

# **The Dramaturgy of Evocation: A visual dramaturgical framework**

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## **COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

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

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation sets out to comprehend the complicated processes at work in generating a transformational and immersive theatrical performance, by investigating the aspects of materiality, visual language, emotions, and signs of haunting. The question that prompted the research is: how can we excavate historical tragic events in theatre and dramaturgically position them on stage, to reach 'evocation'? The research considered how the palimpsest of haunting as a device improves the in-depth evocation of narrative, deepens the audience's participation, and develops a sense of connection between past and present by investigating the aspects of history, memory, presence, and intertextuality. The work unpacks strategies of scenographic visuality that allow theatre-makers to engage the audience, stimulate reflection, and elicit a powerful emotional reaction, eventually strengthening the performance's impact and resonance. Through a range of visual techniques and a mechanism called Pepper's Ghost, this research provides a visual dramaturgical framework as a manifesto, that prefaces a call to action.



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: PALIMPSESTS OF HAUNTING .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 DEFINING HAUNTOLOGY .....	5
1.2 PALIMPSESTS OF HAUNTING .....	8
1.3 RECKONINGS OF OUR PAST .....	10
<b>CHAPTER 2: DEFINING EVOCATION AS CATHARSIS .....</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1 UNDERSTANDING EVOCATION THROUGH CATHARSIS .....	16
<b>CHAPTER 3: MAPPING VISUAL DRAMATURGY .....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 FINDING THE DRAMATURG .....	25
3.2 VISUALITY AS COMMUNICATIVE DEVICE .....	26
<b>CHAPTER 4: THE CASE OF PEPPER’S GHOST.....</b>	<b>32</b>
4.1 HISTORY OF THE MACHINE .....	32
4.2 PEPPER’S GHOST TODAY (1) .....	35
4.3 PEPPER’S GHOST TODAY (2) .....	37
SPACTRAL .....	38
FEAST OR FAMINE .....	41
<b>CHAPTER 5: BONA .....</b>	<b>43</b>
5.1 THE BACKGROUND .....	44
5.2 THE ENCOUNTER .....	45
5.3 DRAMATURGICAL PROCESS: DEVISING PRESENT ABSENCE .....	48
THE SEED IDEA .....	49

ABSENT BODIES .....	51
IMAGES AND VIDEOS .....	52
OBJECTS OF TRANSGRESSION .....	54
SOUND DESIGN .....	55
PERFORMING BODY .....	56
<b>5.4: STAGING THE ENCOUNTER .....</b>	<b>56</b>
SEMIOLOGY .....	56
AFFECTATION AND EFFECT OF VISUAL DRAMATURGY .....	59
REFLECTIONS & LIMITATIONS .....	60
<b><u>CONCLUSION : A VISUAL DRAMATURGICAL FRAMEWORK .....</u></b>	<b><u>61</u></b>
<b><u>REFERENCES .....</u></b>	<b><u>68</u></b>



## INTRODUCTION

Disrupting realities and conjuring lost histories, provide contemporaneous metaphors to visually communicate across time and space. In my practice, as a visual storyteller, I am interested in the visceral engagement that persists in visual exchange. The language of scenography is one that requires a dramaturgical process in the conceptual phase and execution. Theatre and Performance, in a South African context, encompass a hybridization of approaches, techniques, and aesthetics. The research has been formulated from my observations and critique of hidden histories or rather invisible traumas that continue to impact the South African context. In holding a mirror up to reflect today's world, one discovers incomplete narratives. Past deeds, as anchoring forces prevent healing. This project does not aim to merely unveil violence of the past but to visually interact with it. Throughout the research I question how we contract with the spectrality of our past and present. It excavates historical grievances and through a visceral, visual dramaturgy attempts to reach *evocation*, which is a term I will develop in the forthcoming chapters.

As a component of my study program, I spent a semester exchange in Amsterdam. After a few months of engaging with the locals, but also slowly becoming settled in the city, I realised that the dense hidden histories embedded in the city, potentially haunts the past, present and future social and economic landscape. Monuments, stone embellishments and statues that honour and represent oppressive leaders, still stand. The daily lives of individuals are cultivated within and around these approved statues that reign above the people. The deeds of the past have long been defamiliarized, reframed and anonymized, but they still have the same face.

The relationship between the Netherlands and South Africa is based on a problematic history of colonialism, the system of oppression remains in structures after colonialism has supposedly ended. This relates to the idea of 'White innocence', a concept coined by the Dutch scholar, Gloria Wekker, who addresses the Dutch way of looking at the racist and problematic past (2016:1). In her book, she tries to highlight the 'unacknowledged reservoir of knowledge and feelings based on four hundred years of imperial rule' (Wekker, 2016: 1). This is an example of what the state of forgotten histories can present.

What does this mean in the South African context? What has our history presented us? How has this informed how we see ourselves, our country, our expression, our identity?

Is the ignoring the past inevitably part of modernization? The research has enabled an exchange and attempted to open discourse around these prevalent issues understanding that simple answers or ultimate solutions are impossible. Chantal Mouffe describes this as an *antagonistic space*, “the battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation”(Mouffe, 2007: 3). With this research, I intend to confront the hegemonies and open space to reflect on decades of hidden traumas through a theatrical framework I have developed.

My research aims to provide a framework for what I propose to call a *dramaturgy of evocation*, through, a careful engagement with visuality and picture-making in theatre. Elements that form scenography have the ability to take their own life form. Scenography has the potential to become a departure point for 'creating the performance'. An interactive installation as performance, was used during the research, both as a means of exploration and as an illustration of the ideas. My research takes a psychoanalytical approach which evokes associations in the psyche of the audience. This practice does not attempt to provide a solution of any kind but works towards a manifesto, a further written attempt to outline the dramaturgical approach towards staging a thorough investigation. I will not term it a therapeutic theatre because it is not designed to achieve medical healing, but aims to unmask repressed socio-political or personal narratives, designed to accomplish spiritual renewal.

The dramaturgy of evocation is a compelling method that attempts to transcend time and place, taking spectators to landscapes of the past. Rather than just narrating historical events, this approach intends to bring forth a wide range of dramatic elements to generate an emotional response and action from the audiences. In my research, I approach the hauntings of our past and present and uncover concealed histories, neglected tragic events, unknown heroes, in addition to the intricate circumstances and human emotions behind these situations.

To further prove the compelling nature of visual dramaturgy toward evocation, I explored a theatrical illusion – *Pepper’s Ghost* - as a tool for exploring my understanding of evocation. *Pepper’s Ghost* is a holographic mechanism that assists in visual communication, featuring the ephemerality of the images it produces, and this, I argue, assists in revisiting history and generating polyphonic conversations intertwining the past and present. In my

practice, I asked the following questions: What unanswered questions does the lingering 'presence' of bodies from the past pose for us in the present? Who and what is seen or concealed? And to what extent could I possibly use the scenographic performance installation as an effective medium to support and carry out this research?

This project has adopted a Practice-based Research methodology. The collection of essays compiled in the book, *Thinking Through Practice: Art as Research in the Academy* (Waite, Duxbury & Grierson, 2008), seeks to connect the theoretical and practical divides by fusing creativity with critical thought. Artists do rigorous research, experimenting, and prospectively relying on theoretical frameworks and approaches to guide and improve their creative processes. In some respects, the book acknowledges the importance of embodied and experienced understanding for the creation of theatre. To develop fresh insights and comprehension of theatrical phenomena, practitioners engage in embodied methods such as movement, voice work, and improvisation. Originality and contribution to knowledge can be supported by creative outputs such as photographs, music, designs, models, digital media, or other outcomes such as performances and exhibits. I used my scenographic practice to explore my research area. This thesis works in conjunction with that practice and its outputs.

My research has involved observation and detailed recording and reporting of my practice. It is an inquiry done to discover new information, mostly through practice, to obtain results for further exploration. Through the documentation of this research, I will be providing possible dramaturgical structures and processes that could be used in further examining advanced creation.

The dissertation is apportioned into six chapters. The first examines how thinking through layered historical narratives and resonant events, influences an immersive and transformative element in theatrical performances. This chapter dives into the various components of the palimpsest of haunting and the relevance in generating deep emotional connections and profound insights in the audience, by studying the interaction of history, memory, presence, and intertextuality. It looks back at a South African theatre landscape and the reckonings with our past, as layers of performance, fractured memories, lost pasts, and sentimental recollections are examined.

The second chapter seeks to describe *dramaturgy of evocation* via an examination of its essential aspects, techniques, and influences. It attempts to grasp the distinctive aspects of this method through the examination of visual language, emotions, materiality, and immersive approaches. This chapter provides practical insights into how the dramaturgy of evocation is implemented in individual performances by evaluating case studies and examples. The chapter finishes by focusing on this theatrical approach's revolutionary potential and future possibilities, underlining its importance in current theatre practice.

In the third chapter, emphasis is on the importance of visual components in theatrical performances to communicate. It delves into the fundamentals of visual language and investigates how stage design, lighting, costuming, props, and multimedia contribute to the entire visual experience. The chapter presents practical examples of how visual dramaturgy enriches narrative, elicits emotions, and engages the audience on a visual level.

Chapter four introduces the *Pepper's Ghost* mechanism, a popular theatrical illusion of the Victorian period, and discusses its significance in generating ghostly presences on stage. It dives into the history and physics of the *Pepper's Ghost* effect, looking at how it is used in theatre, magic, and other visual arts in the past and the present. This chapter analyses the influence of the mechanism on storytelling, atmosphere, and audience perception via case studies and analysis, demonstrating its enduring relevance and promise in modern theatre.

The fifth chapter turns to a personal practice of evocation within the world of theatre, presenting a first-hand description of experiences, techniques, and discoveries. Using the creative journey of a work produced as part of the research project as a springboard, this chapter delves into the progression of knowledge and use of evocative components through personal creative research. It focusses on my creative process, obstacles, accomplishments, and discoveries in working with a dramaturgy of evocation through reflection and self-analysis.

The last and final chapter concludes with a manifesto, a letter and provocation discussing essential concepts and guiding ideas for practitioners aiming to adopt a dramaturgy of evocation to produce effective and transformative theatrical works by drawing on principles and examples from other artistic disciplines.

## CHAPTER 1: PALIMPSESTS OF HAUNTING

“[H]aunting is . . . neither present nor absent,  
neither positive nor negative, neither  
inside nor outside”  
(Derrida, 1998: 88)

### 1.1 Defining Hauntology

Through a combination of two words, ‘haunting’ and ‘ontology,’ Jacques Derrida explores the term, *hauntology* in his book *Spectres of Marx: the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (Derrida, 1994). Haunting derives from the Old English word ‘hant’, which means to frequent or to visit regularly. It has come to mean the persistent presence or ghostly visitation of supernatural creatures through time. The etymology of ontology is the Greek words ‘ontos,’ which translates to being or existence, and ‘logia’ which means study or discourse. Ontology is a philosophical field concerned with the nature of being and existence.

Derrida contends that Marx's theories and the shadow of communism remain a ghostly presence in our cultural, social, and economic worlds. Derrida describes the term hauntology as a temporal circumstance where the past continues to influence the present, generating a sense of ethereal presence (Derrida, 1994). Derrida's inclination was to underline the spectral quality of the philosophical enquiry of ontology and its questioning of being and existence. Hauntology addresses the complicated mechanisms by which the traumatic components of past events are both buried and rendered visible. Here, we are studying methods of knowing and not knowing, of disputed memory politics, suppressions, and ghostly manifestations.

Haunting and the concept of ghosts appear within the context of many religious cosmologies, spiritual beliefs, and activities. Many religious traditions contain teachings and beliefs about spirits, souls, and the afterlife. Philosophical debates in religious settings may

focus on the nature of ghosts, their link to divine or supernatural worlds, and their relevance in religious narratives or moral frameworks. This essay does not engage with a religious or rather spiritual understanding of ghosts. Neither does it try to confirm nor deny perspectives and subjective debates about whether ghosts (as spirits) exist. I develop my idea of 'ghosts of our past' to acknowledge the temporal displacement of our memories and to allow the past to be experienced as present. What I mean by this is acknowledging that as with the idea of ghosts, memory is composed of fleeting expressions and half-envisioned imaginations. Memory haunts, ghosts do not reside in a realm of the dead but rather struggle in the flesh with their own spirits and wants. It should come as no surprise that spectrality permeates different cultural traditions in locally specific ways. Avery Gordon writes that:

... life is more complicated than those of us who study it have usually granted. Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life, one must confront the ghostly aspects of it. This confrontation requires (or produces) a fundamental change in the way we know and make knowledge, in our mode of production. (Gordon, 2008: 7)

Embedded in the sociological discourse, Gordon's idea of haunting, suggests that ghosts are personal figures, social figures and institutions that have a definitive history of violence or power imbalance and inequality. These figures, as a result, appear or manifest to the living through the imagination, as visceral images in a nebulous<sup>1</sup> form. While Derrida's notion of ghosts is based on immanence – "those who are not there, . . . those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living* [...]" (Derrida, 1994: xix), pointing backwards and forwards – Gordon realises that haunting does not have to be a manifestation of a figure but can result as a notion that continues to hover among us. She argues that racism is such an example, it is a constant reappearance of a ghost, (Gordon, 2008). Gordon views *The Invisible Man*, a novel by Ralph Ellison, as a ghost story because it explores the psychological and sociological repercussions of racism. South Africa's history of violence and racism has brought ghosts of the living and the dead into relation, but it has done so institutionally. The remnants of the past appear in the structural inequalities and varied socio-political

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<sup>1</sup> A form of cloud or haze.

discrepancies that manifest in the South African context. Ghosts manifest on a personal level but in the case of my research I am looking toward a collective haunting. I view the collective experience of a violent historical event or tragedy as spectral. I will use the word spectral as the 'quality of being ghostly', a spectre.

Performance works employing the concepts of hauntology in a visually, visceral frame are, for instance, the works of Quebecois director, Robert Lepage. Lepage frequently mixes spooky and ghostly aspects into his productions. His inventive use of multimedia, such as video projections and digitally enhanced set design, results in evocative and immersive experiences. *The Far Side of the Moon* (2000) and *Needles and Opium* (1991) explore themes of memory, loss, and the haunting influence of the past. "Lepage's intention is clearly to link the individual with the cosmos" writes Michael Billington in his review of Lepage's *the Far Side of The Moon* in a review of the Guardian newspaper (Billington, 2023) He ends by stating " ... with Lepage, the show felt like the embodiment of his own spiritual duality" (Billington, 2023). William Kentridge's multimedia works deal with memory, history and haunting. His mix of animation, shadow play, and projection methods, produces a frightening and dreamy environment. In their visual and thematic portrayals, productions like *The Nose* (2010) and *The Magic Flute* (2005), contain themes of haunting. Kentridge's method of wiping off sections of one drawing and sketching over the top of it, is a metaphor for this 'disremembering' process. Because not all the drawing is erased, art critics refer to this procedure as partial erasure. The layers of partially erased markings that result might be regarded as layers of memory as well as traces of the past in the image. Sarah Kane frequently explored dark and unsettling themes in her works for the stage. In plays like *Blasted* (1995), *Cleansed* (1998), and *4.48 Psychosis* (2000), she delves into psychological anguish, trauma, and the existence of haunting memories and experiences. On stage, Kane's writing style and subject matter may have an eerie and unnerving impact.

## 1.2 Palimpsests of Haunting

I found Derrida's notion of *trace*, following from his hauntology concept, compelling. He argues that language and thought are structured by traces, resulting in an unending sequence of 'deferral' and 'signification' (1976). This term *trace* refers to the ways in which the past leaves a remnant or imprint on the present, even if it is not always immediately discernible. As Gayatri Spivak explicates Derrida:

The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent. This other is of course never to be found in its full being. As even such empirical events as answering a child's question or consulting the dictionary proclaim, one sign leads to another and so on indefinitely. (Derrida, 1976)

Derrida's own description of the trace is as follows:

The trace is not only the disappearance of origin, . . . it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an original non-trace and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an original trace or arche-trace. (Derrida, 1976: 406)

The notion of trace is not limited to understanding language and its structure but manifests through history and culture. Trace, along with Derrida's ideas on hauntology, are closely related. Traces remain a form of absence within presence and present absence; reminding us of what was and what is. According to him, the traumas and injustices of history are among the many ways in which the past is constantly present — *hauntology*. Before finding this term, I had been wondering about various historical events in South African archives illustrating how traces of the past continue to affect the present. I noted how this inevitability creates a haunting that renders historical events more complex. I took a step further to identify what the word palimpsest means, as it seemed to me to be a representation of layers of signification. As a metaphorical framework for understanding the relationship between writing, erasure, and the presence of absence, Blanchot uses the term *palimpsest*. In his book published in 1955, *The Space of Literature* (*L'Espace littéraire*), Maurice Blanchot proposes that palimpsest is an original text or parchment that was partially

erased or scraped clean so that the surface could be reused for new writing. Traces of the original writing, though, could still be recognized beneath the new layer. In literary studies, the understanding is that palimpsests are texts that include remnants of past writings. Blanchot to express the idea that every text is haunted by the remnants of its own erasure as well as the possibility of new interpretations emerging.

Considering Blanchot's definition of palimpsest as a something easily erasable but that still bears visible trails of what came before, combined with Derrida's concept of haunting, I coined the concept 'palimpsests of haunting' to help develop my research. It portrays the illegible and layered permanence of unresolved trauma and memory. I will give you an analogy: It is like writing on a new sheet of paper with a gel ink pen that bleeds through the page and pen traces can be found on the back of the page. Sometimes it is faint; other times you can see it very clearly. If this happens over several pages, you can barely even read the first page you wrote on. This layering eventually exposes repositories of memory caused by lingering effects of the past or present except here, no layer can be erased.

Koleka Putuma's *No Easter Sunday for Queers* poem displays an interesting presentation which I thought would help, visually, in further understanding the palimpsest of haunting. The quotation below is a small excerpt from the poem Putuma writes on navigating opposite worlds, between the Northern and Southern suburbs which exhibit economic and social political differences.

The form of the poem encompasses, italics, capital letters, strikethroughs, very long lines. The parallel I am making here, is the repetitive trace of words, words like 'father' and 'who art'. Accompanied by the uncomfortable experience that manifests due to the style of the writing, the reader is frequently left in the dark as to how to read the text. This reads as if someone was constantly repeating themselves in speech; the complexities of 'forgetting' and 'remembering' are a result of the palimpsest of haunting:

I am holding onto my father/ our father/ my father/ our father who art in heaven, who art in my conditioning/ who art in my sheets/ who art stuck up so far in my ----- childhood/ 'Our Father' is a mantra/ a bridle/ a stutter in a playground with mean kids/ a prayer malfunctioning in my lesbian mouth/ our Father/ my father is a stranger on the pulpit. (Putuma, 2017, 25-33)

I would like to borrow Mark Fleishman's idea of 'unfreedom'<sup>2</sup> as melancholy, a traumatic haunting that remains until confronted. In an unpublished presentation, *Peeling the Wound: Dramaturgies of haunting on the neo-apartheid stage*, Fleishman unpacks the dramaturgical underpinnings of Mandla Mbwothe's recent works as they pertain to the idea of haunting. In his analysis he sees a process of incomplete "collective mourning" in the content of the work and further states that the "dead are not at peace". This is further indicated through the dramaturgy:

The fragmentation of narrative, the turn to the body and affect, the richly complex vocality and sonic fabric that extends way beyond the verbal and that impacts the body before making cognitive sense, the way the productions unsettle the audience and fold them into the sense of ritual are even more significant in this regard. (Fleishman, 2016:13 )

What has been left undone and unsaid, and why does it emerge now? When a traumatic memory or experience is neglected, it will often resurface and manifest in various situations and behaviours. I often use the analogy of extracting a poisonous plant or flower from the ground. If you remove it only from above the soil, though it may appear invisible, it will eventually grow back. Therefore, it must be extracted from the roots. I am proposing that through my methodology, trauma is extracted at its core. The same analogy I apply in traumatic experiences that have occurred. This results in a haunting of the living by the dead. Before I proceed to describe how to approach a dramaturgy of evocation and provide a visual framework, I will first engage with a reckoning of our past – first South Africa's socio-political landscape, and second, its theatre.

### 1.3 Reckonings of our past

In 1948 the National Party became the governing party in South Africa and introduced the system of legislated 'separate development' that became known as apartheid. Apartheid accentuated and fortified the country's foundation in settler-colonization. It was a system of legal, racial segregation that governed where South Africans, based on their race, could live and the education they might receive, and whether they could participate in the electoral

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<sup>2</sup> The idea of 'unfreedom' is borrowed from political scientist, Lawrence Hamilton. (Hamilton, L. 2011. Collective unfreedom in South Africa. *Contemporary Politics* 17(4): 355-72).

process or not. The changes in the 1990s brought an end to legal apartheid, but the social and economic impacts remain profoundly entrenched. Twenty-nine years since the end of colonial rule in South Africa and the country remains plagued by apartheid's traces. In the country today, remnants of trauma and systematic oppression are prevalent and require active response. My research has been an attempt to make the hidden, visible, revealing a present absence - South Africa's living history.

South African theatre-makers in the 1980s and 1990s, showcased an interest in theatre that spoke directly to the socio-political circumstances of the time. *Born in the RSA* directed by playwright and director Barney Simon (1986) was an example<sup>3</sup>. It was described in The New York Times by Frank Rich as a "living newspaper", explicitly crystallizing the notion of theatre as a form of testimony – a tapestry of interwoven individual voices.

Documentary is often associated with film. In theatre it is

explored similarly, where data, or rather personal narratives are compiled, recorded, and translated into performance. In his essay, "Reframing the document(ary): exploring asylum policies on stage", Frederike Oberkrome (2018:264), refers to the writings of Peter Weiss to offer some explanation of formal approaches to this model of theatre-making. Oberkrome defines documentary theatre as being committed to "authenticity", so, like the medium of collage, it uses "authentic material" such as "records, documents, ... interviews, statements by well-known personalities, newspaper and broadcast reports, photos (and) documentary films" (Oberkrome, 2018: 264). The editing process is key to its dramaturgy, selecting and structuring the material, omitting some elements, emphasizing others, or deciding on sequences in a process of subjective mediation that is not neutral but establishes a point of view.

*Born in the RSA* was developed in response to the experiences of diverse individuals who were living in South Africa the 1980s, with the escalated resistance to apartheid and the increased suppression and media silencing under conditions of a State of Emergency. A

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<sup>3</sup> It was first presented upstairs at the Market in August 1985 before relocating to the main stage on September 18, 1985. Sarah Roberts designed the set and costumes, while Mannie Manim designed the lighting. The play focuses on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) during the post-apartheid era in South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a real-life commission designed to redress apartheid crimes and promote reconciliation through truth-telling and forgiveness.

recounting of narratives and testimonies from communities and individuals was the foreground of the play.

This emphasis on personal narrative also became a key concept and mechanism of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings. The TRC consisted of three committees - The Human Rights Violation Committee, The Amnesty Committee and Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee - with varied mandates, all to either consolidate reparation, or establish a space to find closure. The first TRC hearings were held in 1996. The commission moved around the country to be accessible to as many communities as possible. In small towns, community centres, church halls and classrooms were converted into courtrooms. In the introduction to *Ubu and the Truth Commission (1997)*<sup>4</sup>, As quoted in van Der Walt and Meskin's article, Kentridge describes this process as a form of travelling theatre, a series of public presentations and performances:

In each setting the same set is erected. A table for the witnesses. Two or three glass booths for the translators. A large banner hangs on the wall behind the commissioners, TRUTH THROUGH RECONCILIATION. One by one witnesses come and have their half hour to tell their story, pause, weep, be comforted by professional comforters who sit at the table with them. The stories are harrowing, spellbinding. The audience sit at the edge of their seats listening to every word. This is exemplary civic theatre, a public hearing of private griefs which are *absorbed into the body politic* as part of a deeper understanding of how society arrived at its present position. This theatre rekindles each day the questions of the moment. How to deal with the guilt of the past, a memory of it? It awakes every day the conflict between the desire for retribution and a need for some sort of social reconciliation. (van der Walt and Meskin, 2011: 134)

Personal truth expressed in the form of a story – orally delivered, in a formal setting that recited the protocols and formality of a court of law, and to a lesser extent a theatre – highlighted not only the significance of “breaking silence” and “being visible” as an individual, but also the crucial impact of language, cultural frames of reference and language as a means of communication. The performance is the (re)enactment of a past event by the individual expressing their testimony or witnessed act, and by the interpreters of that testimony into multiple languages. Whereas a translator deciphers composed text for

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<sup>4</sup> *Ubu and the Truth Commission*, premiered in South Africa in 1997 and has since been performed around the world.

readers, the interpreter, is conveying an elucidation to addressees who depend on the interpreter's ability to convey the speaker's dialect, without time to reflect, ponder, outline, and contextualize what is said. As a result, one testimony was subsequently revisited by a translator and a journalist who were at the original hearing and probed to reveal the problems in communicating the testimonies.

Assumptions emerged from cultural identity and slippages between urban and rural contexts, insert differences between the Xhosa testimonies and the interpreters' versions in English for example, as does a generational difference between the witness and the interpreter. What was assumed was an understanding that the denotative capacity of language enables a reasonably accurate rendering of the speaker's words, but what emerges upon revisiting the testimonies was the complex position that speakers tell their stories. That position might synthesize aspects of a beliefs system – a cosmological view – that the interpreter does not share although he/she speaks the same language. The horrors and significance of those testimonies in my view is lost. Not only was the interpretation perhaps flawed, the purpose of reckoning and purgation was confounded.

In understanding what is necessary to present memory that is embedded in trauma, I was continuously confronting the question of what the process of recalling a traumatic event requires. In the TRC an actor recalling events though pungent with pain and grief is amongst many other tellers of similar events, made it complex to understand the magnitude of the trauma. Unravelling each event provides clarity for the narration to expand. A careful facilitation further allows the audiences space to treat, cope or communicate the magnitude of this traumatic narrative.

Furthermore, the simple retelling of the traumatic events can result in the individual enclosing the unpleasant memory or feeling and avoid direct confrontation with the event by employing linguistic or symbolic substitutes. In the cosmos of the theatre this permits the person to express their grief without completely disclosing the underlying trauma.

Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (1986) claim that memories get encrypted. The subject constructs a safe-guarded area where the lost item is installed and, more crucially, where it continues to remain alive. They pioneered the notion of 'cryptonym' in the field of psychopathology, investigating how traumatic experiences might be hidden or buried inside

the unconscious mind using metaphoric and symbolic language. Their theories are most closely related to the concept of 'cryptic knots' or 'crypts' regarding the persistence and impact of unresolved traumatic memory. They contend that the cryptonymic process is a psyche-defence mechanism used to defend oneself from the overwhelming effect of painful memories. They present insights into the complexities of cryptonym and its consequences for psychoanalysis and trauma comprehension by exploring the case of the Wolf Man (Abraham and Torok, 1994).

The cryptonym acts as a defensive mechanism, shielding the individual's conscious mind from the traumatic memory's overwhelming emotional impact. In engaging with unresolved traumas, injustices, and lost narratives that have moulded our current reality, we participate in a reckoning of the past. Recognizing and coping with these spectres, bringing them to light provides a greater understanding of their enduring influence on our lives. Cultural narratives, myths, and selective historical accounts can all be used to obfuscate or conceal the joint memory of traumatic occurrences. The way societies recount their histories, the myths they develop can emphasize or overlook and contribute to the distortion or suppression of shared memories associated to traumatic experiences. This can happen purposefully or unintentionally, altering how specific events are perceived and remembered. I aim to unpack what the process of evocation through visual language can provide to confront historical spectres. I'm constantly confronted that that our past never entirely disappears and highlighting the need of acknowledging it to construct a more compassionate and just future. I propose visual tools to express the ineffable aspects of trauma that are encrypted, difficult to describe through ordinary words.

As we've seen throughout this chapter, the standard verbal language frequently falls short of conveying the complexity and emotional depths of traumatic events. With emphasis on nonverbal communication, symbolism, metaphor, and embodied performances; a technique of accessing the unconscious mind and facing the cryptonyms that conceal traumatic memories from consciousness is vital. Moving forward, I underline the theoretical underpinning of the concept of evocation, in order to postulate a comprehensive argument of how visual language is an attempt to unveil and confront collective memories of trauma.



## CHAPTER 2: DEFINING EVOCATION AS CATHARSIS

### 2.1 Understanding evocation through catharsis

To cultivate a visual framework for a dramaturgy of evocation, I will begin by underlining my understanding of *catharsis* (*katharsis*). This is because my idea of evocation is highly influenced by philosophical notions of *catharsis* as an act and theory. I begin by unpacking Aristotle's mention of *katharsis* in his seminal work, the *Poetics* (Aristotle, 1961). Though mentioned just once in his writings, the term *catharsis* has become a central term in philosophical, psychological, and artistic discourse. It describes the effect on an audience at the end of a tragedy and has a common usage when referring to a discharge of strong emotion.

Before examining *catharsis* and its implications in psychology and as a theatrical device, it is important to underline that catharsis was an approach to tragedy as a genre. Here, I employ an understanding of tragedy as an investigation of the human condition, moral quandaries and the consequences of actions that illustrate the deterioration, suffering, and/or death of a central character or characters. Augusto Boal (2008) argues that conventional or rather classical tragedy frequently induces a sense of powerlessness and fatalism. In his critique of the classic interpretation of tragedy, he contends that tragedy may be converted into a more empowering form of theatre when audiences participate actively in questioning and altering oppressive institutions. Boal's aim is to bridge the gap between performers and audiences by urging everyone to become 'spect-actors', actively participating in the theatrical process. I understand this type of critique of tragedy and the archaic notions and connotations this term presents, many of which I agree with, but I also wonder to what extent the notion of tragedy might prove useful when translated into different realities, specifically that of a South African context?

Gossard states that, "Tragedy, in its common form relates to the pathos of immeasurable human grief and mourning" (Röttger, 2019: 41). Gossard outlines Aristotle's notion of Tragedy as follows: "A perfect tragedy should [...] imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation". Following this:

... the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this move neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. (Aristotle, 1961)

The consensus is that the above was offered as a response to Plato's argument that tragedy arouses emotions which ought, for the sake of general psychological and moral well-being, be kept in check. Plato believed that the danger of tragedy is that it would encourage audience members to mirror the immorality they witnessed on stage outside of the theatre, and channel the emotions released by catharsis into immoral acts. Aristotle, on the other hand, felt that, through *catharsis*, tragedy purged extreme emotions in the constructed space of the theatre, precisely so that audiences did not have to act out outside the theatre space. I will not be engaging explicitly with tragedy in this research but felt it necessary to outline my understanding of the form in consideration of my use of *catharsis* in what follows.

Today *catharsis* is defined in the Oxford dictionary as the process of releasing, and thereby providing relief from, strong or repressed emotions. It is the purgation of something. The term is defined in Aristotle as a "powerful emotional experience which not only gives our natural feelings of pity and fear full play, but does so in a way which conduces their rightful functioning as part of the understanding of and response to, events in the human world" (Aristotle, 1961). Aristotle's definition of *catharsis* is embedded in the ability of the audience to recognise and respond to the events of the play and draw connections between the dramatic art form and their experience of the society they inhabit, which promotes an emotional reaction. "The value in discussing catharsis seem to derive from its capacity for defining an abstract relationship between artwork and society" through audience response, "and within that [implies] the proper government of civil emotion" (Sheperd and Wallis, 2004: 177). Psychoanalysis, when interpreting *catharsis*, adds another layer: *catharsis* as the expulsion of pathological emotion, which may operate beyond the dramatic experience itself – it has mutated into a term associated with personal psychological health.

Sigmund Freud, in his theory of psychoanalysis, claims that expressing and releasing suppressed emotions and painful experiences might result in cathartic healing and psychological development. In his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* lecture

(Freud, 1933), he states that catharsis is a therapeutic technique that allows the patient to relive and express repressed emotions and traumatic experiences, leading to psychological healing and further that through catharsis, the patient can transform unconscious conflicts into conscious awareness, facilitating the process of working through and resolving psychological issues. To Thomas Scheff who shares Freud's sentiments, it is an experience allowing a patient "to relive, and hence resolve, past traumatic experiences which remained unfinished," at a distance (Scheff, 1979: 13). Doing so, enables a patient to safely engage with their trauma. According to Scheff's theory of 're-evaluation', the psychoanalytic process evokes past traumas by reliving them in a similar context or way to bring one closer to a state of comfort and possibly resolution. This approach allows for a conscious unpacking of the lived condition. In a similar manner to Derrida's idea of *trace*, which I outline in the first chapter, Freud's later works on *catharsis* can be understood as repressed information brought into consciousness during the cathartic process, allowing for the integration of unconscious content and the reformation of the psychic dynamic (Freud, 1933).

Catharsis can be triggered by feelings other than pity and terror, which are the only emotions described in the *Poetics* and are frequently thought to be the only ones connected to catharsis. Teddy Brunius (1966), has refuted another common belief by pointing out that catharsis is not just the result of a performance on an audience. For him, the author, performers, and audience, all experience catharsis because of their contributions to the work of art. In his view, the classical mind did not distinguish between author, text, performance, and audience in the same way that modern analytics do. He combines both the Aristotelian and the psychoanalytical view in underlining that Aristotle's notion of catharsis is one that attempts to teach, it is a form of learning from past traumas.

In *Beloved* (2007), Toni Morrison dives extensively into the concept of *catharsis* through narration. In the story she addresses the tremendous emotional and psychological healing that results from confronting and dealing with previous traumas. Morrison develops a tale that examines the cathartic journey of her characters as they battle with the weight of history, seek atonement, and recover their identities via a representation of slavery's legacy and its continuing influence on individuals and communities. Furthermore, *Beloved* highlights the communal component of *catharsis*. The community is important in the protagonist's path to rehabilitation and atonement. The common memory and shared

experiences create a space for collective *catharsis*, allowing the characters to confront their past together. The community's support, empathy, and acknowledgement of the shared pain all contribute to the cathartic process, confirming the concept that healing is a group effort rather than an individual one. Morrison depicts her characters' cathartic journey through these thematic levels, demonstrating the transformational power of confronting and dealing with horrific events. The book is a monument to the human spirit's endurance and the power of *catharsis* to offer healing, redemption, and emancipation from the ghosts of the past.

Freud and Scheff have made substantial contributions to the debate on *catharsis*, adding literary and narrative-driven works to their psychoanalytical approaches. This has given me a deeper introspection, a more thorough grasp of the term. Morrison's ability to write emotionally charged narratives allowed me a more in-depth investigation of the human experience, fusing the intellectual and emotional components of *catharsis*. This multidimensional approach provides a more comprehensive view, emphasizing the interaction of emotions, history, and human development. What was recurring from the definitions and prior conceptual ideas of *catharsis*, was the communal component which Morrison shows in a narrative form. Morrison does not outline what *catharsis* is, but I borrowed her engagement to deeply understand *catharsis* in my context.

As an extension of my notion of *catharsis*, I come back to Aristotle because he lays a foundation for my understanding, even if his exploration of the term feels insufficient to me. Aristotle mentions the term only once, as I have stated previously, which creates vagueness and ambiguity regarding the emotions that are elicited within a cathartic state. He mentions, pity and terror, but it is unclear what these feelings involve and how they are cathartically discharged. I agree with Artaud's sentiments when he rejects Aristotle's notion of *catharsis* as a purification of emotions via pity and dread (1938). Instead, I look toward creating an evocative experience that eschews logic in favour of engaging with the basic, intuitive components of the human mind. *Catharsis*, according to my understanding of Artaud's notions, was a violent and destructive process that destroyed the barriers between the self and the outside world.

My engagement with the above philosophers and theorists has allowed me to rework my understanding of *catharsis*. To me, the term encompassing Artaud's provocative aims to

awaken the audience to release them from the shackles of passivity, resonates with Scheff's psychoanalytical approach to resolve through reliving traumatic experience. Through this I include the examination of emotions, incorporating Morrison's communal and intersectional approach. Lastly, and most importantly, following Derrida and Gordon, catharsis recalls the hauntings of the past, present, and future.

I have found it difficult to consider *catharsis*, alone, as a way to approach wanting to explore a form of release from the hauntings of the past, *and* to engage audiences with a call to action. I have therefore turned to *evocation* as a central concept in my research. The term evocation has not been explicitly written about as a concept or practice in theatre, but the primal definition which is "the act of bringing or recalling a feeling"<sup>5</sup> is achieved through aesthetics and techniques in theatre. The etymology of the word *evocation* derives from the act of summoning or calling forth supernatural creatures or spirits. This term comes from the Latin phrase, *evocatio*, which means 'calling forth' or 'summoning'. It combines the prefix 'e-' (which means 'out') with the verb *vocare* (which means 'to call'). The term preserves its essential connotation of 'calling forth' but has grown to incorporate the larger concept of evoking or eliciting a reaction, whether supernatural, emotional, or artistic in origin. *Evocation* is closely related to the concept of association, which describes how the mind links numerous stimuli and experiences. Conditioning, personal experiences, cultural circumstances, and individual differences can all play a role in the establishment of these connections. An *evocation* is a reverberation that transcends the present moment. It is a provocation that calls you to consciousness through emotive connection.

In my conception, *evocation* is an enthralling dance between the artist and the audience in combining emotion and meaning to engage the depths of our humanness, empathy and understanding. An example of a visceral evocation is Artaud's manifestation of the *mise en scene*<sup>6</sup>, which attempted to blur the lines between actors and audience, resulting in a more intense and immersive theatrical experience. Artaud does not explicitly use the word, *evocation*, however his manifesto from *The Theatre of Cruelty* aims to release intense emotions from both audiences and performers, which is in line with the etymological

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<sup>5</sup> Oxford Dictionary definition of *evocation*.

<sup>6</sup> It encompasses all visual decisions made by the director and production team to create a certain setting, deliver a message, and concentrate the audience's attention. Set design, props, costumes, lighting, makeup, blocking, and the positioning and movement of performers inside the frame are all examples of *mise en scene*.

definition of *evocation*. His intention is to startle the audience out of their complacency and cognitive attachment, by means of the employment of unusual performance tactics: loud and discordant sounds, intense physicality, masks, and non-linear storylines all were an attempt at *evocation*.

It is my suggestion that *evocation* summons sensations, recollections, or experiences hidden, in the narrowest crevices of one's subconscious, but it also pushes you to *do* something. Let's consider Edit Kaldor's *Inventory of Powerlessness* (Kaldor, 2013) as an example of dramaturgical evocation. It is a performance presentation that explores contemporary ways of making and performing that bring knowledge of powerlessness into appearance *and* action. In five varied European cities namely, Amsterdam, Berlin, Poznan, Prague, and Athens, hundreds of participants were provided space to articulate a range of situations, states, and feelings – from quotidian frustrations to extremes of affliction, disadvantage, and oppression. They were brought into the collective setting of the theatre as spoken testimony and a cumulative and archivable database or 'inventory' is set up through a digital formula and projected on stage, generated live. Individual accounts of powerlessness were placed in relation to others, as acts of living knowledge. Visually interacting and witnessing the software of interconnected of database the audience can start to decipher the enormity of their shared powerlessness, it is visceral and evocative. This generates debates and impulses that question the systems – social, political, and economic – that provide context for our existence.

The *Inventory of Powerlessness* is not only a moment of collective catharsis, although the piece, by rediscovering the primordial function of theatre, is also that. [...] Requesting active participation of the spectators, whether they take the floor or not, Edit Kaldor invites everyone to reflect not only on his own relationship to powerlessness but paradoxically, to also contribute to a form of 'collective power' by bringing individual powerlessness into a collective setting. A subtle praise of the power of speech and theatre, the *Inventory of Powerlessness* is one of those pieces that gently insist on provoking reflection long after the performance is finished. (Mouvement, France in Kaldor, 2013).

This engagement allows possibilities beyond the conventional ways we think about our audiences. I believe artists now do not allow a passivity in their theatre-making. There is a direct refusal of various conventional systems, spaces and bodies that interrogate the frames

of performance, shifting the relationships between the performer(s), the maker(s), and the audience.

I bring in the *Inventory of Powerlessness* performance as an approach to dealing with emotions and past tragic events in real time using a practice of *evocation*. I thought the bringing of audiences into the space to contribute was effective. After watching a clip of the *Inventory of Powerlessness*, I saw how invested and active all participants were. They were not only careful with information they provided about their personal life but were openly vulnerable. In an interview with Florian Malzacher, Edit Kaldor says: “The entries in the inventory are about the individuals, so what you see is a unique collection of individuals. And all we know about them, are their feelings of powerlessness – which is a weird way of encounter”(Edit and Malzacher, 2015). She further explains that “the audience is not addressed as a group. We try to walk you through as an individual spectator or viewer many different possible ways of perception.” You are called in as a performer, to contribute. “ You get the chance to examine your own ways of relating to powerlessness, to people, to your own idea of how to relate to individual and collective responsibility” (Edit and Malzacher, 2015).

Rehashing ideas of Plato, I found that he was concerned that *mimesis*, as purposeful imitation of life intending to deceive its audience, would have a negative effect on society. The false copies of reality provided by dramatic performance would threaten the audience’s ability to distinguish reality from illusion. Furthermore, the performers or actors would, through presenting an imitation of life as truth or knowledge, confuse social interaction and behaviour. This would, according to Plato, result in the audience being “drawn into” and “taking on” the mental and ethical perspectives *and* behaviours presented by the performers – both inside and outside of the theatre. The *Inventory of Powerlessness* is different to the *mimesis* Plato problematises, which is concerned with faithfully representing or imitating reality, aiming for authenticity and a genuine reflection of the subject matter. The *Inventory of Powerlessness*

places the audience as subjects of a performance. The *Inventory of Powerlessness* dispels a sensationalism by placing the audience as subjects of a performance. I was also interested in the way in which, the *Inventory of Powerlessness* worked as a translation mechanism. An interpreter was present on stage, in real time, typing a summary or gist of what a participant had to say about a time where they felt powerless. This was transferred

into the digital system, an archive that recorded all the contributions and displayed them onto the screen. This was for everyone to see, engage with and release. It became a space for evocation and purgation. In examining what Plato established as mimesis I find that I'm not interested in imitating real life that positions the audiences at dismay. Rather I am interested in awakening them to the frame of illusion. Aristotle's idea of mimesis as it is extensive, will become a foundation to the dramaturgy of evocation.

Aristotle defined *mimesis* as "discernment of likeness...an active and interpretative process of cognition" (Aristotle, 1961). *Mimesis* is thus, following Aristotle, an active process of the audience recognising similarities between art and life, making connections between the two and interpreting them. Where Aristotle advocates for the audience as active interpreters who *know* that they are witnessing a representation of the world, not the world itself; Plato maintains that the audience are passive consumers of the arts which deceive them into believing what they are seeing *is* reality, rather than an artistic representation of it. Aristotle thus defines *mimesis* as a productive activity through which we learn to adapt or transform reality and control how we interact with and respond to the world around us. This idea of using *mimesis* to understand more about the world around us more effectively, puts the power and agency back into the hands of the spectator. The spectator knows the dramatic performance is an illusion, but nonetheless recognises its relation to the world outside of itself or recognises its own adherence to the rules of the world of the play. Both positions are engaged with the effort to truly know what reality is, but...one is concerned to separate copy from reality, to avoid being taken in by illusion; the other wants to use copies as a way of understanding reality better. Central to the concept of *mimesis* is recognition. *Mimesis* works on the assumption that audiences will recognise the actions and behaviours of the characters/performers, and gain pleasure from that familiarity.

In a thorough comprehensive examination of the above theorists, writer, and academics, I propose that the concept of evocation stems from the foundations of mimesis and catharsis. The act of copying or depicting reality in art (mimesis) prepares the audience for feelings and responses. A well-executed act of mimesis allows audiences to recognize and empathize with all that is represented, making the evocation process possible. The purpose of evocation is

not only to bring audiences to consciousness, but also to elicit a transforming experience in the audience, encouraging them to examine their own emotions, attitudes, and perspectives. When used correctly, evocation allows for a strong connection between the piece of art and its audience. What requires further extension in my argument is accentuating visual language in theatre which the following chapter provides.

## CHAPTER 3: MAPPING VISUAL DRAMATURGY

### 3.1 Finding the Dramaturg

In the South African theatre landscape, dramaturgy is an evolving term. The specific use of the term in the South African context is developing in relation to performance aesthetics established in the country. This performance aesthetics emphasises embodied narrative, physicality, rhythm, and ceremonial components. The Dramaturg looks toward traditional performance methods and symbolic constituents used by the artists, infusing them into contemporary conventions. The Dramaturg begins by exploring embodied knowledge before incorporating hybrid and interdisciplinary approaches or methods.

Dramaturgy is the dramatic composition of text or language (not only in its linguistic sense). Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's collection of essays, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1769), introduced both the term and the figure of the "in-house critic," whose role was to assist a theatre in the process of play development, pioneered the concept of dramaturgy as a separate theatrical function. Dramaturgy, according to Lessing, is the dramatic art approach (or poetics) that aims to build play construction principles. Lessing, who was also a playwright, worked as a resident critic at the Hamburg National Theatre, where he counselled the theatre's administration on play selection and delivered his own perception on each production. The evolution of the Dramaturg<sup>7</sup> in contention reformed from Germany to America, all inhabiting their own perception of a Dramaturg's role within the theatre. Berlot Bretch acknowledged that the most cardinal companion to a director is the dramaturg —and Heiner Müller further established dramaturgical training as an essential aspect of theatre-making.

Romanska in the introduction chapter to *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy* (2015) examines the interdisciplinary vehicle of cultural transformation of the Dramaturg in third-world countries reconciling the remnants colonisation. The Postcolonial dramaturgy

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<sup>7</sup> I capitalize the word 'Dramaturg' as I am emphasizing someone who practices dramaturgy not the practice itself

strives to navigate the numerous conflicting historical narratives filled with pain, subordination, and dispossession with the goal of bridging the post-traumatic gaps in the different nations' socio-political fabric. In agreeing with the effects postcolonial dramaturgy, which Peter Eckersall describes as, "symptomatic of the history of domination and colonialism's violent ruptures" (Eckersall, 2014: 103) Eckersall through these descriptions navigates many conflicting narratives of history that are riddled with pain subordination, and dispossession. The imposition of Western theatrical traditions and norms frequently resulted in the neglect and marginalization of local forms of performance and storytelling, and as a result, the concept of dramaturgy in theatre became skewed towards Western paradigms, making it difficult for previously suppressed countries, like South Africa to reclaim and redefine their own theatrical traditions. Various limitations including erasure of indigenous narratives, linguistic barriers and western dominance in theatrical education could have constricted the development of the Dramaturg. By this I do not imply the practice of a Dramaturg was invisible or non-existent but that it had not been named and exercised as explicitly as their western counterparts.

### 3.2 Visuality as communicative device

Visual dramaturgy is concerned with the way in which seeing affects the art or technique of dramatic composition and theatrical representations. It focuses on the visual language of the theatre, employing the power of images, symbolism, composition, and spatial connections to create a unique atmosphere, build a sense of time and location, and express ideas and emotions to the audience. Its goal is to stimulate the audience's visual perception and enhance their sensory experience.

In this chapter, I move a step closer to identifying what is necessary in experimenting with *evocation*, through a visual dramaturgical approach - the dramaturgical composition of text, imagery, symbols, objects, lights, sound, bodies etc. The *mise en scene* is the unfolding of the visual composition of the space, and everything in it. It refers to the relationship between actors, audience, set, lighting, and sound design. It considers the purposeful construction of how the visual composition of a space can affect an audience. What follows

here is an attempt to outline what elements and theoretical underpinnings are necessary in the visual dramaturgical construction.

Visual Dramaturgy raises questions about who and what is seen, imagery, the audience's positionality, and the setting of the production presentation. It acts as a vehicle for delivering affect. We can claim that visual dramaturgy is based on materiality, where there are multiple illusions at play, and the process is only revealed through the willing engagement of participants/spectators as they attempt to negotiate decoding the performance. Perhaps, it is imperative to outline visuality as tool and language in the theatre before underlining the possibilities of hybridity in scenography that I will be examining here. The contrast between how the theatre of imagery and visuality is constructed versus how it relates to the functioning of written and spoken language, becomes the first step in understanding how scenography is a pivotal approach to meaning making.

Language is sequential in both written and spoken form. Although singular words are thought of as separate signification units, each one is connected to and builds upon the ones that came before it. In linguistics, cognization of a sentence is possible due to singular words formulated coherently into a sentence. Verbal language communicates abstract, intellectual notions that are otherwise irreplicable through written form. The visual language is transcendent and is often the relationship between looking and perceiving. In his dissertation on *The Language of Visual Theatre: Sign and Context in Josef Svoboda, Meredith Monk, and Robert Wilson*, Robert Wilcox quotes Mitchell (1986) and states that "image is syntactically and semantically dense in that no mark may be isolated as a unique or distinctive character (like a letter of an alphabet), nor can it be assigned a unique reference" (Wilcox, 1994: 9). When I think about the emotional impact of visual language, I echo Langer who asserts that spoken "language is a very poor medium for expressing our emotional nature. It merely names certain vaguely and crudely conceived states but fails miserably in any attempt to convey the ever-moving patterns, the ambivalence, and intricacies of inner experience" (Langer, 1991: 100)

The idea of a theatre of hybridity, is a theatre that combines live actors with video projection, film and varied multi-media. Prior to exploring this theatre, I classified my practice within the realm of interdisciplinarity. However, a theatre of hybridity suggests that

intermediality belongs in the realm of theatre.<sup>8</sup>In Kati Röttger's article, *The Mystery of the In-Between* (2013), the idea of the 'Vortex effect' is introduced, which consists of the relationship between mediality, theatricality and performativity. In her analysis she foregrounds the following quote by Frieda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt:

We locate intermediality at a *meeting-point* in-between the performers, the observers, and the confluence of the media involved in a performance at a particular moment in time. The intermedial inhabits a space in-between the different realities that the performance creates and thus it becomes, at the minimum, a tripartite phenomenon. Intermediality is a powerful and potentially radical force which operates in-between performer and audience; in-between theatre, performance and other media; and in-between realities – with theatre providing a staging space for the performance of intermediality. (Chapple & Kattenbelt, 2006: 12)

Theatre is an intermedial event marked by the interplay of *theatricality*, a way of seeing that generates the effect of spectatorship and operates on the teetering line between fact and fiction, reality, and illusion. *Mediality* "is the specific quality of the medium in regard to structures, experiences and perception" (Röttger, 2013: 13). Lastly in the vortex configuration is *Performativity*, the medial acts that produce meaningful engagement; the text, picture and music that occur in front of the beholder's eyes are critical for understanding how theatre operates.

In Melissa Poll's *Robert Lepage's Scenographic Dramaturgy* (2018), there is a careful consideration of the tangible elements at play in the work. She states that:

The text is no longer the central and superior factor, all the other elements like space, light sound, music, movement, and gesture tend to have an equal weight in the performance process. Therefore new dramaturgical forms and skills are needed, in terms of a practice that no longer reinforces the subordination of all elements under one (usually the word, the symbolic order or language) but rather a dynamic balance to be obtained anew in each performance. (Poll, 2018: 6)

The interweaving of all scenographic elements has been adopted in interdisciplinary arts and theatre as an emergent form that advantages visual design over dramatic text. What this

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<sup>8</sup>Intermediality is concerned with the interplay of various media forms, whereas interdisciplinarity is concerned with the integration of information and practices from several academic fields. Both notions emphasize the significance of bridging borders and acknowledging the linked nature of distinct disciplines of study, although in different circumstances. Intermediality is particular to media and cultural studies, whereas interdisciplinarity is a larger notion that refers to collaboration and knowledge integration across academic fields.

does is allow theatre-makers to expand and further explore ways of reaching a wider audience that is not constrained by the barriers of language through text. The dominance of languages restricts access to individuals who are within, or can comprehend, that language.

Another extension of this is Erika Fischer-Lichte's concept of theatricality. Her emphasis is on the semiotic process where theatricality becomes the interaction between different signs and symbols. In her work, *Theatricality: A Key Concept in Theatre and Cultural Studies*, she describes non-theatrical signs as: "human beings and the objects of their environment ... always exist in certain ... contexts, which do not permit a human being to be replaced by another or by an object at random or vice versa" (Fischer-Lichte, 1995: 3). Describing theatrical signs, she states: "an object can be replaced by another random object or a human body because, in their capacity as theatrical signs, they can signify one another" (Fischer-Lichte, 1995:3). Her emphasis is on the role of signs in the theatrical process and, like Josette Féral (Féral, 2002), Fischer-Lichte believes that the reception of the spectator, the ways spectator perceives the process using the signs, is central to the understanding of theatricality.

Eckersall and his co-writers of *New Media Dramaturgy*, approach translation through an epistemological lens: How is a particular encounter on stage shaped? They consider the convention of the stage and the body's relation to what is being produced. They make an example of a bucket or chair as an object that bears vast interpretations, based on how it is used and where it is situated within the spatial temporality of a performance sequence. The epistemic justification questions reasons or provides evidence that make a belief or knowledge rational or reasonable. As a theoretical departure, I suggest that epistemology, in the dramaturgy of evocation, is in constant negotiation. It does not try to replicate or challenge what is true because the structure itself requires an account of an event or a lived/witnessed experience. The medium of hybrid theatre and its illusions compels an epistemological question: What is the structure, and what are its limits? What kind of space is required to release, interact, feel exposed or get lost in the hypnosis of the polyphonic sounds of mourning for example. I borrow an ontological reflection from Artaud who felt that theatre provides a totality and unity to life that has been otherwise unattended.

The first phrase of Peggy Phelan's 1993 essay, 'The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction', states that performance's only existence is in the

present. She contends that once a live act is captured on film, it ceases to be performance art since it "betrays the promise of its own ontology" and is replicated for a wider audience and longer shelf-life (Phelan, 1993: 147). She refers to the initial reason that performance art was created as a form, to oppose commodity and elude the control and demands of the art market. I acknowledge Phelan's criticism of film concerning the influence of performance. However, my contemplation revolves around considering film (as well as other digital media) as scenographic components embedded within the live moment of performance, which, in Phelan's idea is inherently irreproducible. Although the argument in my research is not on reproduction and representation of work but rather on this idea of "promised ontology", it is pivotal when considering intermediality not as a method that appropriates the power of theatre and its illusion, but as a proposition for exploring possibilities. In the production *Bona*, which I will outline in a later chapter, nothing is certain, the reality or 'being' is constantly being disrupted or perhaps enhanced. According to Richard Schechner, performance 'is' reality, but perhaps can be referred to as "make-believe" or "illusion of an illusion" (Schechner & Brady, 2013: 42). The performance becomes an unstable landscape. However, Schechner proposes that performance is a transitory event, a happening (Schechner & Brady, 2013).

I have used scenography to return to the world of images as we know it. Verbal text alone, provides limitations through linguistics. The act of *evocation* is one that is felt and cannot often be explicated through words. The departure is an audience interaction that brings together a persistent collective trauma. How do we experience this visually? Theatre could serve a radical spiritual and, therefore, political purpose, revealing and concealing through visual intervention. The verbal and physical languages on the stage should be sign systems that all people can grasp, regardless of their cultural background. Theatre requires "spatial expression" instead of reverting "to texts regarded as sacred and definitive, we must first break theatre's subjugation to the text and rediscover... a kind of unique language somewhere in between gesture and thought. We can only define this language as expressive, dynamic spatial potential, in contrast with expressive spoken-dialogue potential" (Artaud, 1938: 68).

For this analysis, beyond posing epistemological questions, I pose an ontological one: What is the nature of 'being' in the content the medium aims to cultivate through senses and affect? The blending of sensory modalities and the ability to elicit intricate, interconnected reactions across various artistic or perceptual realms are characteristics of synthetic experiences, which can be crucial to both intermediality and developing evocation. The blending of elements from different artistic mediums, such as combining visual and aural components in a performance may have a more immersive and multisensory experience when various sensory modalities are in collaboration. In the following chapter I will expand on intermedial exploration of the relationship of technological mechanisms, performer, maker, and creator to provide a synesthetic experience. Furthermore, I will outline the questions of whether the performer in an intermedial performance loses agency or 'ontological power' to other intermedial elements such as the Pepper's Ghost mechanism.

## CHAPTER 4: THE CASE OF PEPPER'S GHOST

### 4.1 History of the Machine

In this chapter I engage with *Pepper's Ghost*, the mechanism I used in the iteration of *Bona* examined for this dissertation. I present a historical background and provide context of what I explore scenographically to explore hauntology through an evocation. Scrolling panoramas, dioramic effects, and transformations achieved through gauzes, lighting, projection, reflection, trapdoors, and flying were among the Victorian period's scenic technologies, providing immediate and visceral impacts for their audiences. The appeal to baser, carnal instincts 'creeping up from the gutter' was regarded as undermining the higher aims of serious, literary theatre, and this kind of intermedial theatre was derived as theatre of pure diversion (Röttger, 2017). As opposed to this, the integration of digital technologies, or rather new media works, as part of the scenographic experience of contemporary performance, has attempted to subvert the idea of the mere 'thrill and dumb' amazement of scenography. This intermedial aspect of scenography once deemed lacking in sophistication, is presently being recognized as a potentially influential tool for scenography, capable of imbuing profound meaning and emotive resonance. McKinney argues that spectacle that is scenography, is capable of drawing upon our relationship to the world while deconstructing it. She further states that "spectacle generates multiple fertile associations, feelings and memories and does not separate the superficial from the profound or the sentimental from the precise and clear-sighted" (McKinney, 2013: 74). My interest here is in exploring the *Pepper's Ghost* theatrical illusion, its ephemerality, and the mechanism's features to revisit history and generate polyphonic conversations intertwining the past and present. The idea of spectacle is particularly useful in this context because it enables us to understand the connections between technological elements, performance, imagination, and history. This chapter underlines the history of *Pepper's Ghost* and some of its more recent explorations, in hopes of better understanding its mediality, or as Röttger explains it, the "notion of the in between" (Röttger, 2013: 8).

*Pepper's Ghost* first coined and explored by John Pepper and Henry Dircks in 1862, is a 19<sup>th</sup> century, semi-holographic technique, which created an optical illusion foregrounding a

ghost-like floating image on stage. Traditionally involving the positioning of a large pane of glass at a 45-degree angle in front of a stage, the glass served as what is known as a beam splitter<sup>9</sup> in physics, enabling the spectators to see both the background scenery and the reflected image at the same time. The depth of this phantom picture on the stage, matched the separation between the performer or object and the glass. Lights were used to highlight an actor or occasionally an object that was against a black background and not directly visible to the audience, causing the image of the person or object to reflect off the glass. A two-dimensional image placed next to a three-dimensional set gave a ghost-like imagery (Mott, 2021). Pepper used the illusion in his adaptation of Charles Dickens's, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*, to explore with a virtual actor, creating layering of the real and the holographic. The conceptualization of this installation is foregrounded on the physical body's interaction with the medium, where one can confront and interact with the medium.

Pepper and Dircks blended their technological experiments with the fanatical appreciation of Dickens' horror stories. In 1862, during the Christmas season, *Pepper's Ghost* made its debut. The annual polytechnic program held in London by the Royal Polytechnic Institute, now known as the University of Westminster, served as the highlight of the season. Pepper and Dircks extended Dickens' interest in memory and illusion and were keen to maintain the visual dynamic of Dickens' text by dramatically enlarging its spectacular aspects. This consisted of a combination of painted backdrops, lighting effects, and mirrors to construct the theatrical magic. A powerful light, from a specially made magic lantern that was hidden beneath the stage, was cast upon an actor who was standing in front of a sheet of glass that stretched from the pit to the ceiling between the audience and the stage. The moving image of the disguised actor would then be superimposed on a second actor on stage above. All of this was a simple but spectacular three-dimensional spectral effect.

Eckersall describes the technology in theatre as "relational, transforming of matter, fluid and effortless" (Eckersall, Grehan and Scheer, 2017:13). The mechanism operates as an 'image machine' it focusses on the intimacy of the performer's encounter with it and the concurrent themes.

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<sup>9</sup> Optical device that splits a beam of light into a transmitted and a reflected beam.

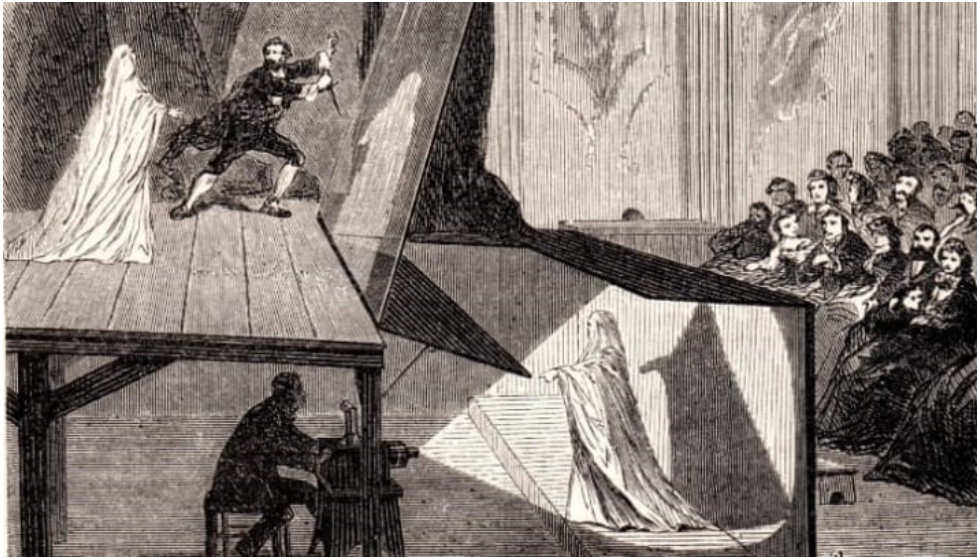


Figure 1: *Pepper's Ghost mechanics*

Often this machine is comparable with the functioning of a hologram. Amani Althagafi states that holography is created when light waves from a laser source interfere with the image that is created. As a result, a wavefront reconstruction of the object is produced that contains the three-dimensional detail (Althagafi, 2018). By using technology, holograms uphold comparable characteristics to *Pepper's Ghost* illusions, but they shouldn't be mistaken for one another based on the traditional way in which we view imagery. Holography has the potential to capture an artifact's features in greater detail. However, *Pepper's Ghost* is a process considered to be an illusion to trick audiences. This technique projects an image that needs different materials such as film, projector, mirror, and transparent glass. In short, it does not need a laser beam or a holographic laboratory or dark room to develop the film with chemicals.

Helen Groth writes that Dircks acknowledged that audiences seem to comprehend and process the spectacle of the illusion by drawing on their past experiences. He explains:

We first see and then exercise our mental faculties. In forming judgments, we bring to bear on the subject all our experience, reading, studying, and power of investigation. If the offered mystery has its equal in some jugglery we have seen, then doubt steps in; or, if we have seen a scientific experiment closely allied to alleged mystery, doubt again interposes; and so on,

step by step, we compare the unknown subject with what is known bearing any collateral quality.(Groth, 2007: 58)

I expand on Groth's above explanation above, that individuals require a contextual basis of personal experience to grasp an illusion. Subsequently, as they comprehend the underlying mechanisms generating the illusion, its 'affect' or impact gradually diminishes. He indicates that when a new illusion is employed, the image's effectiveness or spectrality is based on the viewer's reflecting or conscious distancing. Through habit, an illusion can gradually undermine and eventually lose its allure, so its deceitful attempt to trick the audience is outdone (Grau, 2003). At this stage, spectators are receptive to content and artistic media proficiency, at least until a new medium with even higher appeal to the senses and greater suggestive power emerges, and once again deceives the audience. According to this logic, no matter how elaborately conceived and executed the illusion is, it will only succeed if it can be consciously related to a previous experience stored in the memory. Dircks made a distinction between illusions that form part of and avoid narrative sequence and those designed to produce cognitive or perceptual aberrations.

#### 4.2 Pepper's Ghost today (1)

A dinner party with dancing ghosts, birthday cake, and music is staged in the Grand Hall at Disneyland. Since its opening in 1969, *The Haunted Mansion* uses the *Pepper's Ghost* illusion, along with animatronic figures. Other contemporary adaptations of the mechanism were the 2012 projection of Tupac Shakur, performed alongside Snoop Dogg and Dr. Dre, at Coachella and *The Lack of Signs* developed in 2013 by dancer and choreographer, Andros Zins-Browne, of Brussels. This performance, whose name refers to the Lac de Cygnes in *Swan Lake*, features a 'holographic' image of dancer Chryssa Parkinson doing a disjointed choreography. Within these works there is an interplay of what is absent and what is present, the illusion controls a viewer's ability to delineate between the two. What happens is the live human performer is decentred and often elusive. The notion of 'hauntedness' is employed here specifically when the human performer is present in a spectral state, in their absence. Fleishman utilises Avery Gordon's ideas on haunting when he states that "Ghosts

are the signs of that presence..”, “the ways in which what is absent is made apparent to us”(2016: 5). What seems to be the aim, is to use the optic to create a presence. Tupac Shakur, who has long been deceased, would ‘make an appearance/ presence’. The technical virtuosity would in some way fill the space with a ‘presence’. However, this attempt conveyed the opposite, because the projections became spectres that haunted the work and brought the spectator’s attention to absence instead of presence.



*Figure 2: Pepper's Ghost, 2017, Noordance*

The *Pepper's Ghost* effect has created magic, charmed, and transported audiences for centuries. In a collaboration with Yoko Seyama, Fernando Melo, choreographed a performance for the Noordance lead by mirrors, reflections, appearance, and disappearance, providing a rhythmic journey for contemporary audiences. The dancers appear and disappear in ghostly conversations. Seemingly the dancers are echoes of the past or fleeting glimpses of the future (Seyama, 2017).

Through this list of performances that are produced for a contemporary audience, what is underlined is that they have maintained the illusion, the spectacle. There is

importance placed on concealing the functionality of the illusion, the wires connecting to the projector, the mirror, every factor that is required to present this spectacle is hidden from view. In the next section I will discuss uses of the mechanism where the illusion is consciously brought into view.

### 4.3 Pepper's Ghost Today (2)

The mechanism of *Pepper's Ghost* was set up at *The Centre for the Less Good Idea*, for the Season 7 showcase in 2020. I was a part of the work which aimed to challenge the convention of the mechanism. In the first chapter I introduced the haunting, hauntology and spectres of our past and present. What stood out as I have outlined above is the imagery of what this haunting would look like, the trace of ghostly-ness. In my participation in Season 7 I engaged with the grandeur of the mechanism. I sat in rehearsals while the mechanism was set up and discovered this absent presence. It was as if the performer had transcended into a different realm. Below I have selected the following works from this season, which support my research on using visual dramaturgy, and tools such as the *Pepper's Ghost*, for creative discovery, specifically when working with excavating historical and traumatic material. This chapter section underlines the position of the spectator and how these works exist in a particular way because they are received and reconstructed by a spectator. How does the spectator encode the visual construction of images? Is the act of releasing and purging still possible without their participation? And how is the illusion pivotal? In this engagement, I want to stretch the possibilities of human perception and remove the blanket of realism and the one-dimensional illusion, to engage with disorientated language and its subjects. Through observing his own body, and what is being presented simultaneously, the audience member is called to engage. This is a trope called 'reversibility', which Maurice Merleau Ponty, (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), refers to as the interconnectedness and interdependence of the perceiver and the perceived, challenging the traditional subject-object dualism. In traditional philosophy, the subject-object dualism often delineates a clear separation between the observer (subject) and the observed (object). Merleau-Ponty's concept of reversibility disrupts this dichotomy by emphasizing the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between the perceiver and the perceived. The term suggests that the act of perception is not a one-sided process but a

mutual and intertwined phenomenon where the observer and the observed are in a continuous and reciprocal exchange. Merleau-Ponty essentially contradicts the widely held belief that an external reality exists apart from the observer. Rather, it implies that perception involves a more complex and nuanced relationship, one in which the distinctions between the subject and the object are blurred.

## Spactral

In the meeting of analogue and digital technology, presence is deceptive, it becomes a performative strategy that blurs the lines between real and non-real, or what Masahiro Mori describes as the 'The Uncanny Valley' (Mori, 2012) a kind of 'living dead'. In this section I will be reflecting on several performances from the season that utilized the mechanism in varied ways. The provocation of season 7's works was *'What of text? what are the ways of transforming a text designed to be read into a performance on the stage? Is it necessary to make this change? is there anything to be gained in this process?'*

To begin, *Spactral* (2021), is a contemporary physical take on *Macbeth*, which puzzles out time, language, and the dramatic form of the Shakespearean tragedy and is performed by Thami Majela, Kaldi Makutike and Michael Mazibuko. Confronting the provocation of the season, the work decentralises the performer. The dramaturgical focus seemed to be on deconstructing the artificial binaries between traditional and contemporary art practices. There are varied mediations used in the performance where the dramatic composition is purposefully fragmented, for example, deconstructive dramaturgy of the performer, space, and audience: fragmentation may be used to display scenes or sections out of sequence, or it may weave multiple narratives together in nonlinear methods. It disrupts the audience's expectations and compels them to actively engage with the story to decipher the meaning. Another such example is the performer may break the fourth wall by engaging the audience in the action. What was particularly interesting with the content of *Spactral* was the use of spatial mediations, distorting and altering the theatre space using the Pepper's Ghost mechanism, mediations such as lighting and sounds that foregrounded the illusive and fragmented character.

Theatre and performance are inherently ephemeral and temporal, the traditional convention of theatre itself is a replication of reality and the audience has become accustomed to world-building in the space. The spectator often willingly suspends disbelief and accepts the new reality for the time of the performance. Röttger argues that it is the beholder's perspective that shifts between "medium and mediated and decides to identify pictures, bodies, words, music as referring to the discourses, histories and cultures in which the event is embedded" (Röttger, 2013: 14 ). In the work, *Spectral* a second layer of illusion is proposed, because the spectator is always made aware of the convention. Specifically, because the mechanism of the illusion is clearly visible. The season's works were all performed in a small dark room where only the projections and performers were illuminated. When watched online you are unable to see the beam splitter glass, the wires that connect the projector to the image from the laptop, or the desk in the middle of the room controlling the mechanism. However, the live experience positions the spectator where everything is exposed and open for them to make a conscious decision whether to buy into the optics. Whether this is a point of interest for the production or not, this aspect of the dramaturgy is important for my argument.

In the frame of the video recording of *Spectral*, is a performer who appears to be standing, all we can see is his head and his torso. Without dialogue, when seated directly opposite the screen or watching the recording from the front view, you are unable to distinguish the live performer from the projected one, as the projected layer is perfectly covering the live performer. We later find out that the layering consisted of two projected videos before two live performers join the scene at a later moment. Following an initial moment of disorientation, and the inevitable attempt to spot the difference, the impression that there is an original and a copy, no longer makes sense. This obligates one to pay close attention to the visceral visuality. In *No More Masterpieces*, Artaud asserts that "Our sensibility has reached the point where we surely need theatre that wakes us up heart and nerves" (Artaud, 1938:64 ). He suggests that we have become accustomed to purely descriptive and narrative theatre, narrating psychology. This has provided us very little space to engage with theatre. In welcoming eeriness in an attempt for evocation.

*Spectral* removes the linearity of narrative and positions it in a realm of 'visual chaos'. You often are unable to distinguish each sequence, additionally each sequence can exist in any order and still maintain its readability. This, in some way, is a return to 'magic' a way of affecting sensitivity through intensities of colour, light and sound, using vibrations and tremors, musical, rhythmic repetition. This ghostly effect is one that only the machine can bring forth. The work deconstructs artificial binaries. Who and what is seen? How is the picture scenographically located? For Eckersall, the dramaturgical interest or concern in interdisciplinary works is in who is seeing, and the environment in which the processes of image generation, presentation, and reception are staged (Eckersall, Grehan and Scheer, 2017). The observer must use associative and analytical skills to contextualize and demystify the unfamiliar. It is the *mise en scene*, the construction and combination of all theatrical materials, that pleads for further unpacking.

The audience has come into a space from varied places. In an address in Geneva, the influential French theatre director, producer and actor, Jacques Coupeau said:

An audience is not just a group of people assembled by chance who go here or there in search of less heady amusements. There are nights when the house is full, yet there is no audience before us. What I describe as an audience is a gathering in the same place of those brought together by the same need, the same desire, the same aspirations to satisfy a taste for living together, for experiencing together human emotions—the ravishment of laughter and that of poetry—by means of a spectacle more fully realized than that of life itself. They gather, wait together in a common urgency, and their tears or laughter incorporate them almost physically into the drama or comedy that we perform to give you a stronger sense, and a more genuine love, of your own humanity. (Mackiewicz, 2016)

*Spectral* blurs the lines between the real and the ethereal by seamlessly weaving live performers with projected apparitions, the approach provides a heightened sense of phenomenon. It leveraged on a spectacle that transcends the restrictions of traditional stagecraft by utilizing the interplay of reflection and light. What *Spectral* presented was realization of visionary conception that was meticulous and required lighting, sound, costume, and the performer's physicality to realise the illusion, elements that are pivotal in evoking transformation and insightfulness within audiences.

## Feast or Famine

This presentation although different from *Spectral*, uses the same medium. There is a relatively clear narrative, however the visual imagery is a prominent feature. We are invited to take a closer look at what the technology can present by revealing and interacting with the mechanism. The technology here is overtly visible, the external mechanism operating against a body, and is centrally regulated and controlled alongside the projected image. In *Feast or Famine* directed by Bronwyn Lace, we interact with the machine's materiality.

In time-lapse video, from the Naturhistorisches Museum (Vienna), a swarm of *Dermestes-maculatus*<sup>10</sup> removes the flesh of a *Tyto alba*, a barn owl. The video is being projected on the floor and the mirrored Perspex catches the light to present a 2D mirrored image in front of us. Universities and museums frequently use carrion beetle to remove the flesh from bones during the preparation of skeletons for display. While the owl's skinned, lifeless body may first be the focus, after a while the attention turns to the beetles' activity. All the beetle's life stages are depicted in the video. Soon the movement of the beetle creates motion, the beetle move side to side, eating and carrying away this lifeless owl.

Decay becomes a prominent theme; however, we soon notice that the story is also about life. In low dimmed amber light, we see a body projected on the mirrored screen and lying flat on the demarcated floor. The body seems lifeless for the first few seconds of the piece. Almost unnoticeably we see gentle movement initiated. In the recorded video we are unable to see the mechanism and the body on the floor, however the live iteration reveals the two layers. Simultaneously the body and the video are in motion. There is a slight distortion of the image due to the video being projected onto the performer's body. The attention moves toward figuring out whether the beetles are 'eating' away at the performers body - embodied by Teresa Phuti Mojela. As a viewer you are constantly engaging with a disarray of imagery. You almost want the performer to pause to help you make sense of the image being projected. Eckersall uses the term "dialectic image"

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<sup>10</sup> *Dermestes-maculatus* is a species of beetle with a worldwide distribution, being present on all continents except Antarctica

(Eckersall, Grehan and Scheer, 2017) in describing the relationship of layering the virtual and live human corporeal elements. This presentation is a conversation of this kind. This body that seems to be both subject and object in this frame, intrigues the viewer, compelling her to interact, relate to, and respond to the work. Is it the movement? How is the light controlled? Is it perhaps the dark and eerie beetles or the meditative, mourning sound they chose? The work renders the invisible visible, thereby grounding it, however fragile, elusive, and mysterious it may be.

The method entails projecting an image or a person onto the stage, creating the illusion of apparitions or translucent figures interacting with live actors. This integration of ethereal and tangible aspects adds a new layer to theatrical narrative, enabling a more considered understanding of dramaturgy of evocation. *Spectral* and *Feast of Famine* both maintain and conceal a spectacle of the illusion. This could bring forth necessary discoveries, however, it places the work at a distance, it is a marvel that is encountered with at arm's length. The overt implication that calls for an audience's active witnessing is in my view, when one is confronted with what I call the 'bones of the machine'. The bareness of the projector, the perspex screen that illuminates the image. The rejection of mere spectacle. I introduce my practice in the following chapter, where I experiment, lend myself to the narratives that require in-depth reflection and place the work in its bare form to witnesses, spectators, participants.

## CHAPTER 5: BONA

In the preceding chapters I examined the concept of evocation together with its mediations. In a thorough analysis of two productions, I demystified the mechanism of Pepper's Ghost as a visual dramaturgical approach, witnessing the effect of visual illusion in a theatrical experience. This chapter descends extensively into my own practice as a visual storyteller. Building on these fundamental understandings, I present a process that illustrates the use of these ideas and concepts in my endeavours, drawing on the perspectives and insights obtained in previous chapters. This chapter is a recording of my practice as research. I conceptualised, created, and performed in a work which I called, *Bona*. *Bona*, performed at the University of Cape Town, Hiddingh Campus in 2022 is a Setswana word that translates to 'seeing', 'to bear witness'. On one end of a demarcated audience space, a witness is seated with a machete knife; on the other end, another holds a crumpled piece of paper, waiting to be relinquished from the task of holding the said item. These witnesses are seated in a curved traverse staging with a wall length mirror on one side of the room. They can see me, the performer, I can see them, and they see each other- the act of 'reversibility', a notion I unpack later in the chapter.

I refer to the audience/spectators as witnesses. A witness is a person who has seen something happening before their eyes and can attest to what has happened as a form of evidence. As the discourse unfolds, my reason for using the term 'witness' instead of 'audience', will become apparent. I will further refer to the presentation of *Bona* as an *encounter* instead of a performance. I present here a critical reflection of my practice which has resulted in an interdisciplinary, semi-interactive encounter. Through an in-depth exploration of dramaturgical choices; creative techniques; methodologies and processes used to develop the project; I will provide insight into a visual framework for a dramaturgy of evocation. I am examining the first iteration of the encounter and its effectiveness and/or ineffectiveness in engaging with evocation.

The encounter foregrounds the narrative of the mothers, daughters, brothers, widows, people who bore witness behind the barbed-wire fencing, at Marikana, between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2012. The events are represented by me as a performing body. Mgcineni Noki, commonly known as '*The Man in the green blanket*' (Tau, 2015), became the

face of the deadly wage strike at Marikana Platinum Mine. He is an elusive character and yet has become very prevalent in the South African context since that day, Noki's character or figure is embodied by Bongo Tshabalala.

This encounter is a silent conversation between audience, performer, and the ghosts of our past and present. It makes use of a *Pepper's Ghost* mechanism and visceral visual elements focused on costuming and set design. The presentation confronts the hauntings of unspoken and unjust cases of our current political and socio-economic environment and the staging of this conundrum. *Pepper's Ghost* is used in the installation as a visual mechanism and audiences are invited to participate and witness the unearthing of a trauma.

## 5.1 The background

Before I proceed to decipher the dramaturgical choices and execution of the encounter, it is vital to provide context to the tragic events of the Marikana massacre. In demand for higher wages and fair labour practices, the mineworkers in Rustenburg<sup>11</sup> gathered at The *Koppie*<sup>12</sup>, a sacred hill and space, in joint struggle and kinsmanship. There, 34 mineworkers were killed at the hands of the South African Police Service. A further 10 people, mostly security officials, also died in the days leading up to the massacre. The deaths of 34 people, security officers and mine workers, have continued to shine a spotlight on policing practices and the lack of justice for the families whose lives were transformed on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The community suffered economic repercussions due to the Marikana massacre. Following the disaster, the region's platinum mines, typically employing thousands of individuals, were forced to close. As many residents of the area rely on the mining sector for their livelihoods, the closure had a substantial effect on the local economy. Justice for the victims and their families has been demanded repeatedly in the wake of the Marikana massacre. Many people have demanded that those responsible for the killings be held accountable, criticizing the way the government responded to the tragedy as being delayed and insufficient. After the

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<sup>11</sup> Rustenburg is a town in South Africa's North West Province. It has historically had a significant influence on the nation's mining sector, particularly in the extraction of valuable minerals such as platinum and chrome. To-date mining operations in the area have resulted in social and environmental challenges, as well as economic progress.

<sup>12</sup> A *koppie* is a small hill. The mineworkers of Marikana camped on the *koppie* for a week before the tragedy.

tragedy, President Jacob Zuma, ordered an investigation into what happened. It took more than four years to complete, and the results were not made public until June 2019. The investigation concluded that the killings were the result of police misconduct and that they had used too much force. With the recent commemoration of the 10<sup>th</sup> year since the massacre, recollections of trauma and injustice continue to impact South Africans.

I decided that focusing on this tragic event in an attempt to possibly unearth wounds seemingly buried, was to reveal and open discourse on the presence of our collective trauma. In engaging with evocation, I was interested in an event that resonated with individuals across South Africa, whether they were directly affected by it or not. Millions of South Africans, including myself, watched the massacre live on our screens. This is embedded in the memories of witnesses across the country and what I attempted to do is engage with the tangible and intangible traces of these memories. Reflecting on Derrida's notion of *trace*, which I explained earlier, I take the massacre as an enigmatic imprint or residue left by an absent entity, becoming a palimpsest of memory. The memory of the massacre becomes composed of layers of interpretations, some being individual experiences, media representations or political narratives. Furthermore, the legacies of apartheid have also left enduring traces, the Marikana massacre in this case can only add on to but cannot replace or erase. The memory becomes palimpsestuous.

## 5.2 The encounter

I would like to first disclaim that *Bona* was intended to be an interactive happening aimed at emphasizing immediacy, genuineness, and intimacy amongst witnesses. This would better allow questioning of their passive spectatorship. Although the idea was to dismantle the fourth wall and create a shared experience, the performance was rehearsed and not a lot of active engagement was exchanged. The intention was that if there was an initiative from the witnesses or a momentary happening, that I would easily adapt to it.

When you first enter the demarcated space, it is almost empty, you find a white piece of paper sellotaped to the floor, a frame with a half-mirror, a table with various items: a crushed piece of paper, a Christian wooden cross and some clothing. You are invited to participate by selecting an item placed on a table. I provide instructions for the witnesses

upon entering before the happening. This invitation is not only for witnesses to participate but an attempt to make them aware of the space they are entering. They are implicated from the moment they step in. Within this time, they are asked to help set up the scenography. This consists of a blanket filled with crumpled pieces of paper hanging from the lighting grid, The *Pepper's Ghost* mechanism, the seating arrangement, and other props. After assisting in the assembly of the space, each witness grabs a chair and waits.

Projected on the half-mirrored frame is a countdown from the number 34 to the number 1. Throughout the set-building process we see the numbers decrease. This is not only an indication of temporality, but the number of mine workers shot on the day of the massacre. In the last few seconds of the countdown, I finish preparing for the event that will unfold. A polyphonic cacophony of sounds cues me to open the handwritten letters inside the blanket. As this unfolds the letters are projected onto the mechanism. I stand in the middle of the demarcated space, with witnesses to my right and others to my left. Across from me is a mirror, this allows for the audience to see my body, their assembled bodies, and the illusion of what now appears to be flying ghostly letters. I look to the witnesses who are now holding items of clothing they picked from the table hesitantly. I can find a skirt and a shirt to put on in the space.

The first image is me opening the blanket filled with letters. As I read the letters, the witnesses see images of what is written inside the letters appear on the screen behind me. Bongo Tshabalala is the absent figure that appears projected on the Perspex glass, a ghostly illusion which I recorded beforehand against a black backdrop as seen below.



He is costumed in various items representing various characters and individuals from the massacre. Across from the *Pepper's Ghost* mechanism is a wall length mirror that spans from one end of the room to the other. The witnesses are situated in a semi-circle from where they can see themselves, the video feed, the 3D illusion of the figure of Bongo, fellow witnesses, and my performing body that from time to time is layered between the 3D illusion.

Throughout the encounter, vivid and evocative images appear. First yards of net I made from pink, red and peach thread are laid out on the floor near the feet of the witnesses. I stand in the middle and start to violently pull the net towards me to cover my body with it. This continues for a while until the net is tangled into a ball. Another image involves the cleaning of objects that were splattered with 'blood'. There is a repetition of collecting items from the witnesses and either putting them on or placing them in the space. It is merely a series of events, much like the event would appear in one's memory or recollection. Each event is layered with the next and changes slightly each time it is recalled. In between this repetition, I attempt to draw something with charcoal but then I alter it by tearing up the paper before the image is completed. It is a gradual development of an evolving final image. The final image is borrowed from the memorial archives of the painted wooden Christian crosses placed on the top of the *koppie* where mine workers would gather in the week of the

protest. I am seen with a charcoal pencil, drawing the last image onto the white paper on the floor moments before the last image appears, as if I had traced it.

Throughout the play the musicality places emphasis on the rhythmic and ritualistic engagement of multi-layered, polyphonic songs. This is comprised of a compilation of videos interviewing descendants, wives, and family of the deceased. These are songs of lamentation, of grief, a release and cry. What juxtaposed this was the introduction of Fela Kuti's, *Suffering and Smiling*<sup>13</sup> song that is scathingly critical of the state of our current condition.

### 5.3 Dramaturgical process: Devising present absence.

The ideas of trace, hauntology and palimpsests, which I underlined in Chapter 1, were pivotal in the development of my dramaturgical research process. In the art of the suspension of disbelief, imaginative representations of reality, and the varied creation of fictional stories, the portrayal of presence and absence are inherent. What I am interested in, are the vestiges of a real-life tragic event developed on stage. For example, in a repetitive action of putting on items of clothing at various moments of the encounter, I take on the character of the women and children and loved ones who have lost their family members in the massacre. We are aware that the blouse, the boots, and other items that are part of the piece, do not belong to family members but become representations thereof. Furthermore, the individuals who survived the tragedy are not present in the encounter. I bring this forth to indicate that, through visual symbolism, through images and object representation, I can start to extrapolate on this absence through tangible materiality. The intangible materiality on the other hand, is explored through the *Pepper's Ghost* illusion, challenging our perceptions of what is present (visible) and what is absent (invisible) before being able to open the mind to any kind of purging process. From my participation in the Centre for the Less Good Idea, season 7, *Pepper's Ghost* moment, I knew the innerworkings of the

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<sup>13</sup> In "Suffering and Smiling," Fela depicts the elite enjoying a good time while the masses continue to suffer in close quarters, paying homage to religious leaders and acting like sheep by doing their every bidding. His critique of the socio-political situation in Nigeria 1979s. I use this to reflect on the state of South Africa and the irony of suffering and smiling that persists post colonisation or rather apartheid.

mechanism able to generate the emergence and disappearance of a ghostly apparition, the illusion of a ghost, spectral entity, or remnant.

The content of the encounter features events leading up to and after the tragedy. I do not depict the event in any brutal way. I do not present a chronological ordering of these events. There is an implied order of events but a prominent fragmentation.

### The seed idea

I have been interested in emotionally dense, sensorial, and intensely striking storytelling for a while. In my undergraduate studies I was exploring varied mediums of storytelling but had a keen focus on scenography, a fascination for memory and understanding complex relation to trauma. After a conversation with my supervisor, I wanted to explore all above interests within my research.

Often when I conceptualise and design sets or costumes for theatre, I start from a script analysis - the text is the inception for ideas to form. I gather all my opinions, ideas and reservations and compose a suitable visual treatment. Considering that I would take on the roles of designer, performer, director and dramaturg here, it was necessary for me to remove the said roles and position myself as storyteller, much like a revered *Saranguna*,<sup>14</sup> of the Shona people (Chinyowa, 2001).

In *Bona*, the research for the encounter is acquired from a real-life event. Despite a plethora of resources through documentary videos, interviews, news coverage, I still felt I had very little to work from. I did not intend to present the tragic event as is, but wanted to provide an ephemeral, viscerally charged, purging. Therefore, I had to look toward other means of engaging with the work. In the process of workshopping *Bona*, I remembered a poem I once came across a few years ago, while looking for a piece to perform at the 16 days of activism in Merafong. I pocketed this poem because it seemed a bit too obscure for what they were expecting. To frame the aural and sonic reverberation choices I wanted to make, I thought it fitting to begin here:

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<sup>14</sup> Women said to lead storytelling practice through the “skilful use of language, body movement, expressive characterization, gesture” and various other elements to singularly communicate to audiences (Chinyowa, 2001:19).

## **BLACK SCHIZOPHRENIA**

*I hear voices from*

*a wailing waif*

*lost in the crowds of Clermont Road Crowds that guffaw at graffiti scrawls on Kentucky Fried*

*Chicken and discos nodding at: 'Botha! Release Mandela' and: 'i-Afrika iyabuya'*

*Those crowds battling to keep their suitcase minds closed lest they reveal false*

*bottoms*

*I hear voices blowing out*

*of fiery veins*

*Voices coming from the prison cell against psychiatric blackmail*

*I hear voices*

*I hear brutally intense sounds pregnant with birth expecting excerpts of hate lasering through*

*snaking wings saw cutting across sneaking smiles sounds made frantic by fears*

*of winter cold on the cat-eyed road of coal exports and rising bread prices Sounds of mad*

*rollicking*

*on segregated beaches stuck with suntanned spatters of luxury vomit*

*desecrating the African soil as oceanic waves roll therapeutic hopes onto*

*blacks on the factory floors*

*I hear voices*

*I hear resurgent voices of 'not in my lifetime' assurances from men, women and children*

*who came down South on the Chicken Run*

*I hear voices*

*Angry noises of repressed adolescence Voices of despair and death*

*as young blacks march away from the rat race*

*Shouting back at the hypnotic noises of black status seekers (Gwala, 2016: 112)*

This poignant poem offers feelings of dense auditory experiences. To depict this complexity of imagery the poem utilizes vivid and expressive language. The speaker seems to be perceiving auditory stimuli, the expression "pregnant with birth" implies that these noises are associated with upcoming occurrences. The use of the phrase "excerpts of hate" implies that some of these voices or noises convey negative and antagonistic sentiments. The images of "lasering through snaking wings" and "saw cutting across sneaking smiles" convey an aggressive or uneasy feeling. The mentions of "winter cold on the cat-eyed road" and "coal exports and rising bread prices" imply larger social problems or challenges that contribute to the speaker's heightened perspective. This might imply a chaotic and frenetic environment surrounding the speaker.

The poem encapsulated precisely what it would look and feel like to become overwhelmed and claustrophobic but simultaneously emancipated - relinquishing something that sits very heavily on one's shoulders. The text is heightened and sensitive which provided me with a sensation of disruption, dread, and unease, which I incorporated in *Bona*. Through the rereading of the poem, I understand how one could visually perceive this auditory stimulus and alluded to a remnant of something, traces of voices or the presence thereof. If we look at the concept of (syn)aesthetics, it which is a fusion of the neurological condition of synaesthesia, 'where a fusion of sensation occurs when one sense is stimulated which automatically and simultaneously causes a stimulation in another of the senses' (Machon, 2009: 13), and aesthetics as 'the subjective creation, experience and criticism of artistic practice' (14). For Machon (syn)aesthetics is both 'a fused sensory perceptual experience' and 'a fused and sensate approach to artistic practice and analysis' (14) Seeing the result and possibility for senses to be evoked via the careful consideration of spoken word and aural nature, the poem became a departure point.

### Absent bodies

In contemporary theatre, the portrayal of absent characters can be replicated in one of two forms: the invisible and the off-stage character. The off-stage character performs in an imaginary space beyond the stage space. The invisible character is unseen, existing in an imaginary space. Either way, these characters are invisible to the viewer because they are behind the scenes, or because they are literally abstract and only exist in the mind of the

spectator. In Lara Foot's, *Tshepang* (2003), a broom signifies a little boy who was beaten nearly to death as a child and grows up to become the abuser. The bed strapped to Ruth's back shows the absence of the baby who once nestled there. In *The Invisible Man*, the lead character comments:

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me. (Ellison, 1952: Prologue)

Initially the idea of performing absence seemed contradictory. In using the immediacy of live theatre, this would be an anomaly to execute. I wanted the character(s) to intrude into the space, to simultaneously appear and disappear. I captured movements and stillness of Bongo wearing the costumes and decided that this accumulation of images and videos was adequate - as raw, and improvisational as they were, they were evocative. The videos of Bongo ranged from him dressed in a plain shirt, green blanket tied to one side of his shoulder, and boots on his feet, to him wearing a blue overall with a helmet. The videos projected by means of the *Pepper's Ghost* mechanism, provided an illusion that made it appear as if he was a ghost. I knew that this was the most effective way to emulate the illusion necessary to replicate a haunting.

### Images and Videos

A 2440mm x 1220mm and 3mm thick, Perspex glass sheet, mounted onto a frame that allowed for the glass to rotate to 180 degrees, made the dynamic illusion possible. This was not just a frame with a half-silvered mirror but the tool that bridged the real, the non-real and the in-between as seen below:



*Figure 3: Bona, directed by Angelinah Maponya*

A portrayal of 'controlled' violence of a tragic event on stage, elicits a cynical response, if not from the audience, then from me. I was not interested in portraying a replication of violence through, for example, a dance or musical number. My assertion is, once the performance of the 'act' is omitted it trivialises and oversimplifies the gravity of the incident. Does my attempt to create a visually stimulating and inevitable spectacle fall prey to this?

Appropriately, one could say, this question continues to 'haunt' me. Perhaps the departure is not to present an elaborate encounter and hope witnesses 'feel' or 'release' something, but rather, in the dramaturgical process, to excavate the trauma first and from there ask what it means to engage with it. A process of what seemed like prolonged exposure therapy<sup>15</sup> unfolded. I went through heaps of interviews, documentary footage and posts written in remembrance of the 44 people who were killed and injured on the day of the massacre. The offerings served as a method of expressing grief, demanding justice, and building communal solidarity. Reflecting on the response from family members, I recognised a yearning for clarity and reconciliation. The prevalent response was a void in their lives due to their loved-one's absence. I wrote over 50 letters, borrowing from publicised letters addressed to the deceased, in an approach aimed at getting closer to addressing the in betweenness of absent bodies, neither here nor there.

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<sup>15</sup> A form of therapy focused on progressively and securely addressing and recollecting painful memories that have been avoided. By facing uncomfortable material in a methodical and controlled manner, clients may reduce avoidance and develop healthy coping strategies.

## Objects of transgression

What followed organically was a familiar territory, objects, colours, images, and multimedia. I brought various materials into the rehearsal space, including costumes and objects - objects and pieces of clothing that represented these individuals. Some objects included a boot and a pair of dungarees, a pair of shorts, a skirt. The white wooden Christian cross was a proclamation, a representation of the lives lost. I decided to place it where the witnesses could see it, as a constant reminder of the tragedy. The spear was an object of protest which I brought into the space. Due to its insulating characteristics, thread/wool was another object that proved evocative in the process of discovery. It is frequently linked with warmth and comfort. This generates feelings of safety and homeliness. It represented a softness and sensitivity, a material that could be woven, knitted, tied, and transformed into various forms. I created a giant net, mixing red, peach, and white thread. This was to symbolically represent the fragile nature of the narrative but also the unravelling and unveiling of the buried emotions.





### Sound design

As I indicated above, soundscapes led the research process. I wanted the sound to guide the process in rehearsals too. Reintroducing the sound of the tragedy was contentious. I debated whether it was necessary, much like my reservation for acting out violence. Did we need to hear the cries, screams of despair and gunshots to evoke empathy? No. However, the musicality would become the underbelly of the encounter because one of the many ways the mine workers would raise their concerns is through song - *Sisebenza emigodini sisebenza kanzima*<sup>16</sup>. *Safasaphela I sizwe e si mnyana ngexa ya mapolisa*<sup>17</sup> sung with intensity and pleading. Sobopha Sibonile explains:

We use songs to express our emotions, intentions and requests. In my culture, a song can be used to warn you or to invite you closer. We use songs to advise newlyweds. We use songs for everything in peace and in war. I can say a black person's life is a song. (Lekgowa, 2013)

The mine workers sang at the top of the red hill, the *koppie*, as we all witnessed on our screens. The songs were a call to action against injustice. My approach was towards remembering and recollection. I edited various audio interviews and created a cacophony of sounds that evoked remembrance, protest, and purgation. This exploration of playing with

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<sup>16</sup> Lyrics that translate to: "We work underground, we work hard".

<sup>17</sup> "Black people are being extinguished because of the police".

different soundscapes and really stretching the possibilities of what these elements could result in, changed the temporality of the encounter. What I mean by this is I think this is interesting because music and sound is the underbelly of healing in South Africa. In mourning we sing, in celebration we sing, and so we sing in this encounter.

### Performing body

The dramaturgical process is demanding, specifically, for a work that excavates the memory of traumatic events. Firstly, I positioned my body as a guide. Much like an usher showing you to your seat at the theatre, I was a safeguard. The work is sensitive, it is important and possibly triggering. I entrusted myself to provide a space, hold that space and become part of it. Artaud asserts: “The actor is ... an element of first importance, since it is upon the effectiveness of his work that the success of the spectacle depends [...]” (Artaud, 1958: 98) In the work I attempt to place my body parallel to the encounter.

Secondly, I become the vessel through which the encounter manifests. On stage, actors utilize their bodies to bring characters to life. Through gestures, facial expressions, and movement they embody the ideas, feelings, and personalities of the characters. The performing body is critical in communicating the nuanced and varied experiences of the characters. I did not intend to portray the most authentic characterization, or the most believable character, but rather to lend my body, to be in contention, a communicating channel, if you will, to release, to evocate.

## 5.4: Staging the Encounter

### Semiology

The materials gathered through the dramaturgical research, formed a basis for meaning making. The work of the dramaturg, as I defined it in Chapter 3, does not require making, nor does it necessarily involve directorial guidance. My definition of a dramaturg - one who operates as visual guide - necessitates commitment to unpacking signs and symbols.

Revealing hidden layers of meaning to audiences through object, images, and sound, is a

pivotal role. Through the research, I gathered materials, and I brought them into the space. I examined the function and structure of signs to discover the fundamental codes and systems that govern them. The link between signs, their objects or referents, and the corresponding interpretations, occurred through a process of understanding the context and material. For example, I brought in the white wooden cross, or rather, the Christian emblem as an object that symbolised death. The object is just an intersection of two pieces of wood painted on each side. It is regarded as an icon,<sup>18</sup> but its symbolic character speaks to the teachings, stories, and events that compose the intellectual core of Christianity. In the context of the encounter, it is symbolic of the deceased, a send-off, memorial, and consolation but importantly a remembrance and showing of absence. We can attest through seeing a cross placed in a gravesite, for example, that it represents a body that is no longer present. A symbol, such as a cross, has evolved over time and now generates varied meanings through connotation. What I found difficult was deciding what the materiality in the encounter would be. I thought about the objects I sourced, for example, the Christian cross as an object was white and half a meter in height. Made of wood and easily movable provided ample material to work with symbolically and theatrically. The texture of the wood smooth and bright white, representing the 'newness' of the trauma. The size made the object a focal point dominating the visual field and emphasizing the weight and magnitude of traumatic experiences and memories.

The encounter provides a space to interact with, connect with, and respond to this enthralling figure embodied by Bongo Tshabalala, who appears to be both subject and object. But this begs the question, what is it about the convention that prohibits the audience to interact in any way they see fit? Does the projection mechanism, musicality, the intimacy of the space, prohibit the witness from being an active participant? Perhaps it is the atmosphere of seriousness and haunting materiality? I believe the intimate space allowed for an intrusive exchange. Anne Ubersfeld points out: "The pleasure of the audience

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<sup>18</sup> A term derived from the word "iconography" from German art historian, Aby Warburg who stated that it is the study or interpretation of visual symbols, pictures, and representations, particularly in the context of art, religious studies, and cultural analysis, is referred to as iconography. It entails analysing and comprehending the meaning and significance of visual components such as symbols, signs, gestures, figures, and motifs in the context of a certain cultural or historical background.

oscillates between these two attitudes: a fascination with magic recreation and the observation of a practice of imitation” (Ubersfeld, 1982: 130). First there is a preoccupation with the "magic recreation" of the performance, pertaining to a show's illusionary and magical features - the spectacle involving special effects, extravagant costumes, and physicality. This intends to astound the audience, bringing them inside the realm of the play. The “observation of a practice of imitation”, on the other hand, suggests that the audience is aware that they are watching a skilled imitation or copy of magical phenomena rather than true magic. They know that the magician is not genuinely accomplishing supernatural feats but rather creating the appearance of magic using methods, tricks, and sleight of hand. Much like a court proceeding, in the encounter, I present to audiences the evidence of a case. A series of events of a tragedy we have prior knowledge of. The audience sits with the evidence, which are the objects they picked earlier. By using this example of a court case, I do not intend to present the matter to be deliberated as such. The audience are not here to judge, are not members of a jury, but they are witnessing the event.

The continual altering of perspectives and positionalities arise because of new experiences and viewpoints, but it is also an effect that the mechanism brings with the mirror and projections. I understand that the tragic event exists now within our memories, and amongst these memories are political discrepancies, we all recount and identify with the tragedy differently. The encounter does not aim to direct the participants to have a singular experience but encourages a multi-layered lens.

The space is charged with energy, it shrinks and expands. The space where the encounter takes place is not a passive receptacle in which objects and forms are positioned. The space itself is an object. The visible and invisible permeate the space, as well as different grades of visible presence (through lighting), near-invisible presence, the hidden attendance of the people off-stage. Anything ‘real’ that creeps into this fictive world has traditionally been treated as something we can and should ignore when suspending our disbelief as an audience. In fact, if there are any breaks in the conventional set up of the world of the play, it is part of the task of the performer/creator to “integrate these [real aspects of theatre] into the fictive cosmos as inconspicuously as possible, so that addressing the real audience and speaking outside of the play would not be noticeable as a disturbing element” (Lehmann, 2006: 100) and could still reasonably be seen as part of the fictive world. In the

sight of the participants, this illusion was already broken from the moment I opened the door to welcome them into the space. The idea was for the audience to not only actively witness but to further participate.

#### Affectation and effect of visual dramaturgy

Judith Butler on *Notes Towards a Performative Theory* (2015) articulates that the agency of the body to assemble is political, that acting in concert, performing in masses over issues involving precarity, prompts a political engagement. To Butler, an assembly brings a “body politic” (Butler, 2015) into being, which can be understood as possessing similar but not identical or equal living circumstances, and which can organise collectively to dismantle, oppose and reform democracy.

The question in my research is not only whether art, when used for socio-political activism, can create an effect on the political status quo but whether art is moving towards sensationalism – the ‘shock factor’. Evocation is due to ‘affect’. This is rooted in affect theory as outlined by Stephen Duncombe in ‘Affect and Effect: Artful Protest and Political Impact’ (Duncombe, 2016). Affect and effect are two terms that are often interchangeable, but when applied to the context of art and politics, have distinct definitions. *Effect* in the Oxford Dictionary means “a change which is a result or consequence of an action or other cause” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010), while *affect* is often connected to emotions, it is to “touch the feelings of; move emotionally”. The latter, often associated with political actioning, functions as a catalyst to political protests. The aim, as Duncombe puts it, is not to create effective art but to challenge and transform power - to have an effect. He further mentions that due to the demands of the political agenda that do not always reflect the efforts of the artwork, art protests are not always effective.

If we look at both the performance and the exhibition, there are some things to consider, the artwork does not aim to represent everyone’s individual story, therefore it often misses the collective identity that forms in assembly. Using bodily language and other communicative devices in the performance, I stand voiceless in the middle of a group of people and embody the collective narratives through a visually visceral piece. Through this pursuit that stretches the parameters of how grievances and tragic events are excavated and re-enacted, one must consider the ethical responsibility of such upheaval. As the focus is on

feeling and affect, does the engagement with a specific subject - in the case of Marikana massacre, the re-counting of the miners' deaths - come at the expense of trauma for spectators? Perhaps another issue to consider is the 'memory effect' which is the obscuring of the historical subjects in favour of enhancing the subjectivity of the spectator. Under the assumption that audiences attending the performance are aware of the conventions of the theatre, the illusion that forms the basis for an exchange of text, imagery, sound, or language could replicate violence. Hans-Theis Lehman calls for spectators to re-consider their own heightened consciousness and awareness of the act of spectatorship. For Lehmann, both the maker and spectator have a responsibility (Lehmann, 2006).

In the case of *Bona*, the violence came from the content itself. It operates from a point of responsibility, and I agree that it should do so, because it wants to provoke and jar. Like Artaud's ideas on catharsis, I was interested in inciting provocation. The encounter does not aim to make anyone comfortable in any way. This was an attempt to position the audience in the crux of narrative, where they are not passive onlookers but active participants.

Within the frame of the theatre, violence is not portrayed explicitly as a real-life event. It is translated and expressed through a sequence of aesthetic gestures. Through dialogue, movement, and visual aesthetics there are complex negotiations of what can be seen on stage and what requires a symbolic representation. In *Bona* I encountered limitations and opportunities to provide ways to represent certain actions or images.

### Reflections & Limitations

I have attempted here to present a framework for staging these haunting histories, to shed light on their continuing importance, via the blending of diligent study, creative interpretation, and collaborative and interdisciplinary research through visual dramaturgy. The dramaturgy of evocation provides a strong way of connecting with our shared human past in the field of theatrical investigation. Through digging and revisiting historical tragic events, we confront our history, acquire insight into our present, and maybe construct a more compassionate and sympathetic future. Through the presentation of my findings in my work, I stimulated thinking but also aimed to promote a communal reflection on the human condition and our ability for resilience and transformation.

I had a few limitations in achieving these aims. These included: collaborating solely with myself, as director, performer, and dramaturg; and being unsure about how the audience could fully engage and interact with the medium. I did not invite them into the space to compose with me as much as I intended. The responses from audience after watching *Bona* was that they wanted more engagement with the medium or my body in the encounter. This is what I hope future dramaturgs can explore. This work blurred the lines between the theatrical and the sacred, the ethereal, the non-real. The performance itself becomes a sacred act that aims to create an environment in which the audience may connect, feel transcendence, and are called to react.

## CONCLUSION: A VISUAL DRAMATURGICAL FRAMEWORK

As I stated in chapter 5, the making of *Bona* was what I call a 'singular collaboration'. What this means is, I must rely on my body and all its compartments to fill the multiple roles I took on. A Dramaturg, as is well known, undertakes extensive study of texts, ensuring the consistency of a dramatic structure. In this they strengthen the intention of the play. They investigate the text's themes, societal challenges, and aesthetic aims to obtain a thorough knowledge of its main features. This has been the European idea of the dramaturg. Overall, the dramaturg provides a link between the intellectual and aesthetic aspects of a production, giving historical, cultural, and literary expertise to complement the director's vision and the audience's experience. Here, I propose a strategy to approach the dramaturgical process specifically when working with tragic events, memory, and hauntings of our past through visibility. While the function of the dramaturg is usually focused on text analysis and historical study, the process can begin with the visual components of a performance.

The *dramaturgy of evocation* develops as a transforming force, attempting to rekindle the ability of live performance to reach into the depths of human experience. This manifesto is a call to begin an interrogative process from material, from visual, from interdisciplinary collaboration. Artists, practitioners, and viewers alike, will embrace the power of evocative dramaturgy and produce encounters, performances that remains long after the final curtain falls. Emotion, sensations, and ideas are woven together to evoke a holistic reaction from

those who bear witness. This declaration honours the dramaturg's position as a visionary, guide, and guardian of the Dramaturgy of Evocation. The dramaturg transforms into an alchemist, combining historical background, cultural understanding, and creative intuition to reveal a performance's latent potential. This is a call to transform the stage into a crucible of emotions, ideas, and transcendence. Below is a manifesto that provides a framework and a conclusion to begin a dramaturgy of evocation, doing this through a visual framework. This is how we can excavate historical grievances through visuality.

In the spirit of Artaud, I present a manifesto to conclude my research. I am further prompted by a call from Lehmann that states “dramaturgy needs to reflect upon and respond to altered ways of perception and participation, to rethink the position and the possible functions of the spectator”(Lehmann and Primavesi, 2009: 4).

**The First**, Participants ought to encounter something that cannot exist without them.

“I like shows that last for 30 days like Ramlila, or 41 nights like Kutiyattam, or at least six hours like Ivo’s Roman tragedies. I like it when I don’t have access to everything, when I am participating in something larger than myself, when I am not consuming a product” (Bear and Mee, no date). The coming together of bodies in a space is a fundamental aspect of theatre. Collaboration can only take place if the actors and spectators are mutually aware that a theatrical event is taking place. Evocation dramaturgy is based on the idea that human suffering is inherently shared. It acknowledges that emotions are not isolated to the individual, but are shared and magnified. As a result, the evocative power of theatre depends in its capacity to create a shared experience in which both actors and audience members participate in a common emotional journey. Their presence and participation round out the symbiotic interaction between performers and viewers. Each audience member contributes their own life experiences, prejudices, and emotions to the performance, which impact their interpretation and response. The audience's collective energy impacts the ebb and flow of emotions within the theatrical space. Lean into the process of acknowledging the participant. See them, hold space for them.

“In order to affect every facet of the spectator’s sensibility, we advocate a revolving show, which instead of making stage and auditorium into two closed worlds without any possible

communication between them, will extend its visual and oral outbursts over the whole mass of spectators” writes Artaud (Artaud, 1958: 86).

It acknowledges that emotions are not isolated to the individual but are shared and magnified with community. Be intentional about the positionality of audiences, where are they situated in proximity to the actors, stage etc. If their positioning provides a disruption by means of being in close proximity to the stage/ actor, know that you are a step closer to reflect an accurate representation of evocation.

**The second**, a visual language ought to be established.

Theatre-makers may express complex concepts, topics, and emotions that transcend verbal communication by using visual metaphors, allegories, and symbolic imagery. *Mise en scene* encompassing everything you must rid yourself of; do not think of the work as unintentionally creating a visual spectacle as that would be ineffective. Do not think of the work as unintentionally creating a visual spectacle, because it is ineffective. One should begin accessing what ‘visualness’ means in the world of the play. Find how visuality can be utilised to express complex concepts, topics, and emotions that transcend verbal communication by using visual metaphors, allegories, and symbolic imagery.

The dramatic text has had a central and often, grander influence in the making of a production, the visual elements in a production have merely aided in meaning-making. In Melissa Poll’s *Dramaturgical Scenography of Robert Lepage* there is a careful consideration for the tangible elements, Poll states that:

The text is no longer the central and superior factor, all the other elements like space, light sound, music, movement and gesture tend to have an equal weight in the performance process. Therefore new dramaturgical forms and skills are needed, in terms of a practice that no longer reinforces the subordination of all elements under one (usually the word, the symbolic order or language) but rather a dynamic balance to be obtained a new in each performance. (Lehmann and Primavesi, 2009: 4)

The interweaving of all scenographic elements has been adopted in interdisciplinary arts and theatre as an emergent form that advantages dramatic text over anything else. What this does is allow theatre-makers to expand and further explore ways of reaching a wider audience that is not constrained by the barriers of language through text. The multiplicity of language borders access to individuals who are within or can comprehend the language. Because the language of imagery and the visual is ultimately universal, by this I don't imply that we all have a common understanding or one interpretation of what a single image implies but rather have a wider frame and possibility of understanding and interpretation. Visual language crosses language boundaries, making theatre more accessible to a wide range of spectators. Because visual communication is universal, it enables for a greater reach and a more inclusive theatrical experience. Find your own communicative device by looking toward the visual.

**The Third,** In the conception of a dramaturgy of evocation, materiality takes prominence.

The dramaturg must revert to tangible and intangible materials, The use of tactile, and sensory-rich materials in immersing spectators in the world of the play, creating a stronger presence and emotional engagement. Materiality functions as a visual language, conveying meaning and stark symbolism. Colours, textures, and sensory materials generate a synaesthetic effect or a feeling, a thought, prompt for action. Familiar textures, scents, and sounds provoke deep emotional reactions and memory. By using objects with cultural or personal importance, you tap into an interconnected reservoir of emotions, enhancing an evocative power of the performance. Understand what materials position the production at a place of in-depth discovery, explore object and materials that don't belong in the space, that are displaced. Decode.

**The Fourth,** do not resist the impulse to transcend the confined architecture of a proscenium stage.

Different levels of fiction pervade the environment, as do various degrees of visible presence (as on the illuminated stage), near-invisible presence (as in the dark auditorium), and off-stage attendance. Holder states that "Every movement occurs according to the preconditions of space, and scenography only transforms in accordance with what the set (and

theatre architecture, for that matter) offers". (Holdar, 2005: 15). It is with understanding spatial history that we acknowledge what the space can provide for the work. Was the proposed site where a performance would take place previously a cultural monument? What does the space carry beyond its structural value? What are the traces of lived experience or rather hauntings left in that space? What does the frame provide? You ought to foreground the audience presence and role. The space where the work resides in, serves as a canvas but also becomes a vessel to realise the work. Do not forget an important element; the theatrical space also encompasses the liminal zone where the performance and the audience intersect. Transitions between places can also serve as times of introspection and emotional processing for the audience, allowing them to absorb and integrate the performance's evocative components.

**The fifth**, approach emotions as a generative device.

Operate from a place of feeling. What is key to establish here is, not ignoring when a subject matter is painful to re-member. Leaning into emotions also acts as a trigger for evocation. Audiences can experience release via the evocative power of theatre, allowing them to explore and confront their own emotions, anxieties, and wants in a safe and controlled atmosphere. The emotional journey of the characters matches the audience's mental terrain, allowing for self-reflection, empathy, and personal growth. Find an angle for the expression of strong emotions such as sadness, fear, fury, or grief. A play may use dramatic music, lighting, or sound effects to heighten the emotional impact of a scene. A performance accompanied by a soundscape that gives the actions an eerie sense of reality, pays attention to how participants perceive sounds and how that makes them feel.

Similar to this, Brittany Bruner stats that LaCapra used the term "empathetic unsettlement" to characterize the aesthetic experience of simultaneously feeling for another and realizing a difference between one's own perception and the experience of the other" (Bruner, 2017: 6-8). Be concerned with a dialogue with audiences, leading them to act, think to feel with you in the space. Not forgetting to build tension and intention. Holding space for the process and the execution of the work. To elicit a strong emotional reaction. The theatrical experience is a feeling of immediacy and authenticity that elicits a visceral response from the audience. A play may use dramatic music, lighting, or sound effects to heighten the emotional impact of a scene but it doesn't start there neither does it end here. Emotions become a

catalyst through which one can access the depth of the work. Following the emotional release, the audience may reflect on the experience and the problems addressed in the play. This reflection may result in a deeper understanding of the human predicament, empathy for others, and a feeling of personal progress, or it may not, and that discourse must be opened. Do not neglect providing a space for relief, after the build of tension and intensity.

**The sixth,** Engage directly with the palimpsest of haunting.

What do we do when the work we are exploring happens to be of our immediate history, present or early past? The idea of a "palimpsest of memory" emphasizes the intricacies of human memory, and the continual changes because of new experiences and viewpoints. The lingering presence and resonance of history manifest as faint echoes. What I imply by this is understanding what echoes and haunting are prevalent. Express the haunting through varied visual mechanisms, play with the modern materials that provide endless possibilities of perspective, feeling and meaning. I propose that you do need to create a feeling of surprise and mystery for the sole purpose of being evocative because the work may lack adequate interrogation which is a foundation of the concept of the dramaturgy of evocation. By blurring the lines between reality and the supernatural, these traces might indicate the presence of invisible powers, unsolved conflicts, or the existence of an unseen realm. Traces of haunting offer a sense of curiosity by delving into the realm of the unknown, heightening the audience's emotional involvement and compelling them to explore the convoluted aspects of human existence.

Traces of haunting serve an important purpose in enhancing the emotional depth and complexity of a performance. By imbuing the theatrical setting with remnants of prior experiences or events. These traces can be obvious, such as a physical object with a symbolic value or a visual theme that repeats throughout the performance. They can also be more subtle, communicated by minor changes in lighting, music, or ambience. Traces of haunting, in whatever shape they take, allow the audience to dive deeper into the emotional subtext of the performance, igniting their creativity and curiosity. This manifesto is a conduit through which we begin to evoke, respond, and release.



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