNIE : Maybe

RICHARD : Shit I'll die if it rains.

Hennie, was played by Marius Weyers,²⁴ and Richard by James Whyte.²⁵ For those who saw the production or know these actors, the first lines of dialogue are easy to imagine. It is possible to see Marius, know the weight and history he carries onto stage, and James, his clean-cut friendly intellectualism. However, if the reader of the published text, does not know the actors, then presumably these lines carry a lot less meaning.

In a negotiated space where the writer is present, it is possible to combine this workshop technique with the emergence of the dramatic text. In this way it is possible to marry the actors' personal biography and the actors' text with the character on the page. Thus the actor's biography would contribute significantly to the dramatic text.

A proposal then is this, to create a relationship with the actors and director which is informative, but allows the distance of objectivity, the time for precision and disciplined writing, and the space for negotiation. Here, in this space, the initial *mise en scène* as (pre)text can develop and grow. The danger would be in all instances, that the *mise en scène* as (pre)text might be swallowed or lost. This might happen as the writer commits the hunch to paper, or it might occur in a series of misinterpretations where the initial hunch is overshadowed by a need to get the play on.

To summarize: during the creative process - the phase in which the director, performers and designer work the dramatic text into a performance text or object of knowledge - the associations, relationships and signifying systems

²³ Barney Simon, Nicky Rebelo and cast, 1986. **The Outers**

²⁴ Marius Weyers, well known South African actor.

²⁵ James Whyte, South African writer/actor..

of the pre-text phase can be present beyond their manifestation in the dramatic text through the inclusion of the writer in the creative process.

Conclusion

There are a number of approaches to any given creative process. This exploration examines an approach where the writer is present and in negotiation with the director and actors in order to make visible the signifying systems of the pretext; or as I have suggested the *mise en scène* as (pre)text. The thread that binds the dramatic text to the performance text is essentially the (pre)text and this can only be achieved through a space which allows for negotiation or the weighing up of choices with the aim of creating the best possible production.

On Reflection (of the reflection) on writing as an active process. I would pose that with regard to **Reach**, that there were a number of possibilities within the *mise en scène* as (pre)text which might not have been realised. Further, on reflection, the *mise en scène* as (pre)text was enhanced by the personal biographies of the actor's and director and their own personal (pre)texts. This was achieved through a series of negotiations within the creative process and influenced the dramatic text and performance text. The combination of the *mise en scène* as (pre)text, the dramatic text, the actor's text, the director's text and the designer's text all collide to create the final *mise en scène* and "object of knowledge."

The activity of writing is personal and unique to each writer, there are a number of approaches. However the question remains "How do I best represent my *mise en scène* as (pre) text in the form of a dramatic text, which will translate accurately into a performance text and, reflect my "deep hunch" (Brooks' "deep hunch"?)

This exploration does not intend to assume its own reality as the basis of any or all authentic 'writing' processes. It is simply an exploration of an aspect of the experience as writer of one particular process. The value of the exploration is in the argument about the function of Brooks' hunch as part of writing for theatre. It serves as a reflection on my interest in the possibility of writing good text.

My own thoughts about the text of **Reach** are complex. Through this explorative journey it has become apparent that the *mise en scène* as pre text, demands a great deal of attention from the writer. The challenge it seems is to accurately articulate a hunch or vision in a theatrical manner encompassing image and metaphor within the narrative and relationships. Could **Reach** have

been a better play? Yes without question. Could the dramatic text have provided more clues? Had more layering? Included more complex metaphor? Been more engaging and theatrical? The answer is yes. The most important question with regard to this exploration is, did the dramatic text accurately reflect the *mise en scène* as(pre)text. The answer to this question is, not enough.

Patrice Pavis in **Theatre at the crossroads of culture**, states,

For a text to give birth to a performance is no easy matter. What the first night audience sees is already an end-product, for it is too late to observe the preparatory work of the director: the spectators are present with a gurgling or howling infant, in other words they see a performance which is more or less successful, more or less comprehensible, in which the text is only one of several components, others being actors, the space, the tempo. It is not possible to deduce from the performance the work that led up to it: *mise en scène*, as we understand it is their interaction, not their history, that is offered to the spectator and that produces meaning. (Pavis,1992:24)

For the purpose of this exploration, I would like pose that for the(pre)text to give birth to performance is "no easy matter" The final *mise en scène* is the product of a collective response both fictional and non-fictional to a particular impulse, in reaction to a specific event, or concern, or image, or obsession. The outcome of which, by means of a negotiated space, is "the object of knowledge" (Pavis's "object of knowledge") informed by the true or imaginary biographies of the theatre collective and inspired by the *mise en scène* as(pre)text.

mise en scène is never finite, it begins with the first impulse or instinct or dream and from the start, this *mise en scène* as(pre)text, encompasses all the elements of theatre, including acoustics and lighting; and it is in continual flux, depending on the audience reception and reaction! The *mise en scène* as (pre)text functions along a continuum.

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