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**Mise en scène as a feminine textual body:
making meaning in new plays**

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A dissertation submitted in *fulfilment* of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Arts

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

[2013]

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.

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Abstract

This study proceeds from research I have conducted through autobiographical writing, into my experiences of directing untried play texts for first performance. The question of ownership of the meaning conveyed by the play in performance, in the negotiated space between the writer and the director, provides the frame for this discussion. Who has the right of ownership over meaning, and in times of dissension about meaning, whose meaning should prevail? Since it is the writer's first opportunity to see his or her play on the stage, it would seem that the ethics of the situation favour the writer. However, if the director's modality is unconscious, intuitive and 'felt' as mine is, the best and most ethical path to follow may be hard to discern by both director and writer. At the same time, the intuitive modality of the director may be destabilized by the presence of the writer.

Within this conundrum my focus is on identifying, exploring and considering the director's modality, which I have identified as 'feminine', a term which in this text favours sexual differentiation as a feminist strategy for the re-creation and re-inscription of woman within a male dominated signifying system. Rosi Braidotti's evocation of Cixous' creative writing as a 'feminine textual body' in resistance to woman as 'non-said', and as procreation of woman as a subject, provides the inspiration for the conceptualization of mise en scène as a feminine textual body.

Using Green Man Flashing written by Mike Van Graan and directed by me in 2004, and Lara Foot's *Reach* that I directed in 2007, as case studies, I consider, as well as assess the impact, of my feminine directorial modality on these two performance texts. I am interested in how meaning is made from inside the feminine modality, what meaning is made, and finally, how the feminine modality is affected by the material circumstances in which these two plays were rehearsed.

My aim is to extend the feminine modality into the style of its dissemination by taking the reader into the 'feeling' of the modality in a style of writing that embodies the personal, intimate, intuitive qualities it invokes. I also take a more analytical view, assessing the efficacy of the feminine modality by using the lenses of materialist feminists such as Dolan and Diamond, as well as Irigaray's 'relational alterity'. The outcome of this exploration is that the feminine modality is both a solution and a problem, depending on material circumstances. Its paradoxical nature requires a third space in which it can stabilize, and yet remain accessible to the unconscious.

Acknowledgements: Gay Morris: (my supervisor) for total support; UCT Drama department for bursary support; Gordon Bilbrough & Rob Keith for layout; Solvej Vorster for referencing; Chas Unwin for Rosi Braidotti who opened the door to a wealth of female thinkers; Bryony Mortimer for suppers; Roberta & Revel Fox, Doctors Sally Candy & Rodney Erlich, Michelle & Clifford Bestal for meals, a bed and support; Sara Machett, a feminist, for whose ears, eyes and heart this is written.

CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	1
CHAPTER 1- Introduction.....	3
Case studies: <i>GMF</i> and <i>Reach</i>	6
Performance and representation	8
The process of directing	9
Considerations of style	11
The feminine aesthetic	16
Feminist discourse and the 'feminine'	20
The radical (feminine) Feminist position.....	22
Mise en scène as a text of feminine identity.....	23
METHODOLOGY.....	25
Contents	29
CHAPTER 2	31
The context of this study	31
Conceptual Frame and Literary review	35
Tools of Feminist theatre critique	40
Feminine affiliations and affects	45
CHAPTER 3. CASE STUDY - <i>GREEN MAN FLASHING</i>	49
The context of production.....	49
The play – story and themes	50
Structure and style	51
Hypothetical map of meaning – the play as a moral trial	52
A second map of meaning: Rape on trial	55
The feminine aesthetic and the written text.	58
The female figure centre stage: tipping the balance?	60
Reflections	62
FEMINIST READINGS.....	66
Nakedness at the vanishing point in <i>GMF</i>	70
Countering the male gaze: differing apparatus and frames in <i>GMF</i>	72

Reflections on the Feminist readings	72
CHAPTER 4 - CASE STUDY – <i>REACH</i>	75
Introduction.....	75
<i>Reach</i> – the play	78
Challenges for the feminine director – Style, representation, ideology.....	79
Towards a final text – the start of negotiation.....	82
Meaning (metatext) in mise en scène – isolation or loss?.....	83
Solomon – a problem with interpretation	86
Metaphor and poetry – the feminine unconscious.....	90
Doubts – the negotiation space and the feminine modality.....	93
The sutured textual body	96
Solomon and Marion - mise en scène as cultural textual body	99
Questions about the feminine modality	102
A different kind of negotiation	103
CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION	106
REFERENCES.....	110
PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE.....	117

CHAPTER 1- Introduction

In thirty-five years in the theatre profession in South Africa, I have been involved with different kinds of playmaking activities over and above working as an actor. With regards to playmaking these activities have included workshopping and devising plays; writing and directing my own plays or what is now termed 'auteuring'; and directing classics and imported contemporary plays. But in the last 15 years I have found myself primarily directing new South African texts, written by solo authors. It is this latter work of the director which is prompting the focus of this study.

My research in this study took the form of a 'search' for ways of thinking about what I had been 'doing' as a director of new written texts. After many years as a freelance director moving from job to job and without the continuity or community of a stable company with whom I worked, and without repeated collaborations with the same group of artists, I wonder whether all the work adds up to something coherent. Writing in the form of case studies through auto-biographical recall, I was hoping to find patterns, or signs of an approach or method, that would contribute to a body of knowledge about playmaking in South Africa. What I stumbled upon is consistent evidence of tensions, contradictions and paradoxes.

The challenge begins with a newly written text that has potential for multiple meanings precisely because it is not yet fully realized. Perhaps this is because at this early stage the writer doesn't know what he is saying. Alternatively he may know exactly what he is saying but is not fully aware of, interested in or conversant with, the stage signs that will serve to make the meaning on stage. Under these circumstances the director's role is to achieve clarity of meaning through *mise en scène* (the signs and materials of staging), and also in some cases, by collaborating with the writer in the writing process. The director's agency is to see the potential for meaning holistically: a vision which includes the written text, the performances, and how meaning will work on stage stylistically. And the director's expectation is that the writer and director will negotiate this meaning in a creative flow of exchanges. But negotiation may bring its own problems that can result in a staged outcome that is compromised or diluted. In the making of a work when the creative flow of exchanges threaten to deadlock, arguably the director should forfeit agency. If the director doesn't agree with the writer's choices an

uncomfortable process ensues, when the director is implementing a potential vision for the new play and endeavouring to serve the writer in spite of dis-ease or discomfort. Nevertheless the director must stay 'in service' to the writer's meaning, despite this discomfort.

Thus the collaboration between playwright and director generates the issue which prompts this study: the tensions between authorship and agency, particularly within the axiomatic partnership between the writer and director. Who creates meaning? Who owns the meaning? And in theatre's multi-voiced collaboration of writer, director and actors, whose meaning should prevail in times of dissension? It was this question that drove me to examine my own practice as a director of new playtexts. I began to ask why, how, and in relation to what conditions, I made choices in the course of directing a play text. These questions and the reflective process I employed in this study brought a number of spheres of influence to the fore of my attention; and my efforts have gone into unpacking these.

The material conditions of playmaking in South Africa contribute to tussles around making meaning on the rehearsal floor. With enough time to test all ideas in a laboratory situation, the writer and director could find solutions together in a trial and error process. Performance, whether or not it is derived from a pre-written text, is ultimately an activity with live bodies engaged in space, therefore 'doing' it reveals more about meaning than discussion. But in South Africa there is seldom sufficient financial support to afford enough time for trial and error. Thus in the local context the writing and directing of one's own work - the choice of auteuring - becomes an attractive option. This partly explains its recent prevalence as a practice in South Africa. In auteuring, the process of negotiation between writer and director is eliminated, thus removing a time consuming and fraught segment of activity from the playmaking process. The auteur is able to pursue personal instincts, hunches and directions without the need to justify her choices to the writer. Whereas when the director is directing a newly written text, the staging process could be fragmented or challenged by the presence and input of the writer. Why does this matter? It emerged, in my autobiographical process of teasing out these research problems that my way of working as a director seemed to be primarily instinctive and intuitive. My impulses, or choices, appeared to be connected to some inner voice or source, guiding meaning by mapping the whole. If a connection to this 'inner voice' was severed I lost judgement or conviction - or my way of knowing - or to complete the map metaphor, my coordinates. Understanding the exact nature of this illusive 'inner source' became a research priority.

After many pages of writing it seemed that what I was staring at was not a directorial method, but my own identity. As I examined each directorial choice I had made, from the initial choice of the play to the finest detail, and simultaneously, broader implicit beliefs about theatre, I tracked their sources to the forces that had shaped me as a person.

The most relevant of these forces was the discovery of feminism as I entered the theatre industry after graduation in 1977. It was then that I also encountered the full force of sexism prevalent at the time. There were few parts for women, few plays that reflected my experience of being a woman, and many male critics who to my mind were limited in their view of what makes 'good theatre'. While my experience of sexism and a male dominated world cannot fairly be compared with the kind of oppression experienced by the black population under apartheid at the time, I passionately resisted this feeling of exclusion and invisibility. My stance as a theatre maker became oppositional: I sought an alternative female aesthetic as well as a way of creating theatre that made sense to me and female colleagues and audiences. Outside of the mainstream of theatre I became involved in many playmaking initiatives that focused on women's issues, voices, lives and aesthetics. These efforts were noted and encouraged by co-founder of the Market Theatre, Barney Simon, who urged young directors to explore a highly personalized style or approach (Stephanou & Henriques, 2001:339). Under Simon's mentorship I flourished and entered main stream theatre with a confident directorial signature reflecting a personal perspective and aesthetic. In my position as Resident Director at the Market Theatre Simon helped me identify specific impulses that defined me as a woman and a creative person. I am thus led to the proposition that my craft, and identity as a woman and feminist, are forged together – they are one entity.

During my years of theatre practice, my feminist stance has become implicit, infusing my directorial activities and choices with their subjective, as well as ideological, flavour. It seems that I had been working for many years inside an unconscious modality. Thus, when challenged by a writer in the directing of her/his new play, the source of my choices was not readily available to me for articulation and negotiation, being buried in a complex and unconscious network of personal and ideological associations, premises and beliefs. It emerged in my research that this habitual, unconscious modality may be a threat to the equilibrium of agency in the negotiations between the writer and director about the meaning of a new text. I also have to admit that, despite my putative ethical position that a first staging of a new text should serve the intention of the playwright, in fact my 'preferred' version of meaning has

frequently 'wormed' its way into the performances of new texts I direct, precisely because my directorial modality is unconscious.

For the purposes of this inquiry I would like to take up one strand of the knot around agency and authorship and think about the underlying power and functioning of unconscious intuition and creative impulses, and their relationships with a female identity and the work of the director in making meaning in new plays. By exploring how meaning is made by the director with examples from some of my work, I hope to contribute to an understanding of the creative process of directing new written scripts in the South African context, particularly from a feminist director's point of view.

A core strategy of my research process was to examine past productions that I have directed. Two such productions proved most provocative: Mike van Graan's *Green man flashing* (henceforward called *GMF*) first produced by the writer and which I directed for the National Arts Festival fringe in 2004, and Lara Foot's *Reach*, which I directed for the Baxter Theatre in 2007 and which was again directed by Lara Foot (the writer) as *Solomon and Marion* in 2011. Neither of these plays fall into a formal category of 'feminist theatre', but rather fall into a category of 'new South African work'. From my account of these productions generated in the course of this study, it emerges that I am unable to avoid a subjective response to these plays, with the result that the meanings which I made, or which I endeavoured to make, were coloured by a feminist stance and what seemed to be a personal feminine aesthetic. As a result I began to think of a feminist stance, a feminine aesthetic and the meanings that were produced, as one entity: a feminine modality. This seems to be a useful term for the different aspects of directing, which are inseparable but which generate meaning together. For this reason, in this study I find it necessary to weave together my thoughts around these three entities. I shall briefly introduce the plays to show what I mean by this.

Case studies: *GMF* and *Reach*

GMF (2004) is a post-apartheid political play which deals with moral corruption in the new regime.¹ In the course of the action the rape of the female lead character is pivotal in the narrative. With close examination, I have found that my emotionally inflamed response to the

¹ The date 2004 refers to the first production; the play was first published in 2006 and then 2010. Hereinafter, when this study discusses plays *in performance*, and the play title is followed by a date reference - as was *GMF* (2004) - that date refers to the year in which the particular production was *performed*. These details are found in the reference list. I also may use the same date to indicate that I am quoting from the text that was used in rehearsal for that performance.

subject of rape resulted in directorial choices that favoured this theme, making the female character dominate the performance, with far reaching consequences for the meaning of the play. I believe that van Graan perceives his male and female protagonists to be of equal weight with each character representing equally important positions in his dramatic argument. While I initially observed this insight in my directorial choices, my subjective relationship with the topic of rape energized me later in the rehearsal process into producing significant creative elaborations which on closer examination could be seen as 'feminine'. Although the meaning I generated in *GMF* may not have been exactly what the writer intended, there is evidence to suggest that my feminine modality served *GMF* positively in that it achieved stylistic and thematic coherence in performance, while engaging audiences with its political relevance through a powerful emotional register. In other words the political and moral dilemmas of the play were 'felt' by the audience and not only understood on a cerebral level. It seems that my feminine modality of 'feeling' and 'sensing' a map of meaning infused a polemical play with an emotionally compelling register.

Significantly in this process, Van Graan gave me artistic autonomy and chose not to attend rehearsals. This decision shows a willingness on the part of the writer to accept the director's interpretation. Van Graan has said that he 'likes to give his plays to different directors to see what they will do with them'.² This stance has been borne out in his decision not to develop an ongoing relationship with a single director for his plays. For the 2012 revival of *GMF* he invited a different director – significantly a man – to re-direct it.

With *Reach* (Foot:2007) on the other hand, the writer attended 'run-throughs' and was central to important decisions about the making of meaning in the process of rehearsal. In these conditions my feminine modality may not have fared as well. A less overtly political play than *GMF*, *Reach* features an aging white woman, Marion, who is isolated after the death of her son through violent crime, and is befriended by a lonely young black man. I was drawn to the play because of the bereft mother figure (who reminded me of my own mother who lost a son) and the unlikely and fragile relationship that develops between the two characters. I saw this delicately negotiated relationship as a tentative metaphor of hope for reconciliation between cultures. However, my subjective response may have been a partial source of dissension between the writer, Lara Foot, and myself as the director. Although conceding to

² At Gipca's Directors & Directing: Playwrights symposium (24-26 August, 2012)

Foot's notion that 'isolation' was Marion's problem and not 'loss', my research revealed that unconsciously I found opportunities to 'slip in' *mise en scène* that supported my view. However, the process was uncomfortable and somewhat 'blind': in other words without a complete personal map to find my way I was unable to guide it with confidence.

This disjuncture between personal instinct and serving the writer's intentions raised pertinent questions about the possible limitations of the feminine modality. These questions became even more relevant when later, as part of this research, I viewed Foot's directorial version of her play which she re-named *Solomon and Marion* and directed for the Baxter Theatre (2011). With a new title, new cast and different interpretation, Foot led her production to box office success. Mine had floundered with small audiences in attendance. So contrary to *GMF*, the account of *Reach* reveals a complex and strained scenario for the feminine modality.

Performance and representation

As a feminist director of new texts I am not only concerned with the representation of female characters. In both *GMF* and *Reach* the white female 'leads' play opposite black male lead characters, whose representations I am equally engaged with. These male characters offered challenges of different orders - problems that I believe started with the written scripts. New texts in the untried phase may be unintentionally crafted with racial or gendered undertones and these problems may not reveal themselves until the play is in rehearsal with performers. Thus it becomes part of the director's work to try and navigate such representations with the actors during rehearsals. The feminine directorial modality therefore includes an awareness of the context of our South African racial past and present and not only issues pertaining to women.

With regards to the representation of women on stage, it became useful to re-excavate the feminist sedimentation of my views on women in theatre. Broadly, my concerns were related to the objectification of the female body, the role of the male viewer as 'owner' of the image; and how the image of the female might reinforce or oppose her subjugation. While these references may appear mainly 'pictorial' they take on further dimensions when the female subject is animated in performance. Here the pictorial is amplified, augmented or mediated by the inner life, energy placement, physicality and vocality of the performance, and particularly by the physical arrangement between the audience and the performer. These concerns about the female as a 'subject' on stage revealed themselves repeatedly in my

explorative accounts of *GMF* and *Reach*. Similar concerns arose about the representation of the 'black male subject', particularly in *Reach*.

But the representation of characters is only one of the director's concerns. What else does a director do to make meaning on stage? Given that I believed that my activities as a director had become largely habitual and unconscious, it became important to examine and name the different parts of my directing process. I started by asking which parts were conscious and which parts unconscious.

The process of directing

My process of directing starts with a preparatory phase long before rehearsals begin, in an instinctive, personal (and often emotional) response to the written text; and is followed by apparently more cognitive activities like research, analysis and crucially, the conceptualization of a staging concept in partnership with a designer. The ideas exist in the imagination of the director but must be concretized in set and costume designs prior to the start of rehearsals due to the demands of scheduling and planning in the theatre industry. These plans I see as a hypothetical text of meaning – in the case of designs they would be drawings - a map of possibilities that will be tested in rehearsal in a process that will consolidate, elaborate, change or discard the original plan. With both *GMF* and *Reach* it seems that with my hypothetical map of meaning I initially attempted to honour what I understood to be the intentions of the writers, and in this sense they involved conscious and conceptual thinking. In *GMF* my hypothetical text took the form of a metaphorical staging concept which I thought encapsulated the central idea of the play. In *Reach*, my hypothetical text was also metaphoric but less conceptual than *GMF*, taking the form of an emotional landscape that (I hoped) spoke of the psychically reduced state of the central figure, the lonely bereft woman Marion. That these two hypothetical 'texts' of *mise en scène* emerged in different ways and at different times, is relevant to the case studies of these plays.

Once rehearsals begin the director engages with the work of translating the hypothetical text (or map of meaning) into a staged reality by generating what Patrice Pavis calls the '*mise en scène*'. For Pavis '*mise en scène*' is the concretization of the written text through acting styles, scenography, decor, props, rhythm, proxemic, aural, kinesic signs and all other signifying systems on the stage that are not in the written text (1992:34). He elaborates this theory adding: 'The stage enunciators' - (signifiers) - 'gathered together by the *mise en*

scène , produce a global *performance text* incorporating the dramatic text which takes on a very specific meaning' (1992:30). It is this work of the director on the mise en scène , which I propose in my case, bears the imprint of the director's feminine modality. Ironically, it is during this phase when hypothetical meaning is translated into concrete signs, that the unconscious part of my modality plays the strongest role, with far reaching consequences for the meaning of the new text.

Once these unconscious creative choices have been 'worked in' as mise en scène , the director steps back and assesses the meaning made. She then consciously accepts or rejects her choices, allowing them to remain or changing them. These choices will yield 'very specific meaning' which Pavis calls the 'metatext' of the mise en scène, or 'the discourse of the mise en scène ':

In order to understand the concretization of the dramatic text by the *mise en scène*, we must look for the metatext of the mise en scène, i.e. its commentary on the text or the stage rewriting it offers of the text...one must be especially careful not to confuse this metatext (or unwritten text of the mise en scène) with the series of commentaries written on a dramatic work.... (1992:34)

The meaning engendered by the mise en scène is not separate from the written text but is integral to it:

More than a (stage) text existing side by side with the dramatic text, a metatext is what organizes, from within, the scenic concretization; thus it is not parallel to the dramatic text, but, as it were, inside it, being the result of the concretization circuit (involving signifier, social context and signified of the text). (1992:34)

There is something at the centre of the 'concretization circuit' of the mise en scène that creates coherence. From my point of view this is the director's hypothetical text - the thinking and planning prior to rehearsals which as I have said, may change but will still, in some form, provide an ongoing unifying principle. I therefore propose that the director is engaged with metatext as is any other 'reader' - while authoring it through her arrangement of the mise en scène. The director's focus oscillates constantly between mise en scène and metatext; she is both writer and reader of mise en scène. It seems that in this oscillation I swing between 'authoring' mise en scène in an unconscious state and 'reading' it in a conscious one. But significantly, I do not experience these two ways of making choices as different from each other - as different modes of 'thinking' - but as one modality. It is for this reason that I think of my feminine directorial modality as 'unconscious'.

Considerations of style

One of the key ways that a director may affect the meaning of a new play is through the style with which a *mise en scène* is staged and performed. The style chosen for the *mise en scène* can crucially augment or subtract meaning intended by the writer. Usually when directing a well established play I consciously incorporate my plans for a style in my hypothetical text - a defining factor in my early map of meaning. In the case of an established play a director may follow the style traditionally associated with that play; or conversely a director may consciously choose to 'deconstruct' or alter a play's received style to update its appeal, or for artistic or ideological purposes - because style has a definitive effect on metatext and meaning.

In our current era of postmodern eclecticism where styles are mixed, parodied and deconstructed, the single choice of a style for a play arguably signals an ideological stance and meanings associated with that stance. This seems to have arisen out of the tradition of associating genres with specific periods in theatre history in the west. One style or genre rises to replace another in a resistance to what is perceived to be a genre's growing irrelevance to society, or its artistic stasis. Realism for example, has historically been seen as a resistance to the broad and declamatory theatricality and social irrelevance of Romanticism but has now become associated with conservatism and middle class interests (Barton, 1993:286-7). Revolution follows revolution in form and style, with Brecht challenging realism's domestic and bourgeois interests with his Marxist diadactism (Savran, 2010:269); followed by absurd theatre which challenged the 'absolute positions' of political and realistic theatre and questioned the existence of meaning altogether (Barton, 1993:301-6).

With a new playtext the style needs to be teased out in the rehearsal process, in conjunction with the meaning of the embryonic text. On first reading, *Reach* appeared to be written in a realistic style and used seemingly realistic dialogue. When I speak of realism I am not talking about naturalism with which it is often confused. Whereas naturalism is closer to nature, random and disorganized, realism is a selective mirroring of what could represent reality. Symbolism and poetic effects may be found in realistic writing, as for example in Ibsen's *A doll's house* (1879), *The wild duck* (1884) and Chekhov's *The seagull* (1895) (Barton, 1993: 287). *Reach* seemed to fall into this category, the title being a metaphor for the effort made by the two characters to cross cultural and racial boundaries and 'find' each other. But during the rehearsal period of *Reach* the style proved illusive. While I instinctively resisted the realism which seemed dominant in *Reach* on the basis that it was passé and ideologically conservative,

and furthermore seemed to be blurred by other signs pointing possibly towards magical realism, in retrospect I have to consider that these associations between styles of theatre and ideological resonances, can at times be misleading when making meaning in a new play. When such associations are implicit and unarticulated, they become silent obstacles to the negotiation between writer and director and ultimately affect the efficacy of the production. My urge to infuse the realism in *Reach* with a metaphoric *mise en scène* for example, profoundly affected the metatext – the ‘reading’ or experience - of the audience. With this kind of stylistic elaboration I may have diluted the writer’s intentions.

Whatever one’s association with it, realism has become entrenched in a dominant approach to acting, taken up and preserved by film, television drama, ‘sitcom’ and soap opera. Although largely breaking with realism in form and structure, *GMF* seemed to me to require realistic performances. The influence of film is also present in *GMF*’s structure as it is comprised of many short scenes that jump back and forward over time and place. In addition van Graan emulates a popular television and film genre, the political thriller, providing suspense and intrigue. But it seems that Brecht’s challenge to realism’s middle class focus with his ideological aesthetics, had the most decisive influence on *GMF*.³

Brecht’s theories and practices with text, acting style and *mise en scène* were directed towards awaking class consciousness (Brecht, 1964:69-76). His theory of alienation (*Verfremdung* or the ‘A-effect’), is present in *GMF* in various elements (1964:100-103, 125, 136-147, 160-168, 172-174). Aristotelian identification with protagonist or antagonist is discarded in *GMF*, along with the comfort of catharsis (1964:183); and following Brecht’s later permutation of alienation as ‘dialectical theatre’, (2004:193, 226-229, 281-283), the characters in *GMF* emerge as morally ambiguous (or contradictory) under the stresses inherent in the legacies of apartheid. *GMF* also emulates Brecht’s approach to *mise en scène* in an economy of set and selectivity of semiotics with a breaking up of narrative into episodes - thus eradicating unity of time, place and action (1965:57-62; 200-202; 212; 217-220; 230-233; 249). It was these Brechtian influences in *GMF* that I took up and elaborated in the *mise en scène*, leading to a style that I considered to be in concert with the play’s core theme.

³ Mary Luckhurst summarizes Brecht’s objectives and vision: ‘[He] was committed to a radical dialectical relationship with its subject matter and audience. His primary objective...the awakening of the spectators socio-political critical faculty as the key to class-consciousness, empowerment and the gradual transformation of society’ (2006:127).

While realism and Brechtian theories influenced the mise en scènes of *Reach* and *GMF*, neither of these plays sits entirely within a conjunction of these categories in writing style. Both plays seemed to embody an amalgamation of styles in what could be described as 'syncretism', a South African trend:

in which innovative performers combine materials from cultures in contact into qualitatively new forms in response to changing conditions, needs, self-images, and aspirations. In South Africa, stylistic elements from many sources have been recomposed into new frameworks of meaning, reflecting changing moral relations, systems of identity and value, and realities of power. (Coplan, 1985:236)

Coplan looks at 'the story of South Africa's urban black performing arts' and how 'forces shape cultural expression through social process' (1985:230). Coplan's use of the term 'syncretism' seems to imply an informal, blending or admixture of culturally diverse forms of performance activity arising out of evolving social needs and political forces. Hauptfleisch describes the interfacing of Coplan's syncretic urban performance culture and experimental western theatre with politically driven, community theatre as 'hybrid', or 'crossover' theatre (1997:60). Indeed oppositional politics, multi-racial companies and venues created the crucible for the mixing of local performance forms with imported theatrical innovations initiated by Grotowski (1969), Brecht (1964, 1965), Boal (1979, 1992) and the like, nurtured in theatres such as the Space Theatre, Community Arts Project and the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, the Loft Theatre in Natal and The Market Theatre and Junction Avenue Theatre Company in Johannesburg.

The best of the hybrid work is a complex fusion of a variety of traditions, conventions and performance techniques drawn from various times and cultures. Thus it is difficult at times to separate out the provenance of the individual techniques used, because much of the hybrid work truly constitutes a gestalt of its own. (1997:61)

Hauptfleisch comments that, 'Realism, as a style and convention is totally irrelevant in this context, it is pure theatre, pure and intergrated performance' (1997:60). He notes that the most successful of these syncretic works in the 80's was *Woza Albert*, created by director Barney Simon and actors Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema (1982). As a precursor to the political *GMF*, it is worth briefly describing *Woza Albert*. Drawing upon the style of *Commedia del arte* with conscious references to the European clown tradition in the use of red (and white) fake noses to indicate the race of the characters, this play takes place in an empty space, with minimal costumes and props, and also uses mime, rhythms, dance and song, sourced from urban and rural African traditions and a notably energetic use of the body in performance (1997:61). This style greatly influenced the protest or resistance theatre which followed, consolidating a South African syncretic or 'crossover' theatrical style. The protest movement

then was not only political but spawned an exciting and unique character for South African theatre. However, Hauptfleisch posits that the impulse of crossover theatre was not universally lauded, and that the 'mainstream artistic establishment in South Africa' had, over the years, become 'frustrated at what they perceived as the limitations of the so-called 'protest theatre' of the 1970's and 1980's' (104).

After 1994 when South Africa gained freedom and a democratic government, it appears that theatre lost its 'wind' (Gevisser, 1994, Kruger, 1994), and until 2002 when John Kani wrote and performed in *Nothing but the truth*, according to Greg Homann, few new theatre works of significance were created. It is relevant for this thesis that Homann refers to single-author plays as important examples of a new political theatre in his introduction to the anthology *At this Stage: plays from post-apartheid South Africa* (2009).⁴ He writes:

As much as these four plays share common ground they also stand in their own right as astute and profound commentaries on post-apartheid South Africa ... [but they] pose a single question that pinpoints a contemporary South African debate: 'How do we shape our future when we are still dealing with the trauma of our past?'. (2009: 17,18)⁵

Although they all address this question, these plays are in diverse styles. Homann notes the stylistic shift from the 'monologic form' characteristic of protest theatre, to a more 'dialogic form' (2009:12) and points out that: 'The works in this anthology demonstrate a new confidence in writing plays in which the choice of form supports the plot and thematic concerns of the writer' (26). Possibly this is a significant contrast to the previous era of workshop and devised plays where issues of style, theme and structure were settled communally, and sometimes haphazardly. *Reach* and *Dream of the dog* employ realism while *Shwele Bawo* reflects the style and form of the 'best of protest work created under apartheid' (2009:26). In *Some mother's sons* Van Graan attacks the legal system, a theme he began in *GMF* when he 'probed corruption and evasion in the 'party'' (2009:13). Homann positions the former play as a stylistic offspring of *Green man flashing*:

When Mike van Graan's seminal show to date, *Green Man Flashing*, was first staged in 2004 the filmic style he incorporated was used to accommodate both the time jumps, back and forth, and the multiple locations. This structure added a refreshing layer to the work. Subsequently Van Graan has successfully continued to use this stylistic treatment. (2009:27)

⁴ Homann includes Foot's *Reach*, along with *Dream of the dog* by Higginson, *Some mother's sons* by Van Graan and Motshabi Tyelele's *Shwele bawo* (2009).

⁵ The style of *Nothing but the truth* (Kani, 2002) is unremarkable western realism which has received little negative commentary from audiences or critics. What Homann lauds is its searching exploration of the painful consequences on family life and relations of the struggle against apartheid.

The slow resurgence of single-authored, written plays, directed after the text is complete, was paralleled with the rise of auteur practitioners such as Brett Bailey, Yael Farber, Lara Foot, William Kentridge/Handspring Puppet Company, Magnet Theatre, Jay Pather and Aubrey Sekhabe, who created works from scratch together with a team of collaborators. Whilst each of these auteurs has their own thematic concerns, their work taken together demonstrates extreme stylistic innovation, which derives from earlier syncretic forms but is also further influenced by western postmodernist philosophers and theatre practitioners such as Robert Wilson (1996), Robert Lepage (1996), Ariane Mnouchkine (1996, 1993), Lev Dodin (1996) and Simon McBurney (2005). Overall, amongst South African practitioners the theatrical form itself has become a far more 'conscious' project, in which most formal theatre genres are eschewed, deconstructed or reconstructed in light of a more theorised approach to representation.⁶ It was within this context that Van Graan wrote *GMF* which overtly referred back to 'protest theatre' in political content but attempted to find a style that significantly distinguished it, hoping to capture the attention of a politically disengaged audience who were still caught up in the 'honeymoon' period of the new unified South Africa. In the same context Foot created pieces such as *Wombtide* (1995), *Ma Gents* (1998), *The Well Being* (1999/2005/6), and adapted Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1999). More recently she has created *Tshepang: the third testament* (2003), *Here And Now* (2006), and *Karoo Moose* (2006/7/8). All of these works experiment with objects, images, minimalist poetic language and story, told through physicality and metaphor. No wonder I was surprised then, when in 2006 Foot sent me *Reach* which appeared to be 'good old-fashioned realism'.

Following postmodernism, meaning in South African theatre productions has become increasingly ambiguous and exploratory. *GMF's* mix of 'thriller' genre, spatial and temporal deconstruction and a Brechtian refusal of resolution, comes close to what I call 'indigenous

⁶ Magnet Theatre's *Medea* (1994) was created in a physical theatre style and placed in a theatricalised version of Africa (Francis: 2006); Brett Bailey (2005,6, 9,) explored 'the darkest recesses of African spirituality' in an aesthetic 'that denounced traditional western theatre forms and embraced ritual, ceremony, trance and rural performance practices' (Homann: 2009:8). Kentridge/Handspring Puppet Co, as well as Farber, explored the effects of the 'truth telling' geist during the TRC, with Kentridge/Handspring pushing the boundaries of mixed-media with actors, puppets, screens, live music, deconstructed and fragmented images and narrative in *Ubu and the ruth Commission* (1997); while Sekhabe ripped into domestic and social dysfunction with a dilated super-realism, depicting issues such as rape, wife battering, prostitution and xenophobia. These are my personal recollections of Kentridge/Handspring and Sekhabe. As Associate Artistic director at the Market Theatre I oversaw the artistic development of *On my birthday* (Sekhabe 1995/6) and *Not with my gun* (Sekhabe 1997/8) whilst the playwright headed up the North West Provincial Theatre in Mmabatu (1995-1997). *Ubu and the truth commission* premiered during my tenure at the Market Theatre in 1997. For Jay Pather's company 'Siwela Sonke' see refs (2012);

postmodern'. Whilst the realism in *Reach* evokes postcolonial nostalgia with its solitary, rural, Victorian setting, *GMF* eschews all colonial references and textures. It is essentially contemporary urban South Africa, an unsentimental scenario of characters fresh from the corridors of power in business suits (and since it is the weekend in this text) 'smart casuals', evoking a representation of contemporary South African power and politics within a global context. Gabby lives in the trendiest form of middle class dwelling, a secure townhouse 'complex' – purportedly an antidote to the high levels of violent crime in urban areas.

Perhaps it is no accident that my feminine modality seems to thrive within the postmodern playfulness with form that has prevailed in the last two decades, for the act of deconstructing and revising style is synonymous with juggling with meaning. Geraldine Harris suggests that what postmodernism offers feminist theatre theory is a position 'which attempts to preserve differences, and which resists synthesis and the establishing in advance of a single model for either creating or analysing any sort of performance practice, political or otherwise' (1999:21). Applied to a feminist director free to explore her own meanings, this would be encouraging, but the agency to juggle with meaning through style is governed by the limits and needs of the new texts that I direct. However, as I have indicated, the unconscious, in the making of meaning, is not as easily restrained.

The feminine aesthetic

Having identified the conscious and unconscious parts of my directorial modality, made up of forgotten cognitive activity and now 'felt' as subjective impulses and responses to feminist topics, I had to consider that this modality may simply be the result of prolonged practice, the unconsciousness that arrives after many years of doing the same thing. Why would this be called 'feminine'? What made the *mise en scènes* and metatexts of *GMF* and *Reach* 'feminine' as opposed to 'masculine'?

I began to explore this conundrum by asking a simple question: is a feminine *mise en scène* different from a masculine *mise en scène*? The terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' have come to represent stereotypical notions of gender differences, a result of social and cultural conditioning. While not addressing the issue of whether my claim to a 'feminine modality' is a result of 'conditioning' in this study, it must be noted here that my sense of my unconscious modality reflects some common associations with the 'feminine', such as intuition, instinct and feeling. These stereotypical terms continue to be used in everyday conversation in theatre (for

example) with particular associations and aesthetics attached to them. Consider this comment by the Artistic Director of the Baxter Theatre, Lara Foot, (also the writer of *Reach*) after viewing the revival of *GMF*: 'I saw the Artscape production of *Green Man Flashing* the other night. I couldn't believe it. Yours was so different, so feminine. His (the second director) was so masculine'.⁷ Without knowing the topic of my research, Foot immediately identified sexual difference as a differentiating factor in the two *mise en scènes* of *GMF*. It seems to me that she was identifying a director's aesthetic, a way of colouring and flavouring *mise en scène* and thus meaning or metatext. So what did Foot see? What did she mean by 'feminine' and 'masculine'? When pressed for more detail she described my *mise en scène* in a free-flow of words: 'textured, private, female, naked, pain, see-through curtains, circles, movement, flow, emotion'. The male director on the other hand, she described as having created a *mise en scène* of 'sharp, hard geometric lines, black and white surfaces, defined and delineated spaces, and a 'high-tech' shiny finish, with a screen for projections'. These descriptions reinforce stereotypical notions of sexually differentiated aesthetics but like many clichés they were nearly accurate with regards to my *mise en scène*. I was prompted to relook at an article on my directing style by Anton Krueger (2006) in which he made a direct link between my identity as a woman and the aesthetic I had generated in productions such as *A doll's house* (1989). Specifically Krueger aligns the aesthetic of *A doll's house* with received notions of 'feminine' like intuition and instinct, and adds, significantly for this study, sensuality and intimacy (2006:233-249).

To elucidate this hypothetical 'feminine' aesthetic, I will briefly explore how these terms operate as signs of the former in the *mise en scène* of *A doll's house* (1989). Because *A doll's house* is a classic I felt at liberty to insert a personal interpretation of the play through *mise en scène*, unchecked by the ethics of honouring the intentions of the writer (Ibsen, 1879). Without changing the written text of *A doll's house*, I changed implicit intentions of the writer through altering some of his stage directions. For example, Ibsen sets the break-up of Nora and Helmer's marriage in a formal situation round a table and chairs (Ward, 1989:66).⁸ Instead, I

⁷ In conversation with the writer, July 2012.

⁸ This *mise en scène* is set up by Ibsen in the original (1879) at the beginning of Act 3. Translations differ but Nick Ward's (1989) and Christopher Hampton's (1972) both use the same instruction: 'The same room. The table and the chairs around it have been moved forward to the middle of the room. There is a lighted lamp on the table...'. This only differs slightly from the current English translation available online through The Project Gutenberg Ebook (2008): 'The same scene. The table has been placed in the middle of the stage, with chairs around it. A lamp is

inserted a *mise en scène* in which Helmer makes passionate love to Nora on the night of the 'break up' *scène*. He then wakes up in bed to find her at the dressing table cleaning her face. In post-coital vulnerability Helmer learns of his wife's intentions to leave him. Then in a desperate argument both parties attempt to persuade the other of their point of view. This is contrary to what seems to be Ibsen's intention that Nora has undergone a character change from confused and fractured 'doll' to a mature and decisive woman. My *mise en scène* on the other hand, came from a sense that it would be far harder for Nora to leave her children and husband than Ibsen had made it; that this difficulty would materialize as a desperate last ditch attempt to make Helmer see her point of view, to bring about some change in their condition.

These kinds of elaborations and nuancing of the writer's *mise en scène*, express my identity as a woman through choices that I believe express a female 'truth'. I cannot speak for all women so they are personal interpretations; they represent a direct connection to my own sense of the scenario as a woman. I was not intent on making a 'feminist statement' in which Nora bravely leaves an oppressive relationship in a bid for freedom and self empowerment; rather I wanted to explore what I personally felt was a highly complex emotional decision to leave her children and husband. And yet further beneath that feeling is the director's 'instinct' or 'sense' about the dialectics of story telling, of how drama engages an audience through conflict; that for a modern audience the conflict between Nora and Helmer would need to be complex, replete with turn arounds, twists, surprises, underscored by a desire for the marriage **not** to collapse; thus working against the text to find another possibility for meaning in a 'male' text. The feminine aesthetic then could be said to be initially personal and non-universal in character. Inside the feminine modality I am not attempting to reflect a universal female condition or position, but to speak as a woman with a specific 'sense' of a given situation, allowing the specific to resonate with broader and wider associations. This approach is sustained by an accumulation of detail in gesture and texture, usually small, intimate, visceral and sometimes quite ordinary.

To demonstrate I return to the scenario of Nora and Helmer in bed after making love. She wakes up earlier than him and in the privacy of her bedroom, wipes the seminal fluid from her inner thighs. She then proceeds to take off her make-up at her dressing table. Krueger writes:

burning on the table.' One presumes Ibsen had in mind that the 'break up' scene would occur round the table, a fairly formal arrangement.

Stopford approaches a painfully intimate moment by means of a physical representation.... By going into such extremely fine detail (such as the fact that Nora 'wipes herself down') Stopford tries to approach and convey a tangible, visceral 'reality' and goes beyond what some might consider to be acceptable as a public portrayal. (2006:239)

A deeper reading of this gesture may see it as a final erasure of her marriage to Helmer as she is about to announce her intention to leave him. I would not have been consciously thinking this when exploring the gesture; my attention would have been focused on the visceral logic following the sexual act; unconsciously I would have trusted and hoped that more meaning would resonate from it. Once it was achieved I stepped back and decided it was true to the situation and later saw that it resonated as a metaphor. Put in a different way, I first followed Stanislavsky's (1937) injunction to observe the 'given circumstances' without considering meaning; and then stepped back to 'read' a meaning (1937:54-71). These thoughts I shared with Krueger:

If Nora and Torvald have just made love...then logically she will have seminal fluid about to flow down her inner thigh. What would she do about this? She would wash or wipe herself down. Every woman (and every perceptive man) ... would know this ... I'm honouring a knowledge that the audience and I share ... building a kind of trust by stimulating in them real connections with their sense memories. (2006:239)

This then is an example of what could be considered a feminine aesthetic seen in the use of female detail and texture. By using a common, but intensely private gesture, I attempted to engender a sense of shared experience. It is not only my inner world of sense and sensuality that was 'in play' when I made this choice, but a shared world of the senses, a space of common knowledge, which is nevertheless private and taboo. Such feminine corporeal specificity does not usually belong in the world of a male dominated stage and in a revered master of classic realism such as Ibsen. And yet many audience members would have recognized Nora's actions. This gesture, I suggest, served as an example of jolting the audience into a visceral feeling of recognition: whether the feeling is positive or negative makes little difference as long as there is a strong response or affect (Thompson, 2009). An implicit aspect of my feminine aesthetic I propose then is to engage the audience emotionally, sensually and viscerally. These descriptive terms partially echo Foot's description of my 'feminine' mise en scène for *GMF*. While arising from specifically personal references, the feminine aesthetic implicitly seeks to intersect with the audience's personal references in an experience of the senses and the body, rather than on a cognitive level. Therefore the reception of mise en scène – in Pavis' terms the 'metatext' – takes on an emotional and embodied inflection.

This is borne out in the case study of *GMF* in which I felt compelled to transform a polemical debate into a visceral experience for the audience. In *Reach* I was compelled to include a metaphoric, emotionally resonant *mise en scène* which made meaning beyond the order of signs presented by the realism of the style in which it seemed to be written. My unconscious impulse was to intensify and amplify the emotional and poetic resonances, not only through the obvious signs of emotional performances, but through the sensual and poetic signs (such as metaphor) and signifiers of *mise en scène*.

The relationship then between the unconscious, the body, the sensate, emotions and perception is central to the feminine modality, connecting the process of making meaning to the order of meaning that is made. Having understood this, it still remains for me to elucidate the feminine aesthetic more precisely. It is necessary to look closely at the term 'feminine' as it presents a fundamental and contested issue in feminist theory. Firstly the different views on the term 'feminine' in feminist discourse need to be dealt with.

Feminist discourse and the 'feminine'

The term 'feminine' is contentious amongst feminist thinkers and requires careful navigation through contesting strands of thought. It will be useful to re-rehearse very broadly the theory that I explored to arrive at a personal and viable understanding of the term 'feminine'.

The debate centres broadly around the acceptance or rejection of sexual difference as a foundation for sexual identity and the formation of 'subjectivity' or 'self'. Most feminist thinkers agree that the term 'gender' refers to sexual identity imposed by socialization or culture. This implies that women and men are 'conditioned' by male dominated society into 'a construction' of what male and female, masculine and feminine are (Moffett, 2008, Dolan, 1991, Case, 1988, Flax, 1993, de Lauretis, 1987).

The debate thereafter broadly divides into two ideological camps. On the one hand are those who, despite the dangers of a socially and culturally imposed 'norm', support the theoretical idea and physical reality of sexual difference, claiming and celebrating their feminine identity and particularly the reality of their bodies (Cavarero, 2002, Cixous, 1994, Irigaray, 1993, Braidotti, 1991, Kristeva, 1986). Sue-Ellen Case (1988) tells us that these proponents of sexual difference are known as 'radical feminists' or 'cultural feminists' (63). On the other hand there are those, known as materialist feminists, who resist such a stance on the

basis that the notion of what is 'feminine' has been 'constructed' historically by the male cultural hegemony (Dolan, 1991, Delphy & Leonard, 1992, Wittig, 1992, Diamond, 1997).

Judith Butler worries that the differentiating terms 'feminine' and 'masculine' reinforce heterosexuality as the norm, thus excluding differing sexual identities like lesbian women, homosexual men, and intersexed and transexed individuals (2004:40-56). Black feminist movements have felt equally excluded by the norm implied in the terms of 'feminine' (Shepherd & Wallace, 2004:74).

All these positions overlap and differentiate in 'typologies' that are accepted by some and discredited by others. Shepherd and Wallace iterate three distinct approaches, initially identified by Gayle Austin (1990) to identify these diverse stances. They posit that feminism may severally be:

...a separatist politics that champions qualities that it presumes are essentially womanly ('radical'); the pursuit of equality with men on the basis of a shared humanity ('liberal'); and a focus on gender being culturally produced, implying a necessary engagement with the class politics of the political left ('materialist'). (2004:74)

It is from these typologies that black feminists felt excluded (2004:74). However these categories do not reflect more recent nuances that have developed between these positions, at times bringing them closer. De Lauretis writes:

What is emerging in Feminist writings, is ... the concept of a multiple, shifting, and often self-contradictory identity ... an identity made up of heterogeneous and heteronomous representations of gender, race and class, and often indeed across languages and cultures; an identity that one decides to reclaim from a history of multiple assimilations, and that one insists on as a strategy. (1986:9)

With this nest of conflicting thought strands round the term 'feminine', or 'essentially womanly' (Shepherd and Wallace, 2004:74), I was compelled to clarify and deepen what I mean by 'feminism' first, and secondly investigate how to navigate some of the negative associations attached to sexual differentiation and the 'feminine'. Was there a way of thinking about the 'feminine' positively? This led me to the Italian feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti, who proposes a positive position on sexual differentiation in a strategic move that makes a space for the redefinition of the term 'feminine'; in other words a space in discourse and creativity in which 'woman' is free of the 'constructed' limits of 'feminine'; a space in which woman owns and creates what is feminine. Braidotti's position on sexual differentiation is closely aligned with de Lauretis:

Feminist theory is all about an essential difference, an irreducible difference though not a difference between man and woman, nor a difference inherent in 'woman's nature' (in woman as nature), but a difference in the feminist conception of woman, women and the world (de Lauretis, 1989:3 in Braidotti, 1991:209).

This position of 'difference' is located in a theoretical dialogue between philosophy (reason) and psychoanalysis (the unconscious). Braidotti starts with a radical feminist critique of 'reason'.

The radical (feminine) Feminist position

Reacting against the philosophic premise that rational thought is proof of the subject's existence, Braidotti writes about the power of the unconscious to disrupt this cornerstone of modern philosophy. Until the advent of psychoanalysis, western philosophy recognized as fundamental the principle that proof of the thinker's (or subject's) existence was affirmed in the moment of doubt about his existence. This philosophic premise is encapsulated in Descartes' infamous quote translated from Latin as 'I think therefore I am', now known as the 'cogito'. Braidotti posits that this dictum, which became the foundation of modern western thought in the Augustine Cartesian model, existed as 'a meta-language' which favoured 'man' as subject (the human norm) while excluding 'woman' as a subject; or distorted women's existences, identities, representations and ways of being in discourse, writing and the realm of signification (1991:16-45). This symbolic exclusion or distortion had and still has, far reaching political, ideological and material implications for women and feminists. Braidotti suggests that this meta-language favouring the male as subject is the scaffolding with which the socio-political structures of patriarchy have been upheld and maintained.

[T]he activity of thought, viewed as a specific instance of authority in a chain of effects of power, can be neither pure nor universal. It is always sexed and as a result it manifests the power intrinsic to/in language. The sexed character of discursive power, seen also in terms of its links with the socio-political structure of patriarchy, forms the basis of the radical feminist critique of Reason. (1991:211)

Patriarchal discourse, writing and thought – and importantly the classification and dissemination of knowledge undergirded by reason - are inseparable from the socio-political structure of patriarchy that perpetuates women's oppression in the real world. Thus Braidotti welcomes the challenge presented to 'reason' by Freud (1912) and Lacan's (1949) psychoanalytic theories of the unconscious which exploded the entrenched notion of the rational 'subject' as the model for 'human'. Braidotti sees the unconscious as an ally of 'woman' in that it unsettles the meta-language of philosophy, allowing women to infiltrate the discipline with different kinds of language and writing as modes of resistance, as a way of declaring woman as a 'subject', in the shape and form that she experiences and imagines herself to be (1991:40-42, 129, 138-139).

Mise en scène as a text of feminine identity

Braidotti's idea of 'writing' (1991: 238-39) as a form of resistance and her embrace of the unconscious as a form of 'enunciation' (171), led me a step closer to thinking about the director's mise en scène as a form of enunciation. I began to see that there are features of the unconscious feminine modality when generating mise en scène which parallel a mode of 'enunciation' in psychotherapy. In psychoanalysis there is no meta-language, no priority given to 'reason' as proof of the subject's presence or existence, as is required in philosophy. Instead, psychoanalysis privileges all forms of enunciation and speech forms and everything missing from reasonable, cognitive, rational and linear thought:

...the most imperceptible utterances; the lapses, the flaws, the faltering, the fragments of dreams through which the unconscious manifests itself. The scandal of the unconscious lies in its challenging the centuries-old association of thinking with consciousness. (Braidotti, 1991:28)

In the process of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy raises the status of the unconscious to a text of signs that replaces or even better – augments 'reason' with different orders of meanings, such as the symbolic, metaphoric, elliptic, and importantly, visceral.

It seems to me that the director's feminine modality is comprised in good part of these so-called non-rational utterances of the unconscious. One could propose that the written playtext is a representation of conscious thought (although obviously different kinds of thought activities go into making it), whereas mise en scène represents unconscious or sub-textual meanings being a product of what is felt and intuited, as well as what is thought about, in response to a playtext. The unformed 'thoughts' of the unconscious infiltrate mise en scène in various ways: with images, impulses, sounds, associations, 'fragments of dreams', forgotten experiences, 'lapses', 'flaws' and 'falterings' (Braidotti, 1991:28). These unconscious impulses manifest from, around, under, through and over the playtext, yielding a metatext with signs of the director's feminine identity, as signs of her being, as a 'subject'. This description implies a listening to and allowing of instinct and intuition, qualities of 'feminine' essentialism of which materialist feminists warn us - in Plaza's case - ironically:

If women are dominated, it is because they are 'not the same', they are different, delicate, pretty, intuitive, unreasonable, maternal, have no muscle, no organizational temperament, are rather futile, and do not see beyond the end of their noses. All of which stems from the fact that they obviously have smaller brains, slower impulses, dissimilar hormones, which produce irregularities. (Plaza, 1978: 93-104 in Braidotti, (1991:128)

Krueger finds a way through the potential essentialism in my unconscious feminine modality by proposing that:

for Stopford, intuition has less to do with being a man or woman than it has to do with being faithful to one's convictions. So to be intuitive is to have faith in one's instinctive responses, and to have the courage to maintain that faith. In this sense to be intuitive is precisely not to be continuously swept away by one's emotions, and not to be passive, two aspects which a stereotypical definition of "femininity" might require. (2006:236)

The point is to be receptive to intuitive impulses instead of cut off from them. My idea of the feminine rests on allowing intuition to speak to you through the unconscious, assessing the value of what is signalled, and then acting on it. A connection to intuition and instinct is a connection to a source of energy, an energy that is dynamic, that leads to action (Courtney, 1995). Richard Courtney usefully posits a connection between unconscious impulses, intuition and instinct as aesthetic sources of thought and energy, in other words as the source of creativity. Further, he links intuition and instinct to 'feeling' out of which significance emerges. He proposes that feeling, instinct and intuition lead to cognition. Following Courtney, the unconscious is the route to meaning for the creatively dynamic subject - in this case the director (1995:19-33).

In my terms the feminine also includes all sexes or intersexed people who feel themselves to be excluded from the hegemonic 'norm' and from the status of 'subject' (Butler, 2004:52-3). I propose then that 'the feminine' is a sign of personal and creative freedom of expression and empowerment, arising dynamically from a personal psychic source, which functions within socially responsible limits. Within this frame, sexual differentiation is a way of claiming an identity that re-routes some of the 'essentials' of 'essentialism' towards a creative end. It becomes a 'sign' that has no received features of what feminine is or means; rather the signs shift and morph in a space for the female creator to fill with her own terms of the 'subject', in resistance to a lack of terms or terms that have been historically defined for her. Braidotti points out that women have chosen many ways to reshape and redefine 'woman'. They have, for example:

adopted a variety of places of enunciation....from a sarcastic Dionysian spirit, to the serious; from the poetic vein to political philosophy, different 'styles' of thought follow one another and coexist within this vast laboratory of ideas, reflection and writing that is the women's movement. (1991:171)

There is richness in multiple platforms – 'places of enunciations' – from which women speak and figuratively reinscribe themselves. I am inspired and moved by many women in the arts of all cultures who attempt to 'write' their bodies/themselves into positivity, into something they can love and believe in, as a self or identity; a refusal of the negatives of the feminine and of patriarchy as practised in the real world of South Africa. Their places of enunciation can be in

choreopoetry, one-woman shows, dance, stand up comedy, directing, playwriting, praise poetry, academia, fiction, documentary, and contentiously I include here activities that are not considered performance, like bead-work and embroidered tablecloths. It is in the 'doing', the creative embodied act that the feminine emerges as a metaphor, or signs, which positively make her visible with an effect on her world. Thus my text of 'self' in *mise en scène* is one of many, co-existing in a 'vast laboratory of ideas'.

Although born out of opposition to a male hegemony over meaning in theatre, my aim is not to negate 'man' but to create 'woman'. My focus is on creativity – enunciation – and meanings that contribute to the positive status of women. At stake then, is the act of 'doing', and the signs that emerge from the act of doing. My term for feminism as a stance that embraces multiple voices or enunciations is thus clarified: 'to be a feminist is to be a woman aware of her oppression, acting on the basis of that awareness with other women: it is to "think oneself" with them' (Braidotti 1991:171).

METHODOLOGY

In 'think[ing] oneself' with other women then, this study could be seen as an extension of the self-text of *mise en scène*, a further place of enunciation amongst 'the vast laboratory of ideas' that is feminism. My method of enunciation in this thesis is to aim where possible, for a personal feminine approach in my style of writing. In other words I hope to unite the style of my feminine modality with its dissemination.

The style of dissemination of my feminine modality arises partly from my research which was conducted through extensive 'writing' about my experiences on multiple productions. Writing was the means by which I thought about 'what I was doing as a director on new texts' - and it was through the process of writing that insights emerged. I wrote from many different angles: my input into the written text, effect on style and aesthetics, effect on performance and representation and on the political and ideological positioning of the performance text. With this broad range of material in front of me, I narrowed my interest to a focus on the feminine modality in action – how the *mise en scène* is made, what *mise en scène* is made and what the affects are. I have since narrowed down the research focus even further by choosing from *GMF* only a few pieces of what seem to me prime examples of 'feminine' *mise en scène* with a feminine aesthetic – and possibly even meaning and metatext. The idea is to concentrate on these chosen pieces in some depth, examining them from different feminist

angles. In *Reach* I also choose a few scenarios to demonstrate the feminine modality and aesthetic, but then compare and contrast them with Foot's *mise en scène* in *Solomon and Marion* (2011). In this respect the case study of *Reach* takes a different direction to *GMF*.

The form, tone and structure of this thesis is influenced then, by the fact that it is in writing about it that an understanding of my process of directing has unfolded, become 'visible', and continues to unfold as I continue to write. Thus it is that the structure of my thoughts/thinking is reflected in how this thesis unfolds: in irresolute zig-zags and sometimes comfortably, in concentric circles, usually left open. This approach is further provoked by the emotional *experiences of writing* about *GMF and Reach* which were markedly different. With *GMF* the 'enunciation' 'flew' out of the body and into the text; there was flow and excitement in the process of writing. With *Reach* I struggled to write, to articulate the tensions and contradictions that arose for the director in the presence of the writer. To 'face into' possible truths about your own fallibility or failures, (and there is no separation between personal and professional in the feminine modality), is quite simply, painful.⁹ The paralysis and indecision that I experienced in the collaboration with the writer (and echoed in the process of writing) may have been an understandable response within the circumstances (discussed earlier in this chapter); but it is an uncomfortable memory. The possibility that in this absence of agency I unconsciously found ways to insert my feminine aesthetic brings scant comfort; the revelation, through writing, of the paradoxical nature of this unconscious move, was salutary. Thus it is that the 'enunciation' of *Reach* in this dissertation navigates personal tensions about the topic which affects how it is thought and written about: at times cautious, circuitous, and indecisive. I nevertheless attempt to trace in narrative form and with some delicacy, the complexities and paradoxes for the feminine director in the negotiation between writer and director in *Reach*. *GMF*, on the other hand, emerging in my research as a possibly more robust example of the feminine modality and aesthetic, comes under the cosh: I test and challenge the *mise en scène* in *GMF* through the lenses of some rigorous feminist lenses.

In the writing of this thesis then I attempt to unite the feminine modality with the style of 'enunciation', prompted not only by the process of the writing of my research, but also by the notion of the feminine textual body in which the 'presence' of a female subjectivity (or

⁹ There are many directors who are happy to 'serve' a vision (and thank goodness for them). On the other hand, see Alex Chisholm's interesting article on what director's can do to new writing when they override the play with their personal vision (2012).

writing subject) should be evident. To attempt to achieve this I write in two registers: academic as well as personal. In this I am inspired by Peggy Phelan's introduction to her essay 'Immobile Legs, Stalled Words' (2010:432-435) and Nicole Ward Jouve's *White Woman speaks with forked tongue: criticism as autobiography* (1991:1-12). Both writers show how personal experience is at the genesis of their ideas. Cultural theorist Elspeth Probyn raises concerns about 'who' is 'speaking' in discourse and her ideas of 'speaking the self' as a woman have guided some of my thinking:

[T]he self has been variously claimed and normally left in a "neutered" natural state, the sex of which is a barely concealed masculine one. And until very recently, when selves got spoken they were also taken as a-gendered although of course they were distinctly male. (1993: 2)

Probyn lays out the problem for feminists when she asks 'what self' is talking when we write?

She suggests that when a feminist writes she accepts that the female 'sexed self' is in flux:

I see the self as material evidence of our fluctuating being as women; as a concept, this self designates a *combinatoire*, a discursive arrangement that holds together in tension the different lines of race and sexuality that form and re-form our senses of self.... On the one hand, I cannot think of the self outside of the immediacy of being gendered; on the other, the movement involved in the recognition of gender must be refracted and put to work in figuring modes of speaking....The self is not simply put forward, but rather it is reworked in its enunciation. (1993:1-2)

There can be no clearly defined, clearly positioned self who speaks as a director, a woman or a feminist; we are in the process of forming ourselves in the act of enunciation. The process of reception of such a subjective enunciation takes on a meaning separate from the self who is writing. However, I proceed in the recognition of the *desire* to be 'present', as much as I can be 'present' as a 'self', in the writing of this study. Thus it is that the first of my two registers of writing attempts to embody this desire to be present, to be a feminine subject. This register is informal and subjective, and with it I attempt to evoke a feminine creative modality which I have claimed is sensate and unconscious. I would like to evoke the timbre of that modality; to take the reader 'inside' the feeling of it; of how the connections with inner impulses occur and become insights - and ultimately, *mise en scène*. This 'voice' will also engage in emotions and viscerality with which I express, in my own feminine terms, the process of directing. It also includes everyday speech and slang - perhaps a smattering of profanities - and may also suddenly veer into metaphor and poetic images. Because this 'voice' is a written recollection of words that were once spoken and not recorded for research purposes, it is in a sense a 'construction' or representation of a feminine modality. But at times I have informally tested the details of my recall in conversations with actress Jenny Steyn who played the female lead in *GMF* (10 April 2012), Lara Foot, the writer of *Reach* and Mfundo Tshazibane (15 September

2012), the assistant director of *Reach*.¹⁰ They have concurred with almost every detail of the mise en scènes under discussion, as well as how choices were made. One way or another, in the act of writing and remembering I attempt to reconstruct what I said and thought at the time of directing.

With the second register I step away or take a critical stance, in *GMF* particularly, contemplating what meanings could have been made in the feminine mise en scènes that I generated. I analyze the possible metatexts from several angles: from my own, audience's and critics', and as an exercise to challenge the reflexivity of my feminine aesthetic I examine the ideological and theoretical implications of the representations of the female figure on stage, within a materialist feminist frame. In *Reach* I use the second, more analytical register to reflect on the changes that were wrought within the feminine modality in response to the necessity for negotiation with the writer. I attempt to assess the 'damage' to the feminine textual body by looking at the meaning that was made in *Reach*, and the implications for the idea of the feminine textual body as a cohesive whole.

This study then is partly an autobiographical text - a 'self reading' or 'self-critique' - in conversation with the 'texts' of other feminist writers and theorists. Partially ethnographic, it does not include the contribution and role of actors in the making of meaning in new texts. This is a vast subject in South Africa which includes issues of agency and authorship, race and representation, and the colonization of representation on stage by white directors and writers. While I do refer to a segment of this problem from the director's point of view, the scope of this inquiry will not allow for a full inclusion of this topic.

However, I use material from my interactions with the writers of the plays where necessary. In this regard I have been particularly fortunate that *Reach* was Lara Foot's MA research production. Her written dissertation explores the notion that the writer's earliest impulse or 'hunch' for the play, should be the guiding factor for unravelling meaning in mise en scène. The title, *Mise en Scène as (Pre)text: an insistence on a negotiated space for the creating of new works* (2007), intimates at how useful this text has been for me, in that the 'negotiated space' axiomatically includes the director. I thus at times enter into a dialogue with Foot's thesis, specifically where she was able to illuminate in hindsight, aspects of her process that appeared opaque to me at the time we collaborated on *Reach*. Further, we had a particularly

useful ‘post-mortem’ conversation six weeks after her production of *Solomon and Marion* in September 2011, in which we not only cleared up misunderstandings that had arisen in and **about** the process of *Reach*, but Foot related to me the process that she had undertaken to generate her mise en scène for *Solomon and Marion*. Combined with the fact that I viewed this production, this conversation has contributed significantly to the case study on *Reach*.

In the case of *GMF* I have as a record the emails that van Graan and I shared in the process of his writing leading up to the first production. While this part of the collaboration – the period of writing – is not the focus in my case study of *GMF*, I have been able to corroborate and challenge certain personal memories of the process with this material.

Before concluding, it is important to acknowledge the tensions and contradictions of ‘writing’ my feminine identity into and through the texts of playwrights. I try to balance this self-involved stance by demonstrating how the meaning made through these texts is not only an expression of subjective responses but that these very subjective responses are prompted by the social context and time in which the production takes place. If for example, the rape statistics in South Africa were not as high as they are, I may not have responded so strongly to the topic of rape and the final affects in *GMF* may have been quite different. This thought brings me to the heart of the relevance of this study with which I start Chapter 2.

Contents

I begin Chapter 2 with a discussion on the status of women in South Africa, which from my view amounts to a ‘state of emergency’. The social context in which I work as a director and in which this study takes place, contributes to the rationale for a feminist frame for this thesis. With an incidence of rape at the centre of the *GMF* narrative, I take up the issue of our particularly high rape statistics which point to the female body as a site of violence and oppression. I discuss this crisis within the current social milieu in which woman are politically sidelined, culturally disempowered and physically abused.

Also in chapter 2 I move into a deeper investigation of my conceptual frame of the mise en scène as a feminine textual body, locating it in the overlapping discursive space between philosophy and psychoanalysis. Since it is inspired – as well as challenged - by feminist thinkers, the exposition of my literature review and conceptual frame occur together. The writers that I have recruited fall into three categories: those who help me motivate my conceptual frame of mise en scène as a feminine textual body; those who provide critical feminist lenses for theatre

and performance; and overlapping with the last are those who provide theories of perception and reception as sensate and embodied.

In chapter 3 I present my case for the unconscious, feminine director in *GMF* by looking at segments of *mise en scène* that seem to arise from the feminine modality and express a feminine aesthetic. I assess the metatext (meanings) from the perspective of the director and then through the lenses of various feminists, but particularly related to the representation of the female body within the field of vision. This takes me to a discussion on perspective and ways of seeing. I conclude by examining the *mise en scène* against my claim for a sensate, embodied affect. I discuss my findings which, despite revealing ethical tensions and theoretical contradictions, point to some efficacy for the feminine modality and aesthetic in the final performance text and metatext.

In my case study of *Reach* in chapter 4 I explore how the presence of the writer disrupted the director's feminine modality; and how the director's unconscious modality asserted itself nonetheless in a metaphoric style of *mise en scène* against the realistic style implied by the writing. This 'slippage' points to the dissension between writer and director about the core meaning of the play. A secondary problem was the representation of the black male character Solomon, which materialized also, in a problem with style. I once again use relevant segments of *mise en scène* to illustrate an attempt at a feminine modality, showing how it is fragile and paradoxically irrepressible. I conclude this case study with an account of Foot's own directorship of *Reach*, re-named 'Solomon and Marion' (2011), with particular reference to the solutions she found for the character of Solomon. I then complete this study by looking at the implications of the feminine modality on the directing of new plays.

CHAPTER 2

It is the task of this chapter to position the concept of the feminine textual body within a social context, as well as in the context of Feminist theory. Without these two 'frames', the ideas of a feminine modality and a feminine aesthetic as an expression of a female identity appear dangerously monistic, which in reality and in theory, the feminine self assuredly is not. It is in reality, and in theory, not possible to be a feminist without identifying with, and feeling part of, a community of women in the real world, as well as the representational world of feminist discourse. Locally, the dire conditions of women have a direct impact on feminine creativity: on how, and on what meaning, is made in *mise en scène*, as well as in discourse.

The context of this study

In a country where colonialism and apartheid have generated not only racial and cultural divisions but enormous disparities in economic conditions, how does a white middle class woman 'think [her]self' with other women? This question articulates the tensions that lie between feminist discourse and material circumstances in South Africa. For the moment and for the purposes of this study, my answer to this question must be located in theatre, in the act of directing new plays that represent or present current local conditions. My subjective responses evident in the *mise en scènes* of *GMF* and *Reach* are direct reactions to the deprived material and psychic conditions of women in South Africa. These shocking conditions seem to be a consequence of South Africa's entrenched patriarchal practices, which still prevail in various forms today.

In an introduction to feminism and gender in *New South African key words*, Helen Moffett points out the 'inevitable clash between South Africa's heritage of overlapping patriarchies (colonial, apartheid, Calvinist, missionary, traditional African) and the post-democratic, rights-based Constitution which guarantees political equality for all groups, including women' (2008:112). This clash has created a scenario in which the realms of the public and the private have no synergy. In Moffett's view it is a 'devil's bargain in which women are accepted as equal in the public sphere as 'long as they remain subordinate' in the private sphere (2008:112). She notes Pumla Dineo Gqala's comment that 'by touting equality for women at the same time as refusing to critique patriarchy the liberation movement made a tactical and ideological error for which South African women are now paying dearly' (in Moffett

2008:112). Moffett focuses on the high statistics of rape as emblematic of the national emergency round gender and women's conditions:

The bad news...is that post-apartheid South Africa remains a country at war with itself. Only this time, it is nothing less than gender civil war. Just one week of glancing at newspaper headlines reveals that sexual violence in particular is out of control, with higher levels of rape of women and children than anywhere else in the globe not at war or embroiled in open civil conflictat least one in three South African women can expect to be raped in her lifetime; and one in four will be beaten by her domestic partner (2008:110).¹¹

Corrective measures, discourse and activism have been hampered by divisions among feminists. The residues of class and race hierarchies have played and still play a role in what Julie-Anne Lothian proposes is a failure of women to unite as a powerful force (2011). Moffett suggests that the problem is exacerbated by conversations that are caught up in restricted notions of gender roles, racism and entrenched patriarchal discourse.¹² Porter and Khumalo in the *Sunday Independent* acknowledge the tensions in the discourse with a plea for considered responses to patriarchy and sexism. They ask if there is not 'a third way to address these complex issues and have more nuanced, deeper, more reflective – more effective – dialogues around ...patent instances of discrimination, and the blindness they reveal?' (2012:17). Porter and Khumalo are referring to 'instances' like (current) President Zuma's television interview in which he claims "it's not right for women to be single", and that "women have got to have kids...they actually give an extra training to a woman" (2012:17). These comments from the president come on top of his acquittal from a charge of the rape of an HIV woman, his polygamy, and a paternity suit in which he fathered a child out of wedlock (2012:17). Porter and Khumalo advocate a careful response and I quote them at length because their position seems to encompass a trend in South African gender and feminist discourse, arguably located in an African Feminist approach:

Strong critiques of sexist views and behaviour are crucial. But they must also address constructively, and examine holistically, the sources of gender inequality and seek to engage, rather than alienate, men and women in its elimination....The roots of gender conditioning run deep, and are embedded in the minds and behaviours of most men and women. The roles that both genders unconsciously subscribe to and their ideas of what it means to be male or female; masculine or feminine – how to behave; the pressures

¹¹ Mandi Smallhorne writes during Womens' month: '55,000 crimes of rape or sexual violence are reported each year, according to African Police Service's crime report for 2010/11, but a Medical Research Council survey in late 2010 provides evidence that about 24 in every 25 rapes actually go unreported. This could mean that well over a million rapes take place in our country every year, with the overwhelming majority of survivors being women' (2012:1).

¹² In 1999 journalist Charlene Smith was raped and wrote about it a week later in the Mail&Guardian. President (at the time) Mbeki accused her of 'race rage' and a public spat ensued between them. See references for Lisa Vetten's view on the argument in an online article: 'Mbeki and Smith both got it wrong' (2004), Smith's book *Proud of Me* (2001), and an article 'Did you ever sleep with Mbeki?'

to present oneself as tough, or as submissive; how to relate to the other sex – are pervasive and entrenched. So unless the problem of patriarchy is responded to with approaches that are inclusive and open; and seek to engage and explain rather than shame...men will not develop an understanding of the pain of women and the bitterness of their oppression. (2012:17)

These ideas propose a long view, with a belief in the art of persuasion and education over time. In this Moffett seems to be aligned with Porter and Khumalo, with the further suggestion that race complicates the gender discourse:

...narratives about rape continue to be rewritten as stories about race, rather than gender. From the President downwards everyone assumes that any effort to discuss rape is a short jump to condemning the barbarism of black men. In a society battling to shake off the legacy of institutionalised racism, it still seems a bridge too far to acknowledge that apartheid and its ills (such as the migrant labour system) 'emasculated' black men, left them 'impotent' and experiencing a 'crisis of masculinity'. (2008:111)

Moffett points out that white men rape as well as black men but either way race gets in the way of usefully talking about the problem. Hope for the issue, Moffett suggests, lies in studies of masculinity – how it is 'taught, learned, performed and unlearned' (113).

Schisms between feminists seem to have been further entrenched recently, particularly with regards to the symbolic and material positioning of women in the public sphere. In the run-up to national elections in 2014 the ANC Women's League has chosen not to propose a female candidate for president. Taking this up in an editorial, the Cape Argus wrote:

The League, it said in a statement, still believed in the idea of a woman as president, but only in the future. For now, the party was "not prepared for it" and for the sake of "unity", the league has opted to nominate Zuma ... Spokeswoman Troye Martens has defended the position, saying that it is strategic. She explained that the extent of the patriarchy in the party has meant that at this point it is better to simply try to get women into the branch delegations that will be going to Mangaung than to "bring another candidate to the fore and create further rifts in the organization". (2012:14)

Mangaung is where the ANC held their annual national conference in December 2012 where nominations for elections took place. The 'devil's bargain' that Moffett wrote of in 2008 is illustrated in the Women's League's decision to simply attempt to get women to the conference as branch delegates. This approach is emblematic of how unity and the survival of the party are prioritized over the status of women in South Africa. It also demonstrates the division between a new class of elite women aligned with power, and ordinary women of all classes and cultures. The political in-fighting and power struggles in the ruling party appear to be strengthening divisions among feminists.

The government's apathetic approach to the women's crisis is seen by many commentators as the main problem. In August (women's month) Helen Moffett lost 'her cool' in what became known as the 'blog rant' on her blog site (2012a, b, c). She started by objecting to the 'showpiece' nature of government activities on Woman's Day on the 9th of August. Her

irate tone was inspired firstly by the lip service government paid to women's issues at large expensive events in which speeches and promises were made 'yet again'. Her second point of no return was provoked by the fact that Rape Crisis (and other NGO support) was threatened with closure because of a lack of funds, and that opposition Premier of the Western Cape Helen Zille had responded with 'get in line' when appealed to for funds for Rape Crisis. In South Africa, support for rape survivors is left almost solely in the hands of NGOs. I quote Moffett's 'blog rant' extensively, firstly for the dire picture she paints of contemporary conditions for women in South Africa; and secondly to demonstrate a subjective response to the lethargy with which government and civil society seem to respond to the women's crisis. I retain the profanities as signs of the desperation of the writer:

So ditch the pointless sodding public holiday (estimated cost to the economy: SEVEN BILLION). Stop bleating about the month of women. It's PATHETIC, considering it's open season on South African women 24/7, year in, year out. Our rape stats are a global disgrace (Goddess, how many times do I have to FUCKING say this, the WORST in the world for a country not at war – the scale is unimaginable, the suffering ditto), black lesbians have "carve me up and smash my brains in" signs stamped on their backs, rural women and children live in relentless, grinding misery and poverty HUGELY exacerbated by patriarchal strictures, which are of course absolutely sacred (and the fact that the Traditional Courts Bill, which would render these women even more helpless and wretched, is actually allowed to pollute national airtime is a bloody disgrace). We are failing, no, betraying, no, ABUSING children by callously pissing away their only shot at an education, their ONLY chance of a life of decent employment, a form of abuse that will affect girls worse than boys; we're losing ground in terms of infant and maternal mortality; women without cash are being denied C-sections at state hospitals and giving birth to stillborn babies on the floor as a result. SO DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT FUCKING WOMEN'S DAY YOU BOZOS. (2012a)

It is noteworthy that Moffett's blog rant incited more response to a woman's issue than eleven years of her academic articles did. In answer to one of thousands of respondees she wrote:

... I'm a bit shattered, as I've been saying this stuff for over a decade, with nothing like this response. For 11 years, I've written reasoned, logical material on sexual violence, trying to do justice to the complexity of the issues. This material is taught at universities, used by crisis organizations for training and manuals, but seems to have bypassed the public until now. Was it the F-word that did the trick? For those readers who've (correctly) pointed out the simplistics of this scream of rage, and are interested, please Google my name to see my more nuanced writing in this field. There's an example here. (2012b)¹³

Although Moffett is clearly focused on economically oppressed women in her 'blog rant', by focusing on rape and sexual violence repeatedly in her writings, she includes all women as her audience (as does van Graan in *GMF*). Rape is a nexus between women of all cultures in a historically divided country. Moffett points out that '[a]lthough middle class, educated women certainly have more opportunities than they did fifty years ago, gender roles are more inflexible, more publicly performed, and more violently policed than ever before' (2008:111).

¹³ Moffett then directs readers to more serious writing by providing the website, see refs (2012c)

The fear and event of rape cuts across culture, class, colour and privilege. All women are targets by the fact of our biological sex: our bodies are female, our sexual genitalia make us open to abuse. This is no different for black lesbian women who are targeted for 'punishment' or 'correction' because of their deviation from 'the feminine norm'.

This calls into question the term 'feminine', as does the specific oppression of black women under numerous patriarchies. It makes the issue of sexual differentiation thorny. For if the very site of her oppression is her body – as in hunger, rape, wife battering and public and political exclusion – how may a woman positively reclaim the very sexed body that marks her as a target of difference and pain, as a site of feminine pleasure and self-empowerment in the act of 'writing' herself in a 'sign' of woman? It is within this tension between the conditions of real women and the representational sphere of theatre and discourse that the white feminist director attempts to find a place of enunciation, speaking with oppressed women and not for them. Moffett's move from thoughtful academic and activist to frustrated and outraged blogger seems to me to parallel the process of the 'feminine' director, who moves from a cognitive considered hypothetical map of meaning to an emotionally dilated, subjective response to a topic in the new plays she directs that bears a direct relation to the society in which they are made.

Conceptual Frame and Literary review

Thus far I have pointed to the idea that the feminine director's text of 'self' as enunciation in a 'textual body' of mise en scène, is temporally and spatially defined. The idea of a 'feminine self' is always in flux, subject to the social and psychic conditions of a community of women of which she is one, subject also to her 'gendered construct' but also in resistance to it. Further, the feminine text of self intersects and meshes with the texts of the new plays under discussion, creating tensions in the fabric of the process as well as the text of self enunciation. The materials for creating this irresolute text of meaning are not pen, paper and unstructured time, but a hybrid collection of signifiers within a four week rehearsal period, three-dimensional spaces, objects and living bodies. Despite this variety of materials, I propose that the unconscious desires, what the feminine director feels and wants to say, will find a way into the final metatext in some form or another, reflecting her concerns and something of her identity. While I began to explore this conceptual frame in the introductory chapter, the three critical notions on which it rests, the 'feminine', the 'self' and the 'textual body' require deeper

explication. The theoretical issue is how these terms are intimately related and unite as one proposal. I take up first the foundational premise for the relationship between these terms located in sexual difference as a feminist strategy. I start with a very brief summation of Braidotti's radical feminist argument for sexual difference, which brings the terms feminine, self and textual body into relationship.

In radical feminist terms to refuse sexual difference as a stance is to erase a female history of oppression, to bypass the realities of women's bodies, to overlook the political power of organizing a movement around identity, and to forgo the opportunity for re-creating the figure, symbol and sign of 'woman' in new and innovative ways (Braidotti: 1991). Judith Butler's riposte to Braidotti in *Undoing gender* is worth noting. While Butler is not dismissive of sexual differentiation as a feminist theoretical position, she cautions against the essentialism in sexual differentiation that could impose and reinforce terms which dangerously exclude deviations from the 'norm' relegating them to the status of the non-human. The question, for Butler, is around what constitutes 'feminine'. Can the terms for 'feminine' be liberated from 'normative' implications, biological determinism or essentialism? (2004:192-197). It is not my aim to take up this question as a challenge and prove that the 'feminine' can be liberated from these politically dangerous implications, but rather to take the space provided by the question to explore what the feminine may be, through reflecting upon its enunciation. Irigaray helps this endeavour with her ideas on sexual differentiation as a basis for a total revolution of all relational constructs and practises:

Sexual difference would constitute the horizon of worlds more fecund than any known to date – at least in the West – without reducing fecundity to the reproduction of bodies and flesh. For loving partners this would be a fecundity of birth and regeneration, but also the production of a new age – of thought, art, poetry, and language: the creation of a new poetics. (1993:5)

Irigaray's emphasis on the relational possibilities of sexual difference rather than the 'binaries' or oppositional forces, opens the way for thinking about a new kind of positive representation of 'difference' by re-exploring not only 'woman' but the 'subject':

We need to reinterpret everything concerning the relations between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic. Everything, beginning with the way in which the subject has always been written in masculine form, as man, even when it claimed to be universal or neutral. Despite the fact that man – at least in French – rather than being neutral, is sexed. (1993:6)

Irigaray intimates that 'man' the 'subject' would benefit from being liberated from 'the masculine form' as well. Irigaray's positive evocation of a 'new poetics', and the re-writing of

the subject as woman within relational, and not oppositional (con)texts, is most clearly demonstrated in Helene Cixous' (1994) creative writing. With Cixous, re-writing woman is an embodied act, in other words it involves the female writer on an unconscious and personal level; and will reflect multiple meanings in the process of 'becoming herself' (Braidotti, 1991:240). Braidotti suggests that Cixous:

invests the act of writing in a creative mode as a challenge to the phallic order....Through the direct identification of women with women's texts, Cixous claims the subversive power of feminine sexuality and feminine texts.... Cixous sees the feminine 'textual body' as the 'return of the repressed of phallographic culture', in texts expressing feminine *jouissance*: what is in excess of phallic logic, the subversive, all-transcending force that displaces the binary oppositions of Western thought. (1991:239-40)

The notion of a feminine libidinal source underpins the desire to be a whole subject and in its embodiment produces meanings outside of the normative, 'phallic logic'. Cixous' work is considered an example of *écriture féminine*, with her specifically feminine use of the term 'jouissance' – which has come to signify the feminine libidinal force, or energy of desire, that results in a multiple 'play' of signs of woman in a written text.¹⁴ The 'phallic logic' that Cixous resists in her writings is not only the rule of reason in philosophy and political structures, but specifically the symbolic logic of psychoanalysis that uses the sign of the Phallus as the sign of the whole subject, an identity from which women are excluded. Thus it is that the psychoanalytical scheme of the formation of the subject in infancy underpins the concept of the feminine textual body. It also strongly informs my later analysis of how a subject (audience) 'looks' or 'sees' theatre; in short it is within and against the psychoanalytical theory of the formation of the subject through identification (sexual) that so much contemporary feminist thought is generated, so I will briefly sketch the 'scheme' here.

The theories of the unconscious, which have been embraced by feminists for their liberating effect on what 'constitutes' a subject, have, on the other hand, been rejected by some (and reworked by others) for the negative codification of sexual identity built into the symbolic scheme of the formation of the subject. Maaïke Bleeker's summary in *Visuality in the theatre: the locus of looking*, begins to explain this. She writes that for

[t]he subject of psychoanalysis, the desire for fullness and completeness manifests itself in a desire for the penis (Freud) and the phallus (Lacan). In Freud's account, men appear as those who have, who are

¹⁴ 'Écriture féminine' is a theory 'that flourished in post-structuralist, post-68 France'. Subscribers explored in their texts 'an embodied female subjectivity'; it was an experiment in 'the textual production of feminine writings...to refute the psychoanalytic assertion that woman does not exist'. The texts challenged the notion 'of the lack with the positive affirmation of female subjectivity' (Braidotti, 1991:238-239)

complete, and women as those who are incomplete and want to have what they lack. Penis envy appears as the very cornerstone of female subjectivity. It marks the castration complex of the young girl: her wish to be able to exhibit a penis she does not have. Successful maturation will convert this female wish for the penis into the wish for a baby. (2008:109)

Lacan builds on Freud with some adjustments to the scheme. He uses the penis not as a real organ but as a phallus – a signifier of ‘wholeness’. Underpinning Lacan’s notion is that the ‘subject derives from a primordial whole’. By conforming to the linguistic, signifying Law of the Father, the child is separated from this wholeness and thus becomes a subject. This separation results in ‘lack’ and a desire to return to the state of wholeness. In Lacan’s scheme ‘lack’ defines both male and female subjectivity (in Bleeker, 2008:110); it marks the impossibility of being both sexes, both male and female. Neither male nor female has the phallus; they both want the phallus because it stands for what they don’t have. This system produces a symbolic ‘other’.

Yet only the ‘other’ has the phallus; the subject, whatever organ he or she may have, is symbolically castrated. This ‘Other’ is an ideal other to whom we contribute what we lack. We are symbolically castrated because we have fallen from a supposed primary condition of being at one with the world. Instead our connection with the world that surrounds us is always mediated through the symbolic ‘other’. (Bleeker, 2008: 118)

There are many feminist arguments against this symbolic scheme of sexual identity but for want of space I point simply to Butler’s response which Bleeker explicates briefly. Masculinity is associated with signification, the phallus, which the male owns materially as a penis. Woman falls outside of the signifying system through not only materially lacking a penis, but being castrated (she has lost something) suffering a kind of double lack. Whereas Lacan attempted to render the phallus neutral, the matter of the materiality of different sexual genitals can’t be ignored. In this symbolic order the absence of the sign (absence of penis) and the feminine are conflated. Following Butler ‘this happens within logic in which matter is associated with the feminine and signification with the masculine’ (1993:78 in Bleeker, 2008:112-13). Critically, this leads to a crisis for the representation of women in writing/écriture:

A woman confronted by writing is confronted with her entire erotic and libidinal organization; insofar as the act of writing is socially valorized in terms of knowledge and know-how, it is a phallic gesture, that leads the woman to a direct confrontation with the dialectics of identification to the parental figures the fact that the phallus is the primary signifier of desire ... implies that there can be no symbolic representation of the female sex (Braidotti, 1991:226).

It is to this crisis that women like Cixous and Irigaray have responded. Their re-writing of woman as a resistance to the ‘lack’ in Lacan’s scheme, is predicated on the understanding of the power that writing and thought exercises in perpetuating the oppressed status of women.

The repressed desire for wholeness, the libidinal force denied to women by the symbolism of the Lacanian scheme, should be turned around, used by women and for women to bring 'woman' out of the non-said and non-signified. Her tools of resistance are in allowing the repressed, unconscious desire for 'wholeness' accorded the male subject, to be unleashed in 'jouissance' to speak her 'non-said', to become the 'other' or invent the 'other' symbolically. A piece of creative writing in Cixous' 'Newly Born Woman' provides an excellent example of this. I have chosen a lengthy extract that particularly illustrates a poetic refutation of the Lacanian non-signification of woman, as well as a re-creation of the idea of woman as 'becoming' or 'coming into being' in multiple ways, outside of the hegemonic masculine signifying system:

[Woman's] libido is cosmic, just as her unconsciousness is worldwide: her writing also can go on and on and on, without ever inscribing or distinguishing contours, daring these dizzying passages in other, fleeting and passionate dwellings within him, within the hims and hers whom she inhabits She alone dares and wants to know from within where she, the one excluded, has never ceased to hear what-comes-before-language reverberating. She lets the other tongue of a thousand tongues speak – sound without barrier or death. She refuses life nothing. Her tongue doesn't hold back but holds forth, doesn't keep in but keeps on enabling. Where the wonder of being several and turmoil is expressed, she does not protect herself against these unknown feminines; she surprises herself at seeing, being, pleasuring in her gift of changeability. I am spacious singing Flesh: onto which is grafted no one knows which I – which masculine or feminine, more or less human but above all living, because changing I. (Cixous, 1994: 44-5)

Important here is that Cixous embraces both 'masculine' and 'feminine' in the textual body of woman, while inviting other kinds of 'being' that are unknown and can only be imagined.

Significant too for my concept is that it is an exercise in representation. As Braidotti writes:

...the textual 'body' in question is not a natural body but rather 'a cultural artefact that carries a whole history, a memory of coding and conditioning....the conceptual framework of the feminine libidinal economy is radically anti-naturalistic'. (1991: 243)

The re-inscription of woman can be seen as a representational contribution to changing the coding and conditioning of woman as a cultural artefact. In other words as women we are not forever eradicated from visibility; the tools for certain kinds of transformations are within our grasp.

In theatre the written text and metatext are representational first, contributing to, or subtracting from, the image of women in the world on a symbolic or figurative level. In other words, meanings that may be encoded in an amalgamation of the written text and the metatext as a text of the feminine director, refract outwards towards the image of woman as a whole: the 'textual body' would in theatre, be read in the *mise en scène* contributing to a public 'textual body' of woman. Also, the embodied act of making feminine meaning is both empowering in the real world and also representational of empowerment; and lastly this

symbolism is materialized in the sensate affects provoked by both representation, and the performativity of *mise en scène*, in the senses and beings of a live audience.

The relationship between the feminine, the self, the body and the text then is inextricably linked in the act of making: the making of *mise en scène* is fuelled by the *jouissance* of a specifically feminine desire to be whole, to be a subject, a 'self'. The 'self' though is in flux, in the process of being formed, or revealing itself, in the making. The 'text' is the meaning, the metatext that is read from the *mise en scène*, in signs of feminine concerns. The idea of the 'textual body' therefore resonates doubly with the embodied process of 'making'.

Tools of Feminist theatre critique

For critical tools with which to read the text of a feminine self (or subjectivity) in *mise en scène*, I turn to some of the specific concerns that trouble Feminist critical theorists of theatre and performance (de Lauretis, 1986, Case, 1988, Diamond, 1997, Dolan, 1991, Harris, 1999, Aston & Harris, 2006, Bleeker, 2008). One of the primary concerns is with the representation of women on stage and how the arrangement between audience and performance causes the objectification of the female figure, and more positively, transforms the female figure from an object to a subject. These concerns focus on the visual and pictorial arrangements of *mise en scène* and the visual in performance, which I take up by discussing 'ways of seeing', perception and reception. While these tools are particularly relevant to *GMF*, for *Reach* I use a few aspects of Freud and Lacan's theories of the formation of the subject to explore the unconscious feminine affects that found their way into the *mise en scène* as a default position in a loss of agency.

For feminists the effects of the 'male gaze' are particularly significant. Sue-Ellen Case explains that the theory of the 'male gaze' is founded in 'Feminist psychosemiotics, a combination of post-Lacanian psychoanalysis, semiotics and feminism' (1988: 118). Case attributes the origins of the project of the 'male gaze' to feminist film theorist E. Ann Kaplan (1983:23 in Case, 1988:118). It incorporates the way the viewer perceives the woman on stage; what 'constitutes the project of the male gaze is that the sign 'woman' is constructed by and for the male gaze'. The representations of women 'are perceived as they are seen by men' (1988:119). 'Men' refers here to the 'male subject in capitalist patriarchy', in other words Lacan's desiring male subject, a product of the dominant western culture (1988:119). Plays

traditionally have been performed for the audience to view the female characters as the males would. Case gives an example:

When the ingénue makes her entrance, the audience sees her as the male protagonist sees her. The blocking of her entrance, her costume and the lighting are designed to reveal that she is the object of his desire. In this way, the audience also sees her as an object of desire, by identifying with the male gaze. This example illustrates one major cultural assumption – that the male is the subject of the dramatic action. (1988:119)

Thus it is that women viewers are robbed of a sense of subjectivity as they see no reflection of themselves. According to feminists, Freud and Lacan's theories provide the dominant cultural description 'that establishes the formation of the male as the dominant subject' (or human), a symbolism that is replicated on stage (1988:119). Case lucidly summarizes the issue when she says: 'For feminists Freud and Lacan provide the patriarchal determination of sexual development that explains both the psychosexual male subject and the way that he has come to represent the subject position for the culture at large' (1988:119).

Lacan's psychoanalytical scheme of the formation of the subject again informs much of the thinking around attempts to deconstruct the 'male gaze' from the feminist critic's point of view. Bleeker goes a step further, locating the 'male gaze' in Lacan's scheme of the repressed desire for the unobtainable 'other' of the symbolic stage of the Law of the Father, **in tandem** with the mirror phase in which the child first 'misrecognizes' himself as one with the image in the mirror – a crucial step in the formation of the ego. The correlation is made by Bleeker between the 'look' in the mirror and the uni-directionality of perspective, which has dominated the western 'way of seeing' (2008:162). I use these theories on perspective, the 'male gaze' and the formation of the subject in the mirror and symbolic stages, to explore the implications of some of the visual choices I made with regards to the female character in *GMF*.

In conversation with Maaïke Bleeker are materialist feminists Jill Dolan and Elin Diamond who both transform Brecht's notion of historicization and alienation into a specifically feminist project: to disrupt historical representations of women and male reception through 'denaturalization' (Dolan, 1991) and 'differences' (Diamond, 1997).

As a materialist feminist Dolan proposes Brecht's "alienation" (*vervremdung*) as a theoretical starting point to counter genderized representations (1991:87). She advocates 'apparatus based theory and practice' (99). By this she means that representational strategies (as in apparatus) should be used to 'disrupt the narrative of gender ideology, to denaturalize gender as representation, and to demystify the workings of the genderized representational

apparatus itself'. She rejects those (cultural feminists) who 'retain the theatre-as-mirror analogy' and do not take on and subvert the representational apparatus that shape and form spectatorship and perception. She challenges the assumption that 'subverting male-dominated theatre practice with a woman-identified model will allow women to look to theatre for accurate reflections of their experience' (83). She notes also that Cixous' 'female body' has become equated with the voice, leaving the female body in theatre perpetuating 'genderized meanings' (87). With some scenes in *GMF* with the female lead character naked, I am particularly interested in Dolan's objection to the naked female body on stage and her proposals to counter the male gaze. There are, however several underlying theoretical tenets in her terms that need explication. For example, what are 'representational apparatus' for Dolan, and what sort of assumptions lie beneath those, that may shape and form spectatorship?

Dolan proposes that feminist performance that uses the naked female form (like cultural feminists) posits

the female body as a radical site of opposition to male models. Many of these artists use nudity as an attempt to fulfil l'écriture féminine's proposal that women can articulate their subjectivity by writing with their bodiesthese performers fail to see that the female body is still a sign which, when placed in representation, participates in a male-oriented signifying practice. (1991:83)

Dolan's main target is realism, because it is 'prescriptive' and 'reifies the dominant culture's inscription of traditional power relations....failing to address the traditional form's gender codings as an issue in the construction of meaning' (84-5). The forms and apparatus of realism, the proscenium arch and box set, therefore perpetuate 'the male oriented signifying system' (84). But even within the postmodern theatre project where the realm of male signification has purportedly been exploded with fragmented language, images and narrative, for Dolan '[a] woman is never a woman is a woman is a woman' (57). To demonstrate, she refers to postmodernist Richard Foreman's performance texts which repeatedly feature the naked female body. Dolan cautions that despite Foreman's attempts to 'deconstruct the signs he chooses to their phenomenological essence', Foreman as the auteur of his scripts and images 'is in some ways the ultimate authoritative spectator. He is the final author/father of the performance text, and clearly shapes it's meanings for his own narrative and visual pleasure' (1991:56-7). Whether Foreman 'debunk[s] traditional notions of theatrical pleasure by blinding the audience with bright lights or blatantly fetishizes her with gigantic phalluses, the female nude is valued over the other objects in the stage picture' (50). In other words even though

Foreman uses 'apparatus' that estrange the audience 'the pleasure that he offers and denies is the same as that of traditional narrative theatre and film – women as erotic objects' (50-1). Postmodernist performance is illuminated in Lehmann's theory of the 'postdramatic theatre' (2006). In postdramatic theatre the notion of the 'spectator' has shifted from a subject who could be improved and uplifted by theatre in the modernist and early avant-garde eras, to an unstable entity. With the 'crisis of the subject' brought on by theories of the unconscious in psychoanalysis, the spectator is no longer a stable 'I', a whole person, with absolute notions and beliefs in place. Thus the 'totalizing effects' of the proscenium arch, where meaning on stage correlates directly with that of the audience, is no longer possible. This idea is theorized by Lehmann when he posits 'the totalizing' effect of classical European theatre as

The dramatic perspective', which is ... 'teleological; provides order in view of a goal or telos and corresponds to a world view characterized by unity and coherence in view of purpose and reason. In the post-dramatic theatre, this framework gets deconstructed or rejected altogether. (Lehmann, 1999: 3-19 in Bleeker, 2008: 10-11)

The point that I draw from Lehmann's theory is that the arrangement of space in theatre as well as other 'apparatus', correlate with reception and meaning. Fischer-Lichte interprets this theory of postmodernist reception as the role that the spectator plays in making meaning:

In the mirror of the postmodern theatre the spectator experiences the Self as a decentred subject that ascertains its own identity by observing and becoming aware of just that decentering. The act of looking on proves here to be a creative act that gives birth to the identity of the onlooker. (Fischer-Lichte, 1997: 59)

But, points out Fischer-Lichte, 'the mirror which postmodern theatre shows to its spectators may seem in some respects, a shattered one. It consists of numerous disparate elements, which even as a whole, render no meaningful unit, can reveal no unifying image' (58).

It is at this point that materialist feminism and postmodern theory part company. For, as shown by Dolan's response to Foreman's experiments with the naked female body, despite the theoretical similarities in a rejection of mimesis and realism and a search for new apparatus of representation, for the materialist feminist this does not mean *any* kind of apparatus; it means rather that the apparatus must *differ* and seriously threaten gender coded theatre perpetuated by the uni-linearity of the proscenium arch and perspective - and particularly with regards to the naked female form on stage:

[A]mong all the theatre conventions Foreman discarded or attacked, his allegiance to the strict proscenium arrangement, with its convenient frames and distancing relationship between performers and spectators, is the most crucial element in explicating the meanings constructed by his tableaux for the pleasure of the male gaze. (1991:47)

Dolan's ideas for 'differing' apparatus may extend from textual deconstructions to the way staging is arranged in *mise en scène*. Choosing Cixous' *Portrait of Dora* and Fornes' *Mud* (1986) as examples, Dolan identifies some apparatus and frames from the performance texts. Included are fragmented narrative; the 'reframing' of ideas such as the passive/active role reversals between Freud and Dora; an interference effect with multiple voices, 'spaces off', signs and songs. In Fornes' *Mud* short episodic scenes and *gestus* such as Mae's never ending ironing of clothes as well as 'freeze frame' are examples (1991:99-111). An apparatus then in Dolan's terms, is any part of the representation that calls attention to itself as representation that perpetuates gender discrimination. This is Dolan's reworking of Brecht's theory of alienation into a gender project of 'denaturalizing' (106). The use of the company of actors in *GMF* watching the other actors 'enact' their side of the story, in Dolan's terms would be a 'theatre apparatus' that breaks the 'fourth wall' - the illusionist effect of realism associated with the male gaze. For Dolan the un-linear view of traditional western theatre equates with the distant and objectifying 'male gaze' associated with perspective, a point which is relevant to the discussion on *GMF*.

Challenging Dolan's premise that the interpellation of the male gaze can be 'instrumented' through differing apparatus, is Bleeker's analysis of how perspective is embedded in the formation of the subject as part of a cultural disciplining of the senses in 'the management of attention' (2008:163). Bleeker suggests for example, that perspective has played a primary role, not only in how 'we see', but that it is integrated into our 'knowledge at the most implicit or unconscious level' and has become symbolic because 'the subject is absorbed in and produced by it' (2008:13). This returns us once again to Freud and Lacan's theories of the formation of the subject.

Diamond's adaption of Brecht's notion of alienation as 'differences', focuses on performance rather than the material apparatus of staging. Usefully, Diamond clarifies that materialist feminist theatre criticism is actually 'gender critique' and not to be confused with 'another topos in feminist theory: sexual difference' (1997:47). Nonetheless Diamond is interested in reconciling these seemingly opposed projects within a frame of 'difference' (1997:47). She quotes de Lauretis: 'The female subject is a site of differences ... that are not only sexual or only racial, economic, or (sub) cultural, but all of these together and often enough at odds with each other' (1986:14 in 1997:48). Drawing from Brecht's theories on performance Diamond proposes that 'Keeping differences in view instead of conforming to

stable representations of identity and linking those differences to a possible politics are key to Brecht's theories of the 'not ... but,' a feature of alienated acting that I read intertextually with the heterotopia of difference' (1997:48). Diamond reads

the Brechtian 'not ... but' as 'the theatrical and theoretical analogue to 'differences within'. As such it ruins classical mimesis: the truth modelling that produces self-identical subjects in coherent plots gives way utterly to the pleasure and significance of contradiction – and of contradictions that at any moment are emerging but unseeable. (1997:49)

So Diamond opposes realism and mimesis, as does Dolan, but specifically uses the notions of contradiction and differences in performance as a way of calling attention to the paradoxes and absurdities of the cultural modelling of sexuality and sexual identity. While the staging concept of *GMF* is inspired by Brechtian alienation, mostly the performances were not: they were realistic, almost filmic. However, I take from Diamond her tenet of women as a site of 'contradictions', of 'differences within' when assessing the feminine in my *mise en scènes*.

Feminine affiliations and affects

The feminist concerns viewed through these critical lenses have influenced my practice over the years, but it will be noted in my accounts of *GMF* and *Reach* that these materialist principles are sometimes superseded by my personal feminine *jouissance* which charges *mise en scène* with powerful emotion and 'feminine' texture. Whereas in *GMF* the feminine *jouissance* was fuelled by strong social factors which provoked dilated feeling, in *Reach* it was fed finally, by what I suspect was a very personal encounter with death and loss, manifesting in identification with the bereft maternal figure of Marion. Irigaray's re-working of the symbolic scheme of the formation of the subject is useful for discussing this unconscious directorial creative move. She turns the negative implications (for women) in the symbolic scheme of the formation of the subject into a 'relational operation' or 'filiation', with other women: the female subject's 'lack' and status as 'other' is refuted and replaced by an identification with the mother figure whom 'According to Oedipal logic, all daughters are meant to abandon ... renouncing them in order to at last be admitted into the domain of the Law of the Father'. Irigaray advocates 'seiz[ing] the oppressive logic which imprisons them' and rejecting it (Braidotti:1991:259-61).

The sensitivity of the feminine to 'othering' in representation can also be seen in my discomfort with the issue of the representation of the black character Solomon in *Reach*. Irigaray's 'relational' project is based on an 'ethics' of difference among women which proclaims their subjectivity as 'vertical' or qualitative, as opposed to seeing all women as the

'same' ('horizontal' or quantitative), (Irigaray, 2004:14). This is an alterity which she extends to all relations as a way forward for humanity and is based on the equal subjectivity of all within revised notions of what is 'I' and 'you'.

[N]ever without doubt has an age spoken so much of the other as ours does, globalization and migrations requiring it. But, too often, this other is reduced to an object of study, to what is at stake in diverse socio-political strategies aiming in some manner to integrate the other into us, into our world. Thus we avoid the problem of meeting with the stranger, with the other. We avoid letting ourselves be moved, questioned, modified, enriched by the other as such We flee dialogue with a *you* irreducible to us, with the man or woman who will never be *I*, nor *me*, nor *mine*. And who, for this very reason, can be a *you*, someone with whom I exchange without reducing *him* or *her* to myself, or reducing *myself* to *him* or *her*. (Irigaray's italics. 2004:24-5)

Irigaray thus brings together feminism and racism in one project of alterity with a shift in the notion of what constitutes subjectivity and relation to self and others: 'To make the Black equal to the White, the woman equal to the man is still to submit them, under cover of paternalist generosity, to models put in place by Western man, who resists living together with the different' (2004:25). What is needed are not simply strategies of integration, but a space for difference. It is in this space that the subjectivity of each emerges and the relational is possible. It seems 'the relational' underlies the affects that the feminine modality seeks with an audience. It is hard to theorize a director's intentions because as I have said they are often 'groped for' unconsciously in the process of rehearsal. But I would like to refer to Merleau-Ponty's (1968) notions of perception as a way of thinking about how the feminine aesthetic may function with an audience, how it may affect it – and even interpellate the male gaze to some extent.

Merleau-Ponty originated the terms 'body-subject' and 'embodiment' in his writings which centred on 'understanding the lived, embodied nature of human consciousness and perception' (Auslander 2008:136). These terms relate the body, mind and world as completely intertwined 'and not separable as Cartesian thought asserts' (2008: 138). About 'the primacy of perception' Auslander writes

For Merleau-Ponty.... Any subjectivity is of the world, not separate or disconnected from it, and is fuelled by what he terms the **primacy of perception**. Our access to the world is through the body not through, or only through the mind. Contrary to Descartes' dictum, "Cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am), existence is not thinking but embodiment. Indeed, all thinking is embodied; it derives from consciousness which itself develops from the subject's bodily perceptions. These perceptions undergird rationalization and other conscious and logical operations on their meaning. (Writer's emphasis 2008:138).

The external things we experience in the world are the result of how our bodies experience them; this he calls embodiment. Bleeker explains:

It is a 'place' that both sees and can be seen, that both touches and can be touched. Seeing and touching are each recorded on what Merleau-Ponty calls a map. These two maps are complete, but not super-posable.....what Merleau-Ponty calls "a double and crossed situating of the visible in the tangible and of the tangible in the visible; the two maps are complete, and yet they do not merge into one". (1968: 134 in Bleeker, 2008:158)

An example from Merleau-Ponty:

...when I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the role of "touching" and being "touched". (1968: 93 in Auslander, 2008:138)

This double touching, of the visible in the tangible and tangible in the visible, which cannot happen at exactly the same time, where subject and object cannot be discerned but are interchangeable, is Merleau-Ponty's representation of perception and sensibility. The flow of energy suggested in the alternate roles of 'touching and being touched', the constant interchanging of passivity and activity, object and subject, provides a way of thinking about the relationship between the feminine *mise en scène* and an audience. These notions align with my feminine aesthetic terms of closeness, intimacy, sense, feeling, intuition and instinct.¹⁵ While Merleau-Ponty's two hands pressing – the visible in the tangible and the tangible in the visible - provides a metaphor for the feminine relationship with the audience of flow, embodiment and intimacy, Richard Courtney's (1995) notion of 'felt meaning' and 'felt thought' as an aesthetic theory of performance provides me with simple and direct terms for describing the affect I sense I am after as a feminine director. For Courtney all thought is based in feeling, they are not separable. He divides thought into four categories: cognitive, affective, aesthetic and psychomotor thought. He explains: "These four modes of thought are closely related. They are not separate like soap and dogs. They overlap and mingle. All are present in our thinking – there is no thought that is entirely cognitive or entirely affective. It is the emphasis that we give to a thought that varies (1995:13). It seems to me that the 'aesthetic' is the mode of thought the director engages in when generating *mise en scène*. This aesthetic thought mode is based on feeling and we use it 'when we imagine, choose, judge, and distinguish what we like from what we appreciate, using intuition, insights, and hunches' (1995:13). It is a more reflexive mode than the affective mode which is rooted in emotions ranging from fear and anger, to

¹⁵ Luce Irigaray posits that Merleau-Ponty's ideas render relations exclusively to the body and exclude language, thus excluding the subjectivity of the 'other' and therefore the potential for equality in relations, particularly love (2004:14-22). I use Merleau-Ponty's 'two-hands pressing', a play between subjectivity and objectivity, activity and passivity, in a hopeful metaphor, for what could be achieved specifically in theatre which uses many signifiers other than the body, including language. The key I think is in a flow of ambiguity between states, and between audience and stage, something that is fluid.

moods, 'which include a degree of acceptance or rejection' (1995:13). The affective mode tends to rise quickly in response to danger or a specific thing or event and the emotion is felt in the body as an immediate reaction – perhaps like Merleau Ponty's terms - as embodiment. In Courtney's scheme cognitive thought is not only related to knowledge and its acquisition 'but overlaps with intuition and insight; we acquire knowledge through both, although, as insights appear suddenly ("like a flash"), we do not know their inner workings. We can accept them, so they become a part of our store of knowledge, or reject them' (1995:13). Courtney proposes that the aesthetic (feeling mode) is at the centre of all thought, knowledge and action. 'Feeling' operates through comparison, by emerging, or through the drama of oscillation; in other words to 'experience one in terms of another, that is we experience one in the perspective of another, and vice versa' (1995:22). Through feeling something we attach meaning to it and thus Courtney terms his theory of thinking in the aesthetic mode, 'felt meaning' (1995:22). Feeling 'provides meaning that is in excess of the capabilities of language' (1995:22). In my terms then the aesthetic and the affective modes will be captured from here on as 'felt meaning': those affects engendered by the silent signs of mise en scène that are implicitly charged with feeling or emotion. 'Felt meaning' also appears to embrace ambiguity and oscillation – the possibility of difference in the site of the female figure – and in meaning in metatext. We could say then that my aim as a feminine director is to engage the audience in the aesthetic mode of thought, with affective emotions (embodied) and cognitive knowledge that emerges as meaning through feeling. The drama in an oscillation of feeling inside the viewer (audience) is amplified by an oscillation of feeling between him/her and the performance, in a closeness and shared dynamic of 'two palms pressing together', eradicating the subject/object position between audience and actors; an engagement of give and take, experienced in the sensate realm of the body, which in Courtney's terms will emerge as 'felt meaning'. In the following case study of *GMF* my claim to evoke 'felt meaning' or sensate or embodied affects, will be challenged not only by materialist feminist views that aim to defamiliarize feeling rather than to encourage it, but also by the very operations of the formation of the subject in which it seems that 'ways of seeing' are indelibly branded by the visual components of the psychoanalytical symbolic order. Before this however, the focus is on the inscription of the female subject through the embodied act of creativity.

CHAPTER 3. CASE STUDY – GREEN MAN FLASHING

In this case study of *Green man flashing* (2004) I give an account of how I generated *mise en scène* from inside the feminine modality. This includes how meaning is made in *mise en scène*, which in the case of *GMF* arose firstly from an early hypothetical map of meaning which was fairly conceptual, and then later at a less conscious, impulsive stage, which was more ‘felt’. I am concerned mainly with the exposition of the feminine aesthetic and how it is an expression of my feminine concerns. Through this account I weave my interpretations and thereby demonstrate the text of a feminine self. I then challenge my personal feminine ‘readings’ or metatext, with the theories of Bleeker (2008), Dolan (1991) and Diamond (1997), and tease out the theoretical and practical contradictions in the feminine modality and aesthetic. I conclude with ‘a thought exercise’ in which I attempt to assess the writer’s response to the ‘performance text’ – the final product.

The context of production

Mike van Graan could find no one to produce his script *Green Man Flashing*, and at the time he averred this was because of the politically inflammatory content.¹⁶ I have found no reason to disagree with him. Van Graan had been working on the text for over a year, sending me ‘re-writes’ via email, when he suggested that instead of waiting for a producer’s support, we should take it to the National Arts Festival (NAF) fringe ourselves. Van Graan put up his own money, remaining in Cape Town while we rehearsed in Johannesburg. When we opened at the NAF in July 2004, other than a staged reading, it was the first time Van Graan saw his script performed. *GMF* was then taken up by theatres and festivals around the country: the Hilton Festival in September 2004, the Market Theatre, Johannesburg in January 2005, the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK), Oudtshoorn, Western Cape in April 2005, and the Baxter Theatre, Cape Town in July 2005.¹⁷ *GMF* has been published twice and it is now studied at South African schools and universities, and it was recently revived by Artscape in June, 2012.

Far from being a deterrent, the somewhat hazardous material circumstances of the initial production appear to be the kind of free-flowing, improvisational conditions conducive to

¹⁶ ‘Produce’ in the context of staging plays in South Africa means to supply sufficient funds for the entire production, as well as manage all logistics. Producers in South Africa tend to be established theatres interested in the development of new South African work like the Baxter (Cape Town) and the Market (Johannesburg). Alternatively individual writers, directors and independent companies raise funds from the NAC (National Arts Council) or corporate companies.

¹⁷ See the Plays in Performance reference list at the end of the References for full details.

my directorial modality. In addition, without the writer present, I was free to follow my instincts unchecked. I chose to direct the play because it promised to be relevant and provocative, and it was the first play I had encountered that dared to challenge the new regime. Also I was attracted to the experimental, unresolved nature of the play's form. The rape event was one of many crises in the story and was not the major reason for its appeal to me – or that's what I thought at the time of choosing to do the play.

The play – story and themes

The title *Green Man Flashing* (Van Graan 2010) refers to the little green man on a traffic light that signals to pedestrians they are safe to cross the road. The title suggests a play of ideas. The written text poses the question: if the green light is flashing and it is your right to cross the road but a car is careering towards you, would you still cross the road? This question is addressed to Gabby Anderson who has been raped by her boss Shadrack Khumalo, a member of parliament for whom she is secretary (2010:75). Her ex-husband Aaron Matshoba, 'the party-spin doctor', has been sent to Cape Town to dissuade her from laying rape charges against Khumalo.¹⁸ His argument is that Khumalo has a crucial role to play in keeping the peace in war torn KwaZulu-Natal in the run up to the 1999 general elections. A rape charge would ruin Khumalo's political career and end the peace initiatives in KwaZulu-Natal, and possibly also precipitate widespread bloodshed. Aaron, by using the image of the flashing green man on a traffic light, admits that Gabby has a right to justice but that disaster could result from exercising that right. Thus one woman's rape and her desire for justice, are pitted against the maintenance of peace and 'the good of the whole'.¹⁹

The character Gabby is politicized, and understands both sides of the argument. Her friend Anna Richards, a feminist legal advocate, argues passionately in favour of pursuing the rape charge as it will 'put rape on the national agenda' where she maintains it sorely needs to be (2010:93). Luthando, the shady 'party bodyguard' accompanying Aaron on this mission, wants to squash the rape charges at any cost. Caught in the middle is the ex-security officer, Inspector Theo Abrahams, now the investigating officer, who is summoned when Gabby shoots Luthando under duress. What truth will Abrahams reveal or cover up?

¹⁸ Van Graan refers to 'the party' in his text. The implied inference is surely the ruling party, the African National Congress.

¹⁹ Hereinafter I use the characters' names as Van Graan listed them in the text: Gabby, Aaron, Anna and Luthando are identified by their first names, while Abrahams and Khumalo are identified by their surnames.

Structure and style

It is evident that a relevant political debate is embedded in a political thriller. The provocation for unfolding the story is the inquest into the death of Luthando, the slain bodyguard. Short flashbacks are enacted between the questioning of Aaron and Abrahams, in which we see how Gabby shot Luthando. It appears that she is culpable of his death but there are signs in the text that this is not the full story. And then we leave the inquest behind and are into the body of the play in which we experience the events that led to the shooting of Luthando. The scenes are mostly short, compressing events into tight dialogue, suggestive of a filmic style. However the smooth dialogic flow from scene to scene is rendered disjunctive by the diversity of 'textual styles' amongst the scenes, which take forms such as monologue, statements for the police, and witnessing to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).²⁰ The style therefore never entirely settles into a filmic or realistic genre, with the narrative 'zig-gagging' backwards and forwards in time, ending with a return to the inquest into Luthando's death, where the play began. Here Gabby finally takes the stand. Will she support her ex-husband and the 'party' by remaining silent about her rape and the events leading up to Luthando's death -- the truth of which would compromise the moral standing of all concerned? Or will she stand up for women, and herself, by telling the truth, risk the wrath of 'the party' and discomfort to herself, in an effort to 'put rape on the national agenda' as Anna envisages? (2010:93). The question is never answered as Van Graan ends the play with Gabby's question: 'where shall I start?' (2010:99). Following Brecht, the playwright leaves the audience with a challenge: what choice would you make if you were Gabby?

In short the play aligns most closely with Brecht's dialectical dramaturgy, which Rouse suggests 'treats social conditions as processes and pursues these in their contradictions' (2010:297). Rouse explains:

Brecht's theatre ... concentrates on "the contradictions in people and their relationships". At the same time, however, a dialectical theatre must also reveal the "determinants under which [these contradictions] develop; further, it must reveal these determinants critically. Both these requirements are essentially part of the same concern --the depiction of the contradictory process through which men structure and restructure their lives and the critical examination of the ways in which these structures are used by men to repress other men' (Brecht BFA, 23: 287 in Rouse, 2010:297).²¹

²⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, hereinafter known as the TRC. The TRC was a government initiated inquiry into atrocities of the apartheid era in which 'victims' were able to give witness to their suffering and 'perpetrators' could be granted amnesty in return for full disclosure (<http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>).

²¹ The BFA – *The Berliner and Frankfurter Ausgabe* are not available in English so I rely on Rouse for this .Brecht applies the idea of contradiction very practically to many aspects of his dramaturgy, directing and ideas for acting

In *GMF* the dialectic plays out in an unresolved, moral and political conundrum, with characters who are neither protagonist nor antagonist, good or bad, but are all morally compromised under the social and political pressures prevailing in the aftermath of the liberation struggle in South Africa. In this refusal of 'absolutes' or binaries – good/bad, hero/heroine, and in its unresolved plot, van Graan invites the audience to think about the political and social conundrums he has laid out for them in the text, encouraging debate and argument. Perhaps it bears noting that whilst this is a strategy common enough to playwrights who tackle political ambiguity (David Hare, 1976, 1978; John Arden, 1960, 1965; Edward Bond, 1966; Caryl Churchill, 1985, 1987; Howard Brenton, 1966; Timberlake Wertenbaker, 1996; Susan-Lori Parks, 1997, 2001), to my knowledge no playwright prior to Van Graan after 'ten years of democracy' in the 'new South Africa' had dared, with scant recourse to metaphor or metonymy, directly to challenge the government and Nelson Mandela's political party.

Hypothetical map of meaning – the play as a moral trial

In the written text Van Graan describes his *mise en scène* realistically, rather than with selective Brechtian stage semiotics. The locations are clearly indicated: Gabby's sitting room, Gabby and Aaron's previous home, Anna's sitting room, a court of inquiry and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearing. The multiple settings in a variety of times and places offered challenges to the director. If followed literally, the result would be numerous sets moving on and off, breaking the flow from one scene to the next and thus the mood and tension. Alternatively, multiple spaces on one stage denoting different locations, whilst a regularly used approach, is one that unfavourably reduces the size of the various acting spaces to the scale of a cubicle.

A further challenge to a director with a feminine modality is that the play is dominated by verbal debate rather than the communication of feelings or affect. And yet the political debates around which the play is structured, engage highly charged and emotional topics. So I searched for a hypothetical map of meaning in the first place that would create flow and ease through multiple places and times, and secondly would infuse the intellectual debates with sensate meaning and affect. Also underscoring this quest was a search for the writer's meaning or intentions for the play. The Brechtian paradigm was initially a source of inspiration but the

in *Brecht on Theatre* (1964:277-8 for acting); and see also '*Study of Coriolanus*' (1964:261,2) for directing-dramaturgy.

polemical tone of the writing was an ongoing challenge for a feminine director whose objective is to engage the senses of the audience. In the following section I remember how I found answers to these challenges with an initial hypothetical map of meaning and then in the concretization of *mise en scène*.

My initial hypothetical map of meaning was stimulated by what seemed to be a cluster of interrogatory motifs. The first was the inquest into Luthando's death which starts and ends the play; the second was the testimony to the TRC in a flashback; and the third was Gabby's statement to the police attesting to how she was raped. Images of *giving evidence* or *testimony* are a repeated theme in *GMF*. On identifying this it struck me that all five characters in the play not only give testimony, but are morally tested by the events in the play, all emerging as morally ambiguous. This became a metaphor: *the play is a court case in which all the characters are morally on trial*. I had a sense that this hypothetical map of meaning would help maintain balance between the arguments, allowing empathy and antipathy for all parties at different junctures, thus serving what I intuited to be the writer's intention.

In this case then, apart from aesthetic considerations, my agency was first employed in the writer's service, or in the service of clarifying meaning provoked by the text. Crucially what I took up here thematically was that *GMF* presented a dialectical political argument, and secondly that it was clearly dystopic, a 'reality check' on the 'rainbow nation', signalling the end of the so-called 'honeymoon period' of the first rush of positivity in post-apartheid nation building and reconciliation. Van Graan as a political writer was refusing catharsis - a release from personal and collective anxiety - and instead was intent on escalating it. Having captured the first layer of meaning in a metaphor, this thinking still needed a staging concept that would concretize it. These are my initial thoughts as I remember them, which I communicated to the cast.

This play is didactic, how can we keep it relevant but make it dramatic and theatrically impactful? We need a court case scenario that is free of courtroom cliché and theatrical tropes – we don't want yet another courtroom drama....a pedantic tennis match: here's this argument, now the counter argument... back forward, back forward and so on. Or... what about being honest about what it is? Why not acknowledge that it's a debate, a play of ideas, show it instead of hiding it? ... show that the actors are presenting a conundrum that the audience must chew over. Use its diadactism, use the dialectic, expose everything. A courtroom, a trial, is full of

witnesses – what if the actors witness each other telling their varying sides of the story? What would that do to the play? Would that create Brechtian distance and intensify the dialectic – the contradictions and tensions? What if it's a circular shape – an indigenous traditional space like an imbizo or kothla: gatherings or meetings where tribal or community issues are discussed, and everyone is permitted to speak? Yes, an African reference, something local, an infusion, a flavour, something that will speak without speaking.

Finally, the cast created the curves of an incomplete circle with chairs, the open end being where the audience sat, suggesting that they were part of the trial. The chairs creating the circle on which the actors waited and watched the action, became integrated in the mise en scène as the only pieces of furniture for the 're-enactments'. A minimalist style of mise en scène evolved in which the actors' bodies in the semi-circular space were the main tools of concretization, creating intimacy and closeness, used in conjunction with sound and lighting. The narrative of Gabby and Aaron's love and estrangement was signified by varying the proximity of the space between them. The scene in which Luthando threatens Gabby with violence if she doesn't give up the rape charge, again utilized the actors' bodies in space as they circled each other in a dance of threat and retreat that climaxed when Gabby shoots at Luthando. All the while, actors watched other actors, and then stepped into the circle to 'become' their characters and enact their side of the story.

Following my feminine aesthetic I searched for intimate action that supported and textured domestic scenes for which there were no props or set. For example, an earlier scene in which Gabby and Aaron are still married – prior to the death of their son which precipitated their divorce - sees her complaining about the distance growing between them since returning from exile to South Africa:

GABBY: Maybe I'm just *imagining* that you're reluctant to take me to social functions and when you do, you always hives off, leaving me to fend for myself. Maybe I'm just imagining that you hardly ever introduce me as your wife. Are you embarrassed to have a white wife in the new South Africa? (2010:19).

The key to finding the feminine in this mise en scène was the fact that Aaron and Gabby are preparing for an official 'party' function. We had Gabby insisting on doing his neck tie and nuzzling him lovingly as he tries to dress. She is in fact beginning to berate him but her actions speak of love, whereas in the scene in which we learn that their son has been killed through

violent crime, and Gabby who is inconsolable, irrationally blames Aaron for their mutual loss, the actors spoke to each other from opposite ends of the stage, over a vast distance (2010:23-25).

Even as the metaphoric moral court case provided conceptual coherence and a relevant and flowing staging concept, the resultant minimalism created ongoing challenges to my feminine aesthetic of intimacy, closeness and feeling. On its own the metaphoric moral court case could not yield the intensity and embodied affect that I usually pursue in the feminine modality. At this point I was still primarily engaged with the writer's intentions. I had not yet accessed the signature that would mark this *mise en scène* as a textual body of feminine identity.

A second map of meaning: Rape on trial

It was only once we had explored and blocked the staging of the 'moral court case' that I introduced the next layer of *mise en scène*, which, with hindsight, I perceive as containing the signature of my feminine aesthetic. The second layer of *mise en scène* came from a feeling of dis-ease and dissatisfaction; something was being repressed in me and it needed to come out. It seemed to be an example of Courtney's 'felt meaning' - significance emerging gradually through feeling (1995:22). It was to do with the rape in the story. This feeling became stronger and stronger during rehearsals until one day I said to the cast:

I am beginning to understand that I am incensed by the debates in the play - something as intensely private as Gabby's rape has become a 'party' issue, put on an agenda for discussion, prodded and examined as if it was exhibit 'd' at a trial. Isn't Gabby suffering a triple violation? Damn it, there's something outrageous going on in this story. I mean let's look at it. Firstly she's been raped, then her privacy gets raped because now it's being discussed in the corridors of power – or never mind the corridors, maybe in specially called meetings - trade-offs being whispered among the highest echelons; and thirdly her rape is being used to rape justice. What I mean is that by sending Aaron – her own ex-husband! - down to Cape Town as a representative of the 'party' to persuade her not to press rape charges, she is being emotionally blackmailed out of her right to justice.

But what is this thing about justice? Why's it so important - particularly to a rape victim? What does it mean to be violated by rape? I sense it's to do with a feeling of utter eradication of

anything you can call yourself: 'you'. And we know that's fragile enough to begin with. Or... maybe its not eradication... I think the rapist, the aggressor, STEALS YOU. You need to get yourself back. Justice gives us back to ourselves, and back to our communal selves. It must be public, it must be on record. And then the issue about justice is also big for rape activists... because there are so few convictions in SA, the message is sent out in big neon colours: rape is okay and there are no consequences. Now this play is going to be saying just that - in a very complex scenario, yes - but lets look at the end: Gabby is going to be taking the party's offer to leave the country and drop the rape charges. She is selling out on herself, and selling out on women in South Africa. Ok we know why – it's because of her love for Aaron despite their divorce and because of her love of the country – she is putting the country above her own needs. As women always do. So this is horribly complex, the contradictions are real, not only representational; they are not only a fiction. We know this is directly reflecting reality as it exists here.²² So.

I feel I want to disrupt the evenness, the neatness of what we've done so far, I want to trash the stability of this cosy little African court case we've created. I want to play with tensions and contradictions on an emotional level. Look at this script. Look at our lives. One in three women is raped in this country and this play is pontificating about should she or she shouldn't seek justice – all this talking! We have to do something ...something that makes people feel this, not just talk about it, they must get in their guts, in their bodies, how it feels to be a woman who is raped and put in this horrible situation, having to make this impossible choice. What if we just - put a bath right in the middle of it all?

I had come across the fact that rape survivors, universally, report their need to wash themselves repeatedly (often eradicating evidence of the rape and spoiling chances for a conviction of the rapists). I was reminded of the deeply intimate parts of the body that have been invaded – violated - in the act of rape. The cast were willing to experiment, particularly Jenny Steyn who was playing Gabby and whom this affected. I continued:

²² Van Graan was prescient with this theme in *GMF*. In 2006, two years after the play was staged, Zuma (now President of SA) was acquitted of a rape charge; the accuser, known only as 'Khwezi' left under police guard for life in exile' (Gifford, G. 2010)

I see the circle (imbizo) being disrupted by something completely unexpected like a bath. And around this bath is transparent, shower curtaining. All the actors/characters sit in their chairs in a semi-circle watching. What are they watching? I'm not sure but I sense it's something like this. Gabby, who has just been raped, painfully takes off her clothes and gets into the bath. To the sound of her recorded voice giving her statement to the police of how she was raped, she repeatedly scrubs herself with soap, at first a disembodied gesture – she doesn't know what she's doing - and then more and more frantic, desperate. Why the see-through curtain, why not just a bath? I dunno, Jen – its something about transparency, how her insides have suddenly become visible, her skin has become see-through, she is utterly stripped, exposed, turned inside out... something like that. Yes the curtain is her skin, her last layer of protection, of defence, actually the curtain is about how uncurtained she is, nothing left of her subjectivity, she and her rape are just an item, an object, traded in a barter between powerful men.

That I was challenged to maintain in my imagination the dire consequences of her rapist's political demise is true. I constantly had to remind myself of the balance of the argument. If Gabby pressed charges against Khumalo he would lose political status and fail to play a peace keeping role between political factions in KwaZulu Natal. But it was difficult to weigh a potential loss of life against Gabby's actual rape. I said to Steyn (playing Gabby):

We know from history that this bloodbath in Natal is possible. But this rape in the play... it has taken on the colour red for me, an intense hot hue against sepia tones. It not the same as a potential internecine war, it's something that is happening to women every hour; it is another kind of war.... I don't know, I don't know what it will do, what it will mean.... I don't know what it will say.... I just sense it will be a powerful juxtaposition to the written text. What do you think?

I felt compelled to show the most excruciatingly painful detail I could find about rape, a texture that would speak volumes without words. The image of the see-through curtain is easier to articulate in retrospect: the transparency of the shower curtain metaphorized Gabby's interiority, her feeling of being stripped open and invaded, not only by the physical violence of the rape but by the psychological violence caused by the way in which her husband and the 'party' were dealing it . This transparent 'bathroom' in the middle of a public platform

(courtroom) was an inflamed act of protest, much like Moffett's blog rage, in direct response to the reality of rape conditions in South Africa (2012). The emotionally charged issue of rape contributed to Steyn's willingness to 'play inside' the visual metaphor, but the metaphor itself was something that needed to be felt in the 'doing' to be understood. Steyn had to physically strip, listen to the script of her statement to the police on tape while she washed herself, and feel its power. The recorded statement was performed in a monotone, devoid of emotion. This was also an instinctive choice. I sensed that the less emotional and more factual it was, the more emotionally charged the effect would be. The sound heard on the recording was a disembodied voice that testified to the bare facts - when, how, who and what - of an embodied event, a rape. The flat delivery was interpolated with slight pauses and hesitations, indicating traces of trauma: the struggle to remember, the effort of wrenching the words out of the body. The juxtaposition of this disembodied recorded voice with the image of Gabby's naked and raped body getting into the bath and starting to wash herself, was what finally dictated the register of the vocal recording. The two had to work in delicate synthesis, without the one outweighing the other.

This account of 'finding' a central piece of *mise en scène* (a map of meaning in a metaphor) in *GMF* demonstrates the feminine modality in process - groping, feeling, associating, responding to emotional impulses, the imagination, and to real conditions outside the rehearsal space, allowing the unconscious to speak in its faltering, lapses and fragments; in so doing it illustrates the germination of a feminine aesthetic for *GMF*. That this modality and aesthetic arguably cohered emotionally and ideologically, in this case was attributable not only to willing actors, but largely to the writing of *GMF*. For despite my struggle against the dialecticism of the text, there were aspects of the writing that opened up opportunities for emotionally charged *mise en scène* precisely *because* the events in the play demonstrated a verisimilitude with the contemporaneous political and historical context.

The feminine aesthetic and the written text.

In this section I expand on the explication of the *mise en scène* with some emphasis on the play's textual nature. Apart from the emotional charge provided by political and historical relevance, the written text was structured in such a way that it provided 'spaces' for creative (feminine) moves on the part of the director. Despite the intellectual register of much of the dialogue in which thoughtful debates were thoroughly articulated, I was able to weave an

emotional subtext and feminine texture, as well as sensate affects, around and between the written text. The following then, is a reading of the same scene but this time I show how the text and mise en scène worked together to produce a metatext that communicated an intensity of feeling that I believe captured the feminine aesthetic through 'felt meaning'.

In the written text Gabby's recorded statement to the police is followed by Inspector Abrahams' testimony to the TRC on a human rights violation during apartheid. This denotes a move back in time, as the TRC hearings took place in 1996-8 before Gabby's rape and the year of the election in question in the text - 1999. The temporal distensions of the text are enhanced by the fact that the TRC hearings involved testimonies of atrocities that occurred far back in apartheid history. When Inspector Abrahams was working for the apartheid regime as a security policeman, he witnessed the rape of a female political prisoner while she was in detention without trial. His testimony to the latter event, like Gabby's statement to the police, is a monologue of several pages. These two speeches were written to be performed consecutively but we experimented with breaking them up into shorter sections and alternating them. Thus we had two separate stories braided together in different forms, united by the topic of rape but separated by time and space. I will try to relate the feeling of the outcome in words. Mid way through the play the pattern of short dialogic scenes and time-play is disrupted by a sudden formal address to the audience. It seems that Inspector Abrahams is back at the inquiry into Luthando's death, but slowly we begin to realize that this is different: we have gone even further back in time and he is giving testimony on the rape of a female detainee Mrs Dhlamini. The account is spliced (intercut or edited) with Gabby's recorded voice giving her statement on her rape to the police while she washes herself in the bath. We hear from Inspector Abrahams that Mrs Dhlamini was primed for rape with the insertion of a running hosepipe - while Gabby continues to wash herself. In the cruel irony of the different applications of water lay an emotionally charged connection. In the case of Mrs Dhlamini the constant reference to 'is she wet enough?' is a crude play on sexual preparation for a woman before sex, perverting what should be pleasurable to a painful distension of the womb with water. A second inference is that Mrs Dhlamini is not clean enough to rape until she has been washed. In juxtaposition, Gabby's refuge from the defilement of rape is to wash herself repeatedly.

Van Graan had crafted a temporal irony in the meeting of past and present at the centre of the play, by means of which he reminds us that rape is a weapon of oppression used by anyone who wants to dominate, and is not exclusively a vice of the new regime. In this way he

equalizes the challenge the play poses to both present and past regimes. I, in turn, amplified this correlation by linking the two rapes with the visceral element of water and the image of Gabby's naked, raped body, in the act of washing herself.

The female figure centre stage: tipping the balance?

While the above 'reading' shows the feminine non-verbal text as arguably complimentary to the written text, a third aspect of this *mise en scène* demonstrates how my feminine *jouissance* – drive and desire – may have tipped the balance of focus between the male and female leads towards the female character, thus diluting what could have been the writer's intention to represent their cases equally.

Before the play properly started the actors entered as a company of performers, stood in front of their chairs in the circle and faced the bath behind the see-through curtain. There, a light came up on Gabby, who was lying on her back with her legs bent and spread apart – a position representative of a gynaecological examination. The bath was not yet discernible as it was disguised as an examining table. A female voice without accompaniment sang gently at first while Gabby tensed in preparation for the invasive probe. As the voice climaxed on a high note Gabby let out a pained cry and arched her pelvis away from the (imagined) cold probing instrument. The light faded on her and came up on Aaron, as written in the text, and in preparation for the first lines of the opening scene - the inquest.

The image representing Gabby's gynaecological examination could have been confused with childbirth by audiences who had not experienced a gynaecological examination or birth. It could also have read as a minimalist representation of rape. The inclusion of the figure of an examining doctor would have clarified the meaning but this was materially impossible – we could not afford the extra actor. Despite its ambiguity I decided to retain the image for what I thought were credible directorial reasons. These are the thoughts I shared with the cast when introducing the idea:

To start the play....we need something visceral, something closer to where the play is going. I want to prepare the audience for an intensity of feeling... it must infect the atmosphere of the inquest scenes, which are pretty hard to follow anyway, sort of like a trailer to a Homicide Detective series. We know something's amiss but we're not exactly sure what. So I want to introduce pain, rupture, to say: 'Hey audience it's a bumpy ride ahead, yes it's a thriller but with

a difference, so don't get too comfortable, and be prepared for some bruises along the way!' And anyway I want to break the mystery of the enshrouded bath - its empty presence could be distracting until it's used. So let's kill the questions and use it straight off. I've read that rape survivors must be internally examined for signs of forced entry and seminal fluid, otherwise there's no point in reporting it, because there's no evidence. This can be as traumatizing as the rape itself and contributes to post traumatic stress disorder. Imagine: she's sore, she's lost herself, she's out of body, she's being questioned, hustled from desk to desk, fingerprinted, interrogated, photographed, pushed around from office to office, now suddenly she's in a strange room and a strange man/woman is telling her to open her legs, guys do you know what they use for internal examinations....cold, steel, hard....a probing instrument?

During this description I suddenly became aware that I was talking to the male members of the cast as well as the females. Instinctively I knew that the men would have to know what it was that Gabby was experiencing. Again, I couldn't articulate why, or what meaning might materialize; I could only sense it would create an interesting tension in the watching actors. It achieved the atmospheric effect I was after with a knife-edged tension that is hard to plan consciously. More mysterious than Gabby washing herself in the bath and more abstract in its imagery, the 'witnessing' actors embodied contradiction itself; they were directed to watch with absolute objectivity, but infected with the knowledge of Gabby's pain, as actors they struggled to maintain their impassivity. The actors themselves became the site of cross currents between two opposing forces: a natural impulse to empathize and the objective to be disengaged and simply witness the medical examination. The contrast in tone between the two scenarios created further tensions: the formally dressed circle of mostly male characters (and Anna wore a suit) watching from a distance the half naked, private and painful intimacy of the internal examination. This contrast resulted in a play of differences, a push and pull between objectivity and subjectivity, a call to feel and a call to stay cognitively alert. It seems possible to suggest therefore that Diamond's notion of a play of contradictions (and differences) is discernible here (1997).

I propose then that the Brechtian device serving van Graan's dialectical scheme was diluted by highly charged emotional imagery, and replaced by a third order of affect: Diamond's 'play of differences' and tensions. And in this concatenation of directorial pragmatism, Brechtian 'differences', and feminine jouissance, I positioned Gabby as the lead character. With

the transparent bathroom raised and centre-back of the circle of chairs on stage, and all the witnessing actors in isolated lights facing Gabby in the 'bathroom' in a stronger light, the focus of my feminine interest was clearly signalled from the first moments of the performance text. This was reinforced by the final moment of the play in which Gabby has the final line, 'Where shall I start?' and leaves the audience to figure it out (2010:99). In tandem with the focus I gave to the emotional issue of Gabby's rape in Steyn's performance, this visual arrangement and Gabby's private cry of pain opening the play, I may have tipped the balance away from Aaron and the importance of his arguments, towards Gabby whose problem dominated my feminine jouissance. However, while I may have failed to honour my original aim of reflecting the writer's intentions, the focus on Gabby may have worked advantageously for the play.

Reflections

In this section I weave personal reflections on my *mise en scène* around some critical reviews written in response to the first performance of *GMF* at the NAF (2004). In so doing I aim to bring into play a variety of views on the performance text (amalgamation of written text and *mise en scène*) of *GMF*, which until now has been guided solely by my self personal view. It is interesting to note that this endeavour has been slightly impeded by the fact that the reviewers take a fairly uniform approach in their responses. At the same time, the pattern that emerges is significant when assessing the feminine modality.

From the start the audience was made aware of the 'theatricality' of the piece as opposed to losing themselves in an illusion of reality, following Dolan and Diamond's call for Brechtian distancing. This was particularly denoted by the witnessing actors. This attempt at a Brechtian alienation affect was noted by several reviewers. Here is Max Rayneard of *This Day*:

The set is by no means naturalistic...the actors are very present....If not directly involved they sit on the periphery observing the action....By revealing the nuts and bolts of its own workings, the play challenges the audience not to willingly suspend their disbelief; not to buy in to the slickness of the political thriller, but to critically engage with the moral predicaments confronting the characters. (Rayneard: 2004)

Rayneard readily perceives the Brechtian influences on the *mise en scène* that reveal 'the nuts and bolts of its own workings' as a signal 'to critically engage with' the political and personal dilemmas. At times this device could be seen to embody Diamond's 'differences within'; in other words, generating neither pure alienation nor emotionalism, but an entanglement between them. At the same time it is also possible to imagine that the emotional charge in the *mise en scènes* under discussion, combined with the politically loaded content, in fact

superseded both Dolan's denaturalization and Diamond's 'differences within'. Intrigued by the collection of contradictory theatrical influences present in *GMF*, Rayneard likens the play generically to a strange beast: 'But the beast gets stranger still. Way more than a didactic diatribe *GMF* is an emotionally engaging play, facilitated by the cast's taut naturalistic performances' (2004). Here there is a note of surprise that despite the Brechtian device, he was moved emotionally. According to the received notion of Brecht's theory of alienation, the performances should be a step removed, almost in the third person so the audience can 'critically engage' without emotion. Thus Rayneard is acknowledging the contradictory styles and approaches that make up *GMF*, noting that it is theatrically satisfying. It is also worth observing that he attributes the emotionally charged experience of the performance text, not to the director's *mise en scène*, but to the cast's 'taut, naturalistic performances'. Anton Krueger similarly emphasises performance as the instrument of the emotionally charged timbre of the piece:

Steyn has the most difficult of tasks on stage having to work through a wide spectrum of intensely emotional roles, from mother, to lover, to friend, to victim; and she achieves these transitions with a delicate pathos, offset by occasional comic touches. (Krueger: 2004)

Not only is Krueger highlighting the histrionic range of trauma Gabby is subjected to but indicating the epic nature of her relationship with her ex-husband Aaron. In doing so he emphasises the structural and thematic role of the relationship:

Using the microcosm of an inter-racial relationship, Van Graan portrays the state of the nation from its birth pains to some of the uneasy realities that have to be faced today. After 10 years of democracy, Van Graan takes no quarter in examining the intrigues and corruption that inevitably seem to follow in the wake of power. (Krueger: 2004)

Krueger accepts with ease the paradoxes inherent in *GMF*'s form, referring also to the juxtaposition of the supposedly alienating Brechtian technique and the putatively incompatible emotionalism: '.... a Brechtian style is employed in historicising the problems dealt with on stage, and yet the piece also managed to tap into a deep underlying vein of troubled emotions' (2004). Krueger however, focuses less on form and more on content:

I am reluctant to reveal too much of the puzzle. Suffice to say that the piece includes a murder mystery, crooked politicians, and a philosophical debate on the status of the individual versus the stateIt also includes a crime, horror, rape, murder, love, betrayal and humour and all the bitter-sweet poignancy that goes with living in South Africa today. (Krueger:2004)

Krueger articulates the general disappointment with the political moment in which the play is presented. He is acknowledging that ten years after the first free elections, there has been little

criticism levelled against the new status quo. Inherent in this 'quietness' is a collusion in the nation building project to maintain the trope of the rainbow nation. Krueger avoids comparisons with past political theatre genres and instead directs the reader's attention towards a theatrical future in his headline 'Mapping out a future':

Ever-defiant, Van Graan is set to lead a new brand of politically active theatreThis is a work destined to ruffle feathers, step on toes ... lives up to its promise of being an adventurous work that maps out a future of political engagement in post-apartheid writing. (Krueger:2004)

Almost universally the political nature of the script is lauded and headlined while the visceral nature of the theatrical experience is included as an addendum. It appears that common to most of the comments is the notion first, that *GMF* articulates uncomfortable political and moral questions about the new(ish) South Africa:

It is certainly one of the most debated plays on offerVan Graan has written a deeply disquieting, relevant personal-political thriller, reflecting these times of corruption, cover-ups and smoke screens. it cuts to the chase as a drama and does what theatre is supposed to do – it provokes and it makes you think and it makes you feel. (Mammon, 2004)

Rafiek Mammon does give equal weight to the personal and political and to the activities of thinking and feeling, becoming less caught up in the issue of form and genre. Many of the reviewers however are simply grateful for Van Graan's courage in going against the political grain: 'if this is what Van Graan dares to produce as theatre for post-1994 audiences, all one can say is, more, please' (Brommert, 2005) and 'Green Man Flashing is written with skill and an assured sense of dare. I urge you...to go and see the standing-ovation inducing Green Man Flashing' (Bell, 2005). The word 'dare' is used in both quotations indicating a kind of breathlessness that a writer has finally broken the silence on the new government's sullied record. As Van Graan writes on his website:

Green Man Flashing was regarded by many as a turning point for contemporary South African drama because of the way it dealt with contemporary politics. But it was also regarded as being more remarkable for anticipating the real life drama of the ANC Deputy President, Jacob Zuma, being linked to charges of corruption in the arms deal and then later charged with rape. (Van Graan:2004a)

While these reviews and comments reflect primarily the political content and theatre context placing *GMF* as a groundbreaking piece of political theatre, the following comments come closer to reflecting my feminine aesthetic and *mise en scène*, if not precisely, at least in spirit: 'Many contemporary plays grapple with the heart and mind of conflict and post-conflict life, with all its contradictions, but Green Man Flashing carries a high-voltage current that touches the nerve ends' (Gordimer 2004). Capturing the essence of my feminine aesthetic affect is the

idea of an electrical current, a circuit of 'felt meaning' between the text, the actors and the audience. Adrienne Sichel plugs into Nadine Gordimer's 'high-voltage' with emotionally charged language: 'This finely crafted drama screams to be seen. It tears at the heart and soul of our democracy, and rips at the underbelly of corruption and political power through its astute writing' (2004). Sichel's emotional response is communicated in 'screams', 'tears' and 'rips', which, if not the same, is surely as intense as Gordimer's 'high voltage'. On a more restrained note Judith February, political commentator for the Institute for a Democratic South Africa, comments: 'One of the most compelling pieces of post-apartheid theatre; its tight and mature dialogue reflecting, with honesty, the struggle for morality in the new South Africa' (2004). February takes up the theme of morality which directly informed my (initial) map of meaning for the *mise en scène*: *the metaphor of a moral court case in which all characters are on trial*. She reflects the balance I tried to achieve in her phrases 'with honesty, the struggle for morality'.

None of the reviewers and commentators chose to take up the theme of rape or the treatment of it in the *mise en scène*. It is true, as Krueger points out, that rape is one of many tragedies that befall the character of Gabby; the loss of her son through violent crime, and the collapse of her marriage to Aaron precede the rape, which is then followed by the shooting mishap in which Luthando ends up dead, making Gabby a suspect for murder. Perhaps there are too many issues embedded in one character for reviewers to choose one above another. Alternately there may have been other reasons for not mentioning the rape. It may have reflected a desire 'not to give the game away' or even more hopefully, a sign of 'decency', on the part of the reviewers who, if they mentioned a nude actor onstage, would surely draw audiences to this production, but for the wrong reasons.

Be that as it may, for my final reflection on the affects of my *mise en scène* I return to the crucial piece of *mise en scène* I described earlier where Gabby washes after her rape, while the story of Mrs Dhlamini's rape unfolds. From my feminine view, the fact that the actors had to witness their fellow performer strip, nakedly inhabit the crushed physicality of a rape survivor and wash herself repeatedly, unleashed 'felt dynamics' among them that were unquantifiable. The public and private collided, blurring divisions between the imagined world

of the play and the cold reality of our own society in which rape frequently occurs and almost as often goes unpunished.²³

The social factors that inflame the feminine modality are shared by the audience. The affects generated by these examples of a feminine aesthetic are not solely due to my inspiration, but certain topics in our lived and shared environment of audience and artists are always already inflamed by associations attached to them. The text of my feminine self intersects with the senses and fears of a female audience. Furthermore, not only women engage with inflammatory social malpractices such as rape. Smallhorne points out that 'Rape does not affect the survivor alone. Spouses, parents, children, friends and many more feel the ripple' (2012:1). The fact that not a single critic chose to review the play from a feminist perspective may speak to the point I made in chapter 2 about women's issues remaining in the wings of the national political stage. It is ironic that Anna's argument for the rape charge to go ahead in *GMF* is predicated exactly on this error.

However, it will benefit this study on the feminine directorial modality to challenge this largely self-reflexive (and self-satisfied?) reading of my directorial process and its outcomes, with the ideas of critical feminist thinkers. To this end I take up a theme that has direct bearing on the conceptual feminine textual body generated by the feminine modality and which is extended in the text of this study: the representation of the female subject on stage.

FEMINIST READINGS

The representation of the female subject is a central concern of the feminist project. The 'signs' of women that are created on stage are crucial in contributing towards the reception of female characters as subjects, rather than as objects, or as simply the 'other', and as Case showed us, this includes the female audience, which is schooled to see representations through a male gaze (1988: 119). Feminists in theatre attempt to correct this objectification or othering of female characters in representation through various means, but my interest here is with the pictorial and staging arrangement which the director is particularly responsible for. I am concerned with the choice I made to show Gabby's naked figure in the bath and her partial nakedness in the image that started the performance text. Having explicated the materialist

²³ "Research in Mpumalanga revealed that 120 reported cases of rape only resulted in one conviction ...The fact that we don't have a functional justice system means that many rapists think they'll just get away with it – and they're probably right. That in itself sends a message to society" (Lisa Vetten in interview with Smallhorne (2012:1).

feminist position on female nakedness on stage in the previous chapter, I now take up the issue in order to explore the theoretical tensions and contradictions that could be inherent in the feminine modality. This will involve a fairly extensive detour into theories that have helped me to understand the operation of the male gaze on stage.

In the case of Gabby's scenes behind the see-through curtain (of which there were several) the actors as witnesses were directed to turn their bodies to watch her in the bathroom positioned upstage-centre. This was chosen not only for its alienation effect but as an obvious theatrical device to manage the audience's attention. The result was an intensity of focus which it seems introduced a feminist conundrum. Because of the specific positioning of the bathroom, raised and interrupting the circle of chairs upstage-centre, with the audience at the opposite end of it, it is possible that we suddenly had the traditional uni-directional perspective against which Dolan warns us. A perspectival arrangement between spectator and performer, associated with the proscenium arch appears to be perfectly poised to elicit the male gaze. Although *GMF* never played in a proscenium arch theatre, the fact that Gabby was naked and positioned at the vanishing point of the two parallel planes of perspective created by the two lines of watching actors, the effect was reminiscent of the effects of proscenium arch theatre. With the audience at the vantage point opposite the vanishing point, this pictorial arrangement could present problems for materialist feminists.

Perspective has come to mean two inter-related things. First associated with Renaissance oil painting and later used in scenic devices in theatre to manage attention and create the illusion of reality, it is phantasmagorical: it creates a perception of distance and a perception of being close at the same time - an illusion of spatial reality; but the fact that it is removed from the viewer as a reality, makes it a perfect place for fantasy. This is in essence part of the operation of the male gaze and has become integral to 'the male signifying system'. This 'system' is historical:

Today, rather than promising a *finestra aperta* on the world, the artificial perspective of the early Renaissance is clearly visible as a technique of producing images. Moreover this is a technique that can be located in time and place, and that can be historicized. It appears to be much harder to see the notion of perspective itself as a historical invention, and to grasp the ways in which this invention has pervaded our conception of the visible world. (2008: 13)

Perspective has played a primary role, not only in how 'we see' and in notions of perception, but it is integrated into our 'knowledge at the most implicit or unconscious level' and has become symbolic because 'the subject is absorbed in and produced by it' (2008:13). Thus

Bleeker implies that the notion of perspective is constitutive to the subject – it is integral to who and what we are; and this is instituted right at the inception of the subject in the psychoanalytical matrix of the formation of the subject.

This notion begins to explain why it is that, despite numerous efforts to deconstruct it (in differing apparatus), the male gaze persists as a problem for feminists, and moreover, that the conditions that produce it, the apparatus of perspective, just won't disappear. Simultaneously Bleeker's insight challenges the implications that the subject (audience) can be interpellated by different kinds of visual input; because 'visuality' or 'a way of seeing' is integral to the first moments of (self) perception. Referring to the symbolic order of sexual identification, Bleeker argues that for Freud 'the awareness of sexual difference results from "looking" for the absence or presence of one single factor'; it is from 'the moment in which the male and female subjects first "see" each other' that the difference occurs' (Freud, 1961:135-243 in Bleeker, 2008:111). This begins to explain the male subject's visual obsession with the female genitalia. But we still need to understand how the uni-directionality of perspective fosters this 'gaze'. Thus I turn to Lacan's mirror stage in the formation of the subject, in which the operation of 'seeing' once again seems to play a seminal part.

According to Lacan the infant at six months already recognizes it's own image in a mirror. Once the child recognizes that the mirror image is 'empty ... [it] rebounds...in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relations between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment' (Lacan, 1949:57). This mirror stage should be understood 'as an identification' which means that 'it is a transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image...an imago' (1949:58). This is the moment in the 'symbolic matrix' of the formation of the subject, 'in which the "I" is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject' (1949:58).

Lacan stresses, the image in the mirror is a 'specular' I, 'an exteriority', in contrast to the 'turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him' (58). In a gestalt, these two aspects of appearance symbolize the stability of the 'I' (ego) and at the same time anticipate the alienation that is to follow through the disjuncture between the two. There will always be a part of the subject that is a figure of the imagination, or a projection, or 'phantom'. Lacan posits that in this gestalt of 'the imagos... the mirror image would seem to be the threshold of the visible world' (58).

Thus it is that 'looking' becomes constitutive to 'perception' in the subject: 'that is 'to step inside' the mirror involves to adopt a mode of looking that places a premium on visual information as the point of reference from where to 'place' other perceptual input (or ignore such input)' (Bleeker, 2008:162). Significantly, part of the operation of the (mis)recognition in the mirror, is that the child must anticipate a specific mode of perception that is the product or effect of a history of disciplining the senses by means of culturally specific practices of managing attention (Crary, 1999: in Bleeker, 160-163). This leads to a subject in which visuality is privileged and isolated as a separate category of the senses and of knowledge, in a split between what is seen and can be mediated, and what cannot (Bleeker, 2008:163). Because of how the subject first sees him/herself as 'a self,' that is, in a mirror, there will always be a vantage point and always 'an other' in a vanishing point (the mirror). As I understand it from Crary and Bleeker's view, the sense of the split between 'self' and 'other' derives not only from the split between the real body of the child and the idealized projected self in Lacan's mirror stage, but also from Lacan's symbolic stage of the Law of the Father, to which I return now, with some emphasis on the consequences of the scheme for the subject:

[T]he child trades his earlier, undefined realm of self-satisfaction for the desire to be a self. The self is actually a cultural ideal, alienating him from his libidinal pleasure. The organization of selfhood then drives him into the symbolic order of the culture. Thus the subject's participation in the world of symbols is always marked by an alienation from the satisfaction of libidinal desires and the resulting state of unfulfilled desire. (Case, 1988:119-20)

The splitting of the subject and consequent desire for wholeness with an 'other' in the Law of the Father, has already been set on course by the mirror stage (Bleeker, 2008:163). Both the mirror stage and the symbolic stage are visual operations. The mode of self-perception set by these visual operations is uni-directional. Repressed and unfulfilled desire seems to be awakened symbolically by the vanishing point in perspective, which is also uni-directional. As a feminist proposition this becomes even clearer with the notion that the original, (Lacanian) pre-symbolic site of desire is the mother. It is the mother, the maternal female figure with whom the infant is at one as a 'whole', prior to the symbolic phase, and from whom the infant must separate according to Lacan's Law of the Father (Braidotti, 1991:30-31). It is the maternal female figure who is therefore the object of repressed and unattainable desire, and thus becomes 'the other'. This intensifies the stakes for the male subject who must at all costs align himself with the cultural code of behavioural order, in which the senses must be disciplined.

Some artists and analysts have posited the female genitalia as the vanishing point in perspectival paintings, a metaphor for the invisible and unattainable, the part in the picture that can't be seen and is most desired. Bleeker interprets this in terms of origin, as in the title of Coubert's painting *L'origine du monde*, linking it to the 'metaphysical notion of origin; not just some origin but the origin of the world, the origin of the human life, the vanishing point par excellence' (2008:101). The female genitals on display, which are the vanishing point in *L'origine*, force the viewer 'to face lack in the overt visibility of the site of both castration anxiety and desire' (2008:102). Theoretically then this amalgamation of anxiety and repressed desire underlies the male viewer's compulsion towards the female genitalia. Thus it is that the site of origin, the mother, the female 'other', the female genitals and sexuality become the site of castration anxiety for the male viewer and at the same time the site of unattainable desire.

From a distance, with the illusion of closeness and intimacy, with his vantage point in the theatre replicating his vantage point in the mirror stage, the desired but feared female figure at the vanishing point becomes a surface for the male subject's projected fantasies. Thus the female figure is denied her subjectivity and becomes an object of fantasy. In short, the distance between the vantage point and vanishing point of perspective in theatre allows, even encourages, the objectification of the female figure.²⁴

Nakedness at the vanishing point in *GMF*

So had I, a feminine director, fallen into the trap of objectifying the female subject in the vanishing point of perspective, setting up the promise 'to show all', while allowing the spectator to be removed from the scene of seeing? Let us consider first how the female body was staged within this traditional perspectival arrangement.

In the gynaecological examination Gabby was positioned sideways to the audience with her legs bent and splayed. Her nakedness from the waist down was covered by a sheet, as it would be in reality for such a procedure. The clinical or medical environment was signalled by the white sheet covering the lower naked half of her body, again as it would be in the real world. Her physical and psychic pain was clearly evident as she let out her piercing cry. Thus it was hard to imagine this figure as a surface for the projection of desire except perhaps for the

²⁴ A reminder of why this is a male operation: the male materially owns the symbol of the whole, that is the penis, relegating the female to non-signified; further, in Case's version of 'the male gaze', because the female spectator has no subjectivity and channels for her 'desire', she identifies or 'sees' with the male gaze. Case says: 'For women, one of the results of this representation of woman as 'Other' in the male gaze is that she also becomes an 'Other' to herself' (1988:120).

most perverted viewer. On the other hand, the fact that Gabby's lower half was naked but covered, being almost visible, but not quite, a suggestion of the 'promise' and 'denial' of the site of origin, may have amplified the desire for 'visual plenitude': the pleasure of contemplating access to the 'whole' of the split self.

And what of representing the naked body after it has been raped? Again, the bath was positioned side-ways so Gabby was in profile to the audience. As her sonorous police report played on tape, she slowly started to undress, carefully placing her clothes on a chair. Her movements were disembodied as if someone else were operating her limbs; her shoulders slightly hunched in self protection, while she moved her lower body carefully, inching herself into the water, and then flinching as her female parts encountered it – a texture Steyn found in her immersion in the moment as a performer. Notable was the fragility with which the actress managed her movements, as if in terror that any fast or sudden gesture might shatter what was left of herself. The flinch of pain as her genitals touched the hot water followed the logic of the given circumstances, signalling: rape hurts. Whereas Steyn and I had generated these details in performance to demonstrate the trauma of rape, the material positioning of the naked body may have encouraged objectification; further, what I read as trauma in the vulnerable naked body, could have been construed as abjection, victimhood – a further invitation to objectification. In the male gaze, the abject, passive (even dead) female form arouses desire as there is no animating dynamic to counter the male fantasy. From a materialist feminist view, these naked images at the vanishing point of perspective present problematic scenarios. From my feminine view the (feminine) detail of the performance reduced the distance inherent in perspective through visceral and emotional impact – drawing the seer in closer as 'in two hands pressing', rendering the seer a 'body-subject', the signification travelling from body to body, an embodied dynamic between performer and audience. However, this claim must take into account Bleeker's point that perspective is branded into the viewer's order of perception at the very early inception of the subject. My suggestion that the fixed relationship of the male subject to perspective may be interpellated with sensate, embodied affects, stands open to question. Perhaps after all, Dolan's project of deconstructing the male signifying system - perspective in this case - through differing 'apparatus', may guide this discussion towards a conclusion (1991:91-2)

Countering the male gaze: differing apparatus and frames in *GMF*

My aim at this point is to attempt to identify in Dolan's terms the use of differing apparatus and frames, which may have tempered the objectifying effect of perspective. On closer examination of this piece of *mise en scène*, which the reader is by now familiar with, it seems possible that differing apparatus were indeed operating simultaneously, thus diluting the objectifying effects of the perspectival arrangement of which I was guilty.

While Gabby washed in the bath up stage and behind the transparent curtains, Inspector Abrahams sat in front of the bathroom directly facing the audience to deliver his testimony to the TRC, thus (materially) interrupting the uni-directional gaze towards Gabby. Then, although they were in the same visual frame and shared a theme (rape), these two characters were in entirely different times, places and narratives, splitting audience attention between two stories, provoking a temporal and spacial displacement. Added to this was a further apparatus of Gabby's recorded voice with which the audience's attention was invited in yet another direction. Simultaneous to Gabby's disembodied voice, we had the earthy tones of the real voice of Abrahams speaking directly to the audience, as if they were the TRC commission, a further frame breaking the conventions of perspective. The sound of real water splashing in the bath added another apparatus in the form of a slippage out of representation into the real. And the company of actors watching Gabby could be seen as a final apparatus, drawing attention away from the naked female figure and returning it once more to her through their undivided focus – provoking an ongoing oscillation of attention in the audience. It is possible that these differing apparatus and multiple frames, in issuing simultaneous calls for attention and modalities of engagement, fractured the uni-directionality of perspective and thus diluted the effects of the male gaze. It seems possible to say that the 'differing' apparatus in *GMF* to some extent, countered the gender coded apparatus of perspective.

However, I leave this with Bleeker's warning 'against the mistaken idea that deconstructing or rejecting dramatic frames leaves spectators free to see as he or she wishes' **because** the subject is 'the product(s) of cultural practices that condition' how the spectator will see' (2008:162-3).

Reflections on the Feminist readings

From my feminine viewpoint, the way in which the real water in the bath not only joined the two rape narratives but washed into the senses of audience and performers was crucial in a

feminine appeal to the sensate, to 'felt meaning' for the spectator. The mixing of real sound, recorded disembodied voice, spoken words, dual narratives and split visual images, produced perhaps, a subtle rendering of Dolan's differing apparatus and multiple frames. Although *GMF*'s structure is non-linear, constructed in cyclical and fragmentary pieces, the narrative in the end is clear (if unresolved). With realistically emotional performances that drew the audience in, *GMF* may have come closer to embodying Diamond's play of 'tensions and contradictions'; as the spectator is pulled between a materialist project of differing calls for attention and a feminine project of the embodied impact of identification with Gabby's predicament. These tensions in reception I see as symptomatic of the contradictory feminine modality in which I generated meaning in the mise en scène of *GMF*.

At the same time that the naked female body created theoretical questions and contradictions, it seems it is here that my feminine aesthetic materialized in its most palpable form. It is also possible that the fraught issue of agency in the task of making meaning in new playtexts momentarily came to rest. For in this example of the feminine aesthetic I propose that the writer's intention was simultaneously materialized. Far from diverting and breaking down 'meaning' as multiple frames in postmodernism are supposed to do, it seemed to clarify it. This is a conceptual paradox in that I acknowledge the dangers of Bleeker's Lacanian preconditioned subject/spectator visually locked in a distanced relationship with the object, but bypass it by proposing that a particularly visceral kind of performance combined with a diverse array of apparatus, can turn the Lacanian subject into Merleau-Ponty's body/subject (1968:134). For this to work the affects created in mise en scène would need to be particularly arresting and emotionally powerful, capable of interpellating the female objectification created by perspective, and indelibly branded in the perceptions of the subject at formation.

I add to this one last personal insight about how the unconscious operates within the feminine directorial modality. The unconscious, informed and contoured by multiple inputs, can be ironic and mischievous; it is not constrained to the direct expression of emotion, feeling and impulse. I am saying that I remember, but did not articulate, an irony in placing the naked Gabby at the vanishing point of perspective. Like the other intuitions I have recounted involving 'tensions', I intuited in some part of me that I was creating a contradiction, and I wanted to see what would happen. This thought provides a final example of the paradoxes and tensions in the feminine aesthetic arising from the unconscious feminine modality in *GMF*. In Chapter 4

I examine an instance in which the tensions and contradictions arising from the feminine modality may have resulted in a less coherent textual body of meaning. Here the feminine modality was less free to find its own way in the situation of working with a writer whose preference was to be far more involved in the rehearsal and conceptualization process.

CHAPTER 4 - CASE STUDY – *REACH*

Introduction

The case study of *Reach* provides a clear contrast to *GMF* in that the writer was present during the rehearsal process. Whereas van Graan chose to hand over to me the entire process of finding meaning beyond the written text in the rehearsal process, Foot was present and involved with major decisions pertaining to the performance text of *Reach*. This means that she attended crucial run-throughs after which she engaged in decision-making discussions with me. This single factor, the presence of the writer, resulted in complexities in the processes of making meaning in *mise en scène*, particularly for the director. The most profound of these, and most relevant for this inquiry, is the difference the writer's presence made to the feminine directorial modality. Free to follow the fundamental tenets of the feminine modality in *GMF*, in impulse, instinct, faltering, groping and feeling for meaning, in the presence of the writer in *Reach*, this habitual unconscious modality was disrupted by the need for discussion, motivation and articulation, and finally some kind of consensus with respect to choices made.

There are several other factors that made the process of directing *Reach* different from *GMF*, which demonstrate, as I have already pointed out, the modality's vulnerability. The first was the difference in material circumstances. *Reach* was in the unusual position (for South Africa) to be funded by a German commission. This meant that funds were provided for the writing of the play and for the tour to the Teatro Formen Festival, Hanover. Further it had been accepted to play at the NAF, the Baxter and the Market theatres – all before the script was complete. With so much prior vested interest, the stakes for the success or failure of *Reach* were high. With *GMF*, van Graan and I were on our own, beholden to no one, and responsible for our own successes and failures, whereas with *Reach* the stakes were escalated by the patronage it received leading to a pressurized rehearsal environment.

A further pressure was that *Reach* was the practical component of Foot's MA dissertation. In her inquiry she was attempting to explore her skills as a writer rather than as an auteur, the role that had primarily occupied her till then. This was the first time she had handed over a text to another director and was thus an important moment for her both personally and

professionally.²⁵ *Reach* then rehearsed in circumstances that were more financially and materially supported than GMF, but with much higher stakes attached.

There were good reasons why Foot should invite me to be her first collaborative director and why the collaboration between us should be fruitful. As protégés of Barney Simon we were brought together at the Market Theatre. Although thirteen years separate us in age, we grew side by side as individual theatre makers with distinct signatures and a mutual respect for each other's work.²⁶ When Barney Simon died, I was appointed Associate Artistic Director and Foot was appointed Resident director from 1995 to 1997, under John Kani, the new Artistic Director of the Market Theatre, Johannesburg. We were both passionate about contributing to new South African theatre, we collaborated as a team, giving each other notes, supporting and encouraging each other's ventures and generally sharing a vision about the possibilities for South African theatre. By the time Foot asked me to direct *Reach* I had seen all her original works while Foot had witnessed all my attempts at directing new South African texts. It was this rapport built over years that encouraged Foot to offer me the direction of *Reach*.²⁷ As it was the first time she was entrusting her writing to another director it was important that there would be good communication between her and her director.

As it turned out there were differences of opinion about meaning in *Reach*. These emerged in post run-through meetings, arising from choices I had made in the mise en scène. Being ethically bound to serve the writer's intentions I followed her suggestions. Foot had previously made many new pieces of work on her own, so I conceded to her out of respect for her experience. Moreover, as this was her practical research for her MA it seemed only fair to give her the lead. But, as I have said much earlier in this study, I did not 'feel the direction we were taking 'in my bones'. I was uncomfortable being led as if blind, and unconvinced about the choices we were making. My connection to my instincts became suspended and replaced by the writer's vision. This problem was complicated by the unconsciousness of my feminine modality, which when it did assert itself with mise en scène that made sense to me, alongside and over and above Foot's suggestions, the results were at odds with the writer's meanings. The making of meaning in *Reach* then appears to be a contradictory and fraught process which had a significant impact on my feminine modality. Thus in this final chapter I foreground my

²⁵ Revealed in a post-mortem conversation between writer and director (2011).

²⁶ I only started directing after twelve years of being an actress. Foot went straight from graduating into directing.

²⁷ Communicated to me when offering me the job (2006)

struggle to sustain my feminine modality under the stress of granting the writer agency in meaning, and at the same time the assertion of the feminine modality in places and times that were perhaps not helpful. The idea is to introduce the subtleties and nuances at play within the wider frame of the question of agency in making meaning in new plays.

In an endeavour to understand the dynamics of the interactions between writer and director, initially I wrote 'the story' of the collaboration as a narrative and then commenced analysing the narrative I had written. The narrative of *Reach*, with the putative privilege of endowed material circumstances as a backdrop, has three acts. It starts with a development phase between writer and director prior to rehearsals. Since Foot had already completed a draft of *Reach*, this was a re-write. Recorded by Foot and explicated in some detail in her MA dissertation, *Mise en scène as (Pre)text: an insistence on a negotiated space in the creation of new works* (2007b), this record has proved useful to my study, providing me with insight into issues which, at the time, I was unable to discern. The central tenet of the thesis is that the writer is not necessarily cognizant of the meaning she intends when conceiving of and writing a play. It is thus necessary for the writer to be part of the rehearsal process in collaboration with the director. In this 'negotiated space' dissension or differences of opinion about mise en scène and the meaning that it generates should be resolved by returning to the writer's very early impulses that generated the writing of the play. This proposal introduces several challenges for the feminine director who is accustomed to following her own impulses in response to a written text, and intimates at a loss of agency for the director during her process of creating mise en scène and meaning.

Thereafter the narrative moves to the rehearsal period and the making of meaning in mise en scène. I draw from Foot's account of this phase, but augment her version with my personal informal voice, which at the time existed as a repressed internal (rather tortured) dialogue with myself. In this way I hope to take the reader 'inside' the 'feeling' of the psychic displacement experienced in a loss of agency. I also use this voice, as in *GMF*, to evoke the feminine aesthetic which finally asserted itself. I then step back and analyze the impact of my unconscious modality on the performance text of *Reach*.

The final part of the narrative takes place a few years later, in 2011 when Foot directed her own version of the play, reverting to its earliest title of *Solomon and Marion*. This third act in the story is particularly pertinent as it is in Foot's *Solomon and Marion* that the problems of

meaning in *mise en scène* were partially resolved, thereby illuminating the problems I had experienced in the initial production.

The problems I had experienced in the process of directing *Reach* are related to clarifying the meaning through the choice of a style for the performance; this issue materialized most clearly in the representation of the black male character Solomon. It is thus around Solomon that this narrative revolves, and finally in Foot's *Solomon and Marion*, that it resolves. It is important to point out that the disagreements between writer and director were not evident as such while we were rehearsing. It was only through analysing my directorial activities in *Reach* that I begin to understand that at the centre of the process was a disjunction in conceptions of the meaning of the play between writer and director. I start this narrative with a brief explication of the play, followed by an account of the challenges it presented to the feminine director.

***Reach* – the play**

An aging woman (Marion) lives alone, isolated by divorce, the emigration of her daughter to Australia and the loss of her son through violent crime. Seven years later she still has not recovered from his death. Her life is decaying and closing in around her. Solomon, the orphaned grandson of her previous domestic worker, befriends her. We learn finally that when her son was killed, Solomon was present and has a message from him, one that may bring Marion closure and help her heal. Through this unlikely relationship Marion and Solomon both find some comfort and it seems Marion may recover from her grief.

It is not only Marion who must come to terms with past trauma but Solomon, who although not directly responsible, bears the burden of Marion's son's death - until he can bring himself to deliver the message. We hear that finally he gets the courage when he goes for initiation in 'the mountain' where, as Solomon puts it: boys are 'taught to face up to our responsibilities' (Foot, 2009:63).²⁸ For Solomon the message he carries has added weight for:

In my culture the last person to see someone alive is supposed to speak at the funeral. You are supposed to tell the listeners what you saw and what you heard so that the living can be at peace with the whole story, with the truth about the death. (2009:63)

²⁸ As with *GMF*, I use the published text of *Reach* for references (2009). When I quote the rehearsal text I reference it with the date of rehearsal: 2007a; Foot's dissertation will be 2007b.

Because he avoided doing his duty for seven years Solomon believes he developed a liver illness: 'If you do not do this you can become sick, you can become cursed with bad memories and bad dreams' (2009:63).

Marion rejects Solomon's suggestion that the perpetrators of her son's death could still be brought to book. She cannot face opening up the trauma again. We sense her anger with Solomon for doing that very thing, but Marion vents her pained rage against the media and the country and not at Solomon. Momentarily it appears that through this searing encounter in which the moment of her son's death is revisited, she and Solomon have become estranged. But we soon see that 'insights' into each other's lives have been shared and a gentle bond has been forged between them (Homann, 2009:18). *Reach* (as the title implies) is 'the story of trying to connect, of trying to narrow the divide between differing histories, generations and racial lines in an attempt to accept, acknowledge and reconcile the traumatic past' (Homann, 2009:18).

Challenges for the feminine director – Style, representation, ideology

Despite a history of auteurship in which she favoured image-based and physical theatre, as well as deconstructed narrative, I was surprised to read *Reach* because it appeared to be written in a realistic style.²⁹ The set is described as:

The kitchen/lounge area of a Victorian-style cottage somewhere near Port Alfred, Eastern Cape, 2009. ... The kitchen is warm and cosy with a door centre upstage. The lounge is comfortable in a Victorian way. The furniture is worn and tired. Family photographs line the walls. There is a small writing desk downstage left. Outside is a wraparound stoep. (2009:32)³⁰

Marion is at a desk writing a letter to her daughter in Australia. This is an ongoing device through which Marion's views and feelings are expressed to the audience. The letter also serves to reveal some of Marion's character through her mischievous white lies. For instance she avers to her daughter that she has given up smoking even as she lights another cigarette whilst writing the letter. These evasions of reality reveal the tension between Marion and her daughter and suggest reasons for her isolation. For Marion isolation and emptiness are part of a new phase in her life:

I don't walk much anymore, neither does anyone else, it seems. Although a few weeks ago I did venture out. The paths through the forest where we used to walk Charlie and Shadow are quite empty now ...No trace of families and picnics and kissing couples. (2009:32-3)

²⁹ Foot's auteured 'non-realistic' works until that date were among others, *Wombtide* (1995), *Here and Now* (Market Theatre 1997), *Tshepang* (Market Theatre 2004), *Karoo Moose* (Baxter Theatre 2006).

³⁰ Also in the unpublished text, first draft, 2007a.

Gone is a previous era of warmth, community spaces and family activities. Thus Marion's loneliness is echoed by emptiness in public spaces evacuated presumably through fear of crime and the emigration of white families. Marion is described by the writer as 'solid, has her feet on the ground, a wry sense of humour and an infinite need' (2009:31). When Solomon tentatively lets himself into her house (unmasked) for the very first time she responds with an unexpected:

Marion: I have been waiting for you.

Silence

You have been lurking about my house for days now. If you are here to murder me, just hurry up and get on with it. I can't wait forever, you know. (2009:33)

In this unlikely bravura we learn that Marion is not only down to earth but also deeply depressed, possibly also eccentric, or incredibly brave. We also learn that Solomon has literally been spying on her and she has done nothing about it. Solomon is not here to murder her, but to deliver a message, which he takes weeks to do. He first befriends the crabby, lonely old woman winning her over with his naiveté, and finally just when she is beginning to trust him – she is making him a special stew with wine – he opens up all her old wounds by finally speaking the truth.

Whilst I found the story potentially moving, I also found it mystifying. The play is set up as realism but in the writing of Solomon it was hard to find the layers of psychology and motivation we have come to expect of that genre. This observation led me to wonder about the style that seemed to dominate *Reach*. It appeared to be a realistic play – but was it really? With Foot's track record of unambiguously non-realistic auteurship at the back of my mind, it seemed to me that the issue of the style of *Reach* was unresolved in the writing, particularly with respect to the characterisation of Solomon. I had many questions about Solomon whereas Marion seemed clear. I wondered whether the mystery evoked in the writing was intentional and Solomon's strangeness attributable to an experiment in magical realism. It was possible to imagine that Solomon was a figure of magic, of angelic delivery perhaps, with no other function than to serve the female character's journey towards healing. While I articulated these thoughts to Foot I partially communicated the source of my concern. My concern became clear only in this study as part of the process of rediscovering the layers of sedimented ideological influences that I had long forgotten.

The possibility that Solomon could serve as a figure of magic or angelic delivery presents ideological problems in the sphere of alterity and racial essentialism, a theoretical interstice

where feminism and race meet (Butler, 1993:117-8). It is possible to view Marion (white) as the 'norm' being explicable and intelligible as a referent, and Solomon (black) as 'the other', but not only 'other' in terms of race but 'other' as in 'not quite of this world', in other words outside of Marion's signification system. This would iterate a stereotype of black as naive and primitive and white as rational and knowing: 'Marion 'has her feet on the ground' (Foot 2009:31). Thus feminism and race become entangled, with the figure of the white woman replacing the (white) male as referent for intelligible signification, whilst the young black male figure replaces the woman as outside of signification, as 'other', as 'non-said' (Butler, 1993:47-48). In feminist terms then Solomon lacked subjectivity and was in danger of being 'objectified', becoming an object of use or service, in the story of a female character whose subjectivity was present. My instinct was that the subjectivity of both characters should equally be present in the writing. This worry about the representation of the character Solomon was not limited to ideological concerns. For theatrical impact, for drawing the audience in on a sensate level, I felt that Solomon would need to become more accessible to us - the reader or audience. The mystery of his character would have to be at least partially dispelled. Another way of saying this is that I would have preferred a story of two fully 'present' characters rather than one character being facilitated by a 'phantom' of a character – *if* what we are dealing with is realism. So in essence my problems regarding meaning and intention were both ideological and aesthetic. The aesthetic question was directly linked to a question of style –was it realism or magical realism? - and ultimately meaning – was it a story of two characters who find each other or a story of a woman who needs to be healed? The question about the representation of Solomon pointed to the fundamental question of what the play was about.

Thus in the initial discussions in the process, as with *GMF*, I was consciously focused on how the writer may want to materialize her meaning. What made this difficult is that Foot attests to being unclear about her intentions, writing, in the case of *Reach* specifically, initially from a 'hunch' or under the influence of an 'image'. In her MA dissertation Foot posits that these initial impulses or images form the bases for the *mise en scène* that will be 'concretized' in the rehearsal. Using, but then departing, from Pavis' (1992) notions on *mise en scène*, Foot suggests that the writer's original impulse, image or 'feeling' should be the guiding factor when disagreements about *mise en scène* occur between writer and director. Conceptually this becomes an enigma as Foot sees her initial impulses as the (*pre*)text, the text before the text (carrying intimations of *mise en scène*); as well as *pretext* – the reason or *raison detre* for the

play, or the idea on which the play is hung (again pointing strongly towards meaning and intention).

In this explication Foot is suggesting that a new written text is not complete when rehearsals begin and as such the initial intention or inspiration for the play could easily get lost in the rehearsal process. She makes a plea for the space to ensure that her original intentions find clarity in the rehearsal process and thus find their way into the *mise en scène*, by calling for intimate 'work' between the writer and director. The idea is that the director is directly exposed to the writer's early thinking and acts on the information. These ideas in Foot's dissertation emerged out of her journey with me in *Reach*, and as such indicates the trajectory that this narrative will take, because inherent in her proposal is the intimation of a loss of agency for the director. With this in mind, I return to the narrative involving the problem of Solomon.

Towards a final text – the start of negotiation

Apart from my response to the first draft of the play, Foot received feedback in a workshop held six months prior to rehearsals, attended by actors, the director, the writer and psychologist Tony Hamburger. Here problems in the writing of Solomon's character were revealed. Foot attests to some 'confusion' in the first reading of the text:

The relationship I had conceived of and the *mise en scène* as (pre)text which I had imagined, were not being clearly reflected in the read through, and therefore I presume in hindsight that the *mise en scène* as (pre)text was not written clearly into the dramatic text. (2007b:18-9)

Following this feedback, Foot began to write new pieces for Solomon, monologues that attempted to give him a clearer 'voice.' She described in email to me how, in her revisions, Solomon now addressed the audience directly about 'his needs and fears and about how he feels about Marion. The style of writing includes metaphor and lyricism....a more poetic and dream-like quality within the form' (2007b:18-9). Foot had been inspired in the workshop by the actor playing Solomon (Mbulelo Grootboom) who had a 'sensual and delicate side' (Foot, 2007b:18). With regards to this new 'voice' for Solomon, Foot asked me in an email whether it should continue all the way through (to the end). I wrote back in the affirmative: 'I definitely think you have to sustain it – because its not just about an inner voice – it defines the style of the piece and I think losing it means we sink into a more realistic style which we don't want' (in Foot 2007b:19).

Foot was beginning to move away from realism, not only in a monological form for Solomon but in the kind of poetic language she gave him. I encouraged this move as I saw in her experiment with Solomon's poetic voice an opportunity to contour the style of the play away from an uneasy realism towards a style that she is possibly more inherently attuned to. I wrote back to her that my instinct was to 'sustain the fundamental approach of the theatre making. I start getting confused if I think my stylistic approach is going to thin out and disappear' (in Foot 2007b:19). This shift in style also introduced a richness of tone and texture which I believe was lacking in the first draft. The first lines of the play, now Solomon's, set up the mystery at the centre of the story:

For many many years I have been walking with this story, this thing that I saw, that I witnessed. You see I was given a message. So many times I have tried, I have walked down the path between the aloe leaves, which my grand mother boils to give me a cold stomach, over the dust road, through the gate, with the patterns of branches, and up the small hill, I have walked towards the heavy wooden door, with some power at times, and other times – like a black bird looking this way and that way. But I have never done it. I have never spoken the words. Never even whispered the words (2007a:3)

So now, from the beginning we knew that Solomon had a task that was difficult and it had something to do with the old woman. He also had a 'point of view' equalling Marion's in her letter to her daughter Anna. And the additional writing provided external texture - a dry, aloe dotted landscape, in which we could begin to picture Marion's isolation and Solomon's poverty. My fear, rooted in my feminine modality, that Solomon would be objectified as a figure of magic and mystery was somewhat appeased and in the new poetic monologues Solomon was announced as a character with an internal mental process and a strangely poetic soul.

Meaning (metatext) in *mise en scène* – isolation or loss?

The second chapter in the *Reach* narrative revolves around a run-through that the writer attended one week before rehearsals were due to finish. It was after this 'run' that Foot made her most decisive contribution, urging us (the actor playing Solomon and the director) to return to the writer's (pre)text. In my analysis of this process I have been able to trace the conundrum that arose in *mise en scène* to a disparity in meaning. The question was what theme was at the centre of the play – the metatext or organizing principle in Pavis' terms - that would unite the elements of *mise en scène* into coherent meaning? I start exploring this problem by trying to understand the source of the dissension. It will help first to identify the precise (pre)text, or *mise en scène*, that Foot urged us to return to.

Foot states that her notion of 'mise en scène as (pre)text consists of a range of impulses, dreamscapes, images, emotional responses, light, colour, smell, image, intellectual debate, social analyses, dialogue and hallucinatory landscapes' (2007b:8). For *Reach* these were located in a context of civil instability. With security workers murdering colleagues for not striking, rampant crime, and the death of colleague and actor Brett Goldin, Foot experienced extreme isolation. As Resident director at the Baxter Theatre she was directly affected by the murder of this young talented actor and his friend. At the time of his death Goldin was rehearsing in a Baxter production of *Hamlet*.³¹ His apparently senseless murder sent shockwaves through the theatre industry nationally. Goldin's mother, Denise, emerged as a particularly moving figure as her grief materialized in rituals and a performativity to which the theatre community could relate. Denise Goldin created a bursary for young actors to study Shakespeare at the RSC in memory of her son. For Foot this combination of social upheaval and emotional trauma germinated in

a subconscious, dream-like mise en scène ...It combined news headlines, radio reports, images of naked bodies on the front pages of newspapers, families and friends, conversations about grieving mothers ...empathy and confusion ...colours of black and white ...sounds of heartache and anger and responses of outrage, depression and desperation. It stirred within my own being a sense of extreme isolation. There were the beginnings of a network of associations which combined to form the mise en scène as (pre)text.(2007b:9)

In tandem with the empathy she felt for Goldin's mother, this network of associations led to:

a flash of a woman, ten years after her son's deathin a chair, a blanket over her legs, paralyzed by aloneness. Marion waits. Isolation was to become a central theme in the playthe foreshadow of a mise en scène as (pre)text. I imagined a family house, once full of inhabitants, and images of day-to-day life. Now it was empty – silent. Within this silence, Marion waits. Into her life walks a young boy named Solomon Xaba. Solomon carries with him a message from Marion's son Jonathan. The message is, 'Tell my mother I wasn't scared'. The core of the play was a mother-son relationship between Solomon and Marion. (2007b:9)

Thus Foot locates the 'compulsion' to write *Reach* in her own feeling of dislocation as a white citizen in the turmoil of post-apartheid South Africa and the deep loss of a colleague through violent crime: 'It is this compulsion which interests me. A compulsion in this instance, is what I mean by mise en scène as (pre)text and as pretext' (2007b:10). Thus it is that Foot proposes that her central theme in *Reach* became isolation. It is to this theme that director and actors would return in the case of dissension in meaning in a collaborative process with the writer: 'It

³¹ *Hamlet* was performed in London under the auspices of the Royal Shakespeare Company and then returned to the Baxter Theatre for a run.

is in the “negotiated space” that I propose the work of developing and resolving the *mise en scène* takes place’ (2007b:25).

This ‘insistence’ on a return to the (pre)text inside the negotiated space between writer and director seems appropriate for a writer who is accustomed to allowing her meanings to emerge in *mise en scène* during the rehearsal process – in other words, as an *auteur*. Since I, the director, am ethically bound to materialize the writer’s intentions, this principle of the ‘negotiated space’ should be an advantage, creating conducive conditions for the making of joint decisions. However, the reader may have already read the problems for the feminine director in Foot’s thesis: if we are returning to the writer’s pretext and (pre)text, we are not negotiating, the trajectory of the drama has been determined; in the negotiation space we are re-identifying the writer’s initial impulse for meaning and then anticipating that the director will foster it. Secondly, as I showed in the case study of *GMF*, when directing a new text, the feminine modality needs to *feel* the meaning, allowing it to emerge along with all the other factors crucial to meaning in new texts such as style, characterization and representation. All these elements need to grow and emerge in synchronicity for the feminine director to maintain her own internal map of meaning.

Whereas Foot’s (pre)text was ‘isolation’, to my mind, Marion Banning was self-exiled from life through the paralysis of loss. This is a near death state, in which she would not fear danger from an intruder or from chain-smoking. When she says to Solomon as he first enters ‘I’ve been waiting for you’ she could be greeting the figure of death. Thus my initial impulse for *mise en scène* wove together loss and politics. Loss permeates the text, loss of the beloved son, loss of a previous family life, loss of a full and safe life - all as a result of the new South Africa with its crime and poverty. Loss of security is emblematic of the loss of identity and autonomy which white South Africans experience, particularly those who are unable to acculturate to a liberated South Africa. My approach to Marion was empathetic - but with an acknowledgement of her self-dramatization, an inability to let go of a sense of herself as the centre of the universe. There is dark humour and self irony in her ‘voice’, and an extravagance and hyperbole in her extreme embrace of isolation and loss.

This would seem to be a case of the feminine director ‘listening’ to her personal impulses in response to a written text. With the loss of a brother in childhood I had witnessed and absorbed my mother’s grief for decades, a grief that has never been assuaged. I felt close to loss not only through the loss of a sibling but through the loss of friends and colleagues to

HIV/aids, and the bigger picture in a vast community of South African women who lost children during apartheid, because of apartheid, and in the aftermath of apartheid, that captured my feminine attention. Once again I responded to a sense of female communitas - this time coagulated by a sense of loss. However, these thoughts were not articulated at the time. What I articulated to Foot was vague:

I can't imagine evocatively staging this scenario of loss in a realistic kitchen or sitting room. It needs more stringent selection, a kind of distillation, a metaphor. At this point all I have in mind is a dim image, a sense of something visceral – chalky and disintegrating – with low entropy, breaking down through calcification. 'Loss' lies behind 'isolation'. I think unresolved loss is Marion's real, or deeper problem, with isolation as a symptom.

Now, the reader may immediately identify the dangers for Foot's (pre)text of 'isolation' in my focus on Marion's 'loss'. Subtle though the differences may seem, once elaborated in mise en scène, such differences can become profound. Note too that Foot and I shared a modality, in that I also had not consciously fully identified my impulse yet. Being ethically bound to materialize the writer's intentions and with the writer present to partake in discussions, I was 'holding off', allowing things to be more fluid than in *GMF* and other productions in which I asserted a hypothetical map of meaning. This, it seems, would be the first signal in this narrative of *Reach* to indicate irresoluteness on the part of the director. This difference between the writer's (pre)text of 'isolation' and the director's hypothetical map of meaning of 'loss' marks a primary tear in the textual body of the feminine mise en scène in *Reach*. Small as the tear may seem, it is this pull in different directions towards meaning that signals the underlying problem in generating a mise en scène for *Reach*.

Solomon – a problem with interpretation

I pursue this middle 'act' by outlining the conditions for the director and the actors when Foot came to a run-through a week before rehearsals were to conclude.

When preparing mise en scène for a new text, the normal oscillatory, frame-shifting modality of the director is intensified and amplified. Not only is she attempting to make sense of a written text, to feel and intuit choices in mise en scène, and possible affect (reception), but she is crucially attempting to follow the emergent meanings of a new and untried text every

second of the rehearsal. With the actors she is intuiting possible, as yet untried interpretations towards portrayal of a character that may not be correct ultimately but appear worth exploring and if necessary exorcising, in order to reveal an underlying 'truth' behind the false characterisation, something fresher or truer.

For actor Mbulelo Grootboom there were still conflicting signals in the writing of the character which he and I were struggling to unravel. While Solomon had gained an 'inner voice' and therefore a more substantial presence on stage, many paradoxes remained, such as his 'surliness and sullenness' when he first enters. These kinds of authorial directives are studied carefully by actors when appearing in an untried text, whereas in the case of a well known and oft repeated script, they are frequently ignored. Grootboom was battling to make sense of the character.

Foot's response to the run through is recorded in her thesis: 'There were three major areas in the presentation, which were not working. As an audience member I was not drawn into the play. The complexity of the relationship was not apparent and the text seemed stodgy' (2007b:23). Foot's major problem was the interpretation of Solomon 'which did not allow for that original impulse of mother/son connection between the two characters' (2007b:23). Foot felt that 'Clare Stopford had interpreted Solomon as a kind of 'tsotsie' or gangster...a woollen hat...over one eye and a particular gangster type swagger'(2007b:23). Solomon was 'aggressive and unfriendly' and 'the company had forgotten about the initial reaction to the story, which they had had during the development week ... [T]he sensitivity ...the character's need had been over-shadowed by a new look or shape which altered the mise en scène and meaning as a whole' (2007b:23).

The development week that Foot refers to was the script workshop held six months before rehearsals, which we had indeed forgotten in the effort to 'read' the text in front of us. Furthermore because Solomon's 'new' speeches to the audience had been in part translated into Xhosa by the actor, the manner in which they were now presented distorted their rhythm, and therefore meaning. They had lost their sense of the 'poetic or mysterious'. In Foot's account 'when discussing issues of language and characterization with the director she was immediately in agreement' and, relevant to this study:

stated that perhaps her own preconceptions and life experience of having been attacked in her house by a gang of criminals had led her to interpret the character incorrectly. She also conceded that her decision to play him as a gangster, did not make sense to the script (2007b:24).

According to Foot this was corrected by reverting to the dramatic text's instruction for Solomon to wear formal clothes, a requirement in the isiXhosa tradition for men when they have returned from initiation in the mountains. Foot believed that by wearing these clothes the actor's interpretation of the character would draw 'immediately closer to what I had originally felt Solomon should be' (2007b:24). I try here, in my 'personal voice', to recreate my response on reading Foot's account of this crucial negotiation about *mise en scène* and meaning in *Reach*.

Where was I!? Was I even there? Where had I hidden myself? Had I lost my voice? I took responsibility for a wrong direction in character representation? Why? To keep the peace, to be strategic, to make things move forward nicely because there was so much pressure? I agreed with Lara that the run through was bad, but really, I think I was just being accommodating - taking the blame. For me to say that I had been influenced by my experience of being attacked by criminals in the choices I was making with Solomon was a 'time filler'. What I was really weighing while I mouthed these words, was whether it would be worth entering a long discussion, pointing out all the evidence and clues in the script for our interpretation, wrangling over the contradictions and wasting time. Time was what I really needed for the trajectory I was on with the character to materialize. We were groping towards the idea of how and when the character starts transforming, revealing his vulnerability. Why did I not pause and take the space to say what needed to be said?

There were many signs in the text pointing in the direction we had taken with Solomon: his indirect way of approaching Marion, watching her for months (we eventually learn); his 'brooding and sullen demeanour' when he first enters as described by the writer (2007a:5); the character description: 'he is inquisitive, aloof and fragile. A hard shell with a baby centre' (2007a:2); his connection with the gang of criminals of which he was a member when Jonathan (Marion's son) was killed; and warnings he issues to Marion about the fact that she is alone and not safe out on her property; as well as his stealing of the paint for her house; and especially specific directions written throughout the script such as:

Solomon is surprised, but is also a determined messenger, he does not want to be rattled. He is on guard, he is hardened, he does not want to care for her, he is quite disdainful of her – she is a thorn in his side. He watches her carefully (2007a:6).

And then further on:

Marion: Do you want money? Is that what this is about?
She goes to the kitchen and takes some money from a tin. He does not accept it.
It's all I have.
She puts the tin down.
Silence. He is brooding, threatening (2007a:12).

With a hard shell and a baby centre as a guiding image, I imagined the socially sullen young man with an 'attitude', identifying with his previous power base (gang) on the 'outside', but having been to 'the mountain' something is beginning to shift; he is caught between the new Solomon and the old. This made sense of his hesitation in making himself known to Marion; fears of inadequacy, fears of what he would unleash – fear of the task. He is simply not ready. I imagined then, an emergence of the soft centre in the character, a slow breaking of the shell over the course of the play, a visible transformation from a hurt hardened child who is not ready to own up to the teachings of the 'mountain' until some other need has been met: the eradication of isolation. There is a clear turning point in the play when Marion becomes optimistic - demonstrated in the cooking of a special stew and bottle of wine for Solomon. Having won her trust, and she having won his, there is no turning back for him. It is only then that I had him putting on his traditional post-initiation 'khaki's or 'special clothes' in preparation for the dinner and in knowledge of what he must now do. The acknowledgement of intimacy on Marion's part signals to him that he must now make the crossing himself into the responsibility of manhood by delivering the message.

I saw it, I felt it and I knew it could work but I didn't want to argue it or articulate it. Why? Was it only a matter of wasting time? Why did I simply not say what I knew in my bones needed to be said? Had negotiation taken over my feminine impulses entirely? Or do I not trust these kinds of discussions? I could have articulated it all brilliantly and won the argument but nothing would have won me the time for my vision. I could have argued for the 'felt meaning' process itself, citing Lara's own process with her own texts going down cul-de-sacs, exploring, keeping things lucid and light. But I didn't. I ceded to her out of respect for her instincts and process. In addition, and probably what persuaded me to make that choice, Grootboom playing Solomon had only considered this direction in performance for three days and the run-through lacked nuance. It was a performance 'pulled out of the hat' in desperation at being exposed in the run-through. Moreover the writer had previously witnessed this 'trick' from the actor in another play

and had an aversion to it. So I conceded to her foreknowledge of the actor and followed directions.

What I heard at the time was that Foot saw the character of Solomon in a simple arc or trajectory. The pre-stage event of 'going to the mountain' was the one and only clue: he was now a man and wanted to face up to his duties from the beginning of the play. In Foot's (pre)text Solomon's transformation from boy to man had happened off stage and before the time of the play. And the nature of his character was not masked by the hardness of his life, but simply sweet from beginning to end. There would be no peeling away of the onion layers of the character. Solomon then simply was what he was. Having miraculously escaped the effects of his very hard life among criminals, ostracization at school because of his parents' deaths from HIV/Aids, the death of his grandmother, he was a gentle person who took orphans sweets, cooked food for Marion, painted her house for nothing and castigated her about smoking. Key to Solomon for Foot, was his gentleness and vulnerability and behind his incredible generosity towards the old white woman was a loneliness and feeling of isolation equal to hers. Foot cut some of the more 'stodgy' dialogue and I contemplated how I would work with the writer's 'insistence' on her (pre)text.

Metaphor and poetry – the feminine unconscious

Because of a respect for Foot as a playwright and her track record as an auteur, combined with the implicit ethics of the writer/director relationship, I stepped back, or lost connection with the feminine jouissance, my drive towards meaning through intuition. This loss of jouissance on my part, a kind of paralysis of the feminine energy, was further hampered by the material circumstances of the production. Putatively I heard, and was following, the writer's injunction to return to the (pre)text of two visibly isolated and needy characters. This meant that *isolation* should become the object of my attention and that I should relinquish my hypothetical map of *loss*. And yet the evidence suggests otherwise. What happened instead, is that my attention turned to materializing the style of the performance text following the 'scent' of *loss*. I used the crisis in Solomon's representation and the opening up of negotiations between writer and director to allow the feminine unconscious to follow its 'desire'. It could be seen as an unconscious bid to retrieve something of my feminine jouissance, to insert meaning that made sense to me, in the absence of making sense of Solomon. In the hiatus caused by the emergency in *mise en scène* and meaning, a metaphor emerged, or to be more accurate, the

one that had been waiting in the dreamscape of my hypotextual map of 'loss' since first reading the play, and which had not been articulated. A clear scenario began to take shape in my mind. Instead of the bric-a-brac of a realistic kitchen and lounge, scoured down floorboards defined the empty space which was scattered with *dead flowers and leaves, the remnants of a figurative funeral wreath*; sheets covered the little furniture that was left intact; a tree vine grew through the fragile walls curling its way round the bleached space: *Marion's home was a shrine to loss; the vine was life's refusal to let go; the sheeted furniture were the ghosts of a previous rich life of family and friends.*

We only had a week to go before we left for Germany. The stakes were high, Lara was tense, my cast was tense. That Sunday I took my metaphor to Foot, sensing however that it should be 'sold' as an image. I asked her to close her eyes and imagine: Marion in a blue pool of light, stretched out on the floor among the dead flowers, pale blue-veined arms raw and naked, rocking, keening in grief. This image emerged in part from Solomon's description of Marion being so white she looked blue; but largely I had been haunted by an account of Brett Goldin's mother who requested a friend of Brett's to take her to the traffic island where he and his friend were shot. Ascertaining in exactly what spot he was found, his mother lay down, stretching full length, face to the ground on which her son had died, while the Cape Town traffic thundered past her.

Foot 'bought' this innovation of economy and poetry - a new *mise en scène*. To this scenography I added soil or earth. As part of her reawakening to life through Solomon, and prompted by parts of Marion's letter - 'spring is in the air, I am thinking of planting a few bulbs' (2007a:45) - we introduced deep brown soil on stage. After Solomon delivers the message from Jonathan, 'tell my mother I wasn't scared', two weeks pass and we find Marion, through the ongoing letter to her daughter, attempting to decipher the message by retracing an event when Jonathan was a little boy. All the while she is working with her plants and soil. By sharing her musings about the message she is in essence *Reaching* out to her estranged daughter, attempting reconciliation - but the effort ends in doubt: 'Oh Anne, I'm not sure that I can continue' (2007a:62). In this single small line I intuited a world of feelings for Marion. The following is the subtext I shared with the actress in motivating the use of the soil. It will be noted that it includes Solomon now as 'a sweet boy', not as 'a hard shell with a baby centre' (2007a:2).

Her barriers of pain and isolation have been chipped away by this sweet mysterious boy Solomon; it's dangerous to her because it awakens longings for her own son and she is aware deep down that looking for a replacement for Jonathan is futile, it can only lead to more pain. So it's a 'cha cha', a dance: one step forward two steps back. Despite her wariness, he succeeds in gaining her trust and she begins to feel a life blood, a reason for living, course through her veins again. She starts to open up to life, shares intimacies with Solomon, so much so that she makes an effort one night to clean up and cook him a special meal. And just when she starts to have fun, recounting a funny anecdote about her ex-husband between waves of laughter, bam! Solomon and his message take her back to the day, the hour, the minute her child was killed. But she rallies with anger, irony, and politics – all infused with pain, tears just below the surface. She holds the moment, doesn't give in. She withdraws from Solomon – after all he was just a messenger, not a friend. But two weeks pass and Solomon doesn't come back. Having begun to feel less isolated through contact with Solomon, without him she feels the isolation more acutely. So she reaches out to her daughter – and becomes overwhelmed by her vulnerability. On the line 'Oh Anne I don't know if I can continue' the soil in Marion's hands is the soil of her child's grave, the essence of her child, she throws it, empties the bag of soil, wants, needs to climb into the grave with him, she lies in the soil and pulling, grabbing at it, wants to sink in, to become it, to join her child, to become one with him again. This is how Solomon finds her when he finally returns with a TV set for Marion, a window onto the world which she has eschewed.

With the actress and Foot agreeing to this new scenario, we proceeded. Foot was more interested in the potential of the soil than in the dead flowers, reflecting I think something of our difference in (pre)text and hypotextual map; the dead flowers were a sign of Marion's inability to let go of her loss (a figurative holding onto a funeral wreath) whereas Foot was more interested in isolation (her (pre)text). But she advised me to go ahead and we thus substantially shifted the style of the performance text away from realism towards non-realism, metaphor and poetic imagery. I felt as a result I was able to enhance an atmosphere of aloneness and isolation with an increase in the presence of texture, mood, sensuality and emotion. To this I added the crystal hard single notes of a Mozambiquan guitar, mournful, alert and longing, complimenting an inner landscape rather than reflecting a social context. The set pieces were washed with violet, or lavender light - colours of faded warmth, while the dead red flowers scattered around evoked drops of faded blood. Foot wrote in her thesis:

The change of space and breaking away from definite naturalistic entrances and exits contributed a great deal to the meaning of the play. By allowing for a more metaphorical flowing and sensual delivery of the performance, the relationship became meaningful and complex. The *mise en scène* had completely shifted and seemed to reflect more accurately the *mise en scène* as (pre)text....It is interesting that it was the director who was unveiling the *mise en scène* as (pre)text located in the writer's first hunch or impulse. The director was searching for a way to make the invisible visible. (Brook's invisible visible) (2007b:25).

Thus the hypothetical map of meaning of the director and the (pre)text of the writer were brought together in a *mise en scène* that satisfied both players within the negotiated space. However, this narrative is far from complete because although all seemed good from a certain angle, in hindsight, I propose that the crisis of the run-through a week before 'opening' caused a rupture in the rehearsal space that would create scars from which, I think it could be fair to say, the process never quite recovered. In other words, the product will always bear the traces of the history of its making. The textual body was finally rendered as I 'tore off' in a different direction to the writer. This was borne out in the fact that Foot discarded all poetic resonances in *mise en scène* and intimations of 'loss' in her own *mise en scène* in *Solomon and Marion* four years later.

Doubts – the negotiation space and the feminine modality

The feminine aesthetic that I habitually seek was achieved in the choice of the new poetic *mise en scène*. But the absence of a character arc, or progression, or a peeling of the 'onion layers' of Solomon's character was felt by myself and by the actor. It is my belief that neither of us ever believed in Solomon's mono-dimensional sweetness. There were far too many clues suggesting otherwise in the text.

Also, the negotiation space between writer and director came at a cost to the feminine modality of the director. For example it was counter intuitive to the feminine process to 'pitch' my idea of the metaphor in *mise en scène* to the writer in a moment of crisis. The writer in a sense had become the producer or 'the client', either buying or rejecting an idea. This relationship was subliminally set up by her absence from the felt meaning process in the rehearsal room and her appearances at key run-throughs. In the moment of crisis in the negotiated space the writer became the voice of authority, not from inside the process but from outside of it, she became a problem solver. And I deferred to that authority. And yet I suspect that this would not have occurred were it not for my underlying ambiguity or uncertainty about my agency, my role as director in developing meaning in *mise en scène* for new texts. Trawling through my memories, emails and reviews of productions in the preparation

for this study, evidence repeatedly reveals that I am unsure of the extent to which the director should intervene in meaning making in the presence of the writer. Ethically, there is no doubt that the material is owned by the writer; but conversely Foot had particularly chosen me for my insights and the 'rapport' we usually share, and it appears that possibly I unwittingly retreated from that responsibility.

In the feminine modality there seem to be unhelpful paradoxes. The core essences that make the feminine modality successful, such as feelings of empathy, not knowing, as well as openness to discovery, or emergence of meaning and intuition, are the very same qualities that could cause its failure. The crux of the feminine (felt) modality is its inarticulateness, its 'needing to be done' rather than spoken of. In my view it is predicated on a large margin for error, for cul-de-sacs, experiments that fail and rebirth in other and fruitful directions. In the feminine modality there is no such thing as failure. Each experiment and step taken is a dynamic. Such dynamism leads to more connections and the emergence of meanings. To labour the point: it is a processual modality. Meaning reveals itself through the dramatic act, the spontaneous act of trying and not through the negotiated space of analysing and discussing. If we had had more time I would have *shown* Foot what I had in mind for Solomon, and moreover, what the actor had in mind. The differences in lived experience and embodied attitudes, the factors informing one's modality and one's response to a text, are almost impossible to negotiate in words in a short space of time. Because they are so deeply implicit, so unconscious a part of the *modus operandi* for writing or directing, they are like 'humps in the road' that no one can see.

In my map of meaning of loss in which I gave so much attention to the bereaved maternal figure Marion, there are intimations of a feminist reworking of Lacan's symbolic scheme, in my irrepressible identification with my mother's loss of a son. Filial identification of the daughter with the mother is a positive reworking of the symbolic scheme, which proposes that the mother is rejected in favour of identification with the father. The acceptance of the mother is a way of breaking the symbolic male signifying system in which mother and daughter are supposed to be alienated. In my case it seems to me that my repression of the pain of loss of my brother was conflated with the repressed desire to be 'one' with the 'whole again' - the maternal site of origin.

In Freud's theory of the unconscious the experience of the real world – 'day-work' - becomes 'dream material', some of which mixes with the unconscious and lodges there, never

to resurface again, but some is jolted back into consciousness through a stimulant, and usually in a transformed shape or form. Freud calls this material of the unconscious 'latent conceptions' (Freud, 1949:10). I am proposing that within the feminine modality which welcomes the emergence of 'latent conceptions', following the scent of loss was hardly avoidable, when Marion's loss in *Reach* served as the 'jolt' to the unconscious. The role of memory, which vacillates between the unconscious and the conscious, and is so valued by creative people in playmaking, becomes in this situation a possible burden for the directing of new plays. In my informal voice, in a flow of consciousness, I attempt here to express the internal relationship between personal experience and memory, the unconscious, and the making of *mise en scène* :

What happens between memory and the unconscious? How do they affect each other – it's the memory, her loss, my loss, intertwined, memory, branded, seared really, indelible sounds, pictures, images, that don't fade with time. Had I not been there at the moment she was told that our brother had died, had I not heard her cry out, that cry, shrapnel in the soul, embedded for life, and weeks later, on her knees, unpacking his little bedside drawer, the little diary, the toys, the bits of boys things, it was the smell she said, the smell....whose memory is this? Hers or mine? Had I not been there and seen and felt and heard and smelt, would it still be there inside me, that familial family crest, that hole in the soul?

If there is anything to be said about the symbolic order in which the separation from the mother as the site of origin results in 'lack' for the female subject, it is that the mother's loss/lack witnessed, is a hole the daughter may always try to fill through acknowledgment and visibility, a visibility usually denied the female 'other'. I have written poems for my mother about her loss and sent them to her, and she sent them to her two sisters and they all emailed me to thank me. A circle of female filiation was created. Their subjectivity had been 'seen' and acknowledged. Perhaps the *mise en scène* in *Reach*, in which Marion's pain was explored in such dedicated detail, was a final missive of acknowledgment to my mother. This expression of a very personal experience of loss could be seen as inappropriately enmeshed into Foot's text. In a play where the writer had forgone control over meaning, it may have been brilliant. Foot's (pre)text of *isolation*, and my hypothetical map of *loss*, came from deeply felt, lived experiences. It is possible that these two initial impulses for meaning, so close and yet different,

came together in the final metatext as two texts sutured together, neither one nor the other, but with intimations towards both.

The sutured textual body

In his monograph *The Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*, Ashraf Jamal (2005) posits that South Africa's cultural condition in the post-apartheid period, is heterogeneous and fraught (2005:148). He suggests that the way forward is to embrace the truth of dualism and paradox, working with and within its discomfort and ambiguity in the 'interstice', or space where two entities are stitched together, as in the suturing of a wound or the sewing of a seam. This is the narrow margin where cultures interact or co-create in sameness and difference. By revealing the truth of this difficult interface – the work of healing the psyche of the nation might ensue. (2005:151-153). While the notion of cultural difference does not apply to writer and director in this study, I take from Jamal (inspired by de Kock, 2004) the idea of a sutured seam in which artists work with each other in the discomfort of sameness and difference in modalities and meanings. In this interstitial space, dialogue between writer and director is not so much negotiated as uncomfortably stitched together – cross-stitched - as in a sutured wound (Jamal, 2005:151-153). The result is that the textual body of *mise en scène* is fraught with seams or margins of rupture in what could or should be an organic (felt meaning) process for all those involved.

It is possible that Foot also suspended her personal instincts when she agreed to my poetic *mise en scène* in our moment of crisis, a suspicion born out in her own performance text of *Solomon and Marion* (2011) in which she reverted to a realistic *mise en scène*. I propose then that where the writer is partially present at the process of the realisation of their untried text, but constrained by deadlines, a feminine modality for creating new texts is punctured (as in a needle through skin or cloth) dividing up time into temporal digits of deliverables. Each decision, each move made by the director is under scrutiny by the writer within the short four-week rehearsal period.³² With each assessment the textual body is torn or disrupted, then sewn together in the direction of the same weave or in another direction. If the weave is moved in a new direction too forcibly, the scars of the previous direction will show - the fabric will become distressed. The final textual body therefore gathers traces of rupture and puncture,

³² Equally, the producer or artistic director of a company or theatre could have the same effect if they were interventionist, as many are, far more than was Foot as writer.

abrasion and forced interfacing. The negotiated space between writer and director is thus a fraught and uncomfortable seam, where two separate entities, through flow and rupture, are sewn together with painful compromise and occasional unanimity. The textual body as a consequence shows signs of distress. Whereas if the director is trusted to explore freely and make meaning as in *GMF*, the textual body may reflect the director's concerns, but the performance text has the freedom to take on a more robust and coherent life. By this I mean that the meanings intimated in *mise en scène* hold together as a coherent textual body, building, growing and improving throughout the successive runs with the cast. This kind of textual body reflects the efficacy of the rehearsal process where the map of meaning is permitted to emerge coherently within conducive circumstances. In the *Reach* run, the performances suffered fluctuations, regressions and surges - signs of a ruptured and sutured textual body.

The audience response to *Reach* was somewhat muted, in that, despite fairly good reviews and a strong start at the Teatro Formen Festival and the NAF, the 'houses' were not 'full'. In South Africa new plays tend to be staged in small or 'studio' venues of approximately 150 seats, so falling short of that is considered disappointing. While some reviewers praised the play for its humanity, delicacy and message of hope, others picked up on the social and political issues such as Brent Meersman's headline 'Victims and perpetrators of violence reach out for healing' (2007). Generally though, the reviews are short of the passion – and perhaps interest - that *GMF* evoked. Here is Meersman's verdict of the play:

This is an unpretentious, affirming work and a story beautifully told. It will work well on radio, probably better. It is more of a duologue than a straight play. Solomon has several soliloquies and Marion speaks to us through a family letter she composes Foot Newton skilfully charts the subtle negotiation between these two individuals as they reach out towards each other' (2007:5).

Meersman's pronouncement on the *mise en scène* is more enthusiastic. Although he attributes it to the set designer, the reader will recognize my description from my 'informal voice' to Bezuidenhout when offering my 'new direction' in *mise en scène* : 'Birrie le Roux's set is exquisite. The scrim walls are at once constructed and organic. Fronds grow up the faded mauve walls and rose petals strew the floor. Marion's roots are inextricably bound to this land; her son is buried in its soil' (2007:5). Satisfactorily, for the director, these words evoke precisely the metatext I had in mind when 'slipping in' this *mise en scène* at a late stage of rehearsals. Peter Tromp affirms the unpretentiousness of the play while also offering an average opinion:

Although this two-hander is essentially simple in conception, it has a great many layers that lend it a timely significance. Sensitively directed by Clare Stopford and featuring spirited and touching performances from the two highly likable leads, *Reach* should appeal to a large portion of the theatre-going public. By no means a masterpiece, its humane and generous qualities make it indispensable entertainment. (2007:6)

With regards to the performances he adds that 'much of the play hinges on the power of the two performers ...who are wonderfully attuned to one anotherThe actors' chemistry is very convincing, and they paint a picture of what true healing entails in this country' (2007:6). Jaro Kalac of the *Sunday Independent* unpacks the 'layers' that Tromp hints at. In so doing he begins to explicate the meaning in *Reach* that I aimed for with my poetic and ideologically alert mise en scène:

Solomon is more than a harbinger of emotional carnage to the widow who lives in a house dusty with memories of peeling photographs. He brings news of social unrest, of a crime wave that growls and snaps outside naive Marion's door. Without television or radio, she lives in a cobweb-heavy shrine to her own past, oblivious to winds of change that are gathering momentum in the cities and on the farms. (2007)

In his reading of the mise en scène as a 'cobweb-heavy shrine to her own past', Kalac comes close to my suggestion to Foot and Bezuidenhout that Marion's home is a 'shrine to loss'. Kalac describes two people enacting a little drama of their own in isolation, surrounded by social dysfunction:

But outside the house is a land in which knives are being sharpened in the name of redistribution. Foot-Newton creates an air of foreboding among the props of familiar suburbia a visceral study of a feminine reaction to the clamour of the outside world. (2007)

Kalac alone mentions the feminine 'point of view' in the text, which was amplified by the director's elaboration of a feminine mise en scène . Kalac's understanding of the director's intentions extends to several aspects of the mise en scène:

Bezuidenhout plays the challenging role of the feisty yet vulnerable Marion to perfection, almost instinctively tuned to the subtle nuances of the emotionally kaleidoscopic script. Her reflection of Marion's gentle almost archaic dignity in the face of barely comprehensible tragedy, is a masterpiece of sustained delicacy. In a scène that verges on the unwatchable through its sheer unyielding focus, she crumbles under the weight of Solomon's message. (2007)

In 'she crumbles' Kalac points to the extremely painful mise en scène that I introduced in which Marion collapses and buries herself in the soil, and which I explored in some detail earlier in this chapter. With the 'sheer unyielding focus' Kalac intimates that there is no relief, no escape, nothing to distract from, or to dilute the pain confronting you as an audience member; a case, I hope, of an emotional power that travels from body to body, from actor to audience in an embodied affect. Supporting my supposition of a feminine sensate affect in *Reach*, is that Kalac couples intimacy with intensity:

There is little to interrupt the intimacy that develops between the actors and the audience in this one-act play set within Marion's lounge; it adds to the intensity of the piece. Time, laughter and tears become the only doorways out of this finally crafted environment.

At the same time and almost as a paradox, the 'delicacy' of the performances, the eschewing of melodrama and excess, are welcome additions to a description of the feminine aesthetic. A mix of intense, exacting, embodied pain and a quality of delicacy, is painted by Sichel in a small comparison piece between *Dream of the dog* (with which *Reach* is often compared) and *Reach*:

Director Clare Stopford handles this piece like a piece of cut-glass crystal. The translucence of the writing and the dramatic tinctures are refracted in the characterisations and the exquisitely crafted performances. The woman waiting for death in her Port Alfred home is surrounded by decay and loss ...*Reach* reaches into the dark recesses of history, cultural beliefs and current violent realities ... it touches us where we live. (2007)

These reviews describe, happily for me, not only exactly what I was after with the *mise en scène*, but also the **writing**, as integral to the total affect. As I contended in *GMF* it was in some of van Graan's most inspired writing that my feminine *jouissance* was forthcoming. To reiterate, it is the writing and the writer's intentions that should be served first. This aim is demonstrated in Sichel's short piece in which the writing and *mise en scène* are presented as seamless through her consistent imagery for both: 'cut-glass', 'translucence', 'tinctures', 'refracted', 'exquisitely', 'decay', 'loss' and 'touch'. Taking up the feelings she experienced in *Reach*'s performance text, she recreates them in language, in her critique. For Sichel the affect of the performance text was total, not split between *mise en scène* and writing. Reading Sichel then, it seems that there was no tear in the textual body of *Reach*. And yet I have said, the affects did not hold: the stitching in the seams of the textual body came apart over time. Moreover, Foot clearly did not feel satisfied in the long run, with proof of this in her own directorial version of *Reach as Solomon and Marion*. A reading of *Solomon and Marion* will contribute considerably to this discussion by illuminating the problems around meaning and *mise en scène* in the sutured seam in which writer and director interface.

Solomon and Marion - mise en scène as cultural textual body

Inside the uninterrupted flow of her own felt meaning modality, I contend that Foot was able to find solutions to writing problems and issues of representation, presented by the text of *Reach*, and reconceived in 2011 as *Solomon and Marion*. She was able to cast exactly how she had seen and heard the characters in her (pre)text, especially the part of Marion.³³ Foot had

³³ Foot had strongly suggested Janet Suzman for my casting as she had written *Reach* with the actress in mind.

questioned my casting of Marion, as I had used Aletta Bezuidenhout who I consider extremely creative, with extraordinary access to emotion (in Foot, 2007:17). But Janet Suzman was solid (as written) – if somewhat declamatory – and had moving moments. She appeared at ease with the text and Foot clearly approved of the weight and age that her body brought to the part. Crucially, Foot cut all the ‘new’ writing she had created for Solomon and reverted to the text she had started with before I became involved. This was prompted in part by the examination viva panel’s response to her dissertation, in which it was said that the new writing broke up the flow and took away from the performance text.³⁴

Stylistically, Foot reverted to realism within a traditional box set, but to open the play introduced an isolated image of Solomon in a ritual washing of his face after initiation. This particular kind of isolated image was never used again except in the form of a ‘soundscape’ recalling his initiation, during a heightened moment. What is significant about these isolated ventures into a style beyond realism is that it appears to make little difference to an audience. The affect was achieved without metaphor, without poetry and largely within a putatively ‘dated’ style. These factors are illuminating for the feminine director. Whereas I, a deconstructionist, steeped in the teachings of early feminism, will always break down the old and attempt to find new apparatus to counter the phallogocentrism of old forms like realism; and in spite of the metaphorical *mise en scène* of loss, could not illicit as enthusiastic a response from the audience. Conversely Foot’s habitually playful and experimental approach, harnessed to a style considered *passé* by professionals in the industry and academy, still engaged the audience.

Ironically, Foot as director interpreted her Solomon exactly as she had insisted I should not. Coming in aggressively with a *tsotsi* swagger and a match in his mouth, he barked and bullied Marion, creating tension and expectation of a character on the edge of criminality. When he did show his vulnerability, Solomon demonstrated not sensitivity and sweetness, but a febrile, emotionally fraught register – slightly wild, on the edge, held by morals but with no refinement – an apt innovation. Foot as writer and director was able to fill in the gaps in her (pre)text. In a post-mortem discussion held after I had viewed her production, Foot explained how she had used ‘ministers of culture’ – a fond expression for black artists - who advised her about Solomon. Foot’s instincts about her own (pre)text led back to that crucial event that had

³⁴ Reported to me by Foot straight after the Viva, 2007.

occurred off stage before the play started: Solomon's initiation ('going to the mountain') which is a significant rite of passage in Xhosa culture, bringing the 'boy' into 'manhood'. Thami Mbongo as Assistant Director, working with the actor Kayaletu Anthony and Foot, found the solution to the problem of Solomon's representation. Whilst in the writing of the original script he is something of a mystery, in Foot's *mise en scène* the mystery is infused with cultural and personal tensions, particularly in one cross-over moment between becoming a man and being a lonely and isolated boy. This occurs when Solomon has become such a comfortable part of Marion's life that she says he should help himself to anything he finds in the garage when he goes in search of the gardening tools. He returns wearing a yellow shirt, clearly once Jonathan's, Marion's deceased son. Her response is violent. She flies at him, entirely out of control:

Marion: How dare you? You think you can come into my house and fucking well take over my life. Fucking well wear my son's clothes. Who the hell do you think you are?

Solomon (drops the shirt): Mies Marion I'm sorry I thought you said –

Marion: You thought nothing!!!!!! (She picks up the shirt). Do you think you're him? You think you can be him? You're not. You're nothing! Nothing like him! You're not worth a hair on his head. This is my shirt, my Jonathan's shirt and now you've gone and ruined it. Made it dirty. It's filthy, it's.....it's..... (2009:55).

In the *Reach* version of the text Solomon starts to cry, which makes Marion immediately recant and desperately attempt to appease him (2007a:47). However what Foot found for Solomon in her *mise en scène* with Mbongo and Anthony was more interesting and significantly, more integral to Solomon's background and history. As Marion launched her tirade the sound of singing was heard far away – the young men coming down 'the mountain' after initiation, growing closer and closer. Instead of crying, Solomon started singing with them, defiantly, desperately. With tears hovering below the surface, he grows louder and louder, trying to be a man, trying to drown out the pain of her attack, trying to hold onto everything he feels he has become. It was unnerving, disturbing, and totally theatrical. Psychology, plot, character and culture all came together because of one elevated piece of *mise en scène*. I now – not *understood* Solomon – but *felt* him. Until that moment I had wondered at his aggressiveness with Marion, particularly in the light of all the discussions between Foot and myself about his sensitivity. But once the moment had arrived and departed I 'bought' into the felt and layered world of the character.

Questions about the feminine modality

Viewing *Solomon and Marion* provoked some searching questions about my feminine modality which I reflect on in my informal voice:

Maybe I was trying to do too much with Reach. Make it more than it was. What it was, was a miniature piece, a small study of two lonely people, just simple, ordinary, sore and moving. Is it possible that I'm just too ambitious, carrying too many agendas for theatre? All this metaphorizing and poeticizing and worrying about style and structure and breaking new ground each time; the feminine jouissance, the need to connect with an inner relationship to the text to make affective mise en scène – aren't these just signs of not trusting the text? What if I just let the text live, let it be? That's what Lara did. She even went back to a box set with realism. She didn't care. That's the way she'd seen it. And the audience loved it. When I was sitting in the auditorium I heard two women saying how warm and cosy the set looked. This kind of informal metatext is surely as important as anything written by academics or reviewers? Why do I make it so complicated? Why not just listen to them? Settle for smaller, ordinary, less elevated modes of theatre if that's what they want? Serve the writer and serve the audience, finish and klaar. Why not?

I think the answer is that as a director you develop a signature which, I hope this study has demonstrated, is integral to who you are. Directing is an embodiment, not just of temporal, spatial and material factors but rather the sum of which are embedded in one's choices. If I thought *Reach* was going to turn out to be *Solomon and Marion* I would not have chosen to do it. Even the titles represent the differences in scope being attempted: *Reach* indicating characters that need to do something, take action, and *Solomon and Marion* simply indicating two characters - and that's all. But simultaneously *Solomon and Marion* stands as a warning to the assumptions and implicit beliefs in my feminine modality. Every play does not have to bear an imprint of 'self'; or require a metaphoric treatment, nor an inflamed subjective response or an ideological watchfulness. The feminine modality that I have delineated here, born in the late seventies and early eighties and flowering in the nineties and early 2000's, needs constant reviewing. The shifting terrain of social reality and temporality in our post-colonial environment destabilizes any notion of fixed points of understanding, of knowledge and expectations. What was knowledge in the twentieth century, even in the first decade of the twenty-first century

may be disposable now, and what was valuable in my enclosure then may have questionable currency now. Nothing is stable; notions of modernism and postmodernism loop back and forward and knot and untangle again and we could find ourselves like Foot, a postmodernist, working in the Modernist style of realism.³⁵ In our post-mortem conversation in 2011, Foot attested to being as confused as I was about her realistic style for *Reach*. She was as worried as I was about the conservatism associated with it. She said that finally for *Solomon and Marion* 'she stopped fighting it and just gave in', challenging the production director to construct 'flats' that didn't 'wobble when doors closed'. Amusing as this sounds it is probably this very anxiety about old-fashioned tackiness that spurred the production team to create the 'warm and cosy' affect.

A different kind of negotiation

Starting with hazy, unformed ideas about the character in her writing, Foot took hold of the one clear item she had created initially and towards which she had pointed me in the moment of crisis in *mise en scène* with Solomon: the pre-stage event of his initiation. With her 'ministers of culture' present in the rehearsals, a character was found that was rooted in cultural 'difference', rather than 'othering'. Solomon was rough in manner, as Grootboom and I had imagined him, not inexplicably sweet and sensitive but full of sharp edges and danger, with a sense of himself as a lonely survivor, his subjectivity rooted in the event of his 'becoming a man on the mountain.' Foot's openness to collaboration is a modality we both usually inhabit, but which in *Reach* I lost access to. Nonetheless, Foot's collaborative *modus operandum* in the case of *Solomon and Marion* suggests a way forward, for the question of agency, with regard to making meaning in new plays. Her inclusion not only of Mbongo and Anthony, but psychologist Tony Hamburger, in our earlier workshop are two examples.³⁶ Hamburger's input was invaluable to Foot. He spoke about isolation and what one does about it. The answer is that one seeks to alleviate it, one *reaches* out - and this became the departure point for Foot's understanding of her initial (pre)text. Foot casts her net wide for input. There is a confidence and sense of entitlement in this, as well as humility. My hypothesis is that these qualities come

³⁵ Inspired by a reading of Sarah Nuttal's 'Entanglement', (2009).

³⁶ Foot has also created *mise en scenes* in collaboration with designers on some major successes like *Tshepang* (2004) and *Ways of Dying* (1999). For these plays both designers attended rehearsals consistently and were an integral part of the making of *mise en scene*, i.e. far more involved than the average set designer.

with ownership of the material: with possession one has more latitude and one's affiliations generally are to oneself and one's stories, however embryonic they are.

On the other hand the director of the new text is in a position of unresolved ownership in an entanglement of affinities towards theatre per se. One's subjective relationship with the subject matter, ideological alignments with styles, representation and signifying systems, need to be suspended or conversely drawn upon, in service to the product. It is a shifting field requiring unerring judgement within the material context of time, and the fluctuations of the social landscape.

The feminine as textual body is paradoxically a problem and a solution. The problem emerged in the case study of *Reach* when my text of the feminine self was ruptured in the process of its inscription by the presence of another feminine body of text, in this case the writer's. Whose textual body was to prevail? In the event it was an uneasy stitching together of two textual bodies, although craft and artistry disallowed pure failure. But once the writer was able to retrieve autonomy, the shape of her textual body of meaning became clear and whole. The vulnerability in the feminine modality (or alternatively the strength, given different circumstances) is belief in the value and significance of one's feminine perception and the drive to foreground it in a world which so often feels like it has never acknowledged the feminine. In the case of *Reach*, I believe this modality prevented me from fully apprehending the writer's (pre)text. In the gap created by my loss of agency with the representation of Solomon, I moved to my default directorial position of feminine interest in the female character, in which I sensed powerful psychic damage through loss. I could feel Marion's ache, but Solomon's was more opaque to me. For a white South African director of new texts in the post-colonial moment, Foot's 'not-knowing' and 'openness' to the consultative process with 'ministers of culture' is appropriate.

Thus the problem of agency in the making of meaning in new texts finds another way forward with judiciously selected collaborations. To find answers to the problem of black characters in *mise en scène*, collaboration with black playwrights is not only a tradition in South Africa of which both Foot and I have been a part in the past, but I suggest, an ongoing answer to the vexed question of meaning and representation. However, again I suspect this proposal needs particular parameters in which to be valid. If, for example, I had stood by our trajectory with Solomon as *tsotsi*, a young man with a hard shell on the outside but soft inside, would Grootboom and I have arrived at an equally satisfactory cultural textual body of meaning as

Foot and her 'ministers of culture'? I suspect not. The space earned from ownership was absent. In the material circumstances of our rehearsals there were too many checks and obstacles. The circumstances of production for *Solomon and Marion* were vastly different to those pertaining for *Reach*. It seems then, that when approaching the directing of new texts, particularly within the feminine modality, careful scrutiny of the material circumstances is unavoidable.

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CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

I start the conclusion to this study with thoughts about the role writing has played in provoking the emergence of ideas, and thus contoured the shape of this textual body of a feminine 'self'. The process of writing has been embodied, a roller-coaster between feeling and reflection, replicating the modality of the feminine director. But there are slight differences: in directing *mise en scène* I am responding to, and generating emotion and feeling; whereas in this study I have been **thinking** about this emotion and feeling. My aim however, was to sometimes allow the emotional source of the thoughts to be visible, to share the felt, unconscious modality.

Thus it is that the arguments in this thesis are 'enacted' as representation of this modality, in irresolute thought patterns, 'zig-zags', concentric circles and exploratory dialectical planes, which sometimes intersect and at other times remain parallel, without clashing, without gestalt - without becoming something different. I started with the hunch that this inquiry would reveal some irreconcilable contradictions, and I believe this is how it remains: an ongoing process, in which trial and error, insight and focus, repetition and experimentation, will all contribute towards unravelling the conundrum around the issue of agency in making meaning in new plays. The problem of how to bring together directors and writers in complimentary ways on new texts exists world wide. Alex Chisholm, literary manager at the Yorkshire Playhouse (Leeds), in an online call for a special conference to discuss the same problem, sums up the issue:

I have been party to some dreadful productions where the director has arrogantly trampled all over a writer's work and occasionally vice versa. But, as the working relationship between Simon Stephens and Sebastian Nubling, or between John Tiffany and Gregory Burke demonstrates, with trust and respect on both sides theatre is not either the director's or the writer's but the director's AND the writer's work. (Chisholm, A: 2012)

This plainly states the broader issue at stake in this inquiry. Perhaps in *GMF* we had the relationship of 'trust and respect on both sides' that Chisholm speaks of. Implicit though in her proposal is that it is a partnership that is ongoing, that is 'worked through', that finds its *modus operandi*. With van Graan's policy of employing new directors for each of his new projects this has not materialized, so it is a proposal untested in my enclosure, but one I would welcome as a way forward. Subsequent to *Reach*, Foot has embarked on one other collaboration as a writer. In this case, before rehearsals started the director Mandla Mbotwe told me he 'allows no one to come into his rehearsal space' (2012).³⁷ After a performance of the show (*The Mendi: did we*

³⁷ In conversation at the Gipca Directors & Directing Playwrights symposium (2012: Aug, 24-26).

dance) Foot told me she hardly recognized her script. In other words, the director had used her script as a starting point, or text of research, with which to create a piece concomitant with his unique 'physical theatre' style. Having been banned from the rehearsal space, and knowing Mbothwe's habitual style, Foot was no doubt prepared for a nearly total reworking of her script. Mbothwe has a definite theatrical project of excavating Xhosa tradition and history and bringing it into theatre in syncretic forms and styles. The issue of trust and respect for Mbothwe and Foot as director and writer was removed by Mbothwe's clarity about his position with regards to the presence of the writer and to what the project was about. In other words, it was clear what Foot, as a writer, was engaging with.

However the feminine aesthetic is less visible, less articulated, more implicit, and therein lies its vulnerability. It doesn't signal itself on the approach to a show or a writer, with a flashing sign saying, 'FEMININE APPROACH COMING, ACCEPT OR REJECT'; and in that way avoid an uncomfortable no-woman's land, such as I believe both Foot and I encountered on the *Reach* project. It is also possible that there can be too much 'trust and respect'. I refer here again to *Reach*, in which I propose, (as yet another way of looking at it) that paradoxically I gave Foot too much trust and respect over the issue of Solomon's representation; stepping back, allowing her to 'insist on her (pre)text', when 'pushing back', insisting on my trajectory with the character, would have better served, not the process of negotiation, but the final performance text. This thought is provoked largely by the fact that Foot's Solomon materialized in the 'tsotsi figure' that Grootboom and I were prevented from exploring. These are the ironies and paradoxes, the truths and contradictions of which the feminine textual body is comprised. For in hindsight it seems that in the case of Solomon, where my ideas were taking us towards a viable representation, I was not able to implement them, but in the case of the poetic, metaphoric style of *mise en scène*, which I *was* able to implement, I was very possibly wrong. Likewise, Foot's relinquishing of her very first impulse to stage *Reach* as realism was possibly also a false move. Realism is appropriate for the simple, moving human dialogue between two people that Foot had in mind. The textual 'body' of *Reach* could not happily accommodate another shape or scale.

For a practising director of new texts, this is possibly the most crucial insight, or object of knowledge, to emerge from this research. A playground, a space around the space, needs to be found in the feminine modality, that lies between the charged force of feminine *jouissance*, and the 'blind' paralysis of losing one's own map of meaning. This third space needs to be

porous, to be receptive to the dynamic and energizing creativity of the unconscious 'felt' modality, but also to be protective of it *and* respectful of new players who wish to enter, providing a more reflective space for negotiation.

A further irony informs my understanding of the 'negotiated space' between director and writer in *Reach* that I have claimed is a sutured seam of discomfort: and that is that it was the writer who more satisfactorily embodied the 'felt meaning' or 'feminine' modality, than did the director whose propositions generate claim to it. The evidence for this is in Foot's thesis in an insistence on a return to the writer's first images and hunches that prompted the writing of the play. Foot groped, felt and intuited her way towards meaning, starting with a hunch about Solomon's offstage moment of initiation 'in the mountain', a 'scent' she did not lose, but doggedly pursued until four years later it emerged in *Solomon and Marion*. In effect, with regard to *Reach*, in the short rehearsal time there was only space for one 'felt' modality to operate efficaciously.

On the other hand in *GMF*, it was not only Van Graan's absence from the rehearsal period that allowed my feminine modality to operate at optimum level, but his relationship with meaning. As a writer, he clearly indicates – perhaps in excess at times – what his intentions are. The director's attention can therefore directly focus on the most creative way to concretize those meanings. At the same time, these meanings are so stable within the text that no amount of feminine directorial elaboration of *mise en scène* can obscure them. With Foot's play, the intentions are embryonic, delicate and ambiguous, and, as she attested in her thesis, not always clearly visible, even to her.

My claims for a sensate and embodied affect on the audience present yet another paradox. These claims have been partially supported by reviews of both plays. In *GMF* a political reading of the play superseded the feminine affects, in concert with what I intuit to be van Graan's primary intentions for his piece. In contrast, the feminine affects were acknowledged by reviewers in *Reach*, perhaps against the writer's intentions which were more focused on simple realism than a poetic *mise en scène*.

Despite ample evidence of indeterminacy and paradoxes it is possible to discern certain stable features and patterns in the feminine modality. Firstly, the modality locates itself in representational exercises that attempt to deal with the contemporary social context. Secondly, the specific attention that the female characters receive from the director is consistent with the feminist aims of reinscribing female subjectivity and contributing to

‘writing’ a more diverse, more impactful, female textual body. Finally there is consistent evidence of the unconscious, embodied expression of feminine *jouissance*, with personal connections to impulse, instinct, delicacy and intimacy.

In selecting the foci for engagement and explication in this study I am conscious of so many other paths down which I might have ventured on the self-same productions. My choice to select a few pieces of what I considered to be strong examples of a ‘feminine’ aesthetic was motivated by the feminist frame of this study, which requires the exercise of testing the *mise en scène* through different feminist lenses, rather than to use multiple *mise en scène*s, read through a single lens. The self-reflexive nature of the inquiry also necessitated the input and challenge of feminist thinkers who provide rigour. Thus the feminist aim of thinking oneself ‘with other women’ was attempted in the noticeable absence of such attempts in South African theatre studies. This attempt led to the repeated theme of ‘difference’, often as a term to fragment binary positions. I am thinking here of the sexual differentiation that theoretically underpins the ‘feminine’ feminist terms, and how the tensions created by the threats of essentialism and biological determinism are navigated by de Lauretis’ notion of the female as a site of difference. Elin Diamond follows with her Brechtian ‘differences within’ as a feminist tool of performance critique and Dolan with her ‘differing apparatus’ for gender critique and deconstructing the male gaze; and finally Irigaray’s ‘relational’ project of sexual difference based in equal subjectivity. The terms of ‘difference’ then have permeated this discussion, keeping it free, I hope, of foreclosure, and open to mutation and evolution. With this absence of foreclosure I aimed to support the idea that the signs of the ‘feminine’ self, in the textual body of both *mise en scène*s under discussion, and extended into the text of this study, are in flux; there is no fixed identity, but a play of ‘differences’. While the feminine textual body of *Reach* may have suffered scars and sutures, and that of *GMF* may have been enmeshed in a logocentric text, the feminine desire or drive for subjectivity remains intact.

Finally, it is important to note that the feminine director’s activities are not solely relegated to the foci I have chosen for this study. Within the field of directing new plays itself, *GMF* and *Reach* are not exemplary, but rather a site for the evocation of relevant complexities and problems pertaining to the feminine aesthetic and the problematics that arise from them. Each new play brings with it a new set of writing problems, personnel, personalities, circumstances and challenges, evoking different responses from the feminine modality.

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