

**Between self and author: an autoethnographic approach towards the crafting of
reflexive compositions in postgraduate Drama Studies**

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By

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Abstract

This thesis explores the merits of **reflexivity** in the processes of creating a performance and of performing research in Drama Studies. In it, I make a case for the validity of autobiographical material as an aid to generating such reflexivity. Through an **autoethnographic** case study of my work entitled *Compositions* (a series of performance projects) in which I focus on the theme of **migration**, I provide an in-depth account of my experiences, focusing specifically on the interrelated concerns of **body**, **space** and **journey** in my **ritualistic performance**. My examination explores the dynamic effects of **liminality** within **identity politics**, through which I foreground several issues of concern which I have encountered as an emerging scholar and theatre-maker working within an academic institution. I propose that the process of studying drama in a University ultimately requires one to continually negotiate a range of subject positions, whilst finding connections between these various identities that one may take up during the course of one's studies. By developing an awareness of the overlapping of such identities and inhabiting the spaces in-between subject positions, I demonstrate how taking into account one's personal lived experience can help illuminate one's understanding of both the work of art and the research report, as well as the broader contexts in which such practice-based work exists. I illustrate how such an understanding has ultimately maximised the knowledge and learning that I have gathered, and has contributed to the crucial project of developing my **authorial voice** in writing and performance, which is central to the aims of the Master of Arts degree in Drama.

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Prologue: A false start

I am haunted by the image of an old woman. She is hunched over; her body contorted and bundled into a tight ball of sack-cloth and string. She has only a few teeth left in the back of her cavernous mouth, and her face is ashen with the expression of someone who has just eaten a lemon. Her hair is dry and brittle, her limbs sinewy, her skin wrung out as the bark of a dead tree. And yet she seems sturdy; a bobbing nodding rock-woman amid the yellow breeze and the waving grass, shuffling across dry red earth. She never stops moving in this vast place. She is constantly picking up handfuls of soil, collecting strange and forgotten objects which she carries around with her, threaded on strings or wrapped in parcels of cloth. She plods along slowly, carefully, with her gnarled old walking stick, and she mumbles to herself solemnly, sourly.

I think that I have always been haunted by this old woman. I cannot remember exactly when it was that she first appeared in my mind's eye, but she seems to have been there forever. She reminds me in some ways of my grandmothers – my mother's mother Lois Chikosi (1928 - 2005), and my father's mother Alidzuli Makhakhavhule (1912 - 2008). Although I never had a very close relationship with either woman I have always felt a sense of reverence and awe of them. They seem to represent the epitome of my Shona and Venda heritage respectively, so that a great part of my sense of cultural identity has been symbolically invested in them.

My grandmothers captivate me like the imaginary old woman. But this woman seems much older somehow, ancient as the empty landscape in which I imagine her, and her presence intrigues me. She always seems about-to speak, about-to tell me a story so that I have the sense of something imminent. But the only sound that comes from her is the chewing of her tongue and the whispering of wind against her heavy garments. In her silence she appears everywhere, at the strangest of times and in the gaps between the busy thoughts of everyday. She appears, always, in the moment before I write as though she were egging me on, as though she could only speak through me.

Foreword: Speaking of Compositions

compose

v. 1 write or create (a work of art, especially music or poetry). > order or arrange in order to form an artistic whole. **2** (of elements) constitutes or make up (a whole). **3** [often as adj. **composed**] calm or settle (one's features or thoughts). **4** prepare (a text) for printing by setting up the characters to be printed. **5** archaic settle (a dispute).

composition

n. 1 the way in which a whole or mixture is made up; ingredients or constituents. > a thing composed of various elements. > a compound artificial substance. **2** a work of music, literature, or art. **3** the action of composing. **4** archaic mental constitution; character...

(*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002)

In theatre, one rarely speaks of *composing* a play or a performance, although this is often the way in which one speaks of creating in various other artistic disciplines. I venture that this may have something to do with the fact that in the theatre, often more so than in the other creative arts, one's *composition* tends to be less fixed, more variable, ephemeral, and incomplete. The word seems to imply (for me at least) a certain sense of completion, wholeness, and fixity. Unlike the *composition* that is this thesis – the final, bound, written report of my research – the performance event has a much more undefined value which, arguably, cannot merely be reduced to the sum of its parts. This is not to say that other creative arts disciplines are so reducible, either. Rather, it is simply pointing out the level of difficulty involved in attempting to critically discuss a theatrical performance work such as the one in question, a problem that I will continue to refer back to in this thesis as I begin to describe my experiences.

For me, the concept of *composition* also ties together (conveniently, albeit uneasily) a number of the performances, processes and politics with which I am concerned in this thesis, and it is worth bearing in mind the various ways in which the term *composition* can be understood. One thinks of the notion of *composing* oneself, the instruction to 'pull yourself towards yourself' or 'pull yourself together' when one is feeling dislocated or disoriented. Here, *composition* means finding, indeed *creating* for oneself some unified identity, some sense of a self that has integrity and stability.¹ *Composition* can also mean the process of selection and arrangement, an engaging,

¹ The notion of identity is discussed in a later section, in which the idea of identity as a fixed, unitary whole is also critiqued.

active practice. It points not only to the ‘*what*’ of creation, but denotes the ‘*how*’ as well. Nevertheless, there is still the assumption that one can step back from the work of art as one does from a painting for example, to observe the ‘*how*’ and the ‘*what*’ from a certain critical distance, and thereby assess the value of the artistic object. This seemingly simple act of ‘stepping back’ to observe the art object is complicated in my case partly because I am concerned with a performance event which has taken place in vastly different forms over a period of almost two years. Partly also because as the subject, creator and performer of the work, my ability to ‘step back’ has been somewhat compromised by my direct and in-depth involvement in the project. As I will show during the course of this thesis, however, such a critical distance is not always possible in any case nor is it necessarily desirable, especially in situations where the art object itself remains perpetually incomplete, and where the artist’s identity (my own in this case) *composes* a (substantial) part of this art ‘object’.²

‘A good story’, my grade three teacher Mrs Walton used to say, ‘is like a fish: it must have a head, a body and a tail.’ I have always been guided by this structure, whether I was writing an English language exercise in the classroom, narrating a short story, or labouring over an academic essay. The structure of beginning, middle and end seems to compel me to inadvertently arrange my lived experience according to it. I find it recurring when I am reading a ‘well-made play,’ in my attempts to understand the fragmented plot of a film, or when I think of the *composition* writing exercises that formed part of my primary school education. And I find it recurring especially when I think of journeys, so that when I initially spoke of this research as a journey, I had in mind that self-same three fold structure that would hopefully play out seamlessly, like a well written piece of music.

When I began my research, I originally intended to investigate the theme of migration as it manifested in my performance work. Having theorised the relationship between migration and identity in my literature review, I set out to search for traces of the liminal condition within the performance and with a view of the process of creating the work as well. The premise I set out to prove was that, through privileging the liminal condition in my aesthetic practices I could somehow create a performance

² I will discuss the ways in which *Compositions* exists as an incomplete project/object in a later section. The ways in which my personal identity formed part of the work will also become clearer in the course of my discussion.

experience that was transgressive, subversive, and ultimately empowering for migrant identity. I had planned to carry out my discussion in three swift movements moving from the logical beginning of my argument, through a detailed analysis of the work, to a well orchestrated conclusion. But the beautifully simple research report I had hoped to write proved much more difficult than I had imagined. Even the goals that I had set out at the beginning of my journey became more impossible to achieve, and I found myself composing something completely unmusical and discordant.

So rather than retaining the neat threefold structure, I have found it more helpful to *compose* a series of written episodes which could perhaps stand alone as individual pieces of writing, but which ultimately function much more successfully in relation to one another. The structure of this thesis, then, utilises these episodes of theoretical discussion interspersed with what I call ‘memory fragments.’ I do not consider these to be chapters so much as beads on a string – incidentally arranged into their extant formation, provisionally unified into a whole but potentially interchangeable.

My central concern in this thesis is with the notions of reflexivity and identity politics, which I explore through a particularly focused case study of my performance projects. Acts of reflexivity recur in my discussion, unsettling any traces of a linear structure so that my observations about identity and migration (in relation to the bodies, spaces and journeys that exist in everyday life, rehearsal and performance) are contextualised and continually recontextualised within a liminal framework. I necessarily tackle issues of performance, performativity, and writing as part of this process. Reading this work, then, means engaging simultaneously with the functions of composition, decomposition and recomposition, as I am attempting to ‘perform’ my argument in a manner well suited to my subject. It means reading into the cyclical layering of meanings as they unwind.

Episode 1: Mastering the subject/ Composing research

How does one become a master of one's art? This question is at the heart of my project in this thesis, which is being written for this express purpose. As a documented report of my research, it should demonstrate my mastery of my discipline at the very least in terms of academic rigour. To paraphrase Rhodes University's *Higher Degrees Guide* (2007), this entails demonstrating: adequate knowledge of the relevant research techniques in one's field, a grasp of the apposite literature, clear articulation of the specific topic in question and a succinct review of the findings of the research, as well as achieving a presentation standard as is appropriate to the report (2007: 6).

As a postgraduate Drama student particularly, the attempt to master the discipline and to submit a comprehensive research report is complicated by the fact that 'the very nature of the dramatic arts problematises established research, teaching and learning traditions' (Sutherland 2007: 109). This is partly because the study of Drama is tied up with the study of embodied practice. Performance studies³ which nowadays forms a substantial part of the study of drama 'struggles to open the space between analysis and action, and to pull the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice' (Conquergood 2002: 145). As can be noted from the emergence of the Practice as Research movement in South Africa, 'we are at a point in the history of drama/theatre/performance studies when the relative merits of theory and practice are under renewed scrutiny' (McCullough 1998: 1). And if indeed the study of drama can 'foster the diverse skills required of graduates within the *local* context of a young democracy, and the *global* context of what Ronald Barnett has called a world of supercomplexity' (Sutherland 2007: 109)⁴, then the demonstration of these skills certainly forms part of one's mastery of the discipline. The skills required of a University graduate as outlined by Barnett (2000) include the acquisition of an ability

³ I am speaking of 'performance studies' here as the specialised branch of study. When I speak of drama, theatre or performance studies from now on I will be speaking of the study of all of these phenomena. However it is worth noting that some scholars conceive of these as differentiated areas. See Reinelt (2002) for a more detailed exploration of these differences.

⁴ A definition of 'supercomplexity' is provided in Sutherland's text. A link can be drawn between the idea of 'supercomplexity' and the postmodern condition, although Barnett himself prefers not to use the term postmodernism (Sutherland 2007: 110).

to negotiate the concerns of ontology, epistemology and praxis (Sutherland 2007: 110).

Having emerged from a secondary education system which predominantly privileges the hermeneutical model of acquiring knowledge from within a given text, we as students often take for granted the importance of ontology and tend to become obsessed with balancing the demands of the other two points in the triangle – theory and praxis. In my own undergraduate career I tended to perceive the study of drama as divided strictly into theory and practical work, and often bemoaned the 60% theory mark – 40% practical mark ratio along which the subject was structured. Rarely in the course of one's undergraduate study does one engage with ontology and, even when one does, it is often frowned upon. I have observed on numerous occasions (and from personal experience) how undergraduate Drama students are often encouraged not to perform their own writing in practical sessions or to include their personal identities in the writing of academic work.⁵ The reasons for these admonishments are indeed sound and have their merits, but the adverse effect is that often, by the time one reaches postgraduate level and is being asked to think more independently, it is sometimes difficult to detach oneself from the habit of detaching oneself from one's work.

Whilst the theory versus practice debate is still raging within academic institutions, it seems that the answer lies not in simply adjusting the mark breakdown to a 50% - 50% ratio but in appreciating the inter-relatedness of theory and practice. 'If we are to move forward, we need to understand the radical and progressive possibilities that may be attained by understanding the potential of a dialectical relationship between theory and practice' (McCullough 1998: 3). In order to achieve this, one must understand that

[T]he precise division between theory as a contemplative activity and practice as all action seems too crude a model. There is, surely, a form of action in theory in the form of verbal discourse, as there is contemplation and decision-making in practice. Given that we may accept that there are small elements of the 'other' in each of the areas of discourse, the tension may then seem to be more precisely between language-based theory and the non-verbal aspects of theatrical practice, even between thought and gesture (McCullough 1998: 4).

⁵ I find that this is a recurring tendency in the humanities, and that even where the department has made an effort to remedy this, it is often very difficult to realise a more inclusive approach because students themselves often revert to the binary model and consistently discourage themselves and one another from engaging with ontology in their work.

Dwight Conquergood has cautioned against ‘textocentrism’ or the ‘hegemony of textualism’ (2002: 147). He calls for an awareness of the value of other forms of knowledge/meaning making outside of the textual/literary, especially in light of performance studies’ purported aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice. What Conquergood is arguing for, then, is the appreciation of alternative ways of ‘knowing’. It is worth noting that in contrast to McCullough, Conquergood includes orality as an alternative knowledge system whereas McCullough interprets the binary differently so that the verbal (which might include orality) is opposed to the non-verbal. McCullough is speaking specifically of a binary that exists within Western logocentric metaphysics. Conquergood on the other hand is attempting to present a non-Western worldview into the equation, where orality is the preferred mode that has been marginalised by the Western predisposition for literary texts.⁶ In contemporary Southern Africa one is obviously dealing with a combination of Western literary and indigenous non-literary modes, a condition common to postcolonial cultural contexts and amplified by South Africa’s particularly diverse cultural heritage.

Since drama studies ‘consciously embraces a range of literary and non-literary genres as a means of developing a number of literacies (such as oral, aural, visual, spatial, kinaesthetic, textual and cultural literacies),’ (Sutherland 2007: 110) mastery of the discipline requires one to move beyond the theory/practice split towards a greater understanding of the (super)complexity of lived experience in the 21st Century: a world characterised by uncertainty. It seems, then, that

the pedagogical principle by which we aim to work suggests that human beings are, given the intellectual opportunities, constantly self-changing through their actions. Moreover, the process is not linear, but cyclical, moving through thought to action and back to thought. It is the cyclical process that we describe as praxis (McCullough 1998: 5-6).

There is a possibility that McCullough’s conception of praxis as ‘that which links theory and practice as parts of a process that encourages theory to lead to action’ (1998: 5) differs subtly from praxis as practice/action and is closer to the action research model mentioned in Sutherland’s discussion (2007:113). What is of importance here is that ‘at the heart of this approach to pedagogy is the idea that

⁶ This differentiation will recur in my discussion and will be explored in greater depth later on.

education through the arts, and in particular theatre, offers the potential for ‘self-changing’ through and by the means of critical, thoughtful praxis’ (McCullough 1998: 6). As the interplay of practice and theory, *praxis* in McCullough’s sense can lead to change in the nature of an individual’s being, thereby bringing into play the third point (what I believe to be the apex) of Barnett’s triangle – ontology.

This finally brings us to the question of how exactly one might go about assessing one’s ontological research findings (as an ability to evaluate one’s research findings is one of the criteria for the award of a Master’s degree). One way, which Sutherland argues for, would be through the process of reflective (read reflexive) journal writing. This kind of writing works from the assumption that ‘it is through story – through narratives of all sorts – that we understand ourselves and our worlds’ (Ely 1996: 182) and is designed to unsettle assumed subjectivities, pointing to the broader socio-historical processes through which subjectivities are constructed (Sutherland 2007: 112). A feature of reflective journaling is the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’. Through the use of this pronoun, as well as a host of other techniques ‘experiential knowledge is validated and claimed as important through the establishment of an *authorial voice* [emphasis mine]’ (Sutherland 2007: 117).

Part of the brief for the practical coursework component of a Master’s in Drama Studies is the development of an individual vocabulary or performance language, (where one is working as a director, choreographer, or performer). This requires one to find a ‘voice’ in the stylistic sense, a kind of theatrical identity if you will. Demonstrating mastery in the research report, then, must mean developing an *authorial voice* in the research as well. But how does one go about developing an *authorial voice*?

The *authorial voice* mentioned above is an idiosyncratic identity in writing which is similar to the theatrical identity one sets out to create. A notion of theatrical identity is borrowed from Soule’s discussion and questions ‘what kind of thing is it that we think of as ‘who’[read I]; who is in control of what we call ‘who’[I]; how is this ‘who’[I] made; does the ‘who’[I] exist only in action, or is there a ‘who’[I] that is a state of being?’ (1998: 42) These questions broaden the discussion from my concern in this section with the academic project of my research, to thinking more generally about identity and about the acts of writing and performing. They form the basis of the forthcoming case study and will be explored within both *local* and *global* contexts.

Episode 2: Beginning with 'A', beginning with me

I have established that my task involves embarking on a quest to master my own authorial voice. So *where* do I actually begin, having said that, if my beginning will always be marked (as Derrida would insist) by the traces of that which came before it. My 'chapter', my thesis, my performance, my rehearsal are all preceded by something, some other 'writing'⁷, some force that makes those structures and systems through which I write possible, so that every beginning is in a sense false (Wolfreys 2007: 45). [The figure of the old woman appears again]. If I must begin somewhere, then perhaps I can begin with the haunting memory of a beginning.

I was fourteen years old when the news of our family's planned migration was confirmed. My father had already been working in South Africa for a few years, and so it was inevitable that as his position became more permanent, that the family should follow. As the first waves of unrest began to ripple across Zimbabwe in 1999, with farm invasions turning violent in the rural outskirts and mass stay-aways a frequent occurrence in the urban areas, the timing of our departure seemed almost perfect. From the moment our plans were finalised, I was excited at the chance to 'start a new life'; it seemed like the perfect opportunity to re-invent myself. I remember the build-up to the move and the anticipation that began when my mother and younger brother left Zimbabwe; the restlessness of the short period between their departure and mine; the thrill of the experience when I was finally able to meet them in South Africa; and at last the strange newness of the foreign surroundings. I remember also, beneath all of this, the thinly veiled anxiety that surfaced as I began to grapple with this question of identity and belonging. Our move was a prolonged, drawn out process and it is perhaps because of this that quite some time before the physical act of moving from Zimbabwe to South Africa, I

⁷ 'This is not writing narrowly conceived, as in a literal inscription upon a page, but what he terms 'arche-writing'. Arche-writing refers to a more generalised notion of writing that insists that the breach that the written introduces between what is intended to be conveyed and what is actually conveyed, is typical of an originary breach that afflicts everything one might wish to keep sacrosanct, including the notion of self-presence' (Reynolds 2006: 3).

had already begun to experience this migration. It was, then, as much mental process as it was a physical one.

I had just begun High School the year before we moved, whilst my two elder brothers were nearing the completion of their secondary education. When the decision to move was finalised, my mother and younger brother left for Pietermaritzburg whilst my brothers and I remained behind in Bulawayo. Whilst my elder brothers remained in order to finish their senior exams, I was held in a state of limbo for a few months as my parents searched for a place for me in a boarding school. In the meantime, the three of us were moved to another house in the same neighbourhood to live with a young woman, a teacher at the Girls' College my parents were trying to get me into, who would act as our guardian. At the time I thought nothing of it, as I was simply excited about going to another country. Even as we drove away from our house, number 16A, up, up Duncan Road to some much greater number, all the way to the other end of the neighbourhood and the opposite end of the street, I barely noticed the movement. What I saw as I looked out of the window, an endless avenue of jacarandas in full bloom, seemed as still as a portrait and before I knew it, a blank wall had materialised before me. I sat in my new bedroom and stared at the cream coloured surface. It seemed to be so eternally bare that it became a kind of vortex into which I fell so that my memories of that period still seem trapped in that vacuum, out of reach. Some time after this, one sunny Saturday afternoon, I remember taking out my watercolours and paint brushes, and painting a still life of a small bunch of flowers picked from the garden of that home. The paper was too thin, the paint soaked right through the A4 page but I dried it anyway, and stuck it up with satisfaction on the blank wall. What I can recall of this time, with greater clarity than any other memory, is the fragile look of the maroon flowers on the page. The distorted surface of the paper had the same delicate aspect as the petals, and the puddle of leafy green that marked the bottom of the glass vase was a pleasant contrast to the dark maroon of the flowers, a colour with the brown tinge of dried blood. I felt like a mixture of the two colours – the sprightly, bright-eyed and elated green held against the deep, ominous burgundy. From

then on, I stared at this picture instead of the blank wall, and felt more and more like it by degrees. After a few months my parents returned to take us away for the Easter Holiday, having found me a place in a South African school. I prepared to begin at a new school in Pietermaritzburg.

Soon after arriving in South Africa, I had my first menstrual period. It was a strange experience, as I did not feel any of the pain that I had been told to expect, but I was relieved nonetheless. Having just turned fourteen, I was beginning to worry that I was later than my friends and that there might be something wrong with me, so that the discovery was an exciting and welcome one that nevertheless occurred without much pomp or ceremony. The excitement I did feel was marred just a few days later at my new school.

As I walked down the corridor, a new classmate of mine pulled me aside and whispered quietly to me 'Awe, you've got a spot on your dress'. Instantly, I turned my head to look where she was pointing and realised to my horror that there was a large red stain on the back of my school dress. 'Oh. Thanks' I said, and immediately ducked into the (thankfully) nearby bathroom. Tears welled up in my eyes as I pulled up to the sink and twisted the tainted part of my dress around towards the running tap. All I could think was that I might have been walking around this way unknowingly, like an idiot, for hours. I felt so ashamed as I rinsed and scrubbed the cotton, watching the tinted liquid run down the drain the same way that the paint ran from my brushes, that I daren't go back out and face everybody. I was so embarrassed that I longed to hide under a blanket, to burrow inside a hole in the ground, or to fade into the walls, and it didn't really matter which. If I had felt alienated by the experience of starting at a new school in a different country before, I suddenly felt doubly ostracised because of this involuntary branding, this unforgivable disobedience of my bodily functions. But as I lifted my head and saw my own puffy-eyed reflection in the mirror, I knew that I would have to come out of the toilets eventually. The bell would ring in a few minutes, the lessons would start again after the break, and before long someone would come looking for me.

And so I quickly composed myself, wiped the tears away, wrung out the dress and dried it as much as I could with wads of toilet paper. I emerged to

find my new friend waiting outside. 'Is that better?' I asked, sniffing a little. 'Yes' she answered, and we walked down the passageway to the classroom, I blinking rapidly to try and revive the circulation in my bloodshot eyes. What should traditionally have been a joyous experience of my very first weeks of womanhood became a memory of humiliation and self-consciousness about my body, and whatever naïve hopes I had had of re-inventing myself were swiftly dashed. Later that year, I chose Drama as one of my Matriculation Certificate subjects.

As a new scholar, I feel a constant (and sensible) need to 'locate' myself, and my research, in (relation to) theory. As an aspiring writer, I am led by a need to create a space for myself through stories that bring to life the imaginary communities of which I am a part. As a performer, I am compelled to present myself through my stories to an audience who can witness and thereby legitimate this space and validate my presence in this space. As a writer, performer and theatre maker, then, I am intrigued by the overlap between genres and identities in various contexts. The creative nature of my activities often means that at some point 'the dividing line between person and character, performer and actor, stage and setting, script and text, performance and reality has disappeared. Illusion and make-believe prevail' in all aspects of my lived experienced (Denzin 2008: 119), and so the autoethnographic approach seems well suited to my (re)search and my attempt to locate myself within theory. As a result, I have taken an autoethnographic approach in my research to what was in many ways, from the beginning, an autoethnographic performance project.

As a particular method of writing and/or performing texts, autoethnography uses personal narratives to situate the individual in relation to socio-political contexts (see Spry, 2001 and Denzin 2003, 2008). Also called performative biography, autoethnography 'synthesizes both a postmodern ethnography and a postmodern autobiography. [It] opens up new ways of writing about social life' (Deborah Reed-Danahay cited in Spry 2001: 710) and answers the call to 'craft an emancipatory discourse' in the human and social sciences, especially where issues of race are concerned (Denzin 2003: 24) but also more broadly where there are issues of inequality in a given society. This approach, like my research, draws its ethos from a variety of disciplines and explicitly utilises the subjective authorial voice, bringing out

through contextualisation, a resistance of the objective ideal in academic research. By acknowledging the overlap between various identities, the autoethnographic approach allows me to account for the complex interplay of meanings at work in my writing and performance. This is necessary not only because of the academic project at hand, but because the creation of *Compositions* has always involved such a process of shifting between the roles of writer/performer/scholar.

As it is informed by performance studies, autoethnographic work posits the body as a primary site of meaning and blurs conventional boundaries between written text and body. ‘Autoethnographers argue that self-reflexive critique upon one’s positionality as researcher inspires readers to reflect critically upon their own life experience, their constructions of self, and their interactions with others within sociohistorical contexts’ (Spry 2001: 711).

I am re-visiting, returning, re-viewing the past and recalling the experiences through which I have lived because ‘the emphasis on self, biography, history, and experience must always work back and forth between three concerns – the concerns of performance, of process, and/or of analysis’ (Denzin 2008: 119). As I proceed with my discussion I will continue to write back to this idea of autoethnography, so that my understanding and use of it as a methodological tool becomes more evident and justifiable as my work progresses, autoethnographically. The efficacy of my praxis, performance and academic research might then be self-reflexively evaluated in the very process of writing (and reading) this discussion. It will unfold slowly, in the same way that my authorial voice will begin to emerge as I relate how my theatrical identity began to manifest during the process of creating. It will unfold in the shifts between the roles of writer/performer/scholar.

Episode 3: Preparation – beginning Compositions

Eight years after arriving in South Africa, I performed a solo work entitled Composition A – A portrait of myself through the pictures I have seen (2007) to a small audience in a rehearsal venue called the Lower Studio, located on the ground floor of the Rhodes University Drama Department, Grahamstown. The work had grown out of a deeply personal exploration of my identity. I had wanted to discover how I could represent myself, being a young black Zimbabwean woman of Venda and Shona heritage, living in South Africa. The quest was to develop a performance language of my own and through it, to develop my sense of self. This project was one culmination of a process that had begun a few months earlier.

During a trip home to Zambia⁸ to visit my parents in December 2006, I embarked on a research to discover more about my ‘roots’. I was all the while aware of the intensely precarious nature of my research. In fact, such an excavation had always seemed clichéd and superficial to me in the past. But this time, and quite suddenly, I was spurred on by the idea that I might find something: something that might help to alleviate the sense of detachment and displacement I had been experiencing for some time. I cannot now name the exact reasons for my sudden interest in learning more about my Venda heritage, suffice to say that I had in mind from the outset some creative project which I hoped would grow out of my discoveries. As I have a better grasp of the Shona language than I do of Venda, I also felt that this investigation would help to compensate for my inability to speak or convincingly identify with my Venda heritage.

And so, determined to avoid disclosing myself as a monstrous parody of Alex Haley in search of Kunta Kinte, I began to look for information by surfing the internet. I ‘Googled’™ the word ‘Venda’ and read whatever information I could find on the subject: from the history of the movement of the Bantu peoples across Southern Africa, to tourist attractions of the Limpopo Province, to folktales, myths and traditional practices of the Venda people.

⁸ After living in South Africa for a number of years, my father was transferred to work in Lusaka, Zambia and the family then migrated there in 2001.

Delighted at the wealth of information I had discovered, I consumed several pages of facts and figures and it was at some point during all of this that I stumbled quite innocently upon the idea of initiation. I had found at last my topic of focus. On returning to Grahamstown, I continued my research and found as many books and articles as I could on the subject, which was in fact a limited few. I also began reading An Image Darkly Forming (1987), Bani Shorter's study on women and initiation.

Shorter's text deals with the theme of women's initiation and its importance in tribal societies. She describes how, in the modern Westernised world, the lack of transitional rites of initiation for women sometimes contributes to the problems some women experience in their personal developmental and in their personal sense of identity. Through a focus on five cases from her work as a Jungian analyst counselling women, she builds a case for the revaluation of initiation rites in a modern context. Her work details how these five women, in moments of crisis or transition, managed to create their own individual initiation rites through which they were able to discover and express previously unrecognised aspects of their identities, and how this process of being 'initiated into becoming themselves' (Anonymous 1987: cover blurb) substantially contributed to the resolution of their respective identity crises.⁹

After reading just a few chapters of this work, I immediately felt that my anxieties about my own identity, which had persisted through several emotional breakdowns and despite almost two years of analysis, were suddenly (and quite beautifully!) explained in the thesis of this little book. What better topic to investigate, I thought to myself as I read on, as part of my two-year Masters Coursework in Contemporary Performance?

In making *Composition A*, I was not only investigating my cultural heritage but interrogating the personal motivation behind my creative excursions as well, and asking the questions: Why do I write/why do I perform? How do I write and perform

⁹ This seems akin to a liberal humanist stance on identity, and is at odds with the postmodern notion of identity as malleable and constructed, which I will discuss in greater detail shortly. This tension will become more evident as my discussion develops, especially where the autoethnographic methodology is explored. It becomes central to the project of my thesis as I am concerned with tackling some of the challenges I have faced in my practice and research.

myself? As the academic year began in 2007, I identified my main interests and set out to fill a bill of far-reaching aspirations which were articulated plainly in my concept proposal.

Obviously, I wanted to explore rites of passage in an urban African context and to use ‘performance as a means of re-inventing and revitalising [my] black female identity’ (Moyo 2007a: 2), a theme which I had explored in the past through the study of black women’s autobiographical writing and performance, especially focusing on the work of South African storyteller Gcina Mhlophe, among others. Mhlophe’s *Have You Seen Zandile?* (1986) and her oral storytelling performances had previously inspired me to cultivate an interest in the traditional African performance form.

The idea of narrative-making as part of a process of self-invention is not a new one. Without taking for granted the fact that ‘the notions of identity and narrative stand for two large areas of intellectual problems that have been studied in a variety of disciplines from diverse theoretical points of view’ (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001: 2), one is able to draw clear links between the two. As is shown throughout *Narrative and Identity* (2001), the complex interplay of these two notions can be traced through the structures that govern human perception and experience. Notions of time and history, culture, and the subjective nature lived experience all draw upon the functions of narrative texts or sign systems, so that one can conclude that ‘the very idea of human identity – perhaps we can even say, the very possibility of human identity – is tied to the very notion of narrative and narrativity’ (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001: 15). Furthermore, Clark (2001) explains that in postcolonial theory, identity is said to be constructed through the process of narration, where narration is defined in Genette’s (1988) terms as an act of generating discourse and subsequently, of inscribing identities. Narration thereby bestows a measure of power upon the narrator or author. I will revisit this idea later on.

Through *Composition A* I hoped to take the audience on an emotional journey and wanted to prompt the audience to reflect on their own identities and experiences.¹⁰ But as I anticipated a small non-Venda and non-Shona audience, I knew that a sense of community would have to be found through the act of witnessing and experiencing

¹⁰ This is similar to the notion of ‘reciprocal mirroring’ which is discussed in Soule’s (1998) article, and which I will elaborate upon later in my discussion.

the performance together, rather than through sharing one ideology as would normally be the case in a traditional ritual ceremony.

Being in an academic setting, I also wanted to challenge myself creatively to develop an individual performance language that was not so reliant on a linear narrative structure. I aimed to create something surreal and experiential, and here the influence of Western theatre practitioners I had studied in the past came into practice (for example the symbolist works of Maurice Maeterlinck and Robert Wilson's 'theatre of images').¹¹

For the narrative aspect of the work, I drew from Venda myth – the legend of Zwidutwane was used as a source for a new story.¹² From this folktale, I developed the narrative of a Zimbabwean border-jumper Thilivali¹³ and her abandoned blue child Dombo¹⁴ (see Appendix I for the details of this story). In addition to this new narrative, I hoped to incorporate characters from two other original stories which I had previously explored in a devised performance called *The Water-Glass Women* (2006).¹⁵

The first of these was the character of the Water-Glass Woman, a mysterious, solitary figure dressed in white robes. She performed a solemn daily ritual in her home, filling up thousands upon thousands of glasses with water. She also possessed a secret artistic ability in that she was able to play enchanting music with these glasses. The second original narrative used in *Composition A* was the fantastical tale of *NaiNai of Eeinaa*: an outcast shunned by her community, NaiNai dives each day into the

¹¹ Already, there is a tension here between the desire to use African performance forms and the influence of Western theatre practices, both of which I encountered in my formal education. A very simplistic reading of this tension points once again towards the liberal-humanist versus postmodernist dialectic, where the idea of the stable identity which is affirmed in ritual and storytelling (see Chinyowa 2004), stands against the notion of fluidity in identity, which is the result of the subjective nature of lived experience according to postmodern thought.

¹² Zwidutwane are mythical beings who are said to live at Phiphidi falls in the Limpopo province and inhabit the pool, Guvhukhuvhu, which flows from this falls. Revered by the Venda people, they are sometimes called water sprites and are half spirit/half human creatures that appear to only have one of each limb (one eye/ear/leg/arm *et cetera*) because the other half of their bodies resides in the spirit realm where they also have contact with the ancestors.

¹³ This means 'I do not forget' in Venda.

¹⁴ This means 'stone' or 'rock' in Venda. The name is also a play on the word *Domba*, whose meaning I will explain shortly.

¹⁵ The devised performance that grew out of this was an attempt to explore the idea of womanhood and to find a vocabulary of alternative imagery in opposition to the archetypal notions of motherhood and fertility. It was created in collaboration with four fellow student performers as part of my Honours coursework in Directing. Mmakgosi Kgabi, with whom I later collaborated on subsequent versions of *Compositions*, was also involved in this project as a performer.

ocean from a cliff, and each time the townspeople mock and stone her on her journey back from the shore (see Appendix II figs. 10&14). Combining these stories in performance, I attempted to find links between my personal narrative and identity, and my protagonists’.

For aesthetic influences, I turned to the clothing and symbols of Venda culture, focusing on the initiation rituals for girls as my source. In particular I investigated *Domba*, which is the final stage of the traditional three-part initiation cycle for Venda girls.¹⁶ Although in Venda, initiation is not confined to a single event, I focused my interest on the evening ceremonies of dance and song which characterise the *Domba* experience. And having begun to look at the visual images from Venda initiation, I became generally intrigued with forms of bodily adornment in the rites of various other African cultures. I searched for images of adornment and cicatrisation, and found a wealth of images from Nigeria, Benin, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As a final addition to this, I also wanted to rekindle my interest in visual art and design, and so made the decision to incorporate the elements of visual composition as I understood them – line, shape, colour, texture, perspective and space – into the performance. The title of the performance, *Composition A – A portrait of myself through the pictures I have seen*, reflected this. This title was also as a play on my name, evoking the idea of identity and the notion of beginnings.

A number of resonating visual and literary images were used in rehearsal and remained in the final performance of this solo work (see Appendix I fig. 5). Water, rocks, and stones became major symbols, so that the spoken text and visual design of *Composition A* were all based on variations on these symbols, and even the form and style of the performance seemed to incorporate the fluid, organic qualities of these elements. The process itself was a jagged, fragmented affair characterised by uncertainty and movement. The result of my research and praxis was a performance experience that fused an overtly presentational aesthetic with an intimate, almost

¹⁶ Theoretically, attendance at the almost year-long *Domba* school should follow after the initiate has undergone *Vhusha* (a ceremony performed at a family’s request when a girl begins to menstruate, marking the community’s recognition that the girl is no longer a child) and *Tshikanda* (a month-long initiation school where the songs and dances of the ceremonies are learnt). *Domba* is the most important of the initiation schools, and *must* be attended by girls before marriage, as it is through this ceremony that the girl finally ‘graduates’ and fully becomes a woman. See Schlosser (2002), Stayt (1968) and Blacking (1995) for more detail on Venda initiation rites.

confessional atmosphere, whilst incorporating a number of performance styles. The action was episodic and the atmosphere dream-like.

Since the sole performance of *Composition A* in March of 2007 I have staged several versions of the performance in various settings and also in collaboration with other student performers. In June of the same year, I performed the very first *Composition Z – The House of Stone* with two drama students – Sifiso Mabena and Mmakgosi Kgabi – who are also young black women of mixed cultural heritage, living in South Africa (Mabena is Shona/Ndebele and hails from Zimbabwe; Kgabi is Motswana/Ndebele and hails from Botswana). This once-off promenade performance event took place in the outdoor courtyards of The Old Gaol (now a backpacker lodge), not far from the Drama Department. It was preceded by a devising process during which, in collaboration with my peers, I had sought to further investigate and subsequently resolve the fictional narratives used in the original performance.¹⁷

Later that same year I performed with Kgabi again in *Huroyi Hwangu*¹⁸ – *In de/re Composition*, a version of the original *Composition* that sought to combine ‘A’ and ‘Z’. This particular reworking of the piece was staged in a building called the Tannery on the Rhodes University campus, and was performed for an audience three times (including an open dress rehearsal). Finally, the process of creating and recreating lead to the most recent performance of the work on the fringe programme of the 2008 Grahamstown National Arts Festival. The production, once again entitled *Composition Z – The House of Stone*, ran for eleven nights (including a preview performance) at the newly built Amphitheatre in the Botanical Gardens; a venue not officially part of the University campus but adjoining it.

My research is partly an attempt to locate *Compositions* and its themes, forms, and processes in relation to various theoretical frameworks within the fields of performance and cultural studies. I have taken into consideration all of the works performed over the past two years because it is in the journey of creating the work (at times more so than in the performance of a particular version) that its aspirations have been realised. When I speak of *Compositions*, then, I am referring to the combined

¹⁷ ‘The final question that frames all three narratives, and the space in which the cast and I will situate ourselves is: *who is really telling which story, why, and to whom?*’ (Moyo 2007b: 3).

¹⁸ This means ‘my witchcraft’ in Shona.

works produced over the past two years, and where necessary, I will refer to the particular version of the performance in question by name.

As I have been reflecting on my experiences in creating and performing the work, I have found that the two most prominent themes were the themes of migration and identity, which recurred in each and every version of *Compositions*. Although I was unaware of it to begin with, my initial interest in exploring ‘belonging, identity and displacement’ (Moyo 2007a: 1) was in actual fact a result of my particular experience of displacement as a foreigner. And in writing this thesis, I must constantly remind myself that this experience is not some far-off memory of a distant past. As I write this thesis, I am aware that I am still displaced and that the issues that concerned me whilst creating *Compositions* still concern me now.

Episode 4: Departure – Migrations towards a self

I have recently moved to Cape Town whilst in the final stages of writing this thesis, and have had to make the adjustment of living in a much larger city than the one I had been living in before. Part of the change I have had to adjust to is the weather, for which I have been slightly unprepared. One morning before going out, I seemed to be having a particularly difficult time deciding what to wear, and the only piece of clothing I could find that was to be appropriate to the extremely hot climate was a light cotton dress that my mother brought back for me from Cameroon. It is a favourite, and I quickly decided that that this would be the best thing to cope with the heat and so proceeded to change into the outfit. Everything was as normal until, as I grabbed my keys and headed for the door, I happened to glance my reflection in the mirror. I stopped for a moment and was struck by a wave of fear. ‘Am I dressed appropriately?’ I thought. ‘You’re not in a small town anymore, this is Cape Town, you might get beaten up.’ I stood in front of the mirror, thinking about this, and what surprised me was how genuine the fear was. Try as I may to tell myself that I was being irrational, that Long Street is filled with shops that specialise in this type of clothing, that Cape Town is overflowing with foreigners and ‘how many Zimbabwean cab drivers have I met since I got here?’...without realising it I had already taken one or two steps back towards the wardrobe. Then ‘this is silly, it’s not that bad,’ and after another brief hesitation I walked out of the door.

That was last week. Today, I hear that seven Zimbabweans were burnt to death in their homes in a nearby township during another spurt of xenophobic violence. I am not sure what to do with this information, but after hearing the news I know that I can still retreat to the safety of my upper middle-class apartment building.

Migration is, at its most basic level, the physical movement of bodies across space, from one area to another (one thinks of the annual migrations of birds and butterflies *en masse* across continents). The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines human migration as a process motivated by the search for employment

(Pearsall, J. 2002: 902), and whilst it is most often understood as such, I would broaden this definition to include a wider range of motivating factors so that migration in this study is that which is motivated by, generally speaking, a search for opportunities. In this sense, the refugee who seeks asylum; the student who is in pursuit of a tertiary education; the entrepreneur who is on a quest for capital gains; and the working-class labourer who is in search of a better job (among many others) are all migrants lead by their search for opportunities. A second note to be made is the difference between the migrant and the immigrant who is ‘a person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country’ (Pearsall 2002: 709). Migrants may, over the course of time, become permanent immigrants, but this is not necessarily their primary objective.

The phenomenon of migration has been a defining feature of the modern era that has altered the composition of cultures and communities worldwide (Benmayor and Skotnes 2005: 5). ‘In fact, the pre-colonial history of African societies was a history of people in perpetual movement throughout the continent’ (Mbembe 2007: 27). In contemporary Southern Africa as elsewhere, migration is ‘intensifying fear and reaction, and, at the same time creating more zones of cultural contact with creative constructions of identity and belonging’ (Benmayor and Skotnes, 2005: vii). One might even argue that ‘it is this very culture of mobility that colonisation [Apartheid] once endeavoured to freeze through the modern institution of borders [pass books]’ (Mbembe: 2007: 27). Nowadays and particularly in light of the upsurge of xenophobic violence that marked 2008, the subject has emerged strongly as a potential theme in the theatre in South Africa where the exploration of national identity has already been a topic of concern for practitioners producing work in a Post-Apartheid context (see Tang 2005, Krueger 2007 on explorations of national identity in South African theatre). There have been a number of recent productions such as Magnet Theatre’s *Every Day, Every Year I Am Walking* (2007) and *Cargo* (2007), the Paper Body Collective’s *(In) Medea Res* (2008), and my own *Composition Z – The House of Stone* (2008) which all deal with the topic of migration in its various forms. In fact as I write, the annual Spier Performing Arts Festival has just begun. The event this year is entitled *Infecting the City*, and the theme is Home Affairs – an allusion to the South African immigration department of the same name.

The study of migration situates my research in the immediate and current socio-political and cultural context. It also initiates an ongoing dialogue in my research with a diverse range of disciplines where the study of migration appears to be of interest. The vocabulary used in the study of migration points to differing objectives on the part of those conducting the research, so that I find research on migration categorised according to labels. ‘Diaspora studies’, ‘Transnational studies’ and ‘Border theory’ all deal with migration. For the moment I have chosen not to identify with any particular branch of this broad field, as I do not wish to become preoccupied with terminology. I am also concerned with more than just the physical process and effects of migration but with its metaphoric value as well, particularly in an artistic sense and in the context of my studies. I will also add that there is a vast amount of overlap to be found in theories such as the notions of ‘travelling cultures’ (Clifford 1992) and ‘nomadic consciousness’ (Braidotti 1994). For me, the point is that studies of migration aim to describe ‘the ways in which globalization challenges social organization and identity construction’ (Levitt and Waters 2002: 6).

Indeed, although migration is by no means historically unique to modern times, the current global political and economic climate has brought migration and its surrounding discourses to the foreground.

Intensified globalisation is the order of the day in Africa as elsewhere...The accelerated flows of capital, goods, electronic information and migration induced or enhanced by globalisation have only exacerbated the insecurities and anxieties of locals and foreigners alike, bringing about an even greater obsession with citizenship and belonging (Nyamnjoh 2006: 1).

Along with this comes a growing obsession with identity, and with the need to distinguish between locals and foreigners, citizens and strangers, nationals and immigrants or ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 3). This new wave of identity obsession relies on, amongst other things, an essentialist conception of identity where power can then be divided into strict binaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’. But identity is in fact, far more fragile and fluid than has been thought in the past (du Gay *et al.* 2000: 2).

Whereas animal migration is easily understood to be a repetitive, cyclical occurrence, for some reason (which I will not attempt to discover here) human

migration is more often thought of as an inorganic, static, and un-natural movement. In postcolonial Africa at least, this idea is perhaps more of a Western Imperialist invention rather than a reality (see Mbembe 2007). Yet it still pervades much of the discussion around migration, although studies in the past few decades have begun to try and overturn this conception of migration in popular thinking as a ‘bounded act’¹⁹. Benmayor and Skotnes for example note the need for a departure from the way that migration is conceived and understood in popular thinking and literature as ‘a single movement in space, a single moment in time...[with] the assumption that at a certain point, migration ends and a process of assimilation/integration and upward mobility begins’ (Benmayor and Skotnes 2005: 8). In fact, ‘migration...is a long-term if not life-long process of negotiating identity, difference, and the right to fully exist and flourish in the new context’ (Benmayor and Skotnes 2005: 8).

Shedding light on the particular case of migration in Southern Africa, Nyamnjoh reveals that contrary to the opinions of host governments and nationals, many migrants often do not intend to reside in the host country permanently. Instead they remain concerned about their ‘home’ countries and as such conceive of their day to day reality, (and subsequently their identity,) as being characterised by ‘flexible mobility’ rather than a series of fixed ‘dislocations and relocations’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 76). As such, the migrant is in a constant state of flux and transition and is a nomadic subject whose identity is situated not only in a marginal space but in what is fundamentally a liminal zone. But the marginal space, bell hooks explains, can be a most effective ‘site of radical possibility, a space of resistance’ (hooks 2008: 83) for it enables one to be located as an essential part of the whole and yet to remain simultaneously outside of the mainstream culture/discourse (hooks 2008: 82), and thus able to critique it.

Having contextualised migration thus far, I have already begun to trace the importance of spaces – whether physical or metaphorical – to the entire concept of migration and the way in which it is perceived. It is after all a movement of human bodies from one *space* defined by national borders into another, and as such, it

¹⁹ This phrase is borrowed from Judith Butler’s discussion of the notions of performance and performativity in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). The link I am making here will become clearer in the course of my discussion.

foregrounds the *body* as a site through which power relations can be enacted.²⁰ To the host country, the migrant body is a foreign body, invading both the physical space of the local population, as well as the ideological space of nationalism, national identity, and national culture.

Whether it is through a state's restriction of an individual's freedom of movement, or the violence that plays out when xenophobia erupts in certain societies, the body is central to all experiences of migration. Nyamnjoh (2006) describes in detail the ways in which a politics of the body plays out in the scenario of migration in South Africa. *Makwerekwere* is a name given to black African migrants in South Africa and refers to

a black person who cannot demonstrate mastery of local South African languages but also one who hails from a country assumed to be economically and culturally backward in relation to South Africa...usually believed to be the darkest of the dark-skinned, and to be less enlightened even when more educated than the lighter-skinned South African black (Nyamnjoh, 2006: 39).

I can recall having once been called by this name (by a friend) at school soon after my arrival into the country. Though at first I did not know what the word meant, the experience impressed upon me the simple fact of my existence as an 'outsider' to the dominant South African national culture(s). This naming, although I understood it to be said in a playful manner, had the effect of making me severely aware of my body and appearance, and this new self-consciousness was of course compounded by my age (I was fourteen and was in the throes of adolescence). Although my experience of alienation was by no means as extreme as that of other migrants (I wonder how 'deep' my identity as a migrant runs?) it initiated a profound realisation that remained with me until it was finally explored in *Compositions*. For me, then, the displacement of migration will always be linked with the experience of being a young black woman, and when I speak of my migrant identity, I am also speaking of my racial, gendered, and cultural identities.

Amongst the many accusations levelled against us by the local population, *makwerekwere* are charged with carrying disease and being responsible for the spread

²⁰ This idea of the body as the locus of power is a poststructuralist view developed largely by Michel Foucault, especially in *The History of Sexuality* (1978). His ideas, having had a great impact on feminist theory (see Armstrong 2006) are later expounded by Butler (1993) whom I will continue to refer back to.

of HIV/AIDS in South Africa (Nyamnjoh 2006; Crush 2008).²¹ Additionally, the South African police often ‘identify’ foreigners by their skin colour (dark) or from supposedly distinctive facial features, their accents, hairstyles, dressing styles, ‘or in the case of Mozambicans, vaccination scars on the left front arm’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 49). My own recent experience of being stopped at the domestic arrivals terminal in Port Elizabeth airport and being asked *immediately* for my passport pointed this out to me quite literally. Could it have been, I wondered, because I was wearing a head scarf and an ‘African’ print cotton cloth which perhaps made me look ‘foreign’? I cannot answer this question definitively. I can only admit that such incidences have caused me to be even more aware of my foreignness. At times, I have thought twice about wearing an outfit that may betray my ‘outsider-hood’, and I found myself, especially after the 2008 attacks, reluctant to mention that I was from Zimbabwe whenever someone asked me ‘where are you from?’

Personal speculations aside, it seems true indeed that ‘to the police and authorities, South African modernity, like its identities, is all about appearance’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 49). One can hardly deny the centrality of the body, then, when it comes to issues of migrant identity in a South African context. There appears here to be a ‘hierarchy of humanity’, inherited from apartheid, which replays itself in contemporary South Africa. In it, white South Africans stand at the helm as the superiors, black South Africans are next in line as ‘superior inferiors’ and *makwerekwere* rank lowest as the ‘inferior scum of humanity’ (Nyamnjoh 2006: 44). For the majority of South Africans and especially for those previously dispossessed, migrants exist in opposition to the idea of ‘modernity’ and ‘civilisation’, which is tied up with the ‘proudly South African’ rhetoric of the day.

Having been excluded (marginalised) from the dominant discourse in this way, one can respond in several ways. Often, one either actively performs and affirms one’s migrant identity by joining a community of ‘outsiders’ – for example the ‘Zim-Soc’ student body based on Rhodes University campus which I never managed to join during my time at university – or continuing to observe one’s own cultural practices in the new setting. On the other hand one might also try, as I must admit I have often

²¹ As an aside, I wonder about the effects/ethics of using the title *Infecting the City* for the Spier Performing Arts Festival (2009) dealing with the subject of migration and foreigners in South Africa, especially when it remains such a hot topic in the media and in light of the recent Cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

done, to blend in somehow and go un-noticed by attempting to ‘pass’ for an insider. But as I have discovered, however much one tries to *perform* as an ‘insider’, one’s *performative* identity seems to emerge involuntarily and the two are sometimes at odds with one another.²² Upon being asked where I come from, I often find that even after answering ‘I’m from Grahamstown’, the inquirer persists ‘yes, but where are you *originally* from?’ Ironically, it is perhaps the fact that I ‘speak English so well’, a trait that might ordinarily (if I were a South African black) push me up the ‘hierarchy of humanity’ to a more sophisticated level, that betrays me as being, in fact, a *makwerekwere*.

The implications of the inferred link between narration and identity can be observed clearly in the particular case of migration in South Africa. Nyamnjoh (2006) describes how in South Africa, migrant identity is often constructed (and represented by the media) in a negative light. The derogatory labelling of black migrants as *makwerekwere* is indicative of their disempowerment. Migrant or ‘outsider’ identity is in this case delineated by the dominant majority of ‘insiders’, and migrants themselves are denied the opportunity to be identified by the name of their choice; they are unable to be the authors of their own identities.

In my own case, the difficulty in finding a term that suitably describes my experience of migration was further testimony of this. As a Zimbabwean student ‘temporarily’ resident in South Africa for nine years, I could not describe myself as an exile, refugee, immigrant or tourist. To describe myself in official terms as a ‘temporary resident’ did not, I felt, adequately convey the complexities of my identity or of my experience of migration. Part of the problem here, I realised, was the fact that the authorship of my identity, (the power to name and to construct a narrative of my experience), had been appropriated by the state through the use of such generalising terms. *Compositions* was an attempt to address this problem of authorship: for narration is also, as Bhabha discusses in *Nation and Narration* (1990a), ambivalent and malleable, and it can therefore be appropriated as a tool of resistance.

I might also add that, even when more seemingly appropriate terminology such as Achille Mbembe’s concept of *Afropolitanism* (2007) is presented, I have been reluctant to identify with it. In this particular case my reluctance is generated by

²² See the section on *Identity* for an explication of the differences between performed and performative identities.

reasons of class and, more importantly, the notion of African-ness. As I have understood it, the notion of Afropolitanism seems to question the very idea of African-ness and describes an individual who, as well as being multilingual, has had a far broader experience of transnational travel than I have had. From his description, this individual seems to me less of a migrant and more of a traveller (see Clifford 1992 on the difference between travellers and migrants), driven less by the search for opportunities *per se* and more by a general search for lived experiences. And whilst I do not subscribe to any nativistic definition of African-ness, I must say that I have never consciously questioned my identity as an African or sought to define what that might be by any universally held standard, whereas the Afropolitan individual seems to be constantly questioning and evaluating this idea of African-ness. My reasons may be simplistic and possibly even inadequate, but I do feel that this scepticism is worth pointing out as it has to do with the sense of dislocation I am describing. It is as though the very experience of marginality had become my preferred state of being, as though *not* identifying with any particular stance other than that of ‘outsider’ were more liberating than the formulation of more inclusive categories. This idea of marginality will continue to recur in my discussion.

The various sites of narration in *Compositions*, which I have identified are **body**, **space** and the **journey** metaphor. These can also be seen as constituting and containing ‘texts’, where ‘texts’ are ‘all sign systems that organise meanings along narrative lines. This includes visual, auditive, and three-dimensional sign systems, both static and dynamic’ (Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001: 4). If I recall Derrida’s notion of Arche-writing mentioned earlier, I can broaden this definition of texts even further.

Episode 5: Authoring identity/Composing the self

Before I continue, it may be necessary to clarify what it is that I mean when I speak of identity – this word which has dominated so much of my writing thus far. I began work on *Compositions* after asking the question ‘what is [my] identity?’ There is, of course, no easy answer. Theories and definitions of identity abound in virtually all disciplines of the social and human sciences, and it is difficult to arrive at one definition that adequately accounts for the numerous tomes dedicated to the study of this topic. At the centre of all this ambiguity about identity is a paradigmatic issue between interpretive humanist and constructionist approaches.²³

I am concerned in this study with contemporary performance praxis and with the field of cultural studies, within which identity is generally perceived as an elusive and dynamic phenomenon, rather than as a unified and integral entity. This view, which du Gay, Evans and Redman (2000) call the ‘subject-of-language’ approach, is also now widely accepted across the humanities, albeit for differing reasons (du Gay *et al.* 2000: 2), and can be seen as the unifying thread that runs through contemporary scholarship on identity. But to say that identity is malleable and changing still does not explain what exactly ‘it’ is. So with this view in mind, I find a number of further distinctions useful for deepening my understanding.

In *Experiencing Identity* (1998) Ian Craib argues for the valuation of lived *experience* in any study of identity and its surrounding concerns. He argues that there is a difference between ‘social identity’ and a broader concept of identity, because ‘*social* identities can come and go but *my identity* goes on as something which unites all the *social* identities I ever had, have or will have [emphasis mine]’ (Craib 1998: 4). Social identity is something that I can possess. It essentially relies on (my relation to) other social beings and structures and the actions that I must perform as part of these relations.

²³ If I accept that, in terms of its semantic history the particular term ‘identity’ is itself a relatively new one, having only emerged in literature in middle of the twentieth century (Gleason 1983: 910), and that it has also been plagued with ambiguity since its emergence, I may begin to appreciate the impossibility of trying to provide a singular definition for it. I cannot therefore attempt to offer one here, but I can however outline certain key concepts that pertain to the notion of identity as I have begun to understand it in the creation of *Compositions*; bearing in mind that nearly every one of these theories can (and most of them have been) contested.

But the larger identity which Craib refers to as '*my identity*' is, as I understand it, subjectivity; that is, an individual's positionality as 'a given entity, the author of its own acts and centred in a unitary, reflexive and directive consciousness' (du Gay *et al.* 2000: 2. *cf.* the notion of 'person identity' in Stets and Burke 2000). Craib is arguing, then, that there is a 'dialectic of unity and diversity' at play here (Craib 1998: 5), where the 'I' (subjectivity) and the 'me' (social roles/traits) that compose identity can be seen to be simultaneously occurring rather than mutually exclusive. He therefore uses the pronoun 'I' as shorthand for lived *experience*. This 'I' is the same unitary consciousness through which one might develop an *authorial voice*, and the same authoritative 'self' that might emerge through reflexive writing practices.

One effect of *social* identity on *my* identity then, is that the term 'subject' also takes up its second meaning. 'I' am no longer simply the supposedly autonomous individual that is the 'author of its own acts', but I also become a 'subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission' (Althusser 2000: 37). The dialectical play within identity means that whilst I am developing my authorial voice, I am also still subject to a higher authority, for example the University system which requires that I develop such a voice, or the social conventions that set out a particular relationship between theatre-maker, text and audience.²⁴ So I can say that the *authorial voice* that one seeks to refine through a Master of Arts degree is always-already engaged in a 'conversation' so-to-speak, with other voices or selves.²⁵

In the process of creating a devised performance project such as *Compositions*, a tension emerges when the student theatre-maker's (my) authorial voice is infused with the traces of other voices, be they the voices of collaborators (Kgabi and Mabena) or of the spectators. The effect of such 'other voices' in a performance project can be potentially unsettling especially for audience members, whilst the need to claim authority through an authorial voice/identity in a work (for example in the writing of

²⁴ I am speaking here of the Western convention by which the theatre-maker (that is director, choreographer or performer) is seen as an 'interpreter' of the theatrical or other text, and whereby the audience is asked to simply accept that given reading (see Pavis 2008 and Allsop 2003). This convention is arguably a symptom of 'textocentrism'.

²⁵ I am borrowing Althusser's notion of *interpellation* here, where he suggests that the individual subject comes into being through a process of being 'hailed' by discourse/language and yet must 'always-already' exist as a subject even before this *interpellation* in order to be 'hailed' in the first place (see Althusser 2000 and Stuart Hall's discussion of this notion). This notion is explained in the following paragraph on Judith Butler.

this thesis) may seem at odds with the very nature of the creative exploration. I will return to this idea in a later section.

For Stuart Hall only Judith Butler comes closest to resolving the problem of understanding identity by highlighting the importance and complexity of the role that the body plays in the formation of identity.²⁶ In *Gender Trouble* (1990) but more precisely in *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler manages to begin to narrow the problematic gap between materiality and discourse (or language and gesture as McCullough puts it in theatrical terms) which is at the heart of the identity debate, Butler writes:

The body posited as prior to the sign, is always *posited* or *signified* as *prior*. This signification produces as an *effect* of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which *precedes* its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification (Butler 1993: 30).

So language is tied up *with* and *in* the body, and discourse is not simply produced after the body but *through* it. The production of discourse as Butler states is a performative act which, because it is generated *through* the body is also, on some level, a material act. If one sees the individual subject in Foucault's terms as a discursive formation through which one can understand the material world, then one can distinguish the body as the target of institutional power. Identity is produced, here, through the performative enactment of behaviours and discursive utterances which *interpellate* or 'hail' (to use Althusser's terms) the subject into being. The performative act – which according to Butler differs from 'performance' in the theatrical sense of a bounded 'act' (Butler 1993: 225) – is an 'authoritative speech'

²⁶ Hall traces a seemingly irreconcilable debate on identity between psychoanalysis and poststructuralist discourse theory, and in his own way echoes Craib's concerns about the underrated dialectical play between social identity and *experience*. In his terms, part of the problem that makes it impossible to arrive at a singular definition of identity is the fact that identity arises from the *point of intersection* between the unconscious functions of psychic space and its drives on the one hand, and the discursive functions of cognition that constitute the social realm, on the other (Hall 2000: 20). Once again I find the tension between humanist and constructionist notions of identity emerging.

that sets in motion the compulsory, repetitive embodying practices which are then perceived as [gender] identity. So ‘identity is not only achieved through identification with individuals who share a common outlook but also through recognisable performative repertoires that are expressive and embodied’ (Hetherington 1998: 17-18), and social identities such as race, ethnicity, and nationality can be seen to be performatively constructed. Some, like culture, are also explicitly constructed through performances.

One is dealing here with, to use a colloquialism, a kind of ‘chicken/egg’ dilemma which is a descendant of the classic mind-body problem that fascinated Descartes and others. As the gap between theory/thought and gesture/practice continues to narrow, so I can say that not only does my authorial voice arise out of my lived experiences, but my lived experiences are also being shaped in memory/narrative through the performative utterances of my authorial voice (see the previous section on autoethnography).

Hall concludes by offering his own definition of identity as the ‘point[s] of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us...they are the result of a successful articulation or ‘chaining’ of the subject into the flow of discourse’ (Hall 2000: 19). What we have here for the first time is the idea that identity, being produced of and through difference and discourse, inhabits a particular space of ambiguity. A similar view from postcolonial theory points more clearly to the link between identity and culture.

In postcolonial theory (which utilises Foucault, Derrida and Bakhtin extensively), ‘hybridity – the cultural condition of Third World intellectuals in the West – is asserted to be the condition of all contemporary society’ (Ranger and Werbner 1996: 271). One of the ‘holy trinity’ of Third World intellectuals (Ranger and Werbner 1996: 6), Homi Bhabha argues that cultural meaning is produced in liminal spaces, in the gap between signifier and signified, or what he has termed the ‘Third Space’. This un-representable discursive space is a self-contradicting, ambivalent realm that allows us to appreciate that culture and its systems, texts and symbols are inherently hybrid, and that ‘hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable’ (Bhabha, 1994: 37). The implications of this view of culture on social identities are manifold. Primarily, what Bhabha’s theory of hybridity

demonstrates is that identity, like culture, is created through a constant process of reevaluation where identities, like cultures, ‘are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentred structures’ (Bhabha cited in Rutherford 1990: 210). Identity then functions through engaging difference within a process of selection and exclusion (Hall 2000: 17-18).

P.W. Preston outlines several ways of looking at culture:

First, culture as a cognitive category, a state of mind (with an ideal goal implied), which is the proper concern of the arts and ethics; second, culture as the level of collective social development, with this sphere of concern designated as ‘culture and society’; third, culture as the arts, where a restricted sphere of self-conscious expression is designated (and may be reserved for particular groups, with their own self-images); and fourth, culture as the way of life of a people, the sphere of complex practical activity, or praxis (Preston 1997: 39).

Preston’s notion of culture engages both discourse and materiality. He then goes on to make a schematic review of certain aspects of identity, distinguishing ‘locale, network and memory’ as key concepts.²⁷ In particular, the notion of memory denotes the ways in which ‘practical activities deposit residues in memory and provide the basis for ideas of continuity. Memory comprises a store of *experience* and *knowledge* to inform future activity [emphasis mine]’ (Preston 1997: 43), so that my identity is implicated in a temporal progression and can thus be linked to history and narrative (see Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001). Preston’s approach ‘foregrounds issues of ethnography and biography, and directs our attention to the routines of everyday life’ (Preston 1997: 43). This idea evokes the cyclical processes of self-making in drama studies which McCullough calls *praxis*.

In lieu of a singular definition of identity I have found ‘a simple idea of identity as the way in which we more or less self-consciously locate ourselves in the social world’ (Preston 1997: 43). Recalling Soule’s questions about the nature of identity, I can conclude from this discussion that the ‘I’ which gives rise to an authorial voice is lived experience: a combination of thought and action constructed

²⁷ The notion of locale describes ‘the immediate sphere of practical activity within which we move’ and brings to light the fact that ‘identity has depth and that some matters are more important than others’ (Preston 1997: 43-44). Network ‘points to the wider spread of contacts which people have and use, a spread of contacts which grows out of the spread of practical activities which are pursued within but which move beyond familiar boundaries’ (Preston 1997: 43), and networks reveal the dynamism of identity. Both of these concepts have already been discussed above.

through cyclical repetitions. As much as this 'I' is formulated through action and determined by social structures it is also (always-already) a state of being.²⁸ We might say that in order to discover an authorial voice and become a Master, then, one is called upon to engage with all of these aspects of the 'I' in *praxis*.

And if identity is in actual fact essentially dynamic, then migrant identity is doubly (self-consciously) 'decentred' in that it originates on the margins of the boundaries between dominant cultures, between the home country/culture and the host country/culture. Postcolonial migration for Bhabha is both a 'transitional' reality and a 'translational phenomenon,' the experience is characterised by liminality and there can be 'no resolution to it because the two conditions are ambivalently joined in the [struggle towards] 'survival' of migrant life' (Bhabha 1994: 224).

One week after writing about the phantom of the old woman, my paternal grandmother passed away. I arrive at the airport, at about 8pm in the evening, anticipating a pleasant Christmas holiday in Zambia where my father now lives. I have not been to visit this home in just over a year, and so this visit holds the promise of a reunion with my immediate family – mother, father, and three brothers – who are scattered all over the globe. My father picks me up at the airport, and as we drive home we talk causally about the year, and about the worsening situation in Zimbabwe. We talk about the Cholera epidemic, the deadlocked power-sharing deal between the MDC and ZANU PF, the rising inflation, lack of job opportunities, and the tedious processes involved in obtaining a new Zimbabwean passport. I am aware all the time that something is amiss, but I cannot discover what it is. It is only when we arrive home at last, as we are walking through the sitting room with my bags, that I am told: unknowingly, I stop to look at newly displayed, a series of photographs of my grandmother above the mantle piece. 'Those are very nice photos' I say to my father. It is then that he tells me the news of my grandmother's passing away at about three o'clock that afternoon. I think I was shopping in the duty-free mall at O.R. Tambo airport at the time. I cannot

²⁸ That is to say that there is an ongoing state of consciousness, of living and being in the world. It is not the static singular identity which Soule refutes in her discussion (1998:42).

reconcile the gap in time; I cannot imagine that whilst for me she was still 'alive', she had already gone.

That night, my father and I sit together and watch a few family videos, remembering my grandmother in the images and in our conversation. There is a heavy, slow feel to the atmosphere in the house, and everything seems suspended in disbelief and unreality. The six large photographs on the mantle stare at me; there is something uncanny about them, a kind of inexplicable void in her eyes now that I knew she is gone. In this atmosphere of mourning and loss I am struck by the transience of each present moment, and by the lack of her presence in the still and moving images that I am seeing. Even now as I write this paragraph and remember that experience, there is a loss contained in the words as though someone had cut her out of the entire realm of reality, history, and time. Coincidentally – I think – the last time I went home for a family Christmas in 2004, my mother's mother passed away, and shortly after her death I experienced my second major emotional breakdown in 2005. The first had happened just six months earlier, and it was through these periods of crisis that I had been introduced to analysis. It was also during these periods of anxiety that I began to write fiction, poems and diary entries more consistently than I had in the past.

Episode 6: Limens and margins

Liminality would seem to be the ideal state for conveying the experiences of the marginalised; in this case, for telling the story of the migrant by offering a way in which to articulate the tensions inherent in migrant identity (*cf.* Bhabha's 'Third Space' discussed earlier). The concept of liminality is not a new one to the study of performance. As Susan Broadhurst notes, the term *limen* – borrowed from van Genep's classification of three stages in rites of passage – was used primarily by Victor Turner in his studies on the links between anthropology and theatre (1999a: 14). 'The limen, or threshold... is a no-man's land betwixt-and-between the structural past and the structural future as anticipated by the society's normative control of biological development' (V. Turner 1990: 11). In performance studies, liminality is often used to describe

a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to and anticipating postliminal existence (V. Turner 1990: 12).

The liminal state, as Turner emphasizes, is able to accommodate, negotiate and express ambiguity, paradox and contradiction, and it often functions through symbolic images. As such, liminality lends itself readily as an ideal condition through which multiple identities can be constructed and explored; where identities are ambiguous, somewhat fluid; and where performance forms can freely diffuse and merge.

Broadhurst adds that what she has coined 'liminal performance' emphasizes 'the corporeal, technological and chthonic... heterogeneity, the experimental and the marginalized. Therefore, firstly and most importantly, liminal performance can be described as being located at the edge of what is possible' (Broadhurst 1999a: 12).²⁹ Such performance foregrounds and conveys the experience and condition of liminality (whether explicitly or subliminally), and this manifests in both the process [of developing] and product of a 'liminal performance' work.

²⁹ 'Paradigmatic liminal acts are: in theatre, the hybridized performances of Robert Wilson's operatic 'theatre of images', Pina Bausch's *Tanztheatre*, the 'synthetic fragments' of Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine* and the 'social sculptures' of the Viennese Actionists' (Broadhurst 1999a: 168).

But Turner also makes a distinction between acts that can be termed ‘liminal’ and those that are ‘liminoid.’ This difference occurs between ‘technologically simpler’ and ‘technologically complex’ societies and has to do with, among other things, the separation between ‘leisure’ and ‘work’ that occurs in modern industrialised societies. For him, theatre is one of many ‘liminoid’ cultural performances in an age where ‘the pronounced numinous supernatural character of archaic ritual has been greatly attenuated’ (V. Turner 1990: 12). As a genre, then, theatre must draw on certain ‘power sources’ in order to rediscover this numinous quality. Theatre’s use of a ‘detached, still almost-sacred liminal space’ enables the search for such sources of power, one of which, Turner argues, is the body ‘with its many untapped resources for pleasure, pain, and expression’ (V. Turner 1990: 12). It is interesting to note that, while for Turner, the advent of technology in some ways signals a departure from the centrality of liminal experience to social life, Broadhurst conceives of technology in performance as enabling a rediscovery of liminality, through the chthonic and the heterogeneous. ‘Quintessentially, liminal performance combines the most recent digitized technology with a corporeal prominence, and in many cases, the quest for the almost primordial’ (Broadhurst 1999b: 18). These ideas will be elaborated upon in due course.

Following Turner’s work on the liminal, ethnographers have also gravitated towards the ‘existential spaces in the culture’ of the postmodern age so that the methodology of autoethnography has been enabled in part by the study of ritual.

The critical autoethnographer enters those strange and familiar situations that connect the biographical experience (epiphanies) with culture, history, and social structure. He or she seeks out those narratives and stories people tell one another as they attempt to make sense of the epiphanies, or existential turning point moments, in their lives (Denzin 2008: 121).

However, liminality is not without its pitfalls. Helen Nicholson (2005) and Jon McKenzie (2004) both mention that the notion of the liminal has become somewhat of a norm in performance studies. McKenzie in particular points out the potential of what he calls the ‘liminal-norm’ to become domesticated and normative in its function. After all, in its original sense the liminal stage was part of a process designed to instil

certain behaviours and values into young individuals before they were allowed to be re-introduced into society, thereby preserving the status quo (McKenzie 2004: 28). As McKenzie notes, Michel Foucault once likened this process of separation, acculturation and recuperation which youths undergo in 'primitive societies' with the pedagogical inscription of capitalist norms into young minds through the modern institution of the University (McKenzie 1998: 219). Such a comparison questions the notion of performance and performativity (to which, according to Turner, Schechner and others, liminality is central) are inherently transgressive and oppositional forms.

I venture that the formal study of Drama is often marginalised (hence placed in a liminal space) even within the modern academic institution, and this is precisely as a result of its problematic insubordination to such capitalist conventions as the re-valuation of the University degree according to the qualification gained rather than the standard of scholarship (Sutherland 2007: 109, see Race 1999 for a more detailed argument of this view). During a discussion about the now popular theatrical treatment of displacement and identity themes, a colleague remarked recently that, as students and academics involved in theatre and performance we are more often than not displaced from the mainstream of commercial industries. Furthermore, as she argued, the South African theatre 'industry' itself is a relatively small one where professional support/funding bodies are few and far between, and one often feels 'displaced' even within one's own discipline.

As we observed in an earlier discussion Drama studies transgresses normative (hermeneutic) conceptions of what education is (see Sutherland 2007). Arguably then, Drama Studies (when it is successful) tends not to produce the types of students who can be *unproblematically* recuperated into the capitalist system, even though it may be a part of the mainstream University institution. Having said that, the 'liminal-norm' still ought to be approached with caution particularly in performance studies where it is often accepted as one of the features of performative efficacy, and as a characteristic of the paradigm of performance studies itself (McKenzie 2004: 26-7). I will revisit this discussion in a later section.

In addition to this I must consider Donald Weber's (1995) discussion of the term 'liminal' and his explanation of the preference in anthropology for the term 'border' (mentioned earlier) to describe the experiences of foreign migrants, among other minority groups. With this in mind, I would still prefer the term 'liminal' as key

in negotiating migrant identity and especially for the task of analysing *Compositions*. I find that the term ‘border’, whilst somewhat resonant with the reality of postcolonial African migration, connotes restrictions and implies boundaries which, as cultural studies has sought to prove, are largely imaginary social constructs. For me, the idea of the border emphasises difference and perpetuates the notion of a binary split between dominant modes.

The liminal, on the other hand, allows a modest space for the marginalised. It is the ‘porous, creative middle space between two or more seemingly binary positions in which imaginative capacity is heightened and the possibilities of re-invention abound’ (Kabwe 2007: 47). In *Compositions*, the liminal condition was appropriate to my concern with initiation and ritual. It is also through the unresolved act of lingering indefinitely within the undefined space between, rather than by a definitive crossing of rigid, delineated lines that *Compositions* attempted to locate and articulate its meanings.

Finally, Behdad (2005) suggests that migration is often treated in general terms, as a global phenomenon that plays out between majorities and minorities. The migrant minority is not only geographically displaced but also politically disempowered, and migrant identity is therefore ‘generally’ conceived within this binary as an oppositional identity. Thus, Behdad asserts, there is a tendency in cultural studies to ‘lump together a broad range of aesthetic and cultural practices under the rubric of ‘minority’’ (Behdad, 2005: 224). On the other hand there is the more specific approach to understanding migration, taking into consideration the particular socio-historic contexts where class, gender, religion and language may create further differences and hierarchies within migrant communities.³⁰ This tension between the general and the specific nature of migration presents a challenge for the artist or researcher dealing with migration as a theme. I must therefore locate my discussion of *Compositions* within this tension, describing the ways in which my autoethnographic performance approached the challenge to ‘account for the specific manifestations of

³⁰ *Compositions* deals with various identities. Issues of race, gender and ethnicity figure greatly in the work. Along with this also is the class identity which makes me simultaneously subject to and yet exempt from aspects of ‘outsider-hood’. This may have been from where the important postcolonial project of *Compositions* emerged. However, due to the limited scope of this particular study it would be impossible for me to tackle all of these issues in exhaustive detail. They therefore appear only in brief and in relation to the overarching concern with migration.

displacement while avoiding the pitfalls of ahistoricism and depoliticization' (Behdad, 2005: 228).

My most recent journey home to Zambia in December of 2008 began as a simple trip to one destination, and instead became a much more prolonged meandering that forced me to revisit old homes and in the process rethink the notions I had about my identity and my experience of migration. I had planned to go to Lusaka and spend three weeks there with my family; instead, we (the rolling stones who gather no moss) end up making a number of unplanned journeys in order to bury my grandmother, so that this period of loss is also marked in my memory by the lengthy journeys between Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. These journeys by road take us back to the homes we had not planned to revisit (yet). All the while we are travelling I find myself going back in time also, recounting the entire process of our migrations so that, whilst experiencing a personal loss after my grandmother's death, I am also forced to identify myself anew within a larger social context.

About six days after my arrival in Zambia my father, younger brother and I set off from Lusaka to attend my grandmother's funeral. There is great anxiety as we travel – our trip has been delayed for days while we waited for visas to enable us to enter South Africa, and the notion of driving through Zimbabwe is a daunting one, with the threat of Cholera and the scarcity of fuel as fierce deterrents. Nevertheless, we set off with plenty of bottled water and a couple of jerry cans full of unleaded petrol. After crossing the Chirundu border into Zimbabwe (this is always a strange experience, we line up in the 'visitors' cue and the Zimbabwean immigration officer asks how many days we are going to stay in the country), we encounter numerous army-manned roadblocks and acres upon acres of unused farmland. Ironically, my father points out, we are seldom stopped by the police and are instead allowed to pass through the numerous checkpoints whilst vehicles with Zimbabwean number plates are automatically flagged down. The landscapes that whiz past my passenger-window seem as alien as I feel being here. I fight the urge to whip out my camera and capture a few images of this desiccated land to take 'back home' to South Africa.

We are racing to reach Musina as soon as possible so that my father can participate in making some of the funeral arrangements, and so he and I talk a lot during this twenty-four hour drive. We are on the road, so the conversation turns, naturally, to the subject of the landscape. As we pass various landmarks I listen to stories of life before Zimbabwe's Independence in 1980, when my father and most of the members of his family often had to travel great distances within and across the borders of Zimbabwe and South Africa. After midnight, as we drive over the bridge at the Limpopo border post, my father tells me that in the time of my great grandfather, this area was the family's place of ancestral worship. The first bridge at this border was built over a sacred site – a pool called Bembele which belonged to our family, the Makhakhavhule clan, and was destroyed when the border was erected in the 1980s. My father continues to narrate more stories about the lives of my grandparents and great grandparents, telling of the many migrations that characterise our family history. In-between completing border formalities, road blocks and casual conversations, I am now beginning to locate myself within a greater history of movement beyond my subjective experiences. I am beginning to appreciate that the impact of migration upon my identity is even greater than I had imagined

Episode 7: Empty signs

It is a strange feeling for me to not have living grandparents. My paternal grandmother was my last surviving grandparent. At her burial, I was struck by a strange feeling of rootless-ness, as though I no longer have a past, no longer have a history or an origin. As I write this paragraph, I wonder if it is in bad taste to write about the death of my grandmother. At the time I found (and still find) myself searching the daily events following that news and combing through every moment and emotion like a medical detective searching for forensic evidence of something. Of what? I am not entirely sure, and I am still not entirely comfortable with my own (voyeuristic) autobiographical actions, though I do feel compelled to speak about it. Perhaps it is because of what she contributed to my sense of identity, and because that is something which cannot be replaced or regained. Or, perhaps it is because we were not close as I would have liked, and so the loss of her is compounded certainly by the loss of any chance I might have had to know her better. I do feel compelled to write about it, as I think I have always felt compelled to make some connection to her and to this legacy which she represents, through my creative projects. The Grandmother in Compositions who says ‘ziva kwewakabva’³¹ is speaking quite simply for this desire to have some sense of belonging through history and community. She spoke, I felt, as though she spoke for my own grandmother, as though she spoke from a time and a place long before ‘me, here, now’. But now that word ‘grandmother’ has almost become an empty sign, for behind it there is no longer a living being to touch and see and talk with, to make the past real.

The absence of life-force in the linguistic sign ‘grandmother’ is like the eternal absence that lingers in every act of writing; an ‘uncanny’ division and contradiction in the present moment of writing/reading which is hinted at by Derrida. In writing this text then, I (the speaker/author) am as absent from it as I am present in it – my words stand alone without me, and ‘it is *as if* I were dead’ (Wolfreys 2007: 3). My authorial voice in this text does not already exist, it is not ‘me’ in a sense but it is always

³¹ This means ‘know where you came from’ in Shona.

preceded by my act of writing. And just as nothing remains of my grandmother in the portraits on the wall, so nothing remains of ‘me’ in this text but the traces of my existence – these few thousand words and these collected ideas that attempt to capture my experience. Of late and especially in light of my recent trip home, my process of writing has revealed itself to be a somewhat futile attempt at expressing something ‘real’ or ‘true’. For Derrida this sought-after something/meaning in writing remains always imminent, displaced and anticipated (Wolfreys 2007: 2-3). And if this is true of my writing as well as of my lived experience, it must also be true of my performance, so that every action seems to be in a process and is incomplete. There is a sense in which everything is in motion and on a journey towards an ever-receding horizon.

To this end, ‘the use of writing as a means of developing a reflective praxis within the embodied nature of Drama may seem contradictory,’ but when such writing is *evocative*, *subjective* and *multi-voiced*, it can become performative in the sense that it acquires those attributes that are shared with the dramatic arts (Sutherland 2007: 119). Pollock (1998) also discusses the attributes of performative writing. She uses the term ‘performative’ to describe ‘not a genre or fixed form (as a textual model might suggest) but a way of describing what some good writing *does*’ (1998: 75). She provides a detailed (non-prescriptive) list of some of the actions that such writing might ‘perform.’ From her discussion I gather that reflexive and autoethnographic writing, when done well, can be *metonymic*, *citational* and *consequential* in addition to those attributes already mentioned above. I do not have the scope here to discuss all of these actions in detail, but I will say that the mention of *metonymic* and *citational* actions in writing is particularly interesting and perhaps relevant here.

According to Pollock, *metonymic* writing is

...a self-consciously partial rendering that takes its pulse from the *difference* rather than the *identity* between the linguistic symbol and the thing it is meant to represent. It dramatises the limits of language, sometimes as an endgame, sometimes as the pleasures of playing (*jouissance*) in an endlessly open field of representation. It recognises the extent to which writing displaces, even effaces ‘others’ and ‘other-worlds’...In the ironic turns of its own self-consciousness, metonymic writing thus tends also to displace itself, to unwrite itself at the very moment of composition, opening language to what it is not and can never be (1998: 82-3).

And *citational* writing

...quotes a world that is always already performative – that is composed in and as repetition and reiteration. Citational writing figures writing as rewriting, as repetition of given discursive forms that are exceeded in the ‘double-time’ of performing writing and thereby exposes the fragility of identity, history, and culture constituted in rites of textual recurrence (Pollock 1998: 92).

For now, it is enough simply to put forward the possibility of a kind of writing which could do this.

A challenge I face in Drama studies is the inability to adequately render in written form the findings of my embodied research experiences. I cannot provide you, the reader, with a first-hand experience of *Compositions* to which you might relate this thesis, and mere description is not enough to recreate the performance. But interpretive biography or autoethnography is, after all, less about describing the past ‘as it really was’, and more about an attempt to ‘create new ways of performing and experiencing the past’ (Denzin 2008: 117). As such, it is also about experiencing the present, and in this performative moment of interpretation/translation (*cf.* Bhabha 1994, Jones and Stephenson 1999) the breaking of the boundary between my private and personal selves draws attention to the process of selection and composition.

As I recall *Compositions* and as I attempt to read the entire process and to write it into this thesis, I am aware that ‘one can never *finally* read or claim to have read a text in its entirety. One must continue carefully to read and re-read, because the act of reading is always marked by an ever-receding horizon. It is always to come’ (Wolfreys 2007: 8). The imminence of meaning in the act of reading a text or interpreting a performance, is very much like the imminence of some sense of completion in my identity which I had anticipated whilst creating *Compositions*. But, just as there can be no finality in reading, so identity and subsequently the experience of creating and performing *Compositions* eludes a coherent conclusion. ‘So what is the moral of the story?’ I have asked myself repeatedly. What can I learn from this, and what is it that I hope to prove or to uncover in my research, after the fact? What is the point? The only answer to these questions lies perhaps in the exposition of the interconnectedness of meanings and identities, and in attempting to explore and/or

create meaning through alternative means of production.

In exploring the motion or play at work in the discourses with which I am concerned (migration and identity), I am attempting to find new translations in order to transform (from within) the ways in which I can read and write them as ‘institutions’ – this is the work of *deconstruction* (Wolfreys 2007: 8-10).³²

³² I use this word tentatively and provisionally, however, for it is not, as Wolfreys emphatically stresses, necessarily a particular analytical method or school of thought, though it is often (mis)understood as such (Wolfreys 2007: 9). I am therefore wary of appropriating the (identity) label of *deconstruction* in my work. Rather, I am simply acknowledging the need for a meticulous and continuous (re)reading of *Compositions* and the issues it explores. Such a reading must seek to uncover new meanings and new ways of understanding migrant experience, and must necessarily entail a degree of promiscuity in encountering the theories of practitioners working in various disciplines of the humanities (citing multiple voices).

Episode 8: Performative interactions

I have before me the combined workbook(s) I have kept over the past two years of developing *Compositions*. I can choose to open it from one side and start from A, or turn to the opposite end and start at Z. In-between the two sides, I can turn and read whichever version of the story I wish; the four books are all bound together in such a way as to defy chronology. In order to find an authorial voice in the present that can confidently critique and converse with the authorial voice I have had in the past, I must appreciate the fluidity and ambiguity that characterised the experience of creating *Compositions*. I therefore cannot remain bound by chronology in my reflection. At this point the concept of landscapes becomes quite useful.

In *Land/Scape/Theatre* (2002) Una Chaudhuri and Elinor Fuchs use the word landscape, a term traditionally associated with scenic painting (concerned with aesthetics) and the new field of landscape studies (which focuses on social dynamics), to encompass both the *space* and *place* which we normally speak of in theatre. The word *landscape*, particularly in light of my research, enables me to account for the broader manifestations of spatial paradigms in my performance and theatrical practice. Landscape is within the matrix of *space* and also includes the substance of *place*. ‘*Landscape* has particular value as a mediating term between space and place. It can therefore more fully represent the complex spatial mediations within modern theatrical form, and between modern theatre and the world’ (Chaudhuri and Fuchs 2002: 3). It is a term that also lends itself open to both physical and metaphysical readings and is thus ideal for my discussion of *Compositions*, especially in light of the fact that amongst the sources of inspiration for the work was my interest in the visual arts and the idea of composition in painting and sculpture.

Landscape studies, as the authors point out, is not limited to the visual/representational sense. It in fact alludes to all forms of experience and living. It is about the combined and relational interactions between ideas and reality (theory and practice), and is as much about subjective memory as it is about collective history. The resonances with my project are manifold. Thinking in terms of landscapes affects not only *what* I perceive as meaningful in my discussion, but it changes *how* I perceive and discuss *Compositions* in retrospect and enables me to explore the interrelatedness of **body**, **space** and **journey** in migration. I can move beyond the tendency to treat

performance as a ‘localised, static object, whose defining features are identified, isolated and immobilised for the duration of the enquiry’ (Rae and Welton 2007: 3), and instead appreciate the constant movement which is ‘an essential characteristic of the way an individual mind perceives and so constructs an environment, whether ‘natural’ or ‘cultural’” (Rapport and Dawson 1998:20).

Landscapes in *Compositions* existed as both micro and macro structures. During rehearsals for *Composition A*, eight key scenes or episodes were developed. These were: Introduction/entrance; Storytelling; Dombo; The Grandmother; Border Jumping; The Washing Line; The Breakdown; and The House of Stone (see Appendices for a detailed descriptive breakdown of the structure of each version, including some texts). These made up the bulk of material in each subsequent *Composition* and so became part of the macrostructure. As we moved through different times and venues so the focus of each exploration changed, and this basic structure was altered in various ways resulting in the particular microstructures of each performance. For a typical non-Venda/Shona (speaking) audience member, the performance of *Composition A* might have appeared as follows:

We were ushered into a small room dark room by a woman whose face was painted blue. She harassed the audience and told us where to sit, she was separating people according to how they look and saying things like ‘coloured people in the corner’. She was quite forceful, so everyone was silent and at the same time listening to a noise in the room. A muffled voice-over recording of a woman’s voice played over a Dictaphone™, and the recording sometimes skipped a part of the speech.

A life-sized doll was seated at a small round desk, it looked as though it was supposed to be writing as there was a pen and an open book on the desk, and a lamp with a yellow light, which was the only light in the room. The doll was facing a three-sided cage draped with pieces of cloth, beads, white wool, and what looked like water-filled balloons hanging inside the cage.³³ We

³³ The Author (detached and passive and seated so on the periphery) became a parodic representation of a kind of colonial ethnographer in the ‘field’, observing the characters in the same way that the audience examines the performers in Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez Peña’s *Two Undiscovered Amerindians* (1992). In this work (and also in *Compositions A* and *Huroyi Hwangu*) the colonial

sat around the table facing the same way as the doll. There wasn't much space left in the room and by the end some people were sitting very close to it.

Once the audience had finished coming in the usher closed the door. We heard a woman's voice singing 'tell me a story'. A light came up inside the cage, and the blue head of a woman popped out. She has luminous yellow hair and white designs on her face. She was very animated and narrated a short story about a bird in a small town, and some people who used to throw stones at it, then she disappeared.

Another voice-over recording of the same woman's voice was heard saying 'she hides under the rock not wanting to be seen'. The young woman came out of the cage slowly, humming and trying to climb through the wool web. She wore only a colourful striped cloth, (stockings?), and some luminous markings drawn on top of her blue/black-coloured skin. When the UV lights came up more markings could be seen on her body and the white wool also became luminous. She spoke some strange language (?) and played games with some small stones and a calabash. She seemed animal-like at times, especially when she discovered that she was being watched and then she got frightened and made a commotion. She threw some stones at the doll, but after some time she became braver and ended up playing with it. As the doll did not respond she became frustrated. She fetched some balloons from the cage and exchanged them for the Dictaphone™, then she disappeared behind the cage.

We heard some noises and after some time the light in the cage came back on, and the torso of the woman appeared in another square hole in the cage. She was now wearing a brown cloth and speaking like an old woman in another language. She mentioned 'border...a slice...a teaspoon...sugar...five litre petrol...' then she disappeared again.

We heard some more whispering and the young woman came out again. This time she was wearing a skirt and carrying a bundle of cloth and shoes. She climbed over the cage, moving in and out of it and squeezing

*'contact zone' is alluded to. The scene of two hybrid 'natives' in a cage is a subversive play on the traditional ethnographic and anthropological enterprise, which seeks to observe and document cultures in their 'authentic' forms. See Worthen (2002) and Fusco (1994) for more on *Two Undiscovered Amerindians*, and see Pratt (1992) for more on the nature of the colonial 'contact zone'.*

between the bars as though she were running away from something. She emerged at the opposite side of the cage, climbed through the luminous wool, and started to hum as she came out again.

The woman unwrapped her bundle and seemed to be hanging up laundry on the cage. Once she noticed that she was being watched she then spoke to the doll (or to us?) in another language with some English. She mentioned ‘... walking through the forest...a waterfall... a man who was not entirely there...and then he invited me into the waterfall...but after that...it was blue...imagine.’ One of the cloths became a baby as she was talking, and then she threw it away at the end of her speech. She seemed sad as she gathered her things and started to walk away.

The woman picked up a calabash and balanced it on her head. She started to walk towards us or towards the doll but she lost her balance and dropped the calabash. It broke, there were pieces of it all over the floor and everyone cringed. She froze for a moment and began walking back to the cage.

She was now speaking in English without the accent and talking about herself, and she didn’t seem to be acting anymore. She climbed into the cage and threw herself around hysterically at the same time. She started destroying the things hanging from the cage and pulling the beads down, and she got tangled up. The water balloons burst and the water and tears started to wash off some of the blue makeup and we could see her flesh underneath the blue. She spoke for a long time and became quite upset. When she was finished she collapsed into the ground and the things in the cage collapsed around her. After a while the lights come on and the doors opened and we could leave.

My simplistic, imaginary view of *Composition A* simultaneously distances me from and draws me closer to the content of the performance. There is obviously a great difference between my view of things as the writer/performer/researcher, and the view from the perspective of the actual audience members.³⁴

³⁴This is clear before I have even begun to take into account factors such as the subjective identities of audience members or the physical details of each person’s perspective. In addition Patrice Pavis (2001) suggests that one might also examine the audience’s expectations. Unfortunately such an analysis is not within the scope of my study. I can however comment that the expectations of the audience for the last

Although there were fragments of written/literary text used in the performance and process (which implied a singular authorial voice/identity), *Compositions* essentially relied on improvisation and non-verbal representation. This approach allowed us (the performers and audiences) to ‘rewrite’ the performance each time, and to respond instinctively to the subject matter whilst interacting performatively with one another. So the identities performed in the work were always in a state of ‘becoming’, always imminent, and never fully completed. By foregrounding the narrative act and the problematic question of authorship, *Compositions* also attempted to resist the narrow definitions of migrant identity and offered a way of re-negotiating this identity, where the binary of ‘insider’-‘outsider’ was rejected.

The process and performance privileged the active *experience* of interpretation rather than the submissive ‘reading’ of knowledge/meaning. This interpretive aspect of the production engaged the audience on a performative level, for, as Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson propose, ‘the viewing or embodied reception of visual artworks [or performances] is a *process* that can be engaged as performative’ (Jones and Stephenson 1999: 2).

Tim Ingold (2000) implies that as we live and create through a process of ‘dwelling’ rather than ‘building’, meaning is always-already a result of the combined effects of our past experiences and our present reality coexisting within a spatio-temporal landscape.³⁵ Ingold’s view of landscape takes into account both the subjective/internal and collective/external dynamics of experience, so that the subject not only makes but is made by the landscape (2000: 191). In this way the bodies, identities and experiences of both performers and spectators are integral features within the landscapes of performance, which are lived in rather than looked at (*cf.* Hetherington 1998: 23). On that note, I might return to Soule’s notion of theatrical identity mentioned much earlier.

Central to this notion is the process of ‘discovering and creating in the course of the performance progressively complex and processual interactive identities. As this

Composition Z (2008) would have differed greatly from those of previous audiences because of the commercial festival context of the performance and the category of ‘Physical Theatre’ under which the performance was advertised.

³⁵Ingold draws upon Heidegger’s (1971) ideas on building and dwelling, as well as from theories of Phenomenology. For Ingold, then, ‘building’ involves a separation between the perceiver and the perceived, where ‘worlds are made before they are lived in,’ whereas ‘dwelling’ engages us within actual processes since ‘the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, only arise within the current of their life activities’ (2000: 178-9). It is through a process of dwelling, then, that we make and remember meaning (2000: 186).

process develops, both the individual and social perspectives on identity are explored' and what is discovered from this process – the theatrical or performing identity – is 'the creation through play of a lifelike model of identity as cultural interaction' (Soule 1998: 45). Such theatrical identity is primarily created, as Soule points out, through a process of reciprocal mirroring whereby the presence of an 'other' is integral to the process of identity formation. 'As in life theatrical identity is created through social interplay, the processual interaction between performer and spectator' (Soule 1998: 43). If in performance this 'spectator' is an audience member, then in writing this individual might be the reader (you, reader).

But the functions of reciprocal mirroring are impeded by the fact that in writing (and at times in the theatre due to the prescriptive nature of the notions of *character* and *text*, as Soule notes), one cannot create identity directly through the presence of and interaction with the 'other'. As a consequence one is forced to find alternative means of self-identification, amongst them the use of the imperative personal pronoun mentioned earlier.

There are also other means of fostering this interaction. Ely (1996) speaks of 'rhetorical criteria' which 'talk to how the presentation is crafted by the writer so as to enlist the reader into entering the story, living it the way the researcher has experienced it, and understanding the grounds upon which the conclusions and inferences are based.' Such 'rhetorical tasks are quite different from the distanced, rote ways of writing that have been our lot in the past' (Ely 1996: 169). After giving a number of examples Ely concludes that 'in the final analysis, decisions about form must be based on what seems to the researcher-writer to be most honourable in telling the story' (Ely 1996: 175).

Through this writing, I might begin to dynamise my discussion so as to foster the type of interaction with the reader through which a performing identity, an *authorial voice*, may be created. At the same time however, there is something to be said for the undefined spaces that are to be found in the acts of writing/reading:

[C]ommunication...is a process set in motion and regulated, not by a given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment...[so that]...the fictitious reader's perspective may be divided between the explicit position ascribed to him [or her] and the implicit attitude he [she] must adopt to that position (Iser 2001: 182).

This view of the unwritten 'blank' as a positive generative feature of communication echoes notions of Third Space and liminality, as well as the interpretive (performative) nature of viewing performance, where there are always possibilities for creativity. I am not only creating but I am also being created through the landscapes which I am writing about.

Episode 9: Foreign bodies – appearance and reality in Compositions

I have often seen young Xhosa men who have recently returned from the 'bush', proudly displaying their painted faces. I was once told by a Xhosa friend that there is a certain aura of the uncanny that surrounds such individuals, and that young children are often taught to fear and avoid them. I myself remember the excitement of the occasion, not too long after our migration, when my father took me to fit my very own Mungwenda – the traditional outfit for Venda women (see Appendix I fig. 6). I also have a vague memory of another time when we visited relatives in Venda (in the Limpopo Province) and witnessed the last day of celebrations after my distant cousins' initiation. I think the young women had just completed Domba. I had a sense, through these and other experiences, that in Africa (as elsewhere) people often wear the marks of their identity externally. In rituals especially, the symbolic properties of the body are enhanced, particularly in the liminal stage of rites of passage (see Victor Turner 1982, 1990). Scarification, face painting, and other specialised forms of dressing can all indicate a person's social identities in terms of marital status, biological maturity, age, class et cetera.

Quite recently, I attended a dance workshop at the biannual Dramatic Learning Spaces conference in Pietermaritzburg. During the course of the workshop, the facilitator asked us to pair up and to each complete a seemingly simple task; to create a physical landscape of our earliest memory of 'home', using only the body to map the details of this place. I was struck then by how difficult I found it to create a consistent picture of my earliest home. As I 'danced' my picture of home, I found myself mixing details from various homes in which I had lived, and at times even improvising completely new details which had never existed. I spoke to my partner afterwards about my struggle to remember accurately, and I realised then that my memories of home had become somewhat detached, remote images. I could not rely on the veracity of my memories, because what I remembered as reality seemed indistinguishable from fiction, and I might as easily have seen 'home' in a magazine somewhere.

What is even more striking now as I recount this experience is this: I am certain that, if asked at this moment to describe my memories of home in a piece of text, in verbal or written terms, I would feel more certain about the accuracy of these memories. I find a sense of assurance in the spoken and written word that I cannot be certain of in the spontaneous expressions of my body, so that I can recognise a feeling of not being 'at home' in my body.

My experience may be a symptom of the 'textocentrism' deeply imbedded in my identity, an effect of my class and education. But perhaps this experience also affirms the legitimacy of the argument for valuing embodied forms of knowledge and meaning-making.

At the most basic level what seems to stand between the private and the personal aspects of my experience, acting simultaneously as a barrier and a channel between myself and the outside world, is my body: the body creates the conundrum of identity through its indeterminacy, its existence as both subject and object, its 'doubleness' which renders it as a liminal entity anchored uncomfortably somewhere between the two states (Taylor, Segal and Cook 2003: 4). In performance the indeterminacy of the body is further amplified by the performer/performing body split that occurs within the actor (see Holledge and Tompkins 2000: 110-113), and the very corporeal nature of theatrical performance means that the body's double status is necessarily emphasized.³⁶

Judith Butler discusses Julia Kristeva's³⁷ theory of abjection. As she explains, 'the 'abject' designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered 'Other'' (1993: 181). Kristeva's theory has been used to understand forms of marginalisation such as sexism and racism (Butler 1993: 182). Furthermore, Elizabeth Wilson writes that clothing 'links the biological body to the social being, and public to private,' being in some ways 'an extension of the body yet not quite part of it (2001: 147). Dress marks and reminds us of the uncomfortable

³⁶ Whilst traditional proscenium arch theatre tends to take for granted the synchronicity of the subjective body of the performer with the artificial performing body, the body in performance art becomes a kind of art-object, whilst simultaneously drawing attention to the artist's own subjectivity (see Jones and Stephenson 1999). In either case, the body is a central site of meaning, and in the second case the personal/public distinction is deliberately ruptured.

³⁷ I mention Kristeva here briefly because of the particular relevance of abjection as a conceptual tool here. It was not, however, a major part of the performance and so I have chosen not to go into any great depth with this theory.

ambiguity of the body as both a biological entity and a culturally produced artefact (recall Butler and the performative nature of identities), and is ‘the frontier between the self and the not self’, an attempt to contain the body ‘with its open orifices’ (Wilson 2001: 147-8). In a postcolonial context particularly where attempts have been made to disguise the functions and limits of the body (see Dale and Ryan 1998: 1-11), being unclothed then takes on a very negative meaning.

If I look back at the embarrassing incident I described much earlier I can see that the discomfort I experienced was partly caused by the transgression of these boundaries, a discomfort caused by the fact that the leaking female body resists containment. Part of performing *Composition A* had to do with discovering a sense of being ‘at home’ in the body, resisting the restrictions of Western colonial sensibilities on how the body should look and behave. I had wanted to reclaim my body as a possible identity space from the alienation of being a black female migrant, an abject, marginal subject. This may explain some of the choices relating to the particular costume I used.

Joanne Tompkins also comments on the role of dress as one of the important ‘culturally, economically, and politically laden signifiers of post-colonial bodies’ (1998: 185). She discusses some of the ways in which dress is used in post-colonial theatres as part of the project of subverting colonial identities and destabilising power. Whilst Tompkins is concerned more with the subversive nature of cross-dressing, I would bestow as much significance to costume as an expression of identity in the context of migration since, in South Africa, dress becomes a central issue as I explained earlier. Masquerade in particular also offers one way of ‘engaging with difference and dislodging coherence’ in an attempt to transcend the material limits of the body (Taylor *et al.* 2003: 5-6). The use of masquerade in ritual, then, becomes one of the key ways of experiencing the liminal condition.

When I began work on *Composition A*, I understood initiation as a symbolic process through which personal development is publicly celebrated and expressed in concrete physical terms. In contemporary urban and Westernised societies, the power of such acts continues to be appropriated; the term ‘modern primitives’ comes to mind (see Rosenblatt 1997, Vale and Juno 1989). Shorter (1987) also refers to the act of symbolic wounding and adornment as enacted by one of her analysands: the simple yet significant act of a woman piercing her ears for the first time is seen to be a

personal realisation of ‘a ceremony as old as our records of woman’ (1987: 35).

Intrigued by all this during my creative process, I came to understand that if I hoped to create a performance that was ‘a kind of personal initiation’ (Moyo 2007a: 2) I would be dealing with the body in a similar fashion, and finding expression through symbolic adornment.

My costume for *Compositions* consisted primarily of blue body-makeup necessitated by the characters of Dombo and NaiNai (see Appendix I figs. 2&3). The fact of its elaborateness allowed me a certain freedom of invisibility in performance; the costume became my mask, a kind of second skin that I did not seem to notice once it was on. The ‘foreignness’ of my migrant body was highlighted through the use of costume and, in *Huroyi Hwangu* and the very last version of *Composition Z (2008)*, the use of masks took this estrangement even further.³⁸

The entire costume was a hybrid combination of elements from various cultures. Glass beads were combined with a striped loin-cloth both of which are worn during Venda initiation rites for girls, particularly the *Domba* ceremony, and the body was marked with symbols vaguely reminiscent of styles of adornment in Xhosa and Sudanese tradition where facial painting and scarification are practised respectively. The intention here was to allude explicitly to the idea of the body being ‘written’ into a particular identity. The markings *implied* some meaning which remained hidden so that the spectators, ultimately forced to create their own (non)meanings, became co-authors of the performance, by actively engaging in the performative interpretive act.

The effect of the blue make-up was also one of alienation, as this de-racialized body resisted definition or confinement to any racial category. The performing body was no longer accessible to the audience to be read in terms of race, and this opened up a host of possibilities. Through this process of alienation my migrant ‘outsider’ body was then able to temporarily transcend the racialized label of *makwerekwere*. But this shifting of narrative power did not merely occur as a result of ‘blueness’ (as opposed to ‘blackness’). The stylization of gestures in the performance also served to

³⁸ In *Huroyi Hwangu*, the Old Woman (played by Kgabi) wore a mask, and in the final *Composition Z (2008)* I also wore a mask for some sections of the performance. For most Westernised audiences, the very use of the mask brings up connotations of myth and the archetypal. Masks arouse an ‘aesthetic emotion compounded of beauty, fright, and mystery... The...masked figure... carries us back to the world of the savage, the child and the poet which is the world of play’ (Huizinga 1950: 26). Unfortunately the scope of this study does not allow me to discuss the use of mask and puppetry in *Compositions* in any depth, although this might be an interesting direction to take.

further alienate my performing body from the spectator's body,³⁹ whilst the fact that Dombo spoke her own idiosyncratic language played upon the very notion of *makwerekwere*; a name which derives from the xenophobic view that 'uncivilised' black African foreigners do not have a recognisable language and instead speak gibberish or '*makwerekwere*' (Nyamnjoh 2006: 39).

Dombo's narrative was represented largely through symbols and through her physical interaction with the objects around her. Her appearance was as eclectic as her imaginary world, which comprised of a combination of organic objects (twigs, feathers, eggs, leaves and branches) and some man-made objects (beads, bells, and water-balloons). Stuck between an indigenous African folktale and an urban postcolonial narrative, she was the ultimate hybrid, an expression of my own feelings of (cultural) ambiguity. As a character, she offered a chance for me to explore the materialisation of identity: her skin bore the marks of her liminal condition, like the skin of an initiate.

Dombo's speech was created through the improvised combination of various sounds and word-fragments from Venda, Shona, and some Ndebele. The result was an experimental 'language' in the sense of a repeatable vocabulary of phrases whose meanings were implied although not obviously explicable. I did not have a precise translation for the language, but I worked in such a way that certain root phrases acquired meaning through the similarity they bore to real words or syllables. In this way I could speak Dombo's language with some degree of comprehension and intention.

A few times, I glanced into the audience and saw one or two people with utterly perplexed expressions on their faces. Some seemed surprised and watched with wide eyes, shock and awe registering clearly in their faces whilst their ability to find the humour of some parts of the performance became both encouraging and embarrassing for me. Others looked on silently, their mouths sometimes contorted in a manner that betrayed a combination of confusion and disgust. These moments, which no doubt shaped the course of my performance then, have become curious points of contention for me now.

³⁹During the rehearsal process I had worked with developing a flexible score of actions/gestures for the characters rather than a set choreography/script.

*When I read the audience's responses to the last Composition Z (2008),⁴⁰ I was struck again by the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty about what conclusion to draw. Comments range from some respondents commenting that they enjoyed 'the young water spirit girl – her youthful playfulness' which was 'very real', to vaguely humorous (?) references to *Dombo* as 'sponge-head' perhaps because of the luminous yellow wig I wore during this last version, to more decisive interpretations of the performance as 'chaotic' or 'unclear'. I cannot say for certain how it must have looked, and even as I examine footage of the performance or look at photographs of myself, I experience the same ambiguity over again. The image is indeed alien, but the effect of this alienation is unpredictable.*

So in theory I can appreciate and appraise the ways in which I attempted to eschew restrictive labels of identity placed on my body by the external gaze of the audience in my practice. But I must wonder, as I did then, if I was not by presenting such a hyper-native body, a collage of cultural symbols, a patchwork of symbolic images used out of their traditional context, taking part in an act of objectifying my own subjective performing body? The politics of donning blue body-paint are indeed more complicated than I could have previously imagined. It is possible that, through my creation of super-hybrid I perpetuated the exotic representation of the black female body. Perhaps, rather than having the effect of erasing racial identity the blue body-paint might have compounded the 'othering' of this body, and the 'language' which I constructed in order to resist narrative hegemony may have instead sounded like mere gibberish.

Conversely, this objectifying effect may have been reversed by the collision of a myriad of cultural images in one body, and the blueness which displaces them all. I am aware that there is something uncanny about the image in the same way that there is an aura of mystery surrounding the young men who return to their communities from the bush with their bodies marked: it is almost too much to look at, it is an image of excess.

⁴⁰Questionnaires were handed to the audience before the performances of *Composition Z* (2008) and collected afterwards. The number of these that were actually completed and returned is limited, and audiences for *Composition Z* were also generally very small. However the point here was not to make a quantitative survey as such but rather to gather some general sentiments about the performance.

Because ‘every identity has at its ‘margin’, an excess, something more’ (Hall 2000: 18), Robert Young’s (1995) assertion that ‘it is impossible for a Western audience to ‘read’ the ‘raced’ body, without using the classification system that is deeply embedded in western discourse’ (Hollidge and Tompkins 2000: 113) may mean that

[H]owever hard performers try to escape this gaze, any decision to assign fixed cultural essences to their performing bodies will make evasion difficult. Once this gaze has been triggered within an audience, the body of the performer and the performing body can collapse into a single entity, which is read for cultural and racial generalisations (Hollidge and Tompkins 2000: 118).

Because audiences for *Compositions* were very often made up of mixed race, nationality, and cultural backgrounds it is difficult to assess whether such a classifying gaze was at play, and whether my performing body did indeed become the strange and exotic ‘other’ body. At the very least I hope that the absurdity of making any generalisations about ‘blue’ people would be enough to displace such assumptions altogether, and that the dangerous hybridity of the image is in fact what saves it. Just as the maternal body ‘disrupts taxonomic systems by its potential to produce hybrid offspring, in a theatrical sense this same disruption can occur in symbolic worlds through the creation of hybrid performing bodies’ (Hollidge and Tompkins 2000: 119).

There is of course a danger in over-valorising hybridity just as there is a danger in blindly accepting the liminal norm. Still, the triumph of hybridity lies not in the ‘random assemblage’ (to use Victor Turner’s phrase, 1990: 12) of elements or the careless smashing together of several diverse cultural practices. It is rather in the ability to fuse, out of this interaction, a novel force of creative energy, which I believe I did manage to do. For myself, the process had always been less about appropriating from various cultures, or even presenting one version of Venda/Shona/Zimbabwean identity, than about finding the connections with other cultures, to help me understand more about myself and my own individual (hybrid) ‘culture’.⁴¹

⁴¹ I was fortunate in collaborating with women whom I had worked with before, and who shared similar backgrounds (Mabena and Kgabi). Our cultural exchange was therefore characterised by processes of translation as we found common songs, images and experiences emerging during our time together.

Episode 10: (Sub)liminal landscapes – space and place in Compositions

If my body can be implicated within a landscape where I am involved in a process of dwelling/becoming, then the abstract ideas which sculpt my relationship to space and place must also impact upon the nature of such landscapes. One such idea is the notion of ‘home’. I have already seen that ‘[T]he search for identity... involves movement, in body and mind, within and between spaces of varying scales that are identified as home’ (Olwig 1998: 225).

The imaginary ‘memory space’ through which one might access a lost ‘home’ in performance is particularly poignant in the postcolonial context where definitions of ‘home’ are confounded by the impact of the colonial encounter and its legacy (Hollidge and Tompkins 2000: 97-8). ‘Home’ is also ‘a useful analytical construct because it refers to a conceptual space of considerable importance in the modern-day world of fluidity and movement’ (Olwig 1998: 225). Examining the macrostructure, the entire spatial and temporal landscapes of *Compositions*, points to the importance of this unstable notion of ‘home’ in the creative process, and this in turn reveals the impact of my personal experiences of relocation on my shifting conceptions of ‘home’.

Space in everyday life functions to structure social life as much as it influences creative life. Ric Knowles (2004) argues the value of examining the material conditions of theatrical production and reception. ‘The geography of performance is both produced by and produces the cultural landscape and the social organization of the space in which it ‘takes place’, and to shift physical and/or social space is to shift meaning’ (Knowles 2004: 63).⁴² This is especially true of a work such as *Compositions*, which has undergone a series of shifts. Space and place therefore become key considerations.

For *Composition A*, the space of performance was the same familiar informal rehearsal space of creation. As sense of non-placeness (see Hill and Paris 2006: 76;

⁴² Factors such as the dynamics of the rehearsal space (which can affect many of the aesthetic choices made), and the architecture of the performance venue (particularly in traditional theatre venues where behavioural conventions influence the way audiences and performers interact) merit consideration. Specifics such as seating arrangement, reception spaces, the geographical and historical background of the venue and its surroundings, may affect both the process and the outcome of a creative project.

156-7; Rapport and Dawson 1998: 6) characterised this experience for me because the rehearsal space is often a transitional space, bare and undefined, seemingly lacking in history. The Lower Studio rehearsal room is such a non-place, defined and created by its relation to an end – the final performance which usually occurs in another place (see Appendix I figs. 1&4). I felt that even during the final performance of *Composition A*, there was a great sense of incompleteness due to this non-placeness. The set was only fully created in the space on the day of the performance.⁴³

The small venue dictated a limited audience of mostly Drama students and academics, seated or standing in close proximity to the action. There was a great sense of the distinction between private and imaginary dream space, and public space, simultaneously including and excluding the audience. A comment from my course advisor at the time stated:

I found ‘Composition A’ quite a difficult performance and process to critique. Not only was your investigative journey a deeply personal one, but the performance too spoke of intimacy and I often felt myself to be in the position of voyeur, peeping into, indeed almost intruding into a process that was at heart deeply personal...Space was used in such a way as to underscore the intimacy of the work (Buckland 2007).

But the concern with space was also evident in the metaphoric implications of the performance, through its use of symbols and landscapes. The search for a ‘memory space’ is also an attempt to create *chora*⁴⁴ (Hollidge and Tompkins 2000: 101-2). In *Compositions*, the Author searches for *chora* which will bring about a new sense of

⁴³ For me, the experience of performing *Composition A* was also shaped by a journey that I had taken on the Rhodes University campus earlier that day. Originally, my idea had been to walk alone slowly from one area on the campus to my destination of the Lower Studio over a number of hours, and to have a team of people stoning (literally throwing stones at) me all the way there. In the end the idea was diluted somewhat by the lack of willing participants. I enacted the walk, but it became a kind of advertisement for our first Masters presentations as my two classmates, dressed in their respective costumes, also joined in the walk through various popular sites of congregation where we hoped to entice other students to come and view the work. I was accompanied by one ‘stoner’ who threw small pebbles at me as we moved, and she tried to convince some passers by to do the same. However most people were too afraid to do so and those who were willing simply showered me gently with the gravel instead of actually stoning me. I cannot recall what the original purpose of this act had been, but I am sure that this experience contributed to my state of being at the time of performing *Composition A* (I think I was particularly focused by that point), and must have ultimately shaped my performance as well as the audience’s reception of the work. This idea fell away and was not a feature of subsequent performances.

⁴⁴ *Chora* is the term used by Elizabeth Grosz to describe the creative, regenerative and symbolic space that women strive to create, which is not dependant on the maternal reproductive body. This imaginary construction is identified in the three plays that Hollidge and Tompkins discuss (2000: 101-6). Butler (1993) also discusses *chora*, but Grosz offers a particularly relevant revision of the concept.

self, a sense of belonging and being in space. All the landscapes of *Compositions* were an attempt to create and inhabit this *chora*. ‘The elusiveness of *chora*, the ultimate memory space, does not diminish the effort to reconcile divergent spaces’ (Hollidge and Tompkins 2000: 105).

Composition Z (2007) was performed by myself, Mabena and Kgabi at the Old Gaol backpackers in Grahamstown.⁴⁵ This venue, which had intrigued me for some time, consists of a series of meandering open-air courtyards, many small cells where the guests and staff live, and some communal facilities – ablution blocks, kitchen, and bar/reception area (see Appendix II fig. 7). Rehearsals in this space proved difficult: as the place was fully inhabited we were unable to use any of the small cells as originally planned, bad weather often forced us to rehearse elsewhere, and when we could use the space we still had to limit our rehearsals so as not to disturb guests. We faced these problems in the day, and night-time rehearsals were equally difficult because of the lack of light and because of functions and parties hosted in the venue. The rehearsal period was limited to about three weeks, so the evening of the performance itself was in fact the only opportunity we had to run the entire work from beginning to end.

The performance journey began outside the main doors: the audience gathered around the entrance where the first scene was enacted, and was lead through the courtyards gradually as it progressed. As we performed in a place that was a temporary home for travellers, the audience was never allowed to feel ‘at home’ through stasis. Each spectator’s perspective was constantly unsettled since guests and passers-by could walk in and out of the performance at any time. As it was early evening there was very little natural lighting in the courtyards, a few floodlights and torches created tall and ominous shadows on the high prison walls. The entire venue became a larger version of the cage from *Composition A*, with the audience now experiencing the landscape of journey and displacement from the inside. This was the closest of all the versions to the idea of site-specific performance.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ The Gaol was originally built in 1824. The second prison to be built in Grahamstown, it was intended to house about 200 prisoners. Since it was closed down in the 1970s it has had various uses until about 10 years ago when it was transformed into a backpackers lodge. The imposing walls are about 10 metres high, and on a clear night the stars make up what looks like a kind of painted ceiling.

⁴⁶Lefevre (2005) gives a useful definition for site-specific dance which can also be broadly applied to other forms of performance:

A dance is site-specific when the choreographer receives her spatial dictation, directions for audience placement, and theatrical inspiration from the site itself; in turn, the site becomes the

The idea of ‘hosts and ghosts’ describes the tension in site-specific work between physical spaces of performance and the non-physical implications, histories and meanings embedded or bestowed upon them (Cathy Turner 2004). The site/place is a ‘host’ that carries its own history, whilst the performance is a ‘ghost’, a superimposition of meanings upon the space to create something new. This performance also had more of an archaeological dimension to it, which is key to site-specific work (C. Turner 2004: 376).⁴⁷ Although the thematic ‘ghost’ of the work remained, new texts and new scenarios were devised around the ‘host’ space. One new scene was a comical exchange between two drunk characters at the bar, another scene used ‘houses’ built out of the old and broken furniture that we had found discarded in the courtyards (see Appendix II for more detail on this).

But the lack of adequate lighting which many audience members commented on,⁴⁸ combined with the size of the audience meant that the experience was diminished due to reduced visibility for a large section of the audience. Those who had seen the performance of *Composition A* seemed to prefer that original version and found that *Composition Z* (2007) was over-written and also overly lengthened by the slow process of moving a large audience through the space.

*Huroyi Hwangu*⁴⁹ was performed in a disused tannery. The large hollow shell of the building became a sort of cocoon for the imaginary world of the work, and having complete and sole access to the venue meant that we (myself and Kgabi) could work more flexibly. The set, which now became quite elaborate, appeared as a small circular island; a seemingly permanent landscape in the middle of a large empty space; in turn a bigger landscape. The performance area was delineated by rock, sand and dried vegetation, whilst the design attempted to create several worlds within one

framework for or map of the dance. The site-specific choreographer also generates the work’s movement vocabulary and its content out of her excavation of, research into and interpretation of the site’s unique cultural matrix of characteristics, whether architectural, historical, political, economic, social and/or environmental.

⁴⁷ Turner cites a definition of archaeology as that which is concerned with ‘the things left of the past translated through the cultural and political interests of the present’ and concludes that ‘since site is always a material trace of past events, all site work is potentially archaeological’ (C. Turner 2004: 376).

⁴⁸I noted this from my personal conversations with some spectators after the performance.

⁴⁹The notion of haunting emerged, where I explored the idea of being haunted by the work itself and by the symbolic figures/characters in the work. Thus the maternal/ancestral figure of the Old Woman whom Kgabi played became more prominent.

location (see Appendix III figs. 11, 12, 13). Immediately, meaning was endowed upon these worlds by the audience who became active in ‘writing’ the space.

Ritual space is often delineated by a circle of stones, a wall or enclosure – although this alone is not enough to generate ‘sacred’ space. The space must possess some numinous quality of its own (Moore 1991: 16). In *Huroyi Hwangu*, the audience played a role in the creation of this ‘sacred’ ritual space. Audiences made their own assumptions and associations with ritual, which had not been previously inferred.⁵⁰ The setting and structure of the performance also seemed to suggest the ‘maternal space’ that Holledge and Tompkins identify as a common feature in women’s intercultural performance (2000: 91). This was achieved through the prevalence of water imagery and organic matter in the set and in our gestural vocabulary, and it was also expressed through the use of circular rather than linear dramatic structure.

As the performance began, the audience was lead in by the Old Woman (see Appendix III figs. 12&16) character performed by Kgabi who walked around the space several times, slowly tracing a spiral towards the centre of the space. Through this simple repetitive journey, an allusion was made to the continuous meandering of the body between various identities, similar to the process of citation and reiteration through which gendered identities are constructed (see Butler 1993) or the cyclical self-making that comes through *praxis*. The Author could be heard speaking from the margins of the space where the puppet hovered, literally suspended in the act of writing. As in *Composition A*, a blank book and a pen lay scattered on the desk, and from the Dictaphone™ the voice attempted to complete the semi-autobiographical stories.⁵¹

In this introductory ‘preset’ to the performance, the narrative act was problematised immediately as it was introduced. Inevitably some audience members would have missed this opening part of the performance, and as a result audiences’ performative experiences – that is their interpretations of the work – were differentiated according to how much they had heard about each of the stories from

⁵⁰Although aspects of ritual had been used as sources during the process of creating the work (see the later episode on the use of ritual characteristics in *Compositions*), no such reading was ever imposed upon the audience. Yet often people mentioned that while watching the performance they felt as though they were intruding on a private ritual, and many commented on the notion of fertility rites.

⁵¹As the original tape recording had been lost, a new digital recording was made. The text used here was different then (although it tried to recapture the original), and the clearer recording lent much less of an intimate texture or quality to the soundscapes in the piece.

this recorded voice over and how much they could thus read the meta-textual elements of the performance.

‘In framing more and more images of the hitherto under-represented other, contemporary culture finds a way to name, and thus to arrest and fix, the image of that other’ (Phelan 1993: 2). Phelan puts forward that visibility is a ‘trap’ which places the image/subject under the watcher’s gaze, thereby controlling them. She argues that for the marginalised subject there is ‘real power in remaining unmarked,’ which is a way of resisting the perceived binary power dynamic that exists between visibility (powerful) and invisibility (powerless). Phelan’s suspicion of representational visibility echoes sentiments expressed by Bhabha (2000) with regard to the emancipatory powers of intentional invisibility. This is, however, contested by Cheng who asserts that rather than the ‘*active vanishing*’ proposed by Phelan (which, Cheng argues, has the potential to further disempower the marginalised individual), ‘the best way for those over-visualised but mostly muted individuals to redress this problem, I believe, is not voluntarily to disappear from view but to become *a speaking sight* [emphasis original]’ (Cheng 1999: 208). Power, for Cheng, lies in the voice (*cf.* Gilbert 2001 on the notion of orality within postcolonial subjectivity).

In the final section of the performance my makeup was finally washed off to reveal beneath the representational adorned performing body, my migrant body and my personal performative identities (see Appendix III fig. 17). I shed the masks of invisibility put on during performance and became once more the ‘young black Zimbabwean woman of Venda and Shona heritage, living in South Africa’. I assumed my role as the Author whose characters refused to be complicit in the project of telling their stories, of fixing them in time and space through narrative. In solidarity with their rebellion and their refusal to be defined by another’s voice, I rejected the public performance persona and destroyed the imaginary world built up through the audience’s complicity in the creation of my narrative. I removed the body paint and dismantled the costume, simultaneously becoming visible and invisible.

In this moment, the performance is no longer simply an entertainment performed for an audience to portray several mythical characters/identities. If indeed ‘theatrical performance is a kind of palimpsest inscribed upon the body of the actor whose own identity is not erased by the process and, as such, the performer’s

performativity is part of the performance' (Taylor 2003: 166), then at this point the performative self is explicitly drawn into the performance, all theatricality is self-consciously rejected and I become at last *a speaking sight*.

The Amphitheatre in the Botanical Gardens, where the second *Composition Z* (2008) was performed, is a new venue that had never been performed in before. It is situated in-between a dust road and the natural 'bush' of the gardens. From the seating stands, one sees a small white cottage and to the right an ablution block. One cannot escape the urban surroundings that make up the 'background' to the performance, and so these features were necessarily utilised in the performance (see Appendix IV fig. 11).⁵²

In this last version of *Composition Z* (2008) the work was also adapted to suit a more diverse audience of festivalgoers. The narrative aspect became more prominent and additional characters and scenes were introduced to lend the entire performance a sense of narrative completion, which I hoped would make the performance 'easier to understand'. Financial, logistical and time-constraints meant that we no longer had the Author puppet but instead had only the puppet's clothes as a representation of the Author. The desk and other properties also remained, but Dombo's interaction obviously could not be performed in exactly the same manner as before. This ultimately set up the audience as the last remaining trace of a presiding authorial presence.

Two characters; the Water Glass Woman (a masked figure played by myself) and the Storytelling Bird (a hand-puppet, see Appendix IV fig. 12); were added to the existing structure of *Huroyi Hwangu*, and an alternative ending was devised.⁵³ In it, the symbolic return of the Water-Glass Woman's mask (seen at the beginning of the performance) to me was followed by an equally evocative scene. Here, at last, I was

⁵² For example, the 'border jumping' scene normally confined to the cage became a journey around the entire space, which involved navigating the bushes and ditches behind the audience, leopard crawling through the earth and climbing the large banana tree next to the cottage. The cottage itself became at once an image of refuge and also kind of 'border post'. As the migrant character Thilivali knocked and begged to be let in, desperately in search of sanctuary and shelter, there was no answer. The space of home/safety/shelter was clearly an exclusive space.

⁵³ The feedback I received after my final exam performance of *Huroyi Hwangu* on 24 October 2007 had also implied that the performance needed a more powerful ending.

able to have contact with the Old Woman whose presence had been felt throughout the performance.⁵⁴

The symbolic washing-off of the makeup which was once a frantic denial of the world of magic in *Huroyi Hwangu* was now an act of affirmation and acceptance performed upon me by a maternal ancestral figure. As I collapsed, exhausted by the performance, the Old Woman took me into her arms and gently wiped the blue makeup off my body. She lifted me and carried me on her back, and as we left the performance area I sang ‘tell me a story’ for the last time.

The story of NaiNai was finally told in full in this last version, as opposed to the single fragment that had featured in the previous renditions (see Appendix IV). The story became an allegory for the experience of migration. The protagonist’s identity, like the migrant’s, is ever unstable, ever shifting. She is constantly moving and is thus un-nameable, defying the townspeople’s attempts to assume power over her. In some ways the story is similar to Carol Boyce Davies’ idea of ‘migratory subjectivity’,⁵⁵ where the subject (Black women or Black women’s writing [or performance]) is constituted of multiple, sometimes conflicting identities. It is the ‘slipperiness’ or ‘elsewhere-ness’ of the subject that allows it to transcend and resist subordination and domination (Davies 1994: 36). The story was told in three sections by the Storytelling Bird, with the stage crew/ushers punctuating each instalment by creating soundscapes that echoed the voices of the townspeople.

The first line ‘As always, it was pitifully hot in the faraway land of Eeinaa’ sets up an expectation which is revived with each instalment of the story. But to begin with the phrase ‘as always’ also unsettles the very notion of a beginning. The story does not begin ‘once upon a time,’ there is no *specific* point from which to depart. Instead it is *as if* the subject were always-already in motion, always-already citing the unwritten law of beginnings. It is *as if* NaiNai’s skin had always-already been ‘blue-black’, as though she had always-already been pummelled by the townspeople even *before* she transgressed their laws. And as the story progresses, the narrative is moving forward but it is *as if* the outcome had always-already been written, so that the telling of it reaches backwards through time as well as forwards.

⁵⁴ In *Huroyi Hwangu*, although we interacted during the performance, the Old Woman and I never ‘met’ even at the end. This contributed to the lack of resolution in that version.

⁵⁵This may be compared to Rosi Braidotti’s idea of ‘nomadic consciousness’, which Holledge and Tompkins (2000) cite in their discussion of intercultural performing bodies.

Unlike the traditional Shona folktale which includes a concluding phrase at the end, the story of NaiNai was not easily resolved. Instead, NaiNai ‘fell to the earth, and was shattered into a million tiny pieces’. This could be read as either a triumph (she escapes from the hands of her oppressors) or a failure (like Humpty Dumpty she is destroyed and cannot be put back together again). Either way there is none of the assurance of a ‘happily ever after’, and where the traditional Shona *Sarungano* (story) would end with a concluding phrase such as ‘that is where the storyteller died/that is where the storyteller ended’ (Chinyowa 2004: 40-1) to bring the audience out of the illusory world of the story and back to reality, here there is none. The open-ended nature of this narrative means that it *could* effectively be continued somehow. There is no clear ‘moral of the story’ to resolve the experience by identifying unambiguously the didactic value of the narrative. ‘As always,’ the implication was that all of the characters in *Compositions* were connected to one another somehow, but because of the lack of an assertive, unifying authorial voice the audience ultimately had to determine for themselves how the narratives were related. This could be done by tracing the links between recurring images and objects, for example the blue cloth which was used to represent various objects in each story.

I find the story of NaiNai ever more poignant now as I attempt to structure a discussion of *Compositions*. I have been compelled to return to several beginnings, introducing each version of the work, beginning ‘as always’ and searching for variation in each rendition. Having composed thus far, I prepare to begin again.

Episode 11: A rolling stone gathers no moss

My mother used to call us ‘the rolling stones’ because our family never seemed to stay in one house, city or neighbourhood for more than five years at time. As I grew older and our relocations increased in scale and frequency, I remember both of my parents negotiating the desire to accumulate property and the opposing need to remain mobile and unfettered by material objects. Moving from Harare to Bulawayo in 1992 when I was seven years old is one of my earliest memories of a major migration. I remember that I was slightly nervous about moving. I envied my cousins, because they had lived in the same house since birth and had never had to be uprooted. But, once we were all packed and we got onto the road, I found myself wishing that the journey would never end. There was something quite comforting and pleasant about the experience, a hopeful promise contained in the imminence of something new. The prolonged anticipation allowed me to create this new experience in my imagination and shape it to my fancy. There was something about being in the process of moving between points that I loved. In the car, I drifted in and out of sleep easily as the world slid silently past my window and I remained slightly detached but still ‘in it’. In fact, I realise now that it was largely the prospect of arrival and of potential disappointment that made that move an uncomfortable experience. The contradictory feelings of excitement/freedom and anxiety produced by such movement have, it seems, been a feature of my identity since an early age.

My journeys no longer seem to promise as much as they did before. I have not lived in Zimbabwe for nearly ten years, and on the occasional visit there I am confronted by the strangeness of this place that was once so familiar. Home is now instead a haunted space.

Although the word home can sometimes connote ‘the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection’ (George 1996: 1), this can be overturned in performance. For the black female subject ‘home’ is often a problematic space rather than a space of safety and comfort (see Davies 1994). Representing this view of ‘home’ in turn questions the notion of stable

identities and so, as Davies argues, the image of home can be used to rupture rather than affirm preconceived notions of female identity being fixed [such as ideas of domesticity] (Davies 1994: 65).

The longing to return ‘home’ to Zimbabwe was brought up in the opening voice-over recording (see Appendix III). But in the final House of Stone monologue ‘home’ became a threat of impending disaster, a ruin about to collapse at any moment. Not only does the subtitle *The House of Stone* refer to the deteriorating socio-economic state of Zimbabwe (the word Zimbabwe after all means ‘houses of stone’), but it also goes beyond the literal reference to the country. The *House of Stone* could also be the very notion of identity where, especially for the migrant, self composition/construction is necessarily preceded by processes of deconstruction and reconstruction. As one re-writes one’s identity in the new home/country and creates a new space or *chora*, romanticised ideas of returning to an ideal home space must be shattered, along with the belief in a singular identity.

In a world of supercomplexity the idea of ‘home’ which influences identity formation has become less about the stability found in physical spaces, and has more to do with the repetitive actions that one performs on a daily basis (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 7). Thus, my migrant identity is (re)created in the form of narratives and performances (citations) through which I answer the problematic desire for fixity (see Clifford 1992: 114). Such performative acts can become ritualised through constant repetition, and this ‘restored behaviour’⁵⁶ is what lies at the heart of my theatrical identity and my *authorial voice*.

If home is indeed ‘where one knows oneself best’ (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 9), it seems to me now that my most consistent experience of ‘home’ has been through movement. And if indeed the act of writing is also an active attempt at creating for oneself a kind of ‘intellectual home’ (Rapport and Dawson 1998: 8), then there is a sense in which my writing must push perpetually forward in the attempt to defer arrival, conclusion, death. And at the same time there is always a desire to stand still and discover what it might mean to be rooted, so as not to fall off the face of the world in my rush to get somewhere.

⁵⁶ Richard Schechner’s (1985) term for ‘action that is remembered and can be rehearsed so that it may be incorporated into future performances’ (Hetherington 1998: 153).

Episode 12: Symbolic Journeys – efficacy versus entertainment in Compositions

My second major emotional breakdown happened in April of 2005 at the start of my third year of studying at Rhodes University. It has taken me a long time since then to muster up the courage to think, speak or write about this period in my life in a direct way. I have found that whenever I am in a position of mentioning the episode, I give in to the temptation to laugh it off as a melodramatic act or a plea for attention, to gloss it over as an inconsequential event, or to simply remain silent about it. I often joke with friends about having had an ‘existential crisis’ in a tongue-in-cheek manner, and I must confess that during the writing of this thesis I have delayed the topic for as long as I could. But the nature of my study and in particular the methodological approach I have chosen have made this part of my personal history unavoidable. I realise that I would be defeating the very purpose of my research if I do not write about it, and so I am compelled to do so even as I feel the desperate urge to hide. Skimming across the surface of my personal history and my creative processes, I am compelled to stop from time to time and to dig deeper into the events that have generated meaning and forged my identities.

At this deferred moment I am uncomfortable in my seat, I have a heavy feeling in my head, and my eyes repeatedly well up with tears. I am experiencing an acute sense of embarrassment and I would like to deny that such a thing ever happened to me. I would like to pretend that I did not suffer from clinical depression, experience a nervous breakdown or spend three months in hospital recovering from this ordeal, but the fact does not concede to conceal itself. It is important to me even now because it explains a great deal about the choices that I made at the beginning of Composition A, and about the choices I made after this. And it is important especially now, as I am trying to discover and distil the essence of my authorial voice.

I know that this voice began to take shape long before this thesis, of course. It had already begun to develop before my breakdown. It was there on the night that I made the decision to erase myself and first began to do so, hysterically, by destroying every photograph of myself in sight. It was there as

I expunged my image with black acrylic paint and revelled in the melancholic ecstasy of the act, feeling strangely euphoric, elated though bleak. And it was incubated in the three months of voluntary hospitalisation following that, when I wrote intensely, feverishly as I considered myself to be close to death. It was fed by the anxiety that remained after my disappointing experiences of group therapy and individual cognitive analysis which both failed to remedy or address the prolonged sense of displacement that I could not seem to outgrow. It flourished in this liminal space, but then seemed to recede into safety once I had emerged again from my artificial chrysalis, still feeling a little unprepared to face the world of supercomplexity. In many ways, the journey I have taken as a writer, performer and theatre-maker began in those moments of crisis, in the attacks of panic and anxiety when all I could do was to chant compose yourself, compose yourself, compose yourself, compose yourself, compose yourself, compose yourself, compose yourself, compose yourself, compose yourself...

The sound of my voice (even now as I write, three years after the episode) is marked forever by that particular, peculiar, melodramatic beginning. My quest to find my voice has not only been an academic exercise, it has been my personal journey of recounting those life-experiences which have shaped my work, and this is one of the most crucial ones. When I set out in writing this thesis, I had certainly not planned to go anywhere near this subject matter, but it has unfolded slowly this way. And the 'truth' I sought at the start of this journey, a 'truth' which I thought would manifest in the form of a succinct academic argument, a new discovery, a twist on a theory, an advance in performance or cultural studies (far-reaching and unrealistic aspirations once again) has not occurred. Instead what I have found is simple – an ability to begin again. I can now begin again, listening once more to the sound of my voice, searching for traces of something larger than myself.

Jungian analysis focuses on dreams and images, decoding these as the manifestations of the subconscious elements of an analysand's personality. The process of analysis/therapy 'attends both to the making of images and our being made by them' (Shorter 1987: 39). Shorter then arrives at a view of initiation as a process

enabling ‘the shift from image to likeness’ (1987: 40). From this view, the characters in *Compositions* and the ‘dream images’ that featured in my personal exploration are revealed as aspects of myself.

If indeed initiation is the shift from image to likeness, I must ask myself whether my performance achieved the desired efficacy. This is not simply a question of whether I became blue or was stoned as part the performance as these are mere physical details. But the shift from image to likeness is a metaphysical one. So the question I must ask myself is whether I actually managed to create the kind of spontaneous, idiosyncratically devised and transformative event that Shorter speaks of, by embodying some trace or trait of the images. Did I, for example, manage to temporarily eschew societal labels/identities as NaiNai managed to soothe her burning skin? Did I manage to resist the oppressive domesticity of home spaces or to produce a new hybrid identity as Thilivali did? This question interrogates the core nature of the performance. For Shorter, ‘a ceremony must fulfil the needs of the unconscious as well as the conscious self and, so, it becomes ritual’ (1997: 41).

Perhaps now I may return to the question of ritual in *Compositions* to clarify some observations made earlier. There are many ways of understanding ritual, but I find the following particularly useful:

rituals are episodes of repeated and simplified cultural communication in which the direct partners to a social interaction, and those observing it, share a mutual belief in the descriptive and prescriptive validity of the communication’s symbolic contents and accept the authenticity of one another’s intentions (Alexander 2006: 29).

I could add to this that ‘ritual is a declaration of form against indeterminacy, therefore indeterminacy is always present in ritual’ (Moore and Meyerhoff cited in Layiwola 2000: 118) and that ‘there is a general consensus that rituals are beneficial to the community [in which they are practiced], not to say necessary for its well-being and continued existence’ (R. Weber 1979: 451).

Much has been written about the relation of ritual to theatre performance, but I find Richard Schechner’s efficacy-entertainment braid most helpful in theorising the connection between ritual and drama (Appendix V table 1). Schechner’s system appears in many studies on the topic. In it

[T]he basic opposition is between efficacy and entertainment, not between ritual and theatre. Whether one calls a specific performance ritual or theatre depends on the degree to which the performance tends towards efficacy or entertainment. No performance is purely efficacy or entertainment (Schechner 1976: 207).

Richard Weber adds that the question of ritual and theatre boils down to a matter of perspective depending greatly on the effects of the particular material staging of a production, so that

[I]f one accepts the entertainment-efficacy continuum, and if one applies it to the multiple perspectives of performance, the same play [performance] can move from theatre towards ritual and back again, from moment to moment, between stage and auditorium (R. Weber 1979: 459).

The efficacy-entertainment continuum is comparable to Victor Turner's (1979) listing of the features of liminal and liminoid performance (Appendix V table 2). Both models show how modern drama might originate from ritual form. But Turner's model is particularly interesting for me here as I have been looking at the liminal nature of migrant identity.

Juxtaposing Turner's model with my discussion of *Compositions*, I have found that my performance was often closer to the liminoid side of the continuum than to the liminal. This is because even though I drew from the idea of ritual as a source, the performance remained an overtly theatrical event that stood apart from the social and political normality of everyday life. The audience's participation in *Compositions* was ultimately voluntary and for the most part leisure-related, and whilst I set out to use shared symbols in the work, many of them were based on a repertoire of personal images.

The question of shamanic presence also arises in both Turner and Schechner's models. What I am speaking of here is the feeling of an *altered state* of being that sometimes manifests in the experience of ritual trance or possession. The achievement of this *altered state* is usually associated with ritual drama. Tang (2005) discusses the 'truth claims' of ritual theatre, which is

closer to what Richard Schechner calls 'believed-in theatre'. 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)...the transformation effected by ritual theatre...is not a discarding but a penetration of theatrical illusion as the screen (Tang 2005: 87).

In the avant-garde tradition (for example Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook, amongst others who shared a distrust for language and its capacity for representation, Sanchez-Colberg 1996), ritual theatre claims to ‘disrupt theatrical representation’ and to actually transform its audience (Tang 2005: 87). Importantly, ‘the concept of a ritual theatre and its new methodology has foregrounded and re-defined the mission of the actor on the post-modern stage’ (Layiwola 2000: 130).

The purpose of a ritual certainly must have something to do with the type of transformation achieved through it. Rites of passage in which the aim is to mark a change in life and status function differently from other ceremonies in which the explicit aim is to achieve an altered state, and the experience of the initiate cannot therefore be the same as that of the shaman, especially when the ritual process is traditionally designed to take place over a prolonged period as is *Domba*.

Although I performed using a score of stylized symbolic movements, I never achieved the status of shaman. And whilst audiences responded to these ritualized aspects of the performance and recognized the signs of a ritual, they could not always ‘believe in’ the ritual’s efficacy because the deeper significance of the action was unknown to them. The only moment of ‘believed in theatre’ in the performance, then, would have been the concluding monologue in which the boundaries between illusion and reality were dissolved.

At some point during the difficult process of rehearsing *Composition A*, I was struck by a powerful sense of guilt about my privileged position as a Zimbabwean living in South Africa. This was partly the result of a particularly intense period of daily exposure to newspaper articles and reports on the worsening socio-political and economic situation in my home country. The subject dominated many a conversation so that eventually (subliminally) I began to feel, from reading about the plight of my fellow countrymen and women, that my creative work was irrelevant, self-indulgent and insincere. I began to doubt the entire process and to question my motivations for creating a work that focused on surreal and magical experiences in the face of such

brutal social realities. Each time I rehearsed the character of Dombo, for instance, I felt stupid for ‘frolicking about and speaking gibberish’ (a feeling which often returned during later performances of *Compositions* when in some brief moment I lost track of my conviction and became desperate to please the audience, or when their laughter drew me out of the flow of my Stanislavskian concentration). After weeks of feeling this way I exploded these emotions onto the page a few days before my second ‘showing’.⁵⁷

The final monologue which marked the end of *Composition A* was written in a fit of anxiety. This text was not originally intended to be performed, but the next morning as I prepared to go into rehearsal, I could not see a way to proceed with the work in light of my doubts (and the looming deadline). Spontaneously, then, I decided to incorporate this piece of writing into my performance. I memorised the text but did not rehearse it until the evening of the showing.

In all this – the inconsequential ramblings – there is a noise of clashing symbols. I feel the weight of my world, the birth of my address calling out to me from the nether regions of ineptitude. I wanted to dance, to tell the stories of these things, and all I could find was water. I walked on rock and steep mountain sides; in the distance, goats pirouetting at my advantage, and I on the verge of a mudslide. I am slung back and forth from new embarrassment, embrace my place. Here, I carry a heavy heart and a heady air. Pour drink unto the ground and pray for the intoxicating breath of self-assurance.

I soil myself. In my house of stone I collide with stealthy visions; skeletons dangling from walls, blue earth, yellow light, centipedes and silence. Mute as the moon, dressed in the comfort of my undoing. Three fingers from my feet lie silk and bone, the blood of my brothers and the dream of a time as yet unknown. And in all these sequential amblings, the ambivalence of tales of sultry women and secluded havens begs of amusement to me. My characters laugh; they point accusatory fingers and hurl themselves towards my head. The grey matter pounds, the voices wail and quake my bed. I am a string of

⁵⁷ These are the regularly scheduled presentations of a practical project from which one receives feedback on the project in process. They make up part of the creative and learning process in the structured coursework degree.

hair and torn scalp strung between the rabid teeth of what I cannot say. Still, I stay. I do not know what I am doing here.

Anointed, with thick skin and stench of carcass in my lap, I tread lightly on severed ears, and belch the music of my mind. See it stick, soap, foam and bubble as it curdles in the air. The blue woman, the woman of water, the keeper of glass, rising all at once to throw me with stones. I sit and wait for the collapse of my house of stone. I sit and wait for the collapse of my house of stone. I sit and wait for the collapse of my house of stone, for fissures to writhe and the dust of ages to choke me in its grip. I sit and collapse in the weight of my house of stone.

Heavy as the seeds of doubt sewn deep into the cloth of artistry. What chivalry travails to dig me out of the rubble, is feeble. The rooftops lop off. The hands caked in grime and sod, reveal a fortune in twine.

Still, in the vivid clout of their work I seep through mossy pores. I, the arthropod, the black-eyed boxer the pattern the plan. I compose myself, and prepare to begin again. I compose myself, and prepare to begin again. I compose myself, and prepare to begin again.

The addition of this personal reflective ‘diary entry’ (I did not actually have a diary at the time) into *Composition A* changed the entire performance. The material and narrative content of the work suddenly became more meaningful. My stories began to appear not only as individual fragments but as episodes exploring the same themes and issues in a larger social context. The Grandmother’s speech, the Border-Jumping scene, and the Washing-Line monologue were all somehow enhanced. Suddenly, I felt that I was no longer selfishly using Zimbabwe as the mere background for a frivolous fairytale – I was beginning to discover the impact of migration on my identity. I was beginning to describe the liminal nature of my identity and from this, I was able to finally comprehend the gravity of the devastation in Zimbabwe. In a sense, this was the initiation into being – a step towards being more present in the world than I had been before. But it was not what I had imagined when I had spoken of becoming initiated into ‘being myself’. After the solo performance I returned to daily life and did not feel as though my identity had been *altered* or enhanced in any way. Instead, I had an acute sense of failure at not having achieved what I had set out to do, and I

continued to feel as though using this final monologue had been a cop-out despite the positive feedback I had received.

Revisiting *Compositions* after this was not a deliberate decision. On both occasions it had more to do with the pressure to produce a work during each quarter of the academic year. The dissatisfaction with and failure of my other practical proposals compelled me to return to this work, which everyone else seemed to appreciate, but which did not excite me nearly as much. I was finally convinced into reworking the piece after considering that some themes in *Composition A* had not been developed, remembering that this was only the 'A', the beginning of an exploration.

In moving from A to Z, then, I also moved from ritual to theatre and back, from the personal and symbolic to the collective and the epic, citing the previous versions of the performance each time. The symbolic breaking of the calabash in *Composition A* became the large-scale destruction of homes in the second courtyard in *Composition Z* (2007), which then became the symbolic breaking of an elaborate, haunting illusion inferred in the detailed set of *Huroyi Hwangu*, and which at last became the breaking of the division between my identities in *Composition Z* (2008) where the Author disappeared and I finally returned to the arms of the maternal ancestral figure.

This last *Composition Z* (2008) which I performed voluntarily in the Amphitheatre was a personal milestone in several respects: it was my first independent theatrical production in a professional setting, and it was also a physical challenge. The bruises and cuts I sustained from the strenuous physicality of performance became like my own involuntary scarification as I returned to rub more blue make-up into the wounds each night, so that I can even say that I now (at last) bear the marks of my initiation on my body. I have only been able to appreciate the value of the entire experience of creating and performing *Compositions*, and to finally experience the personal transformation which I had been seeking since *Composition A*, after having felt this sense of achievement and triumph which has been a part of (re)discovering my *authorial voice*.

Part of this triumph also has to do with the experience of creating and presenting another work entitled *Lazarus* at the same 2008 National Arts Festival. An ambitious excursion into the genre of Protest Theatre, *Lazarus* was presented as part of the main Student Theatre Festival, and as such received more technical, financial

and box-office support than *Composition Z* (2008) did. I wrote, directed and designed (but did not perform in) the piece which dealt with the socio-political situation in Zimbabwe. The general sentiment was that I had tried to do too much in one piece, and this became evident after a discussion with the official Student Festival panel of reviewers indicating that I needed to ‘trust the storytelling more’ and include less repeated images of ‘the starving masses’.⁵⁸

Such comments point to a general trend which I believe is a common symptom amongst drama students. I think that the problems I experienced in my practical work had to do with my lack of trust in the validity of my subjective experience. Although the feedback I received after *Composition A* indicated that the sincerity of my personal reflections had been one of its strengths, a general distrust for anything related to my ambiguous identity meant that I felt compelled to explain my position further. The excess of socio-political commentary and ‘angst’ in *Lazarus* and *Composition Z* (2007), then, came hand-in-hand as I attempted to erase the more painful aspects of my personal struggle with identity. I was, then, deflecting the devastation within by reiterating *ad nauseam* the devastation without.

I consider, on the other hand, my independent festival production *Composition Z* (2008) of which the following has been said; ‘‘The House of Stone’ perhaps infers to humanity’s numbed reaction towards issues that have affected our world, its people, deteriorating the very essence of Ubuntu, we have come to learn [original spelling]’ (Buthelezi 2008).⁵⁹ I am interested in this comment because it demonstrates the potential for a myriad of politicised readings which were a feature of *Composition Z* (2008). It shows that stylistically, the form of *Compositions* is a more promising

⁵⁸ Several press reviews expressed similar sentiments and added:

The plot is very thin at best and mostly incoherent... The work makes use of puppets, singing, dancing, nonsensical sets, mask, complex costuming, people on stage, lighting effects, multi-media and theatrical devices I probably haven’t named yet. No-one seems to have told the students that it is the appropriate use of theatrical devices which can give a work its power, not the ability to cram as many of them as possible into a single piece (de Swardt: 2008).

Another reviewer comments

It may take the audience a while to get a grip on the characters as there is a lot going on and performers double up as other characters in a way that is sometimes confusing. The voiceover interludes overload the action and are too wordy and angst-driven... The subtlety of the text may better come through with some editing and simplification. The ending, while beautiful in a symbolic way, doesn’t really make sense (Otto 2008).

An anonymous comment on Otto’s review (above) reads ‘I have seen *Lazarus* and other student productions at the festival you seem to be the only one who understood the story of *Lazarus*...’

⁵⁹ Whilst this review is clumsily phrased and reads with less credibility than those mentioned above I am wary of discriminating against the author on the basis of her articulation and thereby allowing the hegemony of text to discount the value of her individual experience.

avenue for future explorations, and I believe this to be an effect of the way in which the autobiographical and subjective mode was expressed through narrative and imagery.

This is not to say that *Composition Z* (2008) was not without its flaws. The preceding *Huroyi Hwangu* (2007) was probably staged more successfully than my festival performance.⁶⁰ And despite my attempts to ‘simplify’ the work many people still felt as though they had not understood the performance or had had ‘limited, not in depth’ comprehension. Audiences certainly felt excluded from the action and saw themselves as passive spectators rather than being involved in the performance in any way. But they were still able to identify key images however (which included ‘mother and child, bird, water, the blue cloth, the web/cage, stones, eggs, and the colour blue’), and to recognise themes such as ‘displacement, isolation, fertility rites, loss/recovery/reconciliation, culture/tradition, home/journey/longing, struggle/sacrifice, death/rebirth, bondage, *search for a creative voice* and *colourlessness* [emphasis mine]’.

I find it very interesting indeed that audiences were in fact able to gather so many ‘accurate’ (for want of a better word) perspectives on the performance despite the feeling of not having understood the performance. This means that for some at least (albeit unconsciously) the process of viewing *Composition Z* (2008) was indeed interactive and performative, as they had to create their own meanings in the face of a perceived lack of ‘clarity’. Audiences described the performance as ‘art/theatre, physical theatre/mime, expressionism, storytelling, ‘spiritual African’, drama, ritual, fantasy’ and overall only a small number of audience members found the use of text to be of any help in appreciating the performance.

The emotional and intuitive appeal of the performance is what has proved to be most exciting for me now, as it is through this that audiences were ultimately able to relate to the performance. Even though the concern with Zimbabwe was not overtly read, it is also promising that audiences for *Composition Z* (2008) did not complain of the performance being ‘angst-ridden,’ and I feel this is partly to do with the fact that the storytelling (that is, the use of the magical stories as a basis) acted as a useful counterpoint to the personal narrative. More obviously, the fact that the House of

⁶⁰I think that the indoor setting had a lot to do with our ability to create a more compelling visual and sensory experience through the design.

Stone monologue was not performed live but played out as a voice-over recording during the ‘border jumping’ scene seems to be the reason for this, meaning that the conflict between the personal and the political was not read as a theme of the performance. I have, then, wondered whether the most recent *Composition Z* (2008) still managed to express the ‘actual dilemma and the pain of articulating and giving voice to these seemingly variant demands [which] in fact became the creative substance’ (Buckland 2007) of *Composition A* and *Huroyi Hwangu*?

To answer this last question, I must tackle once more the issue of liminality, which has been a major feature of my discussion. At the beginning of this study I cited Susan Broadhurst, and I must return to her concept of liminal performance one last time. It is worth quoting at length her conclusions in the final chapter of *Liminal Acts* (1999).

All liminal works confront, offend or unsettle...[and] display a parodic, questioning, deconstructive mode which presents a resistance, even when individual performances...appear in danger of being appropriated by the mainstream...the liminal mirrors and is an experimental extension of our contemporary social and cultural ethos...Liminal performances are hybridized and intertextual, and share common quasi-generic aesthetic features, such as heterogeneity, indeterminacy, self-reflexiveness, eclecticism, fragmentation, a certain ‘shift-shape style’ and a repetitiveness that produces not sameness but difference...blurring and collapsing of the binaries between traditional theatre, dance, music and art (Broadhurst 1999a: 168-9).

Recalling my discussion of *Compositions* in this and the previous chapter, I can argue convincingly that my work possesses many of these features. Examining the use of ritual in *Compositions* (as detailed above) could account for the primordial and chthonic attributes, whilst hybridity of form, indeterminacy, fragmentation and eclecticism are also fairly self-evident in the work. The emphasis on corporeal prominence and ‘heterosemiotic significatory practices’ have also been discussed under the treatment of the body in *Compositions* and so I am left with the problem of technology, which Broadhurst does identify as a distinctive feature of liminal *film* [emphasis mine] (Broadhurst 1999a: 169). *Compositions* clearly possessed some, though not all, of the features of the liminal performance genre. This might help to explain the confusion that some audience members felt whilst watching the

performance. Such confusion hindered the coherence of the performance so that the efficacy of the ritual that I attempted to create was depleted.

But Broadhurst notes that

[L]iminal performance demonstrates the need for a new form of aesthetic interpretation, given that beauty and harmony are not appropriate descriptions of liminal sensibilities. Rather, the exciting or unsettling are closer to the mark, nearer to sensations evoked by the sublime (Broadhurst 1999a: 171).

So a comment from one audience member describing *Composition Z* (2008) as ‘Poor – chaotic, lacking clear expression, didn’t seem to be a clear, visible conceptual clarity’⁶¹ for example might be explained by the fact that ‘the liminal [performance] provokes and unsettles the audience’ (Broadhurst 1999a: 171) because it engages them in an active collaborative process of interpretation/identity construction, and through this the performance becomes ‘a scene of immediate aesthetic intervention with an indirect effect on the political’ (Broadhurst 1999a: 69).

Examining the relative successes and failures of *Compositions* has been a necessary part of my project. Through this, I have been able to observe the impact of my social and subjective identities on my *praxis*. I have been able to discover first hand that amongst the advantages of autoethnography is the potential for (to borrow Homi Bhabha’s words) ‘shifting the question of identity from the ontological and epistemological imperative-*What is identity?*-to face the ethical and political prerogative-*What are identities for?*-or even to present the pragmatist alternative-*What can identities do?*’ (Bhabha 1997: 434).

⁶¹ I am aware that this may also have been referring to a bad performance on our part. However I am inclined to read this comment in the particular way I have in light of similar comments by other respondents who also complained about ‘conceptual clarity’. Furthermore the same respondent who commented on a lack of ‘conceptual clarity’ was still able to assert that the performance dealt with themes of ‘not belonging’ and ‘cradling, support from other human beings,’ and also found the visual statement of the performance to be the most helpful to his understanding. I am also not able to analyse the performance in that first-hand sense of distinguishing ‘good acting’ from ‘bad acting,’ and from viewing the video of the performance I have found that it is difficult indeed to assess whether the performance was ‘good’ or ‘bad’. In any case, this is not really my topic of interest here.

Episode 13: False Conclusions

As a student of drama studies, one must maintain a sense of equilibrium between the institutional demand for theoretical rigour and the creative imperative to produce finely crafted works of a high standard. In present-day South Africa, a University degree in drama requires one to be strong in both areas, and this often means that the process and product of one's creative projects must be open to a self-reflexive critique as one strives for excellence. However, as students we tend to take for granted the impact of personal identity and lived experience on the process and production of our practical projects, and this tends to occur in our written research as well. Because 'writing about art, making art, is not the same as being the subject of art,' the artistic urge to transgress diminishes when one faces the prospect of exposure (hooks 1995: 135).

During my research I have certainly realised that it is possible, indeed necessary to engage reflexively with the concerns of ontology, epistemology and praxis, and so I have attempted to move back and forth between performance, practice and analysis. In the course of my writing, the divisions between the three modes have begun to de-compose, so to speak. Although it is still 'as if I were dead' because my writing can only ever be partial in the sense of subjectivity as well as opaqueness, and although I can never be entirely present in the text, I have at least begun to negotiate a space between visibility and invisibility, a liminal site of identification in this thesis.

I have realized more deeply the interrelatedness of theory and practice, and have uncovered the cyclical movement between the two (praxis). I have observed how such cyclical movement creates new opportunities for me to learn and improve my skills and abilities as both a theatre-maker and scholar, and how such knowledge ultimately might empower me on an individual level as I take hold of these newly acquired skills and use them to face the world of supercomplexity with greater awareness, thoughtfulness and agency.

I have discovered that

the complexities of writing personally, reflectively and critically involve a mixed genre, multi-voiced approach, and therefore the exploration of different voices and identities...Extending our [my]

ability to negotiate and apply a range of genres, and therefore voices, prepares us [me] for a world of supercomplexity (Sutherland 2007: 118).

Such multi-vocality was a feature of *Compositions* and appropriate to the concern with migrant identity, and I have attempted to make this multi-vocality an attribute of my thesis writing as well. I have endeavoured to do this not only by shifting between the use of the autoethnographic and the academic voice/identity in writing, but also through the complex synthesis in my discussion of a number of theoretical approaches which could be used to unpack the meanings and experiences of *Compositions*.

Pollock describes how ‘marking an absence, metonymic writing also marks itself an active, material signifying process that is neither a prison house nor a fun house, not a place even, but a boundary space, inviting laughter and transformation’ (Pollock 1998: 86). This is the active writing I have attempted to create in this thesis, whilst also enlisting the ‘hopeful melancholy’ that derives from the repetitive, quotational form of citational (performative) actions in writing. Such writing is not only ‘inevitably imperfect, it is the living sign that reproduction can never be total or absolute’ (Pollock 1998: 93).

In addition to this I have certainly attempted to negotiate a balance and to articulate the tension between humanist and poststructuralist concerns as I have experienced such a tension in my praxis. Such a tension is also of course necessarily a feature of autoethnographic writing, as it locates itself between interpretive and constructionist paradigms. In my exploration of the politics of identity, I have located my work *Compositions* and my research within a marginal framework and shown how being positioned in such a liminal, anxious and ambivalent space has in fact enabled me to better understand the complexities and the fluidity at play within my various identities, and through this I have begun a process of writing/reading, living/being, speaking/performing through imminence, rather than immanence. I have been able to ‘re-vision the experience [of creating *Compositions*] as a site for learning rather than as a failed creative action’ (Sutherland 2007: 115).

So if there had been any aspiration to finding some grand conclusion or ‘truth’ in this/my narrative, then, it is false, and I will not make any claims to completion. Rather than aiming to reveal some fundamental argument, I am more intrigued by the resonances that I have discovered in the course of my work between the various roles

or identities that I have taken over the past few years, so that this text is not simply an addition or an explanation of *Compositions*, but is itself a part of/in the series, another *Composition* in the making. Through my writing I have been able to move some way towards becoming *a speaking sight*, towards (re)discovering an authorial voice/identity within my theory and practice.

This thesis is at the most simplistic level an examination of the notions of migration and identity within the context of my nascent career as both a theatre-maker and academic scholar. It is an attempt to map for myself the diverging and/or converging trajectories of certain theoretically and practically engaged thoughts, placing myself at the nexus of these traverses. It is my hope that this study, whilst fulfilling part of the requirement for my Master of Arts coursework degree will also serve two additional purposes: as an assemblage of my work, a retrospective on my journey and the road I have travelled so far, and as an autoethnographic case study for those emerging theatre-makers and scholars who may identify with my perspectives, obsessions, goals and experiences. I have moved from a particular exploration of the notions of identity and migration in Southern Africa, to a broader conceptualisation of negotiating identities in the context of studying Drama at a University. By charting the deeply personal and creative journey I have taken over the past two years particularly, I hope to have given voice to some of the challenges facing us as young theatre practitioners in Southern Africa in the 21st Century. This is indeed an ambitious aspiration, but one which I have pursued through a particularly focused case study of my specific socio-political and cultural contexts. Finally, as I mentioned earlier, writing that aims to engage the reader as fully as possible also involves an equal degree of the writer's own identity, and because of this 'the greatest value of working toward a believable and effective report lies in its affirmation of the self – the researcher – as a central, ethical, powerful, flexible, fallible, learning human being (Ely 1996: 184).

Epilogue: Ending on a performative note...

I recently watched two arresting performances during the Spier Performing Arts Festival 'Infecting the City'. I was struck by the use of space and imagery in the performance entitled Limbo⁶² which was performed at Church Square in Cape Town. This was a work which I felt was of epic scale and magnitude, and most appropriate to this theme of migration and xenophobia. It somehow managed to distil something very essential to the experience of migration, or at least something I have found essential to my own personal experience of migration. There was a definite sense of numerous layers within the dynamic landscapes, and yet it was also incredibly simple.

I then watched another performance entitled Exile⁶³ at the Adderley Street fountains and found this experience equally moving. I was struck by the theatre makers' ability to delicately weave a personal narrative into the vast landscapes of migration, so that the general and the specific details of the experience seemed to flow seamlessly onto one another. Watching both pieces prompted me to reflect once again on my own work, strengths, and weaknesses, and after having been reduced to tears by the combined experiences I left feeling hopeful that I, too, might begin to negotiate this balance in my work.

This year, I will be engaged in a year-long research process which will involve commitment to both theoretical and practical rigour. The performance text which I will be developing is an unfinished project that began in 2006 entitled Searching for Kindling, and it features the figure of the Old Woman once again. In this text which has lain dormant for some years now, the Old Woman is at last beginning to speak. I wonder what she will tell me...

⁶² This was a new collaborative project created by Brian Geza, Fabrice Guillot of Retouramont Dance Company, Julia Raynham and Kai Lossgott.

⁶³ This was another new work created by Alfred Hinkel of Jazzart Dance Company, Michael Lister of Avanti Display Theatre, Mary Manzole and Penelope Youngleson.

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APPENDIX I: COMPOSITION A (2007)

CAST

Usher: Mmakgosi Kgabi

Performer: Awelani Moyo

All of the characters are played by Moyo. The Author character is represented by a life-sized puppet.

TEXTS:

1. Introduction/entrance.

2. Storytelling.

WOMAN: As always, it was pitifully hot in the faraway land of Eeinaa. It was not quite humid, but the wind blew sunny and strange, and combed the golden hair of the village people. A beautiful bird settled on the rooftop of the tallest house on the highest cliff on the furthest point of the world. Her skin was blue-black because each day as she walked through the town, past the village people whose golden locks curled round each other's eyes, she was pummelled with tiny pebbles until she would take off again.

3. Dombo.

AUTHOR VOICE: She has the peculiarity of a stone: Dombo, who cannot be moved. She hides beneath the rock, not wanting her dances to be known. Not wanting her words to be stolen. She has the peculiarity of a stone...

4. Grandmother.

GRANDMOTHER: Nyika yaparara. Vana mazuva ano, va kuda kutiza misha, vachi jamba ma border. Iwe, mwana wangu, enda hako. Wonozvitsvakira kana ka slice, one, kechingwa. Kana ka teaspoon ke suga. Kana ka five litre ke petrol. Asi, ziva kwewakabva.

The world is finished/dead. Children these days, they want to run away from home, and they jump borders. You, my child, go on. You can find yourself even one little slice of bread. Even a little teaspoon of sugar. Even a little five litre of petrol. But, know/remember where you came from.

5. Border Jumping.

6. The Washing Line.

WOMAN: Iwe, rega ndikutaurire! Hanti ndanga ndichifambafamba ka, I was walking through the forest, ndikasvika pange paine waterfall ka, and then ndikabva ndawona munu iwe, I saw a man! Inini ka, I did not know who he was, but ndakamutarisisa and I could see that he was not entirely there. And then, funga hako, ah! Uchaseka iwe, he invited me into the waterfall. Futi anga ari handsome facha! Ah, ndikangonti ooh come on! Saka he invited me into his home, dikagara naye zvakanakanaka. Asi after that hazvina kuzofamba zvakanaka. Nhayi Nhayi, ndakazo ita pamuviri. Futi mwana wacho pe akabuda, anga ari blue. Imagine! Mwana ari blue! Ah, ndakazongomurasa inini!

Hey you, let me tell you. Isn't it I was walking around, I was walking through the forest, and I arrived where there was a waterfall see, and then I saw a person, you! I saw a man! Myself, I did not know who he was, but I looked at him closely and I could see that he was not entirely there. And then, just think. Oh you're going to laugh, he invited me into the waterfall. And he was also a handsome one! Ah, so I just said ooh come on! So he invited me into his home and I lived very well with him.

But after that things didn't go well at all. Really, I fell pregnant. And when the baby came out, it was blue! Imagine! A blue baby! Ah, me I just threw it away!

7. The Breakdown.
8. The House of Stone.



Figure 1 Moyo in the Lower Studio before the performance of Composition A.

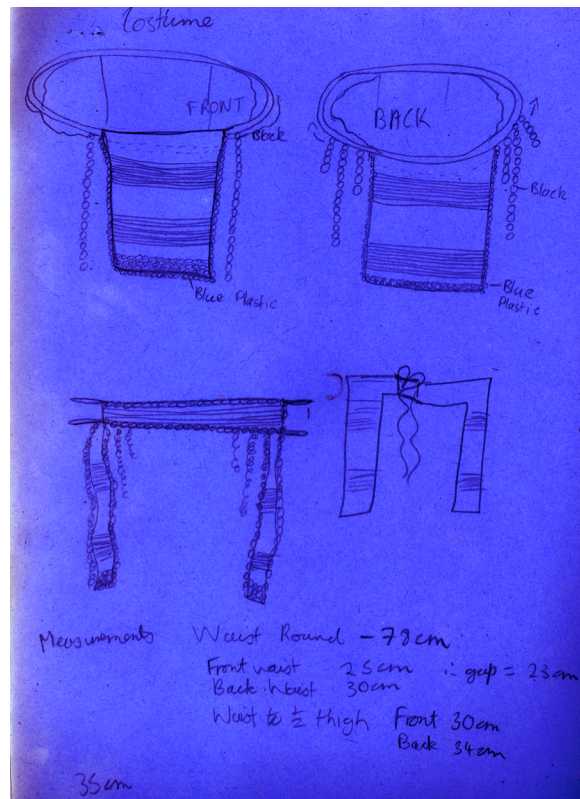


Figure 2 Original Costume Design for Composition A



Figure 3 The front and back perspectives of the costume for Composition A. The performance itself did not feature the striped loincloth depicted in the design due to financial and time constraints on the project.

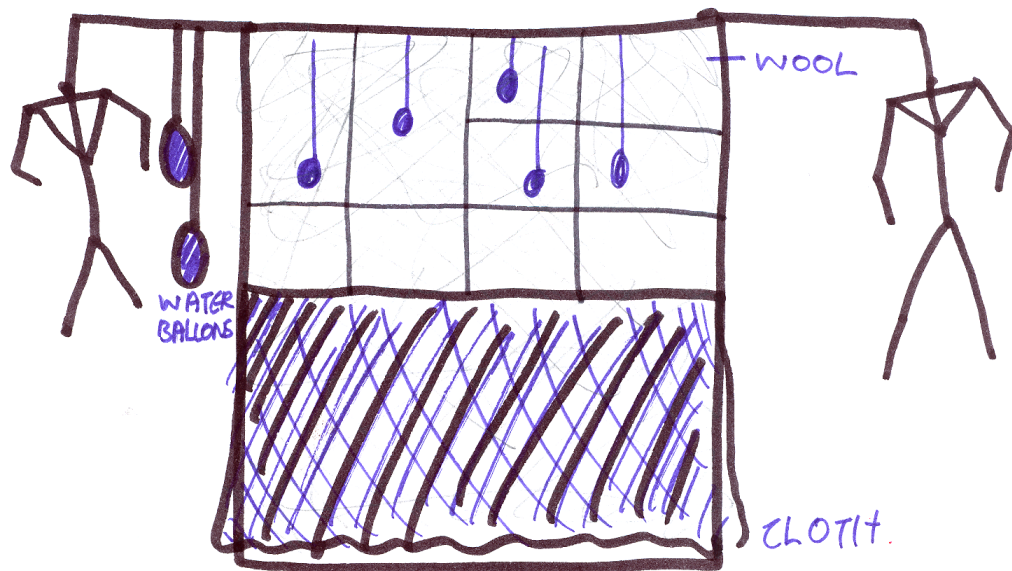
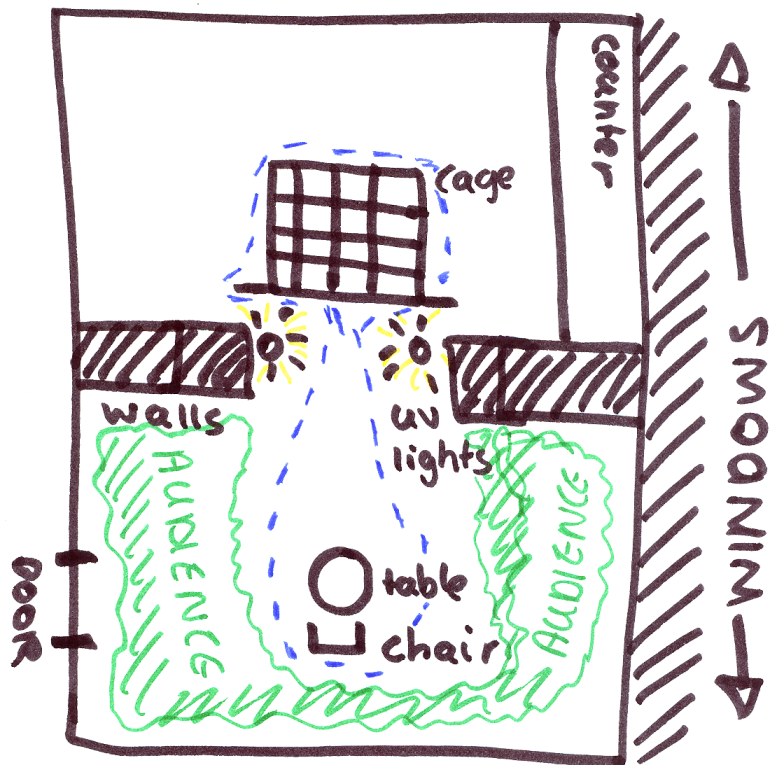


Figure 4 Set Design for Composition A.

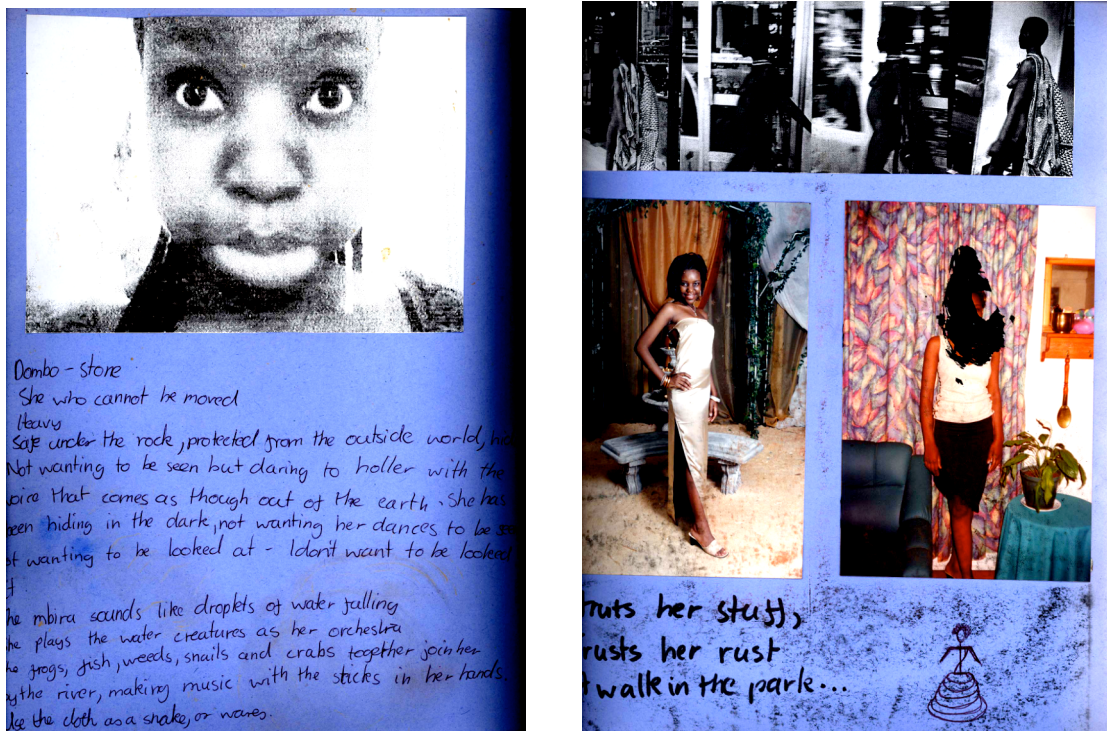


Figure 5 Images used in rehearsals for Composition A.



**Figure 6 Awelani Moyo performing Thilivali's speech. These publicity photographs taken later on for Huroyi Hwangu show Moyo wearing the Mungwenda – the traditional Venda outfit made from colourful striped cloth (worn here on top of another blue cloth).
 Photographs taken by Lauren Clifford-Holmes.**

APPENDIX II: COMPOSITION Z – THE HOUSE OF STONE (2007)

CAST

Woman 1: Sifiso Mabena

Woman 2: Mmakgosi Kgabi

Woman 3: Awelani Moyo

The performers all play various characters during the performance. The Author character is represented by a life-sized puppet in one scene.

TEXTS:

1. Introduction/entrance – *‘Tell me a story’ is heard.*
2. Domestic Scene – *Two women wake up in their respective huts and begin the day. Singing a seTswana song, they go about their chores of sweeping, lighting the fire in the hut, and going outside to do their laundry. They meet at the fence between their homes.*
3. Washing Line.
4. Half Visible – *The story of Thilivali’s love affair is told in English through a poetic monologue between two women. They disappear.*
5. Harassed Border Crossing – *Transition through corridor into the next courtyard. A voice recites a poem in English, then the audience is harassed in Shona by a guard at the Border post.*
6. Shebeen Scene – *Two drunk men in a Shebeen are discussing life. One speaks Shona/Ndebele, the other seTswana. They interact with the Shebeen Queen who scolds them. They are complaining about the behaviour and dressing of young women in the area. The men leave the Shebeen.*
7. Water-Glass Woman Reflection – *A monologue describing the Water-Glass Woman in English, narrating how she was ostracised in her community and how she searched for refuge through water and stories.*
8. The Playground – *Two children are playing in the village. The Grandmother enters, and the children begin to age through a kind of snake dance. They become two grown women narrating the story of Thilivali’s lover in English in poetic monologues. The children finally collapse from exhaustion.*
9. Grandmother.
10. Once Again – *The Author awakens from her daze. She picks up a piece of chalk and begins to draw on the ground whilst reciting a poem about writing in English. When she is finished the children play again until they are called inside by the grandmother.*
11. Murambatzvina – *An Old Man gives a grand speech in Shona, the homes in the village are destroyed at his command.*
12. Border Jumping/Storytelling – *with more text about Dombo and NaiNai in English.*
13. Dombo/Puppet interaction.
14. The Pattern The Plan – *English, the author writing the three stories.*
15. The House of Stone part 1 – *With Thilivali and Dombo.*
16. Fate – *the story of what became of Thilivali, English.*
17. The House of Stone part 2 – *With The Water-Glass Woman and NaiNai.*

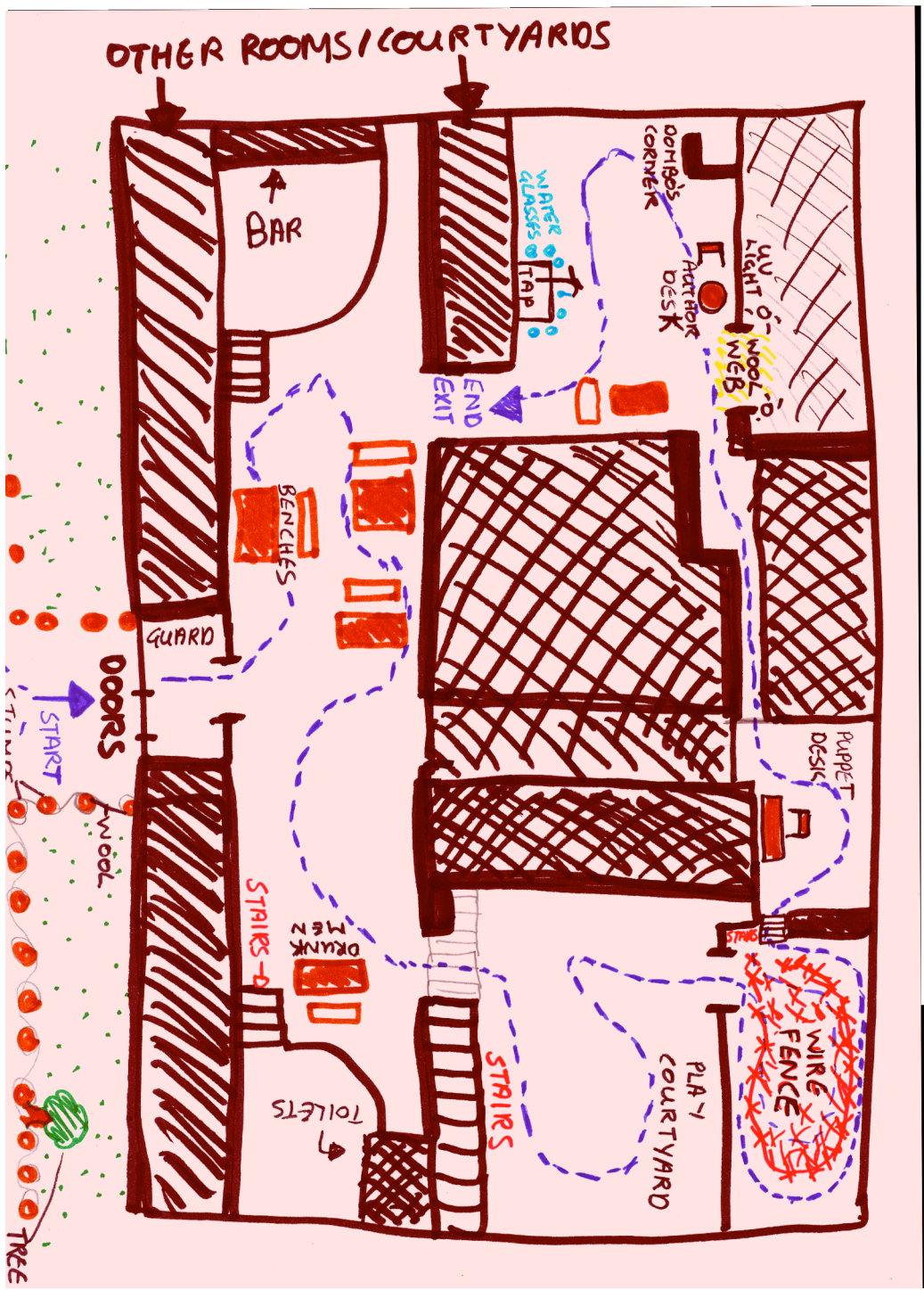


Figure 7 Drawing of the Old Gaol and the physical journey in Composition Z.

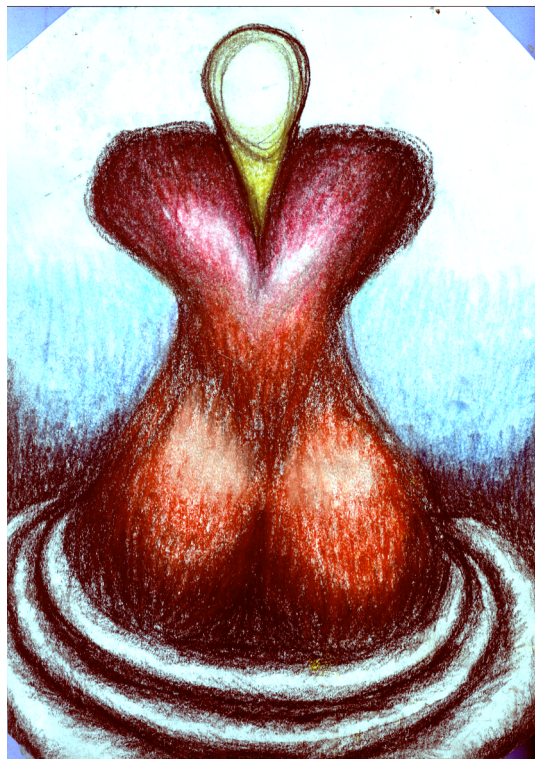


Figure 8 Drawing of a diving figure used as source in rehearsals for Compositions.

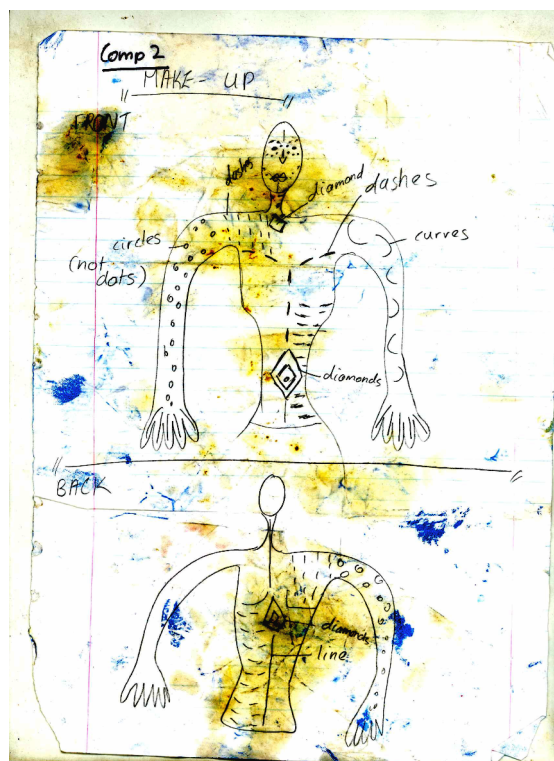


Figure 9 Drawing of makeup design for Composition Z.

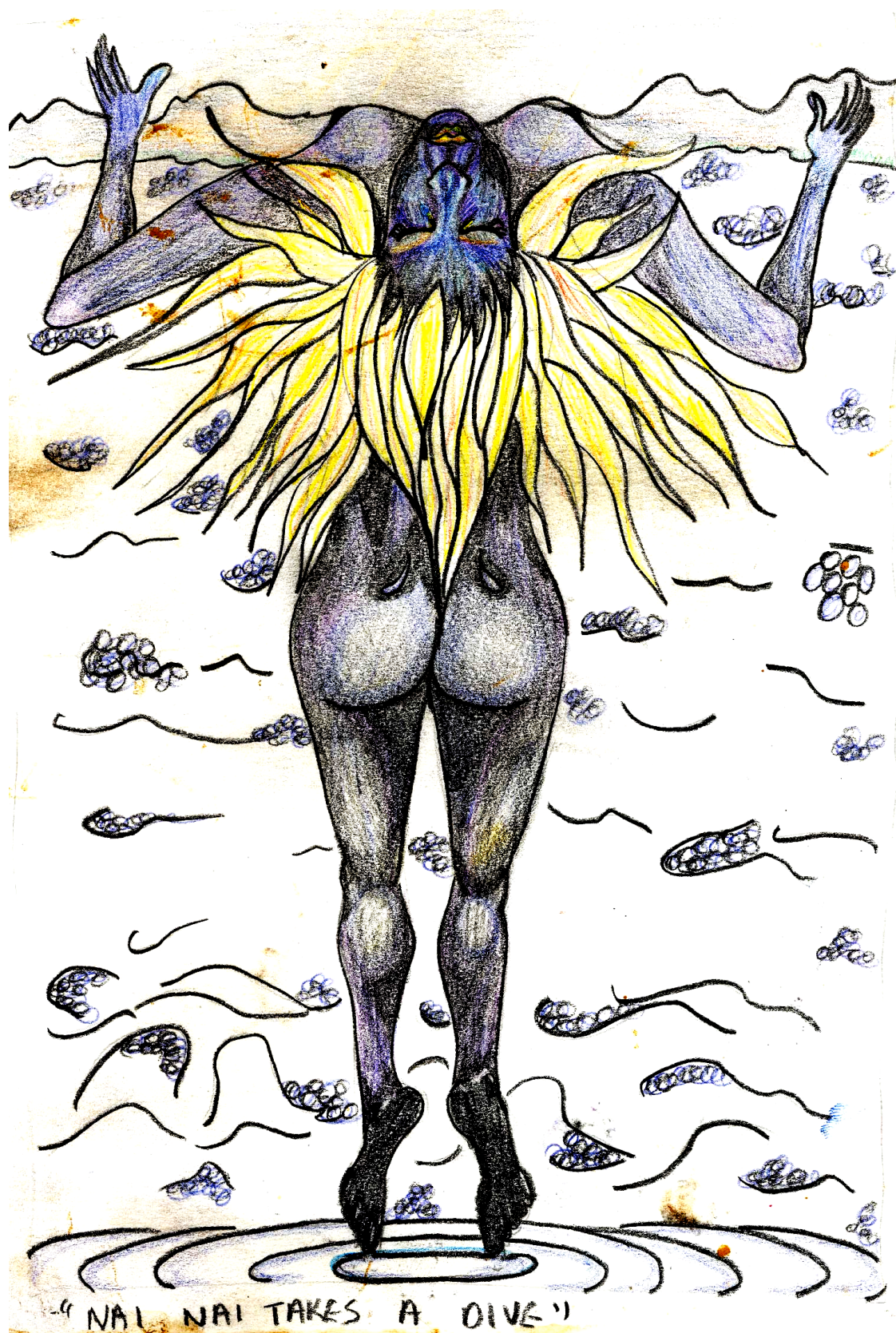


Figure 10 Drawing of NaiNai used as a source for Compositions.

APPENDIX III: HUROYI HWANGU – IN DE/RE COMPOSITION (2007)

CAST

Old Woman: Mmakgosi Kgabi. Does not speak but creates soundscapes and aids transitions.

Performer/Puppeteer: Awelani Moyo

The Grandmother character is a puppet.

TEXTS:

1. Introduction/entrance.

AUTHOR VOICE: It begins with me, here, now. If I sing, if I tell, if I speak I cast a spell. I be witchy. I be witch. Bewitched, cursed, entranced, transfixed. Entrance-d. trance-fixed. A woman told me this story, a story to fill her heart. She had a house, a house filled with glasses. She had a house filled with glasses of water. She had a house filled with... She sits alone in her room, spiralling into time and out of touch with reality... No. A woman told me this story. She had a house filled with waterglasses. They called her the waterglass woman... *Turning pages*. The pages are blank here. I don't know exactly what happened to her. Every step leads round and round in circles. If I only knew... I do not know why. What happens? What happens? What happens to NaiNai? Where do these things go after I've cried and fallen and can't seem to get up again? I plan, I plot, I draw, I lead, I compose something but I cannot go home. Not yet, I think. I still have those stories to tell. I still have to break their spell. *Laugh*. That rhymes, by the way! See, I could be a poet, if I knew. *Clears throat*. A woman spoke to me. She has the peculiarity of a stone. Dombo – who cannot be moved. She lives in a cave filled with, things. Her bubbles, her breasts, her water-balloons. Her little feet, lightweight, and heady. She's the ballerina. Scoops up my thoughts with her head. Slender as a stick, stick-thin, silk skinned, and polishing her calabash. She lives in the dark. Bent double, kneeling, bent down, bent over. The weight of the world on her little shoulders. The water at her feet, weighted down. The sand beneath my feet, eroding, sinking. Like a tree on a dune as the wind blows, hits my face. She's whispering, she's speaking, she's lighting, she's dancing, she's throwing, she's pouring she's running, she's hiding, she's kneeling, bent down, bent double, bent over. She's greeting. She hides beneath the rock not wanting her dances to be known. Not wanting her words to be stolen. *Tears paper*. Between the drops of water, between the torrents. A woman lived in a village. She does not forget, running, leaving, moving. Digging holes and falling into them because they only have one eye. Half-visible, half spirit people.

I do not forget she was bewitched by these people, cursed, entranced, transfixed, and she followed them, but she was afraid. I think she was afraid and so she ran away again and never stayed to see what could happen. A woman told me this story. I do not forget. I can't forget. I can't remember. What would have happened if she had stayed? If I had stayed? If she had stayed in her house, if she had stayed under her rock, if she hadn't dived? If I hadn't left? Her skin was blue-black. Did she know? Why did they stone you? Tell me...

2. Storytelling.
3. Dombo.
4. Grandmother.
5. Border Jumping.
6. The Washing Line.
7. The Breakdown.
8. The House of Stone.



Figure 11 Dombo playing with her stones*



Figure 12 The Old Woman (Kgabi) walking around the set of Huroyi Hwangu*

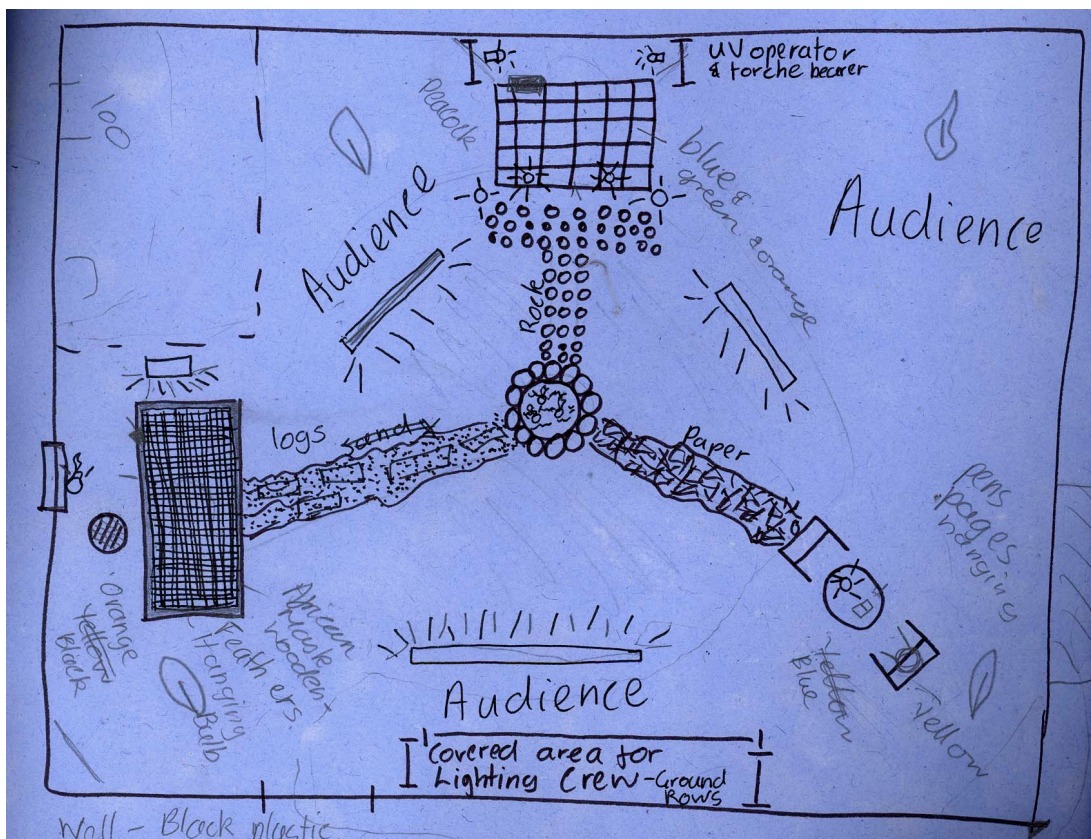


Figure 13 Drawing of the set of Huroyi Hwangu.



Figure 14 Dombo looking into the well*

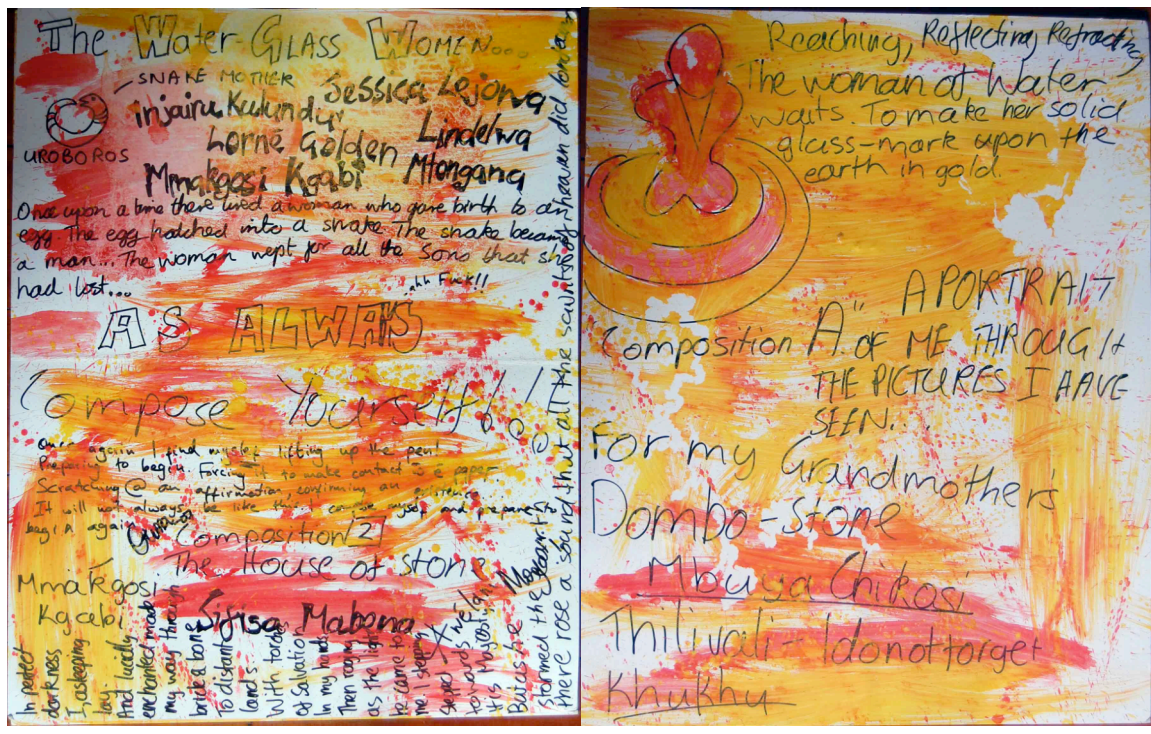


Figure 15 Dedication posters placed on the 'paper path' from the well to the writing desk



Figure 16 The Old Woman (Kgabi) lighting the lamp, and on top of the cage during the final monologue*



Figure 17 Washing off the makeup, the final monologue*

**Photographs in this section taken by Lauren Clifford-Holmes.*

APPENDIX IV: COMPOSITION Z – THE HOUSE OF STONE (2008)

CAST

Old Woman: Mmakgosi Kgabi

Performer/Puppeteer: Awelani Moyo

The Bird and the Grandmother character are both puppets.

TEXTS:

1. Introduction/entrance – *Audience enters behind Old Woman, from the fire.*
2. The Water-Glass Woman – *A masked Water-Glass Woman wearing a Mungwenda emerges from the bushes behind the amphitheatre seating. She carries a hurricane lamp in one hand and a glass container of water in the other. She moves, enacting a series of gestures with the water glass. She arrives at several empty glasses. She puts her lamp down and extinguishes it, then pours water from her container into the empty glasses. Each glass has a different food colouring and dilutes as it is filled. She leaves behind her container and begins to move towards the well, enacting a kind of dance. She falls over some branches and logs on the ground just as she reaches the well. The Water-Glass Woman sits up again, she is now directly opposite the Old Woman who continues her gestures and chanting. The Water-Glass Woman enacts a similar series of gestures and picks up the blue cloth left there by the Old Woman. She approaches the well and lifts the cloth up, then pushes it down into the water. The two women see each other for a brief moment. Both are startled, and the Water-Glass Woman runs behind the cage/backstage in fear, whilst the Old Woman begins to dance and cry out, moving backwards. She settles again on the ground closer to the audience, and beside her is the unlit hurricane lamp.*
3. Storytelling.
4. Dombo part 1 – *Playing. Dombo sees the audience and throws eggs at them.*
5. Storytelling.

BIRD: As always, it was pitifully hot in the faraway land of Eeinaa. NaiNai dived into the water to soothe her burning skin. The townspeople cried ‘the blue woman is in the water’. The People pummelled her with rocks.
6. Dombo part 2 – *Author interaction.*
7. Storytelling.

BIRD: As always, it was pitifully hot in the faraway land of Eeinaa. A great heat dried up the rivers and the seas. NaiNai dived and was swallowed up into the earth. It was hot in Eeinaa. The sand became a great glass. The townspeople raised NaiNai up to the heavens, but she fell to the earth and was shattered into a million tiny pieces.
8. Grandmother.
9. Border Jumping – *expanded to a journey around the space.*
10. The House of Stone – *during last part of Border Jumping scene with Thilivali in the cage.*
11. The Washing Line.
12. The Breakdown.
13. The Return – *The Old Woman emerges from the darkness. She is chanting and dancing, she hands Thilivali the Water Glass Woman’s mask. Thilivali takes the mask and puts it on again, she re-enacts the Water Glass Woman’s dance. She picks up the large container of water and goes to scoop out the drowned blue cloth from the well. She goes to the Author’s desk, where she takes back the eggshell and empties it into the well. The water now turns blue. She takes the container with the egg and cloth inside it to the well.*

She lies down in the traditional Venda way of showing respect. The Old Woman comes to her and takes the blue cloth out of the container. She dips it in the well and begins to wipe the blue makeup from Awelani's body. The Old Woman carries her on her back, and slowly exits from the performance space (left) as the 'tell me a story' refrain is heard for the last time.

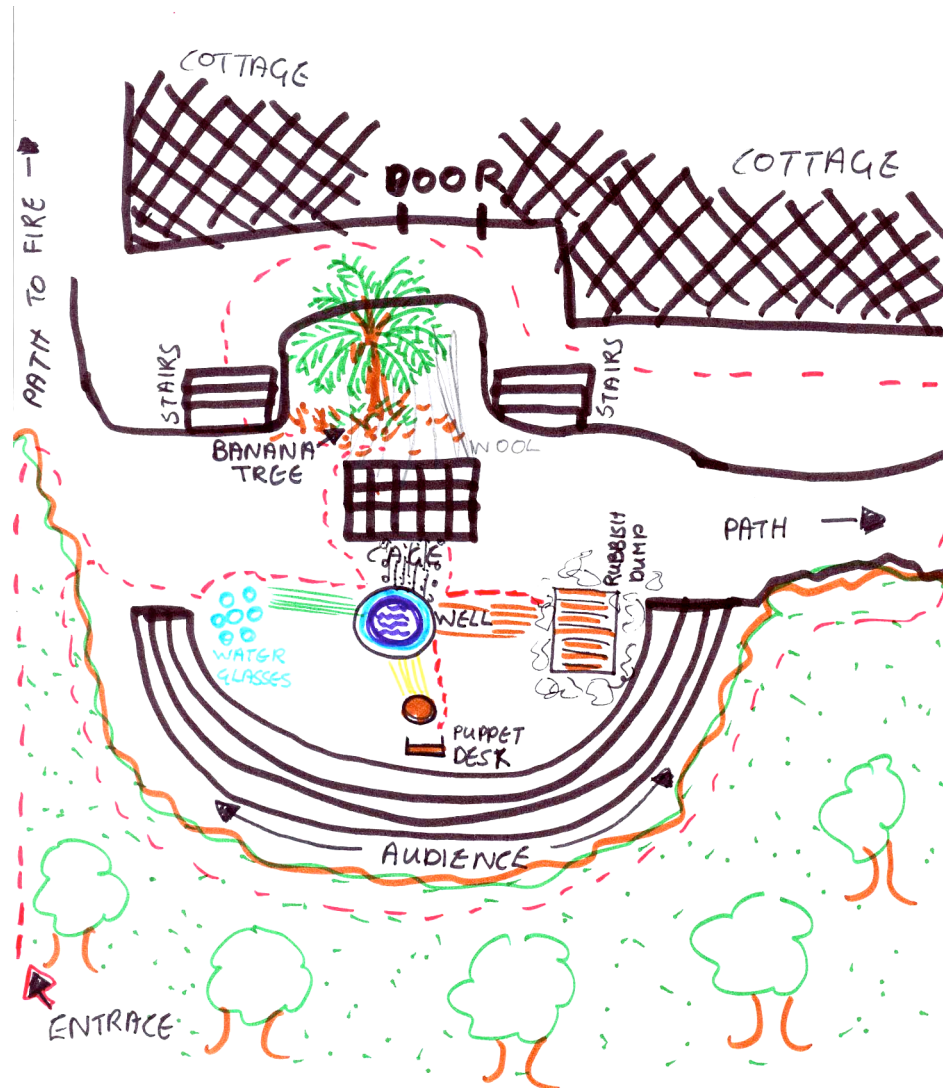


Figure 18 Drawing of the set of Composition Z. The red line indicates the journey of movement through the space from the performer's (Moyo's) entrance.

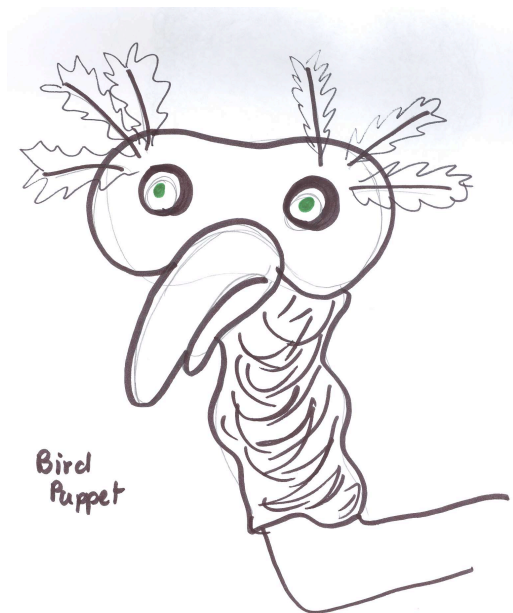


Figure 1 (left) Drawing of the Storytelling Bird hand-puppet.

Figure 2 (right) The poster for Composition Z



Figure 3. Drawings of NaiNai used in rehearsals for Compositions.

APPENDIX V: CHARACTERISTICS OF RITUAL AND THEATRE

1) *Richard Schechner's efficacy-entertainment continuum (1976: 207).*

EFFICACY	←————→	ENTERTAINMENT
(Ritual) results link to an absent Other abolishes time, symbolic time brings Other here performer possessed, in trance audience participates audience believes criticism forbidden collective creativity		(Theatre) fun only for those here emphasises now audience in the Other performer knows what he's doing audience watches audience appreciates criticism is encouraged individual creativity

2) *Victor Turner's definitions of the liminal and liminoid performance forms (1979: 492-3)**

LIMINAL	←————→	LIMINOID
(Ritual) collective tribal and agrarian society cyclical calendrical, biological, social structural performance intergrated into social process reflects collective experience over time shared symbols functional compulsory participation social status organic solidarity inversive, order		(Theatre) collective or individual complex/modern society intermittent within leisure sphere apart from social normality reflects individual experience psychological symbols recreational voluntary participation contract mechanical solidarity, subversive of mainstream

**This table is my own crude construction. Turner offers a much more detailed discussion of each point. I have presented his points in this format in order to draw comparisons between Schechner's and Turner's ideas.*