

Maladamatjuate and the Theatre of Difference:

Staging the Female Body in South Africa.

'Aja Marneweck

MRNAJA001

A [minor]dissertation submitted in [*partial*] *fulfilment* of the requirements for the award of
the degree of

MA IN THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

DRAMA DEPARTMENT

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2004

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 dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

13/10/04

The copyright of this thesis vests in the author. No quotation from it or information derived from it is to be published without full acknowledgement of the source. The thesis is to be used for private study or non-commercial research purposes only.

Published by the University of Cape Town (UCT) in terms of the non-exclusive license granted to UCT by the author.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
GRADUATE SCHOOL IN HUMANITIES

**DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER IN THE FACULTY OF HUMANITIES**

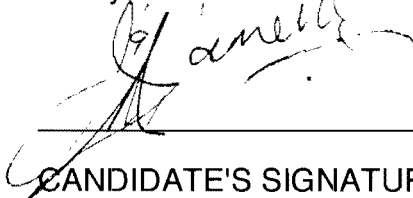
I, **'Aja Marneweck**

of 6 Avronne Court Carisbrook street BoKaap

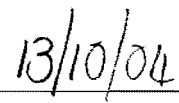
do hereby declare that I empower the University of Cape Town to produce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents of my dissertation entitled

**Maladatjuate and the Theatre of Difference:
Staging the Female Body in South Africa**

in any manner whatsoever.



CANDIDATE'S SIGNATURE



DATE

CONTENTS

Abstract	2
Introduction:	4
A.Theatre of Difference.	
Maladamatjuate and Mami Wata: Performing the Exotic Erotic.	8
Mabali/Later Maladamatjate/ Later the Mami Wata: Staging the Inappropriate Other.	17
Investigating strategy: Layering History.	23
Conclusion: Difference as Possibility.	27
ENDNOTES	28
MALADAMATJUATE	33
Complete Text	
Appendices	78
Additional Multimedia Strategies	
i. Ritual.	78
ii. Video.	84
iii. Soundscape.	85
References	87
Bibliography	90

ABSTRACT:

In this paper, I investigate contemporary alternative staging strategies that critically and creatively explore representations of women in South African theatre. I interrogate representations of the female body of 'difference' and the theatrical interpretation of complex identity in South Africa. Imperative questions are raised around the renegotiation of perceptions of division and stereotype (especially regarding women) in performance in South Africa. I raise crucial questions regarding the empowerment of representations of difference on the stage. *Theatre of Difference* requires representations that are as critically interrogatory of the socio-political circumstances of female identity as they are intimately concerned with the personal processes of the psyches of individual women. Through a largely feminist discussion, the paper investigates black femininity within the discourses of stereotype, icon and myth. Particular focus is given to the application of theory and performance in the production of *Maladamatjuate 2004*, which premiered at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Looking towards a *Theatre of Difference*, I interrogate the key myths and iconographies surrounding the historical image of the snake charmer Maladamatjuate. Studying the cultural phenomenon of the Mami Wata cult, I critically explore the duality of Maladamatjuate's symbolization between Africa and the West. With reference to discussions by Theresa De Lauretis, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Henry Drewal the paper analyses the implementation of creative theatrical development in the layering of theory, perception, history and the personal in *Maladamatjuate*. Translating complex identity and the 'inappropriate other' through theatrical strategy comes to the fore. The

multiplicity and simultaneity of theatrical devices, metaphor and representation are proposed as a platform for complex stagings of difference.

University of Cape Town

INTRODUCTION:

A THEATRE OF DIFFERENCE.

Difference has played a major role in South African perceptions, not only in terms of the structuring of our political and social systems in the past, but in how we see ourselves today. It is the creative possibilities and critical problems implicated in the complexity of 'difference', that I think are at the forefront of new South African theatre. My production of *Maladamatjuate*, 2004 is located as a part of what I have now termed the *Theatre of Difference*. When I talk of 'difference', I am looking specifically at identities that are located in an imposed opposition to a dominant status quo that measures those identities against its own expectations. The term 'difference' in performance is interesting to me because of its paradoxes. It lends itself to the problematic production of 'otherness' in which the body of 'difference' (in the case of this paper, black femininity) is constantly measured against that which it is not, the masculine and western. This complex relationship, as Theresa De Lauretis reflects, seems to insist on a difference that only exists in relation to the dominant, placing different subjectivities in positions of an essential 'otherness' to western masculine models (De Lauretis 1988:155). In this light otherness is not so much different as complicitous with dominant expectation. Difference, through the essentialism of 'otherness', stands in a safe but opposite light to the dominant status quo. The 'other' always exists in relation to what it is not, in a constantly mediated position to the conventional ideal. It is the paradox surrounding the term 'difference' that De Lauretis investigates. She asserts is really a

system of (in)difference that constantly recurs to haunt (or thwart?) the creative challenges of alternative representation (De Lauretis 1988:155).

In my own work in *Maladamatjuate* over the past two years, I have been primarily concerned with developing new staging strategies around the representation of women in the theatre. *Theatre of difference* calls for a renegotiation of the limitations of simplistic binary divisions, especially concerning re-presenting femininity in South Africa. The thin line between the *replication* of stereotypes of difference and the *renegotiation* of them is of critical importance. I began by interrogating influential emerging artists Berni Searle, The Mothertongue Project Women's Collective and Brett Bailey who deal specifically with redefining the body of 'otherness'. The paper investigates staging strategies offered for the performance of difference in South Africa. I ask how can South African theatre makers renegotiate those perceptions and images that maintain potentially empowering difference, in a safe and contained relationship to the ideals of binary separation. Karen Lazaar recalls Gilman Sanders' interrogation of Difference and Pathology. She says that:

[Because] there is no real line between the self and the Other, an Imaginary line must be drawn; and so that the illusion of an absolute difference between the Self and Other is never troubled this line is as dynamic in its ability to alter itself as is the self (Lazaar 1992: 2).

This imaginary line has, I believe, great relevance for contemporary reflections on difference. This seemingly impermeable boundary establishes historically conclusive norms by delineating the categories of difference and representation into the 'us' and 'them'. The borders of division seem to operate constantly through stereotype, myth and, by extension, through cultural and social separation. These stereotypical conventions are as adaptable to circumstance and situation (in the interests of the regulating status quo) as necessary. However, the very fragility of the 'border' as *imaginary* brings its stability into question. In my thinking around the production of *Maladamatjuate*, I wanted to deal specifically with redefining and exploring the borders of female difference and identity. A significant point that Trinh T. Minh-ha raises is that 'many of us still hold on to the concept of difference not as a tool of creativity to question multiple forms of repression and dominance, but as a tool of segregation to exert power on the basis of racial and sexual essences - the Apartheid type of difference' (Minh-ha 1987:2). Difference in South Africa has for so long been appropriated to construct perceptions of identity, experience and representation based on separatism, racial binaries and hierarchies.

My concern is how can I as a South African artist renegotiate these perceptions of difference through not only theory but also theatrical strategy. How can I rethink representation of the female body without recalling her within familiar models of thought, language and representation, deeply inculcated within patriarchal systems of meaning? Where do South African theatre makers begin to perform the female body of difference and desire otherwise? In rethinking representations of the female body, I

believe there needs to be an active awareness of the codes and conventions traditionally associated with the staging of desire. This is in an effort to avoid the recurrence of potentially transgressive and substantiating difference, within masculinist representations. In this light, I believe we can begin to re-imagine and re-perform the difference of the female body otherwise (De Lauretis 1988).

My intention to create a *Theatre of Difference* formed the strong critical basis from which I constructed my production of *Maladamatjate*. This was in an attempt to give critical and creative meaning to a performance of feminine identity deeply involved in its own possibility. I wanted to investigate most specifically stereotypes of the black female body in terms of identity, stereotype and myth and new, deconstructive stagings of these differences. My intention was the renegotiation of perceptions of difference that whilst being aware of the problematic of its involvement in dominant discourses, aims at rethinking itself from more complex and creative perceptions of individual differentiation.

Through a largely feminist interrogation of the female body in performance in *Maladamatjate*, I was primarily concerned with discovering the empowering theatrical possibilities that difference had to offer new representations of the female body. In this light, difference is something to be celebrated, in its enormous creative and artistic potential. Minh-ha suggests that 'difference should neither be defined by the dominant sex nor by the dominant culture' (Minha 1987:2). A question I asked throughout the process was, in seeking alternative ways of performing the female body theatrically, how

could I find power in difference and in representing it, in ways that question or assert the female subject and her individual desires from her own myriad points of reference? I wanted audiences to experience an empowerment of representation and more than that, to reclaim and disorder the limitations of the borders of white, male control, sensibility and fear. Through re-thinking, re-presenting and re-searching traditional representations of femininity in *Maladamatjuate*, I wanted to produce a counter discourse in the staging of the female body and the development of the *Theatre of Difference* in South Africa.

MALADAMATJUATE AND MAMI WATA:

PERFORMING THE EXOTIC EROTIC.

My research for *Maladamatjuate* began in feminist theoretical territory. I have been very interested in stories surrounding the black female body in terms of colonialism and historical representation. These stories I believe, require not only critical intervention but also hold many creative possibilities for the representation of women in a *Theatre of Difference*. I think that many of these historical imaginings still permeate South Africa today.

Many 'exotic' peoples taken to Europe from the colonies, during the height of colonialism in the 1800s, were exhibited for public entertainment and horror. They were figures not only of a conceived abhorrent physical 'otherness', but also a sight of fascination and intrigue. Stereotypes abounded of the explicit sexuality and the illicit exoticism of 'the black woman'. We have seen this exploitation in our own South

African legends and history in the story of Saartjie Baartman, taken to London in 1810 and paraded in a public freak show (Wiss 1994). The story of Saartjie has been retold by women and men all around the world. In my first research paper, I was particularly concerned with Suzan Lori Parks's version of the story *Venus* 1997.ⁱ Parks' play is an audacious and provocative re-writing of recorded history. It recuperates stereotype to throw open it's meanings by transgressing those images through performance. The major element that seemed to be missing, however, was Saartjie's link to South Africa. Before her arrival in England there are gaps in her story. Parks' staging strategies evaded some of the more personal possibilities of Saartjies' icon. I wanted to know more. What other histories could be guessed at or conjured? Before I even began my explorations in uncovering the bones of the icon of Maladamatjuate, I reminded myself of the critical as well as personal complexities of the story. In the very process of remembering, perhaps something new arises that has relevance and meaning for the audience today. Through my work and research in this terrain, I came across a story that would form the theoretical and creative basis of my masters' thesis production of *Maladamatjuate* (2004).

In the late 1800s, colonial empiricism and the expansion of trade enabled a linking of Africa, Europe and the East (Drewal 1988). This in turn led to the spread of many ideas and images between the different worlds. One particular image, which draws me back to icons of Victorian erotic photographyⁱⁱ, was of the sensuous snake charmer Maladamatjuate, a chromolithograph traced to the North German port of Hamburg in 1885. Henry Drewal relates the journeys of Carl C.Hagenbeck, who exhibited exotic

animals in a collection of zoological attractions, brought to Europe from Africa and Asia, in his Garden of Curiosities in Hamburg (1988). The next development in the collection of attractions was the addition of exotic people. It was reported that Hagenbeck's game hunter brought back a wife from one of his travels, and she began to perform as a snake charmer in the 'Volkenschauens' or People Shows. The particular chromolithograph of Maladamatjuate that Drewal explores depicts a dark woman of Asian or African origins in vibrant dress with wild untamed hair and a snake coiled around her body (1988). The erotic, exotic drawing card of the lithograph lies in the styling and presentation of the foreign snake charmer. She stands relaxed in vibrant 'native' dress holding her flute whilst two snakes coil around her body. The exaggerated exotic costume and associations of the woman with the sensuous manipulation of the snakes, has sexual connotations, which link her desire to her openly sexual representation and performance as the exotic snake charmer.

What complicates the story however, is that the same lithograph taken in Germany managed to find its way to the African continent, to be worshipped by local western Africans, as an image of the feminine water deity, Mami Wata. The print of the snake charmer was to have enormous influence and popularity in Mami Wata iconography: It is still widely displayed and evident in cultural practice in Africa today. In West African tradition the Mami Wata is the site of a constantly evolving cultural iconography, a point where African mythology merges with the European to appropriate and re create its own divinatory and mythological systems of meaning. The Mami Wata is an icon that embraces and incorporates otherness into its practice of worship and aesthetics of

representation around this female deity (Drewal 1988). The Mami Wata cult is a recent religious practice that grew out of the colonial period in Africa (Bastian 2004).

Anthropologist Henry John Drewal, insists that the sect explores:

Exotic (western) images and ideas, interprets them according to indigenous precepts, invests them with new meanings, and then re-creates and re-presents them in new and dynamic ways to serve their own aesthetic, devotional, and social needs (1988:160).

The complex adaptations of the Mami Wata inform this 'invention of culture' (Drewal 1988:160). The processes of transformation in Mami Wata absorb existent western systems of meaning and re-create them into their own reality of everyday existence (Drewal, 1988). A key to the transgressive potential of Mami Wata symbolization for me is their appropriation of Western meaning. My interest lies in Drewal's investigations into the relevance of these adaptations. He says:

Their study of our 'ways' - our lore, writings, possessions, or patterns of worship - is actually a resymbolisation of them, transforming our symbols into theirs (1988:160).

In this vital renegotiation of the everyday, the icons and symbols of colonialism and the West are not only destabilized but Africanized. Mami Wata tradition absorbs Western codes and conventions and explodes them into deeply African places of meaning. The

hybridity of culture in Mami Wata worship is a complex merger of Africa and the West that denies the simplistic dividing lines of difference in the first place. *Theatre of difference* explores the assertion of this hybridity. It is the multiplicity of experience which forms the basis of creative potential, meaning and identity in the portrayal of difference (Minh-ha 1989). It is in the re-creations, transformations and adaptations of the Mami Wata that I saw much theatrical potential for the portrayal of 'difference' in South Africa.

Mami Wata theorists suggest that this 'transcultural event' arose through trade between the colonies in the 1800's (Drewal 1988). Drewal suggests that the barrage of trade and industry arriving on ships from Europe reinforced traditional African belief in wealth and success from the oceans. He explores how 'building on indigenous beliefs in water spirits, often represented as aquatic creatures such as fish, crocodiles and water snakes, Africans incorporated new spirits such as the mermaid' into their ever adapting systems of belief (Drewal 1988:161). In much of West Africa, Mami Wata is referred to as Madame Poisson (Madam Fish), or as Sirene (Bastian 2004). The mermaid is a repeated icon in European and African mythological tradition. African locals regarded the wooden mermaids of European mythological tradition, fronting the helms of passing trade ships as influential sea-faring deities. These figureheads were to make 'a profound impression' on the African worship of ocean deities (Drewal 1988:162). Drewal says that the result, in Africa, was a developed interest in European icons and mythology, which transformed the mermaid into an integral image of worship in Mami Wata tradition. Mami Wata is associated with enormous wealth and beauty, which she may

bestow upon her followers (Internet). Local Africans explored the mermaid as an imagistic base for iconic representation. These images created Mami Wata as a beautiful white woman 'emerging from the water combing her luxurious hair as she gazes at her reflection in a mirror' (Drewal 1988:162). The beauty of the Goddess is associated with sexuality, which can be both blessing and affliction. The allure of her beauty is a path to wealth and good fortune. She also links to sexual disease, loss and infertility. She requires faith and loyalty from her male lovers, and sexual betrayal can lead to great suffering (Bastian 2004). The sexuality of the icon of Mami Wata is strengthened by the virility of the phallic snake around her waist. Her sexuality however is not human; she is a powerful dualistic spirit. Mami Wata appears as:

Afflicter and healer, bringer of fortune and bestower of misfortune, [she] is symbolized by the two colors most associated with her devotees in West Africa. The spirit's followers usually wear red and white clothes, in recognition of her potential for both destruction and creativity (Bastian 2004).

The whiteness of the Mami Wata (as a fair skinned mermaid) is relevant to the production of *Maladamatjuate* on a number of levels. White ochre and talcum powder are used in Mami Wata ritual wherein the colour white symbolizes the sacred communion of devotees with the spirits. On a critical level, this transformation of color reminds me of colonialism's civilizing mission in which blackness is perceived through hegemonic white discourse as blackness knowable by the white-washing of difference. Powdering the body in ritual recalls the effects of colonialist perception that interprets

the body of the black as 'other' by stereotyping difference into clearly recognizable images. Nevertheless, most importantly, it also confounds those perceptions by absorbing the meaning of that whiteness back into Africa. The aspect of Mami Wata's destructive abilities, symbolized through the colour red, is also necessary in exploring the disordering and dissection of patriarchal betrayal through a violent and vengeful femininity. These ideas of beauty, creativity, transformation and destruction were to form major aesthetic and theoretical links within the production of *Maladamatjuate*.

Much ritual in Mami Wata sects explores the recreation of the image of the deity. In *Maladamatjuate*, emphasis lies on this ritualistic practice of re-creating the Mami Wata. Devotees constantly interpret and construct their most scared Goddess, on their bodies, in their shrines, through a number of bodily and aesthetic interpretations of her image. This transformation into the Mami Wata is done as it were, through the

mirroring of data from a variety of sources- popular imported prints, dreams, foreign literature, trade goods, and the actions of those from overseas (Drewal 1988:165).

The idea of the re-creation of image and icon is vital to the meaning I explored in *Maladamatjuate*. Devotees construct Mami's underworld in their own places of worship and literally 'impersonate her (Mami Wata) during rituals' (Drewal 1988:165). A common aspect of ritual is in the impersonation of Mami Wata. Using the print of the chromolithograph of the snake charmer Maladamatjuate as a constant reference in their

shrines, Mami Wata devotees prepare their bodies by literally copying the image in the print. Part of this imaging is the ritualistic process of beautification in the sect.

Regarding the interpretation of Mami Wata as a spiritual figure of great physical elegance, 'the print, like the image of the mermaid, also epitomizes breath taking beauty...informants emphasized the beauty of Mami Wata' (Drewal 1988:171)ⁱⁱⁱ. This emphasis on beauty and bodily adornment, explored in *Maladamajuate*, provides a catalyst between the image of Maladamajuate and Mami Wata, which. Clues to their connection appear in the physical aspects of the snake charmer, whose image conveys to devotees the beauty and wealth of their goddess such as her golden bangles and jewelry, her long flowing hair, the snakes around her neck^{iv}.

The layers of symbolization in Mami Wata tradition, in themselves a complex system of meaning, were necessary to the critical and creative possibilities of the portrayal of the snake charmer in *Maladamajuate*. I wanted to explore the complexity of that this mutable and hybrid cultural experience suggested for representations of the character Maladamajuate and a complex female identity of difference. An image, which represented prosperity, power and beauty in one culture, began as the site of such fascination and fear for another. In a way the very dynamics of difference surrounding her stereotypes across the continents, denounces the authenticity of perceptions of her difference in the first place. The Mami Wata and Maladamajuate both encompass such vastly differing icons and stereotypes of a single female of history, worshipped for her image and stereotype in those pictorial moments. In the construction of the image of Maladamajuate as an idealized vision of whiteness and European wealth, was her icon

as Goddess not in some way replicating the process of stereotype and rigid interpretation of the body of woman into the desires and reflections of the dominant status quo? The woman in the picture was not European, she was the 'other' taken from her homeland, dressed up and paraded as a European version of blackness. Yet in the transformations of those European symbolizations, the image of Maladamatjuate as Goddess is re-appropriated into a transgressive and completely African system of worship. How do such symbolizations affect the imaginings around a single woman of history? What silences lurk in the gaps of her documentation? Research tells little of who she was and locates her in the guise of cultural truth. In constructing her again, I wanted to give meaning to her story, whilst still critically exploring the trappings of truth in every instance. In portraying the life of Maladamatjuate, how could I insist on an awareness of the instability of truthfulness in any representation of her, whilst also contacting necessarily those forces of female existence that lend meaning and power to life?

Using this story as a platform for theatrical exploration, the show used a number of multimedia strategies. This was in an attempt to perform the many layers of the story and most importantly, both the personal and political aspects of the character Maladamatjuate. Through an exploration of these complex levels that exist in the processes of the self, my intention was to contact an interrogatory and involved level of theatrical production. The biggest question asked throughout the process of translating the story onto the stage was how, through the development of theatrical strategy around her story, could we contact the gaps in the image. The production was largely involved in the exploration of the levels of public perception and then of personal desire in the

body of Maladamatjuate. These levels were to provide differences of meaning in the exploration of the individual woman not covered in records and theses.

**MABALI/LATER MALADAMATJUATE/LATER THE MAMI WATA:
STAGING THE INAPPROPRIATE OTHER.**

*'I was none of these things, but I became them' -Jeannette
Winterson (Winterson 1996).*

When dealing with the negotiation of *Theatre of Difference*, an important issue arises around authorship and legitimacy. Who has the right to tell whose stories? *Theatre of Difference* requires that theatre makers negate the limitations that the simplistic and essentialist dividing lines of the insider/outsider dynamic places on the multiplicity of experience in representation. Authorship is traditionally concerned with the power of validation and legitimacy upon which essentialist divisions seem to insist. I am more interested in the interdependency of experience and its subsequent representation. New ground can be found in which otherness 'becomes empowerment, critical difference when it is not given but re-created' (Minh-ha 1987:4). Minh-ha asks where the dividing line between outsider and insider should be placed. How is such a line defined? These essentialist separations leave no space to embrace those identities that are 'hybrid' and intermingled (Minh-ha 1987). Using South Africa as a particular example, Minh-ha explores the difficult task of racial categorization implemented during Apartheid. She discusses how, in the state's attempts to classify a whole nation of people according to

nine clearly defined racial categories, it came as no surprise that many reclassifications had to take place in which whites became colored, colored became white, whites became Malay and Malays became black (Minha 1987). A necessary strategy that I explored was the idea of the ‘inappropriate other.’ (Minh-ha 1987:5). The moment the (artist) woman changes her position from insider to out, she stands in an ambiguous and complex space (Minh-ha 1987). This can also be a space of necessary intervention. In this dynamic the artist always has ‘two gestures...that of affirming “I am like you” while persisting in her difference...’ (Minh-ha 1987:5). The most exciting potential in the hybridity of experience for me, is that difference is not something that separates into outsider/insider dynamics. In the body of the inappropriate other, definitions of clear-cut difference are destabilized and reinvented. Difference becomes a force that operates on a number of levels to recreate and substantiate the individual.

The body of Maladamatjuate stands in so many ways as the ‘inappropriate other’ (Minh-ha 1987:5). She is both the ‘us’ and the ‘them’, where the danger (and I believe creativity) of her complex position arises through the very fragility of division and instability that her mixed identity offers. This hybrid identity is crucial to the meaning I wanted to construct out of her resurrection in the production. It was a concept that I explored to depict the more personal and emotional desires of the actual woman in the print. Her presence is largely unaccounted for in history. I find this layering key to generating in the performance the complexity of this woman, who stood as such an impressive and evolving icon across the cultures. Locating the personal journeys of Maladamatjuate as the central narrative of the production, questions of portraying a

complexity in difference and identity came to the fore. Working from a very limited database of facts, the key to the recreation of the story of *Maladamatjuate* lay in the interpretation of the myriad texts and representations surrounding her. In the very intention of re-constructing Maladamatjuate for the stage, I was perpetuating the processes of adaptation and recreation. Directing a multiracial cast provided a complex platform for the work shopped explorations of identity and desire in *Maladamatjuate*. I found this diversity most stimulating in the light of the question of difference. The multiple experiences of the South African women in the production informed the development of the character of Maladamatjuate who emerged as a site of personal and critical merger for the cast and myself. These explorations also facilitated an inquiry into her symbolism in both Africa and Germany. In this way, the production operated on both a critical and creative level through our own interpretations of her icon and its subsequent meaning for us.

The idea of the duality of Maladamatjuate's presence across cultures informed the construction of her character in the production and led me to spaces where her own desires might have existed outside those perceptions. Repetition depicts the recurring and transformative image of the snake charmer in the production. The snake charmer is named Mabali in the play before she is taken to Germany to perform in the Volkenschuaens. The single image of the woman operates on multiple simultaneous levels whereby she becomes Mabali, who is also Maladamatjuate who is also the Mami Wata. The repetition of symbolic objects, metaphors and images enhances this duality of identity throughout the production. These tools draw links between the three

manifestations of the personal and cultural levels of the character of Mabali/Later Maladamatjuate/Later the Mami Wata.

Another aspect in the exploration of Maladamatjuate as the 'inappropriate other', was the renegotiation of stereotype. So much of the interpretation of the snake charmer aligned Mabali to her African body and the sensual connotations of that embodied identity.

Gilman Sander in his interrogation of various stereotypes that dominate masculine perceptions and fantasies of the female erotic, draws links between two icons of feminine sexuality from the late Victorian era, fraught with fear, repulsion and prejudice. They were the prostitute and the 'hottentot' or female racial other. The radical world view of the colonialist eras brought to light a racist fascination with sexual otherness that both repulsed and titillated the general public, displaying a frightening European, male-specific scientific and chauvinistic view of feminine desire. The anomalies and sexual abominations of the other, the black woman and the prostitute, both represent 'the perversities of human sexuality in a corrupt society...the internalization of this perversity in one specific aspect of human society, the sexualized female.' (Gilman 1990:92).

In constructing the character of Maladamatjuate, the duality of her identity informed a more complex representation of her difference and desire in the production. The issue of personal desire was investigated with regards to Maladamatjuate's African spirituality. Maladamatjuate's personal experiences were created out of interviews with Mami Wata priestesses taken from an anthropology journal (Drewal 1987). Her personal emotional trajectory in the production follows her intuitive connections with the elements of water and her belief in African water deities. It is her return to the sea that marks her initial

desires for voyage and discovery. It is also her return to the sea in the end that signals her movement into maturity and an awareness of the ravages of personal loss and betrayal. Moving away from the primitive trope of heightened sexuality, Maladamatjuate's desire is centered on the extension of her creative life. This creativity becomes a powerful and transformative force that allows her body to physically disrupt negative perceptions that are placed on her by her husband.

In the production the priestesses of the Mami Wata enter into possession trance and are able to contact ancestral spirits and deities through bodily expression (Drewal 1987). In the same way that the Mami Wata is said to speak through the body of a chosen initiate, so too is Maladamatjuate in the production able to speak again through her descendents in the present. She is the force of the Mami Wata speaking through the priestesses of today. In this way her personal desires, fears and experiences are voiced in a complex relationship to women who both mediate and interrogate her position to lived experience. In her final monologue she scowls:

PRIESTESS:

My husband ... dressed me in a bodice with stripes and buttons, coins about my waist and a snake coiled around my neck... I wrapped around his arm and fed at his hand. He said my nose was blunt and cruel, my tongue forked, and that my eyes had madness in them. He said I would tear him to pieces if he dealt softly with me... I was none of these things, but I became them. At night, in June I think, I slid off his arm and coiled around his neck, I snapped my chain in pieces

and devoured him on the bed with his eyes wide open. He looked surprised, I don't know why. As your lover describes you, so you are.

This monologue is an adaptation of prose written by Jeanette Winterson in the novel *Sexing the Cherry* (1996). It denounces the stereotype of the animalistic and primitive black female through the counter-mimicry and transformation of those images (Schneider 1993). The stereotype of the monstrous feminine as the devouring female, located as the source of both pain and horrific pleasure in masculine perception, surfaces in the interactions between Mabali and her German husband. In this monologue her husband's worst fears of the exotic desiring woman (connoting perhaps satan as a snake in the garden of Eden) are expressed in a series of racist, negative remarks that he uses to endorse his actions and perceptions of his wife. When Mabali/ Later Maladamatjuate declares, 'I was none of the se things, but, I became them', her words sound over the continents. She talks back not only to Gerard but also to the fabricated perceptions of herself across time and culture. Her words echo the character of the Orchestra/tor's declarations of the falsity of representation, and the fraudulent images circulating and recreating her body throughout the world. In a turn of counter-mimicry Mabali swallows them, digests them and transforms into them, empowering her image whilst ironically twisting the stereotypes. Mabali seethes as a giant serpent into the space. She hisses her husband into a shivering wreck and devours him. However, the last image that the audience is left with emphasizes the ambiguity of the outcome of the story. Mabali stands as a video projection on screen staring out onto the ocean. It is a memory. Mabali remains in the garden of curiosities, still as Maladamatjuate, still performing the snake

dances. She has not left and she sings not of revenge but of loss and remembrance^v. The simultaneous presence of these dual aspects of Maladamatjuate evoke a complex reading of the emotional journey of the woman, Mabali, that is enhanced through the use of multimedia devices to bring about this effect.

INVESTIGATING STRATEGY: LAYERING HISTORY.

Drawing on the multiple and contradictory lived experiences of psyche/ history, reason/myth, everyday and dream artists are finding new ways to perform the body of difference. The permeability of division is at the heart of new visions of difference in South Africa. The most stimulating of this body of work, I believe, offers new methods of representation in which the traditional lines that separate and classify subjectivity and experience, are rejected and re-appropriated. Theatrical strategy is employed to enhance this sense of instability and to interrogate the complexity of experience in theatre. The work of some South African theatre makers that influenced my production explores the diversity and complexity of positions of difference through various staging strategies. It becomes apparent that finding representation that supports the empowerment of the differences of woman is not an easy task. Multiplicity foregrounds some of the most exciting work by female performance artists. Video artist Berni Searle for example, in her installations of the *Colour Me Series* (2001), uses multiple framing perspectives to insist on a more complex view of her own body and position. Hovering in an unknowable space, her camera reveals and withholds information in order to speak back to the discourses of colonialism. It delivers stereotypes of coloured women into a series

of spaces through which Searle deals with the estrangement of her own personal identity. In the Mothertongue Project's recent production of *Uhambo: Pieces of a Dream* (2004) we are taken on a taxi ride into the multiple narrative layers that construct the lived experience of women in South Africa today. These multiple narratives collect in the body of a single woman, allowing the many levels of the narrative process to reside in a space where a story can resonate in so many ways for many listeners and numerous tellers. On many levels, director Brett Bailey invigorates theatrical tradition by reveling in those anarchic and chaotic African forces that haunt the rationalizations of the West, in, for example *Ipi Zombi* (1998). The use of ritual in his work expresses an African theatre trying to rebirth itself through the horror and mutations of past and present Africa (Jamal 2003). Here cultural difference does not separate so much as feed the hybridity of the subject.

The most apparent technique used in *Maladamatjuate* to explore the diverse levels of theory, perception and personal history of the story, was in its use of visual, aural and imagistic layering on stage. Drawing on aesthetic and critical methods of representing female identity in South Africa, these layers were executed by a number of multimedia devices that were used throughout the play. In this way, the playing space was developed to enhance the sense of complication in the existence of the icon of the snake charmer. I employed video, live performance, ritual, dance, soundscape and puppets in order to find a method of expression for her story that lay at the heart of the production^{vi}.

One of the most important mediums used in the development of this layering in *Maladamatjuate*, was puppetry. The process of developing the puppets for *Maladamatjuate* was an intensive, lengthy one. Based on object manipulation, the puppets are created from large pieces of paper, which make up the basic components of the character's bodies. The puppet bodies on stage are life size and require up to three performers to manipulate them. In this way, the presence of the puppeteers lends a multiplicity of identity to the puppet Mabali/Later *Maladamatjuate*/Later the Mami Wata. The audience, in witnessing this layering of the single character, is not allowed to view singularly any aspect of her personal history, culture or life. The character of Mabali never enters the space as a singular form. Her manipulators extend her presence through the dynamism of the facets of each performer involved in giving the puppet life. Lending metaphoric extension to the live performance, the puppets require not only the physical and intuitive focus of two puppeteers working in unison, but are able to explore emotional states in visual ways that extend the performance. Women can transform into mermaids and snakes, anger can fly through the roof, or desire can be expressed through the simple movements of the (multiplicitous) head. On an important level, Jane Taylor says '[P]uppets can provide an extraordinary dimension to a theatrical project...because every gesture is, as it were, metaphorized. The puppet draws attention to its own artifice, and we as the audience willingly submit ourselves to the ambiguous processes that at once deny and assert the reality of what we watch' (Taylor 1998: vii). An important question that William Kentridge raises in his work on the multimedia puppetry production *Ubu and the Truth Commission* is how do we invoke the very personal figures of an agonizing past on stage¹ (Taylor 1998)? When actors are placed in the role

¹ In this case, Kentridge was referring to the portrayal of the witnesses in the Truth Commission in South Africa.

of the victim, the audience is often asked to believe that they are the victim for the sake of involving themselves in the theatrical process, but they know at the same time, that the actor is acting and that the real victim exists/ed in the world! (Taylor 1998). The puppets diffused the idea of the 'victim' into a state of paradox. This is because the viewer is constantly negotiating the reality of the character that they know to be non-human. The artifice of the puppet as object allowed me to mediate the more sentimental aspects of the script, such as in the plot-based scenes in which dialogue occurs. Because the dialogue is kept to a concise minimum, it often tended to more simple primary emotions, which could be read as melodramatic if performed by actors. The presence of the puppet however, absorbed these interactions into a space of metaphoric consequence. The simplicity of the interactions between the male and female puppets created an iconic space of their own. In one scene, the puppets stand on opposite sides of the stage, with a chain clasped in each hand and begin a tug-of-war. This battle between male and female in the presence of the puppets brings onto stage a mythological battle of wills between the sexes. . The use of puppets allowed for the theoretical questioning of the essentialism of representation whilst incorporating such an emotional, imaginative and intuitive medium allowed me to invest some sacredness and personal emphasis into the production. In this light much meaning and connection is drawn between performer and character, performer and puppet and between the performers themselves.

CONCLUSION:**DIFFERENCE AS POSSIBILITY.**

Difference has operated as a major factor in defining and dividing identities in South Africa. It seems as necessary as ever to explore, deconstruct and present differing aspects of identity in creative and meaningful ways. Some of the new deconstructive performances of the bodies of women in South Africa offer strategies for critical and relevant representations on our stages. Drawing on theoretical, personal and multimedia elements, I began to explore alternative methods of representation for the female character in my own production. *Maladamatjuate* journeys into the multiple narrative layers that construct the lived experience of a woman. The production performed, through various devices, its main female character on a simultaneous levels that confound 'truth' and essentialism through these layers of image and meaning. It also contacted aspects of her representation that convey a personal and intuitive vitality necessary to the complex interrogation of her image in cultural construction. The multiple levels at which difference operates in the body of the individual character and the translation of her position as icon on stage, insist that the audience look again and redefine their own notions of simplistic divisions. In the hybrid body, boundaries become unstable and in the telling of her (the individual woman's) experience 'she knows she cannot speak of "them" without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story' (Minh-ha 1987:5). Changing perceptions of difference should allow recognition of the complex political and personal levels operating in the individual, whilst allowing the audience on some level to appreciate that complexity. Nothing can

be taken for granted, most especially the simplistic essentialist gestures of oppression that seek to contain and appropriate identity in the first place. I believe that South African theatre makers need to sacrifice the limiting perceptions of subjectivity as based on the safe grounds of simplistic and naturalized divisions. In *Maladamatjuate* I hoped to create an awareness of how all women, past and future, are deeply involved in the continuous production of meanings and possibilities.

While difference has necessarily played an important role in the shaping of experience in South Africa, *Theatre of Difference* requires a shift in perception. This shift is most necessary when addressing the portrayal of women in South African theatre. I believe that there are many voices of female difference and desire to be developed and explored. *Maladamatjuate* has been an important part of those explorations for me. In this way, I think that my theatre work can not only destabilize, but also negate accepted and naturalized perceptions of 'otherness' and oppressive representation. *Theatre of Difference* provides a platform in which new theatre makers can begin to celebrate subjectivities that whilst being aware of the past are able to look to the future.

ⁱ ENDNOTES:

Parks begins to explore the connections between the eroticization and the racialization of the black female body in the 1800's. On many levels, the play criticizes the mentalities of nineteenth century conceptions of the black female body, which maintained that all black women are the sexualized antithesis of control and order. She uses the historical

character of Saartjie Baartman as the focus of the plays journey. For Parks, the wonder of Saartjie Baartman, arises in the narrative strategies offered through recorded stereotypes of scientific racism, which established Saartjie's excessive lasciviousness as an extension of her abnormally sexualized body - her protruding buttocks and enlarged genitals, which were emphasized in most records and images of her actual existence. These attempts to scientifically sanction difference and to inferiorize the black female, signify a hysterical need to endorse the idea and image of difference in contrast to the European society bent on 'civilizing' the 'primitive'. The colonialist idea of the black female body as polluted, congenital and deformed with regards to her sexuality, expressed the fear of the 'dark continent' - the inscrutable black female and the even more unknowable terrain of her sexuality. (Marneweck 2003)

ⁱⁱ Gilman Sander refers to conventions in early Victorian erotic photography in which the overt sexuality of the black woman was insinuated. He interrogates the iconography of the nineteenth century female body, with reference to the painting of *Olympia* by Edouard Manet in 1862. The image of Olympia, perceived as a sexualized representation of Victorian woman, shows a naked white lady in high-heeled slippers reclining on a bed, and behind her a black female servant in attendance. The painting was seen by critics to reflect the qualities and techniques of early erotic photographic conventions, with its central figure, the woman Olympia throwing a confrontational gaze at the viewer. What is interesting, especially concerning the eroticism of the painting, is the appearance of the black woman servant in the background. While Gilman expounds on the image of the black servant as a ubiquitous figure in European art in the nineteenth

century, the presence of her he observes, serves the sexuality of the image. The connotations of illicit and deviant sexuality that surrounded ideas of the black body in Victorian European society, surfaced in many art works as an icon to lend eroticism to the image of the white woman in the Nineteenth century. In a Viennese erotic print Franz Von Bayros, 'The Servant', a naked black servant is climbing upon a sofa to brush the clothes of a disrobed pouting white female. The 'hyper-sexuality', as Gilman puts it, of the servant draws on the coy and reclusive sexuality of the naked woman, insisting on relation between the wild and untamed sexuality of the black girl in comparison to the timid and modest eroticism of the Viennese lady. Gilman asserts that the association of sexual excess to the body of the black [woman] dates back to the Middle Ages. He recalls the tales of a Jewish traveler called Benjamin of Tudela, who described his encounters with people in Seba on the river Pishon as 'people who like animals, eat of the herbs that grow on the banks of the Nile and in the fields. They go about naked and have not the intelligence of ordinary men. They cohabit with their sisters and anyone they can find...and these are the black slaves, the sons of Ham' (Gilman 1990:81). Such derogatory assertions around black sexuality fed into the development of an iconography of black bodies overtly involved with sexual and bodily deviance. Perceptions of the white female body, which in the Victorian world-view was seen as higher on an evolutionary scale, and thus more appropriate, rational and contained, were compared to the body of the black female. Gilman claims that the black female became 'by the eighteenth century an icon for deviant sexuality in general, almost always, however, paired with a white figure of the opposite sex' (Gilman 1990:82). But it was this very contrasting of the different bodies that set up a referential

discourse of difference, in which black female sexuality was regarded as degenerate and primitive by comparison to the erotic status of her 'superior' white counterpart. In this contrast of black and white femininities, we see a shared inculcation of female sexuality in masculine perception. What is interesting is how those perceptions, whilst dominating both women, set up a discourse of comparison between these two positions of femininity. While white female sexuality was fraught with stereotypes of passivity and inferiority, the black female body was measured as animalistic and excessive against her modest body. White feminine eroticism is set up in a 'morally' superior and contained relation to the difference of the body of her supposedly 'naturally' amoral and lascivious black counterpart (Marneweck 2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ The mermaid is also associated with the mirror. The mirror is a key metaphor in *Maladamatjuate* that provides a link between the character of Mabali and the priestess of Mami Wata. The mirror in practice is used to 'attract' Mami Wata to sacred worship spaces or to distract her if she 'worries them [devotees]' (Drewal 1988:165). The mirror is also symbolic of water. It's surface

Is like the surface of the water. It is the boundary between the cosmic realms of water and land. It is the threshold crossed by those troubled by Mami Wata when they voyage to her watery underworld in their dreams...the mirror allows not only passage between water and land, but between past and future (Drewal 1988:162).

The mirror, perceived as the surface of water, is also the fragile dividing line between the realms of spirit and life. It is highly symbolic of the line that is crossed in the ritualistic movement of devotees in to possession trance. Trance and possession play a key role in Mami Wata religious practice and this element is used within *Maladamatjuate*. The mirror as Drewal insists is a metaphor for the processes of transformation and re-creation in spiritual practice.

^{iv} The priestess of the Mami Wata 'imaging the print... wears a long black wig parted in the centre, a profusion of golden bangles around her neck and a European style formal gown trimmed in gold.' (Drewal 1988: 172).

^v Maladamatjuate sings a song from the German opera *Die Dreigroschenoper* by Bertoldt Brecht(Brecht 1928). It is the lament of Seerauber Jenny, a woman who works in a brothel and who dreams of revenge. Frustrated and humiliated by her position she dreams of a warship with eight sails and fifty guns to sail into port and kill everyone in town.

MALADAMATJUATE

By 'Aja Marneweck

First performed

At the Open Air Big Black Box,

Hiddingh Campus Cape Town 2003

Revised and performed

At the Rehearsal Room, The Monument, Grahamstown Arts Festival 2004

And At the Arena Theatre,

Hiddingh Campus Cape Town 2004

THE CHARACTERS

PLAYED BY PUPPETS:

MABALI/LATER MALADAMATJUATE/LATER THE MAMI WATA

GERARD THE GAME HUNTER

THE MAN

PLAYED BY PERFORMERS:

JD THE ORCHESTRA/TOR

CARL C HAGENBECK

THE DEVOTEES (INCLUDING THE PRIESTESSES OF THE MAMI WATA)



'MABALI: Und das schiff mit agt segeln
Und mit funfzin kanonen
Wird entschwinden mit mir...' (Maladamatjuate 2004:77)

THE PRODUCTION OF MALADAMATJUATE PREMIERED IN NOVEMBER 2003. IT WAS SIGNIFICANTLY REVISED AND STAGED AT THE GRAHAMSTOWN NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL, SOUTH AFRICA IN 2004 WITH THE FOLLOWING COMPANY:

THE DEVOTEES: PHILISWA JAKO
MARTY KINTU
BRENDAN MURRAY
THANDIWE-NAIMA PROFIT-McCLEAN
CHUMA SEPOTELA

THE ORCHESTRA/TOR: HANNEKE RAUCH
CARL C HAGENBECK: BRENDAN MURRAY

THE PUPPETS
MABALI/LATER MALADAMATJUATE/LATER THE MAMI WATA:
PHILISWA JAKO
NAIMA PROFIT MCCLEAN
CHUMA SEPOTELA

GERARD THE GAME HUNTER: BRENDAN MURRAY
MARTY KINTU
CHUMA SEPOTELA

THE MAN: BRENDAN MURRAY
MARTY KINTU

DIRECTED BY: AJA MARNEWECK
PRODUCED BY: THE LITTLE THEATRE & DRAMA
DEPARTMENT AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
AND NATIONAL ARTS STUDENTS
FESTIVAL GRAHAMSTOWN.

VIDEO
CINEMATOGRAPHER AND EDITOR: JACQUELINE VAN MEYGAARDEN
PERFORMED BY: JAQUI DU TOIT
ZAK HENDRIKZ

PUPPET CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN: AJA MARNEWECK

SOUND: MARCO

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANTHONY STRACK VAN SCHYNDEL

LIGHTS/SOUND/STAGE MANAGEMENT: ZAKIYYA BREY

A NOTE ON THE SHOW:

Maladamatjuate was developed as a piece of original visual theatre and part of the new *Theatre of Difference*. The script serves as a structural guideline, but the production is made up of mostly visual, aural, musical and choreographic parts. The story is told with puppets, shadows and ritual. These elements are used to extend emotional landscapes, play with proportions and mediate relationships between performers and characters. A major feature of the show is its soundscape. Scenes flow and finish using breath, animated sound situations and vocalisations that enhance scene, mood and milieu. Dialogue is kept to a minimum and spoken word is easily replaced by movement or other expression but is not the driving force of the play.

A Note on the Text:

External References Within the Text.

The following extracts by external authors were adapted and placed within the text of *Maladamatjuate*:

Brecht, Bertoldt & Weill, Kurt. 1928. *The Threepenny Opera* (Reissue 1979). Methuen Publishing Ltd.

Utilized in Mabali's Monologue, pages 40-41; 77.

Drewal, Henry John. 1988. *Performing the Other: Mami Wata Worship in Africa*. New York, The Drama Review, b.

Utilized in JD the Orchestra/tor's Monologues, pages 43-44; 53-54; 60-61; 71-72.

The Priestess' Monologues, pages 56-58.

Chorus and Priestess' Dialogues, pages 65-66.

Jell-Bahlsen, Sabine. 1989. *Mammy Water: In Search of the Water Spirits in Nigeria*. Videographic Material. California, Berkley University Extension Centre for Media and Independent Learning.

Utilized in the Priestess' Monologue, page 50.

Winterson, Jeanette. 1996. *Sexing the Cherry*. London, Vintage.

Utilized in the Priestess as Maladamatjuate Monologue, pages 73-74.

A Note on the Text Continued:

The Young Gods. 1991. *The Young Gods Play Kurt Weill*.
Compact Disc. Zurich, Roli Mosimann, Artag Studio.

Utilized in Gerard's Monologue, page 38.

MOVEMENT ONE:**THE END.****SCENE ONE:**

Centre stage is a cluttered shrine table. It is covered in white tablecloths and beach sand with a variety of dusty second hand objects positioned about it. The objects recall the ocean - paddles, fishing nets, buckets and spades, sunglasses abound. There is also a lot of broken modern day paraphernalia such as coke cans and perfume bottles, talcum powder and gin bottles. There is a framed picture on top of the table with an image of an old fashioned chromolithograph in the centre of it. The image is the print of Maladamatjuate, the snake charmer, taken in 1885 in Hamburg. The shrine is a beautiful homage to an African water deity we later learn is the Mami Wata. Just in front of it is a large self-standing frame.

An accordion sounds somberly over the darkness. Mabali/
Later Maladamatjuate stands posed in the large frame as JD the Orchestra/tor walks across stage playing the instrument. Mabali is a life-size female puppet, made from paper, dressed in exotic red fabrics. She has been in

Germany and performing as the snake charmer Maladamatjuate in the Garden of curiosities. She stands on parade in her costume, posing and performing for a fascinated and horrified public. The performance she is about to give now however will not be the imposed, sensuous dances of the snake charmer, but a wrathful dirge to her imminent betrayal and her wish for revenge. Gerard, a life size paper puppet in a hunting hat, swoons on to centre stage and begins the show:

GERARD: Mabali, frustrated with her position as an exotic curiosity displayed in a Volkenschauens in Hamburg, dreams of a warship, complete with eight sails and fifty guns, to sail in to port and kill everyone in sight!

Mabali's marriage to the game hunter Gerard ended sourly. Through the trials of exploitation as a curiosity in the Garden of Zoological Attractions in Hamburg, she is filled with a deep bitterness and sense of loss. The song she performs is the German lament of *Seerauber Jenny* from the *Dreigroschenoper* by Kurt Weill. It is the song of a dishwasher in a brothel who dreams of a mighty warship, with eight sails and fifty guns to sail in to harbour and

kill all those who have mistreated her. In her sadness Mabali dreams of revenge, to rise with the might of the goddess to strike down all who betrayed her. Through her performance, she delights in visions of violence and power. But by the end of the song she becomes painfully aware of where she is and what she desires: she wants to return home. It seems Mabali finally chooses to leave, but it is only a wish, a vision, a dream... Lights focus on the singer. Her song is in German. It doesn't matter if the words are not perfectly pronounced.

MABALI:

Und das schiff mit agt segeln	A ship with eight sails and
Und mit funfzin Kanonen	All it's fifty guns loaded
Wird beflaggen dan mast	Will run up it's flag.
Und es werden kommen hundert gen mittag	And a hundred men will land in the
An land	bright midday sun

Und werden in den schatten treten

Each stepping where
the shadows fall.

Und fangen einen jeglichen aus
Jeglicher tur

They'll look inside
and grab anyone
they see

Und legen ihn in ketten und
bringen vor mir

And put him in irons
and bring him to me

Und fragen:welchen sollen wir toten?

And they'll ask:
which one should we
kill?

Und an diesem mittag wird es still sein
am hafen

In that noonday
heat there'll be a
rush round the
harbour

Wenn man fragt, wer wohl sterben mub.

As they ask which
has got to die.

Und dann werden sie mich sagen horen: And you'll hear me
Alle! as I softly answer:
Everyone!

Und wenn dann der Kopf fallt, sag ich: And as the first
Hopla! heads roll, I'll
say: Hooray!

Und das schiff mit agt segeln And that ship with
eight sails and

Und mit funfzin Kanonen All its fifty guns
loaded

Wird entschwinden mit mir... Will vanish with
me...

SCENE TWO:

JD the Orchestra/tor is sitting in a huge pile of paper notes in the corner. She rummages just before she begins to play the accordion. On stage, Gerard the puppet is preparing Mabali to pose as her stage name, Maladamatjuate.

He pulls her into the frame and begins an elaborate process of dressing her up. He flourishes powder over her body. He groans with delight as he places the various objects of adornment onto Mabali. His creation is a success. He gives her a slow kiss then pushes Maladamatjuate forward into the centre light of the stage.

She begins to move.

GERARD: Dance! Come on, like we practiced...Dance!

As the scene unfolds JD stops playing and begins to rummage again through her pile of notes. As an academic it is her job to co-ordinate scientific facts and insights. She is exploring her most recent findings on an indigenous African system of worship, the Mami Wata. She is fascinated by Mami Wata's widespread appearance throughout central and western Africa, and its links to western concept. She comes across a print of Maladamatjuate. The picture is a prolific image that adorns the sect's shrines and influences much of Mami Wata imaging across Central Africa. She begins with a scientific interest but as she looks at the image and as she considers its import, she becomes highly interested in the woman in the print. The

puppet Mabali stands still throughout the monologue. As it progresses, she becomes increasingly restless, agitated. She pulls at her uncomfortable clothing. She starts dancing again but it is awkward and tense.

JD: (FOOTNOTE NUMBER 6:)The most widespread image of Mami Wata is a European chromolithograph found hanging in an Igbo shrine. Dating circa 1885, this image 'Der Schlangenbandige' [the snake charmer] was printed in Hamburg in a wide variety of circus and people show posters for a Mr Carl C Hagenbeck. The photograph of the snake charmer Maladamatjuate, subsequently re-emerged in Igbo sculpture. It was reprinted in large numbers in India and England and distributed widely in sub-Saharan West and Central Africa, where it became a key Mami Wata image in less than 80 years. Plate 3: Maladamatjuate. Note especially the style and cut of the bodice, the stripes of buttons, the coins about the waist, the armlets, the positions of the snake around her neck, the non-functional bifurcated flute, her facial features and coiffure.

JD becomes increasingly excited and intense as the monologue progresses. Mabali's dance builds into a frenzied struggle with her restrictive clothing and the two women erupt at opposite sides of the stage.

JD: Imaging the photograph the priestess of the Mami Wata wears a long black wig parted in the centre, a profusion of golden bangles around her neck and a European style formal gown trimmed in gold!

MABALI: Aaaaah!!!

Lights down.

A screen rises over the shrine and on it appears video footage of an actor as Gerard, excitedly preparing Maladamatjuate for a publicity photo shoot. The setting is an old Victorian studio with photographic equipment. The scene is light and rapid as he dresses her up like a mannequin, styling her to look like the exotic snake charmer. Gold chains and snakes around her neck. Mabali's face contorts as the layers become heavier and heavier. He moves to kiss her and as she grimaces, he powders her face

furiously. The last item Gerard places on her is a large chain, thick around her neck. She winces...

SCENE THREE

The garden of curiosities in Hamburg is full of the sounds of Hagenbeck's impressive, if not dilapidated collection of exotic animals. Paper animals emerge from the decaying transactions of his long career and move around in their pens. A paper Gerard - the zoo's collection manager and game hunter, ambles around the cages. Carl Hagenbeck stands in his office. He is behind a screen and as the light comes up, we see an ominous shadow of a grotesque Victorian gentleman, groaning with the most horrid indigestion. He is a notorious businessman with a huge appetite, although his ulcers give him hell. Carl's overt and uncompromising racist and sexist superiority couches his aggressive business sense. He has no qualms about his attitudes. His misanthropy allows him the ruthlessness necessary for managing his business. He decides to expand his hobby - a collection of exotic wild animals from all over the ancient world. His collection boasts animals from the dark continents and an impressive range of creatures never before imagined by civilized society.

When his neighbours begin to introduce the rare commodity of indigenous African and Asian peoples, his business interests develop into the addition of exotic human curiosities. He is particularly interested in the dark Venus, exotic women. Sex sells!

HAGENBECK: Gerard! Gerard!!! Our zoo is in shit!

He begins to vomit up a snake. After pulling it out of his throat, he throws it out and over the stage at Gerard's feet. Hagenbeck has terrible indigestion and the more worked up he becomes, the worse his stomach feels.

GERARD: Carl?

HAGENBECK: My neighbour, that half-baked German Jew, Schoonraad, has imported some exotic Indian dancing Girls – that arsehole's business is doing better than mine! Half naked cavorting savages with silver bells and nose-rings (vomits up one of his wriggling, tasteless snakes again).

We've always been the best Gerard, but audiences are low and sales are down! So what are we going to do!?

GERARD: Well Carl... I was thinking of juggling orangatang, yes?

HAGENBECK: No, you fool! Don't you understand? People have had enough of animals. They're tired of the monkeys on bicycles routine, lions jumping through hoops and, ugh, capybaras! (A huge bout of nausea consumes him and he throws up).

GERARD: Carl I don't understand, I've ensured that Hagenbeck's has always... I've taken care of things.

HAGENBECK: Gerard, it's about show business my boy. We need something exotic, savage, something that dances – some primitive tits and ass!

GERARD: Yes, yes... (Brings forward a proposition of understanding. He offers Carl a bag of goodies).

HAGENBECK: (Digs in the bag with a hungry appetite. He finds it full of tantalizing human offerings). We want to move on from the animals – get me cannibals, Amazonians (he finds one and eats it). Eskimos, savage blue-assed pygmies, spear-wielding inbreeding dog-

fucking island people (finds another tasty treat and devours it). I don't care! As long as it's sexy. Something to get those German sausages sizzling. I want those frigid housewives so wet they'll need nappies.

GERARD: Africa...Africa Carl. On my travels in West Africa, naked tribes, bare breasted women, wild animal rituals, the whole toot!

HAGENBECK: I like it. I like it. You'll leave in a week and be back in 3 months. We'll have this thing ready for the Christmas season!

GERARD: Africa...

He exits as Hagenbeck swallows the last body.

SCENE FOUR

Drum beats. A light comes up on an African woman with powdered feet and a giant material snake around her shoulders. Her arms surge through the air. She is a priestess of the Mami Wata who is on her way over the

Indian Ocean to visit her followers. She performs the Mami Wata swimming, paddling and immersed. The other devotees begin a quiet song as they watch her paddling. The dance builds into a frenzied climax and the voices and chanting of the others rise over her body. The lights come up on a group of devotees dancing before the cluttered shrine. The ritual builds and the priestess completes her performance consumed by the spirit of Mami Wata. She pulls on a wig and takes her place atop the shrine.

DEVOTEES: Mami Wata, hey ehyeya hey eyeyah
heyeyayah...

The ritual builds in volume and transforms into a determined invocation of the Goddess, Mami Wata. Their singing climaxes and the Mami Wata priestess is glares out into the audience.

Silence.

Ringling. The Mami calls through on a cellphone to her devotees. The group tenses. A broken receiver is passed around the group in expectation. The translator steps up and takes the phone. She opens the ceremony with a call

response greeting in which everyone participates (this can be done in English, but preferably Xhosa or Swahili).

PRIESTESS/TRANSLATOR: Welcome to the devotees.
Welcome to the children of the water. Greetings to the Queen of women. Greetings to the water that is power. We welcome her blessings. (She lifts the phone to her ear) Hello?

MAMI: Mamndkrтуoltihoihjoiyhiodgg b ha!

TRANSLATOR: Mami says that she has traveled very far, over many seas, on a big white boat to be with us today. Please forward cash donations for her travel expenses.

A devotee carries a bowl around the group collecting money, the rest respond in happiness over the pleasure of Mami Wata.

TRANSLATOR: Mami Wata welcomes the new devotees, she is pleased with their stylishness. She looks forward to tonight's banquet.

DEVOTEES: Mami bless us with your wealth - your journey here brings us great luck. We know you have traveled far from your beautiful cream mansion with double bedroom, en-suite Jacuzzi and electric lock-up garage. Would Mami like a glass of coke? She must be thirsty...

They begin an offering to the Goddess. It is Coca cola. The translator drinks first then offers it to the goddess by pouring the drink on to the ground. The group repeats the offering, finally delivering it up to their deity. Mami Wata holds the group in suspense as she sips the coke. They wait in awe for her reaction. She smiles. The devotees sigh with relief. Suddenly she screams out and covers her eyes. She glares menacingly up at the sky.

MAMI: AAAAhhhhmncrrrrrinmmm!

TRANSLATOR: (Incensed) Where's the Gucci?!

DEVOTEES: Gucci, where's the Gucci, give the Gucci, give the Gucci, you give Gucci!

The translator grabs a pair of sunglasses off one of the devotee's heads and forwards it up to the Goddess. Mami puts on the glasses. She extends her arms in approval.

TRANSLATOR: Mami Wata is satisfied. You may bring your requests!

A beat begins and they bring a giant sheet of paper into the circle. Once the request is written, it flies up to the Mami and she considers it with grave intent. The energy in the shrine enclosure is very serious.

MAMI: achnarrrrcrimasser..!

TRANSLATOR: Mami Wata sees a rich Lani with promise of travel. How dare you! Sacrifice...Six months abstinence!

The ritual climaxes through drumming and the paper flies up into the space. It signifies a shift in time. We move back to Africa 1885. The paper, as it is twisting and moving through the air, transforms into a giant hissing snake. The snake puppet will recur to mark the shift into vision later again in the play.

MOVEMENT TWO:**MEMORY.****SCENE FIVE**

As the snake moves through the air, light comes up on the anthropologist who has been watching the ritual. She returns to her notes and again is reminded of the woman in the picture. She has followed her research to Africa. The Orchestra/tor finds herself immersed and the story seems more than just fact...

JD: Footnote number 3: Memory and meaning - such widely differing perceptions. Mysterious, sensuous exotic snake charmer and foreign African water spirit. Imaging the print devotees create Mami Wata's western attire and impersonate her beauty during ritual. Mami Wata appears as a beautiful white mermaid gazing into her mirror while combing her long hair. Dreams and visions play a crucial role. Mami Wata is said to journey all the way from the Indian Ocean to visit her followers. One Mina priestess in Togo explained how her world began to fall apart and whirl around her-

she lost all sense of direction in her life until she learned through divination that Mami Wata was causing the trouble for her and that she must worship her to set things aright. Interview 1, circa 1978: a formal portrait of a Mami Wata devotee.

Jd turns to interview the priestess of the Mami Wata. Soft drumming begins and light comes up on the priestess of the Mami Wata.

During the priestess' dance, a screen rises upstage and video footage appears of Mabali standing at the ocean's edge, gazing out to sea.

The priestess' movements contract and release fluidly as she powders herself all over her body. This dance is part of the preparations of the priestesses who imitate Mami Wata during ritual, using the print of Maladamatjuate as a visual reference. The priestess comes up to the Orchestra/tor, kneels and places a wig on her head. JD watches her intently.

A puppet Mabali enters the space, rhythmically swimming through the air. The effect recalls her as an image of a

mermaid. Mirroring the video footage, Mabali stands at the ocean's edge gazing out in front of her. She sees an object in the sand and moves towards it playfully. It is a toy ship. She picks it up and explores the object expectantly. She pulses the boat upon invisible water, relishing the creativity of the moment and freedom to play.

The man, a large masculine puppet hovers surreptitiously behind her in the darkness. His face is a large Nigerian mask of the colonial hunter. An archetype of masculine power, he is both African and European. He is symbolic of the relationship with men that recurs throughout Mabali's life. Her relationships with her father and with Gerard hold similarities of denial and censure. In both she is faced with an overpowering patriarchal force that not only fears her creative difference, but tries to appropriate it into more acceptable modes of behaviour and presentation. The man sidles through space with cold intent. Coming up unexpectedly, he knocks the boat from Mabali's hands. She cries out and grabs it to herself again. The man emerges before her methodically, takes the ship and disappears with it...



'The anthropologist kneels with Dictaphone in hand. The priestess begins her monologue' (*Maladamatjuate* 2004:56)

The anthropologist kneels with Dictaphone in hand. The priestess begins her monologue.

PRIESTESS: I was always drawn to the seaside in my dreams. When I was small, whenever I went to the sea I would be seeing somebody in the water. I went fishing and I would kill more fish than any person. When I went to the water I had to fall down. I didn't know what to do, every night the spirits would come and take me to the sea. As a child, instead of going to school I would go to the beach and remain there for hours gazing into the water. My father learned of my unnatural behaviour and he punished me. I stopped going to the sea. The water God came and asked me why I left him. Soon afterwards, I became seriously ill. But the following day I went down to the sea again and this time went in, feeling compelled to cover myself in water. Some fishermen rescued me. When I came of age, I left my family home, travelling and searching. I arrived in Togo and met a priest who divined my identity as a chosen Mami Wata, and I was initiated.

In my dreams, she tells me to collect clay, first from one river, then another and also from a third. Then

she tells me to go to the sea. When I reach the shore the waters part making a road and I go inside. I come to a door, open it and see her dancing for me, calling me. In another dream, she emerges from the water combing her long luxurious hair, gazing at her reflection in a mirror. The mirror is like the surface of the water. It is the threshold I cross, troubled, voyaging to her underwater world.

During the monologue, Mabali kneels on the beach, almost in trance. Caught in a vision, she turns to the priestess. The priestess hears her and for a short while is able to see Mabali, across time and space. For a moment, the two women look at each other. They come towards each other as if gazing at a reflection in a pool of water. They move simultaneously, mirroring each other. JD watches amazed and confused at the priestess's actions. She cannot see Mabali. The priestess and Mabali touch briefly. This cracks the moment and ends the vision as they release and move apart.

PRIESTESS: I move through the mirror - between water and land, past and future. I can see the future in

it: the mirror can answer my questions. It does so at night in my dreams.

MOVEMENT THREE:

THE VOYAGE.

SCENE SIX

The paper snake hisses through the air, marking a change in time. Mabali stands alone and gazes out to the audience as the creature passes in front of her.

MABALI: I was dancing for Mami Wata when I saw him. Light skinned with golden hair like the blazing sun. He had blue eyes like the surface of water. I asked around about him and I was warned. He was dangerous. He had unnatural powers that he carried in the piece of steel at his waist. I was told that he came from the sea. The man from the sea. I wonder where he comes from...?

In the darkness behind her Gerard appears. He sees Mabali kneeling in the sand. His face broadens with interest and he moves quietly towards her. He watches mesmerized. As he

moves closer into the space, his presence startles her. Mabali shrinks, unsettled and uneasy. Gerard approaches her with caution.

GERARD: Hello...Fascinating...Fascinating...Do you understand? (He comes in closer as she relaxes slightly).

MABALI: Yes...Who are you? Your eyes, they are blue like the sea...Do you know Mami Wata? What do you want?

GERARD: What's your name (He moves in to her).

MABALI: Mabali...

GERARD: Ma.. ba.. li...(He moves around her).

MABALI: Mabali! (She turns, interested).

GERARD: Mabali...Pleased to meet you. I'm Gerard...
And you're gorgeous!

The accordion sounds.

The Orchestra/tor enters. Increasingly involved in her discoveries, she plays the instrument trying to compose her knowledge. But what are the gaps? Absorbed and confused she obsesses over the image of Maladamatjuate. Churning over the facts, the clues draw her back to the two cultural preoccupations with the icon. This leaves her research wanting more...

JD: Crone 1937:20. One man, recalling the first time he saw the print during his youth in Lagos, admitted that he nearly peed in his pants when he beheld the striking beauty, the long flowing hair, and the snakes of Mami Wata. Water voyages and the beautiful yet cold foreign white siren enticing humans, holding out the promise of sexual gratification and enormous riches. Note especially the style and cut of the bodice, the stripes of buttons, the coins about the waist, the armlets, the positions of the snake around her neck, the non-functional bifurcated flute! The print of Maladamatjuate, like the image of the mermaid, epitomizes breathtaking beauty. Half woman, half fish, what is not shown is what becomes important. The concealed lower portion of the snake charmer

conveys to devotees that the Mami Wata is hiding her secret, her fishtail!

SCENE SEVEN:

The following events take place without words. Breath, soundscape and choreography mark the emotional journey of the puppets.

Gerard stands beneath a large doorframe. He flexes his muscles and pulls himself athletically up to the top. He shows off his strength, but soon begins to struggle with the weight. Since their first meeting he has found himself drawn to Mabali. He is unsure of his emotions. Desire. Sex. Love? On top of that, at the back of his mind is the fact that he cannot return home empty handed. Gerard has asked her several times to return with him and he is running out of time! Sitting like a bird of prey on a rocky perch, he watches intently. Now is the time to swoop in for the kill.

Below Mabali enters deep in thought, struggling with her conflicting emotions.

She is overcome by a vision. The sound of the ocean rises and her white boat appears. She moves towards it with longing. A choreographic dialogue of desire and fear ensues between Mabali and the envisioned object. As she reaches for it, the ship turns on her. Fear, desire, trust, betrayal, voyage, safety, should she go? In a moment, the ship is gone.

She stands wrought with confusion. Gerard calls to her and she moves to him. They embrace.

GERARD: Mabali... Mabali... Dance with me Mabali...!

He tries to lighten the mood. She pulls away and turns the subject back to his imminent departure.

GERARD: What is wrong Mabali? Come with me!

MABALI: Germany is far - why can't you stay here?

GERARD: You'll love it there my dear, It's so
...So...So much more...Civilized!

MABALI: Where will we live? And the people...All those people...

GERARD: I can offer you the world my darling. The public will eat you up. You make a beautiful dancer (Mabali resists). You'll be a star. A star my dear. You're intoxicating, so exotic...(he tries to dominate her).
You're gorgeous...

I found you...

I...I love you, Mabali!

MABALI: You do!

GERARD: Come with me...

You have to...

MABALI: Ahhhhhh... !

GERARD: Please...

Marry me! Marry me...

The accordion plays and JD steps up.

SCENE EIGHT:

JD watches the rituals begin. Drumming. A devotee rushes across the circle hitting the ground with perfume and sand. She begins a stroking, swimming dance. The devotees gather in the space. They chant while the priestess, as Mami Wata with a cloth procession snake wrapped around her waist, moves forward and begins the ceremony. A devotee collects money.

MAMI: (Again in English, but preferably Xhosa or Swahili) Look at Mami Wata! Mami Wata is beautiful, she has long flowing hair and wears fashionable sunglasses, she is a beautiful stylish lady! She looks in the mirror, she combs her beautiful hair.

DEVOTEES: Eyeh!

MAMI: Move to the Mother of Waters. Move through the mirror to her world. She welcomes you!

DEVOTEES: Eyeh!

MAMI: Honour her with your loyalty. She will bring you the wealth and blessings of a Queen of Queens, Mami Wata is powerful and rich, she has gold and silver, cars and money...

DEVOTEES: Eyeh!

MAMI: But! Beware...(She hisses and threatens the crowd with her snake) Betray her, and she will destroy you with terrible affliction. Mami Wata will hunt you, punish you and strike you down!

The crowd erupts and Mami moves up onto the shrine to watch the following proceedings.

PRIESTESS: (Singing a challenge to the chorus) If you see Mami Wata won't you run away? Won't you run away!?

CHORUS: (response) No! no! no! no!

DEVOTEES: Eyeh!

MAMI: Honour her with your loyalty. She will bring you the wealth and blessings of a Queen of Queens, Mami Wata is powerful and rich, she has gold and silver, cars and money...

DEVOTEES: Eyeh!

MAMI: But! Beware...(She hisses and threatens the crowd with her snake) Betray her, and she will destroy you with terrible affliction. Mami Wata will hunt you, punish you and strike you down!

The crowd erupts and Mami moves up onto the shrine to watch the following proceedings.

PRIESTESS: (Singing a challenge to the chorus) If you see Mami Wata won't you run away? Won't you run away!?

CHORUS: (response) No! no! no! no!

PRIESTESS: If you see Mami Wata, won't you run away?
Won't you run away!?

CHORUS: (sings)
If you see Mami Wata
Never run away
Mami Wata likes music
Never run away.

DEVOTEE: But how do you know what Mami Wata looks
like?!

Rupture! A priestess threateningly produces an old framed
photograph to the crowd.

DEVOTEE: But how do you know Mami Wata looks like
this?

MAMI: (Hissing) Sdnlfghbjhngjkh!

PRIESTESS: Mami says: someone with special powers went
under the water to take her picture!

Drumming builds and voices shout out as the devotees rush to the shrine to see their Goddess.

MOVEMENT FOUR:

THE CREATION OF MALADAMATJUATE/THE BETRAYAL.

SCENE NINE:

The German public stand gathered before the shrine - now a stage platform for the performers of the Garden of Curiosities. It is 1885. Gerard the puppet calls the crowd to the stage to look at the exotic snake charmer. Mabali is dressed as Maladamatjuate. She stands in nervous anticipation.

GERARD: Ladies and gentlemen, may I present to you:
the high priestess of West African sex!
Maladamatjuate!

MABALI: (Intimidated) Aaaahhhh...

CROWD: Ooh...Ahhh! (Clapping).

GERARD: (Aside to Mabali) Come on dance, dance, like we practiced...

The German public is thrilled as Maladamatjuate performs. They move in closer to get a better look. Their gasps of delight become raucous and sexually aggressive. Their desire to touch her strange body builds into a frenzied grasping.

GERARD: Here she is, all the way from Africa...Exotic snake charmer. Go on, you can touch her if you like...That's right ladies, come and see, African snake charmer... Come on...Women and children first, go on ma'am, one Mark to touch her arse!

LADIES: Oooh, aah...How exotic...Look at her dance... Oh she's indecent...Can I give her buttocks a squeeze? Oh my Lord! Ha ha ha ha ha! So sensual...

They move in touching and talking, crowding and suffocating.

MABALI: Aaaaahhhh! Leave me alone! (Silence, the onlookers freeze).

Leave me alone...

Mabali drops her head as the lascivious public exit the space.

SCENE TEN:

Screens close off the stage to form a small room. Mabali tries to swim through the space as in the previous scene at the beach. But the tiny confines of the room trap her. She is alone. Since her arrival, she has lived here without her husband performing everyday in the Volkenschauens. Maladamatjuate is proving a great success with the German Public. For almost a year, she has been here alone. She wants to leave. Gerard has started to lock her in the room when she is not performing and everyday she is forced to haunt, waiting for him to return. Where is he? How could this all have happened? Nothing is as she first expected. Gerard arrives late, with a chain in his arms. Another trinket of adornment. Mabali winces...

GERARD: Mabali (he drops the chain to the ground and moves in to her).

MABALI: Don't touch me.

GERARD: What? Come here Mabali.

MABALI: No. Gerard I want to go home.

GERARD: This is your home.

MABALI: This room? No! Why can't we live together?

GERARD: Mabali you know I love you, but...

MABALI: You do? ... You haven't come to me in months.
Where's my money? I know it's a lot - they love me,
you said so yourself.

GERARD: You are a savage and they just want a piece
of you!

MABALI: Why do you lock the door Gerard?

GERARD: Shut up! I have made you a star. I can't
have you walking the streets without supervision.

Mabali moves to leave through the open door. Gerard pushes her away and picks up the end of the chain. He walks to her slowly and methodically, hooks it around her neck, tugs at it and then ties it to the ground. Mabali is dumbstruck and doesn't quite know how to react to this. He leaves and she is devastated.

SCENE ELEVEN

A devotee of the Mami Wata moves before the shrine. She is covering her body in talcum powder. As her breath rises and falls, JD'S monologue storms in.

JD: The Saudi Gazette (1 June 1985) '*Mermaid' jailed for fraud.* A deformed teenager who posed as a legendary African mermaid, the Mami Wata, with the power to multiply bank notes, has been jailed for fraud. She lured gullible customers to the edge of a lagoon at nightfall and made them wait for hours until Mami Wata put in an appearance, wearing a fluorescent dress, with her long hair flowing about her shoulders. She would take their money and tell them to come back the next day. When Mami Wata worshippers mirror

their spirit, they are really inventing her.
Reshaping her. Transforming our symbols into her.
Her body into them. Invention has so few limits - the
process is one of active re-creation, interpretation.
Adaptation. The foreign nature of the goddess herself
seems to attract particularly those who have problems
with their own identity, caught between two worlds.
Invention and recreation. A European chromolithograph
found hanging in an Igbo shrine. Mermaid, charmer,
deity, jailed for fraud!

In a last effort to contextualize and organize her
findings, JD realizes the futility of the whole event. She
is no closer to finding the 'truth' and leaves the stage
with the only real outcome of all of her research. Nothing
is to be trusted. Yet, the processes of cultural memory
are powerful forces that constantly recreate history and
thought.

A male devotee joins in the dance. The powdering climaxes
until the devotees bodies are completely whited out.

Silence.

After a brief moment they fall into a waltz. It is a ballroom dance for Mami Wata and the devotees move in rapture around the circle. The waltz climaxes and shifts into a raucous blues jive. It builds and transforms from high European stylizations back into the frenzied body powdering. Mami Wata emerges and the devotees move towards her. They powder and dress her. A male devotee fetches a large metal chain. He drags it across the ground like a snake, writhing. Its noise builds to a crescendo around the priestess who dances frenzied. The spirit is coming and its intensity is rage and vengeance. The priestess moves into a possession trance. A power pulls her into another world. Her movements climax and she collapses to the ground.

Silence.

In the stillness of the space, the devotees wait expectantly. Slowly the priestesses eyes rise, a glimmer of distant strangeness in them, as Mabali/Later Maladamatjuate speaks through her body:

THE PRIESTESS AS MALADAMATJUATE: As soon as we were married, my husband took me to his family home, far

from anyone I knew. He dressed me in a bodice with stripes and buttons, coins about my waist and a snake coiled around my neck. He made me a star in an exotic show and called me Maladamatjuate! The woman who charms snakes. I wrapped around his arm and fed at his hand. He said my nose was blunt and cruel, my tongue forked, and that my eyes had madness in them. He said I would tear him to pieces if he dealt with me softly. At night, if he was away, he had me chained to our bed. It was a long chain, long enough for me to use the chamber pot or to lie by the window and hear the sea at night. His game was to have me kneel in front of him when we made love and hold me tight in the back of my neck. He said he had to have me in front of him, in case I strangled him in the faltering candlelight.

I was none of these things, but I became them.

At night, in June I think, I slid off his arm and coiled around his neck, I snapped my chain in pieces and devoured him on the bed with his eyes wide open. He looked surprised, I don't know why. As your lover describes you, so you are.

MOVEMENT FIVE:**THE BEGINNING.****SCENE TWELVE:**

Mabali is waiting in the room in Germany. She has been locked up for months. Her relationship with Gerard is over. Still married, she agonizes over his betrayal and neglect. During this time, she has had visions of a great force that transforms and liberates her. Filled with bitterness, humiliation and regret, her anger growing a veld fire within, she is intent and nothing will prevent it.

GERARD: Mabali, here's your dinner.

MABALI: Gerard give me my freedom, I need to go home now.

GERARD: Impossible.

MABALI: I am not asking you...

GERARD: For what? What!

MABALI: You made me a promise, you are my husband. You betrayed me, it is over, let me go (she touches him).

GERARD: Agh (He pushes her away).

MABALI: Gerard!

GERARD: No more! Eat your dinner, get dressed, and pull yourself together!

He moves to untie the chain and lead her downstairs. He picks up the chain, but this time Mabali grabs the other side. A tug-of-war ensues and Mabali pulls the chain away from him. Gerard falls to the ground. Angry but determined he gets up and scowls. He moves towards the door. A light goes on behind a screen. We witness a horrifying but magical transformation (through shadows) of Mabali's body into a great seething viper. The sound of hissing enters the room. Gerard turns and Mabali has transformed into a giant python coiling and hissing through the air. He shakes with fear. She is hunting him down. She wraps her body around him, preparing for the crunch, then lunges down, devouring him. She looks up....

SCENE THIRTEEN:

A screen goes up and video footage appears of Mabali standing again at the ocean's edge, looking out to sea.

As in the first scene, JD is playing the accordion. Mabali appears in the costume of Maladamatjuate and gazes at herself on the screen. She looks out to the public and then begins, slowly, her snake dance. She cannot. She struggles with the red clothing about her waist trying to take it off. Her breath escapes and she is lost. She performs for us again but her song aches through the space with a realization of want, loss and betrayal. She longs for her home, but it is a wish, a dream. She sings again...

MABALI: Und das schiff mit agt segeln
Und mit funfzin Kanonen
Wird entschwinden mit mir...

JD plays up, slow and doubtful as the lights fade to black.



'GERARD: You'll love it there my dear, It's so
...So...So much more...Civilized!' (*Maladamatjuate*
2003:62)

APPENDICES

Additional Multimedia Strategies:

i. Ritual.

ii. Video.

iii. Soundscape.

i. Ritual:

A note on additional multimedia strategies employed in the production. The first is the use of live performance through ritual.

‘In Nigeria and Togo, Mami Wata worshipers write notes to their spirit and receive messages in the same form. Writing had thus become a ritual act, part of Mami Wata performance. Other means of communication are drawn from newer western technology - the telephone, airplane and motorcar help connect great distances between Mami Wata abodes in the oceans and on African soil.’ (Drewal 1988:181).

The function of ritual in *Maladamajuate* is to emphasize the diverse processes of transformation that inform the existence of Mabali as an icon in the contemporary world. They provide a counterpoint to the journey of *Maladamajuate* that operates thematically

on a number of levels. One is on plot level, to revive the image of Maladamatjuate in contemporary Africa. The second is to use the bodies of the priestesses to call the character of Mabali into a living performance space. The rituals establish many of the imagistic and thematic motifs that resurface throughout the play, linking Mabali and her 'frame of mind' to her African spirituality and heritage. The rituals critically explore the transformations and recreations of the Mami Wata aspect of Maladamatjuate. They investigate how the African body is constantly changed and mutated by the paradoxical forces of traditional belief/ colonialism, capitalism/ spirituality, rational/ irrational, African/western that operate in the modern world. The cultural layers of Mami Wata ritual links to the hybridization of the body of Mabali who is created as both African and Western. It celebrates these transformations but also laments those aspects of self that might be lost through the influences of colonialism and the west. The rituals were developed structurally on two levels:

1. Through documented research on Mami Wata cultural tradition.
2. Through a workshop process in which the religious and cultural experiences of the cast were used to create a dialogue of movement and spiritual performance through which they could relate to Mami Wata religious practice.

The rituals are divided up into scenes, which correspond to the journey of Mabali in the structure of the script.

Ritual One:

'In possession performances, Mami Wata mediums swim with their arms and speak in quasi-pidgin tongues as they relate their long journeys by boat, canoe or car to come from distant waters such as the Indian Ocean. Devotees write notes, speak with Mami Wata on the phone, and dance in a European ballroom style...All of these acts are bridges to Mami Wata, bringing her ethos into the world of her followers. Not that these worshippers emulate Europeans or Indians in their daily lives, but rather they ritualize certain behavior' (Drewal 1988:181).

In the first ritual we are introduced to the devotees of Mami Wata. The ritual begins with the priestess entering the trance of the Goddess through dance, she swims through the air, imitating paddling strokes on a boat. She has a snake around her neck, a major motif that heralds the entrance of Mami Wata's vision and power. She performs and impersonates the Mami Wata by donning a symbolic wig and powdering herself, a theme that is carried throughout the play. The rituals involve a hybrid system of western and African customs. Drawing on Xhosa rituals and traditional Mami Wata rituals the devotee characters give praise and offering to the Goddess. Practices such as telephone calls to the goddess, coca cola offerings, and writing on paper are used as part of the proceedings. We are introduced to some major elements of Mami Wata belief. These

are used to comic effect as the audience witnesses the transgressions and transformations of meaning around these common practices in western culture. The ritual plays with some of the more creative aspects of these subversions such as the use of sunglasses to create Mami Wata's image as a fashionable deity. Drewal talks of the reflective surfaces of water as recurring in various symbolic objects held as sacred in Mami Wata culture. Mami Wata wears sunglasses because 'she is a fashionable lady - a comment totally in accord with popular images of mermaids. But sunglasses are more than expressions of fashion. They, like mirrors, represent the surface of water, the threshold that separates as well as unites Mami wata and her devotees' (Drewal 1988). This idea of reflection and mirroring draws a vital link between the priestess and the character of Mabali.

Ritual two:

'The ethereal voice that pierced the room seemed to come from another direction...When we asked what she [Mami Wata] looked like, [the priestess] Mami Wata first said that no one had ever actually seen her, but then directed our attention to a chromolithograph on the wall...We asked the priestess how she knew that Mami Wata looked like the print and she replied: "Someone with special powers must have gone under the water to snap her picture." (Drewal 1988:169).

Ritual two begins with story telling in which the high priestess tells us of the dualistic forces of the goddess. Mami Wata bestows both wealth and blessing but she can also exact great vengeance and afflictions. The snake motif is used to illustrate these ideas, which anticipate the final scenes of Mabali's transformations into the viper. In the play, a coiled stuffed snake is used, similar to the objects used in Mami Wata religious processions. The priestess coils the snake around her waist, drapes it over her shoulder and 'holds it aloft in her right hand just as the snake charmer does in the print' (Drewal, 1988:171). JD the orchestra/tor provides theoretical commentary on the rituals before we observe them. However, seeing them performed provides a contrasting and immediate response to their meaning and function in the play. Here again the perceptions surrounding the goddess are brought to the fore - particularly the emphasis on her physical appearance and her Western wealth. Ritual two brings us full circle to the publicity print taken of Maladamatjuate and distributed in central and western Africa. We see the image resurfacing in the cult and the dynamic influence it has on their representations and transformations.

Ritual Three:

'They began by putting on perfume, cologne and talcum powder...the priests also donned (1) bright European-or sari- style dresses of imported fabric...(2) wigs of straight black hair... (3) Much jewelry' (Drewal 1988).

Ritual two begins with story telling in which the high priestess tells us of the dualistic forces of the goddess. Mami Wata bestows both wealth and blessing but she can also exact great vengeance and afflictions. The snake motif is used to illustrate these ideas, which anticipate the final scenes of Mabali's transformations into the viper. In the play, a coiled stuffed snake is used, similar to the objects used in Mami Wata religious processions. The priestess coils the snake around her waist, drapes it over her shoulder and 'holds it aloft in her right hand just as the snake charmer does in the print' (Drewal, 1988:171). JD the orchestra/tor provides theoretical commentary on the rituals before we observe them. However, seeing them performed provides a contrasting and immediate response to their meaning and function in the play. Here again the perceptions surrounding the goddess are brought to the fore - particularly the emphasis on her physical appearance and her Western wealth. Ritual two brings us full circle to the publicity print taken of Maladamatjuate and distributed in central and western Africa. We see the image resurfacing in the cult and the dynamic influence it has on their representations and transformations.

Ritual Three:

'They began by putting on perfume, cologne and talcum powder...the priests also donned (1) bright European-or sari- style dresses of imported fabric...(2) wigs of straight black hair... (3) Much jewelry' (Drewal 1988).

The process of bodily transformation in Mami Wata tradition, is very important to the themes and meaning in Maladamatjuate. Ritual three is intimately involved with this important aspect of worship - the recreation of Mami Wata through the bodies of her devotees. The recreation of their image according to the snake charmer in the print, reminds us of the transformations of Mabali throughout the story. These rituals in which the priestesses cover their bodies in white powder, mirror the mutations of Mabali in to the persona of Maladamatjuate and even further into the Mami Wata. Mabali's African body is whitewashed into the stereotypes of the exotic snake charmer. She is denigrated both literally and ideologically by the European public, into a set and immovable stereotype of difference that renders her invisible. Her exoticism is located primarily in her position as the outsider to that which is Western and contained, Mabali disappears. The Mami Wata devotees in this ritual however stand in the position of the inappropriate other (Minh-ha 1989). Both outsider and insider, their bodies exist in an empowering 'between' space that confounds the truth of essentialist dividing lines by threatening the stability of traditional meaning. They absorb Western codes and conventions and explode them into deeply African places of meaning. In the mirroring of Mabali's creation as Maladamatjuate through this ritual performance however, we are reminded of the harrowing destruction of her difference, in the wake of the celebrations of the devotees.

This ritual is based on a subversion of traditional European dance into Mami Wata worship. This style of dance is also followed by blues music, said to be a particular favorite of the Goddess. The ritual develops into a frenzied exploration of the ballroom

dance and all of the traditional meanings associated with it. The waltz is about definitive masculine and feminine roles, which the devotees imitate. As the dance builds into ritual Mami Wata emerges. The possession dance is characterized by Xhosa and Mami Wata choreography. The priestess through 'shivers, shouts and disequilibrium' (Drewal 1988:168) draws out of the emotional paradoxes of the ritual, to speak as the voice of Mabali.

ii. Video:

The multimedia element of video began originally as a leading feature of Mabali's emotional trajectory. Shot on two locations, the first part of the video locates Mabali in 1885. Using live performers as Gerard and Mabali (the same actress whom the puppet Mabali is modeled on) the scene takes place in an old photographic studio in Germany where Gerard prepares Mabali for her publicity shoot as Maladamatjuate. Using jump cuts and old film, the footage in this scene is edited in an animated way to portray an almost carnivalesque, clownish atmosphere. The next video sequences were linked to Mabali's inner life and desires. They begin simply with her gazing out to sea. In the following scene, she is in a boat, but when the shot changes, we realize that the boat is actually stuck in the middle of the desert. Initially she remains calm and tries to organize her next move. With very slow wide shots, the camera documents her trying to push the boat to water. The sequence builds as Mabali tries harder and struggle ensues. The boat grinds slowly through the sand but is stuck. She eventually gives up and wanders out into the desert. The footage ends with Mabali walking, walking and lost. In the first

production (2003) feedback stated that the sequences were too long and slow. The sequences also operated separately as scenes on their own. This was my intention. To break the frenzy of the piece with these rhythmic and terribly slow moments in which Mabali moved metaphorically within her own space. In the second production (2004), I decided to try something different and took the most important moments from the video. I used the photograph scene (for its plot value and symbolism) and the sea gazing (as Mabali's longing to set forth into her future and then later, longing to return home). The idea of the boat as a symbol of voyage is taken from the video and translated into the symbolic prop of the toy ship, with which the puppet Mabali interacts. The two short video sequences are blended into the second production. The photographic scene is used as a scene on its own in context. The sea footage layers the playing space simultaneously with live performance. The effects are both so different and the second production, with the shorter video sequences, definitely has a rolling and climactic pace.

iii. Soundscape:

The soundscape of the production is a vital aural narrative. It began as an aspect of the rituals during the workshop process and ended up as a great tool in pace and rhythm. Transitions are for me a most imperative force in a production. Without them pace can fall flat and timing be displaced. The soundscape operates as an aural link that travels over and through the transitions, linking scenes and creating atmosphere in the various stages of the show. It also locates scenes in their environment, often contrasting and signaling Germany or Africa. The soundscape occurs through the vocal dynamics of the

cast. Singing, sound effects, animal's sounds, and calls are all used. There are also live instruments. An accordion takes us to Germany and sea faring tradition, while a djembe drum provides the base notes of the African rituals. Recorded sound also provides us with sound effects and music. The soundscape is carefully orchestrated to enhance the mood and meaning of the show through its progressions and climaxes.

REFERENCES:

- Bailey, Brett. 2003. *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*. Cape Town, Double Story.
- Bester, Rory. 2003. *Berni Searle: Floating free*. Cape Town, Brendon Bell-Roberts.
- Brecht, Bertoldt & Weill, Kurt. 1928. *The Threepenny Opera (Reissue 1979)*. Methuen Publishing Ltd.
- De Lauretis, Theresa. 1988. 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation', *Theatre Journal* 40(2).
- Drewal, Henry John. 1988. *Performing the Other: Mami Wata Worship in Africa*. New York, The Drama Review, b.
- Gilman, Sander. 1990. *Sexuality: An Illustrated History*. New York, John Wiley.
- Jamal, Ashraf. 2003. 'African Sublime'. *Art South Africa*. Cape Town, Brendon Bell-Roberts. Vol 02 Issue 01.

Krasner, David. 2001. 'Black Salome: Exoticism, Dance and Racial Myths'. *African American Performance and Theatre History: A Critical Reader*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Lazaar, Karen. 1992. 'Something Out There/ Something In There: Gender and Politics in Gordimer's Novella'. *English in Africa*. Grahamstown, National Literary Museum. 19 No. 1 May.

Marneweck, Aja. 2003. 'Staging Stereotype and Performing the Exotic Erotic: An Interrogation of Desire in the Texts of Parks and Kennedy'. Unpublished MA. University of Cape Town.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. 1987. 'Not You/Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference'. *Inscriptions* 3/4.

Bastian, Misty L. 'Nwaanyi Mara Mma: Mami Wata, the More Than Beautiful Woman'. www.mamiwata.com. 5 October, 2004.

Parks, Suzan Lori. 1996. *Venus*. *Theatre Forum*. No 9.

Schneider, R. 1993. 'See the Big Show: Spiderwoman Theatre Doubling Back' *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*. University of Michigan Press.

Taylor, Jane. 1998. *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. Cape Town, Cape Town University Press.

Winterson, Jeanette. 1996. *Sexing the Cherry*. London, Vintage.

Wiss, Rosemary. 1994. 'Lip Reading: Remembering Saartjie Baartman'. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 5 (1&2): 11-40.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Burke, Susan. 1996. *American Feminist Playwrights*. New York, Twayne Publishers.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. 'Gender Trouble, Feminist Theory, and Psychoanalytic Discourse'. *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York, Nicholson, L ed. Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1989. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, Routledge.
- Chedgzoy, Kate. 1997. 'Frieda Kahlo's Grotesque Bodies'. *Feminisms*. Oxford & New York, Oxford University Press.
- Creed, Barbara. 1989. 'Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: an Imaginary Abjection'. *Fantasy and the Cinema*. New York, Routledge.
- De Lauretis, Theresa. 1988. 'Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation'. *Theatre Journal* 40(2).
- Diamond, Elin. 1995. *Performance and Performativity*. London, Routledge.
- Diamond, Elin .1997. *Unmaking Mimesis*. London and New York, Routledge,

Garrett, Shawn-Marie. 2002. 'The Return of the Repressed'. *Theater- Yale School of Drama Repertory Theatre*. 32 (2).

Harris, Geraldine. 1999. *Staging Femininities*. Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press.

Kennedy, Adrienne. 1962. *Funnyhouse of a Negro*. USA, Obie.

Marneweck, Roxanne. 2004. 'Theatre of Difference: Re-interpreting History'. Unpublished article.

Ramsay, Christine. 1996. 'Male Horror: David Cronenberg'. *Boys: Masculinities in Contemporary Culture*. New York, Westview Press.

Russo, Mary. 1994. *The Female Grotesque*. New York, Routledge.

Schor, Naomi. 1989. 'This Essentialism which is not one: Coming to grips with Irigaray'. *Differences* 1 (2): 38-59.

Shota, Babalwa. 2004. 'Practice makes Perfect'. *Sunday Times Magazine*. Cape Town, CTP Web Press. May 09.

Thomson, Rosemarie G. 1996. *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*.
New York, New York University Press.

Van Der Watt, Liese. 2003. 'Disappearing Act' Art South Africa. Cape Town, Brendon Bell-
Roberts. Vol 01 Issue 04.