(Re)membering History: Performative Disinterment in Post-TRC South African Theatre-Making

CHKLES001
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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this research paper from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

With the socio-political and even the theatre landscape in South Africa being fraught with questions of identity, ownership, memory and self-representation, I'm often struck by the implications of representing the self, while noting that the 'self' is never and can never be fully removed from some sense of a collective. This dissertation is a proliferation of questions and provocations that I hope will begin to sketch out an emergent body of South African performance work, particularly by young, Black female makers that centres materiality and corporeality as a device through which to resist the particularly logocentric and text-centric dramaturgy of the South African TRC proceedings. This dissertation will unfold as a kind of discourse analysis, drawing from a range of materials in an attempt to arrive at a theory of performative disinterment. While I draw from critical theory and performance studies, the core concepts that I return to throughout the dissertation are language, materiality and dramaturgy. These are defined primarily in relationship to each other, and it is this relationship that forms the basis for performative disinterment. Performative disinterment, as I conceive of it, is a productive suspicion of history that plays itself out through performance. It encourages a dramaturgy of materiality to give language to and articulate memory as counterpoint to history.

I employ theatre and performance as an analytical tool through which to deconstruct the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission looking specifically at the relationship between memory and the representation thereof in the Commission's proceedings. I turn to Susan Lori Park's play *Venus* and Sara Warner's analysis of the play, focussing on what Warner calls 'a drama of disinterment' as a counterpoint to the dramaturgy of the TRC so as to begin to presence a terrain of performance work that employs 'mis'-representation as a device for theatrical representation-ability. I conclude with an analysis of *A Faint Patch of Light* (2018), directed by Qondiswa James and *They Look at Me and This is All They Think* (2006), directed by Nelisiwe Xaba as contemporary South African performances that resists tropes of spectacle and the dominant gaze.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, I was part of the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement at the University of Cape Town, a collective of students, staff, and workers that occupied the central administrative building of the university, calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the grounds as well as radical decolonisation of the institution. This movement was the advent of 'fallism' as a paradigm of political thought – the beginning of the idea that everything must fall. This paradigmatic shift towards materiality is clear even in the naming of the movement – that structures 'must fall' denotes an interaction between materials, a complete surrender to gravity's pull, in this case, a surrender to decoloniality's pull. This call for the removal of Rhodes acts as a materialisation of discourse. What I mean here is that the act of restructuring space, as a physical, concrete entity, removes the discourse of transformation from the verbal round table of intellectualism to the materiality of lived experience. The #RMF movement, along with its subsequent incarnations, namely the #FeesMustFall movements of 2015, 2016 and 2017, held the view that adequate redress, indeed radical decolonisation within the university and the greater governing structures of the country, cannot take place within a frame that is inherently colonial. I find compelling parallels between fallism, and what Walter Benjamin has called 'destructive character'. Benjamin writes, and I'm going to quote at length:

> The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room; only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred.
>
> The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates in clearing away the traces of our own age; it cheers because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed eradication, of his own condition. But what contributes most of all to this Apollonian image of the destroyer is the realisation of how immensely the world is simplified when tested for its worthiness of destruction. (Benjamin, 1978: 301)

Mine is not to place any value judgement on this 'destructive character', this 'fallism'. I refer to this destructive character simply as an attempt to place the type of performance work that I discuss here within a frame of thought. And at the heart of this frame of thought, at least in the way that I appropriate

Benjamin, sits this idea of undoing – the idea that for the 'post' to be in any way a reality, post-colonial, post-apartheid and even post-TRC, then the 'neo', as it were, must be wholly undone. I will venture so far as to say that history itself must be undone, and while this process can take a variety of forms, I will focus in this dissertation specifically on appropriation and re-inscription, particularly within the theatrical frame.

As a young theatre maker, I often find myself asking the question 'what does it mean to represent?' With the socio-political and even the theatre landscape in South Africa being wrought with questions of identity, ownership, memory and self-representation, I'm often struck by the implications of representing the self, while noting that the 'self' is never and can never be fully removed from some sense of a collective. This dissertation is essentially a proliferation of questions and provocations that I hope will begin to sketch out an emergent body of South African performance work, particularly by young, Black female makers[1], with the exception of one performance, that centres materiality and corporeality as a device through which to resist the particularly logocentric and text-centric dramaturgy of the South African TRC proceedings. The question that underscores the entire study is how does what I am calling 'performative disinterment' serve to materialise the 'destructive character' in contemporary South African theatre practice?

This dissertation will unfold as a kind of discourse analysis, drawing from a range of supporting and contradictory materials in an attempt to arrive at a theory of performative disinterment. While I draw from critical theory and performance studies, the core concepts that I return to throughout the dissertation are language, materiality and dramaturgy. The definitions of these concepts evolve with the contexts in which I use them. Furthermore, they are defined primarily in relationship to each other, and it is this relationship that

[1] While this particular public, black female makers, is the primary demographic that this study centers on, I use this public to explore the broader implications and complications of theatrical representationability. I do this to narrow the scope of the research contending that by speaking to a micro-public that I identify intimately with, I might gain insights that can be applied to publics that lie external to my primary ways of identifying. While the representation of women specifically is a key issue in the study, it is only key in so far as it is a conduit for specifying and articulating the intricacies that animate questions of theatricality, representation and historicity.

forms the basis for performative disinterment. Performative disinterment, as I conceive of it, is fundamentally a productive suspicion of history that plays itself out through performance. It encourages a dramaturgy of materiality to give language to and articulate memory as counterpoint to history.

I will employ theatre and performance as an analytical tool through which to deconstruct the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (henceforth TRC) and look specifically at the relationship between memory and the representation thereof in the Commission's proceedings. I will then turn to Susan Lori Park's play *Venus* and Sara Warner's analysis of the play, focussing on what Warner calls 'a drama of disinterment' as a counterpoint to the dramaturgy of the TRC so as to begin to presence a terrain of performance work that employs 'mis'-representation as a device for theatrical representation-ability. Finally, I will conduct an analysis of the two performances, *A Faint Patch of Light* (2018), directed by Qondiswa James and *They Look at Me and That's All They Think* (2006), directed by Nelisiwe Xaba, using 'disinterment' through embodiment and corporeal materiality as a lens through which to theorise a contemporary, South African body of work that resists tropes of spectacle and the dominant gaze precisely by appropriating this notion of 'disinterment'. I also refer, though tangentially, to my own practice as a way to place myself in the research rather than conduct a pseudo-ethnographic analysis from a distance.

There are multiple and at times admittedly disjointed parts to this investigation and this is particularly evident in the structure of the dissertation. I make the following clear in order to invite the reader to engage productively with the material as it unfolds. The dissertation is split into two parts- the contextualisation and the analysis. The contextualisation is split into two chapters which outline the rationale for the study. Paying specific attention to the TRC and Susan-Lori Parks' *Venus* respectively, these two chapters introduce ideas around history versus memory and performance as a site thereof. In these two chapters, I rehearse the preliminary definitions of some of the key concepts that animate this study, namely: history, memory, dramaturgy, language and materiality. By facilitating a conversation between my hypothetical understandings of these terms and an application of these terms to the two

contexts, I begin to imagine how the definitions of these terms might shift as their relationship to each other shifts. In this way then, the first two chapters are less concerned with theorising performative disinterment as they are with providing potential reasons for the necessity of a theory of performative disinterment.

The two chapters that make up the analysis section of the dissertation are where I begin to engage with the theory of performative disinterment deliberately and directly. Here, I bring the focus to theatrical form as an explication of some of the complications that arise in the first section of the dissertation. By introducing predominant scholarship on the politics of form, I attempt to make clear the relationship between historiography and theatricality. In this way then, performative disinterment is actively played out as it relates to broader academic scholarship in the first instance, and to performance and theatre practice in the second instance. While it is possible that the reader might find the structure of this text disjunctive, I encourage them to remain cognizant of the whole, while enjoying the parts of the whole as whole in and of themselves.

CONTEXTUALISATION

Dramaturgies of the Moment: The South African TRC as performative site

South Africa's transition from apartheid into a democratic dispensation is marked by several significant moments, including the release of Nelson Mandela and the repatriation of Sara Baartman's remains. The most notable of these moments of transition however is arguably the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is globally heralded as having laid the ground for South Africa's transition into democracy. By integrating the legal process of testifying and the Christian confession as an approach to the extraction of truths about the apartheid regime, the commission sought to restore the dignity of all South Africans and to begin the process of collective healing and reconciliation. While the model of the TRC was deemed successful by international onlookers, even being adopted by other countries in crisis, such as Chile and El Salvador[2], its many problematics have long since surfaced among the South African citizenry from questions of its memorialization through archiving to, indeed, the complexities of traumatic recounting, interpretation and translation. My aim here is not to discredit the endeavours of the TRC, but rather to conceptualise a particular kind of dramaturgy, a particular set of compositional strategies in that moment, so as to draw comparisons between the mandate of the commission and the resultant post-TRC South African condition, noting indeed that the commission was in itself an archival endeavour and a site for collective remembering.

The TRC necessarily acknowledged the complex and varied effects of the apartheid regime, in its dramaturgy. This was most notable in the separation of the proceedings into three different parts: The Women's Hearings; the Amnesty Commission and the Human Rights Violation Commission, each with a clearly defined set of outcomes. This is particularly pertinent because it not only accounts for the multiplicity of experience and response to apartheid, but it also makes that diversity a central feature of thinking through the many aspects of

[2] See, for example, Popkin, M. & Roht-Arraza, N. 1995. Truth as Justice: Investigatory Commissions in Latin America. *Law and Social Inquiry*. (20)1: 79-116. DOI: 10.1111/j.1747-4469.1995.tb00683.x

healing in a way that productively resists closure. In this way then, the commission attempts to foreground individual experiences of trauma, to gather a more nuanced understanding of the multiple, singular perspectives on the collective condition. My interest in the TRC here is twofold. To begin with, I wish to analyse the commission as a performance in itself. Performance here is used in its most broad sense as that which enacts a particular outcome as well as that which is put on specifically to be witnessed[3]. In addition, I intend to explore the various dramaturgical approaches to archiving the TRC as a site for collective memory. Various questions sit at the heart of my enquiry, from questioning the very possibility of collective memory, particularly as it pertains to trauma, to questions of the representation-ability of memory and to a large extent thinking through the limitations of framing reconciliation through the lens of absolute truth. Further than this is an attempt at thinking through the complexities of translation and historical archiving in the context of asymmetries of power.

The TRC marks a pivotal moment both in South Africa's history, and in the genealogy of South African performance. The mandate of the commission, as described by its co-chair Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was to restore the dignity of individual victims in order to attain collective national unity among South Africans. Put another way, the commission was intended to bring the atrocities of the apartheid regime to the fore, so as to bury the past and begin a process of collective healing. While noble an idea, the irony of exposing in order to bury is not lost on me. The impulse to bury, the idea that establishing an objective and singular truth made up of separate victim and perpetrator testimonies might lead to a sense of closure, seems misguided. As noted by Pumla Gqola (2001: 96), "the TRC, heralded as a site of affirmation where speaking begins and silencing ends, exists also as a site defined by contradiction". This discourse of 'truth' as prerequisite for and propellant of 'reconciliation', is perhaps what I, in this dissertation, call the 'interment mandate' of the TRC. The idea that to reveal, to utter, to remember to and with the collective, one's individual trauma and indeed

[3] Walter Benjamin (1978: 220-238) defines performance and creative output through the lens of production and/or productivity. See also Janelle Reinelt's 2007 Introduction to Performance Studies in *Critical Theory and Performance.* J. Reinelt & J. Roach, Eds. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. (257-261).

violent perpetration, facilitates a space of collective mourning and closure, inevitably leads to a conundrum in which, "[t]he preservation of memory is ... selective and implicated in power. When the 'truth' of 'reconciliation' is privileged, 'other possibilities about the same past ... get repressed, transformed, marginalised, forgotten or silenced' (Motsemme and Ratele, 2000: 2)" (cited in Gqola, 2001: 98). This is precisely because one's relationship to one's own trauma is confounded with disbelief, temporal disorientation and the individual's "inability to distinctly categorically intuit the central state of affairs around which [their] trauma revolves" (Gusich, 2012: 505). Therefore, the TRC is not so much a site for the revelation of trauma as it is a "[r]itual performance, […] a trigger and a screen for the sharing of different memories and for their organization into publics of shared submission to it or to its observation and enjoyment as 'ours'" (Feuchtwang, 2010: 298). The importance of characterising the TRC in terms of ritual performance will be made clearer shortly.

For the purposes of this study, I wish to render something of a dramaturgical definition of the TRC through three broad concepts, namely revelation, logocentrism and absolution. Marco de Marinis and Paul Dwyer offer a compelling definition for dramaturgy that begins by re-defining theatrical text in light of the instability of distinctions between contemporary 'theatre' and 'performance'. By returning to the etymology of the word 'text', they draw parallels between the concepts of textuality and texture, to arrive at text as something woven together. They write:

> 'Dramaturgy' can now be defined as: the techniques/theory governing the composition of the performance-as-text (*testo spectacolare*); it is: the set of techniques/theory governing composition of signs/expressive means/actions which are woven together to create the texture of a performance, the performance text. (De Marinis & Dwyer, 1987: 100)

Understanding dramaturgy as a weaving together of strategies. I argue that revelation, logocentrism and absolution form the fundamental basis for what I have described as the interment mandate of the commission. How I define these terms is based on their relationship to each other. The formulaic, perhaps even dramaturgical structure of the TRC proceedings is such that, 'logos', the Greek word for the word, is the specified centre for the exposition (revelation) of

complete (absolute) truth, a truth that when revealed provides absolution (in the form of amnesty for the perpetrators and healing for the victims). And in what follows, I will outline various devices that characterise disinterment in response to the concepts listed here. Furthermore, I must acknowledge that this potentially incomplete interpretation and application of dramaturgy is only the introduction to my ideas on dramaturgical practice, ideas that are as evolving and uncertain as the practice itself.

A central feature of the TRC is indeed the act of giving testimony, of narrating one's lived experience. Annie Combes (2010: 446) writes: "One significant aspect of the South African Commission that distinguished it from its eighteen international counterparts, such as those in Latin America, is that it was the first to make use of widespread public hearings". So therein begins the culture of the spectacularisation of trauma. Not only are victims performing for their immediate audience within the walls of the commission, but their 'performance' is further moulded and crafted by the media to be received by both local and international publics. This, I argue, creates something of a crisis of interpretation. While witnesses grapple with the weight of recounting, there is the added layer of recounting to widely varied audiences with a range of vested interests in the proceedings, from the translators and interpreters of the testimonies, to the commissioners and fellow witnesses and even further to the media. In this way then, it is clear that the TRC seemed to be less concerned with the individual healing of witnesses, than the broader, collective regeneration of the society, which disregards the idea that "regenerative memory-work is not about 'putting the past to rest' but sensitively disseminating contested views of the past in non-dialectic ways" (Field, 2006: 40). And while I find the very idea of 'regenerative memory- work' perplexing, for reasons I will clarify shortly, I do agree that this kind of work must embrace contradiction and open-endedness as its defining feature.

In an article titled, *The Gender of Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Coombes (2010: 447) further observes that:

> [i]n particular, television coverage of the hearings of the Amnesty Commission (AC) and the Human Rights Violation Commission (HRVC)

> brought into focus the incommensurability of the means of representation with the actual pain, suffering and other complex emotions lived by the central protagonists of these poignant and horrifying narratives.

What is particularly interesting about this observation is that it raises the question of representation from two different angles, both of which are central to this study. In the first instance is representation as in the act of presenting again, the act of articulating and or embodying memory in the present, of remembering physically. The second is to represent as in to stand in for another-another person, idea, another thing. In both instances, "[i]ronically, it is the public nature of what inevitably becomes spectacle that sets limits on the means by which multifarious forms and levels of personal pain and experience can be made explicit to viewing publics" (Coombes, 2010: 447). In this way then, much like with the evolution of theatrical pedagogy and practice, the focus is removed from the 'performer', from the person doing the telling and by extension from the story being told, to the receiver, the audience, the one doing the listening. While this might be the case for any situation in which a story is being told, that the teller has incredibly limited control over how the listener (in the broadest sense of the word) might perceive and interpret what is being told, in the case of the TRC, it is particularly problematic because of the commission's marriage to the concept of 'truth'. Echoes of this very problem can be found in theatre studies discourse[4], when, for instance, the question of 'authenticity' in relation to cultural performance is brought to the fore because indeed where one speaks of authenticity, one might just as well speak of 'truth' or notions of 'the real'. While further interrogation of these concepts: truth, real, authentic, might prove compelling, I will productively limit the scope, at least in this chapter, to one question: 'when is truth?' I chose the word 'when' rather than 'what' for example, because my argument is precisely that truth evolves with and is dependent upon the context and circumstances of its articulation.

[4] See for example Dwight Conquergood and Philip Auslander's chapters in the book [*Critical Theory and Performance,* 2002. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press]; also see Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach's introduction to the same book, which offers interesting provocations in relation to concepts of authenticity and performance.

As is clear in the name, the TRC placed truth at the heart of its endeavours. I will venture further by contending that the commission ritualised truth. The word 'ritual' is used specifically to denote that which "forge[s] an experience of redemptive harmony" (Feuchtwang, 2010: 283) through "repeated performances with expectations of effects beyond the normal". Ritual has three fundamental characteristics, which Feuchtwang (2010: 282) classifies as follows: "ritual has to be completed […]. It has the illocutory force of authority itself [… and] its words are like objects and objects are symbols, emotive and with multiple meanings understandable in the context of the occasion or event of ritual performance". Furthermore, in the context of the TRC, this very concept of ritualised truth leads to the conditions through which,

> alternative discourses emerged and grew in visibility in the newly liberated space. They participated in the 'undoing' of apartheid and in challenging its most insidious lies. These discourses contribute to the creation of new realities, new 'truths'. Their public rehearsal ensures they capture the nation's imagination and are gradually accepted as 'truth'. (Gqola, 2001: 96)

Here then, 'truth' is predicated upon certain conditions including but not limited to public rehearsal and visibility, citation-ality and iterability[5]. A prime example of this is the emergence and continued prominence of 'rainbow nationalism', a condition spurred by Archbishop Desmond Tutu when he invoked the rainbow as a symbolic representation of the diversity of the South African populace, describing us as 'the rainbow children of God'[6], thus becoming:

> [o]ne of the single most unifying symbols of the unfolding South Africa… [and] the insertion of the 'reconciliation text', as embodied in the 'rainbow nation' rhetoric […]. Yet for the 'rainbow vision' to become visible, gain ascendency and greater legitimacy it must be performed over and again, flagged through a range of linguistic and visual signs (Motsemme and Ratele, 2000: 4). (Gqola, 2001: 99).

[5] As a matter of interest, see Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's introduction to the book [*Performativity and Performance*, 1995. New York: Routledge] in which they use the terms above to define performativity borrowing from Derrida, J. Butler, J. and Austin, J.L. They refer to citationality as that which can be referenced and iterability as that which evolves as it is referenced.

[6] See extracts from Tutu's speech following Chris Hani's assassination where he first uses this phrase. These can be found on the South African History Archive website at http://sthp.saha.org.za/memorial/articles/tutus_moral_stature.htm [accessed 2 February 2019].

Truth then, is not so much about fact, but rather about the authority of its initial assertion and its repetition thereafter. And as a result, the implications of this on the greater project of memory-making is that it is not a process of retrieval. "Rather it is constructed through language subject to processes of reduction, distortion and selection 'to sanction the interpretation to which it is meant to contribute' (White, 1978: 107)" (cited in Gqola, 2001 98). Even further than this, what is particularly and necessarily a personalised narrative of memory and traumatic experience is subsumed into the ordinary and typical by what Feuchtwang (2010:288) calls, "a process of ritually ordered amnesia". Furthermore, the ritual itself, in this case the TRC, becomes the locus of collective memory, rather than the individual stories and experiences of the participants.

Feuchtwang concludes his chapter, 'Ritual and Memory', by noting that "ritual is not history. Nor is it personal memory. It produces experiences that are memorable. But of itself, it is a transmission of its own discipline of memory and of its intrinsic temporality" (2010: 298). Because indeed, life and experience are in themselves projects of memory-making. If I am alive in the present, doing, seeing, breathing, feeling, being, any future engagement with this present-past is an act of remembering. And while grand acts of remembering, such as ritualised recounting take place, they become a temporal place holder for the memories they contain. They give shape and dimension to narratives that are otherwise characterised by spillage, slippage and temporal discordance. And in the case of the TRC, they are anchored in the word, both spoken and written. They are legible. It is this legibility that allows them to function as collective experiences, yet in the same vein, this legibility homogenises what should be personalised experiences of memory and forces containment on what should necessarily spill over. In this way then, while the redemptive purpose of the ritual might be realised, the individual participants are alienated from this experience, even more so when their narrative representation falls outside of the conventions of the ritual. In returning the focus to the TRC, it becomes clear that the relationship between collective memory and national identity, in this case reconciliation and the establishment of a new 'South African-ness', is that of

mutual constitution and the TRC functions as a container for this relationship to play itself out.

A lot of responsibility was placed on the TRC - truth, reconciliation, healing, forgiveness, collective memory, regeneration, the list is endless, and several strategies were employed by the commission to facilitate the realisation of these aims. It was a carefully crafted performance[7], with carefully chosen participants, the space in which the hearings took place was designed in a particular way, participants were allowed to speak in their own language and the material tools for translation were provided, and an audience was invited to be present, albeit passively. Catherine Cole notes that "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) embraced performance as a central feature of its operations. While the secondary literature on the TRC is vast, scholars have yet to grapple fully with this unique and defining aspect of the commission – its public, embodied, and performed dimensions" (Cole, 2007: 167). And yet despite this careful crafting, it is the moments in which order slips away that rendered the proceedings truly performative. Furthermore, it is in these moments that the true potential for the commission to realise its elusive mandate of truth lies. Cole (2007: 185) writes about one such a moment, arguing that: "Such occasions reveal the uncertainties and indeterminacies that were as much a part of the TRC's production of truth and knowledge as were the sweeping narratives it generated in its final report".

Cole references the testimonies of the mothers of the famed Gugulethu Seven, cadres of the Umkhonto We Sizwe militant wing of the African National Congress, who were killed execution style by apartheid police. This case was particularly interesting because of the various ways in which it disrupted the Commission's proceedings. Cynthia Ngewu, mother of Christopher Piet, who gave testimony on April 23rd, 1996, concluded by demanding that the officers who had been responsible for her son's death be put in front of the commission and held accountable. In an unprecedented move, the TRC invoked Section 29, which allowed the commission to subpoena the officers to the Human Rights

[7] See also Susan Sontag. 1966. *Against Interpretation*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, wherein she writes at length about the legal trial as theatrical form.

Violation hearings in November 1996. Here, the footage of the death of the Gugulethu Seven was screened to an audience including the mothers and the officers. This scene was particularly emotionally charged in ways that eluded the commission's control. Cole (2007: 183) describes how "[d]uring the video screening one of the mothers hurled a single shoe across the room. This projectile decisively struck two of the nine police officers and completely disrupted the hearing". This moment was followed by one of the mothers rising and shouting "why a rope? Why a rope?" when the video showed Christopher Piet's dead body being dragged by a rope and the mothers' wailing filled the hall. While Cole sites this as a moment of heightened drama, like the climax in dramatic action, I am more interested in the way it acts as a caesura of predetermined action and how it disrupts the carefully crafted narrative of the proceedings. It is almost as if in this expression of unencumbered emotion, the mothers are able to reclaim their agency in the space. Though unconscious, this is an act of active resistance to the stifling "decorum and rationality" (Cole, 2007: 184) of the TRC proceedings.

In 'Dramaturgy on Shifting Grounds' (2009: 3), Hans-Thies Lehmann and Patrick Primavesi argue that "as the text is no longer the central and superior factor [in characterising dramatic theatre and performance], all other elements like space, light, sound, music, movement and gesture tend to have an equal weight in the performance process". When referring to the TRC, not only as a site for collective memory making and retrieval, but also as a performance, we have an ethical responsibility to expand our definition of language itself. To limit the capacity for meaning to 'logos', the spoken and or written word, is essentially to pluck a leaf from a tree, and then call the leaf a tree. It is a fundamentally insufficient assessment of a complex network of signs in performance that are not and cannot be limited to what is spoken. Drawing from Lehmann and Primavesi, it is clear that the circumstances of the communication of meaning and the tools available for that communication are as important to the extrication of "truth", however elusive that truth might be, as the words used in this communication. Furthermore, in the case of the TRC, this insufficiency and instability of language can be traced even to the archive of the proceedings. One such an instance is discussed below.

The official transcription of the incident described above reads: "PEOPLE ARE HYSTERICAL – CRYING AND SCREAMING" (Cole, 2007: 184). This kind of languaging, in addition to Advocate Dumisa Ntsebeza's verbal reproach for the actions of the mothers, is in my view, problematic. The TRC was primarily marked as a space of healing and to censure expressions of vulnerability, which are integral to the process of healing, is surely to impede any potential for that healing to take place. "Given that narrative constitutes identities in different ways, it … matters, then, which kinds of stories are told, who is telling them and how individuals relate with them, and not simply that storytelling occurs and healing ensues" (Palmer, 2007: 374). Here then, the TRC's very narrow understanding of the concept of storytelling plays itself out in a significantly problematic way. Victoria Palmer (2007: 372) contends that "the lived experience is a bodily one" and so too is the process of articulating that lived experience. Furthermore, the voice is a tool of the physical body and the various manifestations of its expression are as much a part of the embodied narrative as the word. Mladen Dolar (2006: 73) offers an interesting provocation in this regard when he describes "the 'object voice' as 'a bodily missile which has detached itself from the source, emancipated itself, yet remains corporeal … so the voice stands… at the intersection of language and the body, but this intersection belongs to neither" (cited in Schlichter, 2011: 33).

This is a pertinent entry point into a discussion around trauma and how it disembodies the body, understanding the voice as an instrument of bodily expression that can be influenced by and in response to trauma. Various acts of re-membering the body might indeed facilitate some sense of healing or recovery – a fact that I argue was under-represented, if at all, in the TRC proceedings. "In this instance, re-membering is not mere postmodern wordplay; it is a vital, ethical encounter with the stories [of gross marginalization that have experiential implications far beyond the systematic and political]" (Wilkins Catanese, 2010: 51). As noted above, the TRC had a particularly logocentric approach, and yet failed to account for the varied and complex manifestations of this logocentrism. The term logocentrism is used here in its broadest sense to denote a particular kind of scripting that goes beyond the word. It ascribes

textuality and legibility to the corporeal body itself, "it acknowledges the way in which we come to embody narratives in circulation (Palmer, 2006) and simultaneously how narratives are shaped by and with our bodies (Garland-Thomson, 2007)" (cited in Palmer, 2007: 372). I will revisit this point in the chapter on performative disinterment, but I include it here as an introduction to the idea that everything is language.

Though potentially reductive, this idea points to the fact that all communication, between humans, between humans and objects, between humans and space even, happens through forms of language. Language here is understood as complex codes of articulation established over time that facilitate the transfer of meaning between subjects. These codes can be established through a range of tactics including but not limited to culture and tradition, socialisation and education. Furthermore, the word 'subjects' here is not limited to the living, breathing, thinking human, but to the intrinsic vitality of all things. The implication here is that materiality, the language of material inter-subjectivities if you will, will be foregrounded in much of the discussion that follows.

At the TRC, victims of gross human rights violations under the apartheid regime were allotted 30 minutes in which to give testimony. The testimonies were uninterrupted, with the exception of sporadic questions for clarification. They were further allowed to speak in any of the eleven official South African languages. The set-up of the venues was such that they would have their backs to the audience, facing and speaking directly only to the commissioners. In this way then, they were given a sense of autonomy over what they chose to say and not say and how they chose to say it. Cheryl McEwan (2003) makes two notable observations on the participation, of Black women in particular, in the TRC proceedings. Firstly, it is that their voices were underrepresented, and even when present, their testimonies were often centred on violence endured by their male relatives (sons, husbands, fathers and uncles) (McEwan, 2003:745). Secondly, she notes that particularly female gendered suffering was related to the everyday struggle for survival, which was of course negated by the TRC's focus on 'gross human rights violations'. McEwan (2003: 746) goes on to further

observe that "[o]ne of the most serious legacies of apartheid is poverty [and the deliberate under-development of Blacks by means of Bantu Education], whose main victims are women".

Several insights can be gathered from McEwan's observations, the most notable being the restricted access, for the Black female voice, to the dominant mode of representation and historical record – text. Even when archived, much of the recorded history focussed on the violent dehumanisation of the Black, usually male body, without noting the effects thereof on the domestic struggles of everyday life. This is perhaps why my particular interest in historical excavation is not only through the lens of materiality, but through the materiality of the everyday. And indeed, this approach must account for the living body's materiality, understanding that the corporeal body is an extension of the physical object world which we inhabit. Furthermore, the body is the primary site for our stories. It is not only scripted, but the 'script' is multi-modal and multi-sensory. When I speak of materiality here, I am referring to the relationship between object and its language, body and its language and the ways in which these languages, in the first instance, come to be established over time, and in the second instance, how materiality can act as a bridge between these distinct worlds of meaning. Departing from the premise that "politics can be located in the conventions, traditions, canons, codes, styles, norms, genres and recurring patterns [of social-political life]" (Postlewait, 2007: 211), I offer materiality as a framework for transculturation, "which offers a more productive way to trace movement of and between cultures" (Wilkins Catanese, 2010: 56). If we understand culture as "beliefs and ideas materialized in action" (Verdery, 1999: 34) and politics as beliefs and ideas materialised in discourse, then the concept of materiality can account for the body and its responses to these 'worlds of meaning'. It is only in coming to terms with the gravity of the body as intra-somatic text that we might be able to productively challenge and reimagine the relationship between memory and representation. The following section will look specifically at this relationship using an example that is not only universally noted, but one that forms a bridge between historicity and representation-ability.

A Drama of Disinterment

The TRC began hearing testimony from victims of gross human rights violations at the hands of the apartheid state on the 15th April 1996. The following day, American Playwright Suzan Lori Parks' play *Venus* debuted at the Public Theatre in New York. "The play depicts the life of Saartjie (Sarah) Baartman, a Khoisan woman who was taken from South Africa to Europe in 1810, where she was exhibited as a human curiosity under the appellation 'The Hottentot Venus' until her death in 1816" (Warner, 2008:181). After her death, Baartman's body was dissected in an autopsy performed by Georges Cuvier, Napoleon's surgeon general and naturalist at the National Museum of Natural History in France, which is also where Baartman's remains would be displayed until 1976. Parallel to the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 was the call for Baartman's remains to be returned to South Africa, where she could be given proper burial. Warner writes that "this request [which came from Nelson Mandela as the new president of a democratic South Africa] marked the first international attempt to reclaim cultural property on behalf of the people of a free South Africa, and Baartman quickly became a powerful symbol of cultural and political restitution" (Warner, 2008: 185).

Venus was not the first literary homage to Sara Baartman, but it was the first to portray her not as a victim, but as a complicit participant in her own exhibition. This interpretation of the history of Sara, though controversial, is particularly pertinent because of the way it employs deliberate distortion of historical narrative as a tactic for resistance and subversion. One of the ways in which Parks achieves this is by portraying a romantic relationship between The Venus Hottentot/The Girl, who represents Baartman, and The Baron Docteur/The Man, who represents Cuvier in the play, a relationship that has not been authenticated. She further achieves this by filling in the blanks of history, as it were, by crafting everyday conversations such as scene 31, in which The Brother solicits money from The Man to fund his latest money making scheme – a scheme involving "a street over there lined with Freak Acts, but not many dark ones, that's how we'll cash in" (Parks, 1997: 12) In this regard, Warner (2008:

197) argues that "Parks is interested in freeing Baartman not from the imperialist gaze, but from the burden of representation itself. Baartman does not belong to all of us, she seems to say – she belongs to none of us". This is a significantly different approach to other interpretations of Baartman's story, for example, Diana Ferris's poem: 'I Have Come to Take You Home'. In the poem, Ferris describes an imagined place of rest that smells like "buchu and mint" at the foot of a hill that has been prepared for Baartman's return. Parks resists this overly sentimental language, a language that risks perpetual coercion by negating the possibility "for there still to be 'life in the most extreme degradation'" (Warner, 2008: 199). To acknowledge one's victimisation cannot perpetually relegate one to the status of 'victim'.

Victoria Palmer (2007: 376), writing on the relationship between vulnerability, suffering and recovery asserts: "I have a realization that sometimes recovery is only found in the new masks, cloaks, fabrics and disguises for the pains of suffering" and this, I argue, is exactly Parks' gift to Sara. Rather than portray Sara as what history has told us she was, Parks gives Sara agency, whether historically accurate or not. Historiography is ultimately a collection of perceptions of the past, and rather than proliferate an already congested collection of disempowering narratives about Baartman, Parks provides a counter-narrative that begins a "process of liberating an individual's moral agency after its capture by negative, oppressive, or stereotypical representations generated from master narratives" (Palmer, 2007: 377). Even further than this, Parks is able to capitalise on the strength of theatrical representation – the fact that it is necessarily divorced from notions of the factual, the real, the authentic, the true and the absolute – to challenge audiences not only to look, but to reflect on what that looking means. Even when critiquing Parks' creative choices in representing Baartman, audiences are forced to confront alternative and potentially contradicting versions of a past they that think they know. In this way then, Parks achieves "aesthetic resurrection [which] acknowledges conflicting accounts of events, but refuses to adjudicate between different versions of the past to produce a singular truth or coherent narrative, and thus denies closure" (Warner, 2008: 199).

While I, in this dissertation, celebrate Parks' version of the Venus, the play was met with much criticism. Many found it to be an irresponsible perpetuation of Baartman's dehumanization and indeed an indication of the complex effects of diasporic African discourse; 'an African would never interpret Baartman's narrative in this way', the critics almost seem to say. Expanding on the many criticisms of the play, *Venus*, Warner (2008: 191) writes that "detractors of the play maintain that exposing any representation of Baartman to the voyeuristic gaze of audiences simply replays this original injustice, [that public representations of Sara became inseparable from her sexual objectification]". Without negating the validity of this sentiment, because indeed why strip one who has been so violently stripped by history, "Parks' *Venus* does not deny Baartman dignity so much as it takes the loss of her dignity as its premise". In this way, Parks acknowledges that while we cannot change the circumstances of history, poiesis[8], understood here as the construction of imagined realities, allows the space for alternative interpretations of that history today because it is an act of embodying memory.

Memory, whether inherited, embodied, collective, cultural or otherwise, "takes place in the present, but recalls, incorporates or appropriates the past" (Knowles, 2009: 16). Memory is always performative, through performance, memory materialises alterity, and potentially contradiction. Furthermore,

> What emerges from the interaction of these perspectives is a vision of performance as an essentially *constructive* medium, and one for which orthodox distinctions between the real, and the theatrical, and the functional and the conceptual, cannot be maintained. However and wherever they appear, bodies and their actions are shaped by, give form *to*, figures drawn from cultural memories. If they thus comprise the means of reproducing those memories, through time and between individuals, as articulators of an unofficial repertoire bodies also provide an arena in which they can be adapted and contested. (Counsell, 2009: 8; emphases in original)

[8] The term poiesis is derived from the Greek and means 'to make'. My use of it in this dissertation derives from Paul Carter, who uses it to refer to creative production and artistic research, to denote thought processes that are carried out through performance and artistic process.

This dissertation is, in part, a meditation on dramaturgical practice in the South African context. Dramaturgy, as an independent practice and even as a discipline is not present in South African theatrical practice. While we, in South Africa, employ dramaturgical thought in the theatre-making process, we do not conceive of the dramaturg as an independent function, it is implicit in the directorial process. Which poses an interesting dilemma for someone pursuing a master's degree in dramaturgy, living and planning to work in South Africa. The function of the dramaturg is inherently a European and, to a lesser extent, North American, conception, and yet I believe that there is space in the South African theatre landscape for the dramaturg. Lehmann and Primavesi trace the historical function of the dramaturg and offer a revision to that function by stating that: "when he or she is not just the guard of the institution (a kind of 'police') or the advocate of the text (a 'literary adviser') or the advocate of the audience (a first 'outside eye' in rehearsal), the dramaturg may instead become a negotiator for the freedom of experimentation and risk" (2009: 4). What I aim to achieve in this essay is to provide provocation for dramaturgical practice in the South African locale, understanding the evolution of the role of the dramaturg as described by Lehmann and Primavesi. I wish to explore the potential for interment and disinterment, more directly burial and exhumation, to act as a dramaturgical approach to theatrical practice in post-TRC South Africa. I contend that by tracing history through practices of interment and disinterment, in the metaphorical and literal sense, we might arrive at provocative dramaturgical strategies. Furthermore, I offer disinterment as a symbolic approach to excavating histories and memories through poiesis.

Katherine Verdery, speaking of 'enchantment' as an alternative entry point into socio-political analysis offers the following provocation: "where else, I ask, might we look for 'politics' in perhaps unexpected places that arrest the imagination?" (Verdery, 1999: 26). The space of poiesis seems a productive place to start. Though animated with its own political implications and complications, the world of making offers interesting opportunities for political analysis, as is clear with examples such as Athol Fugard's *Township Plays* (1993), co-devised with John Kani and Winston Ntshona which offers stories of ordinary people's

experiences of the apartheid regime and the more contemporary *Sainthood*, directed by Tiisetso Mashifane which explores the complexities of all boys' private school culture in post-apartheid South Africa. The act of performance making and its predilection to the imaginative is precisely the alternative place that Verdery calls for. And yet what is most interesting to me about Verdery is how she analyses the political lives of dead bodies. While she centralises her study in post-socialist Eastern Europe, the way she theorises the implied vitality of dead bodies is pertinent to the way I am attempting to think through performative disinterment in the South African context. Where I offer poiesis, she offers corpses, or the dead. She writes:

> Bones and corpses, coffins and creation urns, are material objects. Most of the time, they are indisputably *there* [emphasis in original], as our senses of sight, touch and smell can confirm. As such, a body's materiality can be critical to its symbolic efficacy. Unlike notions such as 'patriotism' or 'civil society,' for instance, a corpse can be moved around, displayed and strategically located in specific places. Bodies have the advantage of concreteness that nonetheless transcends time, making past immediately present… their corporeality makes them important means of *localizing* a claim. (Verdery, 1999: 27-28)

The political leverage of dead bodies is as much an historical reality as are politicized killings, for example. In the South African context, this is best illustrated in the call for the repatriation of Baartman's bones, a case in which the reclamation of the dead and the re-burial of bones was actively and symbolically indicative of a political transformation. However, what further animates and complicates the example of Baartman is the fact that Baartman's body was, in life, the primary object of her oppression. Furthermore, the culture of her people had, at the time of her return, been distorted by colonial influence and forced migration. How then, is a spectacular, diplomatic funeral any different to the appropriation of her body for commerce and politics? But this is perhaps a digression. The process of interment is characterised by 'proper' procedure, as noted by Verdery, and we cannot claim veritable knowledge of the burial practices of the Khoi – and this fact raises fundamental questions about death and 'proper' burial. Indeed, what are the implications of 'improper' burial on the dead and on the living and their relations with and relationship to the dead?

Verdery writes that "any human community consists not only of those now living in it but also, potentially, of both ancestors and anticipated descendants" (1999: 41). In this way then, the act of burial is not simply about a laying to rest, but also a process of welcoming the deceased into the realm of the ancestors. It is an acknowledgement that while the deceased is no longer living among us, they remain – within us and even physically near us. I recently watched a performance by fourth year acting students at the University of Cape Town, directed by Mandla Mbothwe, and called *Nguvi ya Mbegu: Entab'elanga* (2017). The audible opening line of the play, which is repeated towards the end of the performance is: "*asizo'kuncgwaba, sizo'tyala*". This, in English, loosely translates to 'we have not come to bury here, we have come to plant'. This statement is not only pertinent in understanding the relationship between the dead and the living, but also between the human and the land. In the case of a politicised burial, as is the case with Baartman, this relationship goes even further. This is necessarily to say that the ancestral becomes the political.

As previously noted, when I was in my third year in the former UCT drama department[9], I was part of the #RhodesMustFall (#RMF) movement that demanded the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes from the university's main campus. On the 9th April 2015, following a month long period of occupation, protests and performance interventions by #RMF, the statue of Rhodes was removed from the campus in a truly spectacular display of interment (or perhaps of disinterment). While there is plenty to note about this event, my interest is in the engagement of the students with the statue as it was being removed. The statue, hooked onto a harness that resembled a noose was lifted from its plinth and onto a truck. A group of black students, many of whom were part of the movement, mounted the truck with Rhodes. They beat the statue with waist belts and sticks. Viciously. Violently. As I watched this scene unfold, I was struck by a profound sense of irreconcilability. What kind of gratification comes from beating a rock with sticks? Was it, perhaps, that this rock, this sculpture had a life beyond the one Rhodes had lived in flesh? Or was it indeed that this rock perpetuated, immortalised in fact Rhodes' vitality?

[9] Now the Centre for Theatre, Dance & Performance Studies (CTDPS).

This incident had me reflecting on burial, as a practice and as a ritual. Is the significance of burial, perhaps, in rendering the deceased invisible, in hiding them beneath the soil? And if that is the case, what of the tombstone, which is the thing that remains in full view. Does the material significance of burial rest on the bones or the milieu of the ritual - the coffin, the stone? I have a sense that to attempt to answer any of these questions would require a more detailed enquiry into cultural and political specificities, historical context and psychological examination, which is beyond the scope of my research as it stands. I do, however, believe that this example is necessary to help frame the kind of considerations I am making with regards to burial and exhumation. I would like, in this regard, to refer to another example that offers a more personalised viewpoint on the complexities of burial.

When my grandmother was thirteen years old, she lost her father. The circumstances of his death were unremarkable, he fell ill and died after a short hospital stay. What was remarkable about this case is what happened after he was buried. They lost his grave. Another family surfaced and claimed that my great-grandfather's grave was in fact the grave of their late father. Having lost their breadwinner, my grandmother's family were struggling just to make ends meet, let alone pay for an elaborate tombstone. And so, while the two families laboured over who the grave belonged to, with a looming legal battle and costly exhumation, the other family erected a massive tombstone over the grave and secured a fence with a lock around it. The grave was lost, because as sure as my family was that the grave belonged to them, how do you continue to visit, tend to and commune at a grave that is mis-named? What these two examples reveal is the significance of materiality on the ritual of burial, the connection between the body and land as burial site, the materials that both mark the site as well as retain the vitality of the deceased. This materiality is also what stimulates my thinking around exhumation as dramaturgical approach.

According to Verdery (1999: 105), "… to bury a dead person is not simply to reassess his (sic) place in history; it is to revise national genealogies, inserting the person as an ancestor more centrally to the lineage of honored (sic) forbears. Thus ideas about kinship are highly relevant to modern-day politics". Yet, how

can this understanding be applied to critical thought around theatricality and its relationship to historicity in the South African context? What kind of provocations does the burial and exhumation metaphor offer to contemporary dramaturgical practice? What I would like to offer here is a theory of performative disinterment – as an entry point into interrogating the potential for history to, in the first instance, be materialised through performance, and in the second instance, be re-written and disseminated in counter-hegemonic ways.

What do I mean by disinterment exactly? Etymologically speaking, 'dis' means to reverse, to undo. 'Inter' refers to burial. Here then, to disinter, in the most literal sense, means to reverse a burial, to exhume, to expose. When I speak of performative disinterment, I speak to those productions that make use of performance to "peel the wound" of history, in the way that Mandla Mbothwe[10] describes. Sticking with the metaphor of the wound, I would like to offer a provocation: that history is the scab and not the wound. History, I contend, is the layer of dry rough skin that shields what would otherwise be an open wound. History is the visible yet palatable evidence of an injury. It is the body's way of protecting itself from infection, from vulnerability. Beneath the scab, beneath history as it were, is where memory sits. Memory is the vulnerability, susceptible to infection, releasing puss and bleeding from time to time. Memory is what history conceals, and while history's intentions are regenerative, they often obfuscate the wound's need to bleed, to weep and to discharge. Following this analogy, disinterment then is the process of removing the scab, it is the process of exposing what history cannot. Performative disinterment is the process of personalising history through performance, of excavating personal narrative and individual memory in ways that refer back to and comment on politicised and collective history productively.

In this chapter however, I wish to theorize disinterment specifically through the lens of rejecting the subjugation of the individual experience of trauma to the collective experience. I also wish to introduce the potential of materiality as a counterpoint to the kind of "narrative hubris" (Freeman, 2010:

[10] See chapters 3 and 4 in Fleishman, M. 2015. *Performing Migrancy and Mobility in Africa: Cape of Flows*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

270) perpetuated by logocentric performance traditions. If interment is to be understood as a process of collective, ritualistic and systematic mourning and lament in response to death, then in the context of the TRC, we must ask: Who or indeed what is dead and what are the necessary conditions for appropriate collective mourning? Who is lamenting? Which individual responses to this 'death' are necessarily subjugated to the assumed collective need for regenerated unity and a new, democratic dispensation? And while these questions are perhaps posed in a rhetorical manner, my uttering them "reveals the ways in which Park's drama of disinterment calls into question the notion that historical trauma is a wound that must be healed in the name of unity, the idea that reconciliation necessarily entails the establishment of an objective truth, and the assumption that the restoration of dignity is the goal of the recovery process" (Warner, 2008: 183). Healing therefore must be considered as a deeply and necessarily personal and individual experience, one full of paradoxes. And it is this queer nature of healing that the concept of disinterment derives from, an inherent understanding that "just as there is no extricating memory and narrative from convention, there is no extricating that which is wholly 'ours' from that which derives from without [that which is collective if you will]", (Freeman, 2010: 268).

Theorizing in relation to Susan Lori Park's *Venus* and contextualising it within international discourse on the return of Sara Baartman's remains to South Africa, Warner juxtaposes South Africa's appropriation of Baartman's narrative for the reconciliation mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to Park's theatrical response to this moment through her play *Venus* (1997). Warner writes:

> Park's drama of disinterment actively thwarts catharsis and rejects reconciliation in favour of a theatre of resurrection and dis(re)memberment. Whereas post-apartheid acts of interment privilege the ends - political unity, reconciliation, and the restoration of human dignity - over the means, Parks's drama does just the opposite: it dislocates, alienates, and disorders history and 'truth' as we know it. (2008:189)

This sentiment seems to echo Gayatri Spivak's attempt at deconstructing aesthetics, which will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

Furthermore, it pre-empts the possible criticisms of materiality in relation to the historical objectification of the Black female body. It seems quite important that I explicitly state that my interest here is less about 'restoring' a sense of dignity to the Black female body, because it seems too great a load to place on any one performance, any one dissertation, and any one creation. I seek rather, to (re)member the materiality of theatrical representation as a paradigmatic shift from understanding performance as bodies on display, to materials in play. Once again in reference to *Venus*, Warner argues that:

> While Venus may be on display for spectators, the more important spectacle is The Negro Resurrectionist watching the audience watch the show. What Parks exposes, then, is not simply Venus's body, but the death watch itself. Parks's drama of disinterment exposes Venus, but it does so in a way that breaks the hegemony of the visible, producing what Fred Moten in 'Black Mo'nin' calls a 'general disruption of the ways in which we gaze at the face and at the dead, a disruption of the oppressive ethics and coercive law of reckless eyeballing. (2008: 194)

This is of course a fine line, that precarious space between reclamation (of sorts) and perpetuation, and yet a worthy endeavour. While "there is a responsibility to look every time, again, […] sometimes it looks as though that looking comes before, holds, replicates, reproduces what is looked at. Nevertheless, looking keeps open the possibility of closing precisely what it is that prompt and makes necessary that opening" (Moten, cited in Warner, 2008: 195). In a reading of Adorno, from whom in this paper I borrow the concept of negative dialectics, Brian O'Connor writes:

> In this context contradiction is an act of resistance: 'to proceed dialectically means to think in contradictions for the sake of the contradiction once experienced in the thing and against that contradiction. A contradiction in reality, it is a contradiction against reality' (ND, 144-45/148). (O'Connor, 2010: 140)

What is particularly pertinent here is the implied idea that contradiction, or sustained irreconcilability is a fundamental feature of reality itself, and consequently, a feature of our representations of that reality. And yet, the very act of representing, through theatre, sculpting, poetry and other forms, is what allows us the experience of what Adorno calls reconciliation – defined by

O'Connor as "the positive appreciation of what is other than us" (2010: 137). I believe that what Adorno is offering here, at least in an application to Parks' drama of disinterment, is a tactic for using appropriation (of overbearing tropes) as a form of resistance.

The ideas that I have introduced in this chapter point towards, in the first instance, understanding performance as historiography and in the second though not so direct instance, positioning the dramaturg as a kind of historian. Thomas Postlewait, in defining the role of historians writes: "the primary task for all historians, once they have finished their research and begun to write, is to describe and interpret the relations between events and their possible contexts" (2007: 198). This is very similar to the role of the dramaturg, at least as I conceive of it as a mediator between a performance and its audience and between a performance and its context. As demonstrated through the example of Parks' *Venus*, when representing history, the responsibility of the theatre-maker, and by extension the dramaturg, is placed not on truth or veracity, but rather on manipulating form to translate context. This very idea of manipulating form will be the focal point of the chapter that follows, in which I will explore the relationship between memory, history, materiality and theatricality in more detail. I will also offer clearer definitions for these terms to lay the ground for the final chapter. I would like to end this chapter, however, with a question posed by Rosemarie Bank, that I believe reinforces and yet complicates the way I have begun to think through performative disinterment. Bank posits:

> [I]s it the case that audiences don't know the difference between the actual and the assumed, the real and the simulated, or is performance the canny creation of a self-conscious perception of the simultaneous presence of actual and assumed, real and simulated and of the cultural assumption of the other as self? (2002: 237)

As noted in the first chapter, ideas around truth or reality should not be the primary concern of the performance maker, particularly in post-TRC performance making. A more fundamental component of dramaturgical practice is indeed negotiating the relationship between approach or compositional strategies of storytelling and the socio-political context of that telling. Using questions posed to the performance maker, as well as the performance product

itself, the dramaturg can facilitate a process through which the work is held accountable to the space it occupies, and the maker is held accountable to their own concept and process. In this way then the dramaturg is actively involved in shifting the role of performance from rhetoric to form as political commentary.

ANALYSIS

(Re)membering: Questions of Theatrical Representation and Memory

In the previous chapter, my attention was focussed primarily on the product of performance, and not necessarily the process. In this chapter, I would like to bring the focus to the performance making process. The questions I raise here are fundamentally about what it means to materialise poiesis. Through definition, explication and complication of the concepts that I introduced broadly in the previous two chapters, I hope to arrive closer to a more refined definition of the concept of performative disinterment as a model of analysis to apply to the chosen case studies. I depart from the idea that performance, for me, is always a research process. It is a process of materialising thought, of imagining what is known, unknown and perhaps unknowable. Performance has no answers, it is simply the embodiment of questions. It is learning, un-learning and potentially re-learning. But further, and perhaps more importantly than all this, performance is language. It is a tool for communicating the obvious and elusive; it contains many dialects, it is formal and colloquial, and often straddles the line between the two. But what does it mean to characterise performance as language?

Walter Benjamin, writing on human communication through language posits: “every expression of human mental life can be understood as a kind of language” (1978: 314). If language is the inherent, though sometimes unconscious communication of meaning, then I would argue that everything is language and understanding this point sets the groundwork for much of my thinking in this chapter. Following Benjamin, if we understand theatre, or theatrical performance as its own form of language, then it stands to say that we can only ever communicate *in* theatre rather than *through* it because what is communicable is predetermined by the means of communication. This is perhaps to say that to fix an ‘essence’ of a specific performance, for example, is to render this ‘essence’, what Benjamin calls the “mental being”, reducible to language, what he calls the “linguistic being” (Benjamin, 1978:316). He describes this relationship as follows:

> Mental is identical with linguistic being only in so far as it is capable of communication. What is communicable in a mental entity is its linguistic entity. Language therefore communicates the particular linguistic being of things, but their mental being only insofar as this is directly included in their linguistic being, insofar as it is capable of being communicated. (Benjamin, 1978: 316)

I begin by defining language in this way because I find the distinction between the mental and the linguistic useful in characterising performance and theatricality as memory's materiality. What I mean here is that if we understand theatrical form as language, as the 'linguistic being' of memory, then we might be able to characterise materiality as the 'mental being' of memory, that container of inherent though potentially elusive meaning and in so doing, broaden the scope of what is communicable *through* theatre and not just *in* theatre. Furthermore, if we understand theatrical performance as language, as the language of *being* per se, then *being* is the 'mental being' that performance seeks to articulate and communicate. And as the concept of *being* evolves, so too must the languages we use to communicate that *being*. *Being*, in this context, refers to existence. It refers to the unity of breath, space and time, the vitality of temporality and intersubjective interaction. Put simply, it refers to being alive.

My instinct here is that the manipulation of form stems in large part from understanding form as language. To think of form as language offers the opportunity for malleability, for translation. Language is in its nature evolutionary. It is created and shaped, firstly, by what is communicable, secondly, by what it is that is being communicated and thirdly, by the context in which the communication happens. Furthermore, in thinking of translation as a device through which to manipulate form, we productively open this discourse to multi-disciplinary input from theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Jane Bennett. In the introduction to *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Spivak (2012: 13; 20-22), outlines three devices for the process of translation in the context of asymmetrical power dynamics. The first is play, which she defines as a process of "[preparing] the imagination for epistemological [engagement]". The second is the use of the 'intended mistake' and the third- 'ab-use', which entails a pseudo appropriation of the original from underneath as opposed to below. While this might be something of a reach, I find Spivak's

model curiously reminiscent of Jane Bennett's negative dialectics theory (which she borrows and develops from Theodor Adorno), and I will return to her shortly. Furthermore, for the purposes of this dissertation, I would go so far as to categorize theatre as a language which represents "'patterns of social life' and constitute[s] embodied emotional and sensory responses- of terror, awe, fascination or desire- that are inherently entangled within specific dimensions of temporality" (Edwards, Gosden & Phillips, 2006: 8). It is this very question of temporality that has led me to memory. If indeed, objects do possess some capacity for remembering, which then influences the circumstantial particularities of our engagement with those objects, then how can we, theatre-practitioners that is, actively appropriate those memories in our making so as to circumvent the potential limitations of representation-ability within theatrical materiality- to be understood here as the combination of materials that make up the theatrical space. Alfred Gell, (cited in Edwards, Gosden & Phillips, 2006: 12) offers a sophisticated summation of this point by arguing that:

> agency is a 'culturally prescribed framework for thinking about causation' (Gell, 1998: 17) and a 'factor of ambience as a whole… rather than as an attribute of the human psyche' (1998: 20), [therefore], the reengagement with the sensory offers a more adequate framework through which the power of objects as mediators and active agents can be understood.

It seems pertinent to note here that a fundamental part of disinterment is understanding the relationship between history and memory. Disinterment is essentially about revelation, bringing the hidden to light. And while history is always rendered visible through the written word, primarily, and through the spoken word, though to a lesser extent, the dissemination of memory is somewhat more complicated. I do, however, believe that materiality can act as a tool for the excavation of memory. Here, I begin from the premise that the post-TRC moment in South African discourse is particularly characterised by a focus on materiality. The practice of 'being' and understanding what it means to 'be' in the post-TRC context necessarily acknowledges that "[o]ur relationships with stories are important […] to recovering a sense of vulnerability in how we live together, they are important to understanding ourselves as embodied beings who share physical and social spaces" (Palmer, 2007: 374). The many specificities and

complexities of material space and place, as well as how we (as corporeal material) are able to occupy and exist in space, have become foregrounded in discourses around identity, memory, trauma and belonging. This can be traced through various spatial interventions, including but certainly not limited to, The University of Cape Town Rhodes Must Fall movement of 2015, which is discussed above and the Art my Jozi project based in Johannesburg that is focussed on reimagining presently under-privileged community spaces such as Noordgesig and Orange Grove through multimodal performance and visual art forms.

My argument here is fundamentally that the post-TRC condition is characterised by a need to "recover the agency of ordinary people" (McEwan, 2003: 746) by tracing and chronicling disruptions to ordinary life. Rather than do what the TRC did, which was to focus on 'gross human rights violations', "defined as the 'killing, abduction, torture, or severe ill treatment' of any person by a person acting with a political motive" (McEwan, 2003: 746), this moment seeks to construct and reconstruct collective memory by acknowledging firstly, that memory is inherently and fundamentally material, and secondly that it is constantly being renegotiated. Furthermore, constructing collective and historical memory must, in this regard, be centred on the idiosyncrasies of the everyday and the material milieu that characterises 'the ordinary'. In this way then, we are able to facilitate a process of building "a new, shared and ceaselessly debated memory of [the] past" (Asmal, Asmal and Roberts, 1996: 9-10; cited in McEwan, 2003: 744).

A prime example of a memory-making process that centres on materiality is the Amazwi Abesifazane Memory Cloths Programme. Much like the TRC, Amazwi Abesifazane is a rehabilitation programme that attempts to foster healing among communities in rural and urban KwaZulu-Natal through indigenous arts and craft. Founded by sculptor Andries Botha in 2001, and focussed specifically on women, the participants are not only given a platform through which to narrate their trauma, but the project opens up the possibilities of what it means to narrate. The sharing of one's story is not and cannot be simply limited to standing at a podium and speaking. Instead, participants are

given the space to make sense of their own experiences using an alternative medium to words – using pictures, imagery, textures and indigenous forms of arts and crafts. In describing the project, founder Botha states:

> [T]hrough the creation of memory cloths, we are drawing on the collective experience of women who have known loss. Through the process of creation they will hopefully reach some level of catharsis through which they can grow both spiritually, emotionally and financially. This is a necessary, albeit humble, attempt to begin to transform the oral archive into a more formal record of South African history. (Cited in McEwan, 2003: 749)

What is particularly useful about thinking through the memory-making project in the way that Botha describes is that it acknowledges that "memory is [fundamentally] material – it serves a purpose, and this is of considerable significance in contemporary South Africa" (McEwan, 2003: 743). There is no shortage of commemoration in South Africa, from museum exhibitions to statues, special public holidays and even public performance events. What there is a shortage of, I would argue, is commemoration that acknowledges the materiality of memory, and not just materiality in the sense of the physical, but material in the sense of socio-political, economic and cultural significance.

Joseph Roach, cited by Sara Warner (2008: 182), writes that, "from Ibsen on, modern drama has been troubled by ghosts. Their ubiquity stems in part from the fact that they conveniently represent the past that is dead but that refuses final interment". One might say here that objects of significance in various epochs function today as a kind of palimpsest for the past - the physical entities imbued with memories of past traumas that persist today, and somehow resurrect that trauma each time they are interacted with. As proffered by "Maurich Halbwachs (1980), we preserve collective memories by referring to the material milieu that surrounds us" (cited in Chronis, 2006: 269). Athinodoros Chronis, goes on to further argue that cultural recollection is possible to achieve through 'extra-linguistic' means that triumph materiality and embodiment over logocentrism. "This is because objects are invested with 'sensory memory' and, in this capacity, they reveal truths about the past. [According to] Seremetakis (1994: 10), 'the item invested with surplus memory and meanings becomes a

separate and distinct (monadic) memory-form in-it-self [and] it carries within it the sensorial off-print of its human use'" (cited in Chronis, 2006: 269).

In order to fully realize a drama of disinterment in post-TRC South African performance making, the very nature of representation, and by extension, forms of representation, must become the focal object of enquiry. Here then, we must ask ourselves what it means to represent, and further, to what end. In a paper titled *Doing Things: Emotion, Affect and Materiality*, Jo Labanyi (2010: 229-30) suggests that "it might be strategically useful to look at cultural text [aesthetic?] not through the lens of representation (representation of what?) but as examples of expressive culture". In this way then, we might be able to counter the historical weaponization of story, of affect and of representation by the imperialist agenda. With the growing presence of subaltern voices (particularly Black female voices) in the world of art-making, and I limit this observation to the South African context, comes a broader understanding of the very boundaries of artistic practice and convention. Even further than this, however, is the growing sense that convention, in addition to being traditional in the sense of sedimentation over time through repeated exercise, is fundamentally and always culturally located. The idea of reading cultural text not as representation but rather as expressive culture, opens up the opportunity for truly affective communion through the exploitation of materiality for poiesis. And yet I must acknowledge that marginalised groups might feel a sense of suspicion toward material culture owing to a long history of dehumanization and de-subjectification at the hands of imperialism.

Buhle Khanyile, in a paper titled, '*Since 1652: Tortured Souls and Disposed Bodies*' (2019: 11), observes that "coloniality [a condition that he and I agree persists in South Africa today as a mirror to the rainbow fallacy] seeks to psychologically transform oppressed people from humans to things – colonialization = thingification". My argument is precisely that 'thingification' is not always, necessarily a product of colonisation. In fact, I would argue that precolonial African culture is characterised by material culture, from performances in the oral tradition that make use of masks and ornate costumes for characterisation, to the use of totems for spiritual engagement and even an

attachment of knowledge and lessons to different animals. The world of objects, the natural environment which we, as Africans inhabit (at least in precolonial tradition), is as much a part of our understanding of what it means to be alive as is our corporeal body. Even with this understanding, what I am calling for is not a blind return to our primal relationship to objects or an ill-considered equalisation of the statuses of human and object. What I am trying to arrive at is the manipulation of the de-polarized relationship between human and object in theatrical representation so as to appropriate art's "rationality that criticizes rationality without withdrawing from it" (O'Connor, 2010: 146). This is aptly articulated by O'Connor (2010: 146) who proffers that:

> The revolutionary potential of artworks depends on their location within the historical conditions in which they are produced. If society is, as Adorno claims, reified – dehumanizing and reductive, ossifying the relation of subject to object – then authentic art will somehow express this or make it apparent. The ways in which it does so are quite oblique in that art provokes the experience of contradiction – of not being reconciled with reality – without naming society directly.

Similar to Spivak, this kind of approach lends itself to the theory of negative dialectics, which Bennett (2010: 15) borrows from Adorno and describe as:

> this pedagogy [of negative dialectics] includes intellectual as well as aesthetic exercises. The intellectual practice consists in the attempt to make the very process of conceptualization an explicit object of thought. The goal here is to become more cognizant that conceptualization automatically obscures the inadequacy of its concepts. […] [A] second technique of this pedagogy is to exercise one's utopian imagination. The negative dialectician should imaginatively recreate what has been obscured by the distortion of conceptualization. […] [A] third technique is to admit a playful element into one's thinking and to be willing to play the fool.

I would argue here, that what Adorno and Spivak alike are calling for is a culture of embodied knowledge formation. The kind of playfulness, imaginativeness and resistance to prescription that they speak of is what I would imagine emerges when bodies are allowed the space to interact and to respond, in the moment of impact, without a predetermined goal in mind. While theatre is a prime space for this kind of embodied exploration, its aesthetic conventions and praxis often limit the scope of imaginativeness, the imagination is bound by

convention and even conscious subversion falls within conventional theatre traditions. However, Gail Weiss (1999:6) offers an interesting provocation in this regard by saying:

> to describe embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and non-human bodies. Acknowledging and addressing the multiple corporeal exchanges that continually take place in our everyday lives, demands a corresponding recognition of the ongoing construction and reconstruction of our bodies and body images. These processes of construction and reconstruction in turn alter the very nature of these intercoporeal exchanges, and, in so doing, offer the possibility of expanding our social, political and ethical horizons.

It is important to note here that cultural specificity is inextricably linked to conceptualising systems of knowledge formation. "Gramsci argues that there is no 'history of the subaltern classes'" (McEwan, 2001: 743). This is only true insofar as history is limited to that which is recorded in writing. The cultural specificities of the South African and greater African context, privilege oral traditions in the historiography project and while colonial influence and increased participation in global interaction has brought about a significant shift towards combining orality with written text, it must be acknowledged that "the [historical and somewhat persisting] scarcity of black researchers and social scientists [makes] black South Africans vulnerable to becoming the objects of other people's studies, with all the risk of limited insight inherent in that form of scholarship" (McEwan, 2001: 743). To put it another way, for black South Africans, the responsibility of representing oneself ought to be accompanied by a responsibility to reimagining that very means of representation, many of which are colonial imports and still determined by Western convention.

Disinterment, here then, entails a process of deliberately distorting oneself in order to resist the tropes of representation and perception attached to that body-self, in much the same way that Spivak applies the concepts of the 'intended mistake' and 'ab-use'. By appropriating the spectacularisation of the black female body, as Parks does in *Venus* for example, the maker is able to turn the gaze on itself. I'd like to borrow from Theodor Adorno in better articulating my own impulse here, an impulse that I believe leans towards what he terms

‘nonidentity’. Jane Bennett (2010: 14) offers the following definition for this ‘nonidentity’:

> [N]on-identity is the name Adorno gives to that which is not subject to knowledge but is instead ‘heterogeneous’ to all concepts. This elusive force is not, however, wholly outside human experience, for Adorno describes nonidentity as a presence that acts upon us: we knowers are haunted, he says, by a painful, nagging feeling that something’s being forgotten or left out. This discomfiting sense of the inadequacy of representation remains no matter how refined or analytically precise one’s concepts become.

This ‘nonidentity’ is perhaps what I would refer to as the memory of objects. While it might be fair to attribute what I call memory to simple perception or association, I have a sense that the word ‘memory’ connotes a certain necessary mysticism in interrogating what Edwards, Gosden and Phillips (2006: 272) have described as “human-object intersubjectivity and coproduction”, particularly when this study is located in theatre-studies, a discipline that I would argue is fundamentally concerned with representation through remembering. Representation here is to be understood as the act of re-membering, of presenting again, of embodying memory. In a book titled *Remembering Violence: Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission* (Argenti & Schramm, 2012: 252), David Berliner is cited stating:

> Here, there is neither perception nor remembering. Memory is not seen as a set of representations of events and experiences that are shared, but as the way lasting traces of the past persist within us, as the transmission and persistence of cultural elements through the generations. Memory is not these stories of recalled mental images, but a synonym for cultural storage of the past: it is the reproduction of the past in the present, this accumulated past which acts on us and makes us act.

Therefore, it is not so much that I seek to make a distinction between memory and perception here, but rather that in the realm of representation and of theatricality, remembering forms the basis of the kind of re-membering that happens in performance. Historicity is at the heart of my practice, and I’m interested in counter-archives, in embodied archives that manifest in performance. Understanding that history is a collection of perceptions of the past, and thus never quite objective (Foucault, cited in Auslander, 2008: 99), I am interested in how excavating histories through materiality might offer a

counter narrative of history that triumphs human response in the now rather than human perception of what is past. John Locke (cited in Edwards, Gosden & Phillips, 2006: 269) writes:

> There seems to be a constant decay of all our ideas; even of those which are struck deepest, in the minds of the most retentive, so that if they be not sometime renewed by repeated exercises of the senses, or reflections on those kinds of objects which at first occasioned them, the print wears out, and at last there remains nothing to be seen.

The aim of my research is to interrogate this very idea of the "repeated exercises of the senses" in order to think through whether the subjectivity of memory rests in the human subject or in the object itself that the human interacts with. A prime example of this is the black box. The theatre structure is essentially a black box. And if we trace the genealogy of the black box, particularly in relation to the black body, we arrive at cargo ships, we arrive at slavery, human zoos and other oppressive forms of exhibitionism. And yet the theatre space continues to be used as an object of representation, and even as a tool for speaking back to oppressive systems. Even further than this, many makers, emerging and established, are finding creative and compelling ways to re-present history using theatre by supplementing materiality for didacticism and rhetoric.

Recently, I had the strangest experience at William Kentridge's Centre for the Less Good Idea, a performance venue in Johannesburg. I watched a performance called *Commission Continua* (2019), a collaboration between theatre-maker Phala O. Phala and writer and performer Tony Miyambo. The performance is an 11 minute epic, as described by the makers, that traces the history of South Africa's many commissions, beginning with the TRC. It is presented as a one-man show. There is a large desk centre stage that Miyambo sits behind. On the desk are piles of papers, and a play-back recorder and a microphone. Against the wall downstage-right is an operational, multifunction printer. The performance begins with the stage black, the only source of light being the photocopier. Miyambo places his hand on the copier, presses go and says "next". He does this about three or four times as the stage lights fade up.

His first words once the lights are up are "can you imagine a world without paper, a world without the ability to share information?" He then

explains that he is an archivist while adding seemingly arbitrary facts about South Africa's yearly paper consumption. From his desk, he reads verbatim accounts from TRC transcriptions, all the while recording different sounds, mostly the sounds of protest, into the microphone which are then played back by the recorder, creating a live soundtrack. Another line of text, that Miyambo repeats twice in the performance is "kahle, kahle [loosely translated to 'actually'], where is the voice of the victim?" I note the opening line of the performance with emphasis because it is ironic that 'a world without paper' means 'a world without the ability to share information', when the entire performance is crafted around sound, aurality, vocality and visuality – crafted around materiality. Even the importance of paper, a container for text, is replaced by projected images of the performer's scanned body parts. What is written on the paper only reaches the audience when he speaks it. The communicative potential of paper is substituted by soundscape and visual clutter.

I began by stating that I had a strange experience watching this show. Tears. Not crying, *per se*. Just tears. Sitting in that dark, almost completely full auditorium, I was struck by this profound sense of being present. I don't think I understood what I was feeling at that moment, but hindsight is a wonderful gift. I have been researching the TRC, to varying degrees, since my honours research essay; it has been almost four years. I have read original transcripts and listened to audio recordings of some of the testimonies, I have watched documentaries on the TRC that featured the actual victims and perpetrators, and I have read secondary literature on the proceedings. But it wasn't until this performance that I felt even a remote grasp of my own fascination with the TRC. I had an experience that Mikel Dufrenne describes as: "the-being-at-the-end-of-oppositions in which idea and thing, subject and object, noesis and noema, are dialectically united" (cited in States, 2007: 27). Though I could not name what I was feeling at the time, and I still cannot for the most part, I think that I was fully cognisant of what it means to materialise poiesis.

I was moved, literally. Beyond the ideological implications of representing the TRC, beyond the politics of which story belongs to whom and even further

still beyond absurdity of this nerdy little man who scans parts of his body for sport. The psychosomatic, embodied and felt aspects of the performance made it so that I wasn't thinking about what was being represented, but being wholly present in the materiality of the now – completely immersed in the constant hum of the photocopier, the rustling of the papers on the desk, the click of the start button on the printer – sounds that are not deliberately representational but are material, present in the here and now. Andrew Cole (2013: 111), in reference to Bruno Latour, notes that "to be accounted for, objects have to enter into accounts. […] This is why specific tricks have to be invented to *make the talk* , that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce *scripts* of what they are making others - humans and nonhumans - do," and in many ways, that is exactly what *Commission Continua* was able to achieve.

While the above example serves to illustrate the point I am trying to make about the growing importance of materiality in theatrical representation, this research further aims to explore what Edwards, Gosden and Phillips (2006: 6) have described as "notions of an embodiment which both extend and refigure the relationships between body, sensory perception and cultural praxis", in order to re-imagine the potential for Black female representation-ability within the theatrical frame. Here then, theatricality itself, even in its post-modern and somewhat transgressive incarnations, becomes the object of reflection. As Hans-Thies Lehmann (2016: 5) proffers:

> If it is right to locate the tragic in a gesture of transgression, then this movement of passing-beyond - at a time when the theatre of representation is being dismantled - raises the question whether such a movement should still be sought in what is (merely) represented, or whether, instead, it concerns the mechanisms of representation: the theatre itself, its form and its praxis.

At the heart of my research is this very idea of transgression, or at least, how I appropriate Lehman's formulation – that it, transgressing the form, and by extension, its limitations. A recurrent theme in contemporary South African theatre discourse is the question of representation of Black bodies, particularly Black female bodies, from Nelisiwe Xaba's *They Look at me and That's All They Think* (2006) to, more recently, Mamela Nyamza's *Rock to the Core* (2017) and *Black Privilege* (2018). This has led me to question whether it is the stories being

told about Black women that are the problem, or the very medium of theatre through which these stories are told. Aesthetics of representation are often fixed based on global, largely European, conventions. It seems, therefore, pertinent to actively reflect on these forms themselves, in much the same way that Lehmann describes above, by re-centring the partiality and materiality of representation-ability. Post-democracy knowledge formation and dissemination in the South African context, which I would argue theatricality is a subset of, must seek to,

> 'rectify the loss of plenitude of experience under a unifying rationale' (Jackson, 1996: 4, 7). More specifically, it [must generate] new understanding of the degree to which post-colonial regimes [engender] conflicts around material forms that necessitate, in the present, a range of projects that attempt to come to terms with these histories. (Edwards, Gosden & Phillips, 2006: 14)

Put differently, and perhaps more directly, we must firstly understand that ocularcentric focus gives way to tropes of spectacle and the dominant gaze (Edwards, Gosden & Phillips, 2006: 6); which is counterproductive to the somatic eclecticism that theatrical materiality offers. While theatrical performance is about what is seen, it is also about what is heard, smelt, felt, tasted even. It is as much about squinting your eyes when the lights are too bright as goose bumps or leaning forward in your chair when the performer's body seems in danger. Secondly, we must engage the genealogy of performance history with a consciousness of the structurally imposed and political implications of that history and constantly seek to destabilise the assumed objectivity of aestheticism. Borrowing from Ranciere, Bennett (2010: 106) asserts that "a political act not only disrupts, it disrupts in such a way as to change radically what people can 'see': it repartitions the sensible; it overthrows the regime of the perceptible". Thus, it seems inadequate to simply problematize aesthetic content without reflecting on the concept of aestheticism itself.

Jane Bennett (2010: 3) refers to a process through which voice is given to "a vitality intrinsic to materiality, in the process absolving matter from its long history of attachment to automatism and mechanism". Of course, this line of thinking can be traced through scientific thought from quantum physics which characterizes everything as matter, to notions of embodiment as intercorporeality (which I introduced earlier in the chapter). What is even more

interesting here is how this theory might translate in thinking through the politics of form and aesthetics. My provocation here is that perhaps in ascribing memory to objects, or better still, exhuming subjectivities from matter, we might horizontalize relationships of inter-action between human subjects and the objects they use to represent themselves when creating performance space and place. My interest is less in the utilitarianism of objects, but rather the greater, perhaps conscientious implications of material inter-action. Henri Bergson, (cited in Cole, 2013: 113) better articulates this point, saying: "so let us not merely say… that the mystical summons up (*appelle*) the mechanical. We must add that the body, now larger, calls for a bigger soul, and that mechanism should be mysticism". Performance then is not simply an object through which to represent our lives, it is its own life, its own mechanism of being that runs parallel and in reference to our collective conception of *being*.

Philip Auslander has written extensively about the relationship between liveness and mediatisation. Jean Baudrillard (1981: 175-6), cited in Auslander (2008: 5) writes that what is mediatised "is what is reinterpreted by the sign form, articulated into models and administered by the code". I find this definition of mediatisation useful in thinking through contemporary theatre in the South African context – that it is characterised by codes. This is to say that what can be said, what is communicable to return to my earlier formulations, is determined by who is doing the 'saying' and not necessarily how the 'saying' happens. What I am calling for is a shift in focus towards the how. I dare say that poiesis is in danger of being colonised by identity politics. I must avoid making an irresponsible generalisation here by stating that the colonisation of poiesis is my personal fear as a young theatre-maker. I often worry that I spend more time qualifying my performance work with phrases such as: "as a young Black woman" or "as a Black theatre practitioner" than I do just making the work, as if my work might be mistook for privileged if I don't claim my subalternity or worse yet, that the work might come off as apolitical.

The point I am making is that political objectivity is impossible in poiesis. Representation, through theatre specifically, is always subjective and fraught with meaning. "Although embodiment is the medium of received constructions of

selfhood, for [Judith] Butler it is also the Arena in which these can be tested" (Counsell, 2009: 3). For as long as form is understood as a collection of codes, these codes can and must always be challenged and reinvented. And the way to challenge and reinvent them is from within, by immersing oneself in the form and seeking as complete an understanding of how these codes came to be as possible. Spivak and Bennett have offered three devices to achieve this, and I will summarize those devices as consciousness, imaginativeness and playfulness. These are also, I believe, the most important tools for the contemporary dramaturg because they maintain the awareness of "an increasing desire for new corporealities and for unusual experiences of the body [in performance]" (Lehmann & Primavesi, 2009: 4), experiences that account for a larger conception of the body that summons a bigger soul, as described by Bergson above (cited in Cole, 2013: 113).

In the chapter that follows, I will refer to various case studies that consciously, or unconsciously, use the mis-appropriation of theatricality to construct aspects of the maker's own identity. This work first and foremost treats theatre itself as an object. It gives theatre - as discipline and practice - dimensions, texture, functionality. It both acknowledges and seeks to disrupt theatre's genealogy and history by placing the maker at the heart of the performance event. In this way then, the process of making the work is not incidental and neither is the performance. The kind of work that I reference here is fundamentally suspicious of the very idea of theatricality, but rather than remove itself, under the maker's proxy, from the discourse of the theatrical, it instead choses to insert itself, albeit imperfectly, into that discourse as a tool for disruption and provocation.

Realising Disinterment: The Case Studies

Brandi Wilkins Catanese, who writes about Baartman's role in understanding contemporary diasporic African identity, refers to a strategy that Black feminism academic Bell Hooks "describes as common to black women: 'looking and looking back, black (sic) women involve ourselves in a process whereby we see history as counter-memory, using it as a way to know the present and invent the future'" (Wilkins Catanese, 2010: 58). While I believe that the 'destructive character' is the natural instinct for the Black voice in post-TRC South Africa, a complete disavowal of history seems, to me, a cop out. We cannot reject history without engaging with it as counter-memory. History is, after all, the archive through which we are knowable to the world. Instead, we must insert ourselves and our voices into that history through memory and embodiment. Indeed, history offers a way to know the present, but memory offers a way to know ourselves in the present. Understanding history as counter-memory also means understanding that "to interrogate a tradition is to no longer pass it on intact" (Nora, 1989: 10). Our responsibility, particularly as performance makers who are concerned with destruction – understood here as the process of undoing history – is to multiply histories. Drawing from what has been documented and construed as truth, we must complicate, distort, and expose the contradictions which that history cannot admit. Furthermore, we must recognize performance, including but not limited to theatre, as valid a historiographic tool as history books or documentary films.

I would like to reference two contemporary performances here, both of which are adaptations of Athol Fugard's plays. The first is an interpretation of Fugard's play, *Hello and Goodbye*, which I directed a scene from as part of my Honours directing course work. The play follows the lives of brother and sister Hester and Johnnie Smit, whose father's recent death is concealed from Hester by Johnnie. The play unfolds over one day, in which Hester arrives to their family home in Port Elizabeth, a small town on the east coast of South Africa. Their family home, now a collection of boxes full of old things is unkempt, much

like Johnnie himself. Hester, who has been working as a prostitute in the city of Johannesburg for the last decade has come back home to claim money that she believes their father received as compensation for an accident on duty which left him disabled. She spends the duration of the play digging through boxes trying to find this money, which she eventually realises is not there. She also discovers that their father died shortly before her arrival, and that Johnnie lied about him being asleep in the next room. What really drew me to this text is that before anything else, it is a story about precarious humanity. It doesn't reach for a political agenda, and yet it addresses various political aspects of South African life nonetheless.

Watching Hester rummage through box after box of old, seemingly valueless stuff, the audience is made painfully aware of how absolutely debilitating poverty is, not just on one's physical circumstance, but on the psyche. With each box that doesn't turn up "the compensation", we see her desperation mount. In the same way that she rummages through the boxes, she probes Johnnie about the past – recent and distant – and it becomes increasingly clear that her return home has little to do with the money. She is searching, yes, but what for is as much a mystery to us as it is to her. And yet she must search. She must persist. As must we. To tell stories, to make performance is always and necessarily a political act. The choice of what story to tell is always a political choice. And that we, the performance practitioners I reference here and I, are able to tell stories in whatever way we choose is indicative of a significant shift in access to and platform for Black women to represent themselves. While we may be bound by convention, aesthetic and even history, our chosen medium of representation – performance – is what allows us to practice performative disinterment. In making, we not only implicate ourselves in the making and dissemination of history, but we are able to construe memories of individual experience as illustrations of collective, underrepresented political realities.

The play *Hello and Goodbye,* I believe, is a story about family, about loss and lack, about poverty, and this is what influenced my conceptual treatment of the text. In restaging it, I wanted to destabilise normality, firstly in the way that we conceive of family and secondly, in the way that we think about poverty. The

nature of family is as diverse as the multiplicity of people who occupy South Africa, and this is a fact I wanted to highlight. This is where the choice to use an interracial cast comes from. To use Mokokobale Makgopa and Zeno Jacobs as Hester and Johnnie respectively, is both to normalise and to provoke a greater conversation about family, about the politics of family and the dynamics within this family. Rather than accept the assumed subject of the play as 'white poverty', I was more interested in a discussion about the effects of poverty on the experience of family.

Even in this endeavour, I wanted to resist the potential for this work to subordinate aesthetic development to political rhetoric. The wonderful thing about the *Hello and Goodbye* text is that the language reveals the politics, which allowed me as the director to focus my attention on form and on disrupting aesthetic convention. While written as a realist drama with a colloquial meter of speech that places it clearly in Port Elizabeth or a similar small town landscape within South Africa, I wanted to de-localise the performed interpretation without adapting the text. It ultimately came down to style as a tool for interpretation. Understanding that Fugard forms a substantial part of the South African theatre canon, my interest was, with the performance in question but also with my work in general, to refer back to the canonical work while indeed re-placing it within an evolving South African theatre tradition. The set was integral to achieving this. In the original performance of *Hello and Goodbye*, the play is set in a small kitchen, set up realistically with a small dining table and chairs, a sink and lino flooring. When I watched the production at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg, I remember thinking how much it reminded me of my grandmother's kitchen. But noting indeed theatre's genealogical shift from realism, I chose to stage it on a smaller stage on the real stage, using three rostra arranged as a puzzle. My focus in presenting this production was the realisation of concept: thinking through how to materialise a conceptual idea without losing the essence[11] of the play's thematic concerns. I wanted to use

[11] The word 'essence' here refers to the familiarity of object to image, the point at which "a defamiliarized and desymbolized object is 'uplifted to the view' where we see it as being phenomenally heavy with itself" (Bert O. States, cited in Diamond, 2007: 407). Elin Diamond. 2007. The Violence of "We": Politicizing Identification. In Critical Theory and Performance. J. Reinelt & J. Roach, Eds. 403-412.

physical constriction as a visual metaphor for the effects of lack on everyday experience. This is an additional layer to the way I'm thinking about performative disinterment, that the materiality of the performance space is used not only to denote place and context, but as a tool to reveal psychological condition. In this way then, part of the audience's experience of the performance is watching the performers, in this case Makgopa and Jacobs, navigate the performance space both as performers and as characters. And while the delocalisation of place in the performance serves to create a sense of distance between the textual context and the performance context, the lack of placement allows the audience to imagine and place the narrative in whatever context they choose. Furthermore, the physical constriction provides the performers with a physical challenge that acts as a provocation for action.

My interest in this case study is twofold. In the first instance, it is in the way the performance shifts focus from content, to form. While the two, content and form, can co-exist and are not mutually exclusive, my opinion is that the tendency in contemporary South African performance is to punt content above form. In this performance, however, rather than fixate on content and politicised rhetoric, which I have argued is a fundamental characteristic of post-TRC performance, this performance of *Hello and Goodbye* attempts to exploit theatre's materiality, particularly it's space and place-making potential, as an alternative and less explicit entry point into what is ultimately a political conversation, that of poverty and how it affects those who live through it. By using design and scenography to remove place from space – place being specific as in a park, a kitchen, a waiting room and space being an allusion to a place that is recognizable but never fully realised, never fully materialised visually – delocalisation becomes a tool for achieving performative disinterment. In a book titled *Material Thinking*, Paul Carter (2004: 1) writes that "the impulse to identify *poiesis*, or 'making', with *place*-making is no doubt a widespread migrant tendency". If we take this to be true of any form of displacement, be it political, geographical and even representational, then it can be argued that *poiesis*, understood here as the act of creative research or materialising thought, is often concerned with *re*-placement, with making visible that which has been relegated

to the margins of dominant discourse. And yet, Carter further notes that "perhaps that art of making *is* to release the global in the particular" (2004: 1). I am less concerned with the global though, and more with the universal[12]. The global, at least in the way it arrives at my ear here, seems to refer to geographical and spatial rhetoric, while the universal localises the experiential in a way that seems pertinent to the world of art-making.

To release the universal in the particular is necessarily to turn the focus away from broad, political conversation, to specific individualised narratives as a way to uncover that which falls through the cracks of generalisation. Rather than stage a performance about poverty, for example, one stages a performance about one poor family, in the hopes that this micro-narrative can act as a catalyst for a more nuanced conversation about poverty. In this way then, performative disinterment is about specificity, zooming into the micro to get a sense of the nuances of the greater collective condition. Joseph Roach, in a book titled *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* writes that:

> The social processes of memory and forgetting, familiarly known as culture, may be carried out by a variety of performance events, from stage plays to scared rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life. To perform in this sense means to bring forth, to make manifest and to transmit. To perform also means, though often more secretly, to reinvent. (Roach, 1996: xi)

The case study I'd like to turn to next performs this very act of reinvention in a way that better illustrates my instincts.

I recently worked as a dramaturg on an interpretation of Athol Fugard's play *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*. The performance, retitled *A Faint Patch of Light*, was directed by Qondiswa James. In her restaging, she not only chose to cast two Black women in the roles of The Woman and The Lover (originally a white woman and a young coloured man), but they were also fully naked through the entire performance. The entire space was draped in a cocoon of white fabric and the audience was asked to remove their

[12] See Elin Diamond. 2007. The Violence of "We": Politicizing Identification. In *Critical Theory and Performance*. J. Reinelt & J. Roach, Eds. 403-412. Wherein she draws from phenomenology to theorise identification in reception theory and complicates the sense of the collective in audience's relationship to each other.

shoes before entering the space. For me, this was not only an invitation in, but an invitation to gaze and to take note of one's own gaze. The traverse stage further cemented the concept of turning the gaze on itself in that audience members were forced to watch each other watching and to be watched as they watch- a similar device to Park's use of The Negro Resurrectionist in *Venus*. In addition, "this 'reverse gaze' (see Clifford 1988: 120-1) has the benefit of presencing a counternarrative, but the disadvantage of being easily ignored because it is typically reactive. Rather than a binary 'us': 'them' opposition, we can insert the objects we collect, study and display as agents" (Edwards, Gosden and Phillips, 2006: 271-2). Anything that seeks to counter the hegemonic is necessarily reactive, and yet in the realm of performance the reactive is actively generative because it renders reaction material rather than a perpetual feature of discourse.

What is even more interesting about this performance is how it re-centres corporeality and materiality in its approach to storytelling. The nakedness of the performers foregrounds their inter-action with the materials in the space. The central set-piece, a rusting metal bedframe with linen sprawled carelessly rather than carefully laid for cushioning, is the home of some of the characters' most intimate conversations, and yet the audience is painfully aware of the discomfort of their naked bodies against this cold, rough metal. Furthermore, at various moments in the performance, they stand up on and walk across the bed. Because of the lack of a mattress, the simple act of walking or standing on the bed becomes a visual and embodied representation of their political precariousness in the world. They straddle the line between the careful disciplining of rehearsal and the very real possibility that one misstep could lead to injury. This creates a moment of heightened tension in which the stakes for the characters are made urgent, present and material and the this-here-now of the dramatic action becomes the this-here-now of the performance context.

Through the staging and directorial choices made, a language of materiality and inter-corporeality forms the basis of political commentary, a similar effect to that achieved by Parks' *Venus* that foregrounds the very action of spectating. "[I]t is only by taking 'an extended lingering look at' *Venus* that we

can appreciate the way in which this drama of disinterment disrupts the hegemony of the visual" (Warner, 2008: 196). In foregrounding and complicating the act of spectatorship, James is further able to extend dramaturgical responsibility to the audience, and not just the production team. De Marinas and Dwyer describe the active dramaturgy of the spectator as the point where the passivity or objectivity and the activity or subjectivity of watching meet. They distinguish between these two as follows. In the first instance, the audience is a "dramaturgical object", a mark at which to direct the operations of the director, performers and writer. Secondly, they refer to the dramaturgy of the spectator through the "receptive operations" that audiences carry out – "perception, interpretation, aesthetic appreciation, memorization, emotive and intellectual response etc." (De Marinas & Dwyer, 1987: 101).

James further appropriates this idea of spectatorial dramaturgy by including, in the audience, a spectating performer. While this is the story of two lovers, performed primarily by Tiisetso Mashifane and Qondiswa James, there is a third performer whose dramaturgical role is integral to the deconstruction of reception aesthetics in this performance. Jannous Aukema, a White, Afrikaans, male, plays the cello in the performance. Within the dramatic context, his character is somewhat indistinct, it is neither described nor referred to specifically. He is on the stage, within the cocoon of fabric described above, but on the edge of the stage, about half a meter from the audience. When he is not playing the cello, he is watching the two women. Like the audience, he is not lit. The role of Aukema in the narrative is twofold. In the first instance, it is his music that scores the performance. But the music is not only a score, not only a tool for evocation. The music is active in the narrative, at times prompting the moments of disruption between the lovers and at other times responding to their action, as if the different sonic textures anchor the temporality for the audience. Because of the fragmented structure of the story, jumping between memories here and now, and there and then, the music is useful in denoting time and place.

In the second instance, Aukema serves as the gaze – the curated and embodied gaze. Within the dramatic text, the lovers are constantly aware of

being watched, they describe how they sneak around to avoid being seen, and Aukema materialises this constant eye on them. They do not refer to him directly in the performance, they do not play to him as it were, in the same way that they do not play to the actual audience, but they do refer to what he represents. Even when he breaks the space, which happens twice in the performance, he does so from the outside. About halfway through the performance, the lovers are lying in bed asleep and Aukema crosses the stage to a window frame hanging from the lighting rig, which he taps lightly with his finger. He taps twice, and each time each lover awakes, as if from a nightmare. They don't engage with his physical presence in the space, they respond rather to the sound of the tap. This, in addition to the single line of text he speaks in the scene where the lovers are questioned about their affair in a legal trial, "disrupts the hegemony of the visual" (Warner, 2008: 196), by quite literally materialising the gaze as sound. The combination of Aukema being physically in the space, and his sonic presence act as material representations of the gaze.

South African theatre-maker Megan Furniss reviewed the show for Weekend Special, an online theatre and arts blog. She writes: "In this version any witness to this secret relationship is a threat. In Fugard's original it was the literal apartheid arm of the law. Here the concretisation of this threat is in one line of dialogue spoken by the white, male cellist. It was the only moment I would have left out" (Furniss, 2018). Without paying too much attention to Furniss' value judgement, the real insight here is that the lovers being witnessed is a threat and that the threat is concretised. A fundamental component of reception aesthetics is the idea that a performance is only fully realised when an audience is present. And yet, in this case, the dramaturgy of spectatorship is such that the audience is implicated in the dramatic world of the play, not just the performance context. They become the watchdog, they become the eyes that invade the lover's space, and they too are the threat.

James' *Faint Patch of Light* is a sophisticated application of performative disinterment. Much like my approach with *Hello and Goodbye*, James takes a canonical text and effectively resurrects it. Exhumes it in fact. The exhumation in this context takes place through interpretation. Rather than adapt Fugard's

text, she opts to offer an alternative interpretation. She does this primarily through casting. By casting two Black women, James opens up a new conversation, a more contemporary discussion about the politics of romantic relationships, and even about the political implications of Black women representation. Historically, the apartheid Immorality Act was intended to deter interracial breeding[13]. Furthermore, in a paper titled *Sexuality as Constitutive of Whiteness in South Africa*, Kopano Ratele argues that "at the heart of [the Apartheid] constitution, entrenchment, and elaboration of whiteness in South Africa lay a politico-legal idea, with its prescriptions, injunctions, and rights that had significant but under-examined ramifications for the psychological existence, sexual realities and social lives of many individuals and families" (Ratele, 2009: 160).

The hyper sexualisation of the Black female body is as long-standing as the story of Baartman. Even within the realm of theatricality, tracing back to Baartman's exhibition, the visibility of the Black female body has been tied to sexualisation and exoticism. And yet, in James' treatment of the performance, the two performers are made visible rather than spectacularly displayed. By inviting the audience into their private, intimate space, James is able to dismantle the exoticism of Black female femininity. Even though they are completely naked throughout the entire performance, the choice to retain Fugard's text as is, as well as the hyper-domestic staging alienates the performers from tropes of hyper-sexualisation. Rather than perform their sexuality in the way that Baartman was made to do, James is able to normalise Black female sexuality, intimacy and physicality. Through heightened domesticity of the body, juxtaposed against exceedingly poetic language and episodic, fragmented story, the interaction between the two bodies of the

[13] "The text of the immorality legislation not-withstanding, the purpose of these laws was less ingenuous than it appears. Important as it was for the Christian Nationalist government that reigned from 1948 to 1994 to regulate sexual intercourse between unmarried people, the state machinery was in fact deployed to inhibit "sexual relations between 'Europeans' (later called white) and 'non-Europeans' (later given other labels). The state outlawed such relations because sexual relations were perceived as one point wherein the power of 'European' (white) males and the stability of 'Europeanness' (whiteness) were seen to be possibly under threat" (Ratele, 2009: 170).

performers, and between their bodies and the space becomes the anchor for the narrative.

I call this production a sophisticated application of performative disinterment because it not only exhumes history in terms of political context, but it also appropriates form and aesthetic by re-interpreting a significant part of the South African theatre canon. When I speak of form and aesthetic here, I speak specifically to "the vitality and sensuous presence of material forms" (Roach, 1996: xiii), I speak to the idea, as noted by Colin Counsell, "that Structuralism does not easily admit diversity: that in viewing culture as a single semic 'system,' it obscures the plurality of positions and identities all real cultures – indeed, all real subjects – manifest" (2009: 3). Interestingly, when James was working on *A Faint Patch of Light*, we discovered that a part of the copyright clause when performing Fugard's text is that the text cannot be adapted. This presented a rich opportunity for James because indeed, a fundamental component of dramaturgical practice is negotiating the relationship between approach or compositional strategies of storytelling and the socio-political context of that telling. While the limitation of textual adaptation resists diversity in the way that Counsell notes above, the act of producing the work nonetheless, and taking certain liberties, such as casting two Black women, becomes a fundamental tool for political commentary and aesthetic disruption.

The final case study I'd like to discuss is Nelisiwe Xaba's *They Look at Me & That's All They Think*. A dancer by trade, Xaba's work is always centred on the body as a vehicle for representation. Her language of performance is always embodied, drawing from and manipulating classical dance forms and actively pushing the boundaries of dance and choreography's ability to discipline the body. But what I find particularly pertinent about this specific performance is how it makes use of materiality as an extension of her own body's ability to communicate. Though she is a Black woman, Xaba's body and that of Baartman are entirely different. Wilkins Catanese describes her as "long and lean, with not an ounce of extraneous flesh anywhere on her body" (2010: 47). In any other context, to describe Xaba's physique in this way is irrelevant, and yet in the context wherein she is representing Baartman directly, and Black womanhood

more broadly, painting a picture of her body is necessary as it speaks directly to the problematics of Black female representation. Unlike the case of Park's *Venus*, which relies on textual manipulations through heightened language play and verbatim reference to historical documents, Xaba has to rely on material enhancement to her own body to make her point.

The performance begins dimly lit, with Xaba upstage centre. She is wearing a sheer white crinoline, with long, white silk gloves and a sheer white blouse stuffed in the chest area. She carries a thick roll of bubble wrap and a ladder on her head, an image that reminds me of women carrying buckets of water from the river in the village. This moment is scored by Burundian musician Khadja Nin's song, *Sina Mali, Sina Deni*. The song title, a lyric that is reprised through the song, means: *I, who have no fortune nor debt* in Swahili. In the absence of spoken language, performance makers have to establish alternative forms of text through vocality, sonority and visual imaging. And while the melody of the song serves an evocative function, the actual lyrics are an additional layer of meaning that speaks back to Baartman's legacy in significant ways. In the first instance, the combination of a South African performer, with a Burundian musician singing a song in Swahili, the most widely spoken indigenous African language, and the costume that alludes quite obviously to 19th century Europe, reveals the complexities of African diasporic identification because indeed a significant part of Baartman's legacy is displacement, and for the African person, connection to place is as constitutive of identity as connection to name, both of which Baartman was denied.

Furthermore, another reprise in the lyrics of the song is the words 'I'm free'. While 'free' is not a word that springs to mind when describing Baartman's life, perhaps the fact that we are able to re-member her story in the way that Xaba and Parks, among others, have done, does free her. My contention here is that what Xaba achieves with this performance goes further than documentation. And perhaps that is the point, that the task is not to document, but rather to become, to imagine *in being*. But what does it mean to become? "For Xaba, costumes and props [offer] the most potent tool for registering this [endeavour], supplementing and commenting upon her actual physicality"

(Wilkins Catanese, 2010: 47-48). As noted above, Xaba shares no physical resemblance to Baartman, besides being black, and yet the use of synthetic enhancements - the crinoline and the inflatable breasts - that in silhouette mirror Baartman's frame, allow her to become an incarnation of Baartman. The costuming also serves to destabilise preconceived notions about what the Black female body is supposed to look like. The sheerness of the fabric makes visible both the Baartman-esque figure as well as Xaba's natural figure underneath.

Another feature of Xaba's performance that speaks back to performative disinterment is the use of multimedia historic representations of Black womanhood. One such instance is when, about halfway through the performance, the crinoline is opened up to create a screen onto which an old hair straightener advert is projected. Though admittedly hilarious, including this advertisement is a comment on contemporary and historic ideas around Black women and commercial beauty standards. Not only does it draw from the past, it speaks directly to present day tropes of reclamation in diasporic African popular culture, from the advent of 'Black girl magic' to catch phrases such as 'my hair, my crown', which are wholly concerned with destabilising the assumed homogeneity of Blackness and celebrating features of Blackness that have been historically denigrated. Another significant use of multimedia in the performance is the combination of lighting, shadow and silhouette. The performance makes extensive use of back lighting, which distorts the visibility of Xaba herself, so that the audience is often engaging with a shadow. This can be interpreted in a variety of ways but two seem most pertinent to this study.

Firstly, it speaks to the ubiquity of Baartman's legacy on representations of Black womanhood. It is almost to say that how we present today is always a shadow of how she presented then. We are always answering to and for that past, speaking back to it whether consciously or not. Furthermore, it is a comment on the homogenisation of Blackness, a visual representation of the lack of 'I' in the 'we' of Black womanhood. As if in sharing the blanket of identity, in claiming a collective humanity, we relinquish our claim to individuality, we become shadows, of Baartman and of each other. Secondly, it functions as metatheatrical commentary. Martin Puncher notes that metatheatricality, as

defined by Lionel Abel, refers to theatre that is both self-conscious and self-reflexive (Puncher, 2003: 17). With this understanding then, and returning to performative disinterment, Xaba, by rendering herself invisible through the manipulation of lighting, actively reveals the limitations of representationability for the Black female body within the theatrical frame. She not only problematizes historic representations of Black women, but she also centralises the very act of representing through theatre as potentially problematic. She makes looking, and being looked at, and choosing to curate how she is seen an inextricable part of the performance.

In an interview with Jedi Ramalapa (2012) about her practice, Xaba notes that in conceptualising *They Look at Me*, she wanted to draw parallels between Baartman's exhibition and the way she herself is received when she performs in Europe. One of the questions from this interview is: "You'll also be performing your 2006 piece, *They Look at Me and That's All They Think*, what does this piece relate to?", to which Xaba responds:

> When you're performing in Europe, people are mainly interested in seeing your body. […] The black body is still so exotic. When your body is your tool to make or create art, then it becomes a challenge. […] How do you get them to listen? That's the challenge. *They Look at Me*, was also a challenge to Europeans that the black body is just a body *actually*.

In many ways, this is the challenge for the theatre-maker today – understanding the history of performance and further still, understanding that how we think about that history has a history too (Puncher, 2003: 2). Therefore, for the maker who realises performative disinterment, the goal is not to extract herself from representational forms, but rather to appropriate those forms in ways that reveal their inadequacies and prejudices. Furthermore, "the subjects of this research possess knowledge and memory that [can], if offered expressive opportunity, upend the hierarchy of value that presumes the moral inferiority of the subaltern" (Wilkins Catanese, 2010: 49). And yet in order to achieve this, their creative focus cannot be on their own subaltern status. Performative disinterment ultimately derives from the premise of materiality – materiality of and within form, and materiality of the body as well. While the corporeality, of the Black female body in particular, has been historically weaponised as a tool

for subjugation, it remains, as Xaba notes above, a tool for expressive culture and to view it as such is to perhaps broaden its capacity for communication, reclamation and self-determination.

CONCLUSION

As I reach the end of this dissertation, I'm struck by various realisations, the most prominent being that I have only just placed my toe in the ocean. I began with the TRC. The analysis of the TRC was not only necessary to denote a specific historical context, but it also serves as the primary provocation for what I believe is a universal need to rethink how we create and disseminate history. Through a dramaturgical analysis, that is an analysis of the compositional strategies that rendered the TRC a historical site, I sought to complicate South Africa's present relationship to that moment. I did this firstly by noting the commission's focus on the spoken word to extract truths about the past. I then began to introduce materiality as a counterpoint to the word, noting that the truth is a queer and complex concept that cannot be attained from speaking alone. I proposed then that materiality offers a multitude of avenues for truth. If we ascribe language to materiality, then we increase the scope of what is communicable because words can communicate, the body can communicate, the sound of the voice can communicate, and not just the words that the voice articulates.

I thought it pertinent to characterise the TRC as a site of history, though some might argue it to be a site of memory. Understanding history as a privileged interpretation of the past that is disseminated primarily through the written word and wholly implicated in the politics of power and access, I began to wonder about the role of memory in the broad historiography project, asking whether memory has an alternative materiality that might offer an embodied and performed historiography. Pierre Nora writes:

> Our interest in *lieux de memoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where conscious-ness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn – but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are *lieux de memoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de memoire*, real environments of memory. (1989: 7)

The idea that the growing decrease in real environments of memory has made pertinent sites of memory is not only a discovery that I made in the TRC analysis, but also one that provokes the second chapter of the dissertation. The second chapter is about the use of performance to recreate, to imagine, to materialise these 'real environments of memory' by producing a site of memory in performance. The example of Park's *Venus* is meant to illustrate embodied memory as a counterpoint to history. In addition to creating an alternative narrative of Baartman, it offers practical ways for performance to fill in the blanks of history, as it were. Through this example, we see the potential for performance to manipulate historical narrative by actively appropriating archival text, in the first instance. Secondly, by imagining and scripting conversations of the everyday, exploring the engagements of everyday life and crafting relationships that history would otherwise ignore or deem unimportant, Park's *Venus* exposes history's narrow perspective while also offering evolving and contemporary perspectives on that history.

The first two chapters are focussed on context, they offer provocations for what follows in the third chapter. The third chapter is primarily concerned with laying a theoretical framework for performative disinterment. It is in this chapter that I begin to, following the model offered by Warner on a drama of disinterment, develop my own thinking around how to materialise it in theory and practice. The first two chapters establish the 'why' for performative disinterment, while the third chapter starts to venture into the 'how'. Chapter three acts as a pseudo review of the literature I have engaged with, borrowing from a vast range without relying too heavily on any specific text. However, the conversation between Bennett and Spivak is what anchors chapter three. While the two of them are not instrumental in locating the study specifically within performance studies discourse, they serve to centralise form- they unravel the political implications of form, while offering a model for thinking through the manipulation of form as well as noting the necessity for form to be manipulated.

It is also in this chapter that the importance of theatricality in relation to historicity is explored in greater detail. While the first two chapters quite clearly point towards a productive suspicion of history, chapter three calls for the same

in relation to theatre as form. In the third chapter, theatrical form emerges as a historiographical tool that is further able to appropriate memory through materiality for the purposes of representation. Here then, memory and the representation thereof are complicated following the "brutal realization of the difference between real memory – social and unviolated, exemplified in but also retained as the secret of so-called primitive or archaic societies – and history, which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past" (Nora, 1989: 8).

The critical creative analysis that takes place in the final chapter is essentially an explication of performative disinterment in action. Xaba and James' works exemplify performance's ability to materialise present-pasts by actively appropriating history through theatre's materiality. They use performance to refer back to and challenge dominant histories, while embodying and representing inherited memories. Where Xaba seems to attribute memory to, and extract memory from, her own corporeal body, James achieves the same from form and narrative, while my work focusses on space and place. Unlike the rest of the chapters, which are more concerned with theoretical rigour, the final chapter is concerned with creative and practical ideation. This chapter also presents a challenge to my thinking, asking me to speak of what is rather than speculate on what is possible in theory, as I do in the chapters leading up to the last chapter.

I think it is necessary here for me to reflect on the research, both in the context of this dissertation but also placing the dissertation as a single step in a greater performance-based research endeavour. There are a few concepts and ideas that I feel I have not fully materialised in this text, but I would like to speak specifically to dramaturgy and materiality. I have a sense that my understanding of dramaturgy can only grow in practice. I have speculated about the function of the dramaturg as mediator between performance and context. Ultimately, I believe that dramaturgical practice is both indeterminate and evolving, and so too is my understanding of materiality as I conceive of it in this dissertation. I use the term materiality to refer to the materials that make up the theatrical performance space – the stage, the auditorium, lights, props,

sounds, bodies and so forth – but I also use it to denote a particular kind of relationship between corporeal body and inanimate object, a relationship that is mutually constitutive. I believe that the next step would be to explore these concepts in my own practice, as a creator and as a pedagogue.

I began this dissertation with "the destructive character" and in some significant way, I think that much of the performance work that is being created by my contemporaries, those I've discussed and others whose work I will continue to interrogate is centred on this very idea of 'undoing'. While I don't think that a tendency toward undoing is a negative inclination, I do find it useful to think through this undoing as a process of re-inscription and reinterpretation rather than discarding. The kinds of questions that I have asked in this dissertation have articulated anxieties that are characteristic of the contemporary South African 'fallist'. My hope is that in articulating them, I have begun to build a scaffolding, an ongoing research process that both challenges and anchors my practice, that allows for the proliferation of questions and that evolves perpetually towards materialising poiesis.

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