

**Gazing at Horror: Body performance in the wake of mass social trauma**

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by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores various dilemmas in making theatre performances in the context of social disruption, trauma and death. Diverse discourses are drawn in to consider issues of body, subjectivity and spectatorship, refracted through the writer's experiences of and discontent with making theatre. Written in a fractal-like structure, rather than a linear progression, this thesis unsettles discourses of truth, thus simultaneously intervening in debates about the epistemologies of the body and of theatre in context of the academy.

### **Chapter 1: Methodological Anxieties**

Psychoanalytic theory provides a way in for investigating the dynamics of theatrical performance and its corporeal presence, by focusing on desire and its implication in the notions of loss and anxiety. The theories of the unconscious and the gaze have epistemological implications, shifting definitions of "presence" and "truth" in theatre performance and writing about theatre. This chapter tries to outline the rationale for, as well as to enact, an alternative methodology for writing, as an ethical response to loss that does not insist on consensus and truth.

### **Chapter 2: (Refusing to) Look at Trauma**

This chapter examines the politics that strives to make suffering visible. Discursive binaries of public/private, dead/living, and invisible/visible underlie the politics of AIDS and sexuality. These discourses impact on the reception of Bill T. Jones's choreography, despite his use of modernist artistic processes in search of a bodily presence that aims to collapse the binary of representation (text) and its subject (being). The theory of the gaze shows this politics to be a phallogocentric discourse; and narrative analysis traces the metanarrative that results in the commodification of oppositional identities, so that spectators participate in the politics as consumers. An ethical artistic response thus needs to shift its focus to the subjectivity of the spectator.

### **Chapter 3: The Screen and the Viewer's Blindness**

By appealing to a transcendent reality, and by constituting spectators as a participative community, ritual theatre claims to enact change. The "truth" of ritual rests not on rational knowledge, but on the performer's competence to produce a shamanic presence, which director Brett Bailey embraces in his early work. Ritual presence operates by identification and belonging to a father/god as the source of meaning; but it represses the loss of this originary wholeness. Spectators of ritual theatre are drawn into an enactment of communion/community, the centre of which is, however, loss/emptiness. The claim of enacting change becomes problematic for its absence of truth. Bailey attempts to perform a hybrid, postcolonial aesthetics; but the problem

rests in the larger context of performing the notion of “South Africa”, a communal identity hardened around the metanarrative of suffering, abjecting those that do not belong to the land of the father/god – foreigners that unsettle the meaning of South African identity.

#### Conclusion: Bodies of Discontent

The South African stage is circumscribed by political and economic discourses; the problematization of national identity is also a problematization of image-identification in the theatre. In search for a way to unsettle these interrogative discourses, two moments of performing foreignness are examined, one fictional, one theatrical. These moments enact a parallel to the feminine hysteric, who disturbs the phallocentric truth of the psychoanalyst through body performance. These moments of disturbing spectatorship are reflected in the works of performance artist Marina Abramović. Her explorations into passive-aggression, shamanism and finally theatricality and the morality of spectatorship allow for an overview of the issues raised in this thesis regarding body, viewing, and subjecthood. Sensitivity to the body and its discontent on the part of the viewer becomes crucial to ethical performance.

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## A Note on Reading

This thesis is written *against* the inexorable path towards meaning that characterizes the Cartesian rational subject and his epistemology. The writing of trauma, pain, violence and loss, necessarily interrupts this logic. Nor is such interruption the founding premise for this thesis – I have not sought to define and explain it at the beginning of chapter 1, making it the foundational truth of my thesis. Instead, it (without predetermining what “it” may be) accumulates resonances throughout the thesis. Its strange, meandering trajectory and halting rhythm make more and more “sense” only as the reader reads on.

Most likely, the reader will read out of the habit of linear trajectory, starting from the beginning and finishing with the conclusion at the end. The text, however, reveals itself in a kind of fractal logic; for example, what is complex and difficult in chapter 1 may be easier to digest after seeing its echoes in actual theatre productions, explored in chapter 2 and 3. The same ideas may come across as simple in the conclusion. Multiple readings, circular readings, hypertextual readings may be more appropriate, and in a modest way I have tried to help the reader by cross-referencing different sections of the text, and by providing a very brief summary at the beginning of each chapter. I cannot promise an easy journey, because the material is about disease.

## Chapter 1

### Methodological Anxieties I: The habit of truth, and the search for an ethics for writing

*"I am always astonished that there is ... something that, as time goes on, still (encore) brings me here ... facing you."*  
– Jacques Lacan, *Encore*, cited in Benvenuto & Kennedy (1986: 183)

Psychoanalytic theory provides a way in for investigating the dynamics of theatrical performance and its corporeal presence,<sup>1</sup> by focusing on desire and its implication in the notions of loss and anxiety. The theory of the unconscious and the theory of the gaze have epistemological implications, shifting expectations regarding "presence" and "truth" in theatre performance and writing about theatre performance. This chapter tries to outline the rationale for, as well as to enact, an alternative methodology for writing, as an ethical response to loss that does not insist on consensus and truth.

#### What compels us to be here, and do what we do – again?

I am at a *loss* about how to write. In writing this thesis, I am spurred on by a sense of discontent with writing: writing of words on a page, writing of bodies on a stage. I feel discontent with representation (*représentation* – the French word for performance: Brook, 1972: 155) and its ineffectual, remote and indifferent quality that I sense, when I go see a theatre performance or read a book.

Meanwhile, at the onset of a Masters degree, the University considerately provides each student with a handbook as a guide to writing. There are certain rules or boundaries around writing that will make it academically credible, in other words, identifiable as the genre of academic discourse.

So, a contradiction haunts me from the start: my sense of loss throws me into a radically questioning, doubting (non-)stance regarding my subject matter and the way that I should write it. (I wonder/wander<sup>2</sup>: what is "loss"? Having lost something – competence? faith? Mourning a separation – from God? certainty? love?

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis focuses on "body performance". Examples of genres include dance, mime, performance art, physical theatre, and such like; although I am hesitant to let genre boundaries govern my investigation into the body. I am also aware that the word "theatre" does not apply aptly to all these disciplines; the word can however serve as a way to distinguish the performer's body from the body's performativity in everyday terms, such as of social or gender identity.

<sup>2</sup> This comparison of thinking to "wandering" will become clearer at the end of this chapter (p.44). The word eschews the assumption of a position, a "stance" regarding the subject of research; but a movement through it, characterized not by assertions of proven truths but doubting.

connection? Losing thoughts and memories, rootlessness, disconnected from tradition, incredulous towards history. Being lost, directionless, being indecisive, inarticulate ...) At the same time there are boundaries all around me to guide me towards articulation. (Strive for clarity of expression. Articulate your subject position. Decide on the practitioners who will be examined, and the theories that will be used as lenses. Choose a South African subject matter to ensure relevance, but ensure that the theoretical lens is not Eurocentric.) It will be unfair of me to say that the University lays down the *law* as to how I should write my thesis; but through various institutional practices the discursive constraints are unmistakably set.

Surely my quest is to resolve this contradiction and to find a way of writing/performing that satisfies me, instead of leaving me in discontent. But neither of these are individual pursuits; they entail given relationships, or contracts, that govern these activities. The contradiction – the anxiety, the discontent – is located in the writer/reader and performer/audience relationships. This chapter addresses the former while the rest of the thesis addresses the latter, but it is difficult to separate them, as shall become evident.

As a performer-choreographer and a writer, and as a spectator of theatre and a reader of books, I find myself doing these activities out of habit ("because these are the things that a drama academic does"). Habits become problematic and in need of revision when they seem meaningless, hollow; in director and theatre theorist Peter Brook's term, "deadly" (Brook, 1972). My anxiety perhaps stems from a feeling that my very presence in these habitual activities are at stake. One does not need to have quantifiable data as evidence of the general lack of desire to go to the theatre; as a stage performer I can sense it when many more people are deriving more pleasure from attending popular music concerts, cinema, night clubs and watching television than watching my live performances. Even more importantly, the theatre productions that receive calls of "encore" from audiences (literally, or in the form of repeated seasons) often repel me. At an immediate level, this knowledge brings on an anxiety about my presence on stage. But this is only a trivial aspect of my discontent.

One of the recurring themes that psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan talked about



in his seminars in 1972-3, entitled *Encore*,<sup>3</sup> was the dilemma of his presence in giving a seminar:

At stake is the stupidity that conditions what I named my seminar after this year and that is pronounced "*encore*". You see the risk involved. I am only telling you that to show you what constitutes the weight of my presence here – it's that you enjoy it. My sole presence – at least I dare believe it – my sole presence in my discourse, my sole presence is my stupidity. I should know that I have better things to do than to be here. That is why I might prefer that my presence not be guaranteed to you in each and every case. (Lacan, 1998: 12)

Lacan's discourse is characteristically complex, and a wandering explication of this passage is warranted. The dilemma of "stupidity" is not unlike that of the analysand/analyst relationship in a clinical situation, and it is a dilemma in which the relation between language, speaker (or subject) and knowledge is thrown into question.

The analyst has only the analysand's discourse to work with, and yet this discourse cannot be taken as the guarantee of the truth about the analysand's condition. Unlike a medical situation, for instance, where the doctor relies on the patient's descriptions of dis-ease to diagnose the disease, the analytic relation cannot take the analysand's discourse about his/her anxiety for what it is. The subject is not in possession of knowledge about him/herself in entirety; there is the unconscious to account for, whose repressed desires distort conscious representations of self. Psychoanalysis as initiated by Freud has thus always been concerned with unintended uses of language: the slips of the tongue, the hesitations and defences, the jokes that smuggle in unpoliced desires, the rebus that treats linguistic signs as objects, rather than representations of concepts.

The speaking subject (the analysand) is thus incited to "say anything, without worrying about saying something stupid" (Lacan, 1998: 27). This "stupidity" (*la bêtise*), as translator Bruce Fink points out, is Lacan's own translation for Freud's term to name the symptoms of a patient.<sup>4</sup> The unconscious material of the analysand

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<sup>3</sup>While *Encore* is commonly known as Lacan's discourse on feminine sexuality, Lacan's editor Jacques-Alain Miller entitles the seminar as "On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge". It is the discourse on knowledge, and the implications for the analytic relationship, that pertain to this chapter, contextualizing the exchange relations in performance and in writing.

<sup>4</sup>The patient is the little boy Hans whose fear of horses revealed his Oedipal complex. Freud asked the

is contrasted with language, which comes from consciousness; Lacan proposes that the unconscious is structured like a language (through signifiers), the structure of which is different from linguistics and which is up to the analyst to decipher (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 167). The knowledge of the unconscious cannot be consciously known and formalized in language, thus appearing to be "unacceptable, or inarticulate, appearing in fragments of thought ... all of which may appear at first sight to be merely stupid and of marginal significance" (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 167).

A brief aside: it is worth noting that Lacan differs from the Freudian tradition in focusing on the possibility that the unconscious has a logic, a structure of representations of feelings, rather than pure affect itself (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 168). It is not an oppositional binary of conscious language versus unconscious affect, reminiscent of the age-old artistic dilemma of balancing form/technique, and inspiration/emotions – the Apollonian and the Dionysian.<sup>5</sup> Rather than a "disorganized mass of drives", the unconscious is organized "in the form of questioning, which [Lacan] called an 'interrogative voice'" (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 168). I will return to the idea of interrogation later on.

This seems to explain how Lacan's "sole presence" can be his "stupidity". But he also said to his audience: "what constitutes the weight of my presence here – it's that you enjoy it". This seems to be the key to the dilemma of presence – and the phenomenon of "encore". In the first seminar of the *Encore* series, Lacan spoke on *jouissance* (enjoyment, with a sexual connotation of *jouir* – "to come"), specifically exploring feminine sexuality. After this seminar, word went out that Lacan had given a seminar on love, implying that the seminar dealt with problems in love or sexual relationship, an issue which features often in analytical work. But at the next meeting, he refuted this, and insisted that what he spoke on was "stupidity" (Lacan, 1998: 12) – in other words, the nature of analytic discourse, the very possibility of understanding and talking about sexuality and the woman. The significance of *jouissance* is thus to do with knowledge (of the subject) and its limit, and how it affects the analytic

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boy's father to use the word, translated as "stupid" or "nonsense", to name the symptom. (Lacan, 1998: 11n42)

<sup>5</sup>For example, Brook states that the actor "must bring into being an unconscious state of which he is completely in charge" (1972: 141).

relationship.

From a common-sense understanding, enjoyment is, of course, crucial to the dilemma of presence: the audience only attends theatre for the pleasure of it. Or does it? Interestingly, Brook offers this provocation:

Almost every season ... one play succeeds not despite but because of dullness. After all, one associates culture with a certain sense of duty, historical costumes and long speeches with the sensation of being bored; so conversely, just the right degree of boringness is a reassuring guarantee of a worthwhile event. (Brook, 1972: 13)

Similarly, that sexual enjoyment should feature so frequently in analytic discourse is not because of its presence, but most often because of its failure. The truth that manifests as symptoms resides in the unconscious (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 166), and can only be useful within the analyst/analysand relationship if the coherence of the subject's consciousness is broken. This gap, according to Lacan, comes from the subject's demand for love as an infant:

as between mother and child, there was always something missing in the discourse between analyst and analysand. The analytic discourse 'turns around', 'stops and stumbles over' the same symptom – the unfulfilled and unutterable demand for love, which takes place in the analytic relationship. ... The analytic discourse keeps bumping into an empty space, the area excluded by language. (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 184)<sup>6</sup>

The demand for love in an analytic relation stems from relations early in the child's development; the "empty space" that it leaves can be traced back to the emergence of the child as a subject out of the Oedipal complex. The infant sees the mother as the one who provides for the infant's needs, as an "'absolute being' ... who can recognize and love him" (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 174). The infant's physiological needs are bound up with the demand for love. But she cannot fulfil the absolute demand for love, even though she may satisfy the needs; she is also a subject who desires (the father). "The demand for love goes *beyond* the objects that satisfy need"; the infant thus perceives a lack in the mother (the love object), and this is what constitutes

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<sup>6</sup>The correlation between what Benvenuto & Kennedy describe as the "empty space" that confronts the analytic relation, and what Brook proposes as the "empty space" that is the essence of theatre, is perhaps more than co-incidental. Both seem to point to the desires involved in the analysand/analyst and performer/audience relations – something which I attempt to explore in this thesis.

desire (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 174). This is where Lacan differs from Freudian theory: for Freud, the mother's lack is a biological lack of the penis, which is the basis for her desire. For Lacan, her lack is in relation to the father's authority (the Law of the Father); the castration (of the mother as a subject) is not anatomical, but at the level of the signifier, the phallus – as opposed to the penis – which she lacks and which she unconsciously desires (Grosz, 1990: 71).

As the infant recognizes the desire of the m/other, he/she tries to identify with the object of the mother's desire – to be the phallus (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 132). The infant tries to make the absent phallus present in the form of its own body; it is a desire for and of the mother. This Oedipal desire is intervened into by the father; again, away from Freud's more biological account, for Lacan it is the name of the father (the one who has the phallic signifier) that lays down the law. The boy infant, in particular, renounces the oedipal relation with the mother and enters the symbolic order of the father, organized around the signifier of the phallus. He moves from a position of being a phallus to having one, repressing his unspoken desires as the unconscious. This is what enables the child to assume a subject position independent of the mother. As Elizabeth Grosz explains:

The child's sacrifice of its primary love-object [the mother] in conformity with the law must be compensated ... by means of the acquisition of a position, a place as a subject in culture. ... The child ... is now bound to the law, in so far as he is implicated in the symbolic 'debt', given a name, and an authorized speaking position. The paternal metaphor is ... the formula by which the subject, through the construction of the unconscious, becomes an 'I', and can speak in its own name. (Grosz, 1990: 71)

Subjecthood, and the attendant ability to use language, is thus dependent on the renunciation of pre-Oedipal sexuality and submission to the paternal law; conversely, the phallic signifier governs social relations, including the use of language: "the phallus is the crucial signifier in the distribution of power, authority and a speaking position, a kind of mark or badge of a social position" (Grosz, 1990: 125).

For some psychologists, a person's psychic health or pathology can be traced to his/her success or failure of the castration process. Asocial behaviour testifies to the failure to resolve pre-Oedipal (perverse) desires; the failure to submit to the paternal law is seen to affect the subject's exchange relations within the social order,

including the use of language. In this sense, some psychoanalytical theory of the human subject is in harmony with the tradition of the Cartesian Cogito – the subject whose rationality guarantees his knowledge of himself ("I am thinking, therefore I am"). The outlaw is repressed, allowing the conscious subject to conduct his lawful social role.

The nature of knowledge and the use of language is thus implicated in how the human subject is defined. This is what I have called the "habit of truth": the assumption of the speaking subject (thesis writer, or theatre performer) as possessing knowledge of himself gives rise to exchange relations that govern how the form and content of the exchange is judged. Traditionally, the contract of the thesis is premised upon the individual's effort in the adroit use of language ("adroit" from the French *droit*, meaning law; Lacan, 1998: 3) to achieve clarity of meaning, which creates the possibility of truth-telling, and which gives rise to the basis for judging his/her merit. Similarly with theatrical performances. An example is David Best's approach in applying philosophy to human movement (1978), which he argues is possible to be analyzed linguistically. He challenges the simplistic differentiation between language as strictly verbal, and movement as non-linguistic: "no line can usefully, or even coherently, be drawn between communication which employs words and that which does not ... language itself is a *form* of behaviour" (Best, 1978: 145). Thus the concept of "language" becomes applicable to an investigation of the human body's movement. "The crucial distinction is between non-intentional and intentional behaviour" (Best, 1978: 145); language, being intentional, "provides the standards of truth and falsity" (Best, 1978: 146). Artistic meanings, whether communicated through words or movements, depend on the artist's intention being correctly understood by the spectator.<sup>7</sup> Crucially, the artist's intention is "expressed in and logically inseparable from the particular medium of expression" (Best, 1978: 148). Thus he concludes that the emotion of a performance, for example, cannot be known as having a separate existence to the language or form in which it is expressed (Best, 1978: 152). The artist's skill (adroitness) in manipulating the form is thus the basis of meaning, truthfulness (regarding intention), and criteria for evaluation.

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<sup>7</sup> Best's position concerning artistic communication is less restrictive than linguistic communication; different interpretations of the artist's intention are accounted for in the act of communication (Best, 1978: 148). The centrality of intention, however, remains.

However, Best's insistence on intention and clarity can be seen as a symptom of his method: "one might characterize the methods of philosophy as consisting in criticism and clarification, tracing out the *logical* consequences of *what people say*, and revealing the *logical structure of language*" (Best, 1978: 4; emphasis added). The intention of the speaking being and the exclusion of non-logical utterances are already assumed in the methodology. Perhaps unintentionally, Best's argument seems to result in the strange conclusions that a person will always know his/her feelings intentionally. Common sense tells us that this is not true. Psychoanalytical clinical data confirms this: the unconscious disturbs the subject and ruptures his/her language; the authority of intention is undercut. "What is at stake in analytic discourse is always the following – you give a different reading to the signifiers that are enunciated than what they signify" (Lacan, 1998: 37).

Symptoms, anxieties, and feelings of dis-ease indicate that the castration process is not total; the indecent demand for love does not disappear. Some psychologists interpret this to be individual pathologies. But feminists (see for example, Irigaray 1985, Grosz 1990) point out that within this logic, no woman can come out of castration as anything other than not-whole (lacking the phallus), and her desire for the phallus confines her to the maternal role: by bearing a child she has the possibility to possess a phallus (the baby). Luce Irigaray particularly points out that such accounts of feminine sexuality deny the "multiplicity of genital erogenous zones"; the discourse of psychoanalysis uses "masculine parameters" to understand something that is denied by its assumptions (Irigaray, 1985: 63-4). From this I draw a proposition: are all women then to be understood as pathological, or can the feminist critique point to the possibility that no-one comes out of the oedipal complex completely at ease with the symbolic order?

This possibility can perhaps be found in Lacan's theory. The demand for love, that "empty space" in an analytic relationship (see p.5), is the demand for the "absolute being" – the mother who loves and recognizes the infant; the source of certainty and fullness. The analysand speaks to the analyst as "the subject who is supposed to know", as an embodiment of the Other (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 175), and from the analyst a demand is spoken. The demand for love and the demand for

knowledge is intertwined: "I love the person I assume to have knowledge" (Lacan, 1998: 67). And yet this certainty can only be a fantasy, unconsciously projected as the Other; or more accurately, the unconscious that was established through repression is the "internalized locus of the Other" (Grosz, 1990: 126). And the unconscious is organized by the signifier phallus, which is a signifier of lack, because in carrying with it the paternal law it signifies castration (Grosz, 1990: 125). The fantasy of the Other (according to Grosz, the Other is also the intervening symbolic father who prohibits Oedipal desire; 1990: 74) is thus a signifier of lack:

In Lacan's view, the phallic signifier ... structures the unconscious as a language based on a 'defect in being'. Without this defect, or the essential constituting role of lack and absence, and the lacking object, nothing could be represented. ... Language represents in so far as it *prohibits* – it is marked by the phallic signifier, and hence by castration, lack, absence. (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 180)

At this point I am able to pick up again on the dilemma of presence, and explore why the weight of the speaker's presence is that the audience enjoys it (see p.4). In *Encore*, Lacan does not speak of one kind of jouissance but two. The signifier phallus governs the unconscious which gives rise to the speaking being; the use of language also gives the speaker a jouissance, a phallic jouissance. Lacan also posits the possibility of an/Other jouissance, which he locates in feminine sexuality. Benvenuto & Kennedy explain:

There is something about sexual enjoyment which does not make sense, and is of no use to phallic enjoyment, which for Lacan is based on the economy of pleasure. The economy of pleasure supports all the architecture of the words and knowledge based on the 'economy' of the phallus. The phallus is the symbolic and idealized substitute for the missing sexual unity, or one-ness. ... Talking about love is certainly enjoyable, but at the expense of sexual enjoyment 'having its say'. The latter fails to exist for the subject who speaks, who is submitted to the symbolic structure of language. There is a 'phallic' kind of enjoyment in the symbolic operations of language which stands for, and designates at the same time, another enjoyment, connected to sexual intercourse. (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 187-8)

Phallic jouissance is the enjoyment of the mastery of language (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 188); and, by extension, artistic form. But it is an enjoyment that fails. The desires that emerge from the castration process cannot be satisfied by the Other, even as the subject unconsciously longs for it. Language has a remainder, something which it cannot signify (such as the empty space in analytic discourse),

except as a lacking object (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 176).

On this point, Lacan picks up on his earlier work on desire, and the formulation of the *objet a* (*objet autre*, object other). It stems from desire for what is lacking in the mother, and what the mother desires (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 176). The voyeur's looking is, for example, not satisfied by the actual object of his sight; his sexual drive is satisfied by the imaginary object that does not fulfil his desire. So in looking at a "hairy athlete" he sees "the most graceful of girls" (Lacan, cited in Grosz, 1990: 78). *Objet a* is thus "the presence of a hollow, a void, which can be occupied ... by any object" (Lacan, cited in Grosz, 1990: 78). It is an empty space that invites to be filled – which induces desire; with its inability to be satisfied, desire keeps on calling out for more: More! More! *Encore! Encore!* (Robbins)

Lacan offers this provocation:

... for the moment, I am not fucking, I am talking to you. Well, I can have exactly the same satisfaction as if I were fucking. That's what it means. Indeed, it raises the question of whether in fact I am not fucking at this moment.  
(Lacan, cited in Grosz, 1990: 75)

The weight of the speaker's presence – the audience's enjoyment – is thus a void that satisfies the sexual drive; but language is in fact a "standing in" for another jouissance. "[T]he risk involved" (see p.3) in speaking – in being present in front of an audience – perhaps, is the very speaking about a jouissance that escapes phallic identification, and thus capturing it in the phallic economy of words. And yet it is what guarantees the enjoyment (phallic jouissance) of the hearers, and induces them to come again and again.

At stake is the relationship between analysand/analyst and speaker/hearer; and also between performer/audience, thesis writer/reader. If I write the *objet a* of desire (what desire/whose desire?) then what knowledge am I writing? How will my language be different to the adroitness of the writer with a presumption of his Cogito subjecthood? Would this not give rise to the same criteria for judgment? Irigaray's critique still stands: Lacan's theory ultimately returns to the mastery of the phallic signifier; feminine sexuality cannot be conceived as other than the remainder of the phallic economy; the analytic relation only has the stupidity of signifiers to work



with.<sup>8</sup> The critique of psychoanalytic theory regarding sexuality is still open; but I cannot provide a response just yet. Already a host of ideas about subjecthood, knowledge and relations are raised, which needs to be worked through the activities of making and watching theatre, writing and reading. Epistemology is at the same time a question regarding exchange relations: if knowledge is governed around the phallic signifier, what criteria is there to judge a thesis except the *droit*, the mastery of language? Does a "Master's degree" pre-determine the impossibility of resistance? Is there an alternative, an/Other *jouissance*?

The same questions apply to the skills of the adroit dancer or mime. What and whose desires are being induced by eliciting the calls of "encore" from an applauding audience?

### **Truth-telling and the blindness of narratives**

It should now be more apparent how psychoanalytical theory may be relevant in a thesis on theatre. Beyond its ability to explain the themes and characters of plays and dances, the theory helps me think through the very relationship that theatre is based upon. By countering the Cartesian Cogito, "Lacan denounces the illusory mastery, unity, and self-knowledge that the subject, as a self-consciousness, accords itself" (Grosz, 1990: 148).<sup>9</sup> The "theory of the socio-linguistic genesis of subjectivity" helps me investigate how one assumes a "speaking position within culture" (Grosz, 1990: 148 & 122); in other words, it dispels the notion that each individual has equal access to language (words, or "theatre language") in order to speak his/her meanings. Instead it interrogates culture – the symbolic order – and how "exchange relations" are governed by the phallic signifier which is the basis of the cultural order (Grosz, 1990: 126).

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<sup>8</sup>Grosz notes that the point about the possibility of the woman to be talked about within the phallic economy has implications on how artists are able or unable to intervene in culture. Julia Kristeva, cited by Grosz as an example of a faithful follower of Lacan's theory, proposed that the avant-garde transgressor artist/poet can only be male, because he alone occupies full speaking subjecthood, and can thus disrupt the symbolic order through his excess (Grosz, 1990: 164).

<sup>9</sup>For the moment, I cite this statement discounting Lacan's return to mastery as proposed by Irigaray's critique of psychoanalysis, which is touched upon in the above section.

There is a shift of attention from individual authorship to the cultural order which regulates the speaking being and his/her exchange relations. This shift in method can perhaps help me explore the sense of loss, discontent and anxiety regarding my very presence – in performing/watching theatre, and in reading/writing this thesis – as something that is not confined to my own pathology.<sup>10</sup>

At this point, I attempt a shift in writing method: I will tell a story. Throughout this thesis, I will be relating many narratives from different storytellers, storytellers who have journeyed through different landscapes – artistic (descriptions of performances; artistic manifestos; reflections on creative processes), spectatorial (reviews, critiques), and theoretical – and brought back their fireside tales, in the form of writings as representations of their journeys, their wanderings.

Why story? It is not an aesthetic, but an ethical decision. Lacan proposes that psychoanalytic discourse "does not allow us to remain at the level of ... Aristotle's ethics", but encourages a slippage "to Bentham's utilitarianism, in other words, to the theory of fictions" (Lacan, 1998: 3). The Greek tradition, as Fink (Lacan's translator) explains, insists on "the doctrine that the basis of moral obligations is found in the tendency of 'right actions' to produce happiness" (Lacan, 1998: 58n19). With the anxiety over language that psychoanalysis (among other theories) introduced, the possibility of a subject with the knowledge of "right actions" is thrown in doubt. Utilitarianism, for Lacan, means that "we must think about the purpose served by the old words, those that already serve us" (Lacan, 1998: 58). In casting my words, and the words of other writers that I cite, as narratives – fictions – I hope to encourage a reading that pays attention to the loss that is hidden in language. This seems to be a more satisfactory basis for ethical writing; but more on ethics later. First a story.

I began my own journey of writing this thesis (if the myth of origin can be believed in) after the dress rehearsal of the biggest choreographic work I had done. I was nominated for the DaimlerChrysler Award for South African Choreography; on that

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<sup>10</sup>It is hypothetically possible, of course, that I am the sole outsider who experiences frustration and anxiety when it comes to theatre. But my reading and wandering led me to practitioners and aesthetic theorists who write of similar discontents (such as Salverson: see below). The possibility that this is symptomatic of a larger phenomenon such as culture is a basic premise of my thesis.

November evening in 2002 my cast and I would be presenting a 30-minute physical theatre work to compete for the prize.<sup>11</sup>

Each choreographer was interviewed for a video documentary after his/her dress rehearsal. The first question I was asked, after what seemed a rather significant pause indicating, perhaps, hesitation: "All dance is communication. What are you trying to communicate in your piece?" Later, after the interview, the photographer took me outside for some publicity shots. She confessed, "I'll be honest, I did not understand your piece."

My first unspoken reaction to both these comments was not to explain the subject matter of my work, to help them understand where I come from, my intentions (my subject position; my theoretical lens; my history; my community and place of origin). I wanted to pose a question in return, to express my own non-understanding of their comments: "where did your expectation come from that I should make you *understand* something?"

My response, as recorded on the video documentary, was:

I think I want to evoke through dance. I think a lot of people would want to come to a dance theatre and want a message given to them, but what I want to do is to make dance theatre as a place where memories, evocations, possibilities, associations are made possible. I don't think I want a single message to go out to the audience. I want the audience to invest their own memories and their own sense of who they are, where they are, what they like or don't like, what they find disturbing or exhilarating and invest it into the watching of dance theatre. (in Nasser, 2003)

After the performance, I was talking to the audience in the foyer. From the portion of the audience that did not respond with indifference, a few positive comments were offered, not as outright praise, rather they seemed to have been spoken from minds grappling with something murky, unable to pin it down with certainty, unable even to

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<sup>11</sup>The definition of "physical theatre", and all the styles, crafts, and theoretical underpinnings that the term could possibly embrace (which are not homogeneous but often contradictory), are beyond the scope of this thesis. To describe my own work as a physical theatre combining dance, visual imagery, music and text is not sufficient to address, for instance, how meaning-making processes in my work differ from conventional theatre dance works or plays; nor is the description adequate in addressing the political and economic pressures that condition the reception of physical theatre as an art form.

be sure what their response should be. To my ears, there was an unmistakable air of loss, a sense of "if only" (if only I could say I enjoyed it; if only I had understood it; if only I could say for certain how it affected me, if at all), an already belated relation between the audience's response and the performance. I excused myself to go outside, where I wept quite uncontrollably. The next evening I found out that I did not win the award; I had known it, in fact, in the moment of silent hesitation after the end of the performance and before the applause.

The sense of loss (in this case, the disconnection or uncertainty of connection between performer and audience) is understandable, if one invokes philosophy of aesthetics to understand the processes that were at work during the performance of my choreography. Kantian aesthetics, for example, formulates the pleasure of the aesthetic experience as an agreement. For Kant, knowledge results when an object, presented by the senses (such as sight) to the human subject, is able to be matched with a concept. An aesthetic judgment (the concept of "taste") falls between the presentation and the conception, linking the object to the concept of beauty (Sim, 1996: 99). Taste (or the grand-narrative of taste, according to postmodernists like Jean-Francois Lyotard) determines the aesthetic experience of pleasure as a consensus (Lyotard, cited in Readings, 1991: 24); the concept of beauty as a grand narrative is an agreement of art and its place in a community (Sim, 1996: 109). Furthermore, as Sandra Kemp argues, performing arts differ from other arts because it presents not a "being-object", but a "becoming-object"; because performance is processual rather than a completed product, the act of aesthetic interpretation always occurs in the collaboration between performer and audience (Kemp, 1996: 155-156). Thus the artistic judgment of "whether it works or not" happens at the moment of performance, is itself a performance by the audience: "We have no difficulty deciding whether someone is good or bad at telling jokes, for instance" (Kemp, 1996: 156). Performance is thus "*sociable*":

A joke is not a joke if no one laughs ... but our laughter, our sense of the situation, cannot be disentangled from the fact that everyone else is laughing, too. We are embarrassed by an unshared or inappropriate response; if, for instance, we are the only person in the audience to be laughing. (Kemp, 1996: 160)

The pleasure of watching a performance is therefore premised on social consensus. If

one then compares this model of aesthetic perception and pleasure to my manifesto of what dance theatre should be, it is clear that my conception of how an audience should respond runs contrary to aesthetic pleasure. I was asking audience members not to match what was presented to their eyes with what they can mentally conceive, nor to rely on notions of beauty that were agreed upon by the temporary community of the audience. No wonder, then, the sense of loss and disconnection that followed the performance.

At this point I interrupt my narrative, and make two related observations about my writing, both disputing the stake as to the truth value of this thesis. Firstly, the form of the narrative has clearly emerged: a hero's journey; an obstacle which disrupts the hero's relation to his community and brings on a crisis of self; the tears of regret, implying loss, mourning, contrition; a retrospective reflection to draw out a moral of the story that re-affirms the social order. The form or logic of the narrative inexorably leads on to the closure that implies the suturing of ruptures and gaps. The writing itself – that I am able to narrate the event – is a sign of having dealt with the sense of loss, according to some psychological models of wellness.<sup>12</sup>

What does this say about the writing of my thesis, then? Perhaps this: By forming my trauma into words, by representing it in a narrative, I am able to turn my emotional experience into knowledge. Then I can verify my discontent, now represented in statements of hypothesis. Perhaps I would be able to prove that traditional aesthetics do not and should not hold in contemporary South Africa, and my faith in an avant garde mode of art making and reception would be proven right, even if only defiantly and misunderstood by the public (which would, however, indicate the failure to find closure). Or else, I may be proven wrong, and this thesis would be a narrative of mourning, an Oedipal process where I renounce infantile ideals and take up a useful position in "the real world" (often uttered in trepidation by my peers, and as an authoritative decree by older adults), to enter the social order of the theatre industry where the mature desire of satisfying the audience replaces pre-Oedipal narcissism.

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<sup>12</sup>Peggy Phelan (1996), for example, traces the origins of psychoanalysis in the construction of narrative for the symptom of hysteria by Freud and Breuer. The narrating of the symptom's history joins the traumatic event into time; thus the act of narrating, or interpreting the trauma, is a sign of healing. Narrative psychology more explicitly relies on the act of narration for the subject to enact a healing process.

But in fact, the thesis is neither of these. I still live with the memory of the event, this personal sense of loss; but it does not burn in my side as an anger that spurs me onto defiance (at least, not nearly as strongly). Nor is it any longer a paralyzing reminder of my pathology, my deviation from social norms, my need to renunciate infantile desires. How I have survived through this event, then, falls through the cracks of that inexorable logic of my narrative, and the (self-)knowledge it represents.

The second observation is lengthier. The narrative of my loss is written in the mode of a confession or testimony, whose truth value rests on the telling of self, of subjective truth (the truth of the subject). There is almost no way for readers to verify it objectively, because they have no other ways to access to my thoughts, feelings and memories. One can check if I had really been nominated for the award, if I had really cried (through witnesses' testimony of their own memories), if my citation of Kant via Lyotard is defensible. It does not change the fact that these were *my* processes and were "true" to my consciousness; as such a confession is beyond criticism.<sup>13</sup> Confession that is done correctly is beyond criticism. As in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, testimony is not treated as legal evidence to be tested but as a performance of the soul and conscience of the self:

The past decade in South Africa has seen us exploring once again the implications of a legal-judicial process which invoked confession rather than material verification for its primary instrument. As a nation we watched and listened, and felt ourselves competent to determine who amongst the amnesty applicants was bearing false witness, and who was truly contrite and seeking reconciliation. (Taylor, 2004)

The word "truth", as Lacan points out, is of juridical origin; yet the purpose of truth-telling is at odds with what is being confessed:

Even in our times, a witness is asked to tell the truth, nothing but the truth, and, what's more, the whole truth, if he can – but how, alas, could he? We demand of him the whole truth about what he knows. But, in fact, what is sought – especially in legal testimony – is [how things stand with] his *jouissance*. *The goal is that jouissance be avowed*, precisely insofar as it may be unavowable. The truth sought is the one that is unavowable with respect to the law that regulates *jouissance* (Lacan, cited in Caudill, 2000: 249, emphasis added).

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<sup>13</sup>Chapter 2 elaborates on the idea of something being beyond criticism, because of its subjective premise.

The hearer of confession desires the certainty of truth – Was his torture sadistic, or was he reluctant? Is he really remorseful? – and yet this desire is impossible to satisfy (psychologically – see p.10 – but also on a common-sense level). The person who is confessing does not have access to his *whole* being/truth; the truth of the subject cannot be total. David Caudill describes this dilemma in a legal context: "we are asking for a confession of that which is not 'confessable' due to the very structure of the subject of law" (Caudill, 2000: 249).

If confession (or the desire for it) is apparently so futile, what is its fascination? Why does confession appear credible; what makes it recognizable as correctly performed, and its truthfulness trustworthy? What makes a confessing perpetrator appear "truly contrite"; what makes readers of a choreographer writing about his own art agree that he is convincing as to the integrity of his processes and beliefs? More disturbingly, Jane Taylor, academic and theatre writer, asks of the TRC: "what is it in us that makes us seek out the stories of another's grief? ... what makes us follow the stories of torturers?" (Taylor, 1998: v)

Jacques Derrida's discussion on self-portraits deconstructs the discourse of confession, and so I will relate his narrative here, in the hope of responding to some of the (ethical) questions above. Derrida confesses his anxiety regarding drawing:

In truth, I feel myself incapable of following with my hand [by drawing on paper] the prescription of a model: it is as if, just as I was about to draw, I no longer *saw* the thing. For it immediately flees, drops out of sight, and almost nothing of it remains; it disappears before my eyes, which, in truth, no longer perceives anything but the mocking arrogance of this disappearing apparition. As long as it remains in front of me, the thing defies me, producing, as if by emanation, an invisibility that it reserves for me, a night of which I would be, in some way, the chosen one. (Derrida, 1993: 36)

The last phrase needs to be elaborated before dealing with what Derrida might be confessing here. Derrida traces the confession of "the chosen one" through the lineage of blind men in the bible, whose blindness became allegoric of the fall; the divine vision (an angel, an appearance of the Lord) that visits upon the blind man opens his eyes and grants him spiritual truth. In biblical hermeneutics this is the allegory for the union of the Church with God: "Now we see but a poor reflection as

in a mirror; then [i.e. "when perfection comes"] we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13: 12). This event of giving sight/truth by the transcendent Being is a debt that must be inscribed, remembered and proclaimed (Derrida, 1993: 29) – hence the writing of scriptures, the proclamation of the gospel through evangelism, the confession of faith that is simultaneously a confession of guilt (sin) and a giving thanks of salvation.

Confession is thus the performance of the chosen, and the chosen is marked by a wound (Derrida, 1993: 33), a loss of sight, a traumatic event, a fall. It is a confession of the blind (testifying to eventual salvation and communion with God, the origin, truth and certainty). As such the blindness is a sacrifice, in the type of Christ's affliction; and for Derrida, what meets the eye – "the narrative, spectacle, or representation of the blind" – is a "sacrificial event", a blindness at the heart of seeing/drawing/confessing (Derrida, 1993: 41).

Drawing<sup>14</sup> – in particular the self-portrait, the seeing and representing of self – does not transform the self into visible object; confession is instead a testament of invisibility, of an object that, as Derrida confesses, "disappears before my eyes"; "it immediately flees, drops out of sight, and almost nothing of it remains". It is as if Derrida is describing the seeing of a performance, what Kemp calls the "becoming-object" (1996: 156 – see p. 9 above). The affliction on the chosen confessor also closely resembles the call of the stage performer: Rachel Karafistan compares the "'calling' towards performance, the 'urge' to be on stage" which actors recount (or confess), to the calling of a shaman through illnesses and psychic disturbance (2003: 158&151).

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<sup>14</sup>In "drawing" Derrida refers to all performances or confessions of self. "The drawing of men [the patriarchal implication of which is developed throughout my thesis], in any case, never goes without being articulated with articulation, without the order being given with words ... without some order, without the order of narrative, and thus of memory, without the order to bury, the order of prayer, the order of names to be given or blessed. Drawing comes in the place of the name, which comes in the place of drawing ... As soon as a name comes to haunt drawing, even the without-name of God that first opens up the space of naming, the blind are tied in with those who see. An internal duel breaks out at the very heart of drawing." (1993: 56-57) Drawing – the seeing of object and the performance of the hand (body) – never goes without the structure or authority or lineage proceeding from the giving and blessing of the name (language) – the choosing of the blind men. And so: "If what is called a self-portrait depends on the fact that it is called 'self-portrait,' and act of naming should allow or *entitle* me to call just about anything a self-portrait, not only any drawing ... but anything that happens to me, anything by which I can be affected or let myself be affected." (1993: 65) Self-portrait becomes a performance (a confessing, a naming) of self as the chosen one, the blind confessor of salvation.



The martyrdom of the confessor (writer, performer; seer, spectator) is thus what makes his witnessing credible, and its truthfulness trustworthy. Whereas, in common usage, the "witness" is the one who serves the legal purpose of reporting, transparently, what he/she had seen – as if seeing (French: *voir*) is knowing (*savoir*) (cf. Derrida, 1993: 12); confession, in fact, concerns spiritual light:

the blind man thus becomes the best witness, a chosen witness ... Witnessing substitutes narrative for perception. ... No authentication can show in the present what the most reliable of witnesses sees, or rather, has seen and now keeps in memory ... (Derrida, 1993: 104)

The performance of confession is "seen only *through* the blindness that it produces as its truth" (Derrida, 1993: 65):

In Christian culture there is no self-portrait without confession. The author of the self-portrait does not *show* himself; he does not *teach* anything to God, who knows everything in advance ... The self-portratist thus *does not lead one to knowledge*, he admits a fault and asks for forgiveness. (Derrida, 1993: 117)

Confession thus still holds a hearer in fascination despite the impossibility of truth; the "truth" of the narrative, for instance, the story about my existential crisis as a choreographer, testifies not to knowledge, but to a performative imploring for forgiveness, acknowledgment, reconciliation, recognition of my art. I am a practising artist, writing about the conditions of the making and reception of art. The convention of academic discourse, based on rationality, relies on my being a witness who transparently (without interference from the observer) reports what he has seen; the language with which a report is made of what is seen must also assume a transparency of representation. But if I watch performances and read writings through my blindness/loss, what truth will my thesis tell? On the other hand, what discursive model is adequate for the blindness that conditions performance and its seeing? Perhaps, my writing inevitably becomes a self-portrait, an artistic manifesto; my readings of other practitioners a function of my blindness: a narration of my memory, my calling; the wound, the name with which I was chosen (the name of the father?), becomes the (only) story I tell.

Like the testimonies at the TRC, confession generates perhaps not so much

knowledge but a plea.<sup>15</sup> Antjie Krog, who led the South African Broadcast Corporation radio reportage of the TRC, writes this relation between testifier and hearer with the analogy of a husband demanding the truth of an affair from his wife:

Why? Where? How? From when to when – all of that is negotiable with the things I already know. So the more I know, the more you will confess. What truth I don't know, you will never tell me. (Krog, 1999: 300)

The details, the verifiable information, only add to what is already known; or perhaps one should say, the already named – the guilty, the saviour, the confessor. In the TRC's case, the elements of "the guilt of apartheid atrocities", "the national reconciliation process and amnesty", and "the public act of testifying and promising to tell the truth", are all already named. In the case of my narrative, the elements of "my sense of loss", "aesthetic principles", and "the writing of my thesis" stand in the same relation.

If this were the case (and please note the "if"), what is there for the reader to do except, in the same manner as TRC chairman Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the commissioners, to sympathize with the victims, and to make decisions about granting amnesty?

The mark that gives credit to the confessor – the wound, the trauma, the loss – is made evident in tears. Tears, by veiling sight, reveals "the *truth* of the eyes", which is not to see (and know) but to implore (to God, the origin of names) (Derrida, 1993: 126). Within the mode of confession, the spectator feels that s/he has the ability to tell apart the "truly contrite", and one of the most telling evidences that confession has been "performed correctly", is tears. In my own narrative, the climax, the moment of truth, of reckoning, was in my weeping. But what truth did my tears guarantee – the truth of my confession narrative? Or the truth of the narrative of fall and salvation? And thus what truth can the reader identify with or grant amnesty to – the subjective truth of my art which is already named?

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<sup>15</sup>Or, the *point* of testimony is not so much knowledge as a plea. It seems problematic to think that knowledge *in itself*, such as the location where a victim is buried, would be enough to offer closure to the bereaved. That the knowledge could be articulated at all is dependent on the discourse of forgiveness; the speaker testifies because forgiveness is sought. Even if the bereaved refuses to grant forgiveness, the perpetrator's speaking at least signals the end of the hatred or madness that killed the victim, and so giving rest to the departed.

## Ethical anxieties: identification and the dramatic hero

Words fail me. How am I to tell the story of my discontent and loss? Words cannot objectively represent meanings allowing knowledge (*savoir*) to be transparently seen; I can act as my own analyst and diagnose my artistic pathology, but a neat, well-argued interpretation is no cure. Words cannot purport to bypass rational objectivity and confess the truth of the subject; such pre-determined "truth" that is already named is not knowledge, and can never satisfy the hearer's demand for certainty. If I may be so bold, I think I am approaching a crude (un-adroit) understanding of why Lacan's words are so notoriously obscure, why he seemed ambivalent about his relation with the hearers of his seminars, and why he "might prefer that [his] presence not be guaranteed to [the audience] in each and every case" (Lacan, 1998: 12).<sup>16</sup>

All this anxiety! Why am I flaunting my angst, passing off personal pathology as academic knowledge? Why am I displaying my adolescent fantasy of being a social misfit? This, I anticipate, is how some readers will respond, in exasperation. And I anticipate this less out of paranoia, and more out of hearing what some people, both within and outside the theatre industry, have said to me or my colleagues, expressing disapproval when certain types of theatre are made. These are not worth repeating; the silent pressure to make certain types of theatre (in terms of style or content, to elicit responses from audiences that are considered politically, aesthetically or economically appropriate) is that much louder.

The audacity in my thesis, I believe, lies not in the seeming complexity of subject matter or writing style, but in my making this following argument: that my anxiety and discontent should be understood as ethical discontent. In other words, in this thesis I will dare to evaluate art according to ethics. It is audacious, because I refuse to settle my differences with the disapproving voices as "a difference of taste";

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<sup>16</sup>Elizabeth Grosz writes of Lacan's seminars:

Many saw these seminars as a kind of intellectual/sexual tease; his indirect, elliptical, evasive, but always suggestive lecture techniques remains striking for the promise of a 'knowledge' (the gratification of a desire to know) which recedes the closer it comes. (Grosz, 1990: 15)

Lacan was also reputed for his emphasis on the ending or interruption of analysis sessions, rather than the standard 50-minute sessions that guarantees the presence of the analyst/analysand for a set amount of time (Grosz, 1990: 15).

rather, I am implying that they are unethical. Once again, some wandering is needed to unravel these ideas. I return to my narrative of artistic failure, still in search of what caused the failure to offer pleasure to the audience. What, in theatre terms, is the audience's desire?

In Freud's account of drama, the pleasure of the audience rests on the ability to identify with the hero's struggle against God (Freud, 1997: 88). Modern (Western) dramas move the hero's quest from rebellion in the spiritual terrain to the social and the psychological. Freud posits *Hamlet* as the first instance of a drama that deals with psychopathological suffering in the hero; the hero's struggle is between his conscious and repressed impulses, and the pleasure comes from identifying the hero's neurosis as also existing in the spectator (Freud, 1997: 91).

However, Freud also posits a "precondition" to the audience's pleasure: while they can invest their desires in the hero's quest, his presence must protect the audience from actual suffering. The game of make-believe that is drama makes pleasure from suffering, but on the condition that no suffering is caused in the audience (Freud, 1997: 89). The identification is an unconscious one; Freud considers this drama impossible unless the audience's identification with the neurosis can be achieved "with [the spectator's] attention averted, allowing repressed material to surface" (Freud, 1997: 92).

In dramas that deal with the psychological terrain, it means that the struggle between the conscious and the unconscious must end "in a renunciation" (Freud, 1997: 91). Having struggled with the unconscious, as Jacob struggled with the angel, the hero must ultimately succumb (renounce Oedipal impulses) and receive the blessing (of divine vision, the name). The hero must enter into the symbolic order.

So far, this account of the desire at work in a theatrical exchange relation between performer and audience seem well within what is ethical. I have already mentioned Lacan's attack on the Greek tradition of ethics as based on the subject's knowledge of "right actions" (see p.13). To presume the subject as able to know the rightness of his/her intentions and actions could be dangerous: a startling and extreme example is provided by political and aesthetic theorist Theodor Adorno. He asserts that if

rational thought is not checked by what can elude it (perhaps, what the subject cannot know), it is "in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims" (Adorno, cited in Eagleton, 1990: 41-2). In this example, there is a radical separation between the sophistication of language or form and the ethics of the action. For Freud, drama provides a framework for balancing conscious form and unconscious desires, allowing repressed material to surface, but ultimately to be renounced for the social order to return. If the unconscious material is not carefully drawn out while the audience's attention is diverted; if the repressed desires of the hero are not ultimately renounced, causing the audience to be implicated in the suffering; if the conditions of pleasure are not adhered to, Freud claims, the drama simply would not work, the audience would resist it (Freud: 1997: 92-3). I have already mentioned this age-old dialectic between the Apollonian and the Dionysian (see p.4).

However, the identification with the hero, on which the audience's enjoyment is based, needs a closer examination. Lacan relates a story about identification:

I can tell you a little tale, that of a parakeet that was in love with Picasso. How could one tell? From the way the parakeet nibbled the collar of his shirt and the flaps of his jacket. Indeed, the parakeet was in love with what was essential to man, namely, his attire ... The parakeet was like Descartes, to whom men were merely clothes (*habits*) ... Clothes promise debauchery ... when one takes them off. But this is only a myth ... To enjoy a body ... when there are no more clothes leaves intact the question of what makes the One, that is, the question of identification. The parakeet identified with Picasso clothed. ... [W]hat lies under the habit, what we call the body, is perhaps but the remainder ... I call object *a*. (Lacan, 1998: 6)

With what does the audience identify? If clothing (that the parakeet loves) is opposed to the debauchery promised by its absence, then language and meaning (signification) similarly promises the chaotic, unspeakable, outlawed pre-Oedipal impulses hidden under the social order – the repressed unconscious. But the clothes's promise of debauchery is "only a myth"; even when unclothed, the body is constituted and regulated by signifiers: "It enjoys itself only by 'corporizing' the body in a signifying way" (Lacan, 1998: 23). The debauchery of the body, the sexualized body, is produced within the economy of the phallus through castration; *objet a*, that which fuels desire again and again (*encore*), is but a remainder "produced by the operation of language" (Irigaray, 1985: 90). The clothes, the signifiers – the "habit" –

reproduces the "truth" of the unconscious which, at every performance of *Hamlet* and other such dramas according to Freud, must be confronted and brought to Oedipal resolution.

As such, the audience's desire can never be satisfied: phallic jouissance depends on the identification with a hero who tries to stand up to God/repressed impulses; literally, someone who tries to be the phallic signifier, an attempt to recover the lost Other.<sup>17</sup> This is what induces the call of "encore"; Freud describes how these conditions on the audience's pleasure can produce endless combinations of stories and themes, "just as endless, in fact, as the erotic day-dreams of men" (Freud, 1997: 91).

What seems to be left unsaid in Freud's essay is that, if the hero does not renounce his rebellion (against God; the fantasy of the Other that is repressed), the audience, with their libidinal investments in the hero, will also come face to face with suffering. If identification brings phallic jouissance, then what is this "suffering" that comes from the refusal of or escape from castration?

Irigaray develops Lacan's theory of feminine sexuality, showing that if sexual relations are governed by the phallic signifier, a woman's body always serves as the *objet a*, as the "not-whole" that requires the injection of the male phallus, ignoring the many different erogenous zones of the body (see p.8). Irigaray critiques Lacan for not seeing beyond his own logic; perhaps, like David Best with his philosophical method (see p.8), Lacan is trapped by his own language of phallic jouissance:

The production of ejaculations of all sorts, often prematurely emitted, makes him miss, in the desire for identification with the lady, what her own pleasure might be all about. (Irigaray, 1985: 91)

Responding to one such "ejaculation" of Lacan's, that the body "enjoys itself only by 'corporizing' the body in a signifying way", she asks, "How, how many times, are we going to have to be cut into 'parts,' 'hammered,' 'recast ...' in order to become

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<sup>17</sup>Lacan writes: "If an angel has such a stupid smile, that is because it is up to its ears in the supreme signifier. To find itself on dry land would do it some good – perhaps it wouldn't smile anymore" (Lacan, 1998: 20).

sufficiently signifying?"<sup>18</sup> (Irigaray, 1985: 92) Lacan cannot admit to another logic, Irigaray argues, because he would have become vulnerable to another logic "that challenges mastery" (Irigaray, 1985: 90). She thus exposes a significant blindness in Lacanian theory:

woman has no unconscious except the one man gives her. Mastery clearly acknowledges itself, except that no one notices it. Enjoying a woman, psychoanalyzing a woman, amounts then, for a man, to reappropriating for himself the unconscious that he has lent her. All the same, she continues to pay, and then some ... with her body. (Irigaray: 1985: 94)

The theory of the unconscious, located as the truth of psychoanalysis, is found problematic if only for its partiality, its inability to explain the sexuality of about one-half of humanity. Furthermore, even as Lacan distinguishes analytic discourse from philosophical discourse (Lacan, 1998: 16), Irigaray reveals it to be another discourse "that tells the truth about the logic of truth" (Irigaray, 1985: 86). Insisting on the centrality of the phallic signifier as the determinant in social, sexual and linguistic organization,

we might suspect the *phallus* (Phallus) of being the *contemporary figure of a god jealous of his prerogatives*; we might suspect it of claiming, on this basis, to be the ultimate meaning of all discourse, the standard of truth and propriety, in particular as regards sex, the signifier and/or the ultimate signified of all desire, in addition to continuing, as emblem and agent of the patriarchal system, to shore up the name of the father (Father). (Irigaray, 1985: 67)

If psychoanalysis is a phallocentric discourse that insists on truth, then its postulations of psychic health or pathology becomes problematic (see pp.8-9); like the blessing of god's name on the confessor, the discourse already names the knowledge produced by psychoanalysis before it is spoken.

If it is asserted – as can be inferred from Freud – that the failure of the dramatic hero to renounce his repressed desires would lead to the audience's coming face to face with suffering, then one should pose a question in response: suffering from whose

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<sup>18</sup>I would like to insert a personal intuitive correlation here, although it is not backed by analysis: the hammering and separation of the parts of the body in order to produce a signifying body – and the artistic pleasure that results from it – reminds me of ballet training, with the repetitions of standard barre exercises that recast each part of the body so that it is "sufficiently signifying". (Most other dance trainings achieves this in different ways.) The forcefulness with which Irigaray writes somehow echoes the discontent that I feel towards the logic of mastery in theatrical body performances.

perspective? And conversely, from whose perspective is it pleasurable to identify with the hero in his quest? Recognizing the partiality of psychoanalytic discourse, one glimpses the possibility that the desires of the audience, hitherto considered quite obvious and commonly understood, are in fact manifold. To recall Brook, some may find a widely praised theatre event to be dull, not because of unrefined taste but because the others find the barrenness of "culture" reassuring (see p.5). And, to recall Kemp, we may have difficulty deciding whether someone is good or bad at telling jokes after all (see p.15).

The idea that an audience deprived of phallic pleasure can be confronted with suffering is a significant one. If the phallic signifier is revealed to be what it is – a signifier of lack (see p.9) – the fantasy of the Other (god) as the one who possesses certainty and fullness can be shattered. The desire to be One with the Other (Freud describes Eros as the drive to combine two into one) is revealed to be hollow, "fraudulent" (Franses, 2001). The audience's confrontation with a jouissance that escapes the signifier can bring on suffering – horror – since the master signifier that governs meaning no longer holds.

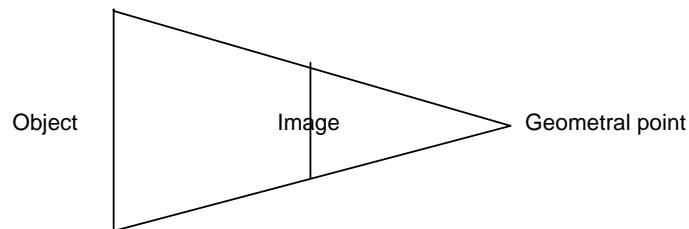
Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva calls this place of horror the abject. If through repression the subject is constituted by drawing lawful boundaries between self and other subjects in the social order, between conscious and unconscious, between body's inside and outside, then "acts or materials that cross or question [these boundaries] are defined as 'abject', to be viewed with disgust" (Counsell & Wolf, 2001: 140). "I" find horror in the abject – the jettisoned parts of self – because "it draws me toward the place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva, 1982: 2). The abject – the unclean and the improper, the physically disgusting and the socially disruptive – "attests to the perilous and provisional nature of the symbolic control" of my subjectivity, revealing the fragility of "identity, order, and stability" (Grosz, in Counsell & Wolf, 2001: 143). The abject, "as in true theater, without makeup or masks ... [shows] me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva, 1982: 3). The horror of facing the abject does not allow the audience the fantasies on which subjectivities depend.

I will elaborate on Kristeva's theory in chapter 3. Keeping my focus on the exchange



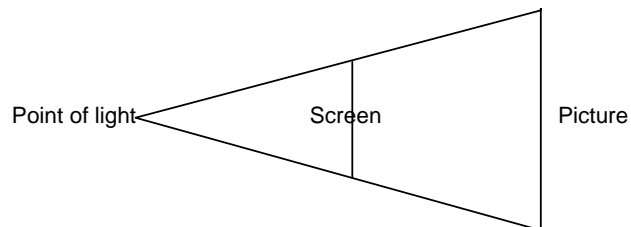
relation between performer and audience, and the ethical anxieties that arise, I hope to explain the horror of this "true theater", citing Lacan's theory of the gaze.

The common sense understanding of the process of watching theatre, perhaps influenced by film theory, is the gaze of the audience at the objects of representation on stage. In this sense, the gaze gives the looker the power as the subject, who sees and knows. The cone of vision allows the object to be focused as an image, and the subject looks from what Lacan calls a geometral point of viewing; this is the familiar perspective instituted by Renaissance painting (Hal Foster, 1996: 139).<sup>19</sup>



The geometral perspective constructs the looker as a Cartesian subject (Grosz, 1990: 78): "I assure myself as a consciousness that knows that it is only representation, and that there is, beyond, the thing, the thing itself" (Lacan, in Mirzoeff, 2002: 127). This looking is the basis for theatre's make believe: the image represents the thing, but is not the thing itself, an obvious example being the use of *trompe-l'oeil*. It is understandable even by the blind, because "[w]hat is at issue in geometral perspective is simply the mapping of space, not sight" (Lacan, cited in Grosz, 1990: 78).<sup>20</sup> For Lacan, that a subject has sight also entails the subject being looked at, hence the notion of the gaze.

A second cone of vision is added, where the subject who is looking is the picture that is seen.



<sup>19</sup>The following drawings are reproduced from Hal Foster (1996: 139).

<sup>20</sup>Descartes's "Optics" explains light rays with the analogy of the blind man's walking stick, as an extension of the senses sending signals back to the subject (in Mirzoeff, 2002: 117).

The gaze is not the look of another subject (another person looking back at me); it is "not carried by any specific set of eyes ... the gaze ... is the person looking being seen ... by objects" (Franses, 2001).

How can an object be said to be looking back at the subject? It is in fact a gaze that is *imagined* by the subject "in the field of the Other" (Lacan, cited in Franses, 2001, emphasis added). It is the subject's desire in relation to the Other that constitutes the gaze, as an excess over perspectival optics (Grosz, 1990: 78). "*The objet a in the field of the visible is the gaze*" (Lacan, in Mirzoeff, 2002: 126). In the same way that pre-Oedipal impulses threaten to disrupt the law of the father and must be renounced in order to become a speaking being, i.e. the ability to use language; so the gaze, as a fantasmatic projection by the desiring subject, can unsettle the position of the looker. "The gaze is ... the drive under which the subject's identity and certainty fail" (Grosz, 1990: 79). Citing from Lacan, Hal Foster notes that the subject,

"looked at from all sides," is but a "stain" in "the spectacle of the world". Thus positioned, the subject tends to feel the gaze as a threat, as if it queried him or her; and so it is, according to Lacan, that "the gaze, *qua objet a*, may come to symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration". (Hal Foster, 1996: 138)

The link between the threat of the object-gaze and the fear of castration is echoed in Freud's essay, "The Uncanny", where the "substitutive relation between the eye and the male organ" is analyzed (Freud, 1997: 206).<sup>21</sup> Both fears demonstrate the process through which the subject – who can use language and who can be represented in the visible field – comes into being by regulating desire.

Thus the screen, similar to language, alleviates the threat of the *objet a*. Hal Foster understands the screen as

the cultural reserve of which each image is one instance. Call it the conventions of art, the schemata of representation, the codes of visual culture, this screen *mediates* the object-gaze *for* the subject, but it also *protects* the subject *from* this object-gaze. That is, it captures the gaze ... and *tames* it in an image. (Hal Foster, 1996: 140)

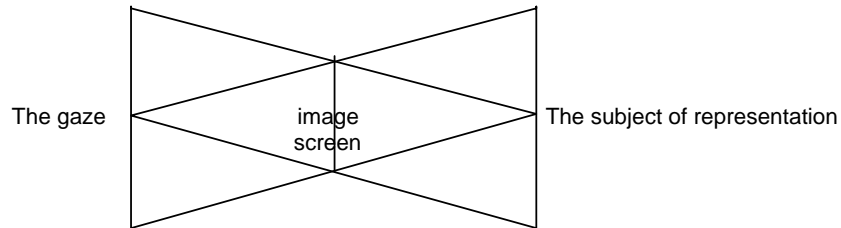
Mirzoeff notes that Lacan invented the term "*dompte-regard*", based on the verb

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<sup>21</sup>Derrida's analysis of the self-portrait also cites Freud's essay on the uncanny.

"*dompter*", to tame/to subdue; the term refers to "a situation in which the gaze is tamed by some object, such as a picture" (Mirzoeff, 2002: 128n1).

Visual representation is thus not only the image, but its superimposition on the screen:



Art is not only the manipulation of the image, capturing the object of representation within a perspectival gaze; but because the human subject, with access to the symbolic order, is a desiring subject, the screen becomes "the site of picture making and viewing" where the subject manipulates and moderates the gaze (Hal Foster, 1996: 140).

Such is aesthetic contemplation according to Lacan: some art may attempt a *trompe-l'oeil*, a tricking of the eye, but all art aspires to a *dompte-regard*, a taming of the gaze. (Hal Foster, 1996: 140)

Freud's analysis of drama as the identifying with the hero's quest can thus be explained as the taming of gaze. The horror that confronts the audience, should the hero fail to renounce his repressed desires (see p.27), is the horror of revealing the *objet a*, the lack that constitutes the subject's desire in the field of the Other. It is a glimpse of the *jouissance* that the subject cannot know.

The theory of the gaze, along with the theory of the unconscious and the role of language, thus offers me a dual method to explore the exchange relation between performer/audience. The theatre, particularly the physically oriented performance forms which are the focus of this thesis, involves both visibility and narrative. But – to restate my anxiety and discontent – does the subject necessarily come out of castration completely at ease with the symbolic order (see p.8)? Must all narratives confess the blindness (the castration) of the patriarchal order? Must all art tame the gaze? Foster argues that some contemporary work aims "not only to attack the image but to tear at the screen, or to suggest that it is already torn" (Hal Foster, 1996: 141).

The implication is that these artistic innovations are not merely the renewal of form, but a questioning of the very act of looking.

I have already mentioned that the motivation behind this questioning, this anxiety, is an ethical one. The perspectival gaze can give the illusion that the world can be captured as an image within the subject's knowledge. Heidegger states,

The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture. The word "picture" now means the structured image that is the creature of man's producing which represents and sets before. In such a producing, man contends for the position in which he can be that particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is. (cited in McKenzie, 2001: 157)

This humanism is described by Heidegger as a "moral-aesthetic anthropology" (cited in McKenzie, 2001: 157), in other words, the aesthetics of seeing gives rise to a moral order. The screen on which such an image is captured, however, can cover up the truly horrifying. Slavoj Žižek uses the theory of the gaze to explain the horror of Nazi Germany:

the *imaginary* screen of satisfactions, myths, and so on ... enable the subjects to maintain a distance towards the horrors they are involved in ... and, above all, the real of the perverse (sadistic) *jouissance* in what they were doing (torturing, killing, dismembering bodies...) (Žižek, cited in Kunkle, 2000)

The stability of subjectivity (having "successfully" gone through the Oedipal complex) is thus no guarantee for the subject's non-pathological social functioning. The social order can institute an image of the ideal citizen as the "measure" and "guideline" for right action, which is in fact an inability to confront repressed horror.<sup>22</sup>

It thus becomes an ethical imperative to explore and explode the pleasure of identification – the phallogentric search for Oneness (see p.26) – in theatrical exchange relations. As an example, I cite a story told by Julia Salverson regarding her theatre work in Canada. Salverson creates community (or "popular", as opposed to mainstream commercial) theatre from testimonies of people who experience violence. She recounts the story of her attendance at a Theater of the Oppressed

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<sup>22</sup>This idea of the *heimlich* (as opposed to the *unheimlich*, the uncanny) nation, which prescribes the image for its citizenry within a communal unity, is further explored in chapter 3.

workshop led by Augusto Boal, whose work often consists of games and exercises to encourage active contribution to the moment-to-moment creation of the drama, usually with the aim of bringing about political, social or psychological change. The people at the workshop, hailing from across Canada, have been through a day which has left everyone "tired, excited, disoriented, curious" (Salverson, 2001: 119). After Boal ended the day's session,

someone involved with the workshop asks us to form a circle and join hands. We have been doing what we're told all day, happily embarking on a succession of games and exercises. Glad for once not to be the teachers, the leaders, we are pleased to oblige. The organizer then asks us to repeat: "We are from near, we are from far, we are one. We are one." I open my mouth, start to repeat, and become immediately uncomfortable. Something inside me refuses this glib recitation of unity. I sense discomfort in the friend and colleague beside me. Later in the evening he asks me, "Isn't it strange? Here we are, a group of people who fight oppression every day. Myself, I have survived torture, imprisonment, exile from my country. And yet I couldn't bring myself to speak up, to say, 'No, excuse me, I don't wish to repeat this phrase that makes me so uneasy: We are one.'" (Salverson, 2001: 119)

The oneness that is aspired towards in this small theatrical act, seemingly positive, causes anxiety in Salverson and her colleague. The desire for oneness is constituted, firstly, by the verbal narrative that aims to create identification; and secondly, by body performance. The simple performance of joining hands in a circle seems to form a screen that does not sit easily with, for instance, Salverson's colleague's real world experiences of horror. Yet it seems to produce such a powerful contract of behaviour in this group of theatre practitioners that they find it hard to rebel. Salverson and her colleague, in effect, have to renounce their struggle, much like the hero submitting to what Freud considers the necessary conditions of theatre.

If exile can be understood as an ejection of the not-self from the (One/whole) nation, Salverson's colleague had strong motivation for feeling "uneasy" – anxious – about the forced identification. Adorno, with the scars of Nazi Germany fresh in his mind, pointed out the violence when (mental) concept is identified with phenomenon ("reality"): "Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme<sup>23</sup> of pure identity as death" (Eagleton, 1990: 43). For Adorno, if history can be universalized (made One), "it is not a tale of cumulative happiness but ... the narrative that leads from the slingshot to

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<sup>23</sup>Crudely defined: a basic principle of reasoning.

the megaton bomb" (Eagleton, 1990: 42). If there is a Oneness, Adorno argues, it "would teleologically be the absolute of suffering" (Adorno, cited in Eagleton, 1990: 42).

What I clumsily named "mass social trauma" (social, in order to distinguish the human agency of atrocities from natural disasters) is no less than the pervasive condition that affect thinking, seeing, speaking, and being. As for theatre,

It is no longer enough – if it ever was – to *assume* that theater is by its very nature about connection; now those of us who practice theater that engages with people's accounts of violent events must articulate the nature of that contact. (Salverson, 2001: 119)

Theatre practitioners repeatedly rehearse statements that praise the "liveness" of theatre; it is the quality that supposedly makes theatre indispensable even when faced with the onslaught of film, television and other entertainments and therapeutic channels that now occupy the major portion of the public's time and imagination. We rehearse phrases such as "sense of connection", "communal experience" and "immediacy" as articles of faith that legitimate our livelihood. But the traditional agreement of aesthetic experience, what Andrew Benjamin identifies as "a set of expectations about mimesis and representation ... no longer makes sense of what art (and the experience of art) may be" (cited in Kemp, 1996: 154). The important point to note is that, to insist on outdated modes of understanding (and producing) the experience of theatre is not naivety, nostalgia or a matter of taste, so much as a blindness to the dissolution of certainty (the transcendental subject/Being based on which hope can be believed in) that mass social trauma has introduced to living and meaning making. The pleasure of identification becomes ethically questionable, stirring anxieties and discontent. God's blessing and conferring of the name produces a blindness that screens out horror. The confession of the hero, his imploring gestures for forgiveness, reconciliation and Oneness rings hollow.

### **Dissensus and the role of the artist/writer**

With the overwhelming tide of traumatic social atrocities in the twentieth century

came the emphasis on the importance of space for dissent.<sup>24</sup> It is this space of dissensus that I search for in the theatre. But a proviso must be stated: there is a danger in treating consensus as inherently oppressive. The rejection of consensus can become a fetish for championing western individualism, the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous, unattached individual (van Heerden, 2002: 9); of art as unfettered from social, political and economic concerns. It should be added that this view of art as having a transcendental Being does not result only in effete notions of "beauty" that retreat from any engagement with the political and social. Another product of this ideology is the transgressive artist, who plays the role of the liberator by transgressing restrictive social norms – the pure negation of *droit*, the embodiment of pure *jouissance*. Anthony Julius traces the rise of the transgressive aesthetic in visual art from the paintings of Manet to its exhaustion in today's cultural order. A hint of the political ineffectiveness of transgression can be seen in the following anecdote:

The story is told of the postwar performance artist Tomislav Gotovac who would walk naked through Zagreb [in the former Yugoslavia]. His purpose was to offer himself as a metaphor to passers-by, similarly without cover before the totalitarian state, however layered in actual clothing they might be. Arrested and tried, he attempted an explanation: 'I am an artist, and my métier consists of stripping, and walking.' To which the judges responded: 'Yes, and our métier consists of gaoling you.' (Julius, 2002: 222).

Some theories also embrace this pure negation as the basis of political action. Eagleton critiques poststructuralists (who did much work on the regulatory function of language) for mistaking consensus or collectivity as always oppressive (Eagleton, 1990: 56):

Those who indiscriminately demonize such concepts as unity, identity, consensus, regulation have forgotten that there are, after all, different modalities of these things, which are not all equivalently repressive. (Eagleton, 1990: 57)

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<sup>24</sup>The rise of democratic forms of government in the twentieth century can be seen as an indication of either the value that is placed on the possibility of dissent, or as an increasing recognition by states of the heterogeneity and dissent that exists within their nations' boundaries. It is true that much can be found wanting in democratic governance: whether the *form* of democracy indeed allows true dissent, and the collusion of democracy with unbridled capitalism and the new imperialism of the Washington Consensus; these will be touched on in chapter 2. However, the twentieth century was unarguably characterized by the ends of many empires and totalitarian regimes, be they imperial (British empire), communist (USSR and its satellite states), fascist, militaristic and/or other totalitarian forms of government (the Third Reich of Germany, expansionist Japanese empire, African states such as Uganda, DRC and South Africa).

To insist on the absolute rejection of phallic jouissance, after all, besides being impossible, is but another kind of repression; Eagleton puts it aptly: "Pure difference ... is as blank and tedious as pure identity" (Eagleton, 1990: 56). (The implications of pure negation will be elaborated later in this chapter.)

In the following chapters I explore the complex dynamic between dissent and consensus through two theatre controversies: in chapter 2, I attempt to re-tell the narratives that surrounded the "victim art" controversy that arose from American choreographer Bill T. Jones's work, *Still/Here*, and the "review" of critic Arlene Croce that sparked a furore of public debate. In chapter 3, I re-tell the stories of controversial South African director Brett Bailey and some of the dissent that he had stirred through his theatre, which blends ritual with spectacle. Each of the controversies offers clues as to how the cultural order in question was destabilized and in trauma. Jones's art is intimately linked to the traumatic losses of life from the AIDS pandemic; Bailey's art is made from the wreckage of colonialism and apartheid. That these artists should have aroused controversy indicates that consensus about the truth of theatre and the role of art was at stake. Concluding my thesis, I re-examine the work of Marina Abramović, whose range of practices from performance art to ritual seems to re-trace my investigations into the above controversies. Emerging from the totalitarian regime in Yugoslavia, Abramović's performances are also located within the crisis of meaning-making. Yet her work also points to ways of negotiating heterogeneity; my reason for citing her work is to find out how one can construct ethical relations in performances out of a space of anxiety and discontent.

The point of the proviso (not to treat consensus as inherently oppressive) is that, while the loss of consensus opens the possibility of dissent, the role of the artist within the cultural order must also be questioned. There is a temptation for me to write about the controversies in order to deliver a judgment on whose aesthetic is ethical, whose is not. (For example, my predilection is to side with the transgressive artist's political project.) However, if my writing method is to attempt to be ethical as claimed, the writer's role must be brought into the investigation as well. What justifies my existence, my work, my being paid? I must ask about what/whose desires I satisfy in writing this thesis, just as I must ask the same about my performing on stage.



To answer these questions, I relate the story of Antjie Krog's struggle to write the story of the TRC. As the head of a radio team reporting on the TRC and as a literary writer, her anxiety is in trying to find the position from which she could write in the wake of gross human rights violations.

Krog traces the inheritance or lineage of her writing through her mother, citing an essay that she wrote when Hendrik Verwoerd was stabbed in Parliament, an essay "picturing the Afrikaner psyche" (Krog, 1999: 147). Krog's mother wrote that she was alone on the veld far from her house in the Orange Free State, when an aeroplane flew overhead possibly containing the coffin with Verwoerd's body. She wrote,

In this moment the life of the man I only saw and admired from afar, had touched my life ... It moved in my soul. And I was wondering what I should do? Should I go out on the streets and call upon people to consider what is happening to our country? Should I call on them with the only call that I know – that of concentration camps, tears and blood? ... And I prayed that my hand should fall off if I ever write something for my personal honour at the cost of my people and what has been negotiated for them through years of tears and blood; that I will always remember that to write in Afrikaans ... brings with it heavy responsibilities. (cited in Krog, 1999: 148)

While Krog's own coverage of the TRC led to this response:

No poetry should come forth from this. May my hand fall off if I write this.  
So I sit around. Naturally and unnaturally without words. Stunned by the knowledge of the price people have paid for their words. If I write this, I exploit and betray. If I don't, I die. (Krog, 1999: 74)

The paralysis of the writer (performer) is directly linked to the traumatic encounter with violence and loss. To write, to represent, becomes a betrayal that takes the sacrifice too lightly. But in Krog's writing one can also sense a conflict about the use of language itself: that words are not neutral tools but paid for by loss. Within the emerging post-Apartheid South Africa, Krog has to negotiate the lineage that paid for her own writing; "It has been stated openly that Afrikaans is the price that Afrikaners will have to pay for Apartheid" (Krog, 1999: 149). For which nation – which consensus – does she write?

Krog negotiates the conflicting authorities and responsibilities that act upon writing; coping with heterogeneity disrupts the natural consensus offered to the artist in a homogeneous society. Putting her dilemma in perspective, Krog includes a passage recounting a poetry festival off the coast of Senegal. She asked two Senegalese poets and a Berber poet what makes a good poet, after describing that the West considers good poetry as finding new ways to write old themes. A Senegalese poet replied that the position of a poet is accepted after scrutinizing the candidate's ancestry and ability. The apprentice poet then learns the nation's poetry with the chief poet. The poet thus keeps (preserves) the nation's poetry, and "your people's poetry is your people's lyrical soul, their history". For the Berber nomad, poetry remembers watering places; the survival of the tribe depends on the poet. The poetry must not reveal the positions of these crucial positions to other groups, or the poet will be cast out into the desert (Krog, 1999: 336). The construction of nationhood is enmeshed in art; to the extent that the nation is intact, consensus is provided for the artist to work. The nomadic poet's tradition is telling: the artist guards the boundary between his own people and others. To betray "us" results in ejection: not only is the poet's role as artist, but the poet's very life, is threatened.

Even though Krog hopes for a time when she can write for a reconciled nation: "I want this hand of mine to write it. For us all; all voices, all victims" (Krog, 1999: 422); she is aware that "it is difficult to make sense of our daily diet of contradictory codes" (Krog, 1999: 435). As a writer, she finds it difficult to write for preserving the nation's truth, in the manner of the Senegalese poet: "The word 'Truth' makes me uncomfortable" (Krog, 1999: 53). She is told by the radio technical assistant that her voice tightens up when she says the word; when she types it, the words comes up "as either *turth* or *trth*". She describes that when she writes:

neither truth nor reconciliation is part of my graphite when sitting in front of a blank page, rubber close at hand. Everything else fades away. ... Truth and reconciliation do not enter my anarchy. They choke on betrayal and rage, they fall off my refusal to be moral. I write the broken line. (Krog, 1999: 54)

For Krog the writer, language slips through the cracks of her anxieties over truth. She seems to realize that language is the law (*droit*) of a nation – a cultural order, and truth is the standard set by language (see p.7). Her anxiety about truth is her anxiety about her writing that was inherited from the Afrikaner cultural order, the exclusivity

of which is being put to test in the new South Africa.

The anxiety about belonging induces a desire to birth a new language, one that does not re-state the truth of her partial lineage; words take on motions, they are performative as if corporeal: "*To seize the surge of language by its soft, bare skull*" (Krog, 1999: 39). Perhaps, the desire is that if such an origin of language can be traced, her words (representation) will not betray the trauma that she must write.

Is this, then, the ethical role of the writer? To rescue writing from detached representation, to return writing to its corporeality? Before hastening to answer this, the relation between language and body needs further exploring; I do so by relating the story of Antonin Artaud's search for a language of the body.

### **The corporeality of writing and the longing for origin**

Artaud's notion of the "Theatre of Cruelty" is famous for his rejection of the banal literary tradition in French theatre. Through the immersion into the body, his theatre aimed to bring about total transformation, of the performer, the audience, and by extension the social order. Commonly his theatre is associated with painful, writhing or naked bodies, as the word "cruelty" seems to suggest. This image was propagated by theatre groups that subsequently claimed inspiration from Artaud, such as The Living Theatre.<sup>25</sup>

Derrida's reading of Artaud, however, points not to the destruction of language to return to a primitive state; Artaud's rage was against the devaluation of "true" language. Artaud wanted to birth words that are gestures, living hieroglyphs; the

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<sup>25</sup>For example, *Paradise Now* (1968) was conceived by American group The Living Theatre as a performance that is also "a revolutionary situation" against capitalist society orientated towards money and power. To make this possible, "the first step was Artaud's declaration that the texts had to be burned, that the theatre of intellect had to be abandoned, that the actor would have to find feeling through inner resources" (Tytell, 1997: 226). Sexual repression is the target in a scene called "the Rite of Universal Intercourse". "In a pile of practically naked figures on the stage floor, the actors making a low humming sound caress each other, undulating and embracing" (Tytell, 1997: 228). At Yale University, the actors in this scene "were joined by almost two hundred spectators, many of whom were partially or totally disrobed" (Tytell, 1997: 240).

word is body. His was a metaphysics of flesh:

The integrity of the flesh torn by all these differences must be restored in the theater. Thus the metaphysics of flesh which determines Being as life, and the mind as the body itself, as unseparated thought ... (Derrida, 1978: 179)

This language is not representation but "the autopresentation of pure visibility" (Derrida, 1978: 238) which is not a citation of a master-text (i.e. regulated by metanarrative, an overarching discourse that regulates the meanings of narratives).

But the wholeness of the origin of language is but a mythic dream of unity. Artaud knew that his language and his body, his words and his breaths, are separated even from birth; flesh is "purloined", words stolen for logical and discursive use (Derrida, 1978: 240). His origin is a void, the orifice of birth, which is the purloining of the body by the Other:

My body has been stolen from me by effraction. The Other, the Thief, the great Furtive One, has a proper name: God. His history has taken place. It has its own place. The place of effraction can be only the opening of an orifice. The orifice of birth, the orifice of defecation to which all other gaps refer, as if to their origin. "It is filled, / it is not filled, / there is a void, / a lack / a missing something / which is always taken by a parasite on flight" (Artaud: August 1947). (Derrida, 1978: 180)

The "Cruelty" thus refers not to its representation, depicting "sadism," "horror," "bloodshed," and "crucified enemies" (Derrida, 1978: 239). These are mere spectacles of horror.<sup>26</sup> The horror of violence and loss of life points to the horror that is revealed when God – the certainty that the Other promised – turns out to be a void, a mere signifier, the *objet a* that promises but does not satisfy.<sup>27</sup> Without the Christian promise of "the belated unification of life and fate or destiny" (Jameson, 2003: 708) – the promise of deferred desire by the patriarchal order that encouraged the subject to renunciation (see p.6) – there remains only the purloined body, the existential body of the present (rather than of a teleological destiny); a body "alienated from itself ... a 'zero-point' within a phenomenal world" (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996: 44).

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<sup>26</sup>The phrase "horror pornography" is used by Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler of the Handspring Puppet Company, co-creators of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (in Taylor, 1998: xvii).

<sup>27</sup>Lacan defines the *objet a* metonymically by the erotogenic rim, orifice, or cut on the body's surface; the gap in the body (metonymic of the lack in the unconscious) invites the filling of desire, which must necessarily return by returning or withdrawing. (see Grosz, 1990: 75-7)

Writing about trauma (apartheid and TRC, AIDS, totalitarian regimes) is thus to revisit the gap that is the subject; the suffering of the subject is a reminder of the body that is already stolen. The horror is in the mantle of the name (God; Other; the Name of the Father) from which language comes, a fantasy of "a place of wholeness of unity which will reflect its truth" (Rimmer, 1993: 204). But it is always already in a state of loss; writing comes from an "inspiration of loss and dispossession" (Derrida: 1978: 179). The identification with the hero turns out to be hollow, and the audience is no longer protected from suffering.

The writer Krog is similarly left exposed to the horror of her people (Afrikaners) and the horror of the name which she has inherited and which gave her writing, leaving her paralyzed and feeling the guilt of betrayal. As Krog stumbles over saying the word "truth", and misspelling it when typing, she is unconsciously being reminded of that thieving nature of language. The Freudian slips mark the surfacing of the repressed.

What, then, of the role of the writer, of an ethical method of writing? The trauma of violence and loss of life, and the existential crisis in response, does not have to lead to a classical or Christian resignation to destiny, or nihilism. Fredric Jameson writes: "What the innumerable holocausts of this period deconceal (to use an existential neologism) is not so much death and human finitude as rather the multiplicity of other people" (Jameson, 2003: 709). Socio-historically, the atrocities were followed by decolonization (and, I would also add, the mass displacement of population on a global scale), which "suddenly released an explosion of otherness unparalleled in human history" (Jameson, 2003: 709). The horror of the Other is the decentering of power, the dissensus that democracy brings.

So: if the relation between horror, theatre and ethics entails a refusal of the pleasure of identification and a suspicion of the screen (see p.32), then the link between horror, writing and ethics similarly entails a suspicion of the originary unity, the metaphysical and/or social-political Oneness that promises knowledge and certainty. The habit of truth must be mistrusted – even when that truth comes disguised as modern theories such as psychoanalysis.

Unfortunately, in the face of horror, simplistic assertions about the value of life and the condemnation of the immoral are often recycled by artists and writers, much like the liveness of theatre is often uncritically upheld as an article of faith. In the wake of trauma, artists and researchers may insist on the need for theatre to justify its existence by serving, variously, as a chronicler of history; as therapy for healing social wounds; as the champion of the masses through entertainment; as platforms for political debate; or as the paragon and preserver of beauty and human values. These discursive positions may be upheld as the self-evident truth of theatre, according to the desires of artists, arts funders, politicians and administrators. They become legitimating narratives for making, commissioning and funding art. But, regarding the trauma to which they respond, these discourses sound like defence mechanisms that ultimately fail to engage with real horror.

In contrast, if loss is the drive behind Krog's writing and its slippages, it is interesting to note her insistence that her words fall off her "refusal to be moral" (see p.36). For Krog, "[t]ruth and reconciliation do not enter [her] anarchy [of writing]". Writing is the movement of graphite over paper; it is the writing of the "broken line".

What Krog is pursuing in that moment corresponds with what Lyotard calls the "figure", which is the excess beyond "discourse". Language for the Cartesian subject is discourse, or conceptual representations of objects; words signify (gain meanings) by being located in opposition to one another within a textual framework (*langue*).<sup>28</sup> Lyotard points out that discourse relies on the suppression of the figural, such as the trace or line of the word that is not concept in itself (Readings, 1991: 19). The construction of this perspectival space (see p.27) is "the identification of being with meaning", which is "the definitive feature of logocentrism", where "all objects must be enclosed within a field of signification" (Readings, 1991: 19). In other words, the world must be known (or knowable) and meaningful to the subject through the mastery of language. If the subjectivity of an artist or writer is thus constituted, ethical action cannot proceed unless the truth is known and stated.

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<sup>28</sup>See Chapter 2 for a more elaborate explanation of the concept.

The figure is what resists such signification. Figure is not the opposite of discourse; "the figural opens discourse to a radical heterogeneity ... which cannot be rationalized or subsumed within the rule of representation"; and "the figural marks this resistance, the sense that we cannot 'say' everything about an object, that an object always in some sense remains 'other' to any discourse we may maintain about it" (Readings, 1991: 4). A claim to accurate representation, or a full understanding of what is represented (conceptually) is premised on the repression of figurality (Readings, 1991: 5).

Lyotard's idea of figurality thus opens up a corporeality of writing in a way that does not long for the purity of wholeness and origin (see p.38). The line, the corporeal is not inherently figural, "the pure negative of representation" (Readings, 1991: 20). The figural – the body, the phenomenological – is not "another kind of representation" in opposition to discourse:

the figural is other to representation ... The figural is that which, in representation, makes us aware that there is something which cannot be represented, an other to representation. (Readings, 1991: 20&22)

So, in Krog's account of her writing, the need to report the discourses of truth and reconciliation through the mass media is constantly in tension with her act of writing; the concepts falls through the crack of writing (graphite and paper). Her writing thus resists recycling already named notions of truth and ethics, but is constantly aware of the problematics in taking language as a transparent given.

To give attention to the figural in writing is a political act; for Lyotard, the figural space allows an imagined displacing of political space, "opening onto a space of social desires and possibilities that are as yet unimaginable within political representation"; the figural of writing "becomes a quasi-symptom of a 'political unconscious'" (Readings, 1991: 7).

It should be apparent that my usage of the words "ethical" and "political" is not clearly distinct. I cite Bill Readings in thinking through these terms. His book on Lyotard is subtitled "Art and Politics", but Lyotard's politics "may appear more like an ethics" (Readings, 1991: 37). In conventional uses of these words, "politics"

entails "a realm of knowledge, of strategy and goals" – a plan of action that proposes a social outcome based on knowledge; and "ethics" implies "a focus on individual conscience", again dependent on a knowledge of right and wrong (Readings, 1991: 37). In both cases, the subject acts according to determinate knowledge. However, Lyotard's ethics (or politics) is one which confronts "the question of judging how to act once one can no longer *know* in advance how to act" (Readings, 1991: 37). It is an ethics/politics that eschews the programmatic. Indeterminacy is the keyword to this ethics.

The determinate treatment of the figural in terms of body and subjectivity in much recent theatre studies, cultural studies, and theory, is partly what caused my discontent. Much of this literature only investigates bodies as discursive entities, as sites for social, political and cultural inscriptions, either because the non-discursive is seen as essentialist or is considered unknowable and therefore unable to be written about.<sup>29</sup> What seems problematic is that such analyses seem to insist on a conscious, intentional representation of the repressed. For example, postcolonial and feminist writers often seem to treat bodies in theatre performances as inscriptions of unequal power relations, so that contestations of image and representation dominate writings on/of the body. Politics/ethics becomes a determinate project to reinscribe a discourse (representations of race or gender relations) on the body that is more just. Lyotard's critique is that "repression does not simply take place *in* historical representation but that oppression begins in the modernist thought of history *as* representation" (Readings, 1991: 61). To write the body in terms of a more just representation of the repressed risks repressing the figural, the loss that always haunts.

In contrast, another part of my anxiety in writing is that the notion of "truth" hangs so dominantly over my head and body. This "truth" is the temptation to be the exact reverse of discourse: to believe in the truth of the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious without recognizing its phallogentricity; to believe that Artaud's mythical hieroglyphics is possible; to believe that pure desire, pure unconscious, pure

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<sup>29</sup>This is related to Lacan's own assertion that the feminine *jouissance* is ultimately unknowable, with implications for what the analytical relationship could and could not be. Some feminists disagree with this patriarchal relationship; the conclusion of the thesis explores some alternatives.



corporeality is the truth. To recall my interview at the award competition (see p.13): I tried to propose a dismantling of discourse in dance theatre by suggesting that no one single message can be offered to my audience; that the work can be an encounter of pure unconscious (what I called "memories"). My language, the words that I used to talk about my dance, assumed that my choreography allowed the bodies to escape discourse, and to perform a truth that originates in bodies.

But, if figurality haunts discourse, Lyotard reminds me, discourse also haunts figurality. "The unconscious risks ... becoming a counter-orthodoxy" (Readings, 1991: 45). Just as it is dangerous to characterize all consensus as oppressive (see p.33), the yearning for corporeal wholeness is futile and yields an ethics that is as determinate as an ethics based on programmatic knowledge. To champion the body and its pure materiality risks treating the body as an authentic totality; it is to posit the body as a determinate origin, where existential anxieties can be cured by being pure Other.

### **Towards an ethical writing**

How can the writing of my thesis pay attention to dissensus, to the heterogeneity of writing? In response to the anxiety of writing and making art in the wake of trauma (both social/historical and metaphysical), my writing methodology takes its cue from Lyotard's ethics of indeterminacy. The point of examining the theatre controversies in chapters 2 and 3 is not to reveal the hidden truth based on which a judgment can be pronounced as to who is right or wrong. This thesis does not aim to offer convincing interpretations of theatre works to substantiate my positing of the "truth" of body performance. I try not to treat theorists as authoritative confessors of truth, refusing to use psychoanalysis or deconstruction as "criteriological tool" by which other discourses are evaluated (Grosz, 1990: 157). In citing source material on the artists, I try not to "just 'read what's there' ... [but] to *do* something" to the text (Readings, 1991: 51). I use the notions of "story" (see p.12) and "re-telling" (see p.34) to indicate my attempt to put the texts to work, so as to explore the cultural order that regulate the individual artist/critic's writing. I do not treat this thesis as an

attempt to render my words as transparent a representation of the truth as my skill allows, just as I do not treat my choreography as a way of communicating my authoritative intention to the audience through the clarity of the dancers' technique. The ethical can be explored only when considered in context of how exchange relations are regulated by the cultural order, and significantly, what slippages of heterogeneity can be found in these societies.

I hope that the first step towards ethical writing is already made, by writing this thesis text upon my anxiety, daring the reader not to treat loss and discontent as pathologies confined to the individual. Also, the linear structure of logic gives way to fractal pathways; questions raised in one section of text may be picked up a few paragraphs later, a few pages later, or in a later chapter. Thoughts occur and reoccur in this text as if motifs in a choreographic work, snatches of movement memories which are held in non-climactic tension, best read as a palimpsest – a text that lends itself to be read, re-read, re-told, re-thought.<sup>30</sup> I have mentioned "wandering" (see p.1), as a pun on "wondering", connoting the curiosity of the thinking process that often resists regulation. A similar method is found in Lyotard, describing a strategy of thinking and writing that he calls "drifting". Despairing of how to counter the utter certainty about knowledge and history displayed by Marxist orthodoxy, Lyotard uses the analogy of a swimmer drifting with the ocean current, so as not to set up a "parity" with the Marxist metanarrative, but to think heterogeneously to it (Lyotard, 1988: 54). And so I have tried not to set up a determinate landscape (geographical and/or discursive) on which to draw my view of the body; I try to allow my writing to drift along with the series of narratives that I relate, like a travelogue, with only my sense of anxiety and loss showing me the next little distance ahead.

The reader may find that this text challenges his/her patience; even a change of reading habits may be needed. But the sense of loss haunts my writing, and I am constantly aware that my words may easily silence and violate the heterogeneity that trauma presents to me. Through this wandering text, I hope that I have not enforced a consensus on the theories and practitioners that I cite. My writing must try to narrate

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<sup>30</sup>Lacan said of his seminar: "What's nice about what I tell you ... is that it's always the same thing. Not that I repeat myself, that's not the point. It's that what I said before takes on meaning afterward" (Lacan, 1998: 36). It makes sense of the "re-telling" strategy I outline above.

*after* their stories, not *about* them; simply to link my words onto theirs, rather than attempt to impose my metanarrative over their stories:

This is what Lyotard refers to in *The Postmodern Condition* as the 'horizon of dissensus', in which consensus is never reached but always displaced by a new paralogical narrative, which does not aim at installing a new consensus but evoking a further paralogical move – its own displacement. (Readings, 1991: 68-9)

It may be a scandalous thing to do, to treat academic writing as stories, even personal stories, and not apologize for its "contamination" by anecdotes, bias of the storytellers, and affects. But it is ethical, not in the sense of compliance with an objective set of guidelines, constituting a genre of writing that determines truthfulness. It is ethical, for Lyotard, in a sense comparable to the way aesthetic judgment is made – indeterminate, without recourse to a metanarrative. I hope that by the end of the thesis, the reader will sense that this is not as scandalous as it may appear, and in fact quite fitting for an artistic discipline, that there is a different process of legitimation at work. It is a process that the academy needs to be aware of, in order not to silence the specificity of the discipline, and its heterogeneity to other academic disciplines.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, it seems the only ethics possible for a speaking being torn between his unknown *jouissance* and his subjectivity as a speaking being. Suffering from performance anxieties,<sup>32</sup> it is tempting to renounce uncertainty and acquiesce to the desires that structure the speaking being; somewhat like a dancer who resorts to his/her dazzling technique in longing for the calls of "encore" from the audience. My thesis could be but a (phallic) signifier in exchange for academic position and recognition. The awarding of a degree, after all, can be a metonym for the desires of wealth, power and status. What about the examiner's desire for rigorous language, to be convinced that I "know my stuff"? My desire to be accepted in the academy, not to waste the scholarship invested in the writing, and my desire for a better paying job? The University's desire for good research outputs, increased funding and reputation? The desires of policy-makers to produce knowledge about Africa, for

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<sup>31</sup>The writers of *Corporealities* assert that the contamination of academic writing by introducing the body – "corpo-realiz[ing] writing" – would "challenge [and] profoundly ... alter the discipline – the human sciences – such as they are not disposed to incorporate it" (Susan Leigh Foster, 1996: xv).

<sup>32</sup>The pun is intentional, relating Lacan's work on sexual relations to my explorations on theatrical relations.

nation-building, for the African Renaissance?

It would probably be far easier to write out of these desires, but the *objet a* of desire is not a graspable object. The writing will "keep bumping into an empty space, the area excluded by language" (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 184) – a sense of loss that haunts all my effort to write, speak, perform, and so inducing anxiety, spurring me to rise again and again – encore. But my performance anxiety could also be an invitation to exploit the gap in the way subjectivity is constituted. I wonder if it is possible to wander towards a time and place where my theatre performances elicit calls of "encore" from an audience who are nevertheless not unaware of the lack that constitutes their enjoyment.

Travelling towards such a horizon is not like the hero's quest. There is no renunciation, no blessing to be expected. Each artist travels through the mire of anxiety in order to establish the possibility for making work. It is not an accomplishment, only a precondition. Krog's story is, for example, strictly her own travelling towards finding a position from which she can write, which is a new consensus in a reconciled South Africa: "I want this hand of mine to write it. For us all; all voices, all victims" (Krog, 1999: 422). At the end, her writing is the imploring of a confessor (see p.17): "forgive me / forgive me / forgive me" (Krog, 1999: 423). Hers is not my journey, I cannot identify with it and thus lighten my anxiety through catharsis; her exit from anxiety is not the answer for my discontent, is not my cure. Similarly, the reader cannot expect to take something determinate away from this thesis, like a perspectival drawing that captures my knowledge, my view of the world which can then be compared to other (self-)portraits. I am not writing this thesis to fulfil the desire for a "model" of knowledge which can then serve as a determinate hallmark for truth or falsity. If I wrote as a confessor of faith (in art, in humanity), the reader would not know what is not already known, and I would be doing a disservice to the reader. However, the re-telling of Krog's story does allow me to embark on my own; and so my hope is that the reader, being next in the chain of re-tellings, can set off on his/her own wandering.

## Chapter 2

### **(Refusing to) Look at Trauma: Visibility and the noisy politics of representation**

*Bill T. Jones's Still/Here and the "victim art" controversy*

*"Sometimes when I step onstage, ... I carry in front of me an invisible phallus. ...  
It is my virility, my right to be, and the assurance that I will always be."  
- Bill T. Jones, cited in Morris (2001: 259)*

This chapter examines the politics that strives to make suffering visible, to let victims have a voice, and to represent the silenced. Discursive binaries of public/private, dead/living, and invisible/visible underlie the politics of AIDS and sexuality. These discourses impact on the reception of Jones's choreography, despite his use of modernist artistic processes in search of a bodily presence that aims to collapse the binary of representation (text) and its subject (being). The theory of the gaze shows this politics to be a phallogocentric discourse; and narrative analysis traces the metanarrative that results in the commodification of oppositional identities, so that spectators participate in the politics as consumers. An ethical artistic response thus needs to shift its focus to the subjectivity of the spectator.

### **Coming out: public visibility as liberation**

Whatever anxieties there may be about representing trauma, images and narratives of suffering are daily disseminated in public. From war journalism to television talk shows, private experiences of trauma are represented publicly as a matter of routine, ranging from the most horrifying to the trivial. The blurring between public and private is a distinctive feature of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): Taylor notes how "stories of personal grief, loss, triumph and violation now stand as an account of South Africa's recent past", marking a shift from the eclipse of personal suffering under the "larger project of mass liberation" (Taylor, 1998: ii).

The role of disseminating private images and stories of trauma is not only played by the mass media; art has also been widely used to this end. Because this chapter touches on the intersection between sexuality/AIDS and art, I cite the AIDS Memorial Quilt as an example. Described as "the largest ongoing community arts project in the world" ([www.aidsquilt.org](http://www.aidsquilt.org)), the Quilt makes its intervention by making visible the names of individuals who have died of the AIDS pandemic. AIDS, more than the wars and genocides of the twentieth century as a social trauma on a massive scale, is perhaps the one that straddles most precariously between the private and the public. Because sex is in the majority of cases the immediate cause, AIDS makes

what is usually hidden from view available for public discourse, along with expressions of opinions (often prejudicial) about sexuality, race and class: what is commonly called the "stigma" attached to AIDS. The AIDS Memorial Quilt attempts to steer this intersection of public/private discourses to counteract stigmas, by making visible private desires, loves, and griefs of individuals affected by AIDS, both the deceased and the bereaved.

The Quilt has its beginning in gay rights activism in San Francisco, USA. Since the 1978 assassinations of prominent gay public figures, Cleve Jones had been organizing annual commemoration candlelight marches. The following is from the Quilt's official history:

While planning the 1985 march, [Cleve Jones] learned that over 1,000 San Franciscans had been lost to AIDS. He asked each of his fellow marchers to write on placards the names of friends and loved ones who had died of AIDS. At the end of the march, Jones and others stood on ladders taping these placards to the walls of the San Francisco Federal Building. The wall of names looked like a patchwork quilt. ([www.aidsquilt.org](http://www.aidsquilt.org))

This inspired the idea of quilt panels, and starting from 1987 the Quilt began touring across the US for display; there are now many affiliated AIDS Quilt organizations across the globe, and since 1996 the Quilt in its entirety has grown too large for a single display. Each quilt panel is of set dimensions, created by people (usually friends/family) who wish to commemorate an individual who passed away from AIDS; panels are then sent to the organizers to be sewn together. Private objects such as photographs and clothing may be sewn onto the quilt. Besides the set dimensions, there is basically no limit to what can be included within a quilt panel. So the Quilt is unlike other public memorials, such as war memorials or museums, which are usually commissioned by a public institution and created by selected individuals through a once-off construction process. The Quilt is an ever-expanding representation of individual expressions of a wish to remember individuals who are/have been part of this extensive social trauma. It has also become customary at each display of the Quilt for the commemorated names to be read over public announcement by celebrities, politicians, families, lovers and friends ([www.aidsquilt.org](http://www.aidsquilt.org)).

The Quilt thus came into being explicitly within the context of remembering. A

slogan on [www.aidsquilt.org](http://www.aidsquilt.org) reads: "Remember. Understand. Share the lessons. Act". Memory serves as the basis for knowledge ("understanding"); once this knowledge becomes public ("share the lessons"), action can be taken to intervene in the course of the pandemic. In other words, while the Quilt offers a space for emotional responses to suffering (such as sympathy, grief, and so on), such personal memories and emotions are represented publicly, for the explicit purpose of intervening in social life. (It is worth recalling that the original impulse for the Quilt was located in a public march.) It is a politics whose efficacy is based on the representation of the private in the public.

Another word that describes this (epistemological) basis for political action is "outing", also with origins in gay culture. To "come out (of the closet)" means declaring one's (homo)sexual orientation; what is privately known is now declared in public. To "out" someone is the involuntary version of the same thing. The implication is that there exists a truth of the self: repressed desires that are first acknowledged privately and then publicly. Making this knowledge public affects one's social relations: although it can be dangerous (gay bashing, ostracization, economic/job discrimination), usually it promises liberation (the idea that coming out enables you to be authentically yourself). This trajectory of coming out seems to have become a model for contemporary cultural discourses and struggles for empowerment. In AIDS activism as in gay activism, "closets" are regarded as detrimental to personal well being. In the late 1980s, activist group ACT-UP in New York issued a poster with the slogan, "Silence=Death" on a pink triangle (symbol of the gay community). The political action encouraged is clear: bring both "shameful" secrets (being gay and/or being HIV+) out into the open, to be seen, heard, talked about; get yourself onto the public agenda so you are not ignored. Similar strategies of visible representation are found in South Africa: public figures are encouraged to wear the red ribbon symbolizing the AIDS pandemic; there have been calls for members of parliament to have public HIV tests; publicity campaigns encourage open discourse about sexuality and AIDS.

The need for a politics of representation and visibility is understandable. AIDS was first linked with homosexuality in the US (it was first called GRID<sup>1</sup>: Gay-Related Immune Deficiency Syndrome), and the American government's reaction in the early

1980s was a virtual non-response, a concrete manifestation of the "silencing" of marginal groups. The need for representation was thus urgent, on which was hinged the lives of HIV+ people: at stake were funding and support structures for medical and social intervention to slow down and to cope with the tide of death. In the face of this official silence and discursively cordoning off of AIDS as a problem of the gay ghetto, making personal trauma visible seemed a sensible politics: AIDS victims are humans too; gay people also love, grieve, and mourn. At least part of the appeal of projects such as the AIDS Memorial Quilt is the recognition of the private domain as a universal, the provocation for policy-makers and society in general to see that "we are all humans, after all". A quilt, a domestic object associated with personal intimacy, is a concrete manifestation of this universal appeal; the act of crying and the need to commemorate also attempts to cement a collectivity of humans as emotional beings.

Understanding and questioning the politics of representation and visibility is a preparation for re-examining Bill T. Jones's theatre performances in this chapter, particularly the choreographic work *Still/Here* (1994) and the "victim art" debate that surrounded it. One of the basic questions that can be asked of this politics is this: why the need to traverse across the public/private boundary? And: how did this boundary come about?

We seem to have a notion that the separation of public and private spheres is self-evident. Sex belongs in the private realm, demarcated discursively, geographically and temporally (Don't tell everyone about your sex life. Get a room to have sex. Sex happens at night/mornings/on weekends). So embedded in the social order is this separation that to upset it, as the controversial artists to be examined have done, is to invite vehement attack. Queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, in a provocatively titled paper "Sex in Public", account for the vehemence of contestation by tracing the construction of the public/private boundary. The ostensible privacy of the sex act is in fact enmeshed in a "constellation of practices" that influence social organization; the boundary of sexual practice impacts on such seemingly non-sexual practices as

paying taxes, being disgusted, philandering, bequeathing, celebrating a holiday, investing for the future, teaching, disposing of a corpse, carrying wallet photos,



buying economy size, being nepotistic, running for president, divorcing, or owning anything "His" and "Hers". (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 359-360)

There are everywhere unspoken habits or expectations in (public and private) living that are regulated according to sexual norm. More than explicit prejudice against alternative sexualities, it is the nexus of social institutions, structures of knowledge and social practice that produces "a sense of rightness" about heterosexual culture. Often *unconscious*, this sense of rightness feels as if it is "hard-wired into personhood", as if it is the foundation of subjectivity (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 359).

Such "heteronormativity" discursively and institutionally produces the separation between the private sphere for the sexual person, and the public sphere for the political/economic person. Sex is constructed as intimacy within the context of home-based familial reproduction, a realm which can serve as "a vision of the good life", a fantasy promising a "simple personhood" that is separated from the chaos of political discourse and economic inequalities (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 358-9). The public sphere is thus organized around a heterosexual privilege, bracketed off as private and sexual: hence "[t]here is nothing more public than privacy" (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 355).

To bring the private, particularly the sexual, into public discourse is thus to challenge heteronormative privileges: this is the potential efficacy of the politics of representation and visibility. Even in seemingly trivial exercises in visibility such as television talk shows, "people testify to their failure to sustain or be sustained by institutions of privacy" (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 360). The promise of the normal, good life falls apart; images and narratives of non-normative social relations can be publicized and disseminated.

However, these sites of visibility are also where the non-normative can be brought to trial: "punitive responses ... tend to emerge when people seem not to suffer enough for their transgressions and failures"; "[e]very day, even the talk-show hosts are newly astonished to find that people who are committed to hetero intimacy are nevertheless unhappy" (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 360). Public visibility does not equate social change; falling short of the normality usually gets blamed on the individual's pathology ("what a slag, she can't even keep faithful to her husband") or

the stereotype of a class ("these trailer trash are all slags"). "On these shows no one ever blames the ideology and institutions of heterosexuality" (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 360). In other words, the Freudian hero's quest in the myth of heteronormative intimacy continues; the Lacanian screen remains intact, taming the trauma of the gaze – the trauma of confronting the idea that it is impossible to maintain a heteronormative subjectivity.<sup>1</sup>

Berlant and Warner enact a Foucauldian analysis of heteronormativity, aiming to intervene by radically re-constructing social relations.<sup>2</sup> My focus is far narrower: to examine the act of representation in theatre, and the exchange relations thus engendered (pun intended). How efficacious is the politics of visibility?

### **The importance of being (re)present(ed)**

The public for art does not stay constant. As cultural conditions shift, the conditions under which the exchange relations take place, and the kinds of responses expected or possible to a piece of art, also shift.

Dance writer Roger Copeland cites what Jean-Paul Sartre refers to as

the crisis of the imaginary, the ways in which fact has put fiction on the defensive in a century of unprecedented horror (and of unprecedented means of documenting those horrors). (Copeland, 1995: 16)

Copeland draws attention to art's conditions of reception: the prevalence of horror changes how the audience receives a piece of art (a literary fiction, an image, a performance). The idea of "art" also shifts: its relation to fact and fiction is conditioned by the perception of pervasive horror. To respond to an image of horror in a past century would have been different to the way one would respond in the late twentieth century and today. Could the response be pity, disdain, indifference? Of

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<sup>1</sup>For explication of the "hero's quest" and the "screen", see chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup>The authors propose "a world-making project", to create "queer counter-publics" that resist heteronormativity (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 361). Such a project, echoing Habermas's theory of publics, may entail intervening in urban zoning, legislations, club cultures, sexual practices, as well as literary and artistic practices. The merit or otherwise of such a project is beyond the scope of my study.

images that depict war and its victims, Susan Sontag writes:

It used to be thought, when candid images were not common, that showing something that needed to be seen, bringing a painful reality closer, was bound to goad viewers to feel more. (Sontag, 2003: 79)

Goya's famous series of etchings, *Los Desastres de la Guerra* (*The Disasters of War*), made between 1810 and 1820, were premised on such sensitivity of the viewer. The "ghoulish cruelty" depicted "are meant to awaken, shock, wound the viewer" (Sontag, 2003: 44). The etchings are accompanied by captions, such as "One can't look", "Barbarians", "What madness!", "This is too much!", and "Why?" Sontag characterizes these captions as the artist's voice which "badgers the viewer: can you bear to look at this?" (Sontag, 2003: 45). The responsiveness – the respons(e)-ability – of the viewer is taken for granted, utilized, and encouraged. The ethical basis of imaging horror is for the viewer to see and respond with feeling.

One is tempted to seek recourse in an essentialist, humanist framework in which to understand, and to prescribe, a reaction of pity and sorrow in response to horror: it is human to respond in this way; if you don't feel, you're inhumane. However, Sontag traces the politics of this seemingly universally "human" way of responding. She notes that published journalistic photographs usually show "grievously injured bodies" in wars "from Asia or Africa" (Sontag, 2003: 72). She traces the precedents of the journalistic custom in "ethnological exhibitions" which displays the "exotic – that is, colonized – human beings" (Sontag, 2003: 72). Such seeing imposes the discursive othering of the exotic on the viewer; "the other ... is regarded only as someone to be seen, not someone (like us) who also sees" (Sontag, 2003: 72).

The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the far-away sufferers – seen close-up on the television screen – and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims *our innocence as well as our impotence*. (Sontag, 2003: 102, emphasis added)

The unequal power relations of seeing that Sontag describes here are not necessarily a callousness, or even perverse satisfaction, towards the suffering of others. The viewer's sincerity, or even a passionate caring, is perhaps not so much questioned as rendered irrelevant by the inability of the image to implicate "our" responsibility, our

participation, in the same world as those who are suffering. To invoke Lacanian theory: "we" see the image of horror via the mediation of the screen, which leaves us in an external viewing position. The object of horror is captured within our subjective (perspectival) look; it avails to us a "meta" level where we can see and know the world, and thus control it. Our subject position is not threatened; the horror is never really our direct concern, however much sympathy we may feel.

This discursive divide between the viewer and the object of viewing (horror) is not confined to the politics of colonialism and its legacy; in the case of the AIDS pandemic, where "one of us" crosses the divide between life and death, the memorial image becomes a representation of the loss, which is also a loss of "me" (the lover, family member or friend takes away a part of my emotional bond by dying). Commemoration enables me to see the image of the deceased, represented as lost; but in the seeing I am confirmed to be alive. The presence of the dead through representation is a way to restore the equilibrium of the subject, to affirm the boundary between life and death.

Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead. So the belief that remembering is an ethical act is deep in our natures as humans ... Heartlessness and amnesia seem to go together. (Sontag, 2003: 115)

Forgetting – the failure to represent the loss – seems an inhumane thing to do, because what is forgotten is the division between life and death, the discursive division which makes life possible. Memory makes passing away understandable. It becomes a way to keep the living "us" as external viewers of death, rather than participants in it, which would be an unbearable horror.

This complex exchange between the seeing subject, the mediating screen and the horror of the gaze, however, is seldom the basis for the politics of representation and its analysis. Particularly in the Anglophone academy, the kind of analysis that has gained prominence and that is identified as having a political relevance or commitment, is one that aims to "give voice to the oppressed" (Readings, 1991: 61). Political intervention is mainly located in contesting the production and dissemination of images of marginalized groups. This "images of" analysis intervenes in how social groupings such as women, black people, ethnic minorities, lesbians and gay men, the disabled and the aged are represented (Dyer, 2002: 1). Its

political efficacy is derived from the idea that, to create and disseminate "positive" or "negative" images of a certain grouping affects their social standing, and hence quality of life.

There are several ways in which representation is assumed to affect the lives of people. Firstly, how a group is represented indicates how or if they are "spoken for and on behalf of" (Dyer, 2002: 1). Representation is linked to their subjecthood, their status as speaking beings within a social order. An obvious political example is the ability (or prohibition) to present a member of parliament to voice the concerns of that particular group. Secondly, representation affects "how they see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens" (Dyer, 2002: 1). It concerns how and if a group has the (discursive and institutional) power to produce images with which they can identify and which will satisfy their sense of rightful subjecthood within the social order.

Note that these two notions of representation deal with subjectivity in terms of speaking and seeing. This echoes the dual method of analysis that I explore in chapter 1, relating the theory of the gaze and the theory of the role of language in the unconscious. The anxiety and discontent over both image and language are related to the dilemma of presence.

Thirdly,

Equal re-presentation, representativeness, representing have to do also with how others see members of a group and their place and rights, others who have the power to affect that place and those rights. (Dyer, 2002: 1)

In other words, other subjectivities, particularly those who hold discursive and institutional power, are compelled to acknowledge and change the narrative frames and institutional structures and practices – in short, the cultural order – to allow these marginalized voices to be heard/images to be seen. For example, Ann Cooper Albright describes this process in theatrical dance: audience responses are the focus of political challenge and change in

dances that foreground issues of social, political, and sexual difference in ways that make the spectator aware of the performer's cultural identity as well as his

or her own cultural positioning. (Albright, 1997: xxii)

The assumption here is that viewing subjects will change by being asked to identify with images of difference presented on stage.

This politics has gained currency in dance studies and other arts disciplines. The academy is moving away from the traditional art-historical approach emphasizing aesthetic coherence, towards locating dance within the discursive field that is culture (or, within culture that is seen as a discursive field). As dance scholars discover that this theory proves productive in linking dancing to other cultural practices, and as they vie for acceptance in the university,<sup>3</sup> the turn towards discursivity in dance becomes prominent: the textual and the visual merge. Janet Adshead-Lansdale embraces a textual model of dance for its ability to destabilize the meaning-making processes of dance, allowing multiple interpretations (Adshead-Lansdale, 1999: xiii-iv). Albright further locates her project within a political urgency:

This book grew out of a conviction that contemporary dance could shed light on the current debates about how cultural identities are negotiated and embodied. The project has acquired an urgency over the past few years as I see more and more dancing bodies becoming *invisible* and arts funding increasingly becoming a political minefield. My hope is that ... [this book] will also expose both scholars and dancers to some of the ways in which dance can be a central, indeed, a crucial *discourse*. (Albright, 1997: xiii, emphases added)

The artistic and the political thus become bound together within representation.

It should be apparent that the premise for this politics is the perspectival gaze: the position of looking equals accession to power, the affirmation of the looking/speaking (and hence knowing) subject. The link between the textual and the visual as theoretical basis also defines the gaze: Lyotard describes the perspectival gaze as the "'textualization' of the visual" (Readings, 1991: 25). The audience's looking is thus the very possibility of the politics of representation. On this gaze depends the political efficacy of empowering the silenced, marginalized, forgotten. This is the main point about the politics of representation and visibility that prepares

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<sup>3</sup>Dance is ephemeral to a greater extent than other theatrical performance, such as drama, which usually has a script as a textual foundation. This had been seen as a weakness in the discipline, which explained "both the lack of serious scholarship, and the lack of funding for its practice" (Adshead-Lansdale, 1999: xii). This link between the politics of representation, which emphasizes giving voice to the silent, and the under-representation of dance in the academy, is perhaps a circumstantial explanation for the theory's currency in dance studies.

my re-examining of the "victim art" debate.

### ***Still/Here*: dance as politics**

Visibility is a way to recoup the horror of trauma, to turn a negative into a positive.

Frank Rich alludes to this politics regarding artistic practices:

To the extent that AIDS is responsible for yanking death out of the American closet, history may show that the epidemic has changed our culture in much the way that the cataclysmic carnage of World War I transformed English literature. (Rich, 1995; in *Dance Connection*)

The dance of Bill T. Jones is usually credited with making marginalized identities visible, to "yank" them "out of the closet", so to speak. The "truth" of his personal realities is always part of his dances:

in a 1994 cover story Time magazine identified [Jones] as a gay, black, HIV-positive choreographer. Newsweek, the New York Times Magazine, and the New Yorker described Jones similarly, and it is probably fair to say that every feature article written about him today speaks of him in these terms. (Morris, 2001: 243)

Jones himself encourages this discourse: identity is "a pivotal idea in everything I do" (Jones, cited in Morris, 2001: 243). His work exhibits "a soul-searching, missionary zeal ... with a multifarious political agenda" (Bremser, 1999: 123). The dances that brought him initial fame were solos that included autobiographical material, and duets with his long-time lover Arnie Zane. Jones does not dance in *Still/Here* (1994), which was choreographed on his company, but the same logic of "coming out" is at work: it is a work about living through terminal illnesses, including AIDS.

So why did it draw such ferocious debate? Frank Rich's comment, cited above, was written for the New York Times, in defence of Jones and to explain his choreographic practice. The defence was occasioned by an article in the New Yorker, written by a leading dance critic Arlene Croce, who refused to see *Still/Here* and yet wrote a piece attacking Jones and his work. Croce's "Discussing the Undiscussable"

(1994)<sup>4</sup> instigated a public furor. Commentators wrote to the press both supporting and attacking her article, and subsequently the debate was furthered in academic writings.

In the following section I will first attempt a description of the work *Still/Here*, and then outline Croce's attack on Jones. At first sight the debate can be judged quite simply: Croce obviously felt threatened by images of the sick and dying, and wanted to maintain the stronghold of white and able-bodied representations and silence black, gay and HIV-positive subjectivities. The ethical judgment can then be easily made: Croce is obviously in the wrong. But can the debate be reduced to Croce's conservative politics versus the liberation movements? The debate indicates that the political efficacy of visibility is open to questions that need exploring.

*Still/Here* is a modern theatrical dance work that developed out of the Survival Project in eleven American cities, consisting of workshops held by Jones with people coping with life-threatening illnesses (Bremser, 1999: 125). The words and movements of the participants became sources for choreography, and video interviews of participants were edited and projected on stage, mainly as "talking heads" (Siegel, 1996: 61). The work, performed by his dance company, consists of two acts, *Still* and *Here*. *Still* is more meditative, reflecting on the process of coming to terms with the knowledge of having a terminal illness, and is performed to a chanting vocal score by gospel/folk singer Odetta. The tone tends towards being "ordered, contained" (Parry, 1995: 22). *Here* is more dynamic, focusing on taking action to live, to defy death; the survivors are thus said to be "still here". The musical score by Vernon Reid is of "aggressively strummed guitar", with recorded voices of workshop participants sampled on tape and edited to the musical rhythm. Compared to the more posed and elegant, almost sculptural group work in the first act, here the dancers "leap and twirl, plunging in headlong dives" (Parry, 1995: 22). Critic Marcia Siegel describes the overall tone of the work as "far from ... gloomy or unspeakable, evok[ing] a sort of '70s positivism, an almost poignant faith that supportive friends and self-awareness can help even those who are imperilled to live bravely" (Siegel, 1996: 61).

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<sup>4</sup>Henceforth all citations of Croce shall refer to this article.



The worth of this work is thus hard to miss: it is an act of memorial for those who died and an affirmation of those still "here". A web site dedicated to *Still/Here* reflects on the work's significance:

The difficult truth is that the majority of Survivor Workshop Participants, both young and old, have died. These images of will, tenacity, beauty and Grace [sic] are most precious because they are *Still/Here*. (PBS.org)

The work thus gives presence to those who have crossed the divide between life and death; it makes visible and celebrates the struggle to live.

It seems strange that such a work would cause a ferocious debate which saw accusations of conservatism and silencing of minorities from the one side, and political coercion and "intellectual swindle" from the other (Kramer, 1995, in *Dance Connection*). No doubt these are sincere responses to the work (except for Croce, who did not see it); but in this context they become "[t]he oddest of affective tendencies" (Massumi, cited in Žižek, 2004: 294). (I will return to this sense of strangeness later by locating it in context of liberal-democratic capitalism. For now I will stay with expounding on the political and artistic significance of the politics of representation.)

The discomfort shown in Croce's attack and the subsequent counter-attacks can perhaps be traced back to the degree to which AIDS was still a contentious, even taboo topic, in American culture. The stigma attached to the subject was perhaps reflected in the intensity of affect in the debate. But AIDS is only one of several terminal illnesses mentioned in *Still/Here*; it is more foregrounded because Jones's works have been vocal and visible representations of his identities as a gay, black, HIV-positive male. (He is "vocal and visible" in a literal sense, since in his early solos he talked and sang as he danced.) By re-tracing the development of Jones's dance/politics, perhaps the source of this discomfort and the ferocity of responses can be found.

Jones reached college in 1970, a year after the Stonewall rebellion which officially heralded the gay rights movement, and merely two years after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. The '70s also saw the rise of work based on the maxim, "the personal is the political", with conscientization groups bringing the work of feminism

into private domains. Jones's early work therefore took place in context of a time when political changes, particularly change in the nature of political discourse as belonging to the public sphere, were prevalent. His dances told stories that were "deeply personal, dealing primarily with his family history and with dreams" (Morris, 2001: 248).

But most remarkably his early work dealt with how these private stories were to be accessed by the audience. Siegel offers her recollection of the early Jones:

he'd brazenly display his gorgeous body, do some outrageous turn from a minstrel show with a seductive smile on his face, then, while we were still enjoying it, snarl some retaliatory joke or whisper a humiliating experience he remembered. He could sing with a velvet voice, he could dance, he could do acrobatics that looked like love scenes with his white lover-partner Arnie Zane, he could pull one-liners out of the day's news or quote from a book. You didn't know if he was making it up or spilling his guts. (Siegel, 1996: 68)

To explain this unsettling switching between seduction and aggression, Morris locates Jones's tactics within his marginalized identity and his attempts to disrupt and wrest control over how he is represented (Morris, 2001: 244). Jones's audiences in those years were "overwhelmingly white", and belonged to the "downtown postmodern avant-garde" scene, rather than the dance-makers who worked with African or Afro-Caribbean dance forms without postmodern devices (Morris, 2001: 249-250).<sup>5</sup> Morris traces how, traditionally, black gay males who appear on stage in a dominant white society undergo a triple "symbolic emasculation": as a black man he is defined by his body, marked by his colour as labourer/slave, and uninhibitedly sexual and hence uncivilized. As a male dancer his public display of emotions violates the definition of masculinity which upholds the homosocial power of men (by remaining hidden from sight, the "unmarked" masculine identity upholds the heteronormative order). As a gay man, he does not only disrupt heteronormative gender identities, but also disrupts his relations to other black men, because (hetero)sexual potency is one of the few powers left for a black man (Morris, 2001: 244-7). Jones thus found himself playing in between these stringent conditions of visibility. By seducing his audiences (he undresses, he gestures and tell stories that are suggestive, he displays his physical prowess with demanding dance technique) he

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<sup>5</sup>The use of "postmodern" in American dance should be carefully distinguished from wider understanding of "postmodernism", and is more appropriately considered modernist. The relevance of this will be explored within this section.

played to the stereotype of the desirable, sexualized male dancer that Alvin Ailey popularized in the 1960s and 70s (Morris, 2001: 247); and then by switching to aggression (he walks towards and addresses the audience directly, mouthing or saying swear words), Jones upset those stereotypes of emasculation. "Jones actually frightened spectators" (Morris, 2001: 251). He refused to be the obedient and passive object for the audience's pleasurable looking, and dared the audience to identify his defiant self as the truth. He "transform[ed] his identity from passive 'feminized' object to active 'masculinized' subject" (Morris, 2001: 250).

A part of what Croce seizes on in her attack on Jones is this wresting of control from the viewer to the performer.

With Jones, you were actually intimidated. ... At first, I saw the intimidation as part of the game that postmodernists played. Choreographers as different as Kenneth King and David Gordon and, later, William Forsythe had fun heckling the critics – anticipating or satirizing the reviews. Jones also did this. When I blasted an early work of his with the phrase "fever swamps," he retaliated by using the phrase as the title of a piece. (Croce, 1994)

She locates this "intimidation" within the "defiant anti-conventionalism" of the 1960s, which she acknowledged as something positive:

I'll say one thing for the sixties: the dance profession flourished in a climate of aesthetic freedom it hasn't enjoyed since. Jones's main connection to the sixties experimenters was to the power they'd claimed to control the terms on which they could be artists and be written about as artists. (Croce, 1994)

However, she criticizes what the artists did with the power they had wrested from what she considers to be serious artistic criticism:

The kind of "innovation" that seeks to relieve critics of their primary task of evaluation is always suspect. In the sixties, if you didn't like the rules you made your own; you fought the critics because they impinged on your freedom. In the eighties, you fought the critics because they hampered your chances of getting grants. (Croce, 1994)

In collusion with funding agencies (such as the National Endowment for the Arts – NEA), artists used art for social and political aims; funders justified their existence on supporting "utilitarian art", abandoning "disinterested art" which could be evaluated on aesthetic terms (by critics like Croce). Croce thus bemoans the use of art for political crusades, which she traces back to the 1960s: "against Vietnam, for

civil rights"; and further back to the "proletarian thirties" (Croce, 1994).

This is one strand of Croce's argument for her attack on Jones: *Still/Here* is not made on (disinterested) aesthetic grounds but for a political end, and thus pre-determines audience response, which cannot be but a voyeuristic sympathy for the victims of disease. It is hence "undiscussable", as Croce indicates in the title of her piece.

There seems to be an important gap emerging in Croce's argument. By attacking "utilitarian art", Croce seems to be discursively designating the relation between art and politics as between form and content (dance-makers use the form of dance to convey political messages, rather than strive for perfection of form). She evokes images of agit-prop theatre, or political plays and sketches with characters acting out scenarios, typically using unrefined acting technique. Indeed she calls Jones's company "a barely domesticated form of street theatre" (Croce, 1994). But these do not seem to apply to Jones's art. The conventional emphasis on content and the clear separation between performer and role do not apply; instead of using art to be political, it seems more accurate to say that Jones's art *is* political. Once again it has to do with the issue of presence. Croce blames the ideology of the 1960s; so it is to the 1960s I return, to trace the shifts in the notion of a dancer's presence at the emergence of the American "postmodern dance".

### **Modernism: text = being = truth**

The phrase "postmodern dance" emerged in the 1960s to distinguish itself from modern dance. Sally Banes describes it as a primarily chronological usage of the word: it came after modern dance. Modern dance as pioneered by the likes of Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham were never really modernist (Banes, 1987: xiii-xiv). New techniques were established which challenged the dominance of ballet, but essentially its attitude to the medium itself is not addressed. The work of the postmodern choreographers, starting with the Judson Church choreographers such as Yvonne Rainier and Steve Paxton, were much closer to how "modernism" is generally understood as an artistic concept:

the acknowledgment of the medium's materials, the revealing of dance's essential qualities as an art form, the separation of formal elements, the abstraction of forms, and the elimination of eternal references as subjects. (Banes, 1987: xv)

Merce Cunningham may be considered as a forerunner of the postmoderns, in that he encouraged dance to be performed and watched on its own terms: as dance movements, rather than as illustrations of content (such as the many psychological or mythical narratives that Graham created). His separation of the formal elements – sometimes bringing the dancing, the music and the stage design together for the first time on opening night – is a typically modernist trait (Banes, 1987: xvi). The postmoderns extended these experimentations and "found new ways to foreground the medium of dance rather than its meaning" (Banes, 1987: xvi). The question "what is dance" became the most urgent: ordinary and undramatic movements, movements of the mouth in eating, the mental action of speaking, movements of a film projector were presented as dance pieces (Banes, 1987: xix). "The body itself became the subject of the dance, rather than serving as an instrument for expressive metaphors" (Banes, 1987: xviii). The act of performing is thus the meaning, or, to echo developments of cultural theory in that era, "the medium is the message" (Marshall McLuhan, 1967).

Because of this, the debate is still open as to whether the work of the postmodern choreographers should more properly be described as late modernist.<sup>6</sup> Bill Readings characterizes late modernist art's innovation as seeking "a new truth to the experience of telling" (Readings, 1991: 74). Readings, in reading Jean-François Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition, is looking at the relation between narrativity (the act of telling) and its claim to knowledge (truth). The traditional representational strategy, in which performers assume roles (characters) within a narrative, seems to belong in what Readings terms "the early modern or classical" model of artwork, which "sought to represent ... the world as a fixed meaning, a tableau" (Readings, 1991: 74). The innovation of Graham relied on finding a new way of telling this "truth" of the world (via a new dance technique), but essentially the picture or meaning stays

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<sup>6</sup>Banes notes that the American avant-garde dance scene of the 1980s was closer allied to postmodernist devices such as pastiche. But she chooses to retain the term "postmodern" to emphasize the continuity from the 1960s to the 1980s (Banes, 1987: xv). The break with historical modern dance, in her view, is more significant; and some of the principles and devices explored in the 1960s still informed the choreographic practices of the 1980s, as indeed I shall argue regarding Jones.

fixed. For the late modernists, the subject's experience of telling becomes legitimated as knowledge (Readings, 1991: 67). The performer's very act of moving is thus the locus of meaning.<sup>7</sup>

The shift away from narrative meaning to the medium of dance is, ironically, probably what gave birth to a "golden age of the art" that Croce nostalgically recalls (Croce, 1994). The postmodern choreographers brought a radical dismantling of habitual ways of seeing dance in strict terms of genre or tradition, such as "ballet", "modern", allowing "dance" to come into focus. Croce reminisces: "All the way up and down the line, the most wonderful dancing, the most brilliant choreography were all about dance" (Croce, 1994). From this ethos emerged choreographers such as Twyla Tharp, who began her career in 1968 within the postmodern ethos and became one of the most prominent choreographers in America. Even though she later abandoned the radical dismantling of dance techniques and the focus on pedestrian or organic ways of moving, opting to work with the most technically brilliant dancers such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, the underlying logic of her choreography was still an investigation of the medium. *Deuce Coupe* with the Joffrey Ballet (1973), for instance, was a juxtaposition of two dance forms on one stage: breakdancing and ballet.<sup>8</sup>

It is evident that Jones is a legacy of this emphasis on formal concerns. The switching between seduction and aggression was not the only aspect of his early solos; also featured was a "detached approach and formal complexity of much of his material", and "an unemotional performance style" (Morris, 2001: 253-4). Some of his works "offered task-oriented abstract movement" (Morris, 2001: 254), reminiscent of the postmoderns of the 1960s who used games and task structures as choreographic devices. He also juxtaposed cool, abstract movement "while reminding viewers through his verbal narratives of the pain of black experience" (Morris, 2001: 254), clearly a legacy of the Cunningham approach against the

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<sup>7</sup>The logic that runs through these works originated from the modernist era of Clement Greenberg and the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock. Greenberg's call for paintings that did not illustrate figures, but which exists solely on the canvas, echoes the choreographers' insistent focus on "dance" that comprised solely of moving bodies, free from the yoke of (literary narrative) meanings. Perhaps it can also be traced within ballet, to some of George Balanchine's works, which stripped ballet of its romanticist narratives.

<sup>8</sup>It is interesting to note that in *Deuce Coupe*, Tharp approached the ballet vocabulary as words – the ballet sequences were constructed from going through the list of standard ballet lexicon alphabetically: "arabesque" and so on. The dance language – its textuality – is its meaning.

synthesis of meanings.

Croce's complaint of "utilitarian art" thus fails to capture the shift in meaning-making brought about by the postmodern choreographers. The seeds of Jones's politics were sown in locating meaning within movement itself. This politics also applied to other choreographers contemporary to Jones: "even when their dances remain specifically private, that very act of confessional revelation seems to take on political meaning" (Banes, 1987: xxx).

Even as Jones moved away from the antagonistic dynamic with the audience, this method of communicating meaning remained. His video solo, *Untitled* (1989), was among the first works created after the death of Zane. While the narration evoked painful memories and longings for people from the past, the dance movements were constructed according to a "continuous revision of the established formal structure" (Gere, 2002: 56) – a rigorous formal manipulation of set vocabularies. The source of vocabulary also betrayed a formal concern: there were sections of "near-literal repetition" of a phrase from an earlier work, *Continuous Replay* (1982), which itself sourced movement from Zane's *Hand Dance* (1977) (Gere, 2002: 55). The remembrance and longing for Zane was thus not so much embodied in the movements themselves; rather, through its being identified (named) as having originated from Zane, the movement text became repeatable quotations, signifying the loss of Zane. Its basis was still the emphasis on the medium (the dance text); its performance is its meaning.

Jones's dance is Jones's politics: his performing *is* the representation of the silent, repressed voices, in society and in personal lives. The truth that drives his politics is in performing: being present, being seen. It can be said that Jones's dancing embodies democracy: as a political system, democracy works on the principle of representation, in which the social groups are represented in the distribution of governing power and hence material resources. Being visible ensures participation in the system; for Jones to perform *is* to represent the interests of gay, black and HIV-positive communities, and their rights to participate. The same self-referential logic is evident in the title for Jones's choreographic work, *We Set Out Early ... Visibility Was Poor* (1997). Jones explains the "we" who started the journey "early" to be

himself and Arnie Zane; but, "[o]n another level, it might be my whole generation of art makers" (Jones, cited in Al-Solaylee, 1999). "Visibility", being "poor", has been the issue against which his dancing struggled:

[Jones] has commented that his early work was an attempt to overcome his invisibility and marginalization as a black gay man. But the picture is different now. "I feel I've been able to show my work, which is the greatest victory for me these days. Therefore I feel less invisible, I feel empowered, I feel validated." (Al-Solaylee 1999)

The identification between autobiography, performance text, meaning and politics is clearly shown; power comes from the visibility of the self, where truth resides.

### **The screen of visibility**

A significant part of what Croce attacks is not *Still/Here* itself, but the lack of separation between Jones the person and his work as I have discussed above. This identification between personal struggles and the act of dancing is seen, from Croce's more classical paradigm, as the representation of narratives of victimhood, hence her label of Jones's work as "victim art". This is the second strand in Croce's argument: the relation between art (beauty) and morbidity (trauma).

Based on the publicity material she had seen (which was abundant, according to her account), *Still/Here* was unequivocally about illness and dying. For her this was not a problem in itself, as she cites nineteenth-century art as laudable examples of how art can use suffering as subject matter, how Romantic artists were in fact "preoccupied with death" (Croce, 1994). But Croce sees these artists as having transcended or "sublimated" their diseases, grief, or morbid preoccupations. Jones, however, as epitome of today's culture for Croce, has made suffering a spectacle. Her anxiety lies in that "[t]he cast members of *Still/Here* – the sick people whom Jones has signed up – have no choice other than to be sick" (Croce, 1994). Because the performers do not transcend morbidity, and do not sublimate suffering into art, the only response she feels capable of making is one of sympathy, not artistic judgment: "I can't review someone I feel sorry for or hopeless about" (Croce, 1994). Her attack on Jones and the political left is that such responses become coercive criteria with which to judge



the worthiness of art.

For Croce, any performer should try to strive towards the ideal of beauty; she specifically cites the "beauty of line" as criterion. In her paradigm, what matters is a good dancer, and cites an example: "Jackie Gleason was fat and was a good dancer" (Croce, 1994). Her problem with overweight, old, scoliotic dancers was that they could not fulfil the criterion of beauty (of line). What underlies Croce's ideal of beauty is clearly the classical model of the separation between performer and role. (A fictitious, but likely, thought process in Croce could be: "Even the less fortunate can strive for art but, let's face facts, a scoliotic dancer cannot attain the beauty of line.")

What is at stake here is the conception of "art" – how one knows something to be art. Referring again to Readings, Croce's paradigm can be termed "classical" because she holds "beauty" as an objective truth. "Classical positivism claims speaker and auditor [or viewer] as mere contingencies upon the truth to be narrated" (Readings, 1991: 66); thus it is incidental whether the performer and the viewer are healthy or ill, privileged or oppressed: a "descriptive anonymity" characterizes this paradigm. Both parties should honour the objective truth of art. Contrasted with the modernist truth of subjective presence, Croce and Jones are viewing art from different paradigms. Jones's paradigm, in which his act of performance is his politics, thus becomes to Croce "unintelligible as theatre" (Croce, 1994).

At this point, I could easily make what seems to be an ethical judgment between the classical and the modernist models of artistic truth, based on the idea of doing justice to (or not betraying) the bodies in trauma, i.e. the Survival Workshops participants, the choreographic source for *Still/Here*. Croce's clinging to beauty as an objective criterion clearly effects an exclusion of bodies in trauma. To recall Copeland's reference to Sartre, the classical model is suffering from a "crisis of the imaginary"; the fiction of striving for transcendence simply does not hold in "a century of unprecedented horror" (Copeland, 1995: 16). The neurosis Croce displays in her article also seems to attest to the efficacy of the politics of representation: like a Freudian return of the repressed, Croce is haunted by the previously silenced bodies clamoring to be seen and heard. Her anxiety at these repressed voices can almost be said to testify to her guilty conscience. So, why would I want to re-open this debate?

Interestingly, I also feel anxious about the lack of separation between Jones's dancing and his subjective truth. I do not object to it on the same basis as Croce; rather my anxiety concerns the politics and representation. What exactly is made visible to the audience? What comes in between the bodies in trauma and the dancing bodies, what is the effect of conflating the two?

Seeing Jones's dance works on video recordings and photographs, reading critical writings on his work, and, particularly, examining his creative process, leaves me with a sense of incredulity as to the efficacy of political representation. Later I will also refer to a similar sense of anxiety which Jones himself feels. What follows is an analysis of the creative processes of *Still/Here*, with which I wish to tease out this sense of anxiety.

The Survival Workshops, the process that generated source material, seemed less therapy than conscious contributions to an art-making process. Jones pointed out that the participants' words and movements, related to their experiences of coping with life-threatening diseases, were used in the piece with their permission. Jones described the workshops and rehearsal process:

With every workshop we developed a gesture phrase, something that everybody could do, and we recorded what that gesture meant to the participants. All the dancers have had to learn 78 of these gestures and what each one meant. Now we are making phrases out of them. We speed them up and slow them down, we make transitions, we juxtapose and invert them. We do these things as a way of making movement. Also I will make a phrase which for me is solving technical problems. I want to see the dancers use their feet more, or I want to make a phrase that has constantly changing directions ... (Farrow, 1994: 81)

Jones's description suggests that he constructed *Still/Here* from a modernist, if not formalist, process. The material was crafted according to its formal qualities: "speed them up and slow them down"; "juxtapose and invert"; "constantly changing directions". The words of participants, for example by one who was living with cancer: "Slash, poison or burn, these are your choices", became lyrics which were then turned into songs for folk singer Odetta, accompanying the *Still* section of the piece. Copeland notes that "the 'genuine' suffering – which we witness or hear about only intermittently on video – is soon distilled into artistic form" (Copeland, 1995:

16).<sup>9</sup>

Reviewer Jann Parry notes the clear coding of meanings in the formalized movements:

At the start of *Still/Here*, dancer Arthur Aviles runs through the sequence of gestures, explaining the coded meanings they carry. "Engulfing the universe" is a sweeping embrace, offered by a woman [workshop participant] with a spine tumour; "maintaining my sexuality" is the provocative pose of a woman with breast cancer ... Gestures and movements are formalised into dance phrases, but they can still be read, like semaphore ... (Parry, 1995: 22)

It would seem that the layers of abstraction in Jones's choreographic process had purified movements to resemble words. What Jones offered was a highly crafted dance *language* which mediated trauma in a highly artistic (artificial) manner. From the written records available, it seems that many spectators noticed primarily the artistic craft of this work. According to Martha Duffy of *Time* magazine, Jones

feels that people know they're watching dance and not documentary. "When I go to talk sessions after my performances," he says, "people want to know about specifics. They want to know about the history of modern dance." (Duffy, 1995: 62)

And the history of modern dance, as Jones explains in Farrow's interview, is about "find[ing] a new vocabulary"; source material such as the "very naive movements and gestures" from the workshop participants were "incorporate[d] and exploit[ed] for their movement potential." Jones goes on to say: "The reason I'm doing this is that I'm trying to find a new vocabulary." (cited in Farrow, 1994: 79.) His explicit aim was to make art; his dance was about dancing.

This seems strange, given that Jones seemed anxious to distinguish himself from the "Northern European aloofness" of formalism, asking critics to respond to his work "at the same level of passion" that he had (Parry, 1995: 21). But Jones's work diverges from his explicit intention; his politics does not operate through embodiment of meaning, but through making movement text available *as meaning itself*. The politics emerge in the act of dancing: "It's about how people partner each other, how people dance in tandem." (Farrow, 1994: 75) The degree to which Jones had been a faithful disciple of the western modernist dance tradition can be seen in

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<sup>9</sup>Regarding the phrase "genuine" suffering, Copeland is quoting from Croce.

his echoing Gertrude Stein's famous modernist proclamation: "What is the meaning of a flower? A flower doesn't have a meaning. It is. What is the meaning of a turn? A turn doesn't have a meaning. It is." (Farrow, 1994: 77)

An important distinction needs to be made between a dancing body that communicates suffering and trauma through the self-reflexive, formal action of dancing, and bodies that experience trauma. The bodies in trauma had taken a journey of artistic crafting, from the ("naïve") gestural work and speaking about their experiences at Survival Workshops, through a rehearsal process, to being seen on stage via video projection and crafted dance vocabulary. The abstraction processes, the beautiful crafting, transformed trauma into text, into image. This change can be highlighted by comparing the bodies of dis-ease to the bodies that danced on stage:

... when [folk singer] Odetta chants an invocation for cancer sufferers, "Slash, poison or burn, these are your choices", a long, lithe woman with a shaven head, Odile Reine-Adelaide, leaps galvanically, one hand clutching a breast, the other her groin ... The words reflect an experience; the dancer embodies it. (Parry, 1995: 22)

The visual codes of the dancer – shaven head, hand gestures referring to breast (cancer) and groin (sexuality) – clearly referred to the cancer sufferer; while the technical dance movement, along with the "long, lithe" body of the dancer, reminded the audience that they are watching a work of art. Parry describes the dance effectively, but the word "embodies" seems inaccurate; rather, the dancer seemed to be offering another layer – "words", "semaphore" – by dancing. Meaning was conveyed through a highly trained dancing body. The dancer did not purport to embody the suffering of the woman with cancer. The abstraction processes drained the *jouissance* from the body in trauma; bodies conveyed clear meanings by being technically accomplished, achieving clarity in performance.<sup>10</sup>

The gap between these two vastly different bodies was sensed by Johannes Birringer

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<sup>10</sup>Interestingly, even though the modernist model applies to both 1960s postmodern choreographers and to *Still/Here* in 1994, the bodies that perform differed quite dramatically. In the 1960s the emphasis was on a refusal to "differentiate the dancer's body from an ordinary body" (Banes, 1987: xxvii), in reaction to the training of ballet and modern dance, and in tune with the 60s spirit of "do your own thing". Bane argues that as sport and fitness became more widespread in the 1980s, "physical dexterity, complicated timing and partnering, and acrobatic embellishment" became the norm; "[i]n the virtuosic works of the eighties, the significance of the dance is the refinement of bodily skills" (Banes, 1987: xxviii).

as the crucial aspect that made *Still/Here* "aesthetically pleasing" for him. He argues that it was not the technical execution of the dance language that pleased him,

but rather the dancers' awareness that technical control here may function ironically as a conscious, futile yet necessary elaboration of personal and psychologically charged experience. The very sense of control is always precariously shadowed and ghosted by the recurring video projections of the witnesses' testimony of their struggle to maintain a sense of dignity in the face of death. (Birringer, 1998: 13)

But it is possible to understand Birringer's insight from the opposite angle: the gap becomes an ironic, anxiety-inducing testimony of how the presence of athletic and articulate bodies is unable to dance the truth of subjectivity in trauma. The more common response to the work is more likely to be as follows:

The thing I disliked about *Still/Here* was its mainstream aura. There was something inappropriate about its flashy visual investiture, its snappy timing, its ruthless editing of the tapes, its slick, accomplished dancing. It left the audience screaming with delight instead of pausing for reflection. (Siegel, 1996: 69)

And, along similar lines:

The sad fact of the matter is that the evening retains little of the raw documentary impact of the interviews with the unwell. But at the same time, the abstracted version of the interviews aren't very satisfying formally, as dance. And the abstracting process hasn't resulted in especially powerful images that embody some deeper essence of suffering or survival. (Copeland, 1995: 16)

The artistic processes of formalism and abstraction continually purge the bodies in trauma. What the audience sees is a screen that has been erected in front of trauma. Although it claims to tell the story of bodies living through terminal illnesses, *Still/Here* hides these bodies behind art. Not intentionally: I do not imply that the work is a pre-meditated betrayal of the participants of the Survival Workshops. But within the politics of representation, the dancing bodies, and the video images of the diseased bodies, can only be the image presented to the subject's perspectival gaze: the political efficacy of visibility is premised on it. But, to recall Berlant and Warner (cited towards the beginning of this chapter), public visibility does not equate social change. Like memorial images of the dead, the primary effect of the image is to prevent the reality of loss (death) from overwhelming the viewing subject, who desires to identify with the living. The image tames the gaze and reassures the

viewer: "I am alive". Croce is wrong in worrying that the dying "have no choice other than to be sick" (Croce, 1994); it is the converse: the living have no choice but to be well. The audience's complicity in the anxiety of representation is left hidden, the normative social order left unchanged.<sup>11</sup>

To recall Sontag:

So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. (Sontag, 2003: 102)

The sympathy comes from seeing the image (of horror) within conditions that leave intact the divide between us and them, with "us" in a safe, external (ahistoricized) viewing position. The horror is mediated through discourse such as "the human condition" (classical, essentialist), or perhaps "unequal power relations" (modernist ideological). These words enable us to *understand* suffering, purporting to reveal the truth about horror. But so quick are we to speak these words as truth that they conceal the lack of reality, the loss, within the very words we speak; hence our "impotence" (our castration). And, they leave us exonerated from our complicity, hence our "innocence".

### **Refusing to see: the indifference of representation**

Even though the conflict between Croce and Jones can be traced to the problem of two different models of relating subjectivity to truth and representation, underlying both sides of the debate is the same premise that needs deconstructing. Each attempts to capture theatrical performance within its perspectival seeing/discourse, seeking recourse to conceptual metanarratives to legitimate its representation as truth – that the meaning of dance can be understood in this or that way. Once this truth is established, it serves as the determinate basis for politics. This common premise is

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<sup>11</sup>This may come across as a cynical interpretation; and I wish to clarify that the focus of this analysis has been on the one particular work, *Still/Here*. Albright records a performance of another work, *D-Man in the Waters* (1989), involving the dancer Demian Acquavella, who was ill with AIDS that he could barely stand. Nevertheless Jones supported him on stage so that he could perform the arm gestures of his solo (Albright, 1997: 75). Clearly, the gap between the technically proficient and pleasing bodies, and the bodies in trauma, was brought into the meaning-making operation of that particular performance of the piece.

the target of Lyotard's poststructuralist criticism, of "politics as representation" (cited in Auslander, 1992: 43).

Lyotard analyzes a narrative in its three instances: narrator, narrated and narratee. In the classical model, the narrated (what is told of, the referent) is privileged as objective truth, which places it outside of narrative and governs it, as a metanarrative. The metanarrative abstracts itself as the concept that legitimates all other narratives, revealing their ultimate meaning (Readings, 1991: 66). Hence, for Croce, the truth of art is in the aesthetics of beauty, to which the pragmatics of narrator and narratee (performer and viewer) are incidental. The "descriptive anonymity" in the classical model (Readings, 1991: 66) renders the performer and viewer's idiosyncratic differences irrelevant for art.

In modernism's case, the subject (narrator) is privileged to the status of a metanarrative. Narration is reduced to "an effect of consensus between narrator and an anonymous narratee" (Readings, 1991: 67). Hence, truth is the performers' experiences of moving. In both models, it is the metanarrative (conceptual abstractions) which legitimates knowledge. Like the screen that regulates the conditions within which an image can be understood, the metanarrative constructs a position outside of the actual event of narration (performance). From this position representations can be viewed, and certainty of knowledge can be derived.

What guarantees presence (in the Derridean sense: the transparency and certainty of meaning for the conscious subject; and in the theatrical sense, the "actorly representation" (Auslander, 1992: 37) as the artistic truth that is guaranteed to the audience) is thus representation by concept, which Lyotard calls "discourse".

Discourse, that is, organizes the objects of knowledge as a system of concepts (units of meaning). Meanings are defined in terms of their position in the discursive framework, by virtue of their opposition to all the other concepts or elements in the system. Discourse thus imposes a spatial arrangement upon objects which Lyotard calls "textual", a virtual grid of oppositions. (Readings, 1991: 3)

Therefore, the discursive space of presence produces meanings through operations of opposition. A textual object signifies in opposition to another textual object in the system of discourse. This analysis of signification in discourse is based on

Saussurean structural linguistics, where textual units acquire meanings through being in opposition to other units. Thus, "cat" signifies something different to "mat" by virtue of the opposition between the phonemes [k] and [m], within the system or "grid" of English phonology. The word "cat" is not inherently meaningful; the relationship between signifier and meaning is thus arbitrary, an effect of opposition.

I have already outlined this discursive operation in terms of artistic and political representation, by referring to Sontag on the viewing of images of horror. The images, as representations of trauma, signify the death of "them" in opposition to the living "us". "Remembering" becomes signified as an ethical action, in opposition to "forgetting". In the politics of democracy (particularly for the US Left), to "speak" becomes a positive value in opposition to "being silent", the "closet" which is valued negatively.

In 2001, in the wake of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, Jones spoke in broadcast and press interviews about envisioning art-making after the horror. David Gere records how Jones contextualized 9/11 in terms of the AIDS pandemic:

Jones reaches back "to another numbing, paralyzing crisis that confronted and continues to confront the dance community – AIDS," before attempting some insight into what we might expect from artists now. Among other things, Jones tells us to expect that "works with a public voice will sound even louder in certain quarters recently vacated by the cool aloof gestures of modernism." He continues, "More literary or theatrical in nature, some will 'name names,' decry and demand to know what is really happening and who is responsible." (Gere, 2002: 62)

Jones privileges the public voice in opposition to private silence; in the face of horror, his solution is to "sound even louder". In the (literal) void that is the site of horror, he proposes "going to the site of ground zero, where the New York towers collapsed, and dancing" (Gere, 2002: 62) – to use dancing to fill in the gap. This logic of representation inevitably leads towards an aggressive, interrogative stance: "decry and demand to *know* ..." (emphasis added).

In this noisy proliferation of loud sounding and filling in of voids, Lyotard "refute[s] the claim that everything is *indifferently* a matter of representation" (Readings, 1991: 5, emphasis added). The arbitrariness of opposition as a meaning-making operation



gives rise to an indifference: opposites essentially have the same value by virtue of deriving their meanings from the same representational system. The clamour of the victim art debate is a very good example: both opposing sides of the debate – the political right and the left – use the argument that their right to voice dissent has been silenced. The left criticizes Croce for conservatism and refusal to let minorities have a voice; cultural activist bell hooks writes to the New Yorker,

The publication of this piece alarms and threatens because it exposes the extent to which right-wing values, particularly censorship – the will to suppress dissenting voices, to limit artistic freedom and critical vision – are gaining cultural momentum. (hooks, 1995; in Dance Connection)

The political right defends Croce for her defiance in the face of political correctness, the new political orthodoxy that threatens to overrule artistic standards and impose political standards. Hilton Kramer writes to the New Yorker,

the ritualistic charges of racism, sexism, homophobia and the like do not issue from any serious attempt to illuminate the problems of art and culture in our tragically divided society, but are designed to silence dissent from a prevailing political orthodoxy. (Kramer, 1995; in Dance Connection)

"Silencing dissent" becomes a charge against political oppositions that are exchangeable. The concept has currency for opposing ideologies, indifferent to the possibility of a referent in the "real world".

Herein lies the malaise of the politics of representation, especially democratic representation in capitalist societies. Opposing political parties discursively signify differences: apparently one side champions welfare and social justice, and the other side upholds free-market competition and conservative social policy. But in reality the left has dismantled the welfare state and does the privatizing for the right (Žižek, 2004: 314); the discursive differences are, at the end of the day, meaningless. The reason is because the signifying operation of opposition is, despite the structuralists' claim, not arbitrary. There is still the presence of the metanarrative, the master-signifier, that governs signification.

Earlier, I propose that Jones's dance is an embodiment of democracy (see p.65). Of democracy, Slavoj Žižek writes,

There is no democracy without a hidden, presupposed elitism. Democracy is,

by definition, not global; it *has* to be based on values or truths that one cannot select democratically. In democracy, one can fight for truth, but not decide what truth *is*. ... As Hegel already knew, "absolute democracy" could only actualize itself in the guise of its "oppositional determination," as *terror*. (Žižek, 2004: 306)

The "elitism" in democracy is in the power to decide what will be legitimated as the truth – the metanarrative – that is the "transcendental guarantee" (Žižek, 2004: 320) of the value of representation; but what it can offer is no more than opposing signifiers that cannot escape the totality of the system. Jones's strategies of seduction and aggression, his politics of visibility, is to wrest from the audience the power to decide his representation. What then does Jones embody?

Sometimes when I step on stage ... I carry in front of me an invisible phallus. ... It is my virility, my right to be, and the assurance that I will always be. I am in search of the dance in which the phallus is forgiven<sup>12</sup> for being a thing that must penetrate, deflower. This dance will be selfish and self-interested, and yet, fulfilled by filling. (Jones, cited in Morris, 2001: 259)

The truth of the phallic master-signifier under which Jones performs is already decided; the politics of visibility has already decided that it will only operate within the perspectival, discursive gaze. Irigaray lists visibility as one of the values inscribed within a phallic discourse of truth (Irigaray, 1985: 86); what visibility offers is the accession to a subject position as a speaking, seeing being, regulated by the master-signifier of the phallus. What this truth/master-signifier/metanarrative does not legitimate, is not seen. Psychically, it is a blindness towards the impossibility for the fulfilment of desire that was precluded by castration and language; politically, it is a blindness towards the impossibility of the good life promised but precluded by the (hetero)normative order (see p.51). Deviance is punished; Jones has to survive by adopting "a conventionally masculine persona" (Morris, 2001: 260),<sup>13</sup> the phallic signifier, in order to overcome his symbolic emasculation; while "no one ever blames the ideology and institutions of

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<sup>12</sup>In asking to be forgiven, Jones becomes the self-portratist as a blind confessor of a transcendental Truth. See chapter 1.

<sup>13</sup>Morris notes that in the early works, Jones's movement tended to be "blunter, less embellished, more squared, and directly forceful"; the verbal narration often involved "tales of heterosexual liaisons" (Morris, 2001: 260). Only in 1984 did Jones and Zane explicitly refer to their relationship in public interviews, even though it has been implicitly read into their duets before this (Morris, 2001: 258). It is important to note again that the focus is not on Jones's choice as to how he represents himself (a return to the Cartesian subjectivity, hence implying notions of truth and deceit); but the focus is on the positions that were open for Jones to assume within the normative order. Morris argues that, in co-opting heterosexual power to overcome emasculation, Jones arrived at a position where he could use this power to declare his identity (Morris, 2001: 260-1).

heterosexuality" (Berlant & Warner, 1999: 360).

What power Jones gains is only meaningful in the indifference of representation, the "terror" of "oppositional determination" (Žižek). The positions available to him must either be "visible" (phallic, in control) or "silenced" (oppressed, passive, feminine), and both of these positions are accorded to him by the audience's perspectival gaze, operating under the master-signifier/metanarrative. If someone such as Croce does not want to acknowledge his power, all she has to do is to refuse to look. The truth of Jones's visibility suddenly becomes meaningless – unsignifiable.

Croce's (in)action should have been the obvious downfall in her argument: she was not present at the show, she did not see something she reviewed, she has broken her professional standard of behaviour. It should have been enough to discredit her argument completely. Yet the debate continued and grew; and despite some criticisms of her arrogance or foolishness in not seeing the work,<sup>14</sup> her arguments gathered voices of agreement.<sup>15</sup> Her refusal to see – however much she revealed herself to be a bigot by doing so – points to a crucial weakness in the politics that have been pursued by the left in the last few decades, such as the "images of" analysis pursued by visual culture theorists (see p.54 above). Albright understands Croce's attack as an unease towards the "disruptive force represented by even the mere *thought* of seeing disabled, ailing, or dying bodies on a dance stage" (Albright, 1997: 74). But she is perhaps using the truth (the metanarrative that guarantees visibility) within which she works, to decry an imagined Croce which is her opposition, and not her real point of view.<sup>16</sup> "Perhaps the best indicator of the liberal fake is the sincere horror expressed by liberals apropos overt racist excesses" (Žižek, 2004: 313). The sincerity of critique is no guarantee of its truth.

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Brustein, for instance, writes that Croce should have gone to see the work and then criticize it, to lend more weight to her argument (Brustein, 1995; in *Dance Connection*). But essentially he supports her view.

<sup>15</sup>Notable public figures who wrote in total or partial support of her view included: Robert Brustein of American Repertory Theatre, writers Camille Paglia and Susan Sontag, and to a small extent, *Village Voice* dance critic Deborah Jowitt.

<sup>16</sup>Allow me to emphasize that I am not in turn denouncing Albright's stance; if I do so, besides pursuing the same recourse to a metanarrative of theory by which to judge her statement, I would also be reducing the complexity of her work in the audiences' gaze and different bodies performing on stage. By questioning her particular statement on Croce I hope I am not trying to discredit the work, nor to propose that Croce is perhaps not bigoted.

The truth that is pursued by the politics of representation becomes a fetish for the subject. The *objet a* fuels but does not satisfy the subject's desire (see chapter 1) – in this case, for political control, empowerment. The screen protects the subject from confronting the impossibility of the total fulfilment of this desire; the gaze of the *objet a* is tamed by holding onto the image on the screen that provides an illusion of a subject in control, looking, speaking. Hence the fetish of the image, the importance accorded to contesting representation. Žižek calls it "the fetishizing power of logos" (Žižek, 2004: 310). Marxists call it "the fetishism of commodities" (Bewes, 2002: 4), the image as a reification of the struggle for subjecthood. The exchangeability of opposing political signifiers (images) can be understood as fundamentally an economic exchange. Democracy (operating through representing the interests of various opposing voices) does not escape, and furthermore colludes in, the overdetermining of "all noneconomic strata of social life" through capital (Žižek, 2004: 294). The pluralistic openness of democratic representation is overdetermined by "capitalism's power to produce variety – because markets get saturated. Produce variety and you produce a niche market" (Massumi, cited in Žižek, 2004: 294). If the (phallic) body of Jones embodies democracy, the images that his dances can produce can only signify as commodities (fetishes) within the (political) market – the same market within which opposing political camps operate. The politics of resistance converges with the dynamics of capitalist power (Massumi, cited in Žižek, 2004: 294); the politics of representation increasingly becomes the production of niche markets. If you don't like what you see, just don't buy it: that (consumer's) choice stays no matter how much one contests representations, and fights for the visibility of the marginalized. Simply by refusing to see, Croce opts out of buying into Jones's niche market, and in one stroke disarms the politics of the left.

Croce's refusal is thus, ironically, the key to unlocking the crisis of "impotence" (Sontag; see p.53 above) in body performance in the wake of mass social trauma. Instead of giving him control, the phallic signifier that Jones carries with his dancing body may be suffering from performance anxiety (see chapter 1). Jones describes the experience of performing:

There is something about the spectator saying, in effect, 'Perform for us. Show us your body.' So it made me extremely aggressive, and maybe that was my desire to impose masculine control ... (Jones, cited in Burt, 1995: 51)

And,

I found myself easily seduced by a set of eyes, learned what it is to engage the expectations and needs of spectators. It made me want to please. Or spit.  
(Jones, cited in Morris, 2001: 252)

His aggression can be understood as an illusion of control that defends himself against performing against his will. This anxious position can be further detected in the following incident, described by Jann Parry, dance critic of a British newspaper:

"What do you want from us?" I asked Bill T Jones at a round-table meeting for the press in Amsterdam, where his company had performed *Still/Here*. He had been berating critics in general (and me in particular) for "inappropriate" responses to his work in the past. "I'm asking you to respond at the same level of passion that I have," he said. "I don't want to play Northern European aloofness. I refuse to speak to you on your terms – why should I?" (Parry, 1995: 21)

Sensing the lack of connection between his work and the critics, Jones asks the audience (of which critics are a part) to recognize his truth, namely his sincerity and passion. He refuses to be seduced by the audience's eyes, and so by setting up an antagonistic relation, he demands a reversal of looking; he will "please" them, or "spit" at them. Parry remains unconvinced: at the end of her review, she writes: "surely a paean of praise [for Jones's "passion"] and a flood of tears [in sympathy for the workshop survivors] are not the only valid responses?" (Parry, 1995: 22) His demands and aggression, his phallic penetration, his masculine control may have won over his power to look instead of being looked at; but his perspectival gaze can only produce an audience in the image of his antagonistic discourse – people who are antagonized, refusing to speak on his terms. The exchanges between opposing signifiers continue.

Croce's refusal to look is thus key to the dilemma, because it points to the difficulty, if not futility, in contesting representation. A more relevant question is: how can the viewing subject be unsettled – that illusory subject who purports to see, know and speak the truth? How can the viewer's "innocence" and "impotence" (Sontag) be changed?

To unsettle the viewer – literally, to leave the viewer feeling disturbed. Goya did this; but as Sontag points out (see p.53 above), the equally explicit photography of

war atrocities may simply leave us unimplicated, offering sympathy from an "impotent" external position. The image can only signify as a fetish for commodity: at the simplest level of analysis, disturbing war images can be neutralized by switching to a "different" television channel.

Discourse always suppresses an "other" by reducing difference to oppositions; the indifference of discourse represses *jouissance*, an unspeakable other that is always at work within and against the text, disrupting the rule of representation (Readings, 1991: xxxi, 5-6).

The screen and the image conspire to tame (or repress) the horrors of large scale trauma before it reaches the viewer. It used to be supposed that the disclosure of private suffering can move the viewing public to demand more justice. But in the marketplace of images, the separation between public (politics) and private (suffering) is only a discursive construct; "private" signifies in opposition to "public" so that a normative order can be maintained – it may be a heteronormative order, or the order of the global market economy. Jones insists on the public voice: to make the terminal ill visible, to dance on ground zero of the World Trade Centre attack; but this call for the "public" assumes a truth of the "private" that now rings hollow, a fetishizing belief in democracy (Žižek, 2004: 312-3): democratic bodies only count if they are seen, represented, remembered.

But: a *jouissance*, an object-gaze, a figurality (see chapter 1), "is always at work within and against the text, disrupting the rule of representation". Before finding out *how* to access this, Sontag proposes *why* this should be necessary:

Perhaps too much value is assigned to memory, not enough to thinking. ... history gives contradictory signals about the value of remembering in the much longer span of a collective history. There is simply too much injustice in the world. And too much remembering (of ancient grievances: Serbs, Irish) embitters. To make peace is to forget. To reconcile, it is necessary that memory be faulty and limited. (Sontag, 2003: 115)

The scale of loss has become that, not only is it impossible to be fully represented, it is dangerous to cling to representation. The fetish of remembering – which is "the fetishizing power of logos" (Žižek, 2004: 310) – demands the presence of meaning. But in the twentieth century, to be present and human, such as being a Jew during the Holocaust or being black under Apartheid, is to have already transgressed and to be killed; they have *committed the crime of being* (Steiner, cited in Kobialka, 2000: 42).

The identification of being with meaning and truth that is characteristic of representation becomes unthinkable, unbearable, and ethically non-viable.<sup>17</sup>

Lyotard's politics is based on the "unspeakable other", the "figure" that haunts discourse and representation. For Lyotard, "[t]o make the Holocaust a concept rather than a name, to claim that the death camps could be the object of a cognition, a representation by concepts, is to drown out the screams of its victims" (Readings, 1991: 22). And, to give voice to the silence of the dead would be to betray that silence (Readings, 1991: 62). This is precisely because the horror entails such complete erasure of being. It would do an injustice to ask a survivor of Hitler's Final Solution: "Have you ever, with your own eyes seen a gas chamber?" Any such witness is dead and the demand for such a witness makes the gas chamber less of a horror than it had been. For the survivor to exist and speak of her knowledge of the horror is to cast doubt on "her authority to bear witness" to that which was invented to terminate her existence (Praeg, 2000: 229). The damage is thus accompanied by "the loss of the means to prove the damage" (Lyotard, cited in Praeg, 2000: 229).

Because representation can do this injustice, it becomes "an ethical necessity that the Holocaust haunts us, that it cannot be remembered but cannot be forgotten either", to exist as an "immemorial" (Readings, 1991: 22). The "immemorial" is "that which cannot be either remembered (represented) or forgotten (obliterated)" (Readings, 1991: 62). "It is that which returns, uncannily" (Readings, 1991: xxxii). The discursive divide between the living and the unliving, subject and object, is unsettled, disturbed. The ethical response demands that

[w]e must not give voice to the millions of murdered Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and communists, but find a way of writing history that will testify to the *horror* of their having been silenced. This amounts to the deconstruction of the binary opposition between voice and silence, history and the unhistorical, remembering and forgetting. It's a history directed towards the immemorial. (Readings, 1991: 62).

For Lyotard, "Adorno's greatness is to have recognized that, after Auschwitz, art can only be historically responsible as [figural] event, rather than representation"

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<sup>17</sup>Jones's exaltation for people to dance on ground zero of World Trade Centre thus appears to me not only a futile gesture of "impotence" in the face of horror and death, but also a dangerous defiance that seems to indicate a lack of understanding as to America's own complicity in their conflict with the Arab world; it seems to betray a false "innocence".

(Readings, 1991: 23).

What, then, for the artist? Michal Kobialka asks:

Is there a way ... [to] surpass the visible which is epistemologically organized by the Self, optically totalized by the eye realizing the vision of transparency of humanity to itself ...? (Kobialka, 2000: 43)

What can the artist do to stop the screen of visibility from maintaining the viewer's "innocence" and "impotence"? Can the artist access the jouissance of the figural, and if so, *how*?



## Chapter 3

### **The Screen and the Viewer's Blindness: Ritual's (empty) promise of atonement**

*Brett Bailey and ritual theatre*

*"Once you realize that the road to confession is not the road to salvation, it may be the case that our narratives of suffering are very mixed with outcomes that we can't really predict."*

*– Jay Winter, speaking on traumatic memory and war*

By appealing to a transcendent reality, and by constituting spectators as a participative community, ritual theatre claims to enact change (not only making it visible). The "truth" of ritual rests not on rational knowledge, but on the performer's competence to produce a shamanic presence, which Bailey embraces in his early work. Ritual presence operates by identification and belonging to a father/god as the source of meaning; but it represses the loss of this originary wholeness. Spectators of ritual theatre are drawn into an enactment of communion/community, the centre of which is, however, loss/emptiness. The constitution of the audience as one body participating within a transforming ritual becomes problematic for its absence of truth. Bailey attempts to perform a hybrid, postcolonial aesthetics; but the problem rests in the larger context of performing the notion of "South Africa", a communal identity hardened around the metanarrative of suffering, abjecting those that do not belong to the land of the father/god – foreigners that unsettle the meaning of South African identity.

### **Ritual and efficacy: transcending visibility**

The published collection of South African director/writer Brett Bailey's early plays is entitled The Plays of Miracle and Wonder (2003). He explicitly warns against treating the book as "pieces of literature separate from the rich and multi-layered non-verbal elements which make up the language of living drama" (Bailey, 2003: 10). Bailey emphasizes the immediacy and energy of theatre through music, visual spectacle, "ritualistic rhythm", and "atmosphere" (Bailey, 2003: 10).

His approach is similar to the western avant-garde in his rejection of the primacy of the word, the exploration of subconscious and dream states, "the quasi-religious focus on myth and magic, which in the theatre leads to experiments with ritual and the ritualistic patterning of performance" (Innes, 1993: 3). Ritual has an even deeper influence for Bailey: working with practising *sangomas* (diviners, traditional healers) in his theatre, he is dealing with the Xhosa cultural context where spiritual practices do hold significance, in comparison to the "de-spiritualis[ed]" west (Bailey, 2003: 9).

The sangomas have been his "main source of inspiration" (Bailey, 2003: 19). A sangoma "serves as a channel for ancestral communication between her society and what Jungians would call the collective unconscious"; in an *iintlombe* (ceremony), the sangomas transport the clapping, chanting community by "coaxing the Spirit of the people into a tangible throbbing force" (Bailey, 2003: 19). Bailey describes this state of consciousness and the "performance techniques" used by a sangoma:

In a ceremony her increasingly strident dancing, chanting and "confessing" (rapid stream-of-consciousness out-pourings and prayers), the clapping, drumming and singing of her supporters, the pungent smoke of smouldering herbs all aid her journey into the trance in which the ancestors "possess" or animate her voice, her movements, her being ... (Bailey, 1998: 193)

Being in the presence of this energy, Bailey claims, "has a healing and rejuvenating impact" (Bailey, 1998: 193).

With the sangoma as the ideal figure of a theatrical performer, Bailey aims "to fuse ritual and theatre in some way, to make drama which would transport performers and spectators" (Bailey, 2003: 15). In *iMumbo Jumbo*,<sup>1</sup> the character of Nicholas Gcaleka directly instructs the audience on how to watch (or participate) in the show:

Gcaleka: Now you white people,<sup>2</sup> you like to watch, don't like to get involved, don't like to sing and clap. Hey, tonight you have that opportunity, tonight we are all together in one Spirit ... If you don't want the Spirit you must close here and here and here [indicating his eyes, ears and finally his arsehole] – put something like a cork so that the Spirit cannot, cannot find you, understand? (Bailey, 2003: 111)

It is thus "the Spirit of the work which is all-important" (Bailey, 1998: 201).

At the end of chapter 2, I ask if the artist can rupture the "screen of visibility" and access the "jouissance of the figural". In this statement there are echoes of

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<sup>1</sup>The original production premiered in 1997. I watched the revival of the play in 2003 at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

<sup>2</sup>The character explicitly identifies the audience as white. An interesting correlation is set up with the audiences that Bill T. Jones performed to in his early works (see chapter 2). In reality, it is perhaps common knowledge that South African theatre audiences are mainly white due to socio-economic realities; however, at the performance that I attended, the groups that were seated in front and across the aisle from me were not white. I will note here that I, also not being white, felt an alienation to the play at hearing this comment from the actor. This incident became an example of my discontent of the theatre experience that I try to understand in this chapter.

spirituality: for example, Jesus's crucifixion is recorded in the Christian Bible to cause the veil of the Temple to be torn in two (Matthew 27: 51; Mark 15: 38; Luke 23: 45), thus providing access to the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctum which was shielded from sight. Peter Brook describes "the Holy Theatre" as the "Theatre of the Invisible-Made-Visible" (Brook, 1972: 47). There is a sense that a higher reality or spiritual truth can be reached in special moments, compared to which daily living is but an illusion. Ritual theatre is highly relevant in my investigation into the performer/audience relationship: it purports to provide a spiritual or psychic communion that transcends the barrier of conceptual representation.

There are four threads of connection between ritual and my investigation, which I would like to explore further:

Firstly, the claim that *ritual transcends language and rationality* (Bailey refers to the Jungian "collective unconscious") differentiates it from other approaches of intervening into the dilemma of representation. An obvious example of theatre that disturbs the screen of visibility is Augusto Boal's "Invisible Theatre", a pedagogic strategy derived from Paulo Freire that is essentially the invasion of theatrical reality into real life.<sup>3</sup> However, it differs from ritual theatre in two ways: the change that Invisible Theatre potentially brings about (namely, its pedagogic efficacy) is mainly achieved through provoking debate, leading to a change in conscious perception and behaviour (as opposed to the unconscious). Its pedagogy also depends on the spectators' not knowing that a theatre performance is occurring. Boal calls the spectators "spect-actors", since they are actively involved in the action; but their participation depends upon their being in a different "cognitive world" to the performers, in other words, without suspecting that the action is in any way rehearsed (Watson, 1997: 168). Therefore the frame of theatre itself is the screen that Invisible

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<sup>3</sup>Watson (1997) cites an example of Invisible Theatre provided by Boal: in a performance in 1978 in Belgium, a group of actors rehearsed actions and scenarios around the unemployment problem that was rife. At the "performance", the actors enter a supermarket as if they are ordinary shoppers: they do not set up the fictional framework of theatre by setting themselves apart as actors. One actor takes some basic food items to the checkout counter, but informs the cashier that since he is unemployed, he cannot pay in cash, but can work for the supermarket for however many hours are needed to pay for the food items. Negotiations and disputes ensue, involving the cashier, the store manager and other customers, with the other actors (invisibly en-rolled as customers) provoking discussions about economic problems, different nationalities in Belgium, prices .... When the police arrives after being called by the manager, customers are collecting money to help pay for the food items.

Theatre attempts to bypass: theatre must not be recognized as theatre.

Ritual theatre is closer to what Richard Schechner calls "believed-in theatre".<sup>4</sup> Even though the audience knows they are watching actors, there is also a real process occurring, such as real-life events that are narrated in the performance, or real HIV-positive blood that is spilt in a performance art event (Schechner, 1997). Christopher Innes describes the merging of illusion and reality in avant-garde theatre (Innes, 1993: 179); the transformation effected by ritual theatre (such as the healing that Bailey claims) is not a discarding but a penetration of theatrical illusion as the screen.

Secondly, avant-garde theatre has traditionally used ritual as inspiration to *disrupt theatrical representation*, so that theatre does not only tell the audience about something, but *does* something to the audience. "[T]he ambition to make theatre into ritual is nothing other than a wish to make performance efficacious, to use [theatrical] events to change people" (Schechner, cited in Innes, 1981: 11). Artaud called for a theatre as a plague that unmasks "the world's lies, aimlessness, meanness, and even two-facedness" so as to transform humanity (Artaud, 1970: 22). His writing had inspired Grotowski's rigorous confrontation of the self in his Poor Theatre, Brook's experimentations in the 1960s leading to ritual theatre, the Living Theatre's mythological visions of transformation, and the nudity and Dionysian events of Schechner's Performance Group, leading to environmental theatre. To greater or lesser extents, all these theatres try to perform a shamanic function, exorcizing the "disease" of the community through the performers' actions (Innes, 1993: 180). The audience are presumed not as spectators sitting on the other side of the divide (such as the "fourth wall"), able to maintain aesthetic and/or critical distance. Even though audience involvement at the Performance Group or the Living Theatre was often crudely conceived,<sup>5</sup> they were nevertheless attempts at countering the "de-spiritualisation of the West" (Bailey, 2003: 9), to reach towards the sacred which

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<sup>4</sup>Although Schechner includes Boal's work as an example of believed-in theatre, he specifically cites Forum Theatre and Legislative Theatre, in which spect-actors are aware that they are engaged in the make-believe of theatre as well as the possibility of social change (Schechner, 1997: 86). The performer/spect-actor relationship is thus different to that of Invisible Theatre.

<sup>5</sup>Innes cites the example of the Performance Group's *Dionysus in 69* (1968), in which spectators were encouraged to strip off clothing and to join in climbing through a canal shaped by actors' naked bodies, symbolizing rebirth. To be naked was considered liberating, and so "the meaning of *Dionysus* ... lay not so much in what was performed, as in simply getting spectators to strip" (Innes, 1993: 174).

"transcends the limits of cognitive signs and concepts" (Uzukwu, cited in April 2002: 51). The politics of the Living Theatre, for example, was not only found in their street protests and slogans, but also in trying to induce in the audience "something of a vision of self-understanding, going past the conscious to the unconscious" (Innes, 1993: 181).

Thirdly, ritual *keeps a community's history through the presence of the performers* in the action of narrating, rather than conceptual representation. It differs to the insistence on memory that serves to signify the separation between the living and the dead (see chapter 2, p.54). For example, Gary van Heerden (2002) examines Xhosa grieving rituals as means of keeping the deceased in contact with the community. While the failure to "let go" is pathological in the western view (Van Heerden, 2002: 9), the Xhosa rituals deal with loss by invoking the presence of the dead. Lyotard (cited in Praeg, 2000: 235-6) explains ritual as an "immemorial" narration: instead of remembering the past as representational content, ritual as a narrative form gives rise to a pragmatics of knowledge, where the emphasis is on the act of reciting (or, as I refer to in chapter 1, storytelling). Focusing on the regularity of metre ("the beating of time in regular periods") rather than the individuality of accent ("the modification of the length of a certain episode"), performances such as ritualized chanting organize narrative and time not for the recalling of the community's memories (accents), but as "an immemorial beating" (Lyotard, cited in Praeg, 2000: 236).

The immemorial thus locates the participants and references of the past within the present act of narrating, or performing a ritual. Lyotard writes,

... a collectivity that takes narrative as its key form of competence has no need to remember its past. It finds the raw material for its social bond not only in the meaning of the narratives it recounts, but also in the act of reciting them. The narratives' reference may seem to belong to the past, but in reality it is always contemporaneous with the act of recitation. (cited in Praeg, 2000: 236)

Gideon Khabela clearly illustrates this by differentiating the Christian missionaries' emphasis on strict, formal catechisms, and the Xhosa's reliance on orality, regulating social behaviour through "myth handed down in the oral tradition without any demand for exactitude and finality. The mythological past was always recoverable in ritual" (Khabela, 1996: 26).

Ritual eschews the distancing of conceptual representation that is characteristic of discourse; the immemorial ritual performance becomes a figure to the discourse of memory, and can perhaps provide clues regarding the anxiety of representation of trauma and loss.

Fourthly, and most importantly, *ritual interrogates my epistemology*. If, for example, Xhosa rituals of mourning are immemorial narrations, do my anxieties of representation apply to these performances? Are my anxieties rooted in western metaphysics, and hence do not apply to, for instance, African theatrical events?

Praeg argues that anxiety about representing suffering is a "reluctance to accept, respond [to] and embrace an African ethical imperative to tell stories" (Praeg, 2000: 232). Was it not ethical and necessary that stories of atrocities and trauma be told at the TRC? It was not a perfect solution, but there was a "moral superiority of maintaining the social bond" (Praeg, 2000: 232). The peace and stability of a nation was more important than fidelity to individual "truths" of suffering, since it promises the prevention of further suffering. Similarly, despite Krog's anxieties around the word "truth" (see Chapter 1, p.36), she insists on reporting the stories of the TRC. She acknowledges the artist's anxiety of defiling the "holy character" of the victims' experiences; but she sees the danger of paralysis and resists it:

German artists could not find a *form* in which to deal with Auschwitz. They refused to take possession of their own history. So the inevitable happened. Hollywood took it away from them. (Krog, 1999: 360-1)

Does an African aesthetics render irrelevant my anxieties around representation? Are my anxieties a legacy of the Enlightenment separation between art and life? Miki Flockemann, citing several writers, notes that African art is premised on the continuity between art and life; African art is functional (in other words, not purely aesthetic) in that art mediates between material and spiritual experiences (Reyes, cited in Flockemann, 2001: 31). This sense of continuity allows art to assume a social position that can readily effect transformation in society; the efficacy of performance is part and parcel of its aesthetics.

To my ears, this trajectory of thought seems to imply the following: if I were open to being transformed, to embrace being in Africa, I would see that the discursive categories and divisions about such notions as art and truth, and hence my anxieties, in fact do not exist. My pathology is diagnosed: clinging to un-African thinking.<sup>6</sup>

But how is the relationship between art and reality constituted in the wake of trauma; what does continuity of art and life mean in a traumatic reality? Does this aesthetics apply to postcolonial hybridities, such as Bailey's ritual theatre? To further my wondering/wandering, I invite a few postcolonial literary figures into my narration.

If Bill T. Jones (in his early solos) could be compared to a Caliban who seduces and curses with the (dance) language he was taught,<sup>7</sup> then one could perhaps find a different way out of the dilemma in the novel *Foe*, J.M. Coetzee's re-working of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Friday, the slave who is unable to speak – to use the colonizers' discourse – points to a different language that resists representation. Friday was Cruso's slave, brought to England when Cruso and Susan Barton were rescued from being marooned on the island. He has no speech, but as Barton describes, "utters himself only in music and dancing" (Coetzee, 1987: 142). To construct the truth of Friday out of his wordlessness becomes Barton's main focus, who hires a writer Foe (alluding to Daniel Defoe) to write the story. As if describing the psychoanalytic experience, Foe says, "In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story" (Coetzee, 1987: 141).<sup>8</sup> Friday's dances are indecipherable to the colonizers; perhaps this is an example of what post-colonialist

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<sup>6</sup>I am aware that, if read with irony, this sentence contains an ominous and potentially offensive claim, making (perhaps unwarranted) allusions to less wholesome episodes in history. Like sections of chapter 1, it is a confession, an unsubstantiated narrative of my experience of making theatre in the new South Africa: labouring under guilt, constantly aware of potential accusations: I am not "proudly South African". My narrative here is meant to echo ideas of consensus and dissensus in chapter 1. I also stated in chapter 1 (see p.12n10) that I do not necessarily reject the possibility that I am, after all, writing about my personal pathology, my refusal to operate within the (new) social order. But there are discontents that remain unsatisfied. So I will continue asking questions, and tentatively propose an answer at the end of this chapter.

<sup>7</sup>The comparison relies on a postcolonial reading of *The Tempest* that does not necessarily confer judgment on Caliban according to his representation by other characters in the narrative, for example Miranda's charges of rape. The comparison focuses on the issue of discourse: who speaks, who has access to the symbolic order, and how is the language used to negotiate power relations.

<sup>8</sup>This trajectory of thought strays towards a romantic primitivism that projects western desires and anxieties on to Africa, constructed as a blank space, where fantasies of pure origin are projected. I will return to this critique later in this chapter, in relation to the search for Spirit.

theorist Iain Chambers calls "the untranslatability of the native's experience" (Chambers, 1996: 47).

Coetzee resists writing Friday as a truth that he knows, which he can represent. At the end of the novel he writes himself within the text, re-enacting the capsizing of Susan Barton's boat. He sinks into the ocean,<sup>9</sup> diving beneath Defoe's discourse, and discovers the shipwreck where he finds the corpse of Friday. He tries to ask Friday: "what is this ship?"

But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday. (Coetzee, 1987: 157)

He tries to dig into Friday's mouth. As it opens,

a slow stream, without breath, without interruption, flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (Coetzee, 1987: 157)

What truth Friday can yield is not uttered in words, but in a corporeal and sensual "stream"; it is felt corporeally ("against the skin"), and the wave reaches far – perhaps it washes across the divides set up by discourse.

Friday's corporeality is a resistance against what Gayatri Spivak calls the "epistemic violence" with which the (European) Cartesian subject views the world (Chambers, 1996: 47).<sup>10</sup> The critique of the perspectival gaze of the subject thus intersects with the critique of western modernity, and the point of intersection is the body. Rey

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<sup>9</sup>The immersion (of Barton and Coetzee the author) into the sea echoes Hélène Cixous's essay, "Aller à la mer". Writing about her theatre work as resistance against the theatre as a patriarchal structure, she advocates a "body-presence" and a lessening of "dependency on the visual" (Cixous, in Drain, 1995: 134). This writing of the body and of the feminine is described as a scene/stage where women will be "listening and [be] heard, happy as when they go to the sea, the womb of the mother" (Cixous, in Drain, 1995: 135). The French essay title offers a pun between "mother" and "sea". Coetzee's choice of narrating through Barton, a woman, is thus significant.

<sup>10</sup>The European conqueror objectified the world, constituting itself as the "Subject of History": The self-assured tone, critical distance and academic or 'scientific' neutrality of the narrative that purports to describe and explain the world flowed without interruption towards meaning. The threat of an interruption, of the violence that constitutes the chronology of events and the semantic disposition of power, is effectively obliterated. In the aseptic and sterilised accounts of history, sociology, anthropology, the 'pain of violence' is written out of the narrative and forgotten. (Chambers, 1996: 47-8)



Chow proposes that the colonizer's subjectivity was in the first instance not constituted as actively gazing; instead, they feel gazed at by the native:

This gaze ... makes the coloniser "conscious" of himself, leading to his need to turn this gaze around and look at himself, henceforth "reflected" in the native-object. It is the self-reflection of the coloniser that produces the coloniser as subject (potent gaze, source of meaning and action) and the native as his image, with all the pejorative meanings of "lack" attached to the word "image". (Chow, cited in Chambers, 1996: 58)

What was it about the native's body that so "gazed" at the colonizer; what performances of body made the colonizer feel the need to cover this body (literally, and through banning indigenous rituals), so as to produce the native-object as image? If this gaze can be recovered, would it tear the screen that protects the colonizer's subjectivity and his perspectival gaze?

So, to return to the question: does African aesthetics render my anxieties irrelevant? Within a postcolonial context, perhaps the more relevant question is: does insisting on African aesthetics escape the colonizer's looking? Does ritual theatre reproduce the image of the native-object, or is it "a place where bodies are their own signs" (Coetzee)? Bailey's theatre manifests the critique of western epistemology: in *iMumbo Jumbo*, as will be explored in detail in this chapter, the critique of Cartesian rationality is simultaneously a critique of colonialism and its representation of Africa. But what does Bailey propose in its place? Is the Spirit, a radically irrational force, an adequate response?

Is it possible to uphold an African aesthetics in the wake of trauma and dissensus? I can only answer this later in this chapter, when the contradictions of postcoloniality and its anxieties are explored further. Before this, an examination of the truth claims of ritual theatre is needed.

### **Competence: shamanic presence and the truth of theatre**

Bailey records in his workbook regarding the play *iMumbo Jumbo*:

More than just a stand against materialistic rationality, this iMUMBO JUMBO must be a celebration of dream, ritual, Spirit, the unconscious and the irrational ... The Spirit cannot be quelled, though scientists and kings may thwart it for a while, though people may side with Big Science. The victory is the Spirit. The ritual of Life. The play must always remember this. (Bailey, 2003: 108)

Bailey's insistence on the Spirit can be seen as fidelity to the subject of his research, Nicholas Gcaleka, the "chief" who travelled to Scotland in 1996 on a mission to retrieve the skull of King Hintsa kaPhalo of the amaXhosa nation. Gcaleka received his mandate in a dream, which traditionally enables a prophet (*isangoma* / *ighira*) to be in contact with ancestors. According to oral history, Hintsa's body was mutilated by Scottish soldiers and his skull taken to Scotland. Hintsa's Hell Spirit was thus ravaging the country, bringing crime, instability and moral degeneration. The return and re-burial of Hintsa's skull would reconcile the ancestral realm with the living, "traditional collective values will be reaffirmed, and the national pride, morality and social harmony of the pre-colonial Golden Age will be restored" (Bailey, 2003: 100). But, on Gcaleka's return from Scotland, the Xhosa royal house organized scientists to examine the skull. Forensic tests concluded that the skull in fact belonged to a young Caucasian woman. The skull was not returned to Gcaleka for burial. Scientists therefore "thwart[ed]" the Spirit.

Some came to suspect the motives behind enlisting the scientists, since the Xhosa royal house were initially supportive of Gcaleka's mission. Bailey came to the conclusion, after gathering information for the production – a part of which entailed recording long speeches and diatribes by Gcaleka on his mission and on the state of the nation – that the Xhosa royal house enlisted the scientists out of the fear that the monarchy was being upstaged. Also, Gcaleka's supporters cited jealousy as the motive (Bailey, 2003: 98). Bailey came to this conclusion:

The point is this: exactly whose neck the skull once sat upon is really irrelevant ... no scientific test can ascertain the symbolic value of an item, the importance it has for the people who revere it. (Bailey, 2003: 99)

The rejection of scientific truth is motivated by something akin to the "moral superiority of maintaining the social bond" (Praeg, 2000: 232). What appears to be "mumbo jumbo" – superstition and magic – to modern scientific eyes may hold more truth. For the purported skull of Hintsa is one example of the many sacred bones,

royal artefacts and similar items of magic that were looted away by European colonizers, and on these purloined items rest the power and legitimacy of nations (Bailey, 2003: 100). In the play, political leaders are denigrated for relying on rational discourse rather than the Spirit:

Gcaleka: Why you people not dreaming, only depending on writing?<sup>11</sup> ... And you chiefs, you bloody bastards, you are nothing to the Spirit, nothing, nothing, nothing! ... First you agree that the head must be buried, then you change your mind, you want the written proof, you want the books! You are powerless, you got no visions, you are puppets. (Bailey, 2003: 142-3)

Writing (rationality) is "powerless" when compared to dreams, to spiritual reality. Bailey remains faithful to Gcaleka by abandoning the epistemology of (Western) scientific discourse.<sup>12</sup> He does this in the play by giving the Gcaleka character long speeches to voice his beliefs, based on the recordings of the real Gcaleka. But Bailey also kept faith with the Spirit in theatrical process and form.

*iMumbo Jumbo* is conceived as a "play within a ritual", which "climaxed with the *sangomas* calling their ancestors into the theatre to ask them to bless all present and to bring peace and light to the city" (Bailey, 1998: 193). It is an "*ntlombe* to tell the people of the world about [Gcaleka's] beliefs, philosophies and predictions, and to strengthen the Spirit in the audience by incorporating them in this ritual" (Bailey, 2003: 106).<sup>13</sup>

It is thus not a representation of Gcaleka's story first and foremost, but a performance that is meant to be efficacious, performative of certain transformations perceived to

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<sup>11</sup>Citations of Bailey's play texts in this chapter may include non-standard English grammar; they are quoted as in the play text.

<sup>12</sup>Even within western science, the "representational paradigm" has been challenged. Koen Tachelet describes the basic assumption of the dominant paradigm as "the successful transfer of 'objective' information from the world outside to an internal representation of it by means of cognitive operations within the brain"; but it is becoming evident that the act of perception constructs reality (Tachelet, 2000: 84). Tachelet concentrates on sciences of biology and cognition; by studying visual perception in animals and humans, the western paradigm of "the ontological distinction between a perceiving subject and a perceived object" (which gives rise to representation) is challenged. For example, the frog does not see a fly as an objective entity; it can only see a fly when in motion. The human eye has a blind spot on the retina where the optic nerve leads to the brain; something that is projected directly into that point cannot be seen (Tachelet, 2000: 84-85).

<sup>13</sup>This echoes the circumstance under which Bailey met Gcaleka: in his account of his research, Bailey met the prophet in Nyanga East (a Cape Town township) on the day when there was to be a ritual sacrifice "to make the Spirit strong" (Bailey, 2003: 93). This first encounter may have informed the eventual dramatic structure of the play.

be needed: the performers, some of whom are actual *sangomas*, "use dancing, chanting and clapping to take them into the state of trance in which they may bring the restorative powers of the ancestors to all present" (Bailey, 2003: 106). The re-enactment of the journey to Scotland is a drama component within a larger ritual performance. Reviewer Suzanne Joubert records,

"You think you are watching a drama show," says one of IMumbo [sic] Jumbo's 21-strong cast. "We are doing much bigger work here." (Joubert, 2003)

Bailey writes in his workbook for *iMumbo Jumbo*: "My performers ... need to believe that their actions, their presence, their energy during the performance have an effect on the world" (Bailey, 2003: 20).

The training and rehearsal process reinforce the irrational:

In training my group members I spend much time encouraging them to yield themselves to various spirits or emotions, to sacrifice themselves to their imaginations. ... The spirit then moves onto their tongues and flow out through their voices, then into their gestures until their very being becomes a vivid articulation of that spirit. (Bailey, 2003: 21)

Echoes of Artaud are evident: the Theatre of Cruelty searched for an "objective theatre language" that "turns words into incantation", "expands the voice" and "liberates a new lyricism of gestures"; a theatre that "aims to exalt, to benumb, to bewitch, to arrest our sensibility" (Artaud, 1970: 69-70). Compare Gcaleka's question in *iMumbo Jumbo*: "Why you people not dreaming, only depending on writing?" to Artaud's First Manifesto: "We do not intend to do away with dialogue, but to give words something of the significance they have in dreams" (Artaud, 1970: 72). Compare also the statement: "I want human fire on my stage" (Bailey, 2003: 22) to the call for performers who are "like victims burnt at the stake, signaling through the flames" (Artaud, cited in Derrida, 1978: 179).

Bailey describes some of his training exercises that push the performers away from rational states of mind: he uses trance "accompanied by wailing, fits and gnashing of teeth"; he uses "roaring and cursing" to drive the performers; he gives a particularly vivid example: "I have blindfolded [the actors] in a forest for hours while they explored their animal selves, and then chased them screaming and stumbling blind

down a steep river course" (Bailey, 2003: 21). He is aware that some people find his methods "manipulative", or that he comes across "as a madman", but he believes his methods are able to "access deep, collective areas of self"; the work "clean[s] the channel of their self for the free flow and conscious control of these currents", and "when these channels are open they will truly be able to perform, touching people at deeply symbolic levels" (Bailey, 2003: 21-23).

Bailey's actors thus emulate the shaman as their ideal (with the sangoma being the shamanic figure within the specific cultural context). The shaman

develops the power to transmit his creative trance to [his audience] so as to transport them out of the ordinary, everyday reality into other cosmic regions ... the shaman is the stimulator of the collective imagination ... This is also the contemporary role of the artist today. (Karafistan, 2003: 152)

Karafistan lists symbolism, Artaud, Grotowski, and Eugenio Barba among others as theatres that draw on aspects of shamanism. Even as South African critics hail Bailey's work as "a new and thoroughly appropriate form of theatre for this country" (Accone, in Third World Bunfight web site) and "a new South African theatre that is highly innovative in its use of indigenous performance modes" (Mda, in Third World Bunfight web site), Bailey's ritual theatre is clearly located within the lineage of the western avant-garde, which he lists as one of his sources (Bailey, 2003: 9).

Drawing the avant-garde connection allows a perspective on Bailey's ideas and methods for the actor's training and mode of performance. Some of his methods remind one of the licentiousness which groups such as the Living Theatre embraced as liberation (see description of their *Paradise Now* in chapter 1, p.37n25). Indeed some avant-garde theatres understood ritual and the unconscious as resisting the fixity of forms and preferring spontaneous actions (Innes, 1993: 173); Grotowski calls them "chaotic, aborted works, full of a so-called cruelty which would not scare a child, ... which only reveal a lack of professional skill, a sense of groping, and a love of easy solutions" (Grotowski, 1969: 86). The most influential avant-gardes, however, emphasized the *technique* of the shamanic actor: "Cruelty is rigour" (Artaud, cited in Grotowski, 1969: 93). The '60s counterculture in America "folded up" because "there wasn't enough competence, enough precision, enough consciousness" (Grotowski, 1987: 31). Bailey also acknowledges the need for

"techniques, stringent discipline and commitment, and strong belief and aptitude" for the actor to emulate sangomas (Bailey, 1998: 196).

Thus an apparent contradiction is at the core of ritual theatre: despite Gcaleka's call to obey dreams and disregard writing, shamanic performance requires not the abandonment of form and language but its fulfilment. The philosophical aspect of this contradiction is explored in chapter 1, in my citing Derrida's reading of Artaud. The practical implication in the making of theatre is that the truth of the shamanic presence is reliant on the apparent falsity and ordinariness of illusion and technique; transcendence relies on lengthy and repetitive preparation. For example, Etzel Cardeña and Jane Beard cite research into the link between facial muscles, bodily postures and emotions; "changing facial expressions without any association to emotional labels and thoughts was more effective than thinking about personal memories associated with these emotions" (Cardeña & Beard, 1996: 35). Bailey notes a similar process in his work: making a sound can rouse emotions (Bailey 1998: 196-7). Cardeña & Beard (1996) call it "truthful trickery". Grotowski notes that the tension between the performer's conscious control and animal instincts "creates a contradictory and mysterious fullness" (Grotowski, 1987: 36-37) – the charismatic presence of the actor.

This appears contradictory because of an idea that emerged with western modernity: the idea that truth is internal and spontaneous, while bodily technique is associated with falsehood. Jane Taylor (2004) traces the shift in notions of truth brought on by the Reformation. A main target of Martin Luther's attack on the Catholic Church was confession. Taylor notes that confession was a public naming of sins that precipitated forgiveness; it was only in response to the Reformation that the more contemporary practice of "furtive whisperings undertaken in a secluded confessional box" was instituted (Taylor, 2004: 8). In other words, "confession" belongs to a regime of truth-telling that has similarities to the proclamation of the Angel's blessing (Derrida, 1993: 29; see chapter 1), the sangoma's verbal outpourings and prayers (Bailey, 1998: 193), and testimonies at the TRC. With the Reformation, however, "the truth of the self [became] associated with conscience, the terrain within, that which is unseen" (Taylor, 2004: 11); truth came to be located in the private as opposed to the

public.<sup>14</sup>

Taylor cites the example of *Hamlet*: in the "Mousetrap" scene, "the suspected murderer [Claudius] is observed throughout the performance [the re-enactment of the murder], and his responses are read for traces of a guilty heart" (Taylor, 2004: 14). The assumption is that the internal burden of guilt must show externally – if unrehearsed. The spectator, not knowing what to expect, must react with truthfulness. The actors, however, were derided by Hamlet for summoning up grief and tears without an authentic source (Taylor, 2004: 14). Rehearsed action is pretence, which is abhorrent. Acting as a profession came to be seen with suspicion.

The body was thus read for signs that point to internal truth. Taylor then traces how truth-telling in western modernity developed with scientific methods: the truth of personhood could be read off the body through objective observations such as fingerprinting technology. Within this regime of truth-telling, then, the *iMumbo Jumbo* story appears dubious, partly because scientific tests proved that the skull did not belong to Hintsa, but also partly because Gcaleka's performance did not come across as sincere, authentic. At their first meeting, Bailey found his "naïveté ... pathetic", and his two main actors shook their heads at the chief's ranting (Bailey, 2003: 94). His performance failed to convince his observers. Later Bailey became aware of Gcaleka's previous charges of forgery: "I know he's a bit of a conman and a power-monger and an opportunistic businessman with the gift of the gab"; and the amaXhosa leaders claimed that Gcaleka had no right to that name (Bailey, 2003: 96). In short, Gcaleka is something of a "fake".

Yet Bailey focuses on a different framework for determining the truth: Gcaleka's authority – his competence – rests on his shamanic presence, his performing the required action with precision and to great effect. Bailey describes his "affecting physicality" in "the way he talks, the way he flings his arms about, the way he touches people" (Bailey, 2003: 97). He performs the ritual of sacrifice, and the cries of his sacrificial ox "will signify ancestral approval" (Bailey, 2003: 101). Against the charges of Gcaleka being a charlatan, Bailey counters: "if the Spirit of the Xhosa

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<sup>14</sup>See chapter 2 for the discussion on constructions of the private/public separation.

Nation chose a rather gregarious and offbeat messenger, who are we to question?" (Bailey, 2003: 96)

The etymology of "shaman" is the Manchu-Tungus word *saman*, deriving from the verb *sa* – to know (Karafistan, 2003: 151). Shamanic knowledge is revealed "in an ecstatic manner" (Grimm, cited in Karafistan, 2003: 151); its truthfulness cannot be tested through rational means: it is beyond criticism. Yet it can be traced and named: Gcaleka's dream is an instruction that came from the ancestors. Similarly, the truth that an actor can access is, for Grotowski, also of ancestral origin.

Grotowski proposes that the actor's competence allows him<sup>15</sup> to access the originary moment of creation. By working with precision and discipline on technique and artistry, an organic realm opens up to the actor where he can explore not only himself, but also the person(s) through whom the art has passed. For example, an actor sings a song; but if he learnt the song from his grandmother, then "who is the person singing the song? Is it you?" (Grotowski, 1987: 39) The actor's impulses explore not only himself, but also the grandmother/singer. The tradition can be traced back further:

You have the song, you must ask yourself where it began. Perhaps at the moment when a fire was tended in the mountains, where someone was looking after animals, he began repeating the opening words, to keep warm. It wasn't the song yet, rather ... a primitive incantation that someone repeated. You look at the song and ask yourself: Where is this primary incantation? In what words? Perhaps these words have already disappeared, or perhaps ... someone else has developed what the first person sang. But if you possess the ability to go toward the beginning of the song, then it's no longer your grandmother singing but someone from your ancestry, your country, your village ... (Grotowski, 1987: 39).

The actor's presence, beyond mimetic fidelity, is the result of tapping into an organic tradition; in an old French saying, you are someone's son; and "if you are the son of the person who sang the song for the first time, ... that's the real image of the character" (Grotowski, 1987: 40).

The truth of the shaman/actor is at odds with the rationality that has come to

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<sup>15</sup>The choice of gender does not only reflect Grotowski's writing, but it is also chosen in light of my interpretation of Grotowski's theory below.



dominate modernity. Liz Mills (2004) locates the epistemology of theatre within a tradition of orality, rather than a literary tradition; its "creative essence" is "original being". The immemorial (Lyotard) nature of shamanic/theatrical knowledge makes it possible to recover the past – the original song – in the present.

### **Performing for the Father: the blind spot of truth**

One is left with an impasse between scientific truth and shamanic truth. The stake involved is similar to that of Gcaleka's quest: what is the truth about the skull that he retrieved? (A rhetorical question: if Hintsu's spirit is appeased by the return of the skull, what about the spirit of the Scottish woman to whom it may belong?)

Is the truth recoverable from the corpse of Friday, the African whom Defoe silenced, and whom Coetzee tries to restore? Is it only recoverable in an African epistemology and an African aesthetics; is it only recoverable as a truth of the Spirit? If that is the case, why does Gcaleka perform as a Caliban, who (like Jones) curses and attacks? Towards the end of *iMumbo Jumbo*, after a caricature of the scientists' announcement about the skull, Gcaleka interrupts the scene with a long, ranting speech:

Gcaleka: ... What is your clan? You cannot dream about Hintsu, he's not your clan. ... Who sent me to overseas to fetch the head? Is it the scientists or the Spirit? ... Why you want to keep my grandfather's head? That body's got no head for one hundred and sixty-one years, can I take your head? Won't take me five minutes. You're playing with his head, where is your respect? My Spirit doesn't play! Why you think everything not come right in this country, how many people must die? ... I can challenge any man, any Spirit! I can turn whole of South Africa upside down in five minutes if my Spirit getting cross. ... There's gonna be a big calamity in this country, gonna be your [the amaXhosa chiefs'] fault. The Spirits of our forefathers are fighting. This is war! You are the enemies. (Bailey, 2003: 142-3)

Like Jones, shamanic presence operates under the master-signifier of the phallus: however sincere the intention, Gcaleka's performance displays aggression and also impotence (see chapter 2). It demands, but does not realize the impossibility of satisfaction. The phallic signifier is clearly in operation in Grotowski's text. Grotowski stresses the competence that must precede the organic process of

accessing the originary truth, the impulse that guarantees theatrical presence. But what is this competence?

The overriding concern for an actor, Grotowski proposes, is to arrive at a place where "you are someone's son"; to realize that you "aren't a tramp, you come from somewhere, from some country ..."; and if you are not someone's son, "you are cut off, sterile, unproductive" (Grotowski, 1987: 40). One cannot dream of Hints's skull unless one is in the Hints clan. The question of technical competence leads ultimately to the question of "your competence": "Are you a man?" (Grotowski, 1987: 40)

To be a man, writes Grotowski, is to be "connected with the vertical axis", to stand; which means to be vigilant (Grotowski cites this word as a Biblical reference), to have conscious control (Grotowski, 1987: 36). To stand means not to fall over – losing your balance (because of incompetence, lack of technique), losing your uprightness, your moral and spiritual steadfastness. We are told that language distinguishes us from animals; language enables man to take greater control of his environment. Theorists propose the erect posture as a key event in human evolution, and one of the results is the increased emphasis on sight as the primary sense perception. Falling becomes an indication of losing the competence of man as a spiritual being – the Fall of Man necessitated redemption, the Angel's blessing; and "the blind are beings of the fall, the manifestation always of that which threatens erection or the upright position (Derrida, 1993: 21).

Shamanic presence can thus be translated in psychoanalytic terms as: How stable is your sense of "I"? Freud states, "the beginnings of religion, ethics, society, and art meet in the Oedipus complex" (Freud, 1919: 260). As I explore in chapter 1, the Oedipus complex is the crucial event in the formation of subjectivity. In more recent psychoanalytic theory, the same question may be re-stated as: How cleansed of the abject is your subjectivity? (see chapter 1, p.26) The horror of abject, which shows me "what I permanently thrust aside in order to live", is felt in confronting the horror of (for instance) a corpse – the abject which brings me to "the border of my condition as a living being", the abject which is death and not just signified death or the idea of death (Kristeva, 1982: 3). The cadaver's root word is *cadere*, to fall; the bodily

wastes that I drop enables me to live, "until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit – *cadere*, cadaver" (Kristeva, 1982: 3). If ritual "must aim to resolve some tension and substitute a situation of equilibrium" (Layiwola, 2000: 128) – in other words, if the purpose of ritual is to resolve some fundamental contradiction in humanity, it is ultimately the definition of "man" – and the fragility with which this standing definition is constructed – that ritual (and ritual theatre) must negotiate. Kristeva writes of religion and art:

The various means of *purifying* the abject—the various catharses—make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion. (Kristeva, 1982: 17)

If body brings me inexorably towards the horror of the abject, what religion (and art) tries to purge through catharsis is my body. Lyotard, in The Inhuman (1991), traces the blind spot in western thinking and development of technology: the distinction of life and death (on which the sense of "I" depends) may be a defence against thinking the breakdown of this distinction. Lyotard writes of the possibility that one day, for instance when the sun (four and a half-billion years old) expands and causes the death of earth itself, not only life will be brought to an end, but the event will be the end of death as well, since after such an event, there will be "no more thinking able to reflect upon that moment as being the death of the sun" (Tachelet, 2000: 88). Artificial intelligence – a technology that tries to think without the body – may therefore be a defence against the possibility of the end. Jettisoning the body ostensibly allows a thinking that can carry on without the abject.

Is it possible that religion is also a technology that tries to cheat the inevitability of ending, repressing the fear of absolute loss, to think without the body? In an interesting parallel, Sandra Kemp describes graceful dancing as an attempt to render the body immaterial, for the dancer to "just think about the music" and forget the body (Kemp, 1996: 158-9).

Freud interprets this repression not in the future, but in the immemorial past. The sacrificial feast of totem animal<sup>16</sup> – the slaying and eating of the animal that holds

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<sup>16</sup>Ethnologists have noted that "primitive men" refer to their totem also as "ancestor and primal father" (Freud, 1919: 218-9). Freud thus draws a parallel between the sacrifice of the totem animal and parricide – as explained in this paragraph.

spiritual power of the community – is, for Freud, a substitute and commemoration of an original murder of the ultimate figure of power. Freud cites Charles Darwin's concept of a primal horde, "a violent, jealous father who keeps all the females for himself and drives away the growing sons" (Freud, 1919: 235). But this social structure is not observed in any human society; thus Freud induces, from the sacrificial feast, an event of murder in which the expelled brothers, both envious and fearful of the father, "joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde" (Freud, 1919: 235). The brothers ate the father out of a desire to identify with his power (Freud, 1919: 236).

The totem feast ... would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable, criminal act with which so many things began, social organization, moral restrictions and religion. (Freud, 1919: 236)

The feast – of the totem animal, and similarly the Eucharist feast of Christ's body – thus establishes the social organization of identificatory kinship:

If one shared a meal with one's god the conviction was thus expressed that one was of the same substance as he; no meal was therefore partaken with any one recognized as a stranger. (Freud, 1919: 224-5)

It is thus significant that Gcaleka derides the scientists for not being able to dream, because they do not belong to the clan. His shamanic truth (the calling of dreams, his performance, his execution of sacrifice) is thus an extension of how his identity, and the identity of the community, was constituted. His competence as a performer is linked to his competence as a "man" (Grotowski, see p. 100). Grotowski's definition of a "man" – of personhood – involves locating oneself within a fatherland (if you are a "tramp", you are "not someone's son", you do not belong to "some country", you are "sterile" – see p.100). Freud's analysis of the origin of social organization perhaps traces the flipside of this personhood: the rejection of the "stranger" (who is not a son of this land) allows for kinship – or identity.

Why is the father/god killed, but then commemorated? What allows the act of

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It is also necessary to comment on the problematic nature of Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. Although the patronizing Enlightenment model of cultural development, from the primitive (supposedly found in contemporary aboriginal populations) to the modern (supposedly found in the superior European societies), did not originate from Freud, his writing on the psychic life of "savages" nevertheless operates within this model. In citing Freud's text, I do not aim to draw on its anthropological knowledge, but the psychological insights it may give.

parricide to become the cement of social organization and personal identity? Even though the brothers transgressed patriarchal authority, the parricide was performed out of both fear and envy for this authority. Remorseful of their act, they instituted prohibitions in the form of taboos (in the narrative of the primal horde, it is the father's women whom the brothers denied themselves) (Freud, 1919: 238). The taboo, which cannot be touched, points towards the unclean and yet also the sacred (Freud, 1919: 32) – the murdered father both hated and revered. Repression (a psychic echo of taboo) thus upholds the law of the patriarch; the Oedipal complex and the repression necessary for the formation of personhood allows the entrance into the patriarchal symbolic order. And this happens through language. This link between language and the psychic narrative of the parricide is traced by Derrida in his reading of Artaud. It becomes possible to read Artaud's theatre, and his quest for an originary language, as a confrontation with the father – the author-god, the seat of originary truth:

the idea of a theater without representation ... permit us to conceive its origin, eve and limit, and the horizon of its death. ... Presence, in order to be presence and self-presence, has always already begun to represent itself ... Which means that the murder of the father<sup>17</sup> which opens the history of representation and the space of tragedy, the murder of the father that Artaud, in sum, wants to repeat at the greatest proximity to its origin but *only a single time* – this murder is endless and is repeated indefinitely. ... [In its self-presence] it erases itself and confirms the transgressed law. (Derrida, 1978: 249)

Even though the performance re-enacts a transgression – a death of originary wholeness that gave rise to representation – each subsequent re-enactment confirms the law. The presence of the actor – who, "like victims burnt at the stake, signal[ing] through the flames" (Artaud, cited in Derrida, 1978: 179) – is a repetition of the original parricide; the actor's competence allows this re-enactment. The body, however, is the casualty: it is burnt (prohibited, repressed, abjected) in commemoration of the death – the loss – at the origin of presence.

The competence of a performer, "the exemplary male subject as adequate to the paternal function", therefore depends on "a negation at the heart of subjectivity – the lack that is fundamental to the constitution of identity in the symbolic order ... "

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<sup>17</sup>"[T]here is always a murder at the origin of cruelty ... a parricide. The origin of theater, such as it must be restored, is the hand lifted against the abusive wielder of the logos, against the father..." (Derrida, 1978: 239).

(Rimmer, 1993: 209-210). The body of a performer on stage

acts as a place where the audience fantasises at the level of represented image using it as a type of mirror that allows for transformation of the everyday body. The external representation is then the place to which the audience constantly refers to sustain their identity. (Rimmer, 1993: 209)

Ritual theatre transcends everyday reality, but its "vision of the invisible" (Derrida, 1993: 29) is not the rupture of the image-screen, rather a blindness (castration) that is the condition of visibility, a deference to "intelligible father who begets being as well as the visibility of being", the patriarch(al law) that "remains as invisible as the condition of sight" (Derrida, 1993: 16). Shamanic presence is the *confession* of this debt to the father.

### **Ritual, atonement and communion**

Besides the performer's competence and shamanic presence, ritual theatre also claims to effect transformation in the audience. Innes notes that the most common link between the avant-gardes and ritual is in the common ideal of "community":

ritual is defined [by the avant-gardes] as an action in which all the members of a community actively participate, one which symbolically or even actually transforms the status and identity of the group ... (Innes, 1993: 174)

Bailey's primary critique of western theatre is that "it does not bring us together in communion" (Bailey, 1998: 191). Such communion is necessary if ritual theatre is to effect the transformation that it promises. Not only would the shamanic actor plunge into the unconscious, but also lead the audience along the same journey: the actors would "set the audience alight, to take them on a journey" (Bailey, 2003: 80). Bailey takes Artaud as his model in this regard. Citing from Theatre and the Plague, the programme note of Bailey's *ipi Zombi?* (1998) compares his ritual theatre to Artaud's vision, which "unravels conflicts, liberates powers, releases potentials, and if these and the powers are dark, this is not the fault of plague or of theatre, but of life" (Artaud, cited in Bailey, 2003: 40). Innes notes the same tendency in the avant-gardes inspired by Grotowski: "Their ideal was to recreate a shamanistic performance exorcizing the 'disease' of the community in the form of taboos,

hostilities, fears" (Innes, 1993: 180).

Bailey's productions tend to seek out the trauma, wound, or disease of a community. *iMumbo Jumbo* emerges out of the restlessness of an ancestor's spirit, and the dispute within the amaXhosa over a sangoma who seems to be an imposter. *Ipi Zombi?* brings to light the events of the Kokstad witch hunt in 1995. *The Prophet* (1999) focuses on Nongqawuse, the prophetess who instigated mass cattle killing that broke the strength of Xhosa resistance against British imperialism. *Big Dada* (2001) satirizes the brutal regime of Idi Amin in Uganda. Instead of hiding what some would consider shameful to the community, Bailey brings the sores out in the open. Artaud sees plague as a means of bringing social and psychic crisis to its breaking point:

It seems as though a colossal abcess, ethical as much as social, is drained by the plague. And like the plague, theatre is collectively made to drain abscesses. (Artaud, 1970: 21-22)

Ritual theatre thus intervenes at moments of crisis and trauma. The role of ritual as a mediator of crisis is widely evident: Khabela describes the Nongqawuse cattle killing as a manifestation of a belief in the coming of a new state, where

[r]isen Xhosa warriors who had died in colonial wars would drive all white settlers into the sea and the new Xhosa culture, devoid of the whiteman's interference, will be instituted. (Khabela, 1996: 81)

The prophecy was a call for cleansing, not only of cattle that were infected by imported Friesland bulls (Khabela, 1996: 67-68), but also the plague of widespread mortality, from warring against the British, from smallpox and tuberculosis, and from famine. Belief in resurrection thus strengthened in reaction to the pollution of death in "the whole of Xhosa existence" (Khabela, 1996: 81).

Thus the violence of ritual has as its aim the restoration of balance in the community. The disease which upsets the harmony of a community is attributed to the community's failure to maintain good relations with *Qamata* (God in isiXhosa) via ancestors as mediators. Any "antisocial behaviour, sorcery and irresponsibility [and] failing to do the family rituals and to display humaneness towards others (ubuntu)" are seen as threats to such harmonious relationships, and are "vehemently opposed

by society" (Mtuze 1999: 46).

Qamata is the God of the whole community. It is therefore imperative that the whole community and the whole nation behave in ways that would be acceptable to him, failing which retribution and public censure would follow on the whole community. (Mtuze, 1999: 46)

The TRC, as repeated rituals of confession, aimed to achieve a similar state of harmony and communion. From a Christian perspective (officially the majority of South Africans are Christians), confessing at a TRC hearing led to a healing of a divided Christian brotherhood (Praeg, 2000: 262). The TRC can deliver South Africans from their sins and restore a unity in Christ which can also be understood as a "previous autonomy" – a *reconciled* nation, a kind of Edenic original state.<sup>18</sup> From an African perspective, confession (and its attendant forgiveness) was "a *ritual re-enactment* of the social bond" (Praeg, 2000: 275) – a restoration of community.

On the link between personhood (one's competence as a "man") and community, Praeg offers a complex argument. He distinguishes between Christian and African discourses of confession, forgiveness and community. The Christian brotherhood (*koinonia*) is constructed upon a conditional exchange: forgiveness is granted on the condition that a confession is made, and this exchange restores the social bond (Praeg, 2000: 274). African *ubuntu*, or the dictum "I am because we are", demands a more circular process in which both confession and forgiveness are imperative for the social bond (Praeg, 2000: 275). While the ritual of confession in the former is enacted according to a transcendental (the spiritual law of the need for sacrifice to exculpate), and is applied individualistically (the refusal of forgiveness does not negate the personhood of the confessor), the ritual of confession-forgiveness in the latter establishes the condition of African personhood itself. The failure to perform this ritual (either by refusing to confess or to forgive) would leave the individual in an "existential vacuum" (Praeg, 2000: 270), because in *ubuntu*, neither the individual nor the collective is prior to the other: I am *because* we are (Praeg, 2000: 275).

However, while Praeg draws out the differences in these two discourses, Khabela

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<sup>18</sup>Praeg analyzes "the politics of return" as a discursive construction which promises a return to African values unsullied by colonialism (Praeg, 2000: 90). The prefix "re-" seems to postulate an ideal original state.



and Mtuze seem to place them on a continuum. They point out the similarities between Xhosa and Biblical spirituality (Khabela, 1996: 4; Mtuze, 1999: 3), and Khabela traces the millenarian tendency in Xhosa prophecy that clearly echoes the Christian logic. In response to crises in land, culture and power, the Xhosa sought "release through an act of atonement" (Khabela 1996: 3). Mtuze specifically links the practice of ritual sacrifice to the New Testament definition of atonement (Mtuze, 1999: 11).

I will not attempt to resolve the differences; however, the outcome of either discourse seems to be the same. In seeking atonement for a wrong – in cleansing society of its disease – it is at-*one*-ment that is sought; the oneness of the community establishes the possibility of transformation.

Ritual theatre seeks the same oneness that enables transformation to occur, not only by the performer's delving into the spirit realm, but by "healing the disease" in the audience as well.<sup>19</sup> A performer in ritual theatre therefore does not so much perform for an audience, as performing with an audience for the gaze of another. Matthew Goulish, of American experimental theatre Goat Island, identifies this other as "the phantom audience" (Goulish, 2000: 16). To arrive at this notion, he first re-cites the story of a Jewish rabbi performing the ceremony of the kindling of lights in a concentration camp during the Nazi Holocaust. The rabbi was confronted by an offended fellow Jew, asking how he could say the blessing that God has "kept us alive, preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season", when they were surrounded by death. The rabbi replied that he did hesitate to say the blessing; but then he saw a vision of a large crowd of living Jews gathering behind him, phantoms that re-affirmed the blessing of life even as death pervaded. From this tale, Goulish draws a parallel in the theatre:

You perform for a different audience – for the phantom audience.  
Although they are not present like the others, they pay much closer attention.

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<sup>19</sup>This echoes Freud's analysis of modern psychological drama as an identification between a neurotic hero and an audience also with neurosis (see chapter 1, p.22). The performer/audience relationship in ritual theatre may apply, to a certain extent, to all theatrical performances, and indeed Karafistan (2003) and Cardena & Beard (1996) try to link shamanism with not only avant-garde theatre, but also to acting in general. Simply by taking cognizance of such textual links as this, as well as the links between different religions that Khabela and Mtuze attempt to draw, one can see shamanism as a discourse premised on a universality (a oneness) that overrides differences.

Think of how profoundly influenced you have been by performances which took place before you were born, which you have only heard about, or even imagined.

Were you not then part of the phantom audience, arriving?

When you are gone, will you not return in the memory audience, departing?

(Goulish, 2000: 16)

Goulish's notion of the phantom audience is remarkably close to African notions of the ancestors. A living person is not conceived from birth, but arrives in the realm of the living from a spiritual realm. After death, he joins the realm of the ancestors, who mediate between the living and God and is thus essential to the harmony of the community. Bujo describes the centrality of the ancestors in a community:

The ancestor constitutes the unity of the community and represents the pivotal point from which all actions of the members of a clan take their dynamism and legitimacy. (Bujo, cited in Mtuze, 1999: 47)

The communion of ritual theatre is legitimated by the phantom audience; its claim to having an efficacy on the (living) audience depends on this other, a belief – a faith – that we the living are *seen* by them. For even as we are blind (part of the lineage of blind men that Derrida identifies – see chapter 1), even as the truth is invisible to us, we can be assured that we are watched over, because the *atonement*, the suffering of the sacrifice (of the animal in a ritual, of the performer in ritual theatre), is an image of the larger communion to come. It is no co-incidence that both Xhosa and Christian spirituality postulate mediators between God and the living: it is the screen on which the image of oneness can be projected; they guarantee community.

### **The imposition of oneness**

Yet the efficacy of ritual theatre is disputed. On the one hand, there are those who insist that the theatre is a space for representation, excluding the possibility of theatre that *does* something to an audience. On the other hand, questions are posed to the premise of ritual theatre: what effect does shamanic presence have on audiences, and is it ethical? (See chapter 1, p.41, regarding “ethics”.)

Gcaleka's failure to fulfil his mission is a case of ritual's ineffectiveness against

rationality. Another example is the failure of Bailey's ritual theatre to "set the audience alight" (Bailey, 2003: 80) – except in a wordy furore of debate – in the controversy caused by the last performance of *iMumbo Jumbo* at the Baxter Theatre, Cape Town, 2003. Towards the end of the evening, a chicken was sacrificed on stage, propitiating and thanking the ancestors. Instead of transporting the audience into a spiritual reality, several spectators walked out of the theatre, feeling outraged. The debate spread to the press, public responses were issued by Bailey and the Baxter Theatre, and the Cape Town Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) officially laid charges.

The sangoma ceremony that caused such controversy is a planned part of the production (in a scene called "Rites" – Bailey, 2003: 138), complete with the smoke of *mpepho* (sacred herb), candles, drumming and chanting; but the chicken is not usually slaughtered, only blessed by the sangomas and returned to the crate. In his public reply, Bailey explains that "where all other ceremonial details were strictly adhered to, this felt phoney" (Bailey, in The Star, 19 Aug 2003). It would seem that Bailey wanted to use the last opportunity in Cape Town to "do it right", to ensure the efficacy of the ritual.

The dispute clearly reflects a larger dispute regarding the nature of theatre. The SPCA protested against the act based on "the moral understanding that the slaughter of animals should not be a public spectacle" (Bodington, in Kemp, 2003). A reader writes to the press: "It is entirely indefensible to kill any animal ... in the name of entertainment. ... African theatre is no different from any other theatre: it is intended to reflect life, not replicate it" (Bird, 2003). Another reader writes: "If there is to be outrage I think it should be that Mr Bailey has seen fit to reduce the sacred to performance art" (Berkman, 2003). The emphasis on theatre being "public spectacle", "entertainment" and "performance art" points to an unfamiliarity in the general theatre-going public with twentieth-century developments in theatre and performance, especially the avant-garde (the misuse of the phrase "performance art" is telling). But more importantly, these views point to an insistence on constructions of truth in theatre: the stage is a public space of make-believe, hence unable and inappropriate to show the private, where truth resides (see chapter 2). Also, there is to be clear separation between art and life. What Flockemann (2001) proposes as an

African aesthetics – the continuity of life and art – is thus rejected. This is one of the arguments used as a rebuttal: if Cape Town is in Africa, then the theatre should follow African ways. Guy Willoughby offers this analysis:

One understands, of course, patrons' shocked reactions: it is because the theatre, like the gallery a hallowed, charmed space in Western culture, became for a moment something else altogether: that space of ritualised sacrifice from which all theatre, in ancient Greece, actually began. (Willoughby, 2003b)

The bias of western rationality against ritual is clearly seen in the SPCA's response: "Whether it's an act of cruelty where people are sitting in an audience, or an act of cruelty in somebody's backyard, it's something that we take very seriously" (Bodington, in *The Citizen*, 2 Oct 2003). This view admits no possibility of a truth in ritual, wherever it is performed. No wonder then, that accusations of cultural insensitivity and racism were voiced in the furore.

This perhaps reflects the clearer lines of division between races and wealth/poverty in Cape Town. The situation in Johannesburg is different. Choreographer Johan van der Westhuizen presented *Nomkhubulwana* (2001) at a dance festival.<sup>20</sup> In this work a Zulu ritual for rain, associated with fertility, was performed by sangomas who entered into trance. According to David Thatanelo April of Moving into Dance Mophatong (MIDM), the sangomas were in deep spirit possession so that Van der Westhuizen ran frantically to prevent sangomas falling off the stage (April, 2002: 50). A substantial portion of the audience felt uncomfortable and angry, and walked out of the performance; those who stayed were mostly white South Africans (April, 2002: 52).<sup>21</sup>

April summarizes the objections of the mainly black members of the audience who walked out, after conversing with some of them:

- The performance of sacred African dance rituals does not belong on stage as it undermines the cultural values of certain African societies.
- The performance of sacred African dance rituals does not belong on stage if

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<sup>20</sup>The FNB Vita Dance Umbrella, at University of Witwatersrand Theatre in Johannesburg, 2001 (April, 2002). This festival mainly takes place at urban theatre spaces, and emphasizes original and innovative choreography; in other words, it takes place in an explicitly theatrical context, as opposed to anthropological or religious contexts – if such categorization of contexts can be made.

<sup>21</sup>It is interesting to compare this phenomenon to how *iMumbo Jumbo* addresses explicitly a predominantly white audience.

they are to be performed with lack of understanding and sensitivity as it will result in cultural values of certain African societies being undermined.

- The sangomas are making a mockery of African culture.

(cited in April, 2002: 52)

While the performers have unquestioned competence to perform the ritual (they are real sangomas), it is interesting that the space of the performance rendered their presence a "mockery". The theatre is identified by black audience members as a western space where African rituals will inevitably be made profane.

Zakes Mda observes that it is generally white playwrights "who have ventured into using African rituals on the theatrical stage. Blacks still hold these rituals in awe" (Mda, 2002: 286). The Johannesburg-based MIDM have made theoretical and artistic interventions into the problem of ritual and theatre, by raising awareness of the dangers of appropriating ritual. This discourse has in some ways set the parameters for contemporary dance fusion in South Africa, specifically in Gauteng. Sylvia Glasser's (founder of MIDM) paper, "Appropriation and Appreciation",<sup>22</sup> encourages sensitivity to aesthetic values in different cultures and political contexts, warning against trivializing rituals and presenting them in inappropriate contexts. Since fusion is inevitable, Glasser's emphasis is on how the appropriation of ritual for stage can be done with understanding and a "respectful and sensitive" attitude (Glasser, 1997: 88) – in other words, ethically.

What did this mean in practice? In making the dance work *Tranceformations* (1991), Glasser identified the main problem as how images of San rock art should be translated visually and in movement. Her solution was to correlate choreographic devices with the experience of San ritual: since "[s]uperimposition is a consistent part of shamanistic art", Glasser choreographed "layers" of activities on stage simultaneously (Glasser, cited in April, 2002: 50). She did not attempt to reproduce the ritual on stage. The production designer, Sarah Roberts, similarly created a set that did not provide a realistic ritual setting, but rather referred to the trance experience of San rock art. She cites as motivation partly modernist aesthetics, and partly the need to eschew presenting the dance as "appropriately costumed animated museum pieces" (Roberts, 1991: 17). Thus in the first scene, for instance, panels of

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<sup>22</sup>This paper has been presented at various times and places; the version I cite was delivered in 1997.

acetate with translucent collages of rock art images were flown from the flybars, to suggest the "incandescent, shimmering" images perceived in the first phase of trance (Roberts, 1991: 22). To "suggest" is the keyword here: it seems that both choreographically and visually, the work did not attempt to effect a ritualistic transformation in the audience, but rather referred to a shamanic experience which can only be suggested on stage. Unlike ritual theatre, therefore, MIDM's approach maintains the difference between the artistic (and fictive) nature of the theatre space, and the sacred nature of the ritual space. Ritual is thus brought to a theatre audience through the mediation (screen) of art, sidestepping the anxieties surrounding ritual theatre. Perhaps Glasser's approach can be compared to that of Bill T. Jones; there is little doubt that the primary experience both aim to offer is an artistic experience, in other words, for the audience to see their work as art and to know it to be art.

In comparison, ritual theatre is far more provocative, in its attempt to upset the representational framework of theatre. So in Cape Town, Bailey's play was seen as heralding the presence of "African belief systems [that] have not been diluted by colonialism and the evangelic missionaries of the last two centuries" in spaces previously dominated by white people – both theatre and suburbs (Mangxamba, 2003). In Johannesburg, Van der Westhuizen's presentation was seen as threatening the sacred nature of the ritual, inappropriately bringing real ritual into the theatre. Yet, despite their differences, both these reactions construct a purity of African ritual that cannot or should not be sullied, "diluted".

It is against this purity – the oneness that ritual seeks – that critique can be made. Because the effect that shamanic presence purports to have on an audience is one of communal transportation, it risks imposing a forced community where dissent may be quashed, or simply not made possible. In *iMumbo Jumbo*, Gcaleka states: "Do you know what's my vision of Africa? It's that everybody must follow his Spirit" (Bailey, 2003: 132). Before this seemingly democratic statement is made, Gcaleka tells a story about speaking to a British man:

I ask him a question: "Who was the first writer in the world! Who introduced everything must be writing down?" He say: "The Chinese." I ask him: "If our policy is not to write, our policy is to dream, what do you say?" (Bailey, 2003: 132)

A clear opposition against rationality is once again constructed in this speech. He then comes into the audience and addresses a question to a spectator: "What is your vision of Africa?" On the day that I attended the production, I happened to be the spectator to whom this question was addressed. I whispered my answer (here paraphrased): "Africa is a place where if you don't agree, you're not welcomed." My feelings of embarrassment and anxiety about replying out loud were not only because of the content of the question, which I felt contained too many assumptions (such as the notion of "Africa") which needed unpacking; but the act of questioning also positioned me as a potential contributor to the show (a "spect-actor" with lines to speak), a show which I did not want to ruin by spoiling the "Spirit". It was in effect not possible to answer in the contradictory to Spirit – to laugh alone is to be embarrassed (see Kemp, cited in chapter 1, p.14). There was a compulsion not to stand apart from the community, even if I felt it was ethically warranted, even if I wanted to.

Was this just a case of my being over-sensitive? Was it my own pathology? I have cited Salverson's experience (see chapter 1, p.31): she was compelled to state explicitly, "We are one", even though internally she objected. The performance already pre-determines a totalization.<sup>23</sup> The 1960s avant-gardes frequently subjected audiences to an enforced ecstasy. Innes cites the example of Schechner's *Dionysus in 69*:

... Dionysus repeatedly announced, "It's a celebration, a ritual, an ordeal, an ecstasy", and the audience were encouraged to join "the community" by stripping and dancing with the performers as a positive act, even though by the time this level of participation was reached the group had a negative significance in terms of the play, mindlessly following a megalomaniac quasi-fascist leader in acts of violence. (Innes, 1993: 175-6)

The Living Theatre gave rise to similar anxieties. A review of *Mysteries in Time* notes the aggression and latent violence that had come into the group's work; and the precision with which they rehearse and perform some of the scenes feels so "impersonal ... that it most resembles a company of Green Berets", as opposed to the

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<sup>23</sup> Even though Salverson proposes a different solution to what I will propose in this thesis (her solution seems to tend toward strategies for contesting representation), there are obvious similarities between both reactions against totalization.

liberation that the group promises (Tytell, 1997: 239). Robert Brustein finds the actors "manipulative, preventing the expression of freedom whenever the point of view was different from theirs" (Tytell, 1997: 239); that *Paradise Now* relies on an "emotional swamping of the audience" (Brustein, cited in Tytell, 1997: 241). Brustein expresses fear that "people might swerve to fascism" (Tytell, 1997: 241). By the end of the 1960s, Schechner also came to see the danger in the avant-garde strategy of communal ecstasy. The same ecstasy

can be unleashed in the Red Guards or horrifically channeled toward the Nuremburg rallies and Auschwitz. ... The hidden fear I [Schechner] have about the new expression is that its forms come perilously close to ecstatic fascism. (Schechner, cited in Auslander, 1992: 41)

The danger of this indiscriminate ecstasy is evident in Bailey's *ipi Zombi?*, a retelling of how the death of twelve school boys in a motor accident led to a mass witch hunt. Based on a testimony of seeing 50 naked women at the accident scene, the blame for the deaths was attributed to witches. There were fears that those boys who were killed were captured by witches as zombies to do their bidding, rather than passing on to the ancestral realm. Bailey records how the Bhongweni community was festering with discontent: unemployment, drug-peddling, exam failure rates and a spate of car-crashes indicated to the community that the "witches were definitely up to their high-jinks" (Bailey, 2003: 31). "Catastrophe large and small in traditional African belief systems is often attributed to these witches: satanic women ... who harness evil to breed disorder in their community" (Bailey, 2003: 31). The stage was set for mass hysteria. In the play, Senti, the leader of the witch hunt, justifies his actions: "We are cleaning this town, my brother, all of these cockroaches must go" (Bailey, 2003: 70) – the (millenarian) discourse of cleansing, maintaining the oneness of community, and returning to an original purity, is evident. The disquieting thing is: as Bailey and his company toured *ipi Zombi?* in the rural Eastern Cape, some audiences believed the actors to be zombies; spectators "threaten violence, forcing the performers to break out of character and introduce themselves as representatives of a harmless troupe from Grahamstown" (Bailey, 2003: 78). If ritual theatre succeeds so well in the continuity of art and life, that it transports the audience to an immersion in the reality of another realm, so that they "threaten violence" – just as a mob in Bhongweni perpetrated a violent witch hunt based on these same fears – then what effect on the audience is ritual theatre really seeking?



And is it ethical?

In a scene from the play, Senti riles the mob of boys to hunt down the witches. As more and more undesirables are named as witches to be eliminated, the character Krotch pleads for sensible action:

Krotch: We need evidence, where's the evidence?  
Boys: No need for evidence!  
No need for evidence!  
Krotch: What about the law!  
What about the law!  
Boys: We are the law! We are the law! (Bailey, 2003: 67)

The Boys' words are telling, for indeed in their ecstatic reverie (in the narrative, and the actors in performance), they do constitute a law – the patriarchal law of shamanic presence. The drive towards oneness (*atonement*) is the phallic pleasure – Eros (see chapter 1) – that supports "all the architecture of ... words and knowledge" (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 187-8). Under the master-signifier of the phallus, the performer embodies the truth and the law (of the father).

The surplus of enjoyment left over by language becomes the unconfessable crime which is pursued by the law of the father, who is the upholder of the phallus as legislative power. The law looks for the truth, but only to put it behind bars, to keep truth on the run, from one signifier to another; the truth retreats and re-appears like a mirror-image ... it moves in an out like waves lapping on the shore, still it goes on, encore ... disguised, mute, fading away, ungraspable. (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 191)

What is confessable is what confirms the law. The murder (the original parricide) is confessed in the form of ritual (sacrificial feast/*atonement*) that upholds the (father's) law. The surpluses – the abjected, the outlawed, the foreigner, the wandering tramp – can only be represented to the law in images that screen the phallic subject from the gaze of their true alterity. The representation of these abjected elements – in a witch hunt's case, the naming of witches – protects the mob from being exposed to their own hysteria; as more witches are named, their illusion (image) of cleansing the community is further re-inforced, and so: encore!

## **No pure Africa: contradictions of postcoloniality**

**vs**

## **A pure South Africa: master-narratives, identity and community**

The problem lies in the attempt to construct a consensus in a postcolonial, heterogeneous society. Some objections to the chicken sacrifice in *iMumbo Jumbo* were motivated by this contradiction that they sense in the play; for example, a reader's letter to the press describes the play as "whimsical and allegorical ... [which] relied on rudimentary and fanciful props to convey its message", such as "wooden babies and porcelain dogs and cardboard trees". The ritual of chicken killing was thus "incongruous" (Bird, 2003).

Bailey's stated artistic intention reflects this contradiction: "The two realms – showbiz and ritual – can work together" (Bailey, cited in Willoughby, 2003a). Within his commitment to ritual there is also cynicism: does the title *iMumbo Jumbo* ultimately affirm or mock the Spirit? (Matshikiza in Bailey, 2003: 7) Flockemann notes

the way Bailey's work incorporates simultaneously Brechtian effects that foreground the constructedness of the representation, while at the same time having a decidedly un-Brechtian involvement of the audience in processes of possibly cathartic emotional experiences. (Flockemann, 2001: 37n4)

The play-within-the-ritual – the dramatic enactment of Gcaleka's quest – uses a cartoonish style that caricatures the characters involved in his story. There is delicious irony in representing the English Queen as clearly black, clutching an absurdly large cell phone and a porcelain dog, calling herself "This is Queen Elizabeth two of England" (Bailey, 2003: 130). Jesus appears on the crucifix with outstretched arms, a crown of thorns, and wearing on his chest a large heart shape outlined by bright blinking pink lights. He "wiggles his fingers frantically and Nicholas bounds up the steps and plucks the nails from Jesus' hands" (Bailey, 2003: 136). The amaXhosa leaders are portrayed by precise ensemble action, stylized delivery of lines, and wearing thick white make-up outlining eyes and lips, as if they are clowns. This aspect of the play is often what makes the most impression; one review states: "IMumbo [sic] Jumbo makes wonderfully escapist theatre" (Joubert, 2003) – a far cry from the Spirit of ritual theatre.

Bailey is informed by the hybridity that he observes in reality. On the one hand, he narrates the mystical encounters which constituted his calling – in 1993 he journeyed into Zimbabwe; one evening, alone in a river gorge, he was approached by a spirit messenger, "silver-blue and completely covered with what looked like large feathers or scales". He was "transported away" with this spirit, and saw visions of barrenness and industrial development on the land. He interprets this experience as the "African Spirit" showing him the spiritual drought of the land, and calling him to work with the Spirit in making drama (Bailey, 2003: 13). On the other hand, when he visited Gcaleka in Nyanga East, Bailey found the chief "hold[ing] court" while a "soap opera flickers blandly on the TV" (Bailey, 2003: 93). Later, Gcaleka sacrificed a goat; the blood "froths onto the electric blue linoleum, and two American soapie stars kiss on the screen in the background" (Bailey, 2003: 94-95). He felt "ecstatic" about "all this impurity, these minglings, these collisions. This is the Africa of today" (Bailey, 2003: 95).

Is this impurity a reason that Bailey's work offends some black intellectuals? Matshikiza describes the objections from "Johannesburg's black glitterati", because a white man "dared to stray into nervous African territory – a mixture of witchcraft, corrupt tradition and dodgy modern politics" (Matshikiza, 2002). Bailey does not appropriate ritual with sensitivity and respect – in other words, he does not construct African spirituality in terms of a sacred purity. On the other side of the contradiction, Bailey also does not please those who desire the absolute truth of spiritual ecstasy. Willoughby records a well-known playwright asking this question: "Why a chicken? Wouldn't, in terms of cultural meaning, a goat or cow have been more appropriate?" (Willoughby, 2003b)

The desire for a truth that is purely African ironically reaffirms a colonial subjectivity:

the desire to re-cover an authentic African epistemology in order to establish African philosophy as autonomous subject, ironically re-iterates Western, enlightenment notions of the autonomous subject. Here, in the pursuit of an autonomous subject the terms of historical oppression are necessarily duplicated in the terms of liberation. (Praeg, 2000: abstract)

Even as the formation of subjectivity shifts away from race divisions, the audience is

nevertheless constructed on the same terms as the western (colonial) subject; its autonomous detachment is secured as it casts its perspectival gaze over the stage. The belief in truth (of the Spirit, or of culturally sensitive representation) ensures that its subjectivity is meaningful.

Does this mean that Bailey's theatre, by embracing the impurity of postcoloniality, enables reflection on the viewing subjectivity? Does it manage to push aside the screen, to reveal the void that shapes the audience's desire for identification?

The answer is no: firstly, the hybridity of postcoloniality is not in itself a truth that can legitimate a subject position (making it *lawful*), without the tendency to purge impurities in securing its identity. The contradiction of Spirit and cynicism or rationality is not a stable co-existence, but a shifting tension. The Plays of Miracle and Wonder came to constitute an early phase of Bailey's work which ended with *The Prophet*. Bailey explains how in this production he pushed "too hard" the exploration of Xhosa spiritual beliefs, rituals, sangoma ceremonies and trance performance, "burning a couple of the performers" (Bailey, 2003: 198). He "withdrew in fear", and "began to question [his] right to work with this material at all" (Bailey, 2003: 198). Later, in *Big Dada*, the "cartoon cabaret style" and "grotesque buffoonery" became the *modus operandi* (Willoughby, 2004). "As one watches this production it's impossible to go beyond style" (Greig, 2001). The Bailey of *Big Dada* describes himself thus: "I'm probably quite a superficial human. I love over-the-top, camp, glittery sensational stuff. For me cheap tricks work" (Bailey, cited in Szalwinska, 2001). There was a strong reverse in Bailey's intent and approach.

It would seem that Bailey realized the terror that Spirit could bring. Was he perhaps also unnerved by the failure of audiences to respond as ritual theatre promises they should? This is the second answer to the question whether Bailey's theatre enables a revision of the viewing subjectivity. A reviewer notes the significance of the audience's reactions in Bailey's first work *Zombie*, an early version of *ipi Zombi*:

But it is this audience integration that fails a thoroughly engrossing chain of events. In Nyanga, the expectation of mass appreciation turned out to be short-lived, as onlookers felt free to join in the actors' dialogue and burst into

uproarious fits of laughter at moments that hardly seemed to warrant it. (Witchcraft? What a crock!) ... (Marshall, 1997)

Bailey also records the reactions of an *ipi Zombi?* audience consisting of black school learners, who

explod[ed] with laughter at what was never anticipated as humorous: the violent killing of a woman, the desperate hacking of corpses with axes in an attempt to destroy the evil witchcraft. ... Sometimes I find it disturbing when I cannot understand, sometimes I let go and laugh along with them. ... [D]rama stirs up deep feelings, drama releases emotions: that is enough for me. (Bailey, 2003: 80)

Bailey's anxiety perhaps indicates that it is not enough to accept that drama – specifically ritual theatre – releases unconscious or spiritual energies without accepting responsibility for how audiences react to it. He came face to face with the problematic statement by Artaud, cited in the programme of *ipi Zombi?*: "Theatre, like the plague, unravels conflicts, liberates powers, release potentials, and if these and the powers are dark, this is not *the fault* of plague or *of theatre*, but of life" (Artaud, cited in Bailey, 2003: 40, emphases added). It seems that offence, disgust and fear were elicited, but not the horror of realizing the fragility and impurity of the "I". Kristeva writes of a horror that confronts and draws the subject towards a place where meaning breaks down; it is a horror in realizing that meaning, and therefore identity, cannot be ascertained by a belief in truth. The audiences' reactions, however, seem to indicate a reaffirmation and entrenchment of their identities, a hardened screen that does not allow disturbances to what the subject holds as truth.

What is this identity that draws an illusion of autonomy around the subject? Again, Bailey's records of his touring experiences offer some clues. In Ginsberg, a township near King William's Town, the performance venue for *ipi Zombi?* was double-booked. Bailey and the troupe took to performing in the streets just outside; the "township fathers" ordered them to leave. They protested that they could not be prevented from performing in the streets, "this is South Africa". The reply was: "This is not South Africa, this is Ginsberg. This is our community. You don't know anything, you haven't suffered" (Bailey, 2003: 79). In Umtata, where school learners laughed at scenes of violence (see above), a white professor explained to Bailey: "They are used to it, they have seen so much violence" (Bailey, 2003: 80).

The point is more complex than over-sensitivity or desensitization against violence; rather, it concerns how identities were forged in the wake of apartheid. The signifier that seems to legitimate their subjectivities is the name "sufferer". And it points towards more than the exposure to violence during the liberation struggle, or the economic hardships that followed. I would suggest, albeit tentatively, that the TRC as a major public intervention into the construction of a new South Africa was instrumental in forging structures of subjectivity. Praeg analyzes the TRC as the construction of a sense of community through discourses of nationalism, Christian brotherhood, and ubuntu (Praeg, 2000: 235). These discourses informed the rituals of confession (and forgiveness) out of which reconciliation was sought. Personal experiences of trauma were narrated, representing an overall narrative of suffering. Even though the TRC marked a shift in that personal experiences of trauma were no longer eclipsed by "the larger project of mass liberation" (Taylor, 1998: ii), Praeg argues that

It is clear ... that there is *no* significant difference between eclipsing the suffering of the individual for the sake of liberation and doing so for the sake of constructing a master-narrative in which the personal comes to stand for the memory of the national. These are simply two different ideologies. Both the ideologies of liberation and nationalism depend for their legitimation as teleological grand-narratives on a Hegelian consolidation of history and autobiography – a consolidation that consumes the personal in order to produce a public "horror pornography" (Jones *et al* 1998: xvi). ... [T]his consumption of suffering also makes it possible to narrate both the personal as well as the national in ... messianic terms ... (Praeg, 2000: 238)

The TRC aimed to establish a South African community or nation by emphasizing the general over the particular, forging a "*master-narrative of suffering* essential for providing a united community with the past necessary *to conceive of its identity* ..." (Praeg, 2000: 235, emphases added). Both perpetrators and victims<sup>24</sup> could identify with the identity of sufferer, since perpetrators suffered under guilt and needed atonement (Praeg, 2000: 255); and all were in need of healing and reconciliation. As they approached the priestly figure of Archbishop Desmond Tutu to perform rituals

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<sup>24</sup>Stephanie Marlin-Curiel notes that the TRC chose the term "victim" over "survivor" despite anxieties about the terminology, as "survivor" has more positive connotations of strength and overcoming adversity. The more passive "victim" was chosen because it is the "intention and action of the perpetrator that creates the condition of being a victim" (TRC Final Report, cited in Marlin-Curiel, 2001: 79). The TRC thus located "truth" in "the moment when the victim was powerless and silenced" (Marlin-Curiel, 2001: 79).

of confession, they submitted to a conversion – converting from a deceitful representation of South Africa to the "Truth" about South Africa (Praeg, 2000: 264). The meanings of confessions and testimonies were thus pre-determined within the metanarrative.

As a parallel, Schechner notes that "real events" (as opposed to dramatic representation) are always already mediatized (Schechner, 1997: 88) – the supposed authenticity of the event is already pre-determined by its media of transmission and reception. Schechner refers to the impact of TV on live theatre: audiences are used to receiving news of "real events" (such as war) in edited broadcasts, usually framed as "morality play: good guys/bad guys, lessons to be learned"; and the victims, relations, and bystanders who speak (confess) on TV about the event tend to "emote on camera, or are edited to bring forth the greatest pathos" (Schechner, 1997: 88). The habit and expectations of receiving "events-as-TV-drama" affect how live theatre is received (Schechner, 1997: 88). The TRC was also represented to most South Africans through the mass media;<sup>25</sup> so that in addition to the metanarrative that consumes personal narratives to produce a "horror pornography" (Praeg), the primary relation between the ritual performance and the audience also constructs the TRC as a (TV) spectacle.

A similar overarching discourse may be found in Bailey's ritual theatre: "questions of sincerity or irony on the part of the creator are deferred – or rather, overwhelmed – by the sheer spectacle on stage" (Willoughby 2003a). The story of the Kokstad witch hunt in *ipi Zombi*? most likely came across to the audience of laughing school learners in Umtata as a spectacle of violence, one which paradoxically affirmed their subject position within the historical narrative of the new South Africa. The explanation that "they have seen so much violence" does not only refer to exposure to real-life violence or to Hollywood films, but perhaps also points to the role that such narratives plays in the construction of identity.

Moreover, identities are hardened around the name of "sufferer". Against the

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<sup>25</sup>Krog (1999), for instance, writes of her anxieties in reporting the TRC. Besides the issues raised in chapter 1, Krog also engages with the more practical problems of mass media, selection of material and its effect on representation.

metanarrative of suffering, the TRC offered the "Truth" of the new South Africa; "the *heimlichkeit* of the nation is offered in return for confessions or testimonies" (Praeg, 2000: 241). Purged of the abject (or, having been atoned by the TRC), a homely (*heimlich*) South Africa becomes the image with which citizens can identify. This presupposition of a collective desire for the homely nation demands of the collectivity

that they should recognise that what the nation has to offer is essentially better or superior to the condition that preceded its narration. This the national narrative does by turning everybody into victims because if everybody can be persuaded of having been victims, then the seductive homeliness of the nation will legitimise itself. As essentially a narcissistic discourse the nation postulates itself as desirable by inventing for itself a redemptive function. (Praeg, 2000: 254)

The nation becomes a "messianic" (Praeg) image, which, just as ritual theatre promises in its millenarianism, delivers its audiences/participants into a higher truth. The sufferer thus entrenches his identity within the historical narrative of the new nation; to disturb his subjectivity is to disturb the truth about the new South Africa. Ironically, the Ginsberg community leader who stopped Bailey's troupe from performing drew a smaller, tighter boundary: "This is not South Africa, this is Ginsberg. This is our community." Perhaps out of disillusionment with living conditions, the nation does not hold the truth for him; but the messianic belief in the community of Ginsberg is as strong, as entrenched, and as exclusive.

The psychoanalysis of subjectivity reveals a similar construction of identity under metanarratives. It is the premise of the "talking cure". For Lacan, symptoms are cured by reordering the signifiers in the unconscious (see chapter 1, p.8); material of the unconscious (symptoms) are interpreted (reordered) according to new master signifiers. These master signifiers are essentially metanarratives with which a subject can identify and which "commits them to certain orderings of all the rest of the signifiers", in other words, to certain values and ideals that are intimately bound up with identity (Sharp, 2002). In the talking cure, unconscious material is "integrated into the subject's symbolic universe: the way s/he understands the world, in the terms of his/her community's natural language. They have been subjectivised ... an integral part of this identity", and thus not considered as alien or foreign (Sharp, 2002). (Note again the cleansing away of the foreign, the unhomely – considered as traumatic and



sources of symptoms – even if it is a matter of re-naming them as *heimlich*.)  
Psychoanalytic interpretation thus "realigns the way [the client] sees her past"  
(Sharp, 2002).

The master-signifier that ultimately interprets the client's unconscious is, as feminist critiques point out, the phallus that governs the symbolic order (see chapter 1, p.6). New narratives can be constructed in the analytic – or theatrical – situation, creating positive images for identification; but "these often work to resubstantialise identity, resituating the phallus as the referential definition of subjectivity" (Rimmer, 1993: 214). Entrenchment of positions, rather than transformation, tends to follow as a result (an example of which is the victim art debate, discussed in chapter 2; see pp.77-78).

Peggy Phelan (1996) traces in the beginnings of psychoanalysis the suppression of a cure that engaged with the body in favour of the talking cure, thus launching a phallogocentric trajectory for the discipline.<sup>26</sup> The talking cure aims to represent the *unheimlich* under the master-signifier of the phallus; this echoes the attempt of the TRC to offer a desirable homely nation organized under the metanarrative of suffering. Both posit a truth and promise a cure; they come together in their collusion to construct personal subjectivities that are defined against national metanarratives. Thus, as Kristeva notes regarding subjectivities within modern nation states: "one can be more or less a man to the extent that one is more or less a citizen ... he who is not a citizen is not fully a man" (Kristeva, cited in Ziarek, 1995: 2). And if competence to perform depends on the question Grotowski raised: "Are you a man?" (Grotowski, 1987: 40) then the criterion for evaluating a South African theatre performer is plainly set out: be proudly South African.

My performance anxiety, and the whole question about body performance in the wake of mass social trauma, can be summed up in the question: "In what sense is the past ... already constructed prior to the act of confronting it?" (Praeg, 2000: 254) Is a confession of the traumatic past (in front of an analyst, a TRC commissioner and the South African public, or a theatre audience) already narrated, its meaning pre-

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<sup>26</sup>This is further explored in the concluding section of the thesis. The related idea that religion may be an attempt to think without the body is explored earlier in this chapter (see p.101).

determined? What is "live" about theatre; what kind of communal experience does it construct, and is it necessarily ethical?<sup>27</sup>

Duma Khumalo testified at the TRC about his wrongful conviction and death sentence during apartheid. He spent nearly four years on death row as one of the "Sharpeville Six", convicted for "his alleged participation in the mob killing of a town councillor" during a mass protest (*He Left Quietly* programme note).<sup>28</sup> Political negotiation eventually released Khumalo from prison, but his conviction was never overturned. Testifying at the TRC proved to be an inadequate ritual for Khumalo: he subsequently participated in the play *The Story I am about to Tell: Indaba Engizoyixoxa* (1996) as one of three TRC testifiers; later, he performed in *He Left Quietly* (2002), a production solely about his experiences. In both these plays, he sits face to face with audiences, recounting his traumatic past. It is doubtful that theatre succeeded in offering Khumalo healing and closure where the TRC failed: he repeatedly re-visited the site of trauma, telling his story again and again (*encore*), refusing closure.

Against the construction of national identity and citizen's subjectivity, there is a need to register the dissent, discontent, and anxieties that are the by-products of the very identity and subjectivity that is upheld (erected) as desirable. Jay Winter studies the trauma of wars and their memories: while consensus constructs neat narratives of "black and white, good and evil, right and wrong, outcome and justification", "wars of decolonization are never wars of consensus" (Winter, in Sujan, 2004). In such cases,

It is entirely unclear whether the act of speaking out ... heals. It's entirely unclear whether the people who do it actually escape from the shadow of the events that disfigure their lives. It may happen, it may not. It's not the case that the truth shall set you free – it's not the case. It may be the case that there are certain injuries that can never ever be healed, and once you realize that the road to confession is not the road to salvation, it may be the case that our narratives of suffering are very mixed with outcomes that we can't really predict. (Winter, in Sujan, 2004)

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<sup>27</sup>I draw attention again to chapter 1, exploring notions of ethics and indeterminacy.

<sup>28</sup>More precisely, Khumalo was charged with "common purpose" for being in a crowd near the scene of the murder of a councillor during a rent boycott in Sharpeville in 1984 (Magardie, 2004). Khumalo's "crime" was simply that he was there. Like many non-white people's experience during apartheid, he had simply "*committed the crime of being*" (Kobialka, 2000: 42). See chapter 2, p.80.

Does all this mean that the TRC was unethical? No. There was clearly the "moral superiority of maintaining the social bond" (Praeg, 2000: 232). The modern world is organized around political states, and without the construction of a national identity there cannot be peaceful living to any extent. Now that this nation has been established, however, a new responsibility to the past arises: to negotiate between the desire for oneness, and the foreigners (the outlawed, the wandering tramps – see p.115) that such desire abjects. For the theatre, this means a need to review not only representational content, but also the performer/audience relation. Also at stake are the processes and performance modes of theatre, so that the craft of making theatre is not taken for granted, but investigated for its impact on the performer/audience relation. It is not only an artistic but also an ethical imperative to investigate the desires that drive us to the theatre again and again, compelling a performer to stand in front of an audience, allowing a spectator to look from the safety of his subjectivity. And, once the dynamics of these desires are more clearly understood, the responsibility remains with the artist to find alternative ways of constituting the theatre event itself – even if this means losing those calls of "encore" to the indeterminacy of this theatre.

## Conclusion

### Bodies of discontent

The South African stage is circumscribed by political and economic discourses; the problematization of national identity is also a problematization of image-identification in the theatre. In search for a way to unsettle these interrogative discourses, two moments of performing foreignness are examined, one fictional, one theatrical. These moments enact a parallel to the feminine hysteric, who disturbs the phallogentric truth of the psychoanalyst through body performance. These moments of disturbing spectatorship are reflected in the works of performance artist Marina Abramović. Her explorations into passive-aggression, shamanism and finally theatricality and the morality of spectatorship allow for an overview of the issues raised in this thesis regarding body, viewing, and subjecthood. Sensitivity to the body and its discontent on the part of the viewer becomes crucial to ethical performance.

Reflecting on contemporary dance in South Africa a decade after the first democratic election, and looking ahead, choreographer Jay Pather offers this thought:

Contemporary choreographers should be urged to stop thinking just in terms of the three-strong dance company and be supported to create large-scale companies that, fired by a contemporary imagination and edgy aesthetics, can inspire a nation as well as rightfully be the pride and joy of the government. (Pather, 2004)

What Pather is proposing here has a degree of ambiguity: what may at first come across as jingoistic rhetoric can be contextualized within the entire article, in which Pather argues for artists to consider their responsibility to and dependence on their political and economic environment. Nevertheless, the point remains that the discourse of/on dance and the discourse of “government” should converge. Pather offers the example of performing contemporary dance at a presidential inauguration, which would signal a kind of national recognition of the significance of contemporary dance. Pather asks, “If we have fought for what is rightfully ours, why can’t we leave the peripheries and inhabit centre stage without losing our edge?” (Pather, 2004)

Here the stage space is clearly circumscribed by the discourse of the “nation” (as represented by the government<sup>1</sup>). A large-scale company “inspires” by being able to offer an image of a collective that South Africans can identify with; the image on

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to political discourse in the west, where oppositional politics signals the health of democracy, here the government is considered legitimate and just because democratically elected. The discourse of political resistance in theatre and performance studies (e.g. the title of Auslander’s book, Presence and Resistance) do not fit well into this scenario. However, see chapter 2, pp.75-78 on the economic hegemony that overdetermines the notion of democracy. Doubt is thrown on the pride with which the “centre stage” – the space of the government, the space of democracy – can be occupied.

stage legitimates ways that citizens can be made into a nation.

As explored in chapter 3, the operation of image-identification in theatre primarily serves to constitute a unity; what the content of that unity is may vary. Pather here advocates "contemporary" and "edgy" (possibly with unspoken bias towards the urban), but there are possible substitutes: "multi-racial casting" and "cultural fusion" once dominated dance discourse in the 1980s and 1990s, while "relevance" once dominated theatre discourse. "Deep roots in tradition" is conceivably the new substitute.

One of the problems with erecting such images for national identification is the government's adoption of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) before 2004, "a macroeconomic policy that genuflects to an international market economy" (van Graan, 2004). Within this environment, it has been the high arts such as opera and ballet that were favoured, appealing to the new middle class (Pather, 2004). Ironically, the "contemporary" and "edgy" aesthetics that Pather proposes are but ways that contemporary dance can enter into a similar discourse of spectacle, by projecting images of a modern, vibrant, and (urban) cosmopolitan nation well adapted to the global market. Dance becomes assimilated into the creation of niche markets (see chapter 2, p.78). Even though Pather problematizes the economic controls over cultural production, the strategy he proposes is not dissimilar to the theatre spectacles that gained support under GEAR: the content may vary, the operation is the same.

[T]o invoke the power of presence through a dramatistic model of political action and art is to link oneself inextricably with the workings of a repressive status quo by "leav[ing] politics as representation uncriticized (Lyotard)" (Auslander, 1992: 43).

My discontent gave rise to the (re)search for a theatre that does not work according to the audience's projection of desire, "attribut[ing] to others, especially a leader, entertainer or artist the secret images within ourselves" (Frenkel, cited in Auslander, 1992: 43). For Kristeva, the figure of the foreigner embodies these "secret images"; and the prevalence of xenophobia in South Africa today may be the cost that is paid for patriotic subjectivities, a cost that theatre, complicit in asserting images of the nation, must share. But the foreigner that is hated and expelled is only a projection of

the foreigner within the construction of our individual and national subjectivities; "the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder", the object that reminds us of the emptiness within identity (Kristeva, in Oliver, 1997: 264).

Discontent and traumatized foreigners reveal the emptiness of a nation. The character of Gregor in a short story by Peter Rule, "A Return" (1988), is the hidden face of apartheid national identity; while Duma Khumalo (see chapter 3, p.124) can be seen as a parallel foreigner that confounds the TRC's construction of a new nation. Both perform an emptiness that destroys the image of the nation, albeit in different contexts; furthermore, the performances of emptiness (void, gap, the tear in the screen) by both foreigners are located in the body.

Gregor is a young white man returning home from fighting in Angola. The trauma of killing and witnessing death left him "*bosbefok*" (psychologically traumatized). He finds himself feeling displaced within what used to be his familiar (*heimlich*) environments, bottled up with memories and feelings for which he can find no words. He falls (see chapter 3, p.100) into an unnerving silence. Gregor becomes intensely aware of the physical motions and tensions that accompany his attempts to speak: "My throat is thick, I cannot reach my words out to her; they are caught before the tongue, clotted in mucus and saliva" (Rule, 1988: 102).

Gregor's silence unnerves his family. One Saturday afternoon Gregor and family go on a visit to the "northern suburbs", a middle-class, fairly well-off part of the city. Despite Gregor's silence, they try to continue a normal family life. Playing with his young godson, Gregor experiences a flashback of the war, remembering the children he had encountered on the battlefield. He cannot continue playing with his godson.

I turn on the garden tap fully, kneeling. I think of the wails of small life thrust from the mouth of the womb, the laughter and cries, the last clotted expression caught in the throat. The water cascades across my scalp, gushes down my back, clogs and bursts in my ears, stings in my eyes. The water flushes like shock over my body, through my shirt, presses my head like a blessing.

Terence turns the tap off.

"What are you doing, Greg?"

His voice is shaky, his face disturbed.

I felt clogged up. I needed a wash. I sit on the grass wondering about such an

answer.

"Damn it, Greg! Answer me!"

The sun stretches its warmth over me like a cloth. My eyes sting with the water. Is it tears? (Rule, 1988: 106)

Is Gregor performing a cleansing, a baptism in this scene? The washing does not provide him with the forgiveness that he needs; he is unable to re-assume a speaking subject position. Rule describes in detail Gregor's physical struggle, the agitation felt particularly on the outer edges of his body: Words are caught at the throat; water washes over his scalp and back, stings in his eyes, and drenches his shirt so that it clings to his skin. The symbolic action of cleansing, even the ordinary weekend afternoon action of playing with water, are ruptured by the sting of the water that touches on Gregor's pain; but by touching it and relieving it, the pain of the body also becomes an unspeakable jouissance. The forbidden pleasure is in hurting where it is not supposed to hurt: the heart of a white South African suburban home.

Khumalo was supposed to feel hurt; he was meant to testify at the TRC, have his memories publicly recorded, in exchange for a healed identity. His repeated performances of traumatic memory in subsequent theatre productions confound this logic. Director and artist William Kentridge, who also grappled with theatre and testimony in making *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997), records his experience of watching Khumalo in *The Story I am About to Tell*. He found the "most moving moment" to be when Khumalo "had a lapse of memory" on stage, and he notes the "paradoxes" between an actor forgetting his place in a script, and a victim forgetting his own story of trauma (Kentridge, in Taylor, 1998: xiii-xiv). Stephanie Marlin-Curiel explains the loss of speech as a physical excess: by talking about their traumatic memories on stage, the actors in *The Story* are bringing out "an embodied memory of violence"; the actors were observed to cover face with hand, to wring hands, and to rock back and forth on the chair (Marlin-Curiel, 2001: 85). These bodily actions "proceed from, but also precede, and exceed beyond speech" (p.80).

I watched Khumalo telling his story in *He Left Quietly*.<sup>2</sup> The audience was ushered

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<sup>2</sup> The performance attended was part of the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, at PJ's, which was a converted school hall. Scaffolding in the hall provides the audience seating throughout the festival, facing the raised stage where the performance would ordinarily take place; but for this production only the raised stage was used.

on to the school hall stage, where a few rows of plastic seats surrounded the playing area on three sides. Khumalo sat but a few feet away from my seat, smoking sedately as he invited spectators to ask questions about him. He remained on stage throughout the play, sitting on a chair, accompanying the enactment with his narration. I cannot decide which moment of the play moved (as in unsettled) me more: the flouting of the dramatic frame as Khumalo spoke to us face to face; or the dramatic re-enactment of masturbation in prison: in a climactic moment of crisis and pain, the actor playing Khumalo stood, slightly bent at the waist, his hand jerking in his trousers. On the one hand, Khumalo's presence on stage clearly marked the moment as "unreal", a mere re-enactment. On the other hand, Khumalo stopped narrating at this point, remaining silent; the scene stood out as an empty, traumatic moment, a taboo that should not be touched: not only because of its content, but also because structurally, it did not seem predicted or explained afterwards by the play's narrative structure.

Perhaps the scene was moving (or unsettling) because, firstly, this usually private bodily action was performed so publicly. The private act is supposed to be the truth, and its public (re-)performance supposedly fictive; that Khumalo and the actor playing him were both on stage should have underlined this distinction, but it did not. Having Khumalo sitting right there, *watching* (like the audience), not talking, somehow blurred the distinction. Secondly, while masturbation is usually understood as an action of comfort or release, this masturbating body was a desperate attempt to get into contact with the unspeakable horror of facing impending death. Like the water stinging Gregor's skin, the jerking hand contacted the *jouissance* (collected in this case in an erotogenic zone of the body) that could not be spoken.

The bodies of Gregor and Khumalo (and his actor) performed in ways that introduced a foreignness, a strangeness that ruptured the performance contexts, whether it is suburban home life, TRC rituals, or the theatre event. Marlin-Curiel holds the actors' bodies in *The Story* "responsible for the 'loss of control' over speech", that the bodies were speaking in ways "unintended by the speaker" (Marlin-Curiel, 2001: 83-84). Her choice of words seems to be derived from a perspective which deems the body an unwelcome element in the healing process. Some psychological theories regard psychosomatic responses as symptoms indicating a



"failure to work through" loss (Harvey, 1996: 15 & 17). Healing is considered successful when embodied memories are purged. Psychoanalysis, inheriting the dualist metaphysics of the Cartesian subjectivity (see chapter 1, p.7), displays the same bias against the body. If subjectivity is formed in the gaze of the Other (mediated by the screen), Kristeva describes the Ego as "a body to be put to death, or at least to be deferred, for the love of the Other so that Myself can be" (Kristeva, cited in Oliver, 1997: 149). The body becomes an abject so that "I" can be formed (see chapter 3, p.100).

Critiques of this metaphysics have been mentioned from various theoretical perspectives; what I would like to elaborate here, however, is a feminist critique that reclaims the body. Even though Lacan left behind a phallogentric psychoanalytic truth that needs deconstruction, his investigation into feminine sexuality nevertheless opened a door for something other, "something which says 'no' to phallic enjoyment. This can be seen in the pains of the hysteric, whose symptoms often represent a denial of the role of the phallus" (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 188-9).

Peggy Phelan (1996) traces the rise of psychoanalysis through Josef Breuer and Freud's Studies on Hysteria. Out of the cases of five hysteric women, Freud built (erected) the discipline of psychoanalysis, which claimed to be "a therapeutic technical procedure which left nothing to be desired in its logical consistency and systematic application" (Breuer & Freud, cited in Phelan, 1996: 90). The technique – the talking cure – emerged when the somatic symptoms of hysteria in Anna O., such as a nervous cough, paralysed leg, and fainting on seeing her image in a mirror, were "cured" by narrating her trauma to Breuer. This spoken act of interpretation allowed the joining of her body (symptom) to her consciousness; the trauma, the origin of symptoms, is framed by narration, given meaning or signified, and integrated into her present sense of self. Phelan, reflecting on this technique, calls hysteria "the first disease in which psychoanalysis imagines a history of the symptom and where the patient discovers that her body's history must be spoken" (Phelan, 1996: 91).

But in re-visiting the case of Anna O., Phelan points out that this original account did not show the talking cure as the only possible basis for healing. The touching of body parts performing hysterical symptoms or the re-enactment of a traumatic event were

crucial parts of Anna O.'s process with Breuer (Phelan, 1996: 97).

Classical psychoanalysis abandoned the physical cure in favor of the clinical technique of the talking cure. A technique that depended too heavily upon touch was a huge risk for an epistemological revolution whose visionary leader [Freud] was determined to be, above all, scientific. *Studies*, almost unwittingly, realizes two different approaches to the cure – and the psychoanalytic movement followed the one that left the body untouched. (Phelan, 1996: 90-91)

Adopting the dualist, logocentric bias against the body, psychoanalysis gained recognition and legitimation as a science. However, body is not simply constructed as opposed to language. Phelan draws a link between the talking cure and the act of dancing and choreographing: "Psychoanalysis and choreography are two different modes of performing the body's movement. Each seeks to give the body a system of time" – the former through conscious narration, the latter through organizing movements in space and time (Phelan, 1996: 94). Both are techniques that seek to discipline the body: the talking cure brings the body into the discipline of linear, progressive time; dance disciplines the body by "*consciously* perform[ing] the body's discovery of its temporal and spatial dimensions" (Phelan, 1996: 92). These techniques of disciplining the body are explored in detail in chapters 2 and 3.

What, then, is the body that critiques the logocentrism and phallocentrism of psychoanalysis? After Breuer terminated treatment, Anna O. had a phantom pregnancy. As a reproduction that embodies an emptiness, the hysterical pregnancy "signifies the excess, the supplement that cannot be contained or interpreted by the talking cure" (Phelan, 1996: 98). The phallocentrism of the talking cure can be seen in the interpretation of Anna O.'s symptoms: they are explained as originating from her anxiety over her dying father, and her unconscious attempt to lend her living body to him. Phelan notes the parallel in which Anna O.'s body is lent to Breuer and Freud in order to give life to psychoanalysis. The patient's body is used "as a stage for the body of the other" (Phelan, 1996: 97).<sup>3</sup> The phantom pregnancy, on the other hand, returns Anna O. to *her* body, "as a body other than her father's or her doctor's" (Phelan, 1996: 99). It is a body that "exceeds narration and the will to mastery enacted by 'masculine' discourse" (Phelan, 1996: 100). As Lacan notes, there is "something which says 'no' to phallic enjoyment" (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 188).

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<sup>3</sup>Phelan notes the significance that most hysteric patients were women; their bodies were wombs (also the root word for "hysteria") for bearing the body of another (Phelan, 1996: 97).

The possibility of this "something" in theatre has been the central question of my research. What body performs the uneasy movements of hysteria, and the choked and jerky movements of Gregor and Khumalo? There are different theories about this body. Moving away from the medical model that focuses on individual pathology, feminist academics argue that the symptoms of hysterical women of the nineteenth century "seemed like bodily metaphors for the silence, immobility, denial of appetite, and hyperfemininity imposed on them by their societies"; lacking "a public voice to articulate their economic and sexual oppression", their symptoms spoke for them (Showalter, 1998: 54-55). For French feminists, the hysteric embodies the possibility of a language that resists dominant phallogentric discourse. Following on from Lacan, who understood the women to have been speaking "the discourse of the hysteric rather than the discourse of the master", these theorists celebrate the hysteric as the speaker of a woman's mother tongue (Showalter, 1998: 56). The hysteric "occupies the place of female absence in [phallogentric] linguistic and cultural systems" (Showalter, 1998: 57), and this absence or loss is seen as generative.<sup>4</sup>

Other theorists argue that hysteria is a body performance produced within the (masculine) discourse of the analyst. According to Elaine Showalter, many historians and analysts explain hysteria as "the product of a dialogue or collaboration between the hysterical woman and the medical man" (Showalter, 1998: 11). Some critics of Freud argue that "Freud pressured his patients to produce narratives congruent with his theories" (Showalter, 1998: 41). The women's oppression, suffered in silence, is voiced through being scripted as hysteria, a script that is written by the (male) doctor. Hysterical performance becomes a culturally articulated way of manifesting unspoken discontent. Showalter states that where a theory of hysterical symptoms is articulated by a theorist or therapist, the location becomes a centre (the centre stage – see p.126) where incidence of hysteria dramatically rises.<sup>5</sup> The analyst's interpretation becomes the truth of the hysterical body performance. An example is

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<sup>4</sup>This is explored in chapter 3 regarding the possibility of a language of the African body, linked to Cixous's writing on a return to the mother/the sea (see p.90n9).

<sup>5</sup>Showalter traces this pattern from nineteenth-century hysteria centred around the Paris hospital La Salpêtrière with Jean-Martin Charcot (Showalter, 1998: 30), to modern-day "hysterical epidemics" in America such as Gulf War Syndrome, Recovered Memory, and narratives of Satanic ritual abuse and alien abduction, disseminated through cultural narratives (for example, the film *Rosemary's Baby* giving rise to narratives of Satanic ritual abuse) and theorists who advocate the truthfulness of these narratives.

the case of Dora, the most famous of Freud's narratives on hysteria. Freud diagnosed her symptoms (chronic cough, headaches, depressions) as hysterical manifestations of her repressed attractions to her father, the husband of the woman with whom her father was having an affair (Herr K.), and to Freud himself. Decades later, however, researchers discovered that Dora's discontent most probably arose from her intellectual aspiration and wishes to avoid marriage in the face of oppression; "Dora was treated like a pawn or a possession by her father and denied the rights to privacy or personal freedom"; she felt that her father had handed her over to Herr K. in exchange for his affair with Frau K. (Showalter, 1998: 42-43). The authority of Freud's discourse confers an aura of authenticity to the unspoken causes of her symptoms, which does violence to the body experiencing trauma.

It is not that the hysterical body performance is fake; it concerns the relation between the unspoken/forbidden, and culturally sanctioned ways of articulating distress (Showalter, 1998: 15) – the screen that allows images to be formed and seen. But it is the viewer of such performances – the analyst – who insists on the truthfulness of his narrative. Hysteria as a disease is defined *as* the lack of narrative order, and the analyst takes upon himself the responsibility to reorganize the hysteric's fragmented narrative:

In doing so, he had not only to fill gaps in the hysteric's story but also to overcome her resistance to his narrative interpretations. For this therapy to work, the hysteric has to accept and believe the analyst's story. (Showalter, 1998: 85)

Contrary to common sense, therefore, it is the performer's body that is often required to conform to the viewer's sense of truth. Phelan compares the technique of psychoanalysis to the technique of dance, such as the dances of Balanchine. Both entail an interrogation of the feminine body under masculine eyes; the ballerina's body is scrutinized for a technique which "leaves nothing to be desired" (Phelan, 1996: 101).<sup>6</sup> Psychoanalysis brings the "private theatre" of feminine experience into the "social space" of analytic discourse (Phelan, 1996: 96); similarly the ballerina performs on a public stage, under the scrutiny of the discourses of dance criticism

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<sup>6</sup>The intended meaning of this phrase, to recall Freud's writing, is that the technique fulfils the requirements of "logical consistency". Another interpretation is however possible: the ballerina's technique becomes a nothing, the empty *objet a* of the audience's desire.

and dance history (Phelan, 1996: 101).

My thesis begins in chapter 1 by stating my sense of loss. As a theatre performer, I am caught in between unspeakable discontent, and the scrutiny of the viewer's discourse, always demanding meaning, order, and truth, something with which he can identify. The psychoanalyst poses a series of questions to the body of the hysteric: "Is she or isn't she? Is she or isn't she making it up?" (Phelan, 1996: 100) When the hysteric returns to her own body, however – in Anna O.'s case, a body in the throes of a hysterical childbirth – the analyst/viewer cannot handle it. Breuer "fled the house in a cold sweat" (Jones, cited in Phelan, 1996: 98). It is not that theatre is pure discourse and rationality; we know that art and the unconscious is a highly fecund combination. But art is always realized in relation to a receiver; theatre in particular must be made at the moment of facing an audience. The meaning-making process in this exchange relation is what constitutes the event; for Lacan,

psychoanalysis does not deal with feelings as such, but with a questioning of emotional states; that is, it is concerned with their meaning, in so far as they are represented in the unconscious. (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 168)

The unconscious is understood to be organized "in the form of a questioning, which [Lacan] called an 'interrogative voice'" (Benvenuto & Kennedy, 1986: 168). The viewer's interrogation is revealed at moments when the meaning-making relationship is unsettled: it can be seen in the politics of representation that informed Bill T. Jones's works and the victim art controversy (see chapter 2, p.56), as well as Jones's feeling interrogated by critics (see p.79). It can be seen in Gcaleka's aggression towards his critics. It can be seen in the threat that Gregor's silent body performance poses to his family and friends, when Terence demands: "Damn it ... Answer me!" (see above, p.129) – he demands to hear Gregor communicate. The director of *He Left Quietly*, Yael Farber, incorporates this interrogation within the play's narrative: Khumalo starts the play by inviting the audience to pose questions to him. Lastly, the TRC's mandate of national reconstruction meant that the individual victims' horror is inexorably commodified for the nation, their experiences subjected to "a process of reporting to the discourse police of re-conciliation and nationalism". Even as the commission countered the silence of suffering, it also "retain[ed] the basic structure of interrogation" (Praeg, 2000: 241).

The work of performance artist Marina Abramović often lays bare this interrogation of the viewing subject, and it is for this reason that I now give some space for a re-telling or re-tracing of her work, as a re-view of the issues of body, spectatorship, interrogation and subjecthood raised throughout the thesis. Perhaps, the solutions she has taken may point to alternatives that lead out of the impasse between performer and viewer.

Abramović's *oeuvre* of body art, objects, and more recently video and theatre work, engages with and challenges diverse discourses: body and consciousness, mysticism, autobiography, history, trauma (war and totalitarianism), identity, gender, risk, even theatre. But I wish to examine some of her works by focusing on the issue of spectatorship. In *Rhythm 0* (1974), the notorious performance in which she remained completely passive as an object in front of the crowd, Abramović's body explicitly performed the emptiness into which spectators projected their desires.

The crowd at Studio Morra in Naples where *Rhythm 0* took place was a mixture of "art world aficionados" and people randomly brought in from the street.

The gallery director announced that the artist would remain completely passive for six hours (8pm to 2am), during which time the visitors could do whatever they wanted with or to her. The parameters were supposedly defined by an array of seventy two objects laid out on a table near which Abramović was standing. (McEvelley, 1995: 46)

The actions of the "spectators" grew in aggression as time passed: "Abramović was stripped, painted, cut, crowned with thorns, and had the muzzle of a loaded gun thrust against her head" (McEvelley, 1995: 46). A wide array of randomly chosen objects (ranging from the gun, to lipstick, wine, and sulphur) were laid out; but according to one account, the "desire, hatred and fear" projected by the spectators were recognizably structured by "the classic triad of mother, madonna and whore", images of which were reproduced on Abramović's body (Iles, 1995: 40). Her body performance can perhaps be understood as symptomatic of the performer's hysterical condition, a body constructed by the viewer's discourse.

Abramović and her partner Ulay's *Incision* (1978) provoked open hostility in a

spectator. *Incision* is described as follows:

*Ulay* [naked]

I am fixed to a wall by a stretched rubber cord.

I move repeatedly towards the audience as far as the elasticity of the material permits.

*Marina*

I am standing parallel to the point of maximum expansion.

(Abramović, 1998: 188)

Abramović describes the building up of aggression in the audience "towards [her] passive role" (Abramović, 1998: 193). She expected an attack but did not know when it would happen. Photographs of the attack show a man with a leg lifted, jumping into the air. The next photograph shows Abramović lying on the floor, and the man seems to be landing from a kicking action. The audience's interrogation manifested in a spontaneous physical attack.

There are two levels of spectatorship in this work: Abramović functions as an observer of Ulay's performance, but she is also performing for the public that is watching. It can be said that Abramović's performance of spectating exposes the usually invisible act of seeing. Her performance of seeing also provokes the public's spectatorship to be exposed, to the extent that it is manifested in aggressive action. After the performance, Abramović records, "the public was engaged in an intense discussion about the function of the observer and his limits" (Abramović, 1998: 193).<sup>7</sup>

Increasingly, Abramović articulated the performance state of emptiness in shamanic terms: Abramović's research into Eastern philosophies, rituals and ceremonies, along with Ulay's similar interest in Tibetan Buddhism and Tantric, Sufi, and Indian philosophies, gave rise to performances in which the emptiness could be reached in an alternative state of consciousness (Goldberg, 1995: 12). Abramović compares this "mental jump" to the effect of trauma:

In Western cultures, it is necessary to have some trauma, some terrible tragedy in your private life, to be able to make a mental jump; perhaps somebody dies, or you have an operation, or you half die and then recover. In Eastern cultures altered states of minds are a matter of education. Sufi dancers, for instance, turn in concentric circles, increasing the speed of the outer circles until those in

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<sup>7</sup> Like Jones's early solos, the exposing of the act of viewing provokes aggression (see chapter 2).

the inner circles enter a trance ... (Abramović, 1998: 406)

The "unliving" and "absence" of trauma (Phelan, 1996: 95) becomes a strategy to counter the western "cultural rejection of pain"; trauma and physical pain undo this repression by "annihilat[ing] the most elemental acts of perception ... 'by destroying one's ability simply to see'" (Scarry cited in Pejić, 1998: 32). The risks taken by performance artists especially in the 1970s were examples of this strategy: Chris Burden is well known for his notorious *Shoot* (1971), where he arranged for a gun shot to be fired at him (in performance, the bullet penetrated his arm). The experience of "getting ready to stand there" (Burden, cited in Carr, 1993: 16) and take the pain, even to face the possibility of death, was the central context of the work (Carr, 1993: 16). Abramović's "Rhythm" series involved risky performances which may have resulted in her death.<sup>8</sup>

The shamanic, meditative performances may involve far less risk, but "seemed to correspond to unconscious desires" which lay behind Abramović's earlier performances (Goldberg, 1995: 12); the absence of movement, like pain, aimed to shatter the seeing of performance. *Nightsea Crossing* (1981-1987) is one such work: it was performed in different locations and with variations, each lasting for several hours across consecutive days. It entailed Abramović and Ulay sitting on opposite sides of a long table, facing each other, motionless,

installing themselves as *tableaux-vivants*, as art, but reducing the events to the point of zero. Or more precisely, reducing the notion of events as visible occurrence to the minimum, since they showed us only their motionless bodies. (Pejić, 1998: 29)<sup>9</sup>

This absence of visual differentiation aimed to quicken perception, subjecting the eye to a process of seeing that is different to seeing a painting (Goldberg, 1995: 17).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Carr lists other examples from the 1970s, for example: in *Escalade sanglante* (1971), Gina Pane climbed a ladder with cutting edges with her bare feet; Dennis Oppenheim in *Rocked Circle-Fear* (1971) stood in a circle while rocks were throw at him from above (Carr, 1993: 17).

<sup>9</sup>It is important that the spectator's experience of the work be distinguished from the seeing of photographic records of the work, the latter being the usual channel through which performance art is disseminated to a wider "audience". The arduous demand on spectators – if they choose to stay with the performers – constitutes a totally different spectatorship to reading art books, where meanings are communicated instantaneously through visual image.

<sup>10</sup>The attempt to use shamanic presence in performance to reach beyond visibility is examined in chapter 3.



Curiously, such asceticism – whether performed with aggressive cruelty or shamanic piety – gave way to glamour, humour, and theatre in *Biography* (1992), a performance of Abramović's own life and work. The performance pieces that each lasted for hours are re-performed in this hour-and-a-half theatre performance. The work opens with an epic image of Abramović hanging in the air; it is dramatically lit, featuring Elvis Presley music and opera, and is performed in proscenium arch theatres. The element of risk remains, re-enacting for example the cutting of body in the Rhythm series, but "like video clips, for one minute, two minutes" (Abramović, cited in Goldberg, 1995: 17). "Finally Abramović, in high heels, and elegantly swathed in a black dress, stalks the runway" (Goldberg, 1995: 18).

The stark contrast with earlier asceticism is often linked to Abramović's break up with Ulay, and a discovery of other parts to her personality that are humorous, sensual, in need of glamour (Goldberg, 1995: 17). This seems to me a partial explanation; Thomas McEvelley contextualizes this change as a general shift in the reception of performance art:

In terms of the social history of art, the artist's sense of shamanic vocation has to do with intensity of commitment. Recently the art audience has learned to expect humor and parody from its artists, but twenty-five years ago, when an artist seemed to be putting his or her body and life on the line for art, the experience of beholding such commitment brought a sense of awe to the audience. One might leave the performance space either shaken or inspired. Now the sight of such commitment often seems anachronistic and embarrassing. (McEvelley, 1998: 23)

The "high artifice" of *Biography* (Goldberg, 1995: 17) seems to be a shift in strategy for a contemporary audience. Expectations of humour and parody from the viewer drain the performing body's claim to authenticity and presence. The "real" blood that is shed in *Biography* is mediated in its reference to (its signification of) an original performance in the past. And so it "really only works in a theatre set-up" (Abramović, cited in Goldberg, 1995: 17), viewed through the perspectival frame of the proscenium arch.

Is the performing body inevitably fixed within the discourse of the audience's eyes? Abramović's video work, *In Between* (1996-7), attempted to negotiate the spectator's interrogation of her body. The public was asked to sign a contract before viewing the

work. The video showed close-up images of a sharp needle, tracing lines on her palm, eye and moles on her neck. The needle also pricks her finger and blood is smeared over the finger with the needle. This, more than the artifice of theatre, seems to remove the spectator from the liveness of the body: today, images of these extreme bodily experiences are easily seen on television and the internet, as well as performed live in night club settings. The medium of video, removed from the body's presence, is also prone to offering a "parody" of the body experiencing pain. One can expect reactions in spectators similar to the medical shows of the nineteenth century: a revulsion/fascination in the exotic. However, Abramović tried to engineer a different set of conditions of perception: the spectator signed a contract that bound him/her to staying the full 40 minutes inside the video installation (Abramović, 1998: 348). They started the piece wearing blindfolds and headphones, which gave instructions to the spectator, such as to loosen belts and jewelry, to release tension in the neck by turning the head slowly, to breathe. This lasted for 25 minutes; only then were instructions given to take the blindfolds off, and the video images were then seen (Abramović, 1998: 47). This new condition of seeing, constructed by drawing the spectator's attention to his/her own body, may elicit different responses to pain, blood and danger. This may or may not have worked, but at the end the spectator was given a "certificate of completion", thanking him/her for the "trust and commitment" given to the performer.

This special commitment by the spectators may be understood as "a moral contract" between performer and audience (Obrist, 1998: 47).<sup>11</sup> The morality of this contract comes from a commitment to pay attention to the body in distress – the performer's as well as the spectator's – without falling back to the interrogative mode, a position which leaves the spectator safely outside of the abjected pain.<sup>12</sup>

A parallel concern for the viewer's bodily condition can be found in psychoanalysis. Clinical data from the object-relations/Kleinian branch of psychoanalysis indicate that somatic experiences can form an important part of the analysis. More significantly, it is the analyst's somatic experiences (and not just the patient's

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<sup>11</sup> See chapter 1, pp.12 & 21-23 for the problematization of "morality" and "ethics", and p.39 till the end of the chapter for an alternative notion of "ethics" as applied to performance.

<sup>12</sup> This mode of seeing is "moral" because it explores how experiences of war, pain and horror should be received – to rephrase Sontag, how to regard the pain of others (see chapter 2).

symptoms) that need to enter into the analytic relationship. Ron Balamuth, for instance, recounts how his bodily sensations (such as "a sinking feeling in [his] stomach, a mounting discomfort") clued him into the transference of his client's memories of abandonment that was occurring, although they were not spoken about. Previously unaware of these sensations within him, his new somatic awareness enabled him to recognize the fragmentation and alienation in the client (Balamuth, 1998: 266). He sensed a tension between his sensations and his position as analyst:

my body is rebelling and will not let itself be coerced by the familiar pressure my mind is exerting on me, pushing me to resume a "knowledgeable" analytic posture that does not feel right for now. (Balamuth, 1998: 266)

The body was "rebellious" (with "near-repulsion" and "organic protest": Balamuth, 1998: 226) against the analyst's "knowledgeable" stance from which he usually interpreted the pathology of the client. The talking cure provides the analyst with a reassurance of his having something to say (Ogden, cited in Balamuth, 1998: 266). But this phallic enjoyment "has to be understood as a defense against the enjoyment of the body as an organism" (i.e. the other *jouissance*); and

the first reaction of the subject will be anxiety ... Indeed, this form of enjoyment implies leaving the Symbolic ... and thus entails the disappearance, i.e., the death of the subject. (Verhaughe, cited in Robbins)

The viewing subject's anxiety concerning the integrity of his subjecthood is an anxiety about his own body. The "death" of the viewing subject unsettles the Cartesian perspectival gaze that fixes the body of the other in his projection. The return to his own body – the abject that allowed his Self to be – signals the end of his fantasy of certainty, the fantasy that was upheld by projecting his desire in the Other as a knowing subject, in possession of certainty. The analyst must give up this fantasy to access meanings of his client that were unavailable to him.

In theatre, the performer must work "against mutual projection between audience and performer", the identification in which "[we] believe so readily in the other as the keeper of our treasure and our disease" (Frenkel, cited in Auslander, 1992: 43). To rupture this fantasy projection, the audience's body must return to the theatre: "the I has to give up the fantasy of the proper self" (Kristeva, cited in Ziarek: 27). The "death of the subject" may sound ominous; indeed without the screen on which the

subject's fantasy of the Other is projected, he may be left in a state of horror – the horror of the disintegration of the self, of meaning. But Balamuth's bodily tensions did not impede his clinical work; his body was the crucial link that enabled the work to proceed. He describes this ability to (re)connect with the "lived body" as "a sense of familiarity and newness", "the feeling of joy" (Balamuth, 1998: 265).

Unfixed from discourses of representation, spiritual transcendence and authenticity, (phallogentric) discipline, and the epistemological certainty of the viewing subject, the body becomes a foreigner, unknown to the self. Should theatre in South Africa strive for constructing citizenship in the image of the nation? What price is paid should this course be pursued, not only with regards to non-nationals but to the foreigners within ourselves? In our eagerness to perform images of competent citizenship, what audience – what community – is constructed? Where are the bodies of discontent?

This thesis thus arrives at not an answer, but a question. It seems that making theatre in South Africa often means a preoccupation with contesting representation, innovating with form, engaging with cultural and social contexts, and struggling with questions of resources. But a question seems to remain not only unanswered, but not thought of to be asked. Where are the bodies of discontent – on stage, and in the audience? Is *encore* all there is to theatre?

Not having found an answer on the stage, I conclude by once again quoting from psychoanalysis. Kristeva's figure of the foreigner, quoted from Strangers to Ourselves, remains merely a guide in my search.

The ethics of psychoanalysis implies a politics: it would involve a cosmopolitanism of a new sort that, cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious – desiring, destructive, fearful, empty, impossible. Here we are far removed from a call to brotherhood, about which one has already ironically pointed out its debt to paternal and divine authority ... (Kristeva, in Oliver, 1997: 290)

Instead of performing on the centre stage circumscribed by dominant discourses (in the current situation, the discourses of governments and markets), the foreigner-performer teeters at the edge of the stage, at any moment falling into the unconscious

– knowing it is dangerous, but knowing the ethical reasons for occupying this marginal space. Only if I am willing to fall, will there be any possibility for the spectator to fall also with me, to discover “his incoherences and abysses, in short his ‘strangenesses’” (Kristeva, in Oliver, 1997: 265).

How will this audience be constituted – who will they be, what will they do?

A paradoxical community is emerging, made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners. The multinational society would thus be the consequence of an extreme individualism, but conscious of its discontents and limits, knowing only indomitable people ready to help themselves in their weakness, a weakness whose other name is our radical strangeness. (Kristeva, in Oliver, 1997: 294)

Will there emerge an audience who is ready to acknowledge its weakness, its uncertainty? What will be my relation to this audience, what body will I need to perform, what techniques to engage with, what performance contexts, to give space for these strangenesses to emerge? I fall, away from the stage, away from the auditorium, away from the demarcated theatre spaces indoors or outdoors – away from the known. It is the only privilege – the only right – accorded to the foreigner in discontent.

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