

STEPPING INTO HISTORY:

Biography as approaches to contemporary South African choreography
with specific reference to Bessie's Head (2000) and Miss Thandi (2002)

THESIS

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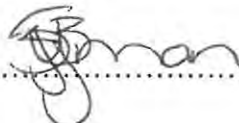
by

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UNDERTAKING

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work
and has not been submitted previously as a dissertation
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ABSTRACT

STEPPING INTO HISTORY: Biography as approaches to contemporary South African choreography with specific reference to Bessie's Head (2000) and Miss Thandi (2002)

This mini-thesis is located in historical discursive practices, choreographing history, biography as a source for making dance in South Africa and choreographic transformations in South African choreography since the 1994 democratic elections. Derridian concepts of deconstruction will be referenced in an attempt to focus the argument of this research, which comments on choreographic transformations since 1994, by subverting the influence of the 'violent hierarchies' enforced by the apartheid regime on South African cultural life and choreographic identity. The researcher draws on these considerations in order to explore the hybrid nature of South African choreography that has emerged since 1994.

Chapter one examines the fallacious nature of historical discourse through a consideration and application of Derrida's notions of deconstruction and fabrication. Chapter two explores the notion of choreographing history in theatre through a focus on the objective/subjective fallacy and the history of the body as a textual medium. Chapter three focuses the study specifically in biography as a discourse within the idea of theatre. This approach to biography can be encapsulated by the phrase 'telling lives'. This chapter also explores the relationship between the traditional binaries of writing as a purely cerebral act and choreography as a purely visceral experience. Chapter four brings the focus to the specific post-apartheid South African context. This chapter considers the hybrid forms of dance emerging in South Africa as well as the notion of protest in relation to theatre and dance. The final chapter is an investigation and analysis of two choreographic works created by South African choreographers since 1994 in relation to biography and concepts of deconstruction. These works are

Gary Gordon's Bessie's Head (2000) and Gregory Maqoma's Miss Thandi (2002). The focus of the analysis also reveals the inherent difficulty in objective interpretation, and considers the problematics of collaboration and autobiography when choreographing within a biographical context.

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Introduction

Modern Western logocentric thought [structure, order and teleos] presupposes a centre of meaning of some kind. This viewing of the world sets up a series of binary oppositions, or the notion that the 'self' can only generate meaning in terms of the 'other'. However, as of late there have been attempts to deconstruct these binaries and shift focus toward contextual/intertextual modes of representation. The influence of post-modern thought and democracy has either overtly or covertly affected current trends and thematic concerns among South Africa choreographers. The result is that questions surrounding the nature of history and biography have come to the fore in the latter part of the 20th century, not only within theatre discourse but also within South African culture as a whole.

In South Africa there has been a contentious debate surrounding the transformations in choreographic explorations since the 1994 democratic elections. Since the Truth and Reconciliation hearings of the mid-1990s there has been an interest among South African choreographers in history. Choreographers were in need of establishing social and artistic identities and submerged themselves in the South African landscape. However, it must be understood that this shift towards history as an approach to choreography is not specific to the South African context.

This thesis is to focus specifically on readings of history, notions of choreographing history, biographical histories/interpretation and transformations that have occurred in South African choreography since the 1994 democratic elections.

The first chapter of this thesis, *Plotting Histories*, will investigate some of the changing views on history as a discourse, both theoretical and performative.

History is to be explored as an intertextual, linguistic construct that is situated within the cultural hypothesis. This requires a close examination of the idea that history consists essentially of seeing the past through the eyes of the present. This is done so as to reveal how history as cultural practice has played a pivotal role in the development of understandings of the body as a 'writerly' medium. It is this process of interpretation that then becomes important in relating history to the creative processes of choreography.

In second chapter, *Historical canvases wrapping present bodies*, history is presented as a canvas that has numerous possibilities. An examination of the subjective/objective fallacy; or rather the idea that logocentricism dictates that the world be seen in terms of binary opposites, is pursued in order to consider the notion of choreographing history. The reasoning here is to lead to answers as to how meaning is generated within society and how and why choreographers consort with dead bodies. Susan Leigh Foster's, *Choreographing History* (1995) opens this inquiry with the suggestion that the historian is determined to trace and excavate the journey towards understanding present realities (the self) in terms of a past realities (the 'other'). These bodily writings are culturally defined as Foster suggests that the production of history is a physical endeavour.

In chapter three, *Tracing Narratives: Biographical Histories*, focus is drawn to the question as to what it means to tell the story of a life. Biography becomes the focus as it necessitates a process of contextual/intertextual/interpretive dialogue. In order to explore this, focus is drawn to the processes of interpretation and biography. Biography has its roots in *life*. *Life* denotes the biographical experiences of a named person. This chapter then attempts to examine the intimate relationship between biography and life thereby revealing the intertextual intimacy between life and death.

Chapter four, *Gloves on or off?*, provides an introduction to chapter five as it attempts to question the impact of fallacious history, choreographing history and

biography on South African choreography. This chapter also considers the notion of protest theatre and whether history has become our new enemy after apartheid. This chapter then examines the dynamic relationship between history and transformation, and considers the thematic/contextual/intertextual/choreographic shifts that have occurred in South African choreography since 1994.

The fifth chapter, *Remembering History/Choreographing Experience*, will consider the ways in which South African choreographers have attempted to utilise biography as a source in the creation of their works. This chapter does not attempt to draw generalised conclusions about the artistic ethos of the two choreographers under question, but rather attempts to focus the study of choreographing biographical histories within the specific South African and theoretical framework presented in the first four chapters. The selected works include: *Bessie's Head* (2000) choreographed by Gary Gordon and performed by members of the *First Physical Theatre Company* and *Miss Thandi* (2002) choreographed and performed by Gregory Maqoma of the *Vuyani Dance Project*. Due to the fact that a mini-thesis does not permit space for extensive analysis of these works, the argument will attempt to consider some of the problematics of interpretation within the post-modern paradigm, as well as, consider some of the transformations that have occurred in individual choreographic identity/content/form.

This thesis will attempt to locate biographical 'histories' as one of the driving forces within contemporary South African choreography. 'Histories' that provide potential inspirational sources and underpin transformation in the form and content of South African choreography.

Methodology and Research Procedures

The conceptual framework that has informed this mini-thesis has been influenced by the seeming objectivity inherent in historical documentation. These traditional views of history have undergone significant developments since the post-modern revolution. In this regard the contemporary focus of South African choreographers on recasting biographical histories has become of increasing interest. The research has drawn on varied perspectives including views offered by philosophy, anthropology and sociology¹.

The methodology and research procedures utilise perspectives offered by dance journalists, researchers and promoters. These research procedures are primarily concerned with the impact of history on contemporary choreography. These scholars provide critical insights into the relationship between choreography and history; both within international and localised contexts. These documents have provided critical insight into the emergence and realisation of the relationship between choreography and history within contemporary South African choreography, since 1994.

A critical interpretation of interviews and video footage of the two works under discussion has provided crucial primary source material for the focus of the thesis. Further primary source material includes numerous newspaper clippings and reviews by a variety of dance scholars and critics. The South African Theatre Journal has also provided valuable insight into the shifting views on South African theatre in general and choreography, both prior 1994 and post-1994.

¹ The reason these areas of enquiry have been followed is because the researcher read these subjects at undergraduate level at Rhodes University.

Historical documentation within South Africa has been dominated by the Western logocentric, white male, middle class view for centuries. The result is that this area of research has only recently emerged as a dominant field of representation. The consequence is thus a lack of localised academic scholarship and hence a lack of knowledge and understanding as to the potentiality of South African choreography and dance. My hope is that this mini-thesis will assist in documenting and generating critical awareness of dance research in South Africa, as well as, open a door for those who wish to explore the pursuing arguments further.

Chapter 1

Plotting Histories

Introduction

“The very attempt at definition furnishes ground for new conflicts. History is not a recipe book; past events are never replicated in the present in quite the same way. Historical events are infinitely variable and their interpretations are a constantly shifting process...There are no certainties to be found in the past.

Gerda Lerner, Why History Matters: Life and Thought. [New York, 1998], p. 199.

The notion of history is not as simplistic as it seems. History’s multifarious nature is alluded to with the analogy of the ‘recipe book’ (Ibid). This analogy suggests that there is no one system of interpretation with which the past can be prepared in order to produce an exclusive history every time it is written. Analogous to this position is the “common-sense view” (Carr, 1961, p. 3), which defines history as a corpus of ascertained facts; these are available to the historian in documents and other manuscripts². “The historian collects them, takes them home and cooks and serves them in whatever style appears to him” (Ibid).

² Hegel advocated that all cultures are striving through time toward a single truth, however post-modern thought (and I’m sure Hegel would have recognised it to) has recognised the rift between movement and the actual diversity of human choices. The idea here is not to set out on a Free will/Determinism debate that a good friend, Mr Daniel Buckland, would encourage me to embark on, but rather to show that culture is authoritively the realm not of accidental but of fundamental difference. It almost seems impossible, in consideration of this, not to agree with Jacques Derrida’s assertion that monism remains our deepest metaphysical pathos.

Many views on the nature of 'history', including those mentioned, necessitate history as an impression of past events. However, history is not a product for consumption, but rather presents a complex plethora of sensual possibilities. This shift from modernist to postmodernist understandings of 'history' has resulted in ambiguity and uncertainty. For example if you were to enquire among your friends as to a definition of history you would be confronted with a multiplicity of meanings and understandings. From 'history is a factual account of past events' to 'history is the story of the past' to 'history is a subjective discourse of a past reality'³.

However, these views are not erroneous, for history has been understood by *many* to be a factual account of past events, including many of the great philosophers of the essentialist tradition (Wood and Foster, 1997, pp. 184-187). Nonetheless, the nature of history has come under much criticism of late with the advent of post-modern theory. Wood and Foster (1997) suggests that the idea of trying 'to get to know how the machinery of history works', has lost its meaning. This notion may be explained with the following analogy,

"Compare history to a tree. The essentialist tradition within Western historiography focused the attention of historians on the trunk of the tree...[post-modern thought has resulted in] that the essence is not situated in the branches, nor in the trunk, but in the leaves of the historical tree...What remains now for Western historiography is to gather the leaves...and to study them independently of their origins..." (Wood and Foster, 1997, pp. 186 – 187).

However, these suggestions present a set of uncertainties as to the essence of history. The notion that arises out of this uncertainty relates directly to history's ever-changing capacity. As Goethe (in Teggart, 1962) remarks, "History must from time to time be rewritten, not because many new facts have been discovered, but because new aspects come into view..." The suggestion here, which originated almost half a century ago, is that discourse (in this case, history) needs to mould to the times in which it is written.

³ These ideas on history are taken from discussions held with friends, lecturers and family.

The most striking consensus in all these understandings is the idea that history and the past are essentially different areas of inquiry. What this intimates is that our notions of terms such as history are culturally defined and are characterised by our specific relation to our environment (social/political/geographical/theoretical). Jenkins (1991) considers the implications of this concept:

“...history is one of a series of discourses about the world. These discourses do not create the world but they do appropriate it and give it all the meanings it has. That bit of the world which is history’s object of enquiry is the past”(p. 5).

1.1 Deconstructing ‘violent hierarchies’

In order to locate these concepts of history within theoretical discourse and within theatre (both performative and theoretical) it is important to consider Jacques Derrida’s notion of *deconstruction*. *Deconstruction* in its simplest form advocates the denial of structure, however, it is not destructive (Degenaar, 1986).

“Deconstruction is indebted to Nietzsche for teaching the mind how to dance by acknowledging the metaphorical power of language and the joyful affirmation of the play of the world” (Ibid, p.81).

Derrida contends that structure presupposes a centre of meaning of some kind. “People desire a centre because it guarantees *being as presence*” (Selden, 1989). Presence is closely related to *logocentricism* because both represent the illusion that it is possible to bypass language and arrive at something which is present in man and therefore guarantees certainty (Degenaar, 1986). This ‘modernist’ obsession, with the centre of being, stems from the fear of the denial of the ‘self’ and the world. The logocentric worldview has developed a number of terms, which operate as centering principles: being, essence, substance, truth, form, beginning, end, and so forth⁴. Attention to this ‘*logos*’ is proposed by both

⁴ These centering principles have been assimilated from Degenaar (1986) and Selden (1989).

Seldon (1989), and Gordon and Tang (2002) when they make reference to the opening lines of the New Testament, “In the beginning was the word.”

“Being the origin of all things, the ‘Word’ underwrites the full presence of the world; everything is the effect of this one cause. Even though the Bible is written, God’s word is essentially spoken. A spoken word, emitted from a living body appears to be closer to an originating thought than a written word.” (Seldon, 1989, p. 88)

Deconstruction rids one of the views of language as a ‘homogenous continuum of meanings’ (Degenaar, 1986, p.90). Derrida argues that this privileging of speech over writing is a core feature of logocentrism⁵. Degenaar explains this relationship as follows,

“Traditional binary oppositions in Western thinking are the following: speech/writing, truth/fiction, male/female, signified/signifier, presence/absence, reality/appearance. These hierarchical oppositions in which the first term is given priority over the second term are said to be at the heart of logocentrism which describes the nature of Western thinking” (p. 93).

It is this idea that leads Derrida to initiating the phrase ‘violent hierarchy’, which refers to the coupling of ‘writing’ and ‘speech’. However, Allsopp (1997) suggests that Derrida provides a theoretical framework that prioritises writing over speech. On the contrary traditional, essentialist Western Philosophy has positioned speech over writing. The reason for this is that ‘speech’ retains presence, as “it incarnates...the speaker’s soul” (Seldon, 1989). This presence is often seen to be lacking in writing. However, this hierarchy can easily be undone. This is achieved when we begin to see that both speech and writing share certain ‘writerly’ characteristics: “both are signifying processes which lack presence” (Ibid). At the same time it is near impossible to avoid the fact that writing’s object of enquiry is speech. Be this as it may Derrida advocates that ‘speech is a species of writing’.

⁵ Lehmann (1997) says of *logocentrism* that it, “is about structure, order and teleos, not simply about the word” (p. 56)

“...Nietzsche and Freud have revolutionised thinking by radically questioning the validity of these hierarchies...Derrida is intent on exposing all hierarchies...in order to bring to light the hidden assumptions and to involve man in the limits of his own thinking” (Degenaar, 1986, pp. 93-94).

‘Writing’ in this sense then does not merely lend itself to the ordering of words on a page, or in a further sense, as the ordering of movement on bodies⁶, but rather as “declaring itself the environment in which dramatic structure is situated” (Fuchs in Allsopp, 1997). Rousseau (in Degenaar, 1986) would argue that writing supplements speech or ‘takes the place of’ speech, this sentiment is echoed by Artaud (in Allsopp, 1997) in his belief that the presence of writing extends rather than closes down possibilities of theatre.

Derrida not only shows that writing supplements speech but also takes the place of speech, ‘because speech is always already written’ (Seldon, 1989). Writing can give rise to representations “both abstract and realist, both ambiguous and lucid” and thus becomes a trace/inscription rather than transcription/description (Allsopp, 1997). Seldon then concludes, “all human activity involves this supplementary” (Ibid). It is this conclusion that becomes valuable on the quest into understanding the notion of history (writing) and the past (speech). In order to arrive at valuable insights into this area of study, let us for the moment return our focus to the relationship between history and the past.

1.2. Views on History

“History – what does that word mean? Sometimes it’s used as a feeble synonym for the past, for all that happened prior to a thing’s nowness. Sometimes it connotes the present-in-the-making. Sometimes it stands for longstanding authentications. Sometimes it flexes as a rubric, embracing biography, chronology, all the kinds of works for which dance writers have claimed the name history. Seldom is it invoked

⁶ It may even be suggested that movement is written on bodies. For example, Balanchine suggested that he wrote his ballets.

to signal its professional or academic conception: the study of change or process through time" (Foster, 1996, p. xii).

History, in a narrow sense, is the science of the human past, as it is considered to be a set of facts that have been collected, analysed and interpreted empirically. However, as mentioned previously an ambiguity arises in attempting to investigate the distinction between 'past' and 'history'. What history is, what it is about, and what its purpose is, are questions that seem appropriate to any scholar approaching this area of study. The idea that Jenkins (1991) brings to the fore is that the past and history are two distinctly separate areas of study. The discourse of history is a special form of thought, research or inquiry (Collingwood, 1946) and is different to that which it discourses about (the past). In the past few decades, philosophers of history have challenged the idea as to whether or not history can provide a true and objective account of the past.

History, like any science, is reliant on the interpretation of empirical evidence. However, because the interpretations are made in the minds of the historians, which are subject to specific cultural, social, linguistic and historical contexts, it then seems evident that the 'history', which is documented, is a subjective one (MacCullagh, 1998). As a subjective discourse, 'history' then seems to implode the traditional boundaries of science. The reason for this, just to clarify for a moment, is that empiricism is based on experience. Within a 'scientific lived experience'⁷ the facts of empirical evidence are outside the agent experiencing, on the other hand, within an abstracted subjective form, such as history (with which all human beings have an association; because we cannot deny that each of us has a past), empirical evidence is based on a personal/emotional/spiritual connection to the historical 'facts'.

⁷ An example of this kind of inquiry is: the sun rose today, it rose yesterday and the day before that. I can therefore empirically assign that the sun will rise tomorrow. There are many learnt empirical experiences like this one, ones that are familiar and aren't based on manuscripted or documented facts.

Jenkins (1991) too denies the objectivity of history:

“...the historian’s viewpoint and predilections still shape the choice of historical materials, and our own personal constructs determine what we make of them. The past that we ‘know’ is always contingent upon our own views, our own ‘present’...Epistemology shows that we can never really know the past; that the gap⁸ between the past and history is an ontological⁹ one, that is, in the very nature of things such that no amount of epistemological effort can bridge it” (pp. 12, 19).

Jenkins (1991) continues with the idea that, “History (historiography) is an intertextual, linguistic construct.” The idea here is that the past *has* happened but in order for humans to talk of the past *now* we require a means to discourse about it: ‘history’. According to Munslow (1997), ‘history’ is best understood as a, “cultural product existing *within* society, and as a part of the historical process, rather than an objective methodology and commentary *outside* of society” (pp. 9 – 10). The most important point raised by Munslow here is the idea that history is a cultural product. This thought is clarified by Lerner (1997) in the suggestion that,

“All human beings are practicing historians...We stress different events as having been decisive at different times in our life history and, as we do so, we give those events new meanings...What we remember, what we stress as significant, and what we omit of our past defines our present” (Lerner, 1997, p. 199).

This quotation allows an understanding into the idea that because each of us has lived a ‘past’ that we are each then an expert in the field of interpretation of

⁸ This notion of the ‘gap’ or ‘in-between’ spaces will be discussed later, but for a greater understanding of this idea refer to Homi Bhabha *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994.

⁹ The branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of being and first principles. Davis, W.A. *The Act of Interpretation* (1978), suggests that, “The discovery that elaborate ontological assumptions underlie not only critical theory but shape the most minute perceptions critics achieve in practice would extend our a priori knowledge of criticism in many valuable directions” (p. 59). Davis’ suggestion here is that such an inquiry (an ontological one) should not be regarded as a way to solve or eliminate our problems. Even if we were to discover some synthesis or truth, there is no reason to assume that such a system would resolve the queries that have been uncovered. There is no reason either a priori or on historical grounds, that there is one thing that all human beings do or must try to do.

historical fact. The reason for this is that histories reflect our own position in time, “history consists essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present” (Carr, 1961, p. 15). The theory then becomes that history is not a discourse, which has as its focus a recording of the facts of the past, but rather as a discourse that has as its prime objective the evaluation of these ‘facts’. If we consider both Lerner and Carr’s arguments then the next set of inquiry we are faced with is, which facts do we forward and which facts do we eliminate? Ang (1996) argues that the foundational theoretical questions are not only “which stories to tell, but also who the ‘I’ is who writes...what are my changing kinds of representational order?”

The answers to such and related questions are found directly within history’s connection to the cultural hypothesis. This idea is diametrically related to Jenkins’ view that history is a linguistic construct. The notion of any culture may be considered as two-fold: it is both an archive (a shifting discipline) and agentive (the means by which culture is performed and resignified). It is important to ponder this point of view for just a moment. The performance of ‘archive’ (theory) is always structured under specific conditions: contextually and intertextually (Tulloch, 1999). However, a further problem arises when considering the ‘fact’ of ‘archive’. Put more crudely, what is meant by historical fact?

“It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context” (Carr, 1961, p. 5).

It has been argued that history is necessarily an interpretation of facts¹⁰. White (1978) and Lerner (1997) both argue that the historian must interpret/reconstruct the facts of the past. The reasons provided by White are: “On the one hand there are always more facts in the record than the historian can include in his narrative

¹⁰ In order to give the reader insight into the development of this argument I feel it important at this point to provide an understanding of interpretation: “Function, structure, and purpose, in that order, become the primary categories of interpretation.” (Davis, 1978, p. 2)

presentation,” and on the other hand the historian must fill in the gaps of the information in the historical ‘jigsaw puzzle’¹¹ based on inference and speculation.

“... ‘all history is the history of thought’, and ‘history is the re-enactment in the historian’s mind of the thought whose history he is studying’[Collingwood, 1933]. The reconstitution of the past in the historian’s mind is dependent on empirical evidence. But it is not itself an empirical process, and cannot consist in a mere recital of facts. On the contrary, the process of reconstitution governs the selection and interpretation of facts: this indeed is what makes them historical facts. ‘History’, says Professor Oakeshott, ‘is the historian’s experience. It is ‘made’ by nobody save the historian: to write history is the only way of making it” (Oakeshott and Collingwood in Carr, 1961, p. 16).

It then seems plausible to suggest that history be approached from two different arenas: firstly as an academic discourse and secondly as a social practice. As an academic (literary) discourse, history’s object of enquiry is the past. As a social practice (as in theatre) the environment in which it exists governs history. This seems credible in that language determines the means by which we think, interpret, and analyse. History plays an important role in society as it provides a sense of meaning to a seemingly meaningless existence. If we are able to consider our *present* actions in terms of *past* events or our *present* events in terms of *past* actions, it provides a sense of community and wholeness with the world in which we live. Juanita Finestone in her paper “*Memory in Translation*” (2002) further substantiates this idea when she suggests that,

“...often this history tells us more about the historians than past events. We begin to understand that writing history is always the history of the present rather than documented chronological contexts that attempt to narrate the past.”¹²

¹¹ The notion of history as a ‘jigsaw puzzle’ is taken from E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (1961). “It never occurred to me to enquire by what accident or process of attrition that minute selection of facts, out of all the myriad facts that must have once been known to somebody, had survived to become the facts of history. I suspect that even today one of the fascinations of ancient and mediaeval history is that it gives us the illusion of having all the facts at our disposal within a manageable compass: the nagging distinction between the facts of history and other facts about the past vanish because the few known facts are all facts of history. As Bury who had worked in both periods said, ‘the records of ancient and mediaeval history are starved with lacunae’. History has been called and enormous jig-saw with a lot of missing parts.” J. B. Bury is cited from *Selected Essays* (1930), p. 52.

However, even history as a social practice is governed by subjective realities. Each experience subjugates past events. The past thus becomes eternally open to interpretations, whereas history is apparently closed. Jenkins (1999) further argues that the construction of history as discourse is merely a means whereby [wo]mankind is able to generate meaning for themselves,

“...the *idea* of the historical past can thus be considered as just one more example of the many imaginaries we have fabricated to help us make sense of the apparent senselessness of existence and to protect us from the possible trauma occasioned by having to face radical finitude” (p. 14).

In considering the argument here it then seems that the notions of both history and the past are imagined. However, Jenkins considers the fact that the past did actually happen, and in that sense it cannot be imagined. Nonetheless the past is imagined in the sense that the historical meanings and understandings it has been considered to have for us are dictated by the semantic authorities of the present. This idea suggests to us that the ‘facts’ of the past are able to be manipulated endlessly to fulfil the role of contemporary ‘isms’ – post modernism, structuralism, Marxism, feminism, racism, empiricism, sexism. The ‘fabrication’ of the historical past is thus under question here. This notion of fabricating histories is excavated by Professor Gary Gordon and Acty Tang in their paper “*Navigations and Fabrications*” (2002). Gordon and Tang consider responses to two of the *First Physical Theatre Company’s* works, Surround Her with Water: An Epiphany (1992) and Bessie’s Head (2000). Bessie’s Head is a,

“...documentary danceplay that dissects the events surrounding that birth of the writer born in South Africa, Bessie Head. Facts and stories...dance and drama...words and songs...collude in this interior viewing of an artist’s private domain” (Gordon, March 2000)

¹² This idea is also explored by Acty Tang, “Physical Theatre as Historiography: Corporeality and Intertextuality in the transformation of personal past a re-enactment of the danceplay *And the empty space of his shadow*” (Spring, 2001). “Historiography...thus exhibits an awareness of its construction as a narrative or discourse, and resonates with similar self-reflexivity in literature and theatre in the twentieth century. This self-reflexive act of narration reveals the present, and its attitudes towards and its methods of appropriating the past, more than revealing the past itself.”

A critic responded to the documentary danceplay Bessie's Head as follows (translation by authors) "It is regrettable that many of the less informed members of the audience, after the show, kept asking the same questions that they had when they arrived: Who on earth was Bessie Head?" (Muller, 2000). In comparison another critic, reviewing Surround Her with Water was convinced it was a true story. However, the work was the fictitious creation of a 'biography'.

Gordon and Tang (2002) consider the irony of this as follows, "We have a need to 'know the truth', to 'have clarity', to have a form of omniscience, to be provided with a logical succession of information that convinces us, that forms the proof of reality" (p. 30). This need to know against the backdrop of what constitutes fiction and reality sets up another uncertainty/grey area. The uncertainty that is brought to mind is the question as to where fact and fiction collude. We know now (in 2003) that histories are interpretations that become shadows of the past. Degenaar (1986) articulates this as follows,

"All discourse is historically conditioned....history, however, should not be viewed as a ground of meaning, [it is not] a privileged authority which determines meaning. It is itself part of a general text that we are continually interpreting and re-interpreting" (pp. 97-98).

Homi Bhabha (1994) considers this grey area [between past and history, imaginaries and realities] as the most crucial and suggests that these 'in-between' spaces provide the landscape for specifying strategies of 'selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity...the act of defining society itself" (pp. 1-2). Loren Kruger (1999) suggests that,

"people in society are their own cultural agents, transforming those situations by acting *on* and acting *in* them, in short, by performing them... The significance and even the audience's *perception* of cultural practice as culture arises out of the place and occasion, rather than the form, of its performance. This emphasis on performance and participation in diverse cultural practices as rather than 'extension' of cultural property allows us to review drama as cultural practice....By stressing the historical and social specificity ...of cultural practice...it challenges the very commonplace that has excluded drama..." (pp, 56-57)

‘In-between’ spaces provide scope into who we are, and why we behave the way we do. Gordon and Tang (2002) suggest that this pursuit of history is a corporeal act. Corporeal acts are directly linked to ‘proprioception’ which Steinman (1985) defines as “how we sense ourselves”. Foster (1996) defines corporeal acts as follows,

“Corporealities seeks to vivify the study of bodies through a consideration of bodily reality, not as natural or absolute given but as a tangible and substantial category of cultural experience.” (p. xi)

Both Bhabha (1994) and Gordon and Tang (2002) tend towards the idea that what becomes important is the in-between spaces in which we exist. What this then suggests is that the historical past and the historical present are subjugated by experience in the sense that empiricism celebrates truth/validity. However, the grey area set up by Bhabha and the ‘corporeal acts’ acts suggested by Foster lend themselves towards the notion of the *textual landscape* (Lehmann, 1997) or within theatre the idea of ‘performing culture’ (Tulloch, 1999).

1.3 Why should we worry new meanings for “history”?¹³

Foster (1996) suggests that the reason to ‘worry new meanings’ is induced by the body.

“Postmodern performances of bodies: cross-discipline fascination with the body as discourse; theoretical de-stabilizations of the grounds and identities in which bodies have moved. Long absent from analysis, the body looms open – open to theorizing, historicizing, interpretation. It is present that for dance demands a past to be wrought through the makings of histories. Dance must consider its constructions, its changes through time, its presents” (Ibid, p. xiii).

History as cultural practice has played a pivotal role in the development of understandings of the body as a ‘writerly’ medium. By extending our studies of

¹³ Taken from Foster (1996, p. xii).

historical narratives we are able to situate bodily 'texts' within contemporary cultural practice. Desmond (1997) asserts, "...we can further our understandings of how social identities are signalled, formed, and negotiated through bodily movement." The idea here is that the body has been marginalized in contemporary society. The reason for this is that the modern world is dominated by logocentrism; the belief in a binary system. However, as of late, especially within South Africa, the body has regained its importance. This idea is advocated by Mark Fleishman (1997),

"In South African theatre...the body is not simply a vehicle for the embodiment of the text; it serves as part of the text in its own right. The physical body in South African theatre is a source of primary meaning which constantly challenges the hegemony of the written word in the meaning making process"

This renewed emphasis on the body, according to Flockemann (2001) could be seen as indicative of the processes of transformation, "involving here the 'unlearning' of previously learned social and racial identities/habits", but perhaps also pointing to the possibilities of 'speaking differently'. The body is able to subvert and satirise aspects of society, which construct this 'social body'. The ideas presented here are directly linked to Derrida's deconstruction. The body as a system constitutes its own language that is socially constructed. However, in breaking the codified binaries inherent in the social body and reflecting on the historical social body, contemporary society is able to re-invent the body's text. The body is able to access a memory, a time before language intervenes, before conscription of identity/purpose/intent.

"...we begin to appreciate that the body has a mind of its own. The body becomes historiography in motion. No textual construction of history can exhaust what the body remembers. And it is up to us to embody this unknown through the stains of memory" (Finestone, 2002, p. 13).

Finestone's observation becomes increasingly important as it paves the way for an understanding into the dynamic relationship between history and choreography. History provides us with no singular 'objective' truth about the past. Rather history becomes an intertextual, cross-referential, interpretive

observation of the myriad of 'facts' from the past. It is this process of interpretation that then becomes important in relating history to the creative processes of choreography. The transient nature of dance, the past and the body all collude in order to create an intertextual, textual landscape that the choreographer dialogues with. This is evident particularly in the South African context where our documented history has been questioned since the 1994 Democratic elections. South Africans, in this case South African choreographers, are now attempting to re-define the past, and in turn re-shape the future.

Chapter 2

Historical Canvases Wrapping Present Bodies

Introduction

“If we start by moving, by thinking through moving, and by living through moving, we’ll arrive to that disturbing vision: that the predicament of dance is to be an art of erasure. Dance always vanishes in front of our eyes in order to create a new past. The dance exists ultimately as a mnemonic imprint of what had just lived there.”

Andre Lepecki, (1996) “Embracing the Stain: Notes on the time of dance”, Performance Research, 1(1).

The dance like the past is ephemeral in nature. However, history the hard copy of the past is a fixed point of reference. Lerner (1997) suggests that this documented account of the past is “all form and no content”. The past, unlike history, is a jumble of events. Events do not follow sequentially. This idea can be explained as follows:

History is a canvas. The artist approaches a blank canvas and is able to interpret an event, an image (mental or physical) in whatever means he/she chooses, using any number of brush strokes and colour. He/she places the canvas on an easel at any point in the studio that he/she chooses; he/she dictates the light of the room so as to suit his temperament, as well as, the climate. The rendition may be expressionist, impressionist, neo-classic,

cubist, surrealist, and so forth, dependent on the artist's chosen style of interest. The artist continues through a process of shading, applying lowlights then highlights, he/she chooses one image and re-creates it in his/her own image, starting with what fascinates him/her most, first. However, as the artist continues creating the image it moves beyond a point of erasure, for as a line is drawn, a perspective encouraged, the image grows more and more lucid. This image will live on canvas for eternity. He/she immortalises the image¹⁴.

The above analogy links well with the notion of 'fabrication' introduced by Gordon and Tang (2002) at the beginning of their paper, "*Navigations and Fabrications*". The idea presented is that fabrication results in no discernible beginnings or endings. This ambiguity in the processes of writing the dance and writing the past involve a transient response to the object. The moment of production thus also becomes the moment of reception. What is important to note here is that with regards 'choreographing history' it then becomes evident that choreography's point of reference is the hard copy of the past: history. Because the past is ephemeral, transient, short-lived, momentary, the choreographer then has to draw on the subjective interpretations supplied by researchers and historians. The idea here is that the choreographer making the dance or the historian writing the past is open to a field of representation: a representation that is directly linked to a fascination with 'otherness': An 'other' time/place/person/moment/thought (Hall, 1997)¹⁵.

¹⁴ These ideas are taken from Edel (in Pachter, 1981). For more on the process of expression consult David Best's *Expression in Movement and the Arts: A Philosophical Enquiry*. Lepus Books, 1974.

¹⁵ The notion of 'otherness' is captured in Stewart Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage, 1997.

2.1 The Objective/Subjective Fallacy

As is now evident, the process of writing history is a subjective process. The researcher/historian chooses and produces topics that are determined by cultural, social and pre-academic practices. This notion sets up what Gottschild (in Desmond, 1997) calls the subjective/objective fallacy; or rather the idea that logocentricism dictates that the world be seen in terms of binary opposites, which are non-relational entities. However, be this as it may, the notion of binary oppositions neglects to recognise the interchange that occurs between the one end of the binary spectrum and the other. What we have failed to realise is that these oppositions are only definable in relation to each other. We only know *bad* in terms of *good*, *poor* in terms of *rich*, *black* in terms of *white*, the *past* in terms of the *present*¹⁶. This idea draws us back to Derrida and another concept, that of *differance*. Derrida (1981) explains this notion as follows:

“The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present” (p. 26)¹⁷.

[Wo]mankind is identified by placing itself in opposition to the ‘otherness’ of the known self. The question that now arises on the journey into an understanding of ‘choreographing history’ is; why is difference so compelling a theme? The answer is four-fold and lies in the phenomena of linguistics, anthropology and psychoanalysis and points to an acceptance of binary oppositions. Hall (1997) investigates these in Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices:

¹⁶ Valerie Preston-Dunlop is helpful on this issue. For example when approaching Rudolf Laban’s motion factors: no longer is reference made to ‘sudden’ or ‘slow’, but speed exists on the continuum of time.

¹⁷ Derrida’s ideas are discussed more in-depth in J. Degenaar’s Art and the Meaning of Life. University of Cape Town Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, 1986.

1. Firstly, 'difference' matters because it is essential to meaning, without it meaning could not exist. Saussure argues that meaning is relational, the idea here is that it is the difference between language structures [like good/bad, rich/poor, black/white, past/present] that signify and thus carry meaning. Meaning depends on the difference between opposites¹⁸.
2. Secondly, everything we say and mean is modified by the interaction and interplay with another person [or time]. The argument here is that difference is required because we can only construct meaning through a dialogue with the 'other'. The 'other' is thus essential to the generating of meaning.
3. Thirdly, a culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The marking of 'difference' is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture. Binary oppositions are crucial for all classification, because one must establish a clear difference between things in order to classify them.
4. Lastly, the 'other' is fundamental to the psychological constitution of the self¹⁹.

Kristeva (in Hall, 1997) suggests that what these views encourage is a process of purification. To gain some clarity on this idea let us consider the argument for a moment:

"Symbolic boundaries keep the categories 'pure', giving cultures their unique meaning and identity. What unsettles culture is 'matter out of place' – the breaking of our own unwritten rules and codes. Dirt in the garden is fine, but dirt in one's bedroom is 'matter out of place' – a sign of pollution, of symbolic boundaries being transgressed, of taboos broken. What we do with 'matter out of place' is to sweep it

¹⁸ Hall here makes clear reference to cultural conditioning, masculine vs. feminine, British vs. alien. The idea here is that we classify ourselves in terms of what the self is not.

¹⁹ For more on the Psychological aspects of self look to the work of Sigmund Freud. Especially Freud's views on the formation of sexual identity.

up, throw it out, restore the place to order, bring back the normal state of affairs” (Hall on Kristeva, 1997, p. 236).

The views presented by Hall and Kristeva then suggest that cultural meaning is generated through symbolic boundaries. These views in conjunction with the arguments from linguistics, anthropology and psychology, although seemingly disparate, are not mutually exclusive. They each offer a rationale into an understanding of the role of ‘otherness’. Gilman (in Hall, 1997) suggests that the world is a mere extension of the self, and even though there are no physical lines that separate the self and ‘other’ that an imaginary line needs to be drawn in order to maintain the illusion of the absolute difference between self and ‘other’.

Foster (1995) explains the role of the researcher in similar terms.

“...The historian’s body wants to consort with dead bodies, wants to know from them: What must it have felt like to move among those things, in those patterns, desiring those proficiencies, being beheld from those vantage points? Moving or being moved by those other bodies? An historian’s body wants to inhabit these vanished bodies for specific reasons. It wants to know where it stands, how it came to stand there, what its options for moving might be. It wants those dead bodies to lend a hand in deciphering its own present predicaments and in staging some future possibilities.” (Pg. 6)

What Foster points to here is that the historian is determined in the journey to understanding present realities (the self) in terms of a past reality (the ‘other’). The fact that we as a culture have made such a big deal of the oppositional nature of binary concepts, disregarding the symbiotic relation of opposites determining each other, “says a lot about how we perceive, what we value or devalue, what we do and how we do it” (Gottschild in Desmond, 1997). However, from some process of ‘lived research’ we might infer ideologies about kinaesthetic and affective ways of knowing. It is established that, no matter what we do, the world is seen from specific, individual, historical, socio-cultural, economic, and political conditions. The only means by which we are able to

move beyond this process is to examine the linguistic methodologies versus the personal ideologies employed.

The importance of language has already been itemised as one of the major reflectors of academic discourse. The reason for this is that language holds a mirror to the world in which we live and in turn it patterns our thought structures. However, language has for centuries been used as an intercultural weapon. The reason that language has warranted so much power over the marginalized is the fact that it negates the world of experience. Language, like science, follows stringent structures determined by the modern world. This world attempts to maintain a sense of order, the Apollonian myth, in order to maintain itself. However, Nietzsche (1969) suggests that, "One must have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star". The suggestion here is a return to the world of the experiential in order to create a world of symbols that unify man with reality²⁰.

In the 1930's Antonin Artaud revolutionised the world of theatre with the introduction of concepts on language in theatre. Artaud's²¹ view was that the theatre of authors (of language) is the fundamental source of the death of the theatre. Artaud suggests that the 'sacred theatre' should replace the dead theatre of representation,

"The true purpose of the theatre is to create Myths, to express life in its immense, universal aspect, and from that life to extract images in which we find pleasure in discovering ourselves.... May it free us, in a Myth in which we have sacrificed our little human individuality, like Personages out of the Past, with powers rediscovered in the Past" (in Silverman, 1990, p. 142).

Gottschild proposes that in order to avoid this dichotomy (that of linguistic versus personal ideology) that the focus should remain on the experiential nature of the world. The reason for this is that experience requires a variety of

²⁰ For more insight into these ideas consult Frederick Nietzsche's Thus Spoke Zarathustra and Twilight of the Idols. New York: The Viking Press, 1969.

²¹ Also refer to Antonin Artaud's The Theatre and its Double. Calder and Boyars Limited, 1974.

investigative tools in order to create subjective understandings of the world. The fields of science and language dictate that the world is and always will be a certain way. And hence there is suspicion that our, "In the beginning was the Word" logocentric worldview has prejudiced our perception of all cultural systems (Polhemus in Thomas, 1993).

This notion shows the importance of following the relativity of the subjective/objective fallacy; and thus the idea that it all depends through what eyes we look at the world as to what we will see and what we will portray to culture at large. Or rather the way in which forces, movements, motifs, trends, languages of previous and contemporary societies influence us, live within and around us, and constitute the threads with which we weave our 'new' patterns (Gottschild in Desmond, 1997). These patterns are the anonymous, unauthored codes of a given culture. This leads to the idea that 'all texts are intertexts'. What this implies is that there is nothing new under the sun, only variations on prior patterns and processes assimilated and reconfigured in any present moment. Every culture is then panoply of quotations from a wide spectrum of past and present conditioning forces.

2.2 Some Views on 'Choreographing History'

In focussing on historical bodies we open up the studies on 'bodily texts' and how these shape identities. The notion of 'choreographing history' suggests that all bodily actions may be referred to as 'bodily writings' because they have all grown out of cultural practices (Foster, 1995). The idea here is that every gesture, movement, glance is culturally defined. These cultural practices construct corporeal meaning in the sense that each of the body's moves traces the physical fact of movement. Foster suggests that a 'nonnatural relationship develops between physicality and referentiality'; meaning is thus generated

through the physical and verbal colliding. This may be taken further to the objective/subjective, as well as, the Apollonian/Dionysian dualities colliding.

Each 'bodily writing' is defined through an interchange between 'language context' and 'physical action'. Polhemus (in Thomas, 1993) suggests that we should celebrate the physical as it exceeds the limits of verbal culture. The idea here is that the body and its 'natural' behaviour are the primary source of meaning making and becomes our first object of encounter before the introduction of the 'Word'. Language and the physical collude in a 'present' moment (a moment of being), the exact moment of doing. However, be this as it may, these movements are historically prescribed. Historical bodies create physical imports that continually transform this 'nonnatural' meaning, and consequently continuity is prescribed through the comparisons between past and present action/reaction.

Foster (1995) suggests that the production of history is a physical endeavour,

"Once the historian's body recognizes value in kinaesthesia, it cannot dis-animate the physical action of past bodies it has begun to sense" (p. 7)

If writing bodies require a proprioceptive relationship between past and present bodies, they also necessitate analysis of their responsibility in the cultural production of meaning: their facility for expression, the relationships between the body and subjectivity they may elucidate, the bodily authority, representation and regimentation of which they are capable, the philosophy of individuality and sociality they may provide. Bodily meaning is not generated by the 'facts' that have been documented in discourse. These 'facts' validate the causal relationship between body and those cultural forces that 'prod, poke and then measure its responsiveness'. They validate only bodily reaction.

"The construction of corporeal meaning depends on bodily theories – armatures of relations through which bodies perform individual, gendered, ethnic, and communal identities" (Foster, 1995, p. 8).

However, this continuity is questionable if we consider the words Isadora Duncan, wrote toward the end of her autobiography, My Life (in Duncan, I and MacDougall, A. R., 1929),

“Incidents which seemed to last a lifetime have taken only a few pages...I often ask myself desperately, what reader is going to be able to clothe with flesh the skeleton that I have presented?”

This statement from one of the most revolutionary choreographer/dancers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries stresses the predicament of the choreographer attempting to write ‘history’. However, the question arises; what does it mean to choreograph history? As we have discovered in Chapter 1, the past and history are two distinctly different but not separate things. How are we then able to create a dialogue between these seemingly disparate areas of practice?

The first area of interest when approaching this body of research is a basic query into how the choreographer is able to maintain an intertext with the traditional views of writing as a purely cerebral act and dance as a purely visceral experience. In order to displace this traditional binary Hines (2000) talks of the “body as text” and discusses the language of corporeal semiotics. The idea raised by Hines is that there is a language in every-‘body’ that is unauthored and that is visibly available for anyone we come in contact with to read. All bodily actions, whether authored or unauthored, according to Banes (1995) may be referred to as bodily writings. Banes’ reasoning for this is that all these ‘bodily writings’ have grown out of cultural practices that construct corporeal meaning. Gottschild (in Desmond, 1997) suggests that the process of writing about the past is an exercise in metaphoric choreography, “choreography for the page”. This sentiment is echoed by Lepecki (1996) and relates to Lehmann’s (1997) notion of the textual landscape.

“If the body is a landscape, it is also a theatre of images, a site for history to rest. Dance happens in this fractured time, in this site for loss and desire that is memory – that primal stage tainted by the bodies whom we sheltered” (p. 104).

2.3 A brief history of 'Choreographing History'

"In dance theatre the story is told as a history of the body, not as danced literature.... If a logic exists it is not a logic of the consciousness, but of the body, one that adheres not to the laws of causality but rather to the principle of analogy."
(Servos in Kozel, 1997, pg. 101)

Gottschild (in Desmond, 1997) suggests deconstruction theory has qualified that to invent a history means to interpret selected events. The research process is thus also affected by the medium in which it is made, in this case 'choreography'. Choreographers enter ideas affectively, kinaesthetically and cognitively. The idea is that choreography is not a purely bodily-movement-based experience.

The notion of choreographing history may be traced to an interest in primitivism²². Torgovnick (1990) suggests that the nostalgia of civilized man for a return to a primitive or pre-civilized condition is as old as it seems his civilized capacity for self-reflection. It must be recognised that the term primitivism properly refers to a dauntingly ancient and universal human characteristic with a correspondingly wide range of manifestations. Many use the words primitive, mythic, interchangeably. The entire knowledge of early forms of mental life is necessarily inferential and has never been something on which all authorities have agreed. Primitivist discourse is a discourse fundamental to the Western sense of self-ness and 'other-ness'.

Gottschild (in Desmond, 1997) identifies researchers like Katherine Dunham, Maya Dern, Robert Farris Thompson and Cornel West who absorbed themselves into the cultural experiences of the 'other' and advanced in their work from the view of a subjective/objective continuum. These efforts signify processes of

²² For more insight into the notion of *Primitivism* consult Torgovnick, M. Gone Primitive: savage intellects, modern lives. Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

experiential methodologies and trade the “horizontal” relationship of content/context for the “vertical” tenacity of cause/effect.

“They parallel efforts by performers and other artists to turn to the – ‘ings’ – the dancing, not the dance; the singing, not the song”(Gottschild, 1997, p. 168).

This is done so as to capture the vigour and energy of the integrated approach of process as an “antidote to overdoses of the declarative, full-stop mode of a product-oriented tradition”(Ibid). Barthes (in Wallis, 1984) suggests that interdisciplinary approaches occur when the solidarity of existing forms are broken down in the interests of a new object, a new language.

Foster (1995) explains this interest in the ‘other’ as follows,

“It is one thing to imagine those bodies of the past, and it is another to write about them. The sense of prescience conveyed by a body in motion, the idiosyncrasies of a given physique, the smallest inclination of the head or gesture of the hand – all form part of a corporeal discourse whose power and intelligibility elude translation into words” (p. 9).

Foster here explains the ideals of wanting to know from the past, but at the same time makes us aware of the seeming impossibility of this task for she continues,

“Bodies’ movements may create a kind of writing, but that writing has no facile verbal equivalence. In commencing to write a historical text, discrepancies between what can be moved and what can be written require of historians yet another form of bodily engagement and exertion. Yes, the act of writing is a physical labour, rendered more vividly so when the subject of that writing is bodily movement resurrected from the past by the imagination” (p. 9).

This leads us to the next area of inquiry; although we have this desire to learn and know from the ‘other-ness’ of being, and we believe that the experiential model allows room for specificity, how does this body then transform into text?

2.4 An introduction to the body as/and text

In modern philosophy language has been given priority as frame of reference for the exploration of philosophical problems. Rather than starting with the subject, the mind of man, or with the object, as in the past, the starting point now becomes language. Language, the structure of language, is believed to be the necessary condition for understanding the relationship between subject and object. Degenaar (1986) suggests that if we view both subject and object as composing reality then we can say, "How we articulate our world, determines how we arrive at what we call reality" (Hawkes, 1978p. 160)." Degenaar (1986) concludes by saying that since language is the basis of articulation the focus should be on the structure of language and the way it enables us to constitute meaning and understand the world.

However, language is not merely confined to the written text. This is clear if we consider Finestone's (2002) suggestion of the acceptance that the body has a mind of its own. "The body becomes historiography in motion" (p. 13). This notion of the writerly body creates ambivalence as the former is situated within linguistic constructs and the latter within the personal. Polhemus (in Thomas, 1993) suggests that we are able to create a dialogue between the traditional binaries of 'writing' and 'body' if we consider the fact that the body is inevitably caught up in a symbolic congruence with the social body. The social body has been written so completely that its writing directly influences the unauthored writing of the body. Foster (1996) suggests that in permeating bodies with corporeal experience that it then becomes clear that the body has always housed the capacity to be written. 'Writing the body' then seems less challenging than it did at the outset. To write the body is to imbue it with the social conventions in which it exists, and hence the body becomes a textual discourse through motion.

The final image then becomes a question into the liaison between life and death. Martin Heidegger (1962) suggests that the temporal dimension of human life extends both forward and back, so that people are not only able to establish meaning from the past but also anticipate a future for themselves. This then returns our attention to the post-modern hypothesis, in that through a necessity to acquire meaning from the past we then lack 'being-as-a-whole' (Heidegger in Langness and Frank, 1988). The suggestion is then that only through immersing oneself in the everyday world of other people are we able to overcome the anxiety that the uncertainty of the past presents. This continual uncompletedness of a life illuminates the problem encountered by the choreographer attempting to choreograph history or more specifically choreographing biography.

Chapter 3

Tracing Narratives: Biographical Histories

Introduction

“[The]...principal mode of engagement with the past concerns the need to develop a biography for the role...This act of biographical invention serves the same function as it does for Stanislavski: it enables the actor to produce the illusion of a single whole, coherent ‘character’ whose behaviour flows from a concrete past into a determined present.”

W. B. Worthen. (1996) “Invisible bullets, violet beards: reading actors reading”, in *Textual and Theatrical Shakespeare: Questions of Evidence*. (p. 210)

The idea that history is able to recover and represent the content of the past draws attention to the relationship between history and narrative (Munslow, 1997). Philosophers W. B. Gallie, Keith Jenkins and Hayden White (amongst others) believe that we do not live stories but only recount our lived experience in the story form. The argument runs that narrative does not *pre-exist* but rather that narrative is ‘invented’. Invented is used here to signal that there are many different stories to be told about the same events, the same past.²³ White (1978) believes that the past is invented or imagined rather than found, he does not dispute the existence of the past, but suggests that we impose narrative on past events for explanatory, ideological and political reasons.

²³ Professor Andrew Buckland brought this idea to my attention that there are only ten stories in the world, it just depends on how you tell them. This idea relates to Jacques Lecoq’s notion of Simplification and Amplification. For more insight into this consult Lecoq’s writing in [Creative Teaching](#).

The process of culinary skill involved in bringing together the range of ingredients of the past leads us to the domain of interpretive research. Interpretive research, according to Denzin (1989), has as its subject biographical experience²⁴. The biographical method centres on the collection and analysis of stories, accounts and narratives that speak to turning point moments in people's lives. A narrative relates to the causal, temporal sequence; or rather that every narrative describes a sequence of events that have happened. However, as post-modern discourse suggests this sequence of events would not have to be displayed sequentially nor chronologically. More exactly the nature of a life demands a non-ordered, non-linear progression of 'fact'. This interpretation of a life points to an emphasis on experiential and affective modes of communication.

Denzin (1989) points out that the emphasis on self, biography, history and experience must always work back and forth between a concern for process and the analysis of the specific lives of individuals who live the process that is being studied. *Life* denotes the biographical experiences of a named person (eg. Bessie Head or Raymond Vuyo Matinyana/Miss Thandi). This process of naming becomes fundamental in the coherency of the agent acting on the world and affected by the world.

Levi-Strauss asserts that, as with the Apollo/Dionysus duality there is a sense of order versus chaos when this body of 'life' work is approached. This notion of being caught between the unwarranted dualities existent in the nature of narrative may be articulated as follows,

“...if historical facts are constituted rather than given, so too are they 'selected' rather than apodictically provided as elements of narrative. Confronted with the chaos of 'facts,' the historian must 'choose, sever and carve them up for narrative purposes'. In short, historical facts, originally constituted as data by the historian, must be constituted a second time as elements of a verbal structure which is always

²⁴ As a distinctly qualitative approach to social research, interpretive theory attempts to make the experiential world of the subject more accessible to the receiver. Interpretation stems directly from the philosophical theories of Marx, Heidegger, Sartre and Strauss.

written for a specific (manifest or latent) purpose. This means that, in his view, 'History' is never simply history, but always 'history-for,' history written in the interest of some infrascientific aim or vision" (Levi-Strauss in White, 1978, p. 55).

3.1 Observations and Interpretations

Before embarking on an understanding into the notion of the narrative form of biography, we first need to arrive at some conception of interpretation. Interpretation becomes the level at which all understanding is generated or mediated in order to establish the subjective 'facts' of the end product: the autobiography/biography/social commentary. Denzin (1989) suggests that interpretation stems directly from observation, for in order to interpret an action/event/moment one needs to have observed that action/event/moment. Observation necessitates a viewing of the world (via text, speech, movement, sight and so on) and an understanding of that world. It may be argued that we immediately, at the moment of inception, conceive and comprehend the world. The reason for this assertion is the idea that 'I' and the world affect each other. 'I' and the world do not function independently, nor are they in opposition, but rather coexist and inform each other.

The question that now arises is, how are we able to validate observation? This question is of utmost importance especially considering the argument from subjectivity and the 'fact' that we live within a post-modern worldview. Post-modernity proposes that the imaginary line between binary oppositions be dismantled and rather be replaced by a process which encourages dialogue/intertextuality. This relates directly to Derrida's deconstruction principle and thus intelligibly corresponds to the ideas expressed in Chapter 2; that of breaking the 'violent hierarchy' of binary oppositions.

As formerly established linguistics, anthropology and psychoanalysis, command that meaning is only generated by means of viewing the 'self' in opposition to

the 'other'. However, considering the negation of this principle, it leaves us in a predicament. The idea now is, how can meaning then be generated under the conditions set up by the post-modern discourse of the 20th Century?

At a level of credulity, meaning is generated through a process of intertextuality. As has been argued, "all texts are intertexts". Intertextuality, according to Tulloch (1999), looks at the discursive relationship between multiple subjectivities. It can therefore be argued that the generating of meaning follows a two way process. The world and all that is in it undergoes continual transformation. This changing world cannot be dictated by the scientific worldview; which demands that the world maintain a set way of being. The world contains its own "dialectic and its own internal logic" (Denzin, 1989). The meaning that is generated in and by the world can only be discovered by the observer's (in this case the choreographer's) participation in the world. This view is further extended to suggest that the world does not stand independent of the process of observation. The idea rather is that the world of the observer is the world being observed.

There are many philosophical theories, which attempt to explain the notion of observation. The two, which are traditionally at binary opposites of the spectrum²⁵, are the *positivist*²⁶ and the *interpretivist* views. The positivist view on observation calls for the subject of enquiry to be directly dis-related from the object inquiring. However, this view attempts to negate the argument from experience; the idea that all interpretations and observations stem from man's direct experiential observations of the world. It is for this reason that Denzin (1989) advocates the *interpretivist* mode of thought. The idea here is a participation in the social world so as to understand and express more effectively its emergent properties and features. Mills (1959) expresses this viewpoint in the following way:

²⁵ I use the binary oppositions here in order to produce a focus that is warranted from theory.

²⁶ Philosophers that provide insight into the subjectivity of observation may be consulted here: Locke, Hume and Descartes.

“The most admirable thinkers within the scholarly community...do not split their work from their lives...What this means is that you must learn to use your life experiences in your [work]” (in Denzin, 1989,p. 26).

This becomes interesting from the perspective of the choreographer, as the engagement with artistic imaginings, expressions, communications and meanings often require personal sources and visions. The idea then becomes that interpretations of human experience can only stem from an observer who has completely submerged him/herself in the phenomenon they wish to interpret and understand. Davis (1978) suggests that the process of interpretation has become exceedingly difficult as none of the linguistic and social frameworks under which the world operates enables one to establish a relationship at the level of first principles²⁷:

“Until we think that problem through at the level of principles...we will most likely end up with an eclecticism of frameworks rather than a principled integration of them” (Davis, 1978, p. 82).

We then seem to require an establishment of foundations of interpretation that function independently of language and social discourse. Interpretation has at its core an emphasis on lived experience and suggests that the phenomenon encountered should be judged from the persons most directly associated with it. Davis (1978) suggests that different interpretations of the world too do not function independently of one another but rather coexist and affect the medium of representation.

²⁷ Walter Brown (MA Philosophy student at Rhodes University) suggests that the foundational theory of truth implicit in first principles may be challenged by a coherentist view of truth. This theory of truth is seeing the truth of each statement as being a function of its relation and coherency with all other statements. As opposed to the foundational where the first principles are used to construct the truth.

3.2 History/Choreography/Knowledge

Henry James (in Pachter, 1981) suggests that representations are nothing unless
 “...we live over their [the object of enquiry] perceptions, live over their growth, their
 change their varying intensity of the same – since it was by these things they themselves
 lived” (p. 7)

These representations are then ascribed multifariously through a number of disciplines. However, what we now encounter is the question as to how different modes of enquiry affect each other. It has already been established that there is a fundamental relationship implicit between choreography and history. The literary historian tells ‘tales’ of the past by writing them with signs in language and choreographer historian writes the ‘tales’ of the past by writing them with movement on bodies²⁸. Both ‘words and movement’ and ‘language and bodies’ hold a past. Foster (1995) shows how the documents from which the historian sources his/her ‘tale’ can,

“never produce an isolable and integral single physical figure, but instead stock an antiquarium storeroom with the sharded traces of bodily movement across the cultural landscape” (p. 6).

Foucault (in Munslow, 1997) argues that language is an ideologically contaminated medium, and what it can and cannot do is dependant on the use to which it is put. Degenaar (1986) suggests that this dismantling of language produces a “catharsis of clarification since the human mind succeeds in mediating contradictions in experience on the level of imagination” (p. 62)²⁹. Language and body are linked through Foster’s notion of the ‘antiquarium storeroom’, as well as, Foucault’s view of the contaminant features of language. The idea is that both language and body are open to many possibilities of

²⁸ The idea presented here is that the form history takes does not only have to be written in language, but rather that there are innumerable possibilities in documenting the past.

²⁹ The notion of the ‘catharsis of clarification’ relates directly to the ideas expressed by Levi-Strauss in the belief that there exists a universal mind, which unconsciously structures the human mind. This idea then too exemplifies the idea from Foster (1995) that past bodies affect present bodies, which in turn affect future bodies.

'writing' in the sense that both house many rooms of documents to be excavated; all is thus dependent on the means by which these documents are interpreted.

On the contrary these views appear to avoid a series of uncertainties that arise. The first of these uncertainties questions how we are able to create an intertext between the literary and the choreographic. The relationship between the choreographer and researcher may not seem an obvious one, but let us consider the resemblances. First, let us consider the procedures by which a dance is made and by which a 'history' is written. Layson (1983), "Writing Dance History", identifies the following two stages of research: selection of study area and interpretation of sources. Horst (in Thomas, 1995) suggests that choreography was founded on two things; "a conception of a theme and the manipulation of that theme." Although these concepts feed the 'intuitive/cognitive' continuum (Gottschild in Desmond, 1997) and seem to be contending approaches and have traditionally been viewed as binary opposites, we now find that they do not oppose each other but communicate with each other, work together and coexist.

"They are processes which reflect, embrace, and require each other. The fact that we as a culture have made such a big deal of the oppositional nature of binary concepts, ignoring the symbiotic relation of opposites defining each other, says a lot about how we perceive, what we value or devalue, what we do and how we do it."
(Gottschild, *Some Thoughts on Choreographing History*, 1997, p. 168)

What we must take into account here is that there is no one-way of writing 'history' or writing dance. However, among the great diversity are discernible characteristics. Writing history and choreographing dances are ways in which knowledge of the subject can be brought into the public domain. Pachter (1981) assimilates these ideas in the consideration that public lives (like those of Bessie Head and Raymond Vuyo Matinyana) are not lived in isolation, but rather that these lives have impact far beyond their immediate frame and therefore invite and encourage response and interpretations.

“If certain lives have the power to touch or to transform our own, to exalt or to terrify us, then we, with the biographer as our representative, have the right to make sense of those lives, to their innermost nature” (p. 6).

The second uncertainty that arises, with regards biographical interpretation, is the concept of knowledge. Knowledge, is a belief about a particular segment of reality. Knowledge, like history, is socially and politically constructed. As Foucault (1980) states, “Knowledge derives not from some subject of knowledge but from the power relations that invest it...” (p. 220). Knowledge can be assumed neither to be objective nor to be valid in any objective sense (Denzin, 1989). As a result of the philosophical nature of both history and knowledge ‘writing history’ and ‘choreographing dances’ can only reveal the interpreted worlds of interacting individuals. However, a written history is based in language, which according to Degenaar (1986) consists of arbitrary signs and thus we should not expect language to give us a referentially true account of things as they are. Degenaar here turns to Foucault’s view that the knowledge of history inscribes that there is no truth-value to be found in the past.

In answer to the question then as to how we are able to create an intertextual communication between the literary historian and the choreographer historian we come to a series of conclusions:

1. both stem from a physical self that dominates the mode of enquiry,
2. both possess certain ‘writerly’ characteristics which are inherently infused in the creative process of interpretation,
3. and, at an elemental level representation is fundamental to the telling of lives.

Vedel (2002) suggests that the series of discourses that contain the suffix ‘graphy’ all point to the act of writing. “Where choreography deals with the

writing of the movements of the dance (chorea), historiography reflects the events of the past in the writing of history” (p. 3)³⁰.

3.3 Philosophies of narrative as/and performance

The notion that now surfaces is, how is the subjective imaginary reality of history able to generate meaning within any given context? History is an ever-changing discourse. This idea may seem ambiguous in the sense that history discourses the past ‘which is fixed’, however, it seems more plausible if we reconsider that history is the subjective/narrative of the past. Thus, although, there are a limited series of ‘facts’³¹ within the past, there are in fact any number of ways in which these facts may be grouped together in order to create a history. White captures the essence of this in that,

“Historical situations are not inherently tragic, comic or romantic. They may all be inherently ironic, but they need not be emplotted that way. All the historian needs to do to transform a tragic into a comic situation is to shift his point of view or change the scope of his perceptions...*How* a given historical situation is to be configured depends on the historian’s subtlety in matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow with a meaning of a particular kind.”
(Hayden White in Munslow, 1997, pp. 143-144)

Michel Foucault expands Hayden White’s view further. Foucault (1972) believes that man/woman is not able to stand outside society and history and thus generate objective and truthful knowledge. Foucault holds that language (the means by which we write and talk of past events) is dependent on the use to which it is put (social, political).

³⁰ Vedel is a dance scholar and research fellow at the University of Copenhagen Institute for Art History, Dance and Theatre Research. Vedel’s paper deals with a South African/Nordic exchange programme committed to developing dance history research.

³¹ For a greater understanding on the concept of historical fact refer to E. H. Carr, What is History? (1961). Chapter 1: *The Historian and His Facts*. (pp. 1–24).

The idea here is that history is thus fabricated or invented within specific social conditions. However, it must be understood that the notion of ‘fabrication’ or narrating history does not question the validity of the historical narrative, but rather points to the idea that one past has many histories. As Finestone (2002) explains,

“[fabrication]...does not mean concocting or inventing a history. Rather, it means that via a creative interaction with existing textual discourses and interpretations...we can attempt to decode and construe meaning.”

Cooper Albright (1997) suggests the recasting of history is essentially performative. The idea here is that it is the creative facet in the telling, and re-telling of histories that is inherently performative. Finestone (2002) points out that although the fundamental focus of Albright’s study is Afro-American, we are however able to draw parallels to the South African circumstance by making reference to the procedures of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, “testimonies transformed to become ‘story’ ”. Ndebele (2000) articulates this idea as follows:

“and so it is that the stories of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission seem poised to result in one major spin-off, among others: the restoration narrative. In few countries in the contemporary world do we have a living example of people reinventing themselves through narrative” (in Finestone, 2002, p. 14)

3.4 Biography as a process of interpretation: historical ‘tales’

Munz (1997) suggests that in order to do justice to time, it must be described in a narrative form. “Narrative is the only literary device that will reflect the past’s time structure.” This view supports Hayden White’s assertion that historical accounts are nothing but interpretations. It thus seems evident that narrative structure is a means by which one is able to recount a past reality. When we think of narrative we immediately assume that a modernist mode of

representation should be followed, for example the structure of a well made play, or the structure of modernist novels, beginning, middle and end.

Post modernity offsets this worldview in the sense that there are no certainties to be found in the past (Lerner, 1997) and thus the past cannot be recounted with objective assurance. The idea here is that the past is a jumble of events rather than a chronological series of events. However, Munz accepts this premise, he suggests rather that the past should be seen as a jumble of events and that history be seen as a series. The idea here is that through a process of selection and interpretation that documentation becomes systematic and sequential rather than random and episodic.

Adshead and Layson (1995) suggest that historical writing is involved with recreating the past, and thus hinges on description and connecting narrative. Vedel (2002) turns to the writings of Foucault and suggests that the task implicit in writing is no longer to decide the truth-value but rather to explore the documents from within. The idea is now rather that the literary historian and the choreographer historian re-contextualise the artefacts of the past in order to reconstruct new meanings, narratives and images which are representative of the past in the present.

The biographical method then rests on the collection, analysis and interpretation of events that speak of a turning point moment in a life. People build biographies around the experiences associated with the social construction of the self. The idea here is that through a process of naming and classification the world creates the self. Sartre adopts a phenomenological standpoint and advocates the idea of the '*epoche*'. The idea here is an assertion of the singularity of being and an experiential endeavour into the existent world. Sartre states that a person is "summed up and for this reason universalised by his epoch, he in turn resumes it by reproducing himself in it as a singularity" (1981). What is suggested here is an endeavour into the world of experience with no scientific or psychological

baggage. Interpretation thus attempts to uncover the plethora of the inter-relationship between the self as singular and the self as a universal enterprise. It is for this reason that Denzin (1989) suggests that all interpretations are both biographical and historical and that they are always fitted to the historical moment that surrounds the subject's life experiences.

Biography then has its roots in *life*. However, Derrida (in Smith, 1995) suggests that the thing/object we call life is perhaps neither a thing nor that which can be named nor recorded. Smith (1995) draws our attention back to the relationship between science and history, or more specifically in this instance 'life' and suggests that,

"To call it [life] a thing, to name it as an object for 'science' (biology, biography, autobiography) is already perhaps to defend oneself against it, to fix it over there, bring it a little nearer, describe it with naïve candour, to ward it off and protect oneself against it in bringing it close and making of it a shield" (p. 130).

The nature of life then appears as illusive as the nature of the past. For neither is a tangible thing but rather an experiential entity that coexists, affects and is affected. Derrida argues that life is not definable in terms of 'death'. The idea here is that the 'violent hierarchy' is yet again deconstructed and rather places focus on the intertextual relationship between factors of discourse rather than an attempt to explain and define them in terms of each other. The complexity of a life's history can thus be recounted in numerous ways, under the auspices of the subjective lens. The telling of 'tales' has become the core of writing new histories, "a history that contains 'histories' and allows for the 'truth' to be found in diversity" (Persson, 2002).

The process of consorting with dead bodies comes under the lens next. If as Derrida asserts, the life is not a thing as opposable to death, but rather a complex structure open for interpretation, how are living bodies then able to interiorise dead bodies? Freud (in Sandler, 1984) advocates that the ego wants to devour

this object (life) and thus incorporate it into itself. This idea is explained more lucidly by Smith (1995) in the suggestion that,

“The living incorporate the dead by devouring them, in mourning. Incorporation makes a sepulchre, or stomach, for the eating of the other, a process of object idealisation not easily differentiated from scientific consumption, so that there is still life in the deceased, which is the life of the deceased within the bereft. The deceased are dead but still living, in the mourner, so it is still life, of a sort” (p. 131).

However, contrary to this view is Derrida’s suggestion that the dead are not an object, “neither a corpse nor a corpus, but already, from the beginning, the ‘condition’ of life.” Traditional views on biography place it on par with the role of the mourner, however biography does not have at its core the subject of life but rather the unique psychic configuration that is this life.

The intimate relationship between biography and life is summoned up by the intertextual intimacy between life and death. Although biography has its roots in life; life has its roots in death, biography then becomes a consortium of life death. Smith (1995) suggests that,

“...to think life death together must be, at the very least, to overcome the prejudice toward the one time and the unique to which the name of the subject...is given” (p. 134)

Wood (in Sallis, 1978) suggests that in considering life death a transformation occurs at the level of theory and opens up a re-inscription and re-working of the values of writing. The reason as already asserted is that there is an intertextual path between life and death. Biography then simultaneously incorporates these two preceding ‘objects’.

“...it is both the course of a life seen as a process rather than a stable entity and the unique psychic configuration that is this life and no other. In Platonic terms, I propose that we understand a world of becoming that is moving perpetually towards the world of being that is this phenomenological, eternal present...or, in reverse perspective, that we should understand memory as a faculty of the present and an exact reflection of present being that also recapitulates and reverses the entire process by which present has come to be what it is” (Olney in Smith, 1995, p. 133).

This Derridian interpretation of the life death contingency and its relationship to the biographical method determines that life is already always death. To think of this concept philosophically, however, negates its purpose and it is for this reason that I turn to the writings of John Keats,

*No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not one light seed from the feathered grass,
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest*

Hyperion by John Keats, taken from Allot, M (1980), Keats: The complete poems. London: Longman

Chapter 4

Gloves on or off?

Transforming South African choreographic *identity/content/form*

Introduction

“Theatre is the reflection of the society within which it is produced: be it purely popular forms or serious theatre of engagement. With the election in April 1994 the old order fell, and with it the identities, structures, histories and issues of the past three decades have come under scrutiny, and still we are left asking: Who are we? What language do we speak? How do we access and interact in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society? And finally...In the new era of redefinition, how will South Africa and its public define itself?

Yvette Hutchison, “*Access to rather than ownership of: South African theatre history and theory at a crossroad*”, in South African Theatre Journal Volume 10, Number 1, May 1996.

As political events rapidly determine new priorities in South African intellectual life, scholars of the theatre are playing an important role in articulating the relationship of theatre to material circumstances. Steadman (1989) suggests that during the 1980s the source of theatrical works took the form of “recovering history from the distortions of a selective historiography”. These methodologies needed to be continued through the transitional period in South Africa and into the new millennium in order to reconstruct the fallacies of the past. Looking back over the past 10 years in South African theatre history it becomes evident

that the transformations shifted from the singular concern with “recovering history” to a dual concern of “recovering history” and breaking down traditional Western views of theatre.

Hutchison (1996) suggests that over the past three centuries theories of drama and theatre in South Africa have evolved in a relatively stable framework due to the strong Eurocentric socio-cultural context provided by the rigid political structures. However, with the demise of apartheid, this secure framework has collapsed, resulting in the need for the redefinition of drama theory and theatre history³².

This redefinition is discussed by Hauptfleisch (1992) with the suggestion that South African theatre may be viewed on a continuum of performance forms “which range from ritual dance...to formal, classical theatre in the Western sense” (p. 65). Having played a prominent role in forging new cultural directions since the early 1970s, Steadman (1990) argues that the theatre of the 1980s “fail[ed] to elicit popular appeal, and practitioners and observers were engaged in repetitive debates about the role of protest, resistance and struggle in the themes and styles of theatre” (p. 1). However, be this as it may, since the 1994 Democratic elections South African society has undergone fundamental transformation. Dr. B. S. Ngubane (1996) suggests that in accordance with the principles of justice, democracy, non-racism and non-sexism, every sector of our society is facing change and “while this may be unsettling for some, for many, it brings hope that their needs, views and aspirations will now also become part of the mainstream” (p. 2).

³² Hutchison traces the history of theory in South African theatre in the article “Access to rather than ownership of”: South African theatre history and theory at a crossroad”, in South African Theatre Journal Volume 10, Number 1, May 1996.

Furthermore the arts, culture and heritage contingency cannot be an exception in this transformation process, since it too was overtly affected by the unjust allocation of skills, resources and infrastructure under the apartheid regime.

4.1 'dramatically speaking, Apartheid was better'³³

In 1994 Robert Greig reported in the Mail & Guardian that "if theatre in South Africa is to grow, it has to find new enemies" (p. 35). Although this view is supported by many, especially the idea that South African theatre is inherently political, there is a counter argument which suggests that theatre in South Africa needs to find new forms which will allow it to escape the shadow of apartheid. Prentki (2001) explains this as follows:

"[the challenge is to]...move beyond what Loren Kruger (1999) has called 'post-anti-apartheid theatre' with its replication of forms which no longer reflect or represent current realities. This is the process described by Athol Fugard (1997) as 'like being in a boxing ring by myself with the gloves still on' (p. 121).

Fugard then proceeds to ask the most valuable of questions; "Will South African society and its theatre select the easier option of finding a new enemy or the more painful one of removing the gloves?" (p. 121).

The answer to Fugard's question lies in the controversial nature of Antony Sher's title, "*dramatically speaking, Apartheid was better*". This title alludes to the idea that theatre after apartheid's demise was less informed, less interesting and perhaps less clear. This idea is reiterated by John Kani (1997, cited in Bain and Hauptfleisch, 2001) in suggesting that artists who had in the past reacted against the injustices of the white regime, now "...found they had nothing to say..." resulting in "...a strange lull" and work which was "unsettled,

³³ Marcia Blumberg cites Antony Sher's title from an article published in The Economist (1995). Blumberg's article is entitled "Re-evaluating otherness, building for difference: South African theatre beyond the interregnum" in South African Theatre Journal Volume 9, Number 2, September 1995.

undefined, unclear". Duma Ndlovu too stresses that although dance in South Africa may be starting to map out a new course, that in fact it is exactly where it was in the late 1980s (in Bain and Hauptfleisch, 2001). However, it must be noted that Sher's title is highly contentious, for how can he suggest that South African theatre was better off under the apartheid regime?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that apartheid provided a target for protest, resistance, satire, however, now the urgency has diminished and "the once sharp focus has blurred"(Blumberg, 1995, p. 33). Andrew Gilder, free-lance arts journalist and Arts Editor for the Cape Times suggests there was a lack of clarity in the mid to late 1990s and continues in saying that,

"I think that we have come through a period where nobody knew what...was going on. In the mid to late 90s I think things were a little tricky, a little unclear, I'm not saying that they are clear now, by no means, but I think there is some clarity coming in" (Interview conducted on 14 September 2002 by JHB Snyman)³⁴.

The sense that some clarity is emerging is evident if we consider that post-apartheid dance too has blurred its boundaries. In the 1980s there was a strong focus on fusion, however Samantha Pienaar (2002) suggests that fusion was argued by many to be yet another form of cultural imperialism. More recently the shift has been towards confluence. Carolus (in Donaldson, 2001) suggests that this move toward confluence highlights the multi-faceted, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society that is South Africa. The result is that,

"More than ever South African dance is a theatrical force to be reckoned with. When choreographers tackle social biography and autobiography...they take a less literal, more complex multidisciplinary route. At the centre of the text is the moving, thinking, often talking, body" (Sichel, 24 March 2002, Sunday Independent).

³⁴ This interview was conducted with Andrew Gilder at the FNB Vita Dance Indaba in September 2002. For more insight into these ideas please refer to video footage of this interview obtainable from the archives of the Rhodes University Drama Department. The reason the transcription is not available in the appendix is due to space constraints; the interview is over an hour long and deals with a range of issues all of which would not have been able to be included in the transcription.

This then leads to a theatrical syncretism that, according to Hauptfleisch (1992), is an attempt to move beyond the limitations of hegemony. The hybrid forms which are evolving in South African dance is substantiated by choreographer Gregory Maqoma as he attributes this to a need to show that ‘personal feelings’ are also general public feelings; “we share the same sentiments” (Interview conducted on 14 September 2002 by JHB Snyman)³⁵

4.2 Shifting Disciplines: the re-emergence of the physical body

Traditionally theatre works in South Africa, and surely too in the rest of the world, were created from pre-existing texts. However, it is at this point that we begin to question the traditions of South African theatre. Due to the strong performative element prevalent in South African society, theatre has traditionally not drawn on writerly practices in the making of theatre³⁶. Prior to the 1994 elections the emphasis was on the way in which theatre reflected ideological and socio-political shifts. This is evident if we consider the political theatre of the 1970s and the prolific theatre makers of this period:

“The workshop techniques of Fugard, Kani and Ntshona...enabled them to create performances which rapidly captured the imaginations of audiences and identified their work as uniquely South African. Characterising all that new work were formal innovations like episodic structures, quick shifts of scene and tempo, oral narrative, music and street rhythms, jazz and factory work-rhythms” (in Gunner, 1994).

Theatre in South Africa, according to Hauptfleisch and Steadman (in Huthison, 1996), has largely been approached in terms of dichotomies: “African/Western, Afrikaans/English, black/white, indigenous/imported, theatrical/literary,

³⁵ I conducted this interview with Gregory Maqoma after his performance of *Rhythm Colour* at the FNB Vita Dance Indaba in September 2002. For more insight into his understandings of this area refer to (Appendix A). This interview is also available on video at the Rhodes University Archives.

³⁶ By this I make specific reference to the oral traditions in South African culture. For more insight into this area of interest consult Liz Gunner (ed), *Politics and Performance: Theatre, Poetry and Song in Southern Africa*. Witwatersrand University Press (1994) and Ruth Finnegan *Oral Traditions and The Verbal Arts*. Routledge: London and New York (1992).



popular/political” (p. 40). What is now being called for is a shift away from a dominant single cultural focus towards a broader focus. There is evidence of this occurrence in South African theatre if we consider Miki Flockemann’s (2001) assertion that theatre now (in the new millennium) more appropriately emphasises the way in which performance events themselves foreground processes of transformation. Flockemann (2001) suggests that there is a renewed interest in the body and suggests that this focus has some relevance to the shift toward dance drama and physical theatre in recent years. The reason for this is a shift towards a body focus in South African performance. As Fleishman (1997) states,

“...it is the physical body that should be the canvas on which new images are created...The physical body forms part of the meaning-making process of almost all theatre where human performers appear live in front of an audience. In much Western theatre, however, most of the meaning is contained in the written text.³⁷ The body provides secondary meaning, often quite unintentional and unplanned. The written text is given life when it is raised from the page and set inside the body of the actor. Much stress is laid on the clarity with which these words are spoken by the body but little attention is paid to the way that body moves in response to the words. In South African theatre, on the other hand, the body is not simply a vehicle for the embodiment of the text; it serves as part of the text in its own right. The physical body in South African theatre is a source of primary meaning which constantly challenges the hegemony of the written word in the meaning making process” (p. 201).

The question that now arises is why the increased importance of the physical body in South African theatre? Fleishman (1997) suggests that the answer is four-fold:

1. firstly, the workshop techniques employed in the 1970s have played a profound role in the development of South African theatre over the past 30years. Workshop implies a physical process “in which gesture exists before and alongside words as an independent sign system” (p. 201);

³⁷ “By this I mean theatre which is essentially South African, thematically and stylistically, as opposed to imported theatre produced in South Africa” (p. 213).

2. secondly, South Africa has a fundamental history of oral tradition. Ong (1982) suggests that, “The oral word...[is] always modifications of a total existential situation, which always engages the body” (p. 67);
3. thirdly, Fleishman references Richard Schechner’s argument that the theatre produced within a specific culture mirrors the social issues inherent in that culture. The argument is that life in South Africa, “has a physically dynamic nature which feeds physically dynamic images on the stage” (Fleishman, 1997, p. 202);
4. and, lastly, it may be suggested that the focus on the physical body is a means by which are able overcome language diversity. According to Mbongeni Ngema (1989), there is a need to develop a style of theatre in which the body tells the story much more than the words.

Now, however, because each of the body’s moves traces the physical fact of movement the result then, according to Gottschild (in Desmond, 1997), is a shift from cause/effect to content/context. This process highlights the importance of experiential methodologies and hence requires allowing the context in which performance events are created to inform process and product.

However, theatre practitioners are today, as they were 30 years ago, plagued with doubt and the theoretical and methodological practices of choreography have come under scrutiny. An integral part of the wider cultural formations affecting the status of theory as a practice within art historiography and cultural studies is the study of contemporary theories that impact on the current South African condition³⁸.

Thus far, theories that impact international discourse have been discussed, however, it seems more appropriate at this point to turn the focus inward, that is re-turn our focus to the South African model. One of the most important areas of

³⁸ The ideas of transformations that have occurred in theory have been highlighted in the previous chapter. But for more on these ideas refer to Stiles, K. Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A sourcebook of artists’ writings. University of California Press 1996.

study currently is the rift that has developed between writing and performance culture in South Africa³⁹. Sitas (in Gunner, 1994) describes this rift as a “brilliant chaos”.

Both the traditions have been colliding in the context of socio-political initiatives, “the two primordial poles...stand opposite each other drenched in prejudice” (Sitas in Gunner, 1994, p. 139). However, if we once again consider Derrida’s deconstruction principle, surely there is, rather than a rift between the two, an intertextual, two-way process communicating between these two seeming extremes.

The question that now springs to mind is whether the notion of text is still based on the idea of writing as something which is still primarily located on the page. Allsopp (1997) suggests that with the advent of post-modern thought that the idea of writing has loosened its ties to the page. As a matter of fact post-modern discourse has had an incredible impact on the state and nature of most discourses. Once again it seems important to reiterate that we are encountering a difficult period of transitions in South Africa, however, one way of not falling prey to pessimism is to become involved in understanding the process of transition. Possibly the most prominent discourse affecting art historiography and cultural studies at present is the post-modern worldview, which entails the dissipation of objectivity and reveals the world as composed of an indefinite number of meaning generating agencies (Anderson, 1998).

This shift in methodology necessitates that we listen to the ‘language’ we use. Language here not only refers to the spoken word but also to bodily language, aural language, among others. This awareness of language then holds a mirror to the world and moulds our thoughts. The idea is that South African people have

³⁹ I do feel that this rift may have its primary source in the fact that writing is based in the Western logocentric worldview, whereas performance is inherent in South African culture. It has also been suggested that the ‘violent hierarchies’ be dis-mantled, but I fear that for the moment they may have to be reassembled, in order to establish the crux of the pending argument.

been divided because of experience, as well as, language. The Apartheid state produced a language of disempowerment and this is evident if we consider the thematic concerns of South African theatre prior to the democratic elections of 1994. Since 1994, with the introduction of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a theatre of memory and experience has emerged⁴⁰.

Finestone (2002) draws on Sigmund Freud's suggestion that memory⁴¹ "is akin to dream in the sense that it is neither logical, rational nor chronological" (p. 14). The journey to biographical history then becomes, for the choreographer, a journey into post-colonial discourse. Finestone (2002) suggests that post-colonial discourse "seeks to reinvent the past for the purposes of the future". The post-colonial discourse challenges the confidence of the authoritative culture or system. There is an attempt to avoid hierarchical engagement, and work within as open a system as possible. Hutchison (1996) suggests, "one cannot simplistically separate the African and European traditions which have become so intertwined in the colonial experience". The idea then is not an attempt by South African choreographers to re-write the past, but rather to engage with it critically and with a sense of specificity.

The idea is not to delve in to nostalgia but rather to allow the new definitions of theatre to determine "the kinds of histories that have been written, particularly in emphasis and interpretation" (Hutchison, 1996, p. 38). The idea is that experimental forms challenge theme, content and form. Amongst these forms is the hybrid style of 'Physical Theatre'. Gordon (1995) states that,

"...historically in this country, we have a sense of art with a capital A and that there are only certain kinds of ways that you can perform or make works. I think that physical theatre really changes that (our brand of physical theatre). I think that it alters people's perceptions" (in Frege, p. 99).

⁴⁰ For more insight into the nature of theatre in South Africa, I have included a series of overviews from the National Arts' Festival held in Grahamstown annually. These provide insight into the nature of productions prior to the release of Nelson Mandela, through the process of transition, and into the late 1990s. (Appendix B).

⁴¹ I would like to suggest that experience be included in this discussion of memory, as it holds many similar traits.

This is not to say that physical theatre is the only challenging form in the South African context, but that it is one of the many dominant forms along with confluence, dances drama, afro-contemporary and integrated dance. The hybrid form of South African dance then becomes an intertextual dialogue between traditional theatre forms and Eurocentric ideals. The idea is not to set up a dichotomy here, but rather to elucidate the idea of intertextuality and hence, the focus on the experiential methodology. Flockemann (2001) suggests that this syncretism is in keeping with the aesthetics of transformation and involves an attempt to “represent the unrepresentable, or to ‘say the unsayable’, ... referring to the unspeakable atrocities of the past...” (p. 36).

These ideas emphasise the importance of experience and memory and Gordon (1995) suggests that choreographers and artists need to consider the environment in which they exist, “perhaps you have to look at many people, many different groups, dealing with many diverse possibilities” (in Frege, p. 101)⁴². This notion is not specific to South Africa and is also not new. In 1977 Bertolt Brecht (in Prentki, 2001, p. 122) stated, “Taught only by reality can/Reality be changed”. Although not a new idea there seems to be a revival of this trend in contemporary South African choreography. The idea expressed by Brecht here is that only when theatre connects itself with the lived realities of the social structures in which it exists, can it explore those realities dialectically. Prentki (2001) suggests that only once this is achieved then “the legacy of apartheid⁴³” can be surpassed, and “the theatre develop from an anti-apartheid to a post-apartheid discourse” (Prentki, 2001, p. 131).

⁴² This quotation is taken from “An interview with Gary Gordon, Rhodes University, October 1994”, conducted by Ilona Frege in *South African Theatre Journal*, Volume 9, Number 2, September 1995. (Appendix C).

⁴³ The notion of “the legacy of apartheid” is discussed further by Steadman, I. (1992). “Performance and Politics in Process: Practices in South African Theatre” in *Theatre Survey*, Volume 33, Number 2.

However, Prentki suggests that South African dance has changed from being primarily a theatre of production events. The suggestion is that it has become “a theatre of behavioural change, a theatre of social transformation” (ibid, p. 132).

This change in aesthetic and ethos requires that all voices be heard that,

“all truths are represented in the process; not so that we inhabit some individualistic, pluralistic, relativist, post-modern nightmare, but so that these contending truths may be structured into the dialectic that enables a community to rehearse its contradictions, achieve its transformations; not by resurrecting myths of identity but by engaging in self-development ‘taught only by reality’” (ibid, p. 133).

4.3 What are South African Choreographers making dances about in the new century?

Owing to the fact that interpretation is subjective in nature, it is less than possible to pinpoint one specific trend in South African choreography. However, it is possible to highlight some of the current trends.

Over the past 10 years there have been dramatic shifts in the sources that South African choreographers have turned to. Hutchison (1996) points out that immediately after the democratic elections of 1994, theatre in South Africa saw very little new writing from South African writers; this sentiment was reiterated by Nadine Gordimer (in Maree, 1998) when she asked the question “What do you have to write about now that apartheid is dead?” As disconcerting as this was for writing there was, however, a great deal of new work from South African choreographers. The reason for this perhaps is that the changes that occurred in South African society were more appropriately articulated through the physical text rather than the written text⁴⁴. By physical text, reference is not only made to dance but also other physical theatre works, such as: Andrew Buckland’s Human Race (1996), Greig Coetzee’s Tales from a Termite (1996). The reason for this is

⁴⁴ Reference here is once again made to Mark Fleishman’s notion of the ‘Physical Image’ (1997).

perhaps that writing is directly associated with colonialism, whereas the body is a trait inherent to South African theatre and culture at large.

More recently there has been a re-infusion of culture and history in the source of making theatre in South Africa. This is particularly evident in dance. Hauptfleisch (1997) highlights that the most fundamental issue is,

“...to discover and learn to deal with the vast treasure-trove of events and artefacts produced before and during the colonization period, but ignored, denied or undervalued in the past. At the same time, contemporary work too was being stunted, through the perpetuation of skewed attitudes and critical thinking, based on a false historical perspective” (p. 10).

Maree (1998) argues that in the changing climate of theatre the past becomes ‘a site for concern’ and questions whether minds should be recast so as to prevent a reoccurrence of repression or should it be laid to rest? The idea here is that the fallacies of the past represented while South African theatre was dominated by the apartheid regime may be the new enemy that Greig (1994) sought. Idyllically the situation would be one of ‘removing the gloves’, however, the theatrical system in South Africa is still haunted by the ‘legacy of apartheid’ and therefore the answer seems clear. Surely we should re-cast, re-invent, re-examine, re-consider and re-tell the past in a changing present?

The idea of telling the past in theatre⁴⁵ and telling the past in dance⁴⁶ has become a prominent thematic concern as of late. Adrienne Sichel (2002) suggests that at the 2002 FNB Vita Dance Umbrella “Biography and autobiography ricocheted around from programme to programme”. There is a desire to regain the lost voices of the apartheid regime. This sentiment is held by Bodil Persson (2002) with the suggestion that,

⁴⁵ Reference here is made specifically to three new works by South African writers presented at the 2002 National Arts’ Festival held in Grahamstown: John Kani’s *Nothing but the Truth*, Zakes Mda’s *The Bells of Amersfoort* and Yale Faber & Duma Kumalo’s *He left quietly*.

⁴⁶ There is a diverse range of South African choreographers dealing with telling the past; among them Robin Orlin’s *daddy, daddy I’ve seen this piece six times before and I still don’t know why they are hurting each other* (2000), Gladys Augulas’ *Strings* (2000), Vincent Manstoe’s *Motswa Hole* (1996) and Barena (2001, Sylvia Glasser’s *Passages of Rites* (1997).

“History is made up of thousands of voices from the past not only through stories that they tell but also through historical documents, objects and settings. All these link the past to the present. We might recognise ourselves in those forgotten voices or we might feel like strangers in their presence. But they all make us aware of ourselves and our present life. The personal story is a very important part of writing our history” (p. 59).

In Aristotle’s *Poetics* (in Lehmann, 1997) he declares explicitly that it is not characters that are imitated in theatre but their action. Lehmann suggests that if this view holds that language then undergoes a process de-semanticization. This idea is prevalent in South African Theatre, particularly South African Dance, where the body is the central meaning maker. This is evident in the work of The First Physical Theatre Company, The Forgotten Angle Theatre Company, MouthPeace, Vuyani Dance Project, among others. Fleishman (1997) suggests that,

“In South African theatre...the body is not simply a vehicle for the embodiment of the text; it serves as part of the text in its own right” (p.

Fleishman is here suggesting that the essentiality of the physical image is what provides South African Theatre with its uniqueness. Flockemann (2001) reiterates Fleishman’s sentiments in suggesting that this (the essentiality of the Physical Image) has some relevance to the shift to physical theatre and dance drama in recent years, “involving here the ‘unlearning’ of previously learned social and racial identities/habits, but perhaps also pointing to the possibilities of ‘speaking differently’ (Ibid). The physical image is able to subvert and satirise aspects of society, which construct the social body.

However, Swerdlow (in Schwartz, 2001) suggests that, in the new century, theatre practitioners in South Africa need to reclaim a vision of “...all the things that theatre can be.” What this suggests is that South African Theatre has failed to uncover a distinct voice during the post-Apartheid period. Swerdlow continues by suggesting that in order for South African theatre practitioners to

uncover a distinct voice that they need to “...start doing work that we want to do, that we think is necessary, that excites us or disturbs us...”

Artaud (in Lepecki, 1996) suggests that we should embrace the ‘Time’ of history and that the most needed and radical revolution will take the shape of a regression into time. This sentiment is reiterated by Derrida when he says that, “the dance changes place and above changes places...bodies...ideas...times.” The fact is that dance is able to inhabit our bodies and reformulate the timing for new identities, and “open up spaces in which the Otherness can gesture” (Lepecki, 1996).

The new textuality of South African dance produces a peculiar shift off axis, “while the dialogue on the stage is fading, dialogue returns with a new emphasis between stage and audience”, between life and biography (Lehmann, 1997).

4.4 “...with a history like ours...who needs enemies?”⁴⁷

In this chapter I have questioned the nature of South African theatre, but more specifically South African choreography in new century. The characteristic feature of the previous century was that of protest theatre, particularly evident in the mid 1970s and the majority of the 1980s, due to the socio-political environment of apartheid South Africa.

After the democratic elections of 1994 the demise of apartheid as enemy resulted in the question being raised; should South African theatre continue to function under the guise of protest theatre? I have argued that South African theatre that has source in history is essentially protest theatre and there are many enemies left to fight. One is the legacy of apartheid, but another is the fallacy left over to us in enforced subjective histories. Biography then allows for the telling of ‘otherness’

⁴⁷ Flockemann (2001) presents this question as a response to a need for different ways of reading both new and historical texts.

by accepting the relativity of the subjective/objective fallacy. This new source for confrontation and protest allows for a dialogue between present realities and past fictions. The result is a shift toward a multi-lingual, multi-disciplinary, intertextual approach to making dance theatre in the new century. This approach attempts to overcome a certain type of written history. This type of history is the subjective perspectives offered by the fallacious dictatorial written historical perspectives that portrayed themselves as objective truths before 1994.

Chapter 5

Remembering History/Choreographing Experience:

The problematics of interpretation in Gary Gordon's *Bessie's Head* (2000) and Gregory Maqoma's *Miss Thandi* (2002)

Introduction

This chapter will explore the relationship between history, choreography and biography in making specific reference to two works created by South African choreographers since 2000. *Bessie's Head* (2000) choreographed by Gary Gordon of the *First Physical Theatre Company* and *Miss Thandi* (2002) choreographed by Gregory Vuyani Maqoma of the *Vuyani Dance Project*⁴⁸. The analysis of these works will draw on the theories that have been employed in the first four chapters of the thesis.

As has been established in previous chapters there is difficulty inherent in providing an objective interpretation of these works, however, a range of source materials have been utilised so as to create as broad an understanding as possible⁴⁹.

The analysis will explore current trends and thematic concerns in these works. This chapter does not attempt to draw generalised conclusions about the artistic ethos of the two choreographers under question, but rather attempts to focus the

⁴⁸ The performances of these works that are cited are the video version of *Bessie's Head*, made for television by Alan Auld in May 2000, and a performance of *Miss Thandi* at the FNB Vita Dance Umdudo on 17 April 2002 at the Rhodes University Theatre in Grahamstown.

⁴⁹ It is at this point that I encourage the reader of these words to view both works, which are available on VHS video from the archives of the Rhodes University Drama Department. The reason this suggestion is made is so that the reader will be able to dialogue critically with the pursuing argument.

study of choreographing history within the specific South African context presented: with regards interpretation.

Apartheid provided South African theatre practitioners a focussed enemy. Now in the 21st century South Africa's social and political problems seem even more complicated and involve a range of issues that "because of their estimable relationship with the past – are difficult to categorise, even more difficult to successfully write about" (Bain & Hauptfleisch, 2001, p.16).

The ideas presented above place the following analysis of Bessie's Head and Miss Thandi precariously on the edge of human memory and interpretation. Bain & Hauptfleisch (2001) suggest that most of the challenging work done in South Africa in the recent past, tends to deal with coming to terms with the past, and more appropriately the 'legacy of apartheid'.

The problematics of interpretation arise in Gordon's Bessie's Head because of his focus on collaboration as it necessitates the coming together of many different voices. Maqoma's Miss Thandi becomes problematic for a different reason. The reason here is the fact that Maqoma (the observer/interpreter) knew his subject (Raymond Vuyo Matinyana) personally. However, as has been noted there is no one means of preparing the past so as to create an exclusive history every time. It is to be proposed that the aesthetic of both choreographers necessarily influences the mode of interpretation.

This individuality in interpretive methodologies results in a unique authenticity. Stefanova (2000) suggests that there is a unique authenticity inherent in South African theatre as it considers the communication with its audience and tries to speak to as wide a range of people as possible.

"theatre which not only does not look down on the art of story-telling, but is firmly based on it and works hard to develop it through blending all the arts' elements into a new theatrical language" (Stefanova, 2000, p. 198).

In analysing the works it is important to consider the new language that Stefanova talks of and to deliberate the relationship between the source of the works and the form and content of each. In order to achieve this the works will be analysed separately so as to draw conclusions from each individually. Comparisons and contrasts will be drawn at the end of the chapter in an attempt to consider the impact of these works on the ever-changing climate of South African choreography.

The reading of these works presents another problem. Culler (1975) suggests that

“The ideology of our culture promotes a particular way of reading literature [in this case dance], and instead of challenging it you make it an absolute and translate it into a system of rules and operations which you treat as the norms of rationality and acceptability...Texts can be read in many ways; each text contains within itself the possibility of an infinite set of structures, and to privilege some by setting up a system of rules to generate them is a blatantly prescriptive and ideological move” (in Degenaar, 1986, p. 91).

The conditions that enable cultural analysis⁵⁰ have changed. Apart from the more explicitly theoretical and politically driven questions of what sense one makes of sourcing biography, there is also the difficulty in defining this area expressly. Viewing biography from one point of view and attempting to analyse its affect on choreography in South Africa is problematic. The main reason for this is the changing views on historical subjects, as well as, the changing spatial and temporal complexity of the cultural terrain itself. This is said, not to cop out of arriving at conclusions, but rather to reiterate the interpretive nature of the analysis.

However, an attempt at conclusions that may be reached, with regard the theory set up. Firstly there is the express fact that both Gordon and Maqoma question the impact that symbolic boundaries have had on personal and social psyches.

⁵⁰ With the use of the phrase cultural analysis, I include dance and choreography.

Gordon approaches this deconstruction through a focus on the relationship between identity and sanity/insanity. He questions the nature of identity through the production of a multi-disciplinary work that has at its core a focus on collaboration. Maqoma attempts to deconstruct logocentric perceptions of the black male dancing body, through probing the world of *Miss Thandi*, the drag artist. However, this biographical/autobiographical work re-invents the body's text through accessing Maqoma's personalised memories of Raymond Vuyo Matinyana.

Both Gordon and Maqoma approach the subject with a dual interest. Bessie Head is caught between the two worlds of her identity and Miss Thandi is caught between the two worlds of her cultural identity. What becomes interesting here is that both choreographers acknowledge the interpretive medium of making dance, and hence this could explain why they both choose to explore the dual personality of their subject. Bessie Head and Miss Thandi are transformed from the ephemeral world of memory to the ephemeral world of performance. This becomes increasingly appropriate in that only through the performative can they truly express, Who is she?

5.1 Stepping into Bessie's Head

"In Bessie's Head (2000), Gordon becomes cartographer as he begins to map out a site for the excavation of the imagination. The historical evocation of creativity is figured in South African writer, Bessie Head. A landscape is re-constructed using Bessie Head's past as a source to assemble images and design responses to questions of power and identity."

- Finestone (2002), "*Memory in Translation*" in Footsteps Across the Landscape of Dance in South Africa, December 2001 – August 2002.

Foster's (1995) idea that the production of history is a physical endeavour forms a good point of departure into an analysis of Gary Gordon's Bessie's Head (2000). Gordon's *First Physical Theatre Company* has, since its inception in 1993, had a keen interest in history, mythology and the veritable journey of human emotion (Gilder, Interview, September, 2002). It is therefore not surprising that Gordon selected Bessie Head as a source for this work. Bessie's Head deals specifically with the contemporary South African political condition in that it attempts to query the historical past and in turn comment on the historical present. This is arrived at through the processes of collaboration and interpretation. However, considering the subjective nature of history and interpretation the question then arises as to how Gordon is able to translate and re-invent the world of Bessie Head? Rather we should ask, how is he able to answer the question, "Who is she?" (Taken from text written by Reza de Wet for Bessie's Head)

Finestone (2002) suggests "the work provides very different and subjective accounts of events surrounding Head's conception and birth, dispelling any notion of a fixed or official historical 'truth'" (p. 15). Jordaan (2000) provides insight into Finestone's suggestion through advocating that in Bessie Head's

head as in Bessie's Head there are no clear-cut answers and hence generate no clear-cut answers for the viewer. This lack of identity intrigued Gordon but was found to be troubling for some including critic Waldo Muller. In his review of Bessie's Head entitled "*Stuk leer jou niks oor wie Bessie was*" in Die Burger of 11 April 2000, Muller suggests that,

"Dit is asof die gegewe vassteek by die feit dat die skrywer in 'n tehuis vir sielsiekes gebore is en by geboorte van haar ma geskei is. Die toestand van kranksinnigheid word so omvangryk verken dat dit 'n oorheersende teenwoordigheid in die stuk verkry. Daar is soveel toespelings op geestesversteurheid dat 'n mens byna vergeet Head was 'n begaafde skrywer".

In this quotation Muller suggests that the focus of the work detracts from who Bessie Head actually was; a renowned writer. However, Gordon was attempting to get to the heart of the question, Who is she? Gordon is more interested and swept up in Head's lack of identity under the laws of apartheid South Africa than in merely documenting her life. For Gordon the main issue in Head's informative years was her grappling with the fact that she was born from a racially mixed relationship. Gordon thus chooses to embark on an emotional and intellectual journey into the disturbed psyche of a woman attempting to identify herself. Gordon does not set out, as is his right as historian, to only celebrate Head's life, but also to shed some critical light on the conditions and injustices of her time and the political climate in South Africa.

Head's story becomes increasingly relevant in contemporary South Africa as it challenges preconceptions of the viewer and thus "gets into the heads of real people caught up in the topsy-turvy world that was, and is, South Africa" (Ryan Fortune, Cape Times, 24/03/2000).

The process of interpretation in Gordon's Bessie's Head becomes more complex, for not only is Gordon interpreting events surrounding Bessie Head's life but he is also collaborating with a range of other theatre practitioners in the

making of the danceplay⁵¹. Each collaborator interprets the events depicted and dissects them from a personal framework, which is socially and culturally determined. After the initial phases of research and interpretation Gordon then brings these ideas to his cast of performers. The process of interpretation is then taken further with the fact that Gordon creates a movement language through a process of workshop and experimentation with the performers⁵². These ideas are reiterated by Andrew Gilder in his preview of *Bessie's Head* entitled "*Breaking dance limits*" (in *Cape Times* Monday, March 20, 2000), where he suggests that,

"Typically for Gordon the process of creating the work began in extensive research, at the [National] English Literary Museum, into the enigma surrounding Bessie Head's birth",

and by Ryan Fortune (2000) when he states that,

"It's [the fact that Gordon is able to get in the head's of real people] a feat achieved by the fact the Gordon appears to have given his dancers/collaborators lots of freedom to experiment, and then put in the many hours of work required to hone the piece into its final, thought-provoking, and quite beautiful, form."

Gordon's focus on research and collaboration is considered in his article '*Physical Theatre: Weaving Together the Threads of the Curriculum*' (1994). Here he highlights the core functions and importance of collaboration between artists and art forms:

"Physical Theatre by its nature requires the collaboration of creative and performing artists. It cannot function solely on the endeavours of one artist. Physical Theatre is made by artists working as a collective. It draws on the artistry and skills of both staff and students in the [Rhodes University Drama] department...Collaboration, in whatever form it takes, is no easy process...but there is another dimension to collaboration. The collaboration that exists amongst the collective during the conception, the working and the creative processes. The choreographer is interacting with the biographies and the social, cultural and artistic backgrounds of the performers. It is through an exploration of these histories and her stories that a

⁵¹ These collaborators include: Jenni-Lee Crewe (Assistant to the choreographer and designer), Reza de Wet (original text and lyrics), Andrew Buckland, Samantha Rankin, Francois Le Roux, Lindsay Reardon, Roux Engelbrecht (design), Michael Carlin (lighting design) and Leonhard Praeg and Zingisani Mkefa (original music).

⁵² The work was performed by Juanita Finestone, Martin Gylling, Zingisani Mkefa, Jane O'Connell, Daluxolo Papu, Helen Seaman, Tanya Surtees and Acty Tang.

dialogue is set up through the utilisation and improvisational techniques, contact improvisation and partnering...[Physical Theatre weaves together the visual, vocal and aural elements of performance and thus] It becomes almost redundant to regard Physical Theatre as a separate area of exploration, study, research and performance” (*The Art of Physical Intelligence*, Volume 3, *Enquiries into Physical Theatre*, p. 11-12).

The process of collaboration then links directly to the interpretivist view on interpretation. This position, as mentioned in Chapter 2 of the thesis, establishes that it is only through an observation of the world by an observer, who has completely submerged him/herself in the phenomenon, that the exceeding difficulties inherent in interpretation can be overcome (Davis, 1978).

In creating the documentary danceplay *Bessie's Head* Gordon utilised both writings by Bessie Head (*A Question of Power*)⁵³ and those important in her life in order to explore the complexities of Bessie Head's early childhood. Head was born in an asylum in 1937 to a white mother, who had been committed, and a black father, who was unknown to her. Ryan Fortune (2000) suggests that Gordon reflects on Head's dilemma and takes the audience on a 'lyrical and disturbing journey into Bessie's dreams and nightmares'.

Although the work does not deal with Head's writings specifically, so as to become a dance biography, it utilises moments and relationships from her life in order to explore the fragile psyche of a woman whose mother, whom she never knew, greatly affected her (Toni Muller, *Daily Dispatch*, 31/03/2000). Gordon does this in order to "probe the unquiet mind of mental disorder" (Marilyn Jenkins, *The Citizen*, Tuesday 14/03/2000) so as to investigate Head's lack of roots, 'both geographical and familial' (Ibid).

⁵³ Finestone (2002) suggests that *A Question of Power* "deals with the psychic disintegration of a woman and her struggle to free herself from the controlling, tormented voices she hears in her head" (*Memory in Translation*, p. 15).

Gordon's Physical Theatre aesthetic becomes a distinct ethos with specific objectives that affect both the form and content of the product (Gordon, 1994, p. 12). Gordon's interpretations reflect the post-modern paradigms under which the work was created. Karen Rutter of the Daily Mail & Guardian Online, 21/03/2000, suggests that,

“There is no specific emphasis on Bessie's literary role, or indeed, in any chronological capturing of her life. Instead, the post-modern treatment stresses certain aspects, ignores some, [and] invents others”.

The structuring and process in the making of Gordon's Bessie's Head alludes to the multifarious nature of history or rather the idea that there is no one system of interpretation when considering the 'facts' of history. Gordon's utilisation of an episodic structure allows the viewer a means of considering Bessie's story from as many angles as possible. Although the work deals specifically with Bessie searching for her roots, Gordon approaches Bessie's dilemma through her head. It is in Bessie's head (a large cavernous skull at the back of the stage) where all her memories lie, where Bessie is able to embark on the journey into self-discovery.

Bessie re-invents herself through a series of duets⁵⁴. It is this structure that challenges the logocentric worldview and the modernist obsession with the centre of being. Gordon's Bessie's Head suggests no fixed meanings. But rather “invites the audience to fill the open gaps with their own interpretations” (Jordaan, 2000).

Gordon presents an inquiry into Bessie's identity through the combination of a physical text, vocal text, visual text and aural text.

This deconstructivist post-modern approach to Bessie's Head results in what Karen Rutter (21/03/2000) refers to as “part homage, part excavation, part

⁵⁴ For an analysis of these duets and the work as a whole refer to (Appendix D).

discovery". This observation becomes pertinent to the contemporary South African condition, in that Gordon is attempting to re-define himself, not through telling his own auto-biographical history, but rather through turning to the biographical history of Bessie Head. This is not to say that Gordon's own story is not to be found in Bessie's Head. Jordaan (2000) sheds light on this idea of Bessie's Head becoming a biographical, autobiographical, socio-graphical encounter when she writes that,

"Bessie's Head did not aim at giving a historical account of Head's life, but rather an artistic interpretation thereby allowing multiple decoding. Bessie Head was instead used as a source in such a way that she became a metaphor for the 'artist's private domain', which does not only refer to the artists Head and Gordon, but to all artists and in a sense to the creativity that resides in every person" (p. 112).

Gordon's Bessie's Head thus becomes an intertextual space where the audience is able to consider their own story in the physical story that they are encountering. In this sense then each bodies' memory; those performing, those viewing, those creating, becomes a text. It is in this space where "the psychological and metaphorical conspire with the physical" (Adrienne Sichel, '*Cries and Whispers*' in Star Tonight, 14/03/2000).

Bessie's Head becomes a 'potent dance'⁵⁵ that delves into the troubled psyche of the nation. Head's writings then become performative and create an intertextual encounter that is bound by context. It is for this reason and the complexity of the subject matter Gordon is dealing with that it only seems appropriate that he takes a multi-disciplinary approach to making Bessie's Head. The multi-disciplinary nature of Bessie's Head thus reiterates that this work is an inquiry into a life, rather than a factual, purely subjective re-interpretation.

⁵⁵ This is taken from Beverley Brommert's article entitled '*Potent dance that explores troubled psyche*' in Star Tonight, Thursday, 23/03/2000.

5.2 Stepping with Miss Thandi

“Miss Thandi is not only a highly theatrical obituary for Raymond Vuyo Matinyana but touches on his own autobiography...Miss Thandi is typical of Maqoma’s eclectically provocative exploration of kinetic African identity where the rural constantly impinges on the urban, tinged with sparkling irony. There is so much beneath the surface of Maqoma’s dance. The contextualised acts and images are there for the taking. What you make of the debilitated dancer...depends purely on your own story deciphering abilities”.

- Adrienne Sichel. “*Taboos stripped bare in dance of disempowerment*” in Sunday Independent 24/03/2002

Mark Fleishman’s (1997) focus on the physical image becomes a pertinent issue when considering Gregory Maqoma’s Miss Thandi. The reason here being that Maqoma presents a multi-valent, ambiguous and complex character which demands an imaginative response from the viewer. Whereas Gordon focuses his interpretation of Bessie Head on her struggle for identity, Maqoma focuses on the relationship between himself and the subject. The result here is a challenging of repressive racial, gender and cultural stereotypes. In his article “*Dancing like a movie*”, (in Mail & Guardian, 18-24 February 2000), Robert Colman quotes Maqoma as saying, “I’m looking at how the past has influenced the present”. This is evident in Miss Thandi where Maqoma considers Matinyana’s past body’s influence on the present.

Adrienne Sichel suggests in her article entitled ‘*Taboos stripped bare in dance of disempowerment*’ (in Sunday Independent, 24/03/2002) suggests that Maqoma has an “eclectically provocative exploration of kinetic African identity”. However, Sichel suggests that in turning to biographical histories South African theatre makers are “sparking an appreciation of indigenous drama” (Ibid). Maqoma is no exception to this sentiment in that he is able to

imbue the ordinary with deep significance. However, there is nothing ordinary in Maqoma's treatment of *Miss Thandi's* biography. Maqoma says,

“I don't look at dance as separate from other art forms. My choreography always involves music, theatre, fashion, video, visual art and poetry...[my style this is] as fusion of African and Western forms”⁵⁶.

Maqoma's style is eclectic in that he incorporates elements of the ballet tradition, as well as, afro-contemporary. This confluence was formed from his training at *Moving Into Dance* and *PARTS*. However, it is because Maqoma takes on life that he creates work which is political and dynamic. Maqoma's exploration of *Miss Thandi* is both agonising and celebratory. Maqoma journeys into the dual world of Matinyana and through Miss Thandi tries to hold her together.

In the Umdudo Views, the review and preview paper affiliated with the FNB Vita Dance Umdudo held at the Rhodes University Theatre in Grahamstown 2002, Dr Fred Hagemann reported in his article “*Dance reflects national psyche and concrete benefits*”⁵⁷ that

“three themes were evident – cultural identities, the self in the world, and biography. Together, they reflect a national narrative that embraces public concerns, individual struggles, and private memories”(2002).

Gregory Maqoma's Miss Thandi was featured in this programme on the opening night of the FNB Vita Dance Umdudo. The work is a biographical tribute to the late Raymond Vuyo Matinyana. Matinyana was better known to the performance world as *Miss Thandi*, an African drag artist, of Xhosa tradition. Maqoma celebrates and laments Matinyana's life in an attempt to immortalise his significance. Matinyana challenged convention, culture and tradition through

⁵⁶ This quotation is taken from Robert Colman's article “*Dancing like a movie*” in Mail & Guardian, 18-24 February 2000.

⁵⁷ This article was the lead story in the Umdudo Views, Volume 1, Issue 6, 22 April 2002. (Appendix E).

his creation of *Miss Thandi*. The question that we now ask is, why does Maqoma turn to the biographical history of *Miss Thandi*?

The answer to this question lies in Maqoma's personal relationship with Matinyana. Maqoma identifies with the character of *Miss Thandi* and says "through reflecting Miss Thandi's biography I'm also reflecting my own autobiography" (Interview conducted by Bailey Snyman, 14/09/2002). Maqoma wishes for his audience to create their own story and believes that the dance is a two-way communicative process where he and the audience inform and move each other.

Maqoma knew Raymond Matinyana before he established the character of *Miss Thandi*. Maqoma asserts further that,

"I know him [Raymond and *Miss Thandi*] on a personal level and I know him also as an artist. And I've lived with him and shared with him so many things on a social level and even artistically or even at a professional level. I draw a lot from that character of *Miss Thandi* but also I draw a lot from the perception of people regarding that character, and I also draw a lot from the perception of people regarding the gay community" (Ibid).

However, the challenge that is presented here in an attempt to analyse this work under the theoretical boundaries set up in the first part of the thesis, is the relationship between the biographical and autobiographical. It is argued that autobiographical accounts become even more subjective than biographical accounts. The reason for this, as set up by Pachter (1981), is that when the writer/choreographer relates too directly with the object of inquiry or to the life presented, there is the fear of the biographer allowing the life 'to become a vehicle for the airing of his biases, or, worse, for the satisfaction of his own longings, distorting the life to prove a point emotionally necessary to himself' (Pachter, 1981, pp. 8-9). Furthermore, there is a great threat when the biographer and the subject know each other, as is the case with Maqoma and Matinyana.

Edel (in Pachter, 1981) wonders if valid biography is even possible under such circumstances.

However, Finestone (2002) suggests that autobiography is the “re-invention of what we imagine our most intimate memories to be” (p. 16). She states further that,

“auto-biography...is where two areas of public and private either collude or collide. It questions the known relation between bodily experience and cultural representation, tracing relations between body and identity”.

Surely, however, there still exists in South Africa a viewing of the self in terms of the other? Autobiography, according to Albright (1997), is able to restructure the self/other dichotomy. Maqoma’s Miss Thandi thus becomes such an excavation in that it draws on Maqoma’s complex plethora of subjectivities, as well as, Matinyana’s experiences and their affect on each other.

Maqoma’s challenge is then to probe beneath the public self and claw at the intimacies of the private self. This challenge is met from theory in that the past is ephemeral in nature and because it is a jumble of events it then seems less than possible that Maqoma is able to recount all his own personal lived experience. Rather, the suggestion is that Maqoma recounts his own story in relation to Matinyana’s biographical history. The endeavour then becomes a two-way intertextual process for Maqoma, as he believes, the choreographer carries the responsibility of portraying the “burden of history” (interview, 14/09/2002). Maqoma suggests that,

“it is a reflection of people, it’s a reflection of cultures, it’s a reflection of histories, it’s a reflection of the evolving history that we all follow...[Maqoma is] dealing with issues that are affecting my society...” (Ibid).

Maqoma’s Miss Thandi takes a multi-disciplinary approach to dance making. Linda Peyters in her article ‘*Moving on up*’ (in The Citizen, 13/03/2002),

“In Miss Thandi, Maqoma has found a truly authentic voice and breaks new ground in terms of dance language. His choreography is refreshingly unselfconscious, unapologetic and distinctly African”.

This authentic voice appears in the form of Miss Thandi, both as character and dance. Adrienne Sichel describes the multifarious nature of Miss Thandi as follows,

“Maqoma’s Miss Thandi is an unflinchingly honest multimedia biography and autobiography of two black South African artists caught in the crossfire of their sexuality and culturally shredded identities. On video is Raymond Vuyo Matinyana...On stage is Maqoma clad in a white designer mini dress. Strips of white, red and black cloth designating passages of Matinyana and Maqoma’s life demarcate the dancing ground [and] inventive music...performed live” (*The night SA dance finally grew up* in Pretoria News Interval, 12/03/2002).

Maqoma is prolific in his handling of biographical history in Miss Thandi as it reflects views of the contemporary social body. History becomes a commemoration of our common experience as South African’s in that it honours the unconscious solidarity “of a people celebrated in the moments of greatest stress” (Kazin in Pachter, 1979, p. 84). Maqoma too becomes the physical epithet of Raymond Vuyo Matinyana, and transports the viewer into *Miss Thandi*’s world of uncertainty. If this work is autobiographical then surely this too tells us something of Maqoma’s story. In Maqoma’s words,

“Identity is a big thing...I think we are actually in a crisis at the moment...That we are trying so hard to define ourselves within this diversity...and in trying so hard to define ourselves we actually at the same time are trying to protect our own squares...and by protecting our own squares we are actually creating an “identity”... and the question is now, maybe we have found our own identity as individuals, but as South African what is our identity?...I think we find that it is that we are unique, that it is a nation without any identity, any strict form of identity, but we are still South African because we don’t have identity. So our identity is not having an identity”⁵⁸.

⁵⁸ This quotation is taken from an interview conducted by JHB Snyman on 14/09/2002.

5.3 Resolving the problematics of interpretation

It is clear from the above analyses then that the task implicit in making dance in contemporary South Africa is no longer to decide on a truth-value but rather to probe the documents performatively and from within. The body thus becomes, for both Gordon and Maqoma, historiography in motion⁵⁹. They draw on the idea that 'I' and the world coexist and consciously do not attempt to split the work from their lives. It then seems pertinent that the world of the observer is the world being observed.

Biography as with choreography follows a process of the conception of a theme and the manipulation of that theme. It then only seems appropriate that the two worlds collude and collide at this point of departure. Contemporary biographer's, according to Pachter (1981),

"are far less likely to 'expose' a life, to treat its public ideals and manners, its perfected sense of self, as an ironic backdrop to the true inner drama of character. The biographer is less the judge or debunker: He is far more willing to accept as valid and revealing, if not as literally true, an individual's improved presentation of himself before the world. His goal is to portray, as Justin Kaplan has written, 'the whole sense of a person,' the relationship between the public ideal of himself, which he holds as his 'personal mythology,' and the inner fears, longings and spirited aspirations that call it forth" (p. 13).

It then becomes evident that the biographer's/choreographer's intervening role, should to be taken into consideration. It thus encourages us to go beyond a view that personal stories are trapped in time. Rather the lives of these men and women encourage the questioning of conflicts over identity, and the relations between personal freedom and the responsibility to deconstruct the stereotypes that are still so prevalent in our society.

⁵⁹ For more insight into readings of these works refer to **Appendix F**.

Conclusion

What does it mean to choreograph a life? It is this question that has been of utmost importance since the outset of this thesis. Modern archives present the historian with mountains of information; however, this does not seem to be the case within post-apartheid South Africa. We now realise that there is very little objective documentation of South African lives prior 1994. The choreographer, who turns to biography as a source for making dance is then enlisting more data into the minimal archives of South African history.

However, the questions that have been presented in this thesis, have not only shed light on notions of history, choreographing history and biography but have also presented a predicament for the choreographer archivist. This predicament has been fuelled by post-modern discourse, in its attempt to deconstruct the 'violent hierarchies'. The challenge to nullify that predicament, has been attempted, however, due to the limitations of a short dissertation, the researcher is once again made aware of the fallacy of objectivity.

Attempting to come to decisive definitions only creates uncertainties. It has been established that we are unable to replicate lives in the same manner every time considering the myriad of facts available for interpretation. To reduce paradigms to their most simplistic understandings is to avoid the concepts inherent in post-modern discourse. This opens the door to understanding concepts as intertextual references rather than separate entities. The notion of the body as established by Finestone (2002) having a mind of its own has become an integral device in the expedition towards generating understandings of transformations in contemporary South African choreography. The body becomes a textual landscape that holds a plethora of meaning generating images akin to the diverse nature of the historical biographies utilised in Bessie's Head and Miss Thandi.

South Africans are at a point of departure into establishing identity and meaning from the past in anticipation of a future for themselves and this is evident in current choreographic explorations.

Characters from the past provide challenges for the contemporary South African choreographer attempting to re-define the processes and modes of inquiry into the past. As Foster (1995) suggests choreographing history requires two considerations, "...that history is made by bodies [and that]...all those bodies continually conspire together and are conspired against". Dance produces bodies that are both able to initiate as well as respond. Derrida has provided critical philosophies into this area of study; the notion of deconstructing 'violent hierarchies' is pivotal to generating meanings for this study.

This thesis has established that there is no truth-value to be found neither in the past nor in biography. Language and the physical collude in a 'present' moment (a moment of being), the exact moment of doing. The challenge is rather to become critically aware of fallacious South African histories and to probe beneath the landscape of the lives that have gone before.

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- Adrienne Sichel: Interviewed by Lanon Prigge FNB Dance Umbrella 1995

Appendix A

Interview with Gregory Maqoma

Conducted by Bailey Snyman

14/9/2002

Do you feel South African choreography has shifted since the 1994 democratic elections? If so, what would you suggest are some of the dominant changes.

Well, it has been a dramatic change. I think, for our choreographers who were fortunate enough that they appeared at that period, where there were changes and where there were acceptances from different cultures, there was an acceptance of one another. Also there was that curiosity from the outside world and in wanting to know what was really taking place in South Africa and that is the reason why we have South African Choreographers travelling a lot overseas and that was because of that curiosity that people had. But also in terms of productions there was also a development in terms of people were able to freely express their emotions and express their ideas which they couldn't do in the past because of those restrictions and also because people were lacking that identity. I call our generation a lost generation, because we are all still trying to find ourselves within this democracy and within this culture.

Do you feel that the choreographer has a specific function role within our society?

Well, I would say so. I think that any art form without a social responsibility for me is something else. I don't see it as art because art resembles people, it is a reflection of people, it's a reflection of cultures, it's a reflection of histories, it's a reflection of the evolving history that we all are following. So we carry that responsibility of portraying that history, that burden. It is a burden basically that

we all carry, and we try by all means to express our emotions and our responsibilities through our art form.

Does this responsibility lie within social or personal histories?

I don't think you can stop reflecting yourself. I think you are continually reflecting yourself within the whole society, and I think I'll take my own example where in Rhythm Colour I try to reflect a society but at the same time I'm reflecting myself, so it's a two way process.

Something like Miss Thandi, that character I find similarities to, and through reflecting Miss Thandi's biography I'm also reflecting my own autobiography. At the same time I'm reflecting a society. So its all those things, I find it difficult to separate, unless I'm dealing with someone's biography that has got nothing to do with my own autobiography. But in most cases so far I have been dealing with issues that are affecting my society but have also have probably affected me directly or even indirectly.

In making Miss Thandi did you allow source to inform the movement content?

Yes. Mainly because I know Miss Thandi and I've known him before he even established this character of Miss Thandi. So, I know him on a personal level and I know him also as an artist. And I've lived with him and shared with him so many things on a social level and even artistically or even at a professional level. I draw a lot from that character of Miss Thandi but also I draw a lot from the perception of people regarding that character, and I also draw a lot from the perception of people regarding the gay community. So there is an element of fear, and whether it is a fear of going through the process of death, or a fear of the society you live amongst, there is always an element of fear which is quite evident within this character.

How would you respond to Adrienne Sichel's suggestion that in the new century South African choreographers are taking a more multi-disciplinary approach to making theatre.

I wouldn't say necessarily. It does affect but it is not necessarily so. If it does affect the choreographic approach, it does it on 2 levels:

1. it is on a personal level, that you reflect what ever you feel inside or your experiences,
2. and secondly, its on a general level, basically, and you ask, do other people feel the same sentiments that I do? And how can I then reflect people's opinion, and that is why we find multi-media aspects coming into play, that's why people use video that's why people use slides, just to enhance that even in the outside area and outside my own personal feelings there is that general feeling that we share the same sentiments.

What does History in broad sense mean for you?

History is for me is always evolving because it keeps repeating itself. History is not a past. I think we live the history, for me it is continuous, because we keep on going back to that history. We keep going back into things that have happened in the past, maybe to find answers, maybe to find comfort, maybe to find reason. But history for me is evolving, it like culture changes. It changes people, it changes who you are.

How would you respond to Susan Leigh Foster's suggestion that past bodies affect present bodies, which then in turn affect future bodies?

Yeah, definitely so. Already now I am passing my experience of Miss Thandi to a wider audience, probably some of them have never met him, may never meet that character. But I'm passing that to them, maybe someone else will embody that history or will embody my own history one day and say that I reflect the

history of Gregory which Gregory reflected in his history. So there is always a carry over of those histories.

Do you feel that the turn to history is a need by South African choreographers to establish an identity?

Especially in South Africa. Identity is a big thing, its still a big thing. I think we are actually in a crisis at the moment, that we are trying so hard to define ourselves within this diversity. And in trying so hard to define ourselves we actually at the same time trying to protect our own squares and by protecting our own squares we are actually creating an "identity", some kind of an identity, which is not really a South African identity. However, it is still your identity. And the question is now, maybe we have found as individuals our own identity, but as South African what is our identity.

Where do you hope it is all heading?

I don't know. I like the way it is at the moment. We have all these options, we have all these cultures that cross each other, which influence each other, which we borrow from, and it is exciting. And I think we can't allow ourselves to be in our own squares because it has never worked in the past and it will never work. I think we find that it is that we are unique, that we are a nation without any identity; any strict form of identity. But we are still South African because we don't have identity. So our identity is not having an identity.

Appendix B

by Adrienne Sichel

Thinking back on the hectic nine-day Standard Bank National Festival of the Arts I remembered a relevant statement that "the arts must define whatever new society it is that we're evolving.

"To find what are the values, and hopefully to try to find better methods of human exchange and interchange". The speaker is Lloyd Richards, Dean of the Yale School of Drama and artistic director of the Yale Repertory Theatre — coincidentally where Fugard's A Place with the Pigs had its world premiere before reaching the Grahamstown Festival. More to the point, in the same interview in the Christian Science Monitor's Agenda for the 21st Century series, Richards said "A theatre is an exciting place to be. A dangerous place to be, because living people are there — there is communication in so many different ways ... as long as that exists, we will have theatre. People telling stories and having conversations. And the theatre is a conversation."

In this case Grahamstown was Conversation Capital, hosting a cultural summit, at the same time and on the same continent as the historic Dakar conference. Author André P. Brink, replacing Fredrik van Zyl Slabbert at relatively short notice, gave the Winter School's keynote address on "The Arts in Society" before jetting north to Senegal.

It's fitting that the 1820 Foundation, which instigated this national arts jamboree 13 years ago, has a logo which looks like an oblong window. The 1987 event, which had a 50 percent increase in attendance on 1986 and enormous support from young people, certainly provided a window onto various aspects of South African life.

Whereas the State of Emergency was more than a bit player at last year's Festival, this year people took over in no uncertain terms. Not that the Festival, which increasingly cannot in all fairness be branded totally elitist, is representative of the masses. But it did provide a wide base for socio-political expression in a range of art forms.

The amount of community theatre was staggering. "Stop the revolution I want to get off!" cried New Nation critic Tyrone August in a review in the new Festival daily newspaper Cue. He was referring to the amount and poor quality of "protest" theatre. What struck me most, no matter how low the technical standard, was the diversity of forms using virtually the same stock material drawn from daily experiences. Dramatised narratives about township life with its Kitskonstabels, Young Lions, trade unions, detention et al, all featured in worker plays and teaching plays. Not that these works were seen in their proper perspective out of their natural setting away from participating target audiences.

Professor Ian Steadman put these unknown quantities, unknown to the average white citizen at any rate, in their political and artistic context in his highly edifying Winter School lecture "Theatre and Society in South Africa". Prof. Steadman pinpointed and discussed three particular forms: community-, trade union- and black theatre.

One of the main criticisms the adjudicators had of the Student Drama Festival (which drew a record eleven entries out of a possible thirteen) was that the groups tended to intellectualise the scripts. They didn't fill the acting space with their bodies or tell a story. That couldn't be said about the "protest" theatre.

The heavy township participation ranged from the mainstream Sekunjalo, Gibson Kente's slick, touristy, ideological mish-mash musical (which ironically went on to be banned in King William's Town) to the truly impressive Kwanele by the Nyanga Theatre Group. This well structured beautifully acted and directed work highlights the function of the cultural worker.

Among my most unforgettable moments of Fest '87 was the one-off performance by 52 people, from 10 years old to middle-age, in the minute makeshift theatre of Dicks. The Black Solidarity Cultural Group from Langa, under the inspiring leadership of a distinguished gentleman named Chris Zingelwa, were deposited at the Monument unannounced, determined to participate. They were found accommodation in a township church hall, and given a single slot. This incident was an act of theatre in itself. Their passionate, if chaotic, performance of Langa

Day, a chronicle of their daily lives, was wildly energetic and not without nuggets of considerable dramatic merit.

In this same technically limited venue, totally unsuited to ensembles, I was also vastly entertained by the eight-member Isizwe Experimental Theatre Group (also from Langa, Cape Town) and their people's alternative history The Question Mark dating from Jan van Riebeeck to present day.

Then there was Search!, a two-hander, with considerable commercial potential in the tradition of Bophal, performed by young men from Sebokeng. It centred on the international frontline of the guerilla struggle and the education system.

The Breughel Theatre Group of Stellenbosch were a treat with their am-dramish but deliciously original, in concept and design, Lucy Strata in which Lysi-strata, transplanted to the Cape, plots to bring Apartheid down her famous way.

Trade unionism, and how it can ultimately fail, was theatricalised in Khaya Mqayisa's How About Black Coffee?. Processed community theatre was exemplified by the Cape Flats Players' Aluta Continua - The Struggle Continues. Women's rights and plights were explored in two other Cape Town community projects: Vukanil was a potential winner from the dynamic Nomtheto Sibisi and friends. Some of them partook in Isegazini - It's in the Blood, a Fringe hit, in the form of a moving collage of music, drama and movement. It tells the emotionally charged true story of the relationship between Athlone "nanny" Myrtle Cupido (who makes her stage debut) and Yda, the white child she raised.

Apart from Sekunjalo, Soweto was represented by the music-based Uphu' van der Merwe (which won a Fringe Merit Award) and Township Boy previously staged at the Market. Both group productions, featuring white directors, received capacity audiences and standing ovations.

But there was more to Festival fare than battle cries of resistance and communities at war with the system, and with each other. The full spectrum of theatre traditions was on show at this theatre bonanza. Festivalgoers could take their pick from Pieter Toerien's classy offerings of Michael Atkinson as George Bernard Shaw in the one-man show My Astonishing Self and the delightful Noel and



Troopies Barry Berk and Damon Galgut won cheers they didn't expect.



Leslie Fong and Antoinette Kellerman in "Anatomie Titus Fall of Rome".

Gertie (Coward and Lawrence, of course). Or laugh and cry at the Lindberg's staging of the freshly imported West End comedy When I was a Girl I used to Scream and Shout.

On the main programme the Arts Councils let rip with the equine curiosity Strider (PACT's great hit with the audience, less so with the critics) and Anatomie Titus: Fall of Rome (CAPAB's stupendously theatrical spectacle about violence breeding violence). Both Councils were well represented on the Fringe. Judging by their choice of material and the performance standard PACT emerged as stylish and versatile, but entrenched in "safe" theatre. CAPAB on the other hand (and I'm not counting Carvings of Conflict, that lulu of a lemon from Port Elizabeth) takes laudable risks with a remarkably flexible ensemble of players.

Another major presence on the mainstream Fringe (a main Fringe, Fringe Fringe, And Beyond the Fringe were obvious this year) was Pieter-Dirk Uys. He shocked, and alienated many of his adoring followers with the hard-hitting satire Rearranging the Deckchairs on the SA Bothatonic (no lifebelts for complacent ja-broers) and won a new flock with his new bilingual comedy Panorama set on Robben Island. Awarded a Fringe Merit Award, this two-acter, featuring Susan Coetzer's brilliant portrayal of an Afrikaans school teacher, is a snappy designer number, but the seams are still showing. Uys's marathon Die van Aardes van Grootoor was given enthusiastic, but misguided treatment at the Student Festival by the Natal Technikon. It did prove, however, that a professional revival is long overdue.

Afrikaans theatre fared very well with Titus and three ATKV Kampustoneel plays: drama Student Wayne Robbins's UCT stunner Dis al, the Windhoek Akademie's Smeerige Geskiedenis and Kinderspeletjies. The latter, a black comedy, got full professional treatment from Gerrit Schoonhoven and a superb PACOFS all female cast.

Spontaneous events included the South African premieres of Saturday Night at the Palace: The Movie and another local film Wêreld Sonder Grense.

Music tastes were catered for from marimbas to the much hailed visiting Verdi String Quartet, the Cape Town Sinfonietta and a number of top choirs.

Lively public debate was stimulated by Cue the newly introduced daily Festival newspaper produced at the Department of Journalism and Media Studies. Festival news, gossip and reviews provided a useful public service at the cost of 20c. Among the contributors were members of the high powered arts Press corps from around the country and the London Sunday Express's Clive Hirschhorn, a judge at the Student Festival.

Hirschhorn commented in an article headlined "It's bloody difficult to write a play" on the fact that not a single dramatist, albeit one in embryo, has surfaced from one of the country's campuses' on the student Fringe. I suggest he was both at the wrong Festival and looking in the wrong place. If he had ventured into the wider Fringe he would have discovered the likes of Deon Opperman (G.A.T.), Wayne Robbins (Dis al) and other young talents who first surfaced at the ATKV's Kampustoneel which, paired with PACT's Pot-pourri, has in the past four years revealed considerable talents.

What remains after such a bombardment of entertainment? Basically individual responses and images.

One morning I saw a local little boy, walking hand in hand with his older siblings to the shops. White-faced Francesco the Clown, aglimmer and aglitter in satins, sequins and feathers was carrying props to his car. The child stopped dead in his tracks. Enchanted. For a few seconds his humdrum world was transformed.

That was on a pavement. Transformations and enchantments were happening in performance spaces by the minute for nine days. Whether it was Elzabe Zietsman's stupendous voice and personality in her sell-out cabaret; the sight of Marius Weyers transforming into Strider, a dying horse; Jennie Reznak smoking cigarette ads in Cheap Flights; or Lesley Fong dangling from a rope by his ankle above the bloody carnage of Anatomie Titus; David Dennis outdoing Charlie Chaplin and Peter Sellers in CAPAB's Ubu Roi; spells were cast.

Ultimately in an arts event of this scale, which acts as a social barometer and forecaster, theatre is not only a great conversationalist, but a master magician. Long live the Standard Bank National Arts Festival so graciously hosted by the city of Grahamstown.

André P. Brink: ASPEKTE VAN DIE NUWE DRAMA

Pretoria: Academica, Second, revised edition, 1986.

Recommended price: R18,95 + GST.

Reviewed by Temple Hauptfleisch

Besides being a major novelist, playwright and academic, André P. Brink is arguably the most influential Afrikaans critic of the late seventies and early eighties. While the real impact of his literary column in the Afrikaans Sunday paper Rapport will no doubt only become clear later, he has patently had a significant canonizing influence on recent writing, in virtually all fields. The first appearance of this book in 1974 was therefore an important event in many ways. Brink's erudite analysis of twentieth century trends in theatre and his coinage of the term "die Nuwe Drama" (the "New Drama") to describe those elements — philosophical, structural, critical — which can be said to distinguish the theatre of our times from preceding traditions, (Chapters I-IV in the new version) became a basic text in Afrikaans theatre and literary studies. And his brave, creative and lucidly argued evaluation of the "new" writers in Afrikaans who so forcibly changed the form and content of theatre in this country during the sixties and seventies still remains one of the base texts for any study of Afrikaans drama (Chapters V-VI).

What we have now is a revised and updated version of the original text, a version which includes some discussion of certain new theoretical trends in literary studies (e.g. Reception Aesthetics and Deconstructionist theory, notably through a discussion of the work of Barthelemy Smit in Chapter VII) and an evaluation of all significant ("beduidende") new (published) work up to 1985. (Brink is certainly still not afraid of going out on a limb as a critic!)

And one once again cannot but laud Brink's sound — and amazingly still rather solitary — contribution in this field, despite two fundamental difficulties the present critic has with the book. In the absence of any other comparable work, there seems to be little point in overemphasising the weaknesses which the second edition (and the passage of time) have brought to the fore, but in view of the whole current debate around the entire canonizing structure in the country, it might be useful to sound a warning of some kind.

THE 1991 GRAHAMSTOWN FESTIVAL: An Overview¹

Darryl Accone

The Star, Johannesburg

The only incontrovertible thing about the Grahamstown Festival is that it was - inevitably - bigger than last year's: more people bought more tickets to see more productions.

But was bigger better in aesthetic terms? Did the 102 drama productions on the Fringe present significant new writing on South African issues or seize the opportunity provided by the Fringe to present experimental work?

For me the festival showed the first attempts by writers to humanise the victims of apartheid and move away from didacticism (though in the latter regard with signal lack of success in some productions). Bludgeoning messages gave way to a consideration of the dehumanising effects of apartheid on the individual: believable characters replaced demagogues; dialogue supplanted sloganeering. But, self evidently, perceptions depended on how many and which performances you saw (perhaps the strongest argument adduced by those in favour of a reduced Fringe).

The practical problems that influenced the perspectives and altered appreciation were considerable. The sheer number of productions presented problems for festival-goers and critics alike. For the public, to the possibility of aesthetic disappointment were added the factors of wasted money and time, all made more likely by the paucity of production information in the programme (not the fault of its compilers). However, there was an inherent safeguard in the improved overall performance standard - quite marked for those who have been watching the Fringe develop over the last four or five years.

It was content rather than presentation that worried others, a by no means negligible number of whom voiced concern that new works failed to deal with major local issues and that, infected by the same malaise of avoidance, other offerings were convenient stagings of non-South African classics.



Gamakhulu Diniso from *Kuyanuka - Stink For Us All*, performed at the DALRO Pot-Pourri Festival in April.

But there was no absence of political and violent issues. Education, one of the most volatile and political of subjects (have we forgotten the 1976 Soweto student uprising and its continuing consequences?) was examined in, among others, Gamakhulu Diniso's *Kuyanuka - Stink for Us All*, the Lukhanyo Freeway Artists' *Crisis in the Classroom* and Smal Ndaba's *NET Boys' High*. Nevertheless, it is true that the violence of political aspirations (too often simplistically described as Xhosa/Zulu tribalism) received short shrift from playwrights. Possibly the only play to address the issue was the Zakheni Cultural Group's *Living in Fear*, which accorded with its programme billing as "an anti-violence tragedy of inter-organisation conflicts".

The kernel of an answer to addressing this issue may lie in the comment of the ANC Department of Arts and Culture chief and writer Wally Serote, following his Winter School address "Our Lives and Poetry: A Personal View":

Writers are very dull people, (he suggested,) but only in the sense that they can't articulate immediately what they see, perceive and experience... But they are absorbing and processing before writing.

The fruits of such process were evident in, for example, *At the Edge*, Ronnie Govender's Cato Manor inspired piece as well as the reworked *Tooth and Nail*, which undermined comfortable notions of the New South Africa. And what should not be overlooked is that both those works, together with the Young Artist Award-winner Peter Ngwenya's *Where is My Son?* and Janice Honeyman's resurrection and adaptation of Percival Gibbon's *The Story of Margaret Harding*, appeared on the Mainstream drama programme: unthinkable even a few years ago.

Equally inconceivable then would have been a major ANC presence at the Festival. All that was changed by Barbara Masekela's watershed visit of 1990, in the wake of which Albie Sachs, Chris Hani, Gertrude Shope and Wally Serote were all scheduled to participate in this year's Winter School. However, the timing of the ANC National Congress in Durban meant that all but Serote had to withdraw. Nevertheless, Sachs's paper, *A Bill of Rights for South African Artists* was read for him at the Winter School.

It began by saying

... less than two years ago ... I made a simple suggestion to my colleagues in the ANC, namely, that we ban ourselves from saying by way of monotonous incantation that culture was a weapon of struggle.

Now in addressing an audience made up more of aesthetes than of activists, I propose, with equally banal solemnity, that we prohibit ourselves from repeating from morning till night that art is not a weapon of the struggle ...

We have huge questions that need to be faced up to in our country and culture is right at the centre of the enquiry.

A Bill of Rights, Sachs maintained, "creates nothing. It acknowledges and defends what is already there, and guarantees space for development of the new". He continued:

We know some of the things we have fought for ... abolition of censorship, freedom of expression, the right to criticise our rulers and challenge the system under which we live.

A Bill of Rights is thus imperative to consolidate principles that have been established in struggle, to block retrocession and to impede new modes of violation.

The draft bill includes clauses guaranteeing freedom of speech, assembling, information, association and religion and language rights. But of particular importance to the arts (and particularly disturbing) is the clause on creative freedom. It reads:

There shall be freedom of artistic activity and scientific enquiry, without censorship, subject only to such limitations as may be imposed by law in accordance with principles generally accepted in open and democratic societies.

There are many who see in this an insidious caveat, a hidden proviso that makes allowance for the future suppression of the very freedom it purports to promote. If the example of the recent furore over America's National Endowment for the Arts is anything to go by, the "principles generally accepted in open and democratic societies" are prescriptive and proscribing. Having laboured under those yokes for far too long, theatre and the arts in South Africa deserve to be freed, not set up to be ensnared once more.

That very danger formed part of the subject of *The Dogs Must Be Crazy*, presented by Cape Town's Community Arts Project (CAP). A presentation combining mime, surtitles and subtitles, the show also examined searchingly other major questions in the arts, like the cultural boycott. While some of the material may have been crass, much of it was withering satire. Equally exposing local grotesqueries was the ultra-sharp *One Man, One Pizza*, which showed off a meaner, even more incisive Ian Fraser. There was sharp writing, too, in Owen de Jager's *The Porno Shoppe*, an acute consideration of the currencies of social and sexual interaction. Those were also the subjects of Charl Blignaut's *Dangerous Liaisons*, which borrowed here and there from distinguished precursors and included a neatly appropriate lifting from *Hamlet*. The writing really needed a more experienced cast (Nicky Rebelo and Lynita Crofford aside) to transmit the author's comic and other intentions.

Well served by performers Charles Halati and Mathy Matlaopane was Sekiswa Sewanywa's *Is it too late?*, a production from the Mmabane Cultural Centre. Again, the work focused on the individual in the light of the everyday degradations of apartheid.

Another tack was taken by Nicholas Ellenbogen's Theatre for Africa. On the lighter side of its offering, the immensely popular *Raiders of the Last Aardvark* repeated its success of 1990 while its sequel *The Return of the Son of the Raiders of the Last Aardvark II*, proved even better. Ellenbogen's environmental musical concept took flight in the accessible, entertaining and poignant *Trophy Hunters*, co-written by Neill Solomon. The addition of Andrew Buckland gave audiences the breathtaking spectacle of body artists Buckland and Ellis Pearson together in *Raiders II* and *Sala Kahle*. Unfortunately I did not see the latter, but judging by the company's other offerings, its subject - the re-allocation of land - would have received trenchant and engaging treatment.

What does all of this tell us about the Festival? That it is in transition, yes. But it is a potentially exciting time, rather than the picture of gloom perceived by many.

In terms of drama, the desire is to craft plays rather than statements. That is a giant step forward, and it yielded a number of works of intense "relevance". As I left Port Elizabeth's H F Verwoerd airport, my mind held the image of that grand architect of apartheid as seen in Paul Slabolepszy's considerable *Brait Laaities* - presiding

over and bedevilling the simplest human contact between two individuals.

Note

1. *SATJ* would like to thank *The Star* for permission to reproduce this article, and the accompanying photographs.



Take the Floor by Susan Pam-Grant and D.J. Grant. Directed by Lara Foot. Photo: Ruphin Coudyzer.

THE 1994 GRAHAMSTOWN FESTIVAL

Michael Arthur and Tom Arthur
James Madison University, U.S.A.

It has been said time and again that the Grahamstown Festival is like a mirror held up to South African society. During the last several years of transition especially, the Festival has been analyzed as a barometer measuring societal and cultural changes in an emerging "New" South Africa. This year, for the first time ever, such observations ceased to be contingent upon a theoretical "New". The 1994 Grahamstown Festival was the first to take place during the reign of a majority elected South African government. While it remains too early to make any definitive statements regarding the successes and failures of the transition, such a momentous change in the lives of both the performers and presenters manifests itself less in the productions of the Festival than in the general atmosphere of Grahamstown.

Two years ago, (the last time we attended the Festival) many of the shows actively - and, frequently, self-consciously - confronted the questions presented by the challenges of the ongoing transition. This year the works at Grahamstown reflected an ambiguity which defies easy categorization. In several of the main-stage shows the emphasis was upon entertainment over analysis and rhetoric. For example, Pamela Sue-Grant's pleasant enough *Take the Floor*, nicely staged by (the seemingly ubiquitous) Lara Foote, contained enough shameless mugging by the performers that it was easy to forget that the work contained all the substance of cotton candy. Similarly, productions of both Deon Opperman's *Goya* and Capab's presentation of Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*, while essentially "idea" plays, worked best precisely because they were *supposed to be* about something, rather than because they actually had something to say¹.

One of the greatest controversies going in to this year's festival had to do with the main stage exclusion of PACT and its premiere of American playwright Tony Kushner's celebrated epic *Angels in America* due to labor problems between the Performing Arts Council and its union workers. While the Performing Arts Councils face increased scrutiny in a changing society, the organizers of the Grahamstown Festival did see fit to invite one of the more celebrated community theatre troupes in South Africa, the

Amakhwenkwe Cultural Group, to perform their *Eita de! Hoesit?* in the Festival's main township venue, the Community Centre. Although these two events are not necessarily related, they may be indicative of the shift in the festival's perception of what constitutes an accepted cultural institution in the New South Africa. Nevertheless, at a Winter School lecture devoted to the future of South African theatre, the emphasis was upon established white artists and their observations. The panel participants, Reza De Wet, Andrew Buckland, and festival-favorite Nicholas Ellenbogen all seemed to respond to chairperson Tim Huisamen's questions with varying degrees of impatience and enthusiasm, while observers were left to wonder what a representative from (for example) the Amakhwenkwe Group might have contributed.

Members of smaller community arts companies used the Grahamstown Festival as a resource to get feedback on their work while examining the efforts of others. The July 7 issue of *Cue* featured a story about Joza's *Masande Players* and Luvuyo's *Lukhanyo Freeway Artists*:

[They] cannot follow a hit formula because they know none. And while concern about money is one of the issues about which they create work, they are not at the festival for money. They want comment.

"How can we make our show better?" asked 23-year-old Gray Kesheni from *Masande*.

On a rainy afternoon during one of the Festival's last days we watched the work of young dancers with the Mamelodi Theatre Organization (a few of them no older than six) perform before about ten people in the cavernous city hall as if they were working a full house. The reason for their enthusiasm became apparent when the performance was halted after about half an hour so that Germaine Acogny, previously associated with Maurice Bejart's dance school in Dakar, could lead them in an impromptu dance workshop.

This year, audiences could be forgiven if they had the impression that all theatre lobbies led to Sophiatown. In such works as Barney Simon's *The Coat*, Paul Slabolepsky's *Victoria Almost Falls*, and in the revival of Fugard's *Nongogo* audiences were reminded of the spirit of a multicultural South Africa which might have been, had it not been "bulldozed" nearly thirty years ago. In some ways this attitude was an

extension of the new-found national pride on display throughout the streets and shops of Grahamstown where merchants hawked pins and t-shirts emblazoned with the new South African flag.

For these reviewers, the most dramatic example of this national spirit occurred in the Monument theatre during the blackout which hit a large section of South Africa's southern coast midway through the festival. About a hundred people from the audience took to the stage and, illuminated only by the beams of a few flashlights, turned the delay into a celebration by leading the audience in an exuberant medley of Motown songs. As a bad situation turned into an opportunity for community spirit, the singers began a rousing version of *N'kosi Sikeleli Africa* which nearly brought the darkened house down.

Another distinguishing characteristic of this year's Festival was the preponderance of "monologue-plays," works which depended not on the presence of dialogue and multiple characters but solo performers stepping out and telling their stories directly to the audiences. In Deon Opperman's *Goya*, as well as in his *Sweet Sorrows*, Athol Fugard's collaborative *My Life*, Thuli Dumakude's *Buya Africa*, and even in Hearts and Eyes Theatre's choice of presenting American performance artist Tim Miller's text, *Get Hard*, Grahamstown's stages presented actors going one on one with their audiences. Watching *Sweet Sorrows* and *Goya* we were reminded of a moment near the end of Opperman's *Women in the Wings*² two years ago. In an attempt to comfort a young actress who fears that the new South Africa will have no place for a young ingenue, the older actress played by Wilna Snyman (who also starred in *Sweet Sorrows*) tells her, "there will [. . .] always be stories and music and laughter--for these things are [. . .] stamped into the earth of this land. And where they are, there you will find the actor too" (73).

The following reviews represent a small fraction of the works presented at Grahamstown this year.

Eita Da! Hoesit!?

Written and Directed by Jablani Masilela

Director Jacob Masilela described the subject of *Eita* in the Festival programme as "the rise and fall of apartheid," an answer to "Eita da!" ("Hello there") and "Hoesit?"

("How is it going?"). The ensemble production was presented at the Recreation Centre in Joza, one of the Black townships neighboring Grahamstown, by the Amakhwenkwe Cultural Group from Nelspruit after being awarded the "Best of the Lab Showcase" at Johannesburg's Market Theatre Laboratory earlier in the year.

The production began with a drum roll introducing a township master of ceremonies. Things went wrong within minutes when a voice belonging to a young boy in the auditorium objected that the person on stage was the "killer" of his family. As the man on stage nervously attempted to dismiss the interruption, other performers planted in the house took turns urging the boy to speak and demanding that the show continue, uninterrupted. Thus incited, others from the audience began to pour onto the performance platform until the assembled group suddenly turned forward announcing that the previous action had been a play within their play.

At this point the company began singing about their "miserable life in this country" and went on to address the foolishness of avoiding school. Thereafter, the scenes shifted to 1948 and the formal establishment of apartheid, and then began moving forward in time as a staged history of apartheid. Cast members each assumed many roles, including the white police, black mourners at a funeral interrupted by gunfire, reformers, a drunk possessed of a bitterness beyond repair and other characters. At times the entire company would stop suddenly, face out towards the audience and shout things like "Mister Government, when are you going to stop this violence?" and/or conversely "We must let bygones be bygones." Ultimately the time of the action shifted to the moment, just before the election, when people in the townships must decide whether they believe in the possibility of genuine reform and a "new, non-racial South Africa."

The first section of the presentation, with its illusion of audience interchange, was initially puzzling but ultimately proved to be both uncomfortable and gripping. In a society confronted everyday with the notion that neighbors and allies may have been former enemies, the accusations of the child towards the man on stage caused enough uncertainty to elicit genuine discomfort. However, after the first few minutes the group generally stayed within the clichés of that "protest theatre" which supposedly lost its reason for existence on the day Nelson Mandela was elected President. Interestingly, the company members several times articulated their own worry that South Africa was

headed into a banal Tupperware-peddling television desensitized American style existence.

Eita was highly praised by outside critics, with one newspaper writer, Andile Xaba calling it " . . . an impressive ensemble piece," a "celebration presented with verve, insight and . . . a positive outlook," another saying " . . . it takes the mickey out of 40 years of National Party rule and all that socio-political jazz . . ." and a *London Financial Times* columnist remarking on July 10 that the play was one of a number of 1994 Grahamstown offerings marking the end of "apartheid angst." (The first two reviews were printed in the Festival programme's introduction.)

The National Song and Dance Company of Mozambique

Though this superb professional company was begun fifteen years ago, in a neighboring country, this was its first Grahamstown appearance and, in fact, its first anywhere in South Africa. According to the Festival program, the group was "originally composed of students, soldiers and workers from various regions in Mozambique" and in recent years has been "highly praised in the many part of the world" it has visited. These reviewers attended all three of the Grahamstown programmes presented.

The first work, "Peace Poem," emphasized themes of national reconciliation and empowerment as well as the educational benefits, within that context, of art in particular and culture in general. The company's nineteen dancers and five musicians, performing before an almost entirely white audience, gave a vivid, athletic and above all committed performance to the accompaniment, first of a lute-like instrument, and then to various combinations of drums, marimbas and their own vocalizations. The performers frequently split into separate single-sex choruses dressed in colorful, tradition-based costumes; blue trimmed in orange and white, green against a background of yellow, orange against green, etc.. As *Eastern Province Herald* dance critic Janet Buckland wrote in the July 6 *Cue*, the company often looked like a "richly textured African tapestry" in motion.

This first performance, based on recent Mozambique history, began with a "war" which broke down into the confused exhaustion of all concerned. Individual "fights" then erupted, demonstrated by duelling dancing between two, then four, then the entire troop of performers. Out of the symbolic wreckage of this "combat," the participants

ultimately forged a reconciliation (symbolized by a dancer dressed as the White Bird of Peace), and moved on to cooperation, and finally democracy.

The second programme, entitled "The Sun Has Risen," consisted primarily of collages of traditional Mozambican dance styles unified by a contemporary choreographic treatment. The implied question posed by this equally energetic, deeply dedicated offering was, if a basically multi-ethnic country with as many dispirit and formerly warring factions as Mozambique can grope its way towards cooperation, is there not hope for us all?

The last concert, "Celebration," consisted of combinations of the previous offerings and a few new group pieces, with more of an emphasis upon music, both vocal and instrumental. During the final moments of each of the three pieces, the performers came forward and invited, almost commanded, audience members to join them in their dancing, a summons taken up enthusiastically by many people in the house.

Arcadia by Tom Stoppard

A CAPAB Production Directed by Patrick Curtis

As the Grahamstown program has it, Stoppard's *Arcadia* "takes us backward and forward in time" between the early years of the nineteenth century and the present in one English country mansion. The play alternately mocks academia in general and the new historicism in particular, while dealing with matters as dispirit as chaos theory, entropy, thermodynamics, Fermat's Last Theorem, Newcomen's Improved Steam Pump, feminism, the history of British landscape gardening, the life of Byron, the differences between the classical and romantic imagination and the end of existence as we know it (referred to in the piece as "the arrow of time"). Though dauntingly complex, the work is possessed of a luminous clarity of tone and is regarded by many commentators, including these writers, as its prolific author's best work to date.

The plot of *Arcadia* moves between events occurring in 1809, including a relationship between two fictitious characters, precocious thirteen year old Lady Thomasina Coverly and her tutor, Septimus Hodge and, simultaneously, what Lord Byron, a houseguest at the time, was doing just before his first departure from England and arguments almost two hundred years later about what precisely took place regarding both matters. Just before her accidental death in a fire, Thomasina successfully formulates modern "chaos

theory," leaving her brilliant doodlings in the form of an elegant though necessarily incomplete algorithm, which in turn causes her late twentieth century counterparts in the play (and us) to wonder what might have happened, not only to Byron but science, had things worked out differently.

Having seen *Arcadia* on London's West End just three days before viewing CAPAB's South African production, we could not resist some comparison of the two presentations. Though the acting in the Grahamstown version was excellent, in most cases superior to that of the much-praised English cast, mundane lighting and scenery as well as clumsy blocking served to obscure the meaning of the second presentation. CAPAB director Patrick Curtis often placed his actors in straight lines parallel to the front of the stage or clumped together in the center of the set, leaving four to five feet of empty space between the proscenium walls and the action. Whereas in London the rear flats in the crucial last scene were licked with flickers of red and orange light foreshadowing the coming fire, the production presented in Grahamstown was lit in a flat white wash illuminating, but not supporting, the action during the same scene.

Arcadia is not simply about algorithms, but is an exceedingly graceful iterated (repeating) algorithm itself. Ultimately the play seems to suggest that "getting on with the dance," physically and metaphorically, is the only sensible response to mankind's inevitable end, as much a play-filled (as opposed to merely playful) response to Beckett's *Endgame* as Stoppard's first play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, was to the older playwright's *Waiting for Godot*. Though London director Trevor Nunn's production was up to the challenge of Stoppard's demanding new script, the CAPAB presentation got the words right but blurred the meaning by awkward, unsure handling of both atmosphere and choreography.

Buya Africa

Featuring Thuli Dumakude and directed by Welcome Msomi

Buya Africa (Come Back Africa) was written and developed by its central figure, international star performer Thuli Dumakude. The South African singer/dancer/actress was the 1983 winner of an Obie for the Off-Broadway season of *Poppie Nongena* and a 1984 Lawrence Olivier Award for Best Actress in a West End production of the same play. The production was directed by Welcome Msomi, an award winning practitioner himself as well as the husband of its lead. According to Ms. Dumakude, who has not

lived in her native country in recent years, *Buya* is a "celebration" of her experiences from her youth to the present.

The first act was devoted to Ms. Dumakude impersonating and singing the parts of rural Zulus; a woman as child and mother, an eighty-five-year-old man who recalls being pushed out of his house and off his land as a youngster, the courtship and marriage of a country girl -- and the experience of the long awaited voting day this last April. Each of these vignettes ended in established South African songs. The second act began with memories of Ms. Dumakude's own rural grandparents, the performer's first days in Brooklyn ("another township in New York") and her early experiences as a singer in America. Ms. Dumakude erroneously took American folk singer Pete Seeger to task for taking writing credit for the popular "Wimoweh," previously established in South Africa as "Mbube" -- "The White Cat" in English³. The presentation concluded with an introduction of Ms. Dumakude's percussionist, Valeri Naronjo, and guitarist, Emma (both Americans) who then joined the singer in performing a tribute to South Africa's slain anti-apartheid activists.

Ms. Dumakude, obviously an accomplished performer, was bitterly attacked in the July 7 *Cue* by *City Press* writer Sandile Memela. In an article entitled "Losing the Spirit of Africa," Memela granted that the performer was a "vocal powerhouse" who "pulls at the heartstrings and inspires the soul," but maintained that the show lacked "spiritual depth and content" and further charged that Ms. Dumakude had achieved little or no connection with her audience. "It has been said that it is just not enough for an artist to sing or write a poem about Africa," wrote Memela.

For an artist to capture the soul of the continent she has to become part of her living people and pulsating culture; the songs will come by themselves. After almost twenty years of living in the concrete jungle of New York Thuli Dumakude...has lost all the ingredients that make her songs carry the spirit of Africa.

In addition the reviewer noted with obvious distaste that the production's "musical arrangements had been entrusted to an American" and further accused both backup musicians of being out of tune.

The July 10 *Sunday Times'* Festival summary by Barry Ronge also criticized *Buya*, though from a different standpoint. Noting that eminent South African director Welcome Msomi had directed the piece for Ms. Dumakude, Ronge charged that it had been "Billed as a drama," but was no more than "brief bursts of patter" to introduce a cabaret "starring his wife." This chauvinistic dismissal of the star's artistry on the basis of her domestic arrangements, or to put the matter plainly, this blatant sexism, was echoed in other Festival-connected coverage. A July 6 *Cue* article by *Scope's* Grant Siddall called "The Girls of Grahamstown," put forward a view of the city at Festival time as a pick-up paradise, "a mecca for right-thinking men the country over" full of "translucent-skinned, flaxen haired nubile" and "ethereal, pixie like creatures."

Finally these reviewers, who heard nary an out-of-tune note and personally witnessed audience members, not only applauding every Dumakude number enthusiastically but often literally dancing in the aisles, ended by being troubled at Memela's and Ronge's reaction to her work. Whether *Buya Africa* was drama or cabaret, and irrespective of the degree to which Ms. Dumakude's work was or was not influenced by her director/husband, the presentation was one of the few top flight international-level offerings at this year's Festival. It seemed to us that factors besides performance excellence, such as Ms. Dumakude's leaving South Africa years earlier to continue her work, and apparently worse still, returning with American musicians -- as well as her daring to be both a woman and an international star -- were being considered in these reviews of, and commentary on, *Buya Africa*⁴.

"Culture? What Culture?"

Winter School Lecture by Mike Van Graan

General Secretary of the politically independent National Arts Coalition Mike Van Graan addressed a packed room, the only Winter School presentation attended by these observers at which large numbers of black and Indian young people were present. Ignoring a "joke" by his introducer to the effect that Van Graan's color accounted for his recent rise to national eminence, the former African National Congress arts activist set forward his self-defined charge.

When the topic "Culture? What Culture?" was first proposed to me a few months before the election as a Winter School topic, it reflected a concern that as the country underwent its heart surgery, the doctors did

not think it important that the revived patient should sing or dance or use . . . creative imagination. It was sufficient that the patient had a new lease of life; the subsequent quality of that life would be left to chance.

Van Graan first commented upon the "mixed signals" the new government was sending to the arts community and then went on to discuss three challenges which had to be faced; "to motivate and locate the importance of the arts and culture within the current discourse facing national priorities"; to "propose concrete recommendations for how the arts should be developed"; and to organize "in the most effective ways" in order to have those recommendations taken seriously at the national and regional levels. He went on to urge his fellow arts advocates to learn from the mistakes of other in the post-colonial era to concentrate on the spiritual/artistic as well as material needs of the newly enfranchised population.

The remainder of Van Graan's presentation was devoted to considerations of culture and development in any newly emerging society; far from being mutually exclusive, the former was integral to the latter, he said. Van Graan also discussed strategies by which national and regional arts groups might empower themselves in post election South Africa, specifically emphasizing the importance of achieving access to decision makers with what he termed "quality arguments" and "practical" policy proposals in support of projected activities and/or organizations.

Van Graan asserted his belief that western models of economic and social development would not always be applicable to South Africa, particularly with respect to the distribution of, and access to, the arts. Van Graan adopted the perspective that art itself was not culture, but a reflection of culture. In Van Graan's conclusion, he noted that, because colonialism in general and apartheid in particular had created psychological and emotional scars which the arts were uniquely suited to address, they would be a "crucial component" in developing citizens' "human essence" and that creativity most essential to building a positive national future.

Goya

Written and directed by Dean Opperman

Though admitting that little is known about Goya's life, as opposed to his work, festival veteran and former Young Artist Award Winner for Drama Deon Opperman

wrote and directed his interpretation of the great Spanish painter's thoughts from youth to old age for the Grahamstown main bill. Established classical actor Dick Reineke performed the role of the artist for seventy-five uninterrupted minutes, sounding very much like a solo Salieri in Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*.

A romantic artist in the baroque tradition, the historical Goya was an iconoclastic observer whose superb painting reflected the political turmoil and uprooted conventions in Spain which presaged the start of the modern era. Opperman's version of the artist seems to have reflected a more personal, as opposed to historical, perspective. As he said in a July 2 *Cue* interview with Barrie Hough, a considerable part of himself went into the work: "My arrogance, my pain. I wrote my own world into *Goya*." In Opperman's and Reineke's portrait, Goya is a brilliant, outspoken, often angry artist existing in a world of venal and cruel dullards. The play's turning point occurs when the painter loses his hearing after a fever and, once he begins to work again, does so with "newly flayed eyes."

Goya, exceptionally beautiful to the eye and ear, aspired to a virtually operatic scale. At one point Reineke appeared out of a murky on-stage dimness in a dark cassock over a crimson suit wearing a lighted candelabra, at another he sported a white shirt, ebony-colored breeches, ivory stockings and black shoes with silver buckles—hyper-dramatic toning which in theory seemed appropriate for its subject. Nevertheless, the performance got poor reviews and was not especially well received by audiences. This might have been because the presentation, while impressive in scope and visual detail, lacked both humor and warmth. The historical Goya worked in a number of different styles, some of which, to be sure, may appear enigmatic from a contemporary perspective. However, he seems to have been a painter who, whatever his excesses, had a special empathy for his subjects, whether in portraiture or scenes of the "Desastres de la Guerra" ("Disasters of the [Napoleonic] War").

At the end of his *Cue* interview, Opperman was quoted as saying "I hope *Goya* is more than a portrait of an artist as I see him and a vehicle for my own private ache. I hope it casts a mirror for all mankind to look into." It is not surprising that the Grahamstown audience failed to embrace this dark, abstracted and highly intellectualized set of images as its mirror.

My Life

Staged by Athol Fugard and Rebecca Waddell

After Athol Fugard's years of writing plays which indirectly reflect the violence and injustice endured on a daily basis by his fellow South Africans, the very ground beneath his feet must seem to have shifted, with recent events such as the abolishment of apartheid and establishment of a democratic government elected by universal suffrage. Perhaps in response, the playwright's 1993 *Playland* was little more than a staged dialogue between a South African zulu and an afrikaaner about the future of the country, almost as if Fugard is now groping for new means of on-stage expression given the changing political situation in his country.

In *My Life* Fugard has returned to the collaborative method out of which his earliest scripts were developed (including *Orestes* and *Statements After An Arrest Under The Immorality Act* with Yvonne Bryceland and her husband Brian Astbury as well as *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and *The Island* which were evolved with John Kani and Winston Ntshona). For this most recent presentation, Fugard has worked with a multi-racial, multi-ethnic group of six South African young women (five as performers and one as an assistant director) ranging in age from fifteen to twenty-one, rather than older veterans of the country's struggles.

My Life is generated out of the performer's own stories and performed as a "recital, not a performance" (according to Fugard's program notes). As Fugard observed in the July 8 *Cue*, "When everybody else was listening to the hollow rhetoric of the election, I was hearing the girl's fresh and wonderful stories." Notwithstanding this apparent excitement about the work, Fugard went on to note almost apologetically that he had not dealt directly with the writing as he had with previous collaborators, but nevertheless, along with Ms. Waddell, had done his best, ". . . given the limited scope of this project, to reflect and celebrate the cultural diversity of our South African reality . . ." The presentation used the direct audience address so often employed throughout the '94 festival, with each of the performers stepping forward to talk about her own genuine experiences, aspirations and fears. (It is noteworthy that, for whatever reasons, no one of Afrikaans heritage was included.)

There were a few startling and poetic moments in the piece, such as a segment in which one of the players juxtaposed a severed arm with the sentence, "Songs are the wings of

the mind." The presentation was smoothly staged and beautifully lit. On the whole, however, *My Life* was banal, sometimes cloyingly so. "We have given you our hearts, our stories" said one of the young women while another added that "If we are to build a new country, that's what we'll have to do," an insight with which one even the most hostile audience member could not quarrel. The presentation culminated in a seemingly endless stretch of preachiness.

Argus critic Ian Macdonald asserted in the July 9 *Cue* that "The old master" had "done it again," that *My Life* was "Heartwarming and touching," leaving the audience "with a smile." These reviewers agree that the slice-of-life authenticity and youthful optimism of the performer's stories in *My Life* had some impact and induced what *Weekly Mail & Guardian* reviewer Mark Gevisser referred to as feelings gone "all soft and fuzzy" in his piece on Paul Slabolepsky's *Victoria Almost Falls* published in the same issue of *Cue*. Nevertheless, we believe *My Life* lacked depth and insight, notwithstanding its multi-culturalism and implied assurances that the new South Africa will include females and belong to the young. To be plain we wondered if the work would have been produced at all without its public identification with Athol Fugard.

Nongogo by Athol Fugard

Directed by Jerry Mofokeng

In his excellent book on the theatre of Athol Fugard, *Truths The Hand Can Touch*, Russell Vandenbrouke quotes the playwright's own assessment of his 1958-written *Nongogo* as "inflated verse drama" which, in retrospect, he finds immature, gauche and derivative. Vandenbrouke himself asserts that it is "unlikely" this dated and deeply flawed work would ever be staged at present "except out of curiosity." The play revolves around the desires of "Queenie," a successful shebeen proprietor and former "nongogo" (prostitute), to escape her past and live a normal life.

Director Jerry Mofokeng, this year's Young Artist Award Winner for Drama in South Africa, took on this historically interesting but theatrically unpromising material for production on Grahamstown's main stage, an effort these reviewers found as doomed as Queenie's efforts to escape her fate as a "fallen woman" in this late fifties melodrama. In fact Mofokeng's efforts to bring the play to life, which chiefly consisted of a massive technical investment and carefully "designed" actor movement and line

3. According to a reference on page 50 of *Popular Music: An Annotated Index of American Popular Songs*, Volume 1, 1950 to '59, edited by Nat Shapiro and published by the Adrian Press of New York, NY in 1967, "Mbube" was first adapted for American consumption as "Wimoweh" by Paul Campbell, a collective pseudonym for the folk group "The Weavers" of which Seeger was a part, from a recording made in 1930's South Africa by Solomon Linda--to which it was credited.
4. Not every reviewer was as negative as Mamela and Ronge. In a July 9, page 10 column entitled "Vibrance in Thuli's stories, song and dance," *Eastern Province Herald* critic Terry Herbst praised the singer's accompanists and added, not only that her "vibrant showing" to capacity houses had "put paid to critics who have structured her" for forgetting her African roots "during her long exile," but that he, himself, felt "the richer for having had the privilege of watching" this "hard working showbiz phenomena" do her work in "her own distinctive way."
5. Humphrey Taylor in "GRAHAMSTOWN FESTIVAL: top billing shows sell out as attendance figure breaks records," in *The Weekly Mail & Guardian*, June 8 to 14, 1994, p. 30.
6. Terry Herbst. "Alas, despite fine acting, Victoria falls," *Eastern Province Herald*, Saturday July 9, 1994, p. 10.
7. Mark Gevisser, "Pap and fettucini in a cultural melting pot," *Cue*, July 9, 1994, p. 5.
8. Ibid.
9. Robert Greig, "Introduction" in *Mooi Street and Other Moves*, Witswatersrand University Press:Johannesburg, South Africa, 1994, p. xvii.



Michael Atkinson, Roger Dwyer, Alan Swerdlow, Mauro Faraoni in Graham Green's *Travels with my Aunt*, adapted by Giles Havergal, directed by Mark Graham. Photo: Ruphin Coudyzer.



Buya Africa (Come Back Africa), written by Thuli Dumakude, directed by Welcome Msomi. Photo: Ruphin Coudyzer.

 REPORTS, REVIEWS and PAPERS

The Standard Bank National Arts Festival

Grahamstown, 4-14 July 1996

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If the Grahamstown Festival can be seen to be a microcosmic reflection of South African society, then - from a certain perspective - this year's Festival suggested that perhaps a social, economic and political stalemate has been reached. Dirty, windblown streets, crowded pavements, unrelenting crime, heart-breaking poverty, drug indulgence and sleazy third-rate Fringe Festival productions seemed determined to mar the good name and reputation of this otherwise fantastic celebration of South African art and culture. It was thanks largely to the clearheaded decision-making of the Main Festival organisers, that the disappointments associated with poor shows, dirty side-walks and traffic congestion were overshadowed by a smorgasbord of uncommonly fine theatre on the Main Festival programme. The excitement and enthusiasm which is so much a part of the annual Grahamstown experience was noticeably down on previous years - a significant change speculatively attributable to both the popularity of the smaller Oudtshoorn Festival earlier this year, and also due to growing financial instability.

Whatever the reasons, statistics indicated waning box-office sales on the Fringe. *Cue* reporter, Maria McCloy (1996:2) reported that ticket sales "... this year are 101 128 as compared to 113 826 in 1995." Theories concerning dwindling sales included the speculation that the cold had kept "weekend daytrippers" away, and that the increased average ticket price, from R15.18 in 1995 to R17.58 this year, had caused potential Festival-goers to stay away. Many of the masses complained that it was simply too expensive to attend shows and be in Grahamstown for the Festival, and for some, the "experience" was simply more important than the art.

Despite an overdose of rave reviews for many mediocre and even sub-standard Fringe shows in the official Festival newspaper, *Cue*, many Festinos - critics, performers and spectators alike - complained that both the quality of many productions as well as the atmosphere of the Festival as a whole were significantly disappointing in comparison with previous years. More - it seemed - is not necessarily better, and the theatre on offer on the Fringe was slim in quality, despite the sheer enormity of choices available. The Main festival, however, saw increased sales and after the first week, "ticket sales for the Main were up 5,3% compared to the same time last year" (McCloy, 1996:2). And, the Fringe was the source of most disappointments. Whereas one is accustomed to finding several welcome surprises away from the Main Festival, this year saw the Fringe hosting a plethora of shabby productions. For my own part, the 1996 Festival represented an enormous paradox. Many of the finest shows converged to compete with the lower end of mediocrity and it is perhaps appropriate that this report focuses on the Main Festival which proved to be the chief exponent of quality productions. The Fringe, however,

was a veritable mine-field riddled with inconsistencies and non-professionalism, and perpetuated by scandalous, inaccurate marketing hype.

That said, where productions were good, they were extremely good, and usually served as remarkable tributes to the organisers and those companies which brought excellent theatre to the Festival. Unfortunately, what was very clear from the distribution of good and very poor productions, is that financial restraints play a considerable part in the worth of the final product. And while higher budgets were clearly a contributing factor for many shows, it was clear that wise-spending Festival-enthusiasts saved their precious Rands for the more expensive Main productions, and often wisely stayed away from the lesser fare on offer from the Fringe. Those in the know sought quality entertainment rather than submitting themselves to excessive show-hopping, and the result was full Main venues and disappointing (although often deservedly so) houses for the Fringe.

The demand for not-only-good - but brilliant - theatre is possibly best suggested by the success of the two Mark Graham directed Terrence McNally productions. *Lovel Valour! Compassion!*, an hilarious Aids drama, and *Master Class* which featured Jana Cilliers as the opera diva, Maria Callas, were both resounding successes - both at the box office, and according to Festival critics. Strangely, despite the fact that both plays were penned by the same writer, and both share the same director, they emerged as very different and quite independent productions - similar only in their undeniable quality and value as fine entertainment. According to the Vice-Chairman of the Festival Committee, Mannie Manim, "The rights to the McNally plays were acquired by Pieter Toerien and PACT Drama respectively, both of whom proposed these productions to us for inclusion in the Festival" (In Knox, 1996:1). According to *Cue* critic, Catherine Knox (1996:1), "(b)oth were hot from Broadway and represented fine work by one of the most commercially successful dramatists working today." Commercial success is certainly an apt description for both of these shows despite the fact that one is a gay play, while the other delves quite intensively into the very private mind of an opera star but makes use of little on-stage action. The quality and success of both of these productions can certainly also be attributed to the talent and artistry of Mark Graham who was described by Manim as a director "whose time has come" (In Knox, 1996:1). Manim further described the budgeting considerations of the McNally/Graham combinations, in terms of the emphasis on the business aspect of showbiz: "It was desirable to engineer a balance between commercial productions which could end up in the black, and very expensive shows which were important to include even though they were sure to cost far more than the box office could recoup. The McNally/Graham plays clearly belong to the money-spinner category" (Knox, 1996:1).

While these two plays originated from the same source, both represented quite diverse theatrical styles, while sharing common points of departure in terms of their comic brilliance, dramatic dexterity and theatrical genius. The in-your-face gay-play perspective was understated enough to never interfere with the entertainment worth of the tragedy-comedy concoction of *Lovel Valour! Compassion!*. A brilliant unravelling of its eight characters (played by seven men) - all gay; friends whose various interpersonal relationships reveal the desperate soul searching which might be experienced by any human being. Explicit and extended nudity was handled carefully, though quite boldly, to suggest life's realities and to emphasise those vulnerabilities which affect us all.



André Roothman and Terry Norton in a scene from Marthinus Basson's production of *Macbeth*.

While psychological barriers are exposed, so too are physical barriers, hence multiple scenes featuring the characters undressing - laying themselves on the line, so to speak. But ultimately, the play deals with raw human feelings and emotions, and the performances were sincere and memorable - side-stepping the blandness of character types in order to reveal real personalities. The company, thanks to creative direction, was able to transcend the restraints of time and place, while the provocative use of language and movement on a stylishly clever set, came to reveal many of life's startling intricacies and many truths concerning the world of art and show business. Running for three hours, and including two intervals, *Love! Valour! Compassion!* nevertheless held audiences' attention and received favourable criticism from Barrie Hough, who wrote in *Cue* that, "*Love! Valour! Compassion!* is profound and poetic while being extremely entertaining. With plays like this around, theatre has little chance of dying" (Hough, 1996:1). His enthusiasm was justified praise of a superbly directed text.

Mark Graham's second production, *Master Class* was a tour de force of brilliant acting by Jana Cilliers, faultless direction and stylish minimalist set design (by Andrew Botha). With her sympathetic but thoughtful characterisation of the opera diva, Cilliers delivered a convincing Callas in the time after her career had waned. Her reminiscences of her roller coaster life emerge as a colourful and often saddening expression of words and energy which reveal as much about the opera star as about a life in the theatre and the dedication necessary to make one a great performer. *Natal Witness* critic, Margaret von Klemperer wrote in the *Cue* that Cilliers' performance was certainly the finest at the Festival this year: "Cilliers never sings a note during the play. But she lives the roles her students attempt, and she shows what can be done with the spoken rather than the sung word. In what is virtually a monologue she reflects with enormous passion on genius and the sacrifices it demands. It is an intensely theatrical performance, profoundly moving, often funny, and exciting to watch" (Von Klemperer, 1996:3).

While McNally's two contributions to the Main Festival proved that contemporary theatrical innovation can be entertaining and didactic - even if only on an emotional level - much of the Main programme was filled with classical and proven successes. Shakespeare, Brecht, Miller and Pulitzer Prize-winning August Wilson were represented, alongside local writers and directors Deon Opperman, Andrew Buckland, Ronnie Govender, Janice Honeyman and Pieter-Dirk Uys.

Acclaimed Cape Town director, Marthinus Basson brought new life to the Bard's Scottish Play, which premiered in Grahamstown before a home-town run aimed at school pupils who are studying the play as a set work. *Macbeth* took on a high-tech, spectacularly post-modern look, combining state-of-the-art technology with the trappings of modern communication. Basson went so far as to alter the conception of the supernatural and the occult. According to the *Rapport's* Barrie Hough, writing in the *Cue*:

Against their all pervasive power the 'evil' Macbeth and his ambitious lady are turned into frightened and even frail victims. It is even suggested that Macbeth's experience of supernatural creatures is induced by electrodes while Lady Macbeth's dementia can be attributed to mind-

altering drugs. Mirrors are cleverly used to suggest the states of hallucination. Mirrors become a metaphor for vulnerability, which brings the audience very close to Macbeth and his lady. At various stages throughout the production the audience sees themselves reflected and contorted in a mirrored surface. Has a production of *Macbeth* ever been so personal? (Hough, 1996:3).

Indeed, Basson's vision of a disturbingly surreal Scotland was a somewhat provocative and at times disturbing one, filled to the brim with clever gadgetry and theatrical effects wizardry. The Macbeths become fragile victims of an out-of-control political system - "Bureaucratic gods" as Hough refers to them. The play had a surreal look and feel, suggesting cinematic stylism and depth, but suffered from inconsistent and even hapless performances - especially from a desperate Banquo who appeared to be searching for a wave which he could catch out of the Rhodes Theatre. Terry Norton's cold and calculating Lady Macbeth brought a euphoric turbulence to her first victimising, then later defeated character. On the other hand, André Roothman's Macbeth proved the ultimate victim; impressionable and disquieted from the start. With high-brow eclecticism and a penchant for stylistic wizardry, Basson's concoction was a wowing crowd-pleaser - visually arresting to say the least. Hopefully, his mesmerising vision of an alive and lively interpretation of Shakespeare will prove inspirational to other South African directors who are not yet comfortable with innovation and experimentation.

Bertold Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* was wonderfully transformed into the colourful and appropriate *The Good Woman of Sharkville* for this year's Festival. Janet Suzman's highly theatrical and marvellously staged production was hardly alienating, but proved the point that educational can be entertaining and stimulating. Injected with several powerful performances - particularly by Pamela Nomvete as the kindly prostitute turned corrupt businessperson, and Sello Maake kaNcube as her bitter lover, Vuyani - the production was energetic and lively from start to finish. The cast certainly had fun with this epic journey through co-related worlds of good and bad which take place in a tawdry dead grey set designed by John Engels. The essence of Brecht's original is captured quite admirably in Suzman's adaptation - and the characters work well against the grandiose backdrop which represents the poverty-stricken slum world which is Sharkville. It is this setting which gave the play its meaning for a new generation of South Africans who must seek goodness within the ruins of the past. Our struggle - the play suggests - is with an evil which has the ability to emerge from each and every one of us, and it is only through discipline and respect for ourselves and fellow members of our society that we will be capable of overcoming the bad which looms over our future.

While the South African version of Brecht had much to say about our past and future, it was Deon Opperman's superlative epic Afrikaans production, *Donkerland*, which most awesomely captured my imagination. An inspired creation which was at once moving and entertaining, this tribute to a changing South Africa proved Opperman to be a worthy torch-carrier for emerging theatre in this country. Produced in two parts, *Donkerland* follows the "saga of the De Witt family, whose trials and tribulations over 158 years are lovingly recorded by Opperman in a mammoth theatrical exercise that takes five hours to unfold.... Opperman's work makes no attempt to apologise for, or

judge, the Afrikaner. What it does do is provide a trenchant indictment of racial discrimination, with the wheel turning full cycle from De Witt illegally claiming land as the Great Trek took place, to his family losing it nine generations later to, ironically, a black government. The episodic play, performed on a revolve with a minimum of props, reads like a history book as the De Witt family is torn apart by prejudice and hatred. Mother and her daughter die in a British concentration camp, Meidjie loses her husband tragically, another loses a leg in a mine accident, and a bitter youth indoctrinated to hate blacks dies after killing the child of his brother and a labourer" (Herbst, 1996:1). The play - despite its epic nature - is essentially about people's lives, and it is Opperman's ability to reach the soul of his characters often using only a few lines in a few scenes, which gave the production its warmth and theatrical brilliance.

A range of stunning performances emerged from the intelligent - and in places, quite brave - casting. Eric Nobbs, Andre Odendaal, David Clatworthy and Petru Wessels, for example, all gave stunning portrayals in changing roles - alternating according to the passing generations depending on the age of the characters concerned. Witty, apt, and in its tempo, absolutely engaging from start to finish, this drama was fresh both in its style and narrative technique. Emotionally appealing and texturally complex, *Donkerland* is very much a new departure for South African theatre - mesmerising in its capture of our blood-stained history, its imaginative suggestions for a hopeful future spill over into our hopes and dreams for our cultural identity. *Donkerland* may be about our tortured nation, but it offers careful wisdoms which are universal and quite profound. The drama offers spirited revelations concerning the eternal circle of life in all its cyclic glory, and the numerous tableaux comment on the ability of mankind to endure all the hardship and cruelty which life throws our way. Man's survival against the odds - and often in spite of himself - appears to exist at the core of Opperman's poetic production.

Sadly, it seems that *Donkerland* was unable to tour the country, because of the cost involved in transporting the set, and because of the financial insecurity associated with the overly long production. It is outrageous to think that many non-Festival goers will be prevented from experiencing one of the highlights of this year's Festival because of financial and logistic constraints. Clearly, this was the most memorable work at Grahamstown this year, and it can only be hoped that the film or television version will be hot on its tail.

This year's winner of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Drama was Lara Foot Newton, who also directed another Grahamstown hit, Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Precise and intense, the production was carried off with astounding sincerity, and the no-nonsense handling by the director allowed the integrity of the play's deeper metaphoric meaning to come across with great gusto. Parallels between the witch-hunting in Salem, and the search for truth by our own Truth and Reconciliation Commission, are no doubt just beneath the surface, and the power of Miller's language unquestionably seeks the roots of moral truth through logic and common sense. That people are all too keen to hang any suitable scapegoat is a valuable truth which certainly applies to our society at this juncture. Lara Foot Newton explored Miller's landscape with magical ease, and led a fine cast into a spectacular ensemble of explorative portrayals which made the performers one with their well-textured

characters. It was perhaps only Marcel van Heerden's schizophrenic accent which disturbed the purity of the production.

Accents, it seems, are an unavoidable problem in South African theatre at the moment. Basson's *Macbeth* suffered thanks to various inconsistencies, and Jerry Mofokeng's production of August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* was hard-pressed to secure satisfactory American South accents from its all-black cast. Marthinus Basson claims that the solution lies in "mother-tongue versions of the plays" (In Knox, 1996b:1). Concentration on accents tend to cloud actor training - especially for those speaking English as a second or even third language: "Our training is lousy. We're pussy-footing around the issue of accent. After three years at UCT, a lot of black actors can't handle the language" (In Knox, 1996b:1). Perhaps his point is a valid one - and South Africans simply need to be more adventurous in their production of classic English texts - daring to translate such works. However, where critics and audiences are justified in their complaint, is where inconsistencies crop up, and even worse, where dialogue cannot be understood at all. If a production is performed in English, then a precedent should be set as far as the quality of the diction and pronunciation are concerned. Numerous performances at this year's Festival contained uneasy portrayals by actors uncomfortable with their accents.

August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson* explores the difficulties of an Afro-American family which is struggling to deal with a past which has grown out of slavery. The struggle focuses on the conflict between a brother and sister who fail to agree on the sale of a family piano - an heirloom which symbolises the family's oppressed history, and it's link with a lost cultural identity. While the siblings struggle with the ghosts of a terrible past, it is their present interpersonal conflict which threatens to destroy them both. Rich with emotion, the drama is a relentless portrayal of human conflict and the importance of investing in a personal heritage, told in the realistic idiom. The cruelty of slavery and the difficulty of dealing with this sordid side of American history, suggests some parallel with our own current social situation. Each character fights for individual freedom, and in the process, each is in danger of foregoing a greater freedom of expression. The personal experience, it seems, is an intrinsic component of our popular memory, but does not always serve the compensatory which we share with those close to us.

The Piano Lesson was directed by Jerry Mofokeng, who commented that, "For me, the journey we take with *The Piano Lesson* is not about how to succeed, but about taking the opportunity to dream and the courage to pursue the dream. I'd rather we dream and fail, than die cowards as we wrestle with our new democracy" (Mofokeng, 1996:69). To an extent, it is this spirit of hope which most accurately describes this particular production brought to Grahamstown by Johannesburg's Civic Theatre. Mofokeng's handling of this feisty text demonstrates a wrought-iron ability and an intelligent understanding of the complexities of the American black experience. The cast gave strong performances despite the single casualty which was the often tiresome accent.

Other successful Main Drama productions included Janice Honeyman's adaptation of Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and Andrew Buckland's inventive and playful *Human Race* which combined mime, dance and movement theatre to good comic effect. Conflicting opinions met both of these productions - but in most respects, both were

entertaining, and full of promise. Honeyman's *Tale* was big and complex - following an epic story, and suffering technically as a result. With its huge sets, intricate costumes and pageant-styled theatricality, the "*Le Mis* without the musical fanfares" (Chisholm, 1996:10) tended to forgo narrative simplicity for stage wizardry, a problem further enhanced by the sheer enormity of the tale being told. Colourful and explosively powerful in places, many of the characters do unfortunately tend to become lost at the expense of the whirlwind production. Some clever theatrical devices and atmosphere-enhancing puppets added to the fun of the overall spectacle.

Human Race on the other hand is a simple and amusing - if usually grotesque and over-the-top - tale, told in Andrew Buckland's novel and exciting style which might be termed physical theatre. The pleasure of the production "lies in relishing the blithe wit, the skill and the delicate touch 'trainees' in the cast bring to the affair.... And for the sly humour of [Buckland's] own performance as three central characters - a hapless immigrant, a smarmy negotiator-cum-hatchetman, and a slime monster called Roadkill - in this depiction of life as a particularly pointless Comrades Marathon. Run the race, win the prize. Losers get their legs chopped off" (Minervini, 1996:1). The only drawback of the production lay in the subtle disconnection between audience and performers. While the cast had loads of insane fun, the audience was often left to absorb repetitiveness and mindlessness which made it difficult to distinguish elements of serious commentary from moments of sheer fun. Nevertheless, the production proved Buckland to be a master of his craft - skilled, well-practised, and intoxicated by his own love of this theatrical form.

It is worth mentioning in some detail Buckland's involvement in Gary Gordon's First Physical Theatre Company. This exciting and innovative dance company has brought a thrilling new form to South African stages. In what Gordon refers to as a non-elitist theatre form, physical theatre combines dance, movement, drama, comedy, technology and a range of thrill-getting devices to stimulate the senses and indulge the imagination. *The Unspeakable Story*, which was already a popular production at last year's Festival, has Buckland in a main role, as the painful memories of surrealist painter René Magritte are explored as a series of documentary danceplays scripted by Reza de Wet. Sumptuous dancing and anxiety-creating stage techniques ensure that every moment is balanced by the extremes of classy comic ease and unsettling emotional bombardment. The play is, in the end a tender tragedy, engaging not only for its artistic beauty, but also its thrilling combination of creative elements. The First Physical Theatre Company has emerged as a veritable showcase of superbly athletic dancing and physical characterisation cocooned within a strong narrative shell.

There were few Fringe surprises - especially in terms of the drama programme - and these were easily outnumbered by hordes of shoddy and unimpressive productions ranging from the hopeful to the hapless. Shining lights on the Fringe, however, included Fred Abrahamse's wonderful direction of Steven Berkoff's *Greek*. A startlingly well-performed Baxter Theatre production, the play turned language into a powerful tool, while the stage was used to create a sterile vision of a sick and twisted society. Turning the Oedipus legend into a wicked concoction concerned with the existential search for true love, Berkoff's contemporary adults-only classic deals equally with social injustice, economic prejudice, political evils and the deconstruction of the contemporary family

unit. Duncan Rayne Lawson gave a strong and unswerving virtuoso performance as the over-alert Eddie, while Terry Norton, Bianco Amato and Mark Hoeben, all contributed to the excellence of this delightfully striking play.

While a number of the Main Drama productions might be seen to reveal universal realities which may be linked to contemporary South African issues, one Fringe production went out of its way to alter an existing text in favour of local political fare. Ariel Dorfman's acclaimed thriller *Death and the Maiden* maintained its underlying message in the Windybrow Theatre's adaptation of the text, but as a whole, the production lacked the air of menace which would have been necessary to make it convincing. "The translation of the original into a South African mystery-thriller exploration of the ultimate worth of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is an interesting concept, but many holes are left wide open in this often-pedestrian performance. The show involves Paula and John, a happily married New South African couple: he is black, she is white, and he has just been appointed to the Truth Commission. On the evening of his appointment, John - the victim of a flat tyre - is rescued from the side of the road by a kindly doctor. When the doctor visits John and Paula's home, Paula suspects him of torturing and raping her years before, while she had been a progressive, liberal student. She decides that justice would best be served by her taking her revenge right away, and she begins her almost violent search for the truth. All she wants is an admission of guilt. The ensuing "court case" takes us on a psychological journey through Paula's troubled past" (Bain, 1996:5).

While the attempt at reconciling an internationally successful drama with a contemporary South African milieu, proved to be an interesting experiment for the Windybrow company, on the whole, the production discovered little which was truly new or refreshing through this adaptation. Slightness in the direction (by Damon Berry) also marred an otherwise interesting attempt at enlivening our theatre. Perhaps it is safer for the links between our situation and those more universal stories, to emerge naturally - as they did through *The Piano Lesson* and *Macbeth* - than to deliberately concoct fictitious tales which all but ignore the universal worth of a successful theatre production.

Another disappointment - especially since the poster gave such promise of excellence - was the Chris Weare-directed mess, *Dogs*. Starring Anthea Thomson, who did her best to salvage a ghastly text, and an out-of-place Peter Hayes, *Dogs* attempted a stage version of recent White trash cinema exposés. While a darkly surreal mood promised to expose itself from time to time, this hope was laid to rest by poor dialogue and a nowhere plot. Even worse, was the sub-amateurish *The Doomsday Play*, which rearranged time and place in a flurry of deranged and deluded tableaux which lost more and more meaning as each painstaking moment passed. Paul Slabolepszy's *Once a Pirate* was funny and entertaining, while being thoroughly trite and unadventurous. Seputla Sebogodi seemed ill at ease with his Orlando Pirate-obsessed character, and the result was a less-than-polished performance. Kafka's *Report to an Academy* was attempted by Mario Schiefs, with Esmael Teixeira as the ape who has learnt to talk. A much shortened version of the original, the production was somewhat stilted and interesting only thanks to Kafka's entertaining observations about the human race.



The cast of *Greek*, from left to right, Bianca Amato, Terry Norton, Duncan Rayne Lawson and Mark Hoeben.

Two proven texts - one local, and one American - were revived for the Fringe, and both proved to be winners. *Woza Albert*, which was originally conceived and created by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, was a lively resurrection directed by Bo Peterson and featuring two newcomers - Zwelibanzi Majola and Zolani Cata. The show was captivating in its sheer energy and bravura. David Mamet's celebration of Seventies' insecurity, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, proved to be a cheerful atmospheric romp which had audiences cheering for more. Mamet's once disturbing use of language today seems strangely comforting for audiences who have grown up with cinema and videos which have broken down most literary and censorial barriers.

Dealing most successfully with the New South Africa, was Greig Coetzee's brilliant *Tales from a Termite*. Imaginative, physically astute and sparkling on stage, Greig's hilarious verbal and visual antics are simple and effective, and deal unashamedly with our developing political and social structure, while toying with the unusual personalities who have shaped our nation. Stand-up comedians such as Mark Banks, with his *Stark Raving Mark*, and Ian Fraser, who delivered his *Big One*, commented unflinchingly on everything from the organisation of the Festival itself, to the desperate plight of our economy, and on to sensitive and inane sexual issues. Comic work such as this suggested quite strongly that there is still much to be said about South Africa and the society which it has bred - even when many are still dazed by the post-Apartheid euphoria which has led to catastrophes such as the *Sarafina 2* scandal.

There was much good work happening in terms of music and dance at this year's Festival. Adèle Blank and Christopher Kindo's Free Flight Dance Company brought an extraordinary programme of three dances, *The Lark*, *90's 4-Play* and *Us*, the first of which was this year's winner of the First National Bank-Vita award for "The most outstanding presentation of a new contemporary work". The quality and professionalism of this company - which has toured Europe and Africa - is no doubt attributable not only to its talented dancers, but also to its two directors, Blank and Kindo. The Free Flight Dance Company was one of the more significant highlights of the Fringe Festival. On the Main programme, however, the PACT Dance Company proved its worth under the artistic direction of Esther Nasser. Two programmes were presented, each featuring existing and original works. Of particular interest was company dancer, Susan Abraham's choreography of *Pedestrian*, to music by the Soweto String Quartet. The piece combined elements of African and post-modern dance vocabularies to suggest an emerging South African dance culture which is both disciplined and original.

Two operas were presented on the Main Festival programme. *Porgy and Bess* was a large-scale production presented by CAPAB Opera, and under the direction of Angelo Gobbato. The opera used a mostly local black cast, but reserved its leading roles for foreigners James D Butler (Porgy) and Roberta Laws (Bess). Conductor, Willie Anthony Waters, was also imported from the Greater Miami Opera to lead the musical direction. On a very much different scale, was Gian Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, which was translated into Xhosa by Patrick Tikolo. "Short, powerful and utterly enjoyable, *Amahl and the Night Visitors* is firm proof that opera is genuinely capable of embracing 'other' cultures.... these performers - members of CAPAB's choral training programme - have mastered their art to a fine degree. What is most astounding about

this straightforward, very pure production, is the natural and wholly unforced style with which the finely-tuned voices are projected through the auditorium. Everything, from the piano accompaniment to the universality of the Christmas story, helps to make this production completely user-friendly.... *Amahl* proves that opera need not be all about budget and spectacle. And if our diverse cultures are to find common points of interest, let us hope this is one of them" (Bain, 1996:14). Indeed, it was this type of cross-cultural experience which truly raised one's hopes at this year's Festival - unpretentious, glorious in its artistic merit, and thoroughly entertaining, this opera suggested a path forward for our country's developing cultural aspirations.

While both Main operas were charged with energy and brilliance, I managed to see very little quality cabaret or musical theatre on the Fringe. While Nataniel's *Pie Jesu* received very favourable reviews in the press, and David Kramer's *Kat and the Kings* was praised as being of "an international standard" (Kerem, 1996:1), there were only two musical theatre productions which left me impressed. Charl-Johan Lingenfelder's hysterical satire, *Follies 3:16*, proved to be fun and hip, while exploiting a range of musical styles and crowd-pleasing stage antics (MacDonald, 1996:3). Up-and-coming musical director and performer, Anton Luitingh's tribute to Elton John, entitled *Blue Moves*, also left audiences satisfied that they had been treated to a quality musical production featuring three talented young performers.

Commercially viable disappointment was my response to Theatre for Africa's usually inimitable style. Nicholas Ellenbogen's company presented a number of shows, and featured a host of well-respected names with much theatrical talent. Despite this, and perhaps due to the now overly-formulaic technique employed in productions such as *Raiders of the Broken Heart*, Theatre for Africa delivered little worthy of praise. *Raiders*, for example, served little purpose other than to present a range of puns and self-indulgent jokes concerned with South African idiosyncrasies, while delivering a half-baked attack on the Hollywood film industry. At R25 a ticket, the show proved lightweight to say the least, and considering that most of the fun was provided by the tiresome and unfortunate audience participants, one wonders just why Ellenbogen's fans flock to his shows year after year.

For myself, the 1996 Standard Bank National Festival of the Arts represented a strange paradox. Despite having my car broken into (before the Festival had even begun), despite the three day bout with food poisoning contracted in a sit-down restaurant, despite the appalling ablution facilities available at the camping site where I experimented with alternative living conditions and despite the number of interminably poor shows which I bitterly ground my teeth through, the Festival was yet another week-and-a-half of magic and mystery. There is something undeniable about the power of theatre to transcend the minor inconveniences and sad realities of life. Perhaps Pieter-Dirk Uys' irreverent attitude during his *Truth Omissions* show best describes the spirit of the Grahamstown Festival-goer - we all laugh deeply at our own recognition of the truth, which, in effect, is our undeniable complicity with it. We cannot escape the fact that we - the audience - make the show what it is, and it is our continued presence in, or absence from, the auditoria which inevitably determine the success, or lack thereof, of any show.

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The Role of South African Television as an Agent of 'Truth and Reconciliation'

A Conference Paper

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Television in South Africa celebrates its twentieth birthday this year, and is already accepted as a normal and often indispensable part of our daily lives. At present it is estimated that sixty four per cent of the country's adult population watch television in the average week (and forty nine per cent daily), and it would seem logical to assume that, as electrification of homes in the country increases, this figure will increase accordingly. The discursive position of a communication medium so prevalent in our lives seems worthy of some exploration.

A letter from a member of the public to the *Sowetan*, dated 28 June 1995, has the following to say:

South Africa as a nation has suffered from a brutal political system, one that has systematically destroyed the culture and social identity of most Africans. The SABC was used to legitimise and perpetuate this unjust social order through images that maintained white supremacy, while consigning black people to a depressed socio-economic status.

Hence, in the new dispensation, one expects the SABC to be making and promoting programmes that confront this oppressive portrayal and reconstruct new images for a new social identity and hence a new nation.

But, on the contrary, it seems the SABC now takes for granted its primary responsibility for the task of engineering a new social identity. Looking at the programme line-up, nothing suggests any SABC concern with this task. It nauseates me that in this era the SABC continues to pay only lip-service in this regard. I think it's high time the SABC looks seriously at its principal task as the chief socialising agent. It must begin to promote images that decolonise and transform how we think about our social reality.¹

The report at hand sets out to explore a number of the issues raised by this letter and other documents, questioning the discursive position of SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) television: its political impact and responsibility, its status as prescriptive or descriptive, and the connection between these concerns and what people actually choose to watch.

The remarkable prevalence and popularity of television has stimulated many widespread and well-known debates around the social and ideological influence that the medium may or may not have on its viewers: issues of sex and violence, the effects of television on children, the moral accountability of television, and so on.



Make Believe
Standard Bank National Arts Festival
Grahamstown, 2-12 July 1998

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It was while attending the *MasterClass* by Seattle-based, Pittsburgh-born Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright, August Wilson, that I heard some of the most insightful comments at this year's Grahamstown Festival. Wilson, a writer whose works include *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, *Fences* (Pulitzer Prize-winner in 1987), *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson* (Pulitzer Prize-winner in 1990), *Two Trains Running* and *Seven Guitars*, spoke for well over an hour on the techniques of writing great plays. He spoke passionately about his own lifelong engagement with life and with writing – a heartfelt talk by an experienced and gifted creator. Before he began his wholly personal discussion, however, he commented on the marketing slogan which was printed on the T-shirt I happened to be wearing that day.

The slogan read: "make believe!", and what was significant to me was the comment that this great writer made upon reading it. He said: "That's what it's all about... Isn't it?" Indeed, surely that is what theatre is all about. And certainly not only on one level either. Firstly, theatre is about the imagination: theatre practitioners must possess the ability to (re-)create characters, stories, worlds, intrigues, histories or whatever, without recourse to the luxury of reality – one has to pretend, to *make believe*. Secondly, theatre practitioners must *make* audiences *believe*. Without a believing, captive audience, the theatre dies – it loses its soul, it no longer has the right to exist.

Grahamstown 1998 may have given rise to fears that there is no longer anything worth believing in. The Festival may have seemed a

disappointment to the droves of performers, producers and directors who played to small or practically empty houses night after night. Critics and commentators may have developed serious doubts as to the continued viability of such a large and diverse festival. And the figures certainly suggested that the end is in sight... On the final day of the Festival, *Cue*, the official Festival newspaper reported that the "drop in ticket sales, both on the Main and on the Fringe" was "not as dramatic as first thought." Figures up to and including Friday 10 July were as follows: 42 224 tickets sold on the Main (13,13% down on 1997), and 80 606 tickets sold on the Fringe (18,32% down on 1997) (Anon, 1998:1). Perhaps not "dramatic", but certainly distressing...

Indeed, the Festival was in competition with World Cup soccer, and more significantly, with the steadily deteriorating economic situation and rapidly falling Rand. Alex Dodd of the *Mail & Guardian* summed the situation up quite poetically:

It's no secret: attendance is down. At the most recent official count on Sunday, ticket sales on the main festival had dropped by 15% and by a whopping 23% on the fringe. Festival director Lynette Marais has cited a number of reasons for this: the decrease in South Africans' discretionary income, competition in the form of World Cup soccer (woe is me), the existence of other festivals that have sprung up over the past few years...

The line I've heard, from artists and art-lovers alike, is that the festival has lost the crazy, whimsical spirit that used to pull them to Grahamstown like moths to a paraffin lamp in years gone by. The most frequently touted justification from people who haven't bothered to trek down for the festival is the "shopping and shopping" one – too commercial, too sanitised, they say (Dodd, 1998:2).

Dodd's article, which highlights some of the more obvious problems which appear to have kept the crowds at bay this year, also discusses

the wonderful diversity and quality which is at the heart of the Festival:

...content-wise, it's possible the festival is at its best ever. The diversity of work on offer seems finally to be organically reflecting the multiplicitous jamboree that is South African culture. There really is something for everyone – and even better, something of quality (Dodd, 1998:2).

And what a pleasure to be able to share Dodd's enthusiasm regarding a Festival which many criticise as no longer being viable. Surely, it is the incredible excitement of the hordes of performers who challenge themselves by trekking to the Festival each year, that remains a constant reminder of the importance of such an event?

Believing in oneself

The addiction to Grahamstown is certainly much stronger than the obvious logic behind the saying "once bitten, twice shy". The financial whipping which my fledgling production company experienced with a Fringe musical in 1997 could not keep Two Man Productions away from the ever-present danger which poor houses hold for tiny theatre companies. This year, partner Anton Luitingh and I decided to take two shows to Grahamstown, and the results were rather mixed. Once again, we could not have pulled either of the productions off had it not been for student performers who offered themselves up for the task for little more reason than their love of the job. Gaerin Hauptfleisch, a Masters' student at the University of Stellenbosch undertook the direction of both plays. Also an act of love and charity, these were in addition to the Student Festival production, *The Refrigerators*, which he also directed.

Our choice of productions for the Fringe was a strange combination: a serious drama by one of the world's most respected and celebrated living dramatists, David Mamet, and a science-fiction spoof which I wrote myself.

Mamet's *The Cryptogram* is a 65-minute three-hander which was written in 1994. The drama unfolds as a puzzling reconstruction of a dysfunctional family as seen through the eyes of a 10-year-old boy, John (played in our production by 20-year-old female actor, Naomi Smit). Seemingly simple and platonic relationships become the source of intrigue and curious conflicts which are simultaneously mysterious and reminiscent of daily life. Donny (played by Ruth Lavelle) is the mother of the sadly disquieted boy whose father's absence is the source of much emotional turmoil. Only Donny's male friend, Del (myself), tries to give the child any advice or direction, and even this supposedly natural kindness may disguise some hidden agenda.

Hauptfleisch chose to use a stark, simple set which was drenched in black and dominated by harsh, hard surfaces. While the small and functional set helped to focus attention on the action, dialogue and narrative, it also proved useful in terms of its financial viability. We worked in a semi-realistic style and put most of our focus on interpreting an extremely difficult and frequently complex text which asks more questions than it dares to answer. We received wonderful responses from miniscule audiences and a favourable – if somewhat bland - write-up in *Cue*:

Mamet's script is as cryptic as the title implies. The well-rehearsed cast worked hard to convey and transcend a childhood full of dangers. Recommended for those who come to the Festival seeking intellectual challenge (Robin Palmer, 1998:11).

With the heavy Rand-Dollar exchange rate, the rights for the production cost a small fortune, and the serious subject matter obviously kept audiences far away. A disappointing result after a lengthy and emotionally strenuous rehearsal period, but we once again learnt a serious lesson about Grahamstown: serious drama does not fit in on the Fringe. The queues outside any rock music tribute show were

confirmation of that.

In contrast with the Mamet play, my spoof was far from serious drama. Our intention with *The Z-Files* was to draw in the crowds, and although we never quite pulled in the masses we were after, the production did manage to cover most costs. My press release described the show as "a fun-filled journey packed with mayhem and ridiculous intrigue" in which "South African security and sanity are under threat". The play satirised the international television phenomenon, *The X-Files*, and poked fun at characters such as Fox Mulder (who became Socks Mulder or "Mully", played by Anton Luitingh), Dana Scully (who became Agent Sulky, played by Stephanie Hough), and the sinister Cigarette Smoking Man (who became Nicotine Man, played by myself). The text looked at the ridiculous possibility of an alien encounter in a South African milieu – a situation which is complicated by the defrosting of Prime Minister Verwoerd, who has been cryogenically frozen since his apparent assassination.

Hauptfleisch blasted numerous wacky sci-fi elements into the show. Incorporating outlandish weaponry and a demented vertically-challenged alien (again played by Naomi Smit), these inventions appeared to be crowd pleasers. Added to this was a marvellous, slightly off-beat sci-fi soundtrack with arrangements by Luitingh, as well as the incorporation of slides to emphasise the television roots of the show. One reviewer raved about the "impressive use of slides, music, sound and lighting in recreating a real sci-fi atmosphere" (Breytenbach, 1998:8). But there were also criticisms. Strangely, coming from two different sources, these appeared to contradict one another; *Die Burger's* reviewer, Willem Breytenbach (1998:8) commenting that the storyline was overly complicated, and *Cue's* student reporter criticising "the blatant and the obvious" (Humphry, 1998:12) pursuits of the production. And so the search for more fulfilling theatre criticism continues...

The intention of the student drama festival is to provide a platform for

hopeful theatre practitioners of the future. And whilst this system does clearly discriminate on at least some socio-economic level (only a handful of potential artists can afford tertiary education), it remains a wonderful source of encouragement for developing performers, directors and playwrights. *The Refrigerators* was certainly an avenue for developmental and experimental style. I was somewhat disappointed that the Department decided not to use an original text this year. An awkward and decidedly weird text which at times resembles a crude amalgamation of *Egoli* and *The Rocky Horror Show*, it was certainly a good starting point for off-beat experimentation.

Mario Fratti's bizarre play did undergo stringent editing, however. A play which sprung from a clearly Seventies' imagination, it combines the absurd possibilities of cryogenic freezing and an outlandish black comedy thriller! Indeed, the results were nothing less than unusual. Hauptfleisch stretched the limits of the play by doing away with devices required by the text – potential set elements, such as the five refrigerators themselves, were played by members of the cast! In fact, in addition to being responsible for creating cartoon-like sound effects, we were also made to become, in turn, an assortment of home appliances and electronic gadgetry. The play managed to support a plethora of frequently confusing narrative possibilities from which the audience was forced to draw its own hysterical conclusions. Most of the laughter, however, seemed to come from the numerous sight-gags and the surprising relationships which developed between the actors-playing-characters and the actors-playing-objects. In its concept, the production hinted at Brechtian *verfremdung*, but I did sense that the audience failed to follow the narrative very clearly at all – if this was of any consequence anyway... *The Refrigerators* received a scathing review from Terry Herbst writing in the *Eastern Province Herald*, but playwright and *Cue* guest writer, Zakes Mda (1998:3), praised the show for its energy, ingenuity and all-round good performances.

Believe in the Bard

Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* received an exciting – if somewhat imperfect – reworking at the hands of a group calling itself GAT (Graphic Arts Theatre). As a multimedia cornucopia of grungy music, ambiguous characterisation and varied performance forms, the *Dream* achieved almost cult status at this year's Festival, particularly amongst younger Festinoes. Directed by Jesse Knott, the Bard's classic was presented as a loud but frequently inaudible event in which a live band, strange sound effects and a roving, quite voyeuristic video camera played some of the major roles. Apart from an energetic Puck (played by Rob Jansen van Vuuren), the performances generally left much to be desired – although as works of visual art, many of the characters did emerge as objects of fascination:

At times, the production verges on becoming a visual orgy, with naked flesh, firedancing and trance-like moves combining with distracting video footage and 'sound wizardry' (sic) (Robertson, 1998:8).

While fairies writhed and danced torturously, the dialogue emerged in an assortment of stylistic reflections on the play itself – a postmodern post-mortem which was at once alienating and absorbing. A partially interactive playing space meant constant self-awareness on the part of the audience, and the no-holds-barred treatment of the material ensured constant questioning and re-evaluation:

The stage area surrounds and encompasses the audience, placing you quite literally in the strange forest of the night, of which every space and dark corner seethes with undulating creature-like bodies. The punk-like fairies are straight out of a rock video, even, at the end, giving in to the urge to get down to the pulsating grind of the band, now hidden, now revealed, behind an intricate screen and makeshift backdrop (Robertson,

1998:8).

All-in-all, an unpolished combination of assorted talents and ideas made for a performance which certainly points a way forward – especially if theatres are to continue attracting audiences in the future:

Knott's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* offers a thrilling and extreme alternative to bored and boring youth culture, but beware if you yourself feel 'past it' – it might not sit comfortably (Robertson, 1998:8).

On the Main Festival, the accessibility of Shakespeare was also an issue in the Take-Away Shakespeare Company's production of *King Lear*. Sean Taylor received much praise in the press for his "brilliant" turn as Lear, "with his performance revealing both the strength of the man and the weakness that overtakes him" (Watson, 1998b:5). The minimalistic production, adapted and directed by James Whyte, ignored the outdated traditions of "Men in tights and lots of make-up speaking iambic pentameter in an imaginary English accent" (Whyte, 1998:52) and consequently played to full houses. The director's aim – to create theatre which can compete in an arena of powerful relevance – particularly for South Africans – was achieved through powerful performances, a "simple minimal set", "basic everyday" costumes and "limited but effective sound effects" (Watson, 1998b:5). Truly a production which suggested the lively approach which can be used in the staging of Shakespeare – an artist who wrote in response to his contemporary society.

Disbelief: diabolical dialogue and deliberate disfigurement

It takes an actress of the stature of Sandra Prinsloo to be able to deliver the line, "Henry ate his father" and be confident that the audience will not fall about shrieking in disbelief.

Not only does she deliver it but she makes us swallow a whole

lot of dialogue that would make a lesser performer a laughing stock (Watson, 1998a:11).

Clearly, Harry Hofmeyr's first play, *Requiem* (presented on the Main at the Rhodes Theatre), went down less successfully than expected. Directed by Deon Opperman and featuring a brilliant cast including Prinsloo, Eric Nobbs and Andre Odendaal, the play was described as "a guilt-ridden journey into South Africa's Calvinist past with the focus on one particular family and the highly melodramatic troubles they get into" (Watson, 1998:11). In actual fact, there was very little positive criticism in response to this sell-out show.

On the other hand, there is much good to be said of the less-well-attended Roy Sargeant production of Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*. It was a clean, slick, smooth production with beautifully articulated dialogue and perfectly recognisable characters. But perhaps this was also the production's shortcoming: in the final analysis, it was tremendously sterile and failed to give a true sense of the dirty, filth-drenched world in which the title character, John Merrick, actually existed. But then again, perhaps this was the point of the stark, often shiny-white, set and almost clinically clean performances: to encourage some sort of introspective comparison between inner and outer beauty. Certainly, a major concern of the play is the obvious distinction between the outer hideousness and the heart and soul of John Merrick, who "is probably one of the most famous freaks in history" (Coleman, 1998:1). Indeed, mankind's social "attraction" to freakdom is commonplace: disfiguring diseases, surgical enhancement, Michael Jackson-like physical alteration – these are all topic of current and somewhat universal interest, and the sideshow exploitation of this show's "Elephant Man" is somewhat reminiscent of some of our prevailing social preoccupations.

It is the stark contrast between a naked and spotlighted Merrick (played by Kevin Smith) at the start of the play, and his transition - through costume changes through the production - into a well-attired near-

"gentleman", that reminds us of the impact which society at large has on the individual and his/her status. Indeed, no make-up, prosthetics or other special effect was used to simulate the awkward physical appearance of the "Elephant Man". Only Smith's performance, and his dauntingly tortured posture, reflected the dreadful injustice of genetic inconsistency. And herein lies the importance of the story, that just as hereditary factors are subject to rolls of some great unpredictable dice, so society and our manmade milieu may come to otherwise influence and determine the course of our existence.

The play enjoyed a number of polished performances with superbly crafted accents (courtesy of accent coach Shirley Johnston), but the ensemble did not always work - perhaps because of the disjointed dialogue and inane one-liners which attempted to convey the universal relevance of each character's remarks. Also, the vaudeville style use of placards to introduce each scene (and these were numerous), and the tedious - or rather unadventurous - entrances, exits and scene changes, added to the often stilted overtone of the production. Despite Smith's heartfelt performance and dedication to his role, it was at times difficult to believe in the overall sincerity of the entire production. Certainly, *The Elephant Man* is a difficult text to transform into captivating theatre, and perhaps David Lynch's film version of the same story managed to infiltrate the social consciousness at a far more believable level.

Do you believe in zombies?

All eyes are on Brett Bailey's *Ipi Zombi*, deemed to be the buzz production of the Festival. It is a reworking of the show presented at the festival two years ago and is said to be the best representation of post-Apartheid African theatre yet (Snyman, 1998:5).

Clearly, one of the Festival's most talked about productions was Brett

Bailey's *Ipi Zombi*?. Staged in "the Power Station", a venue which had - in previous years - been used for events such as rave parties, *Ipi Zombi*? represented a journey for its audiences - not only because of the content of the production, but also thanks to the travelling involved in getting to the just-outside-of-town abandoned power station.

The subject matter is absorbing. Based on fact, and explored through a ritual fascination with music, singing, dance, and other performance forms, the concern is chiefly with contemporary South African life and the continued influence of traditional and more mysterious features of our multi-cultural heritage. The story goes as follows:

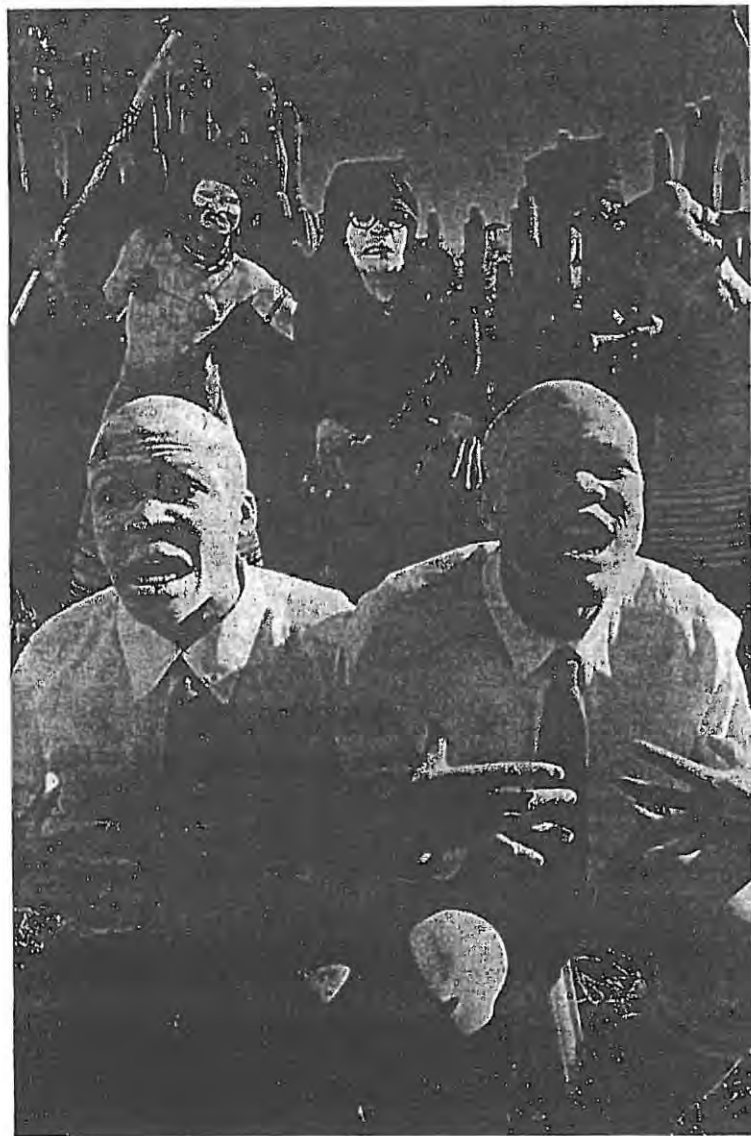
Another day in Africa: September 30 1995. More carnage on the road. This time it's a busload of schoolboys: 12 dead.

Survivors report they saw 50 old women, naked in the darkness at the roadside shortly before the crash. Trainee witches, chasing after human blood to inscribe their graduation certificates...

The witches mutilated and then imprisoned the souls of the dead as zombie slaves. Thirteen days later a Mrs Magudu, who is believed to hold 12 zombies in her wardrobe, is tortured and executed by a posse of youths. Emotion erupts at the mass funeral two days later. Witches' meat has been substituted for the bodies and there can be no burial.

Two days later, another witch is executed. Youth leaders are arrested. For six weeks sangomas try to sniff out the witches, and resurrect the boys. On December 6, another funeral is attempted, but youths attack the bodies with axes to try to drive out the witchcraft... (Knox, 1998:1).

The journey to the Power Station could be taken in the heebie-jeebie shuttle, which transported audience members directly to the venue's front door. And the venue itself was all important to the production whose creator is admittedly fascinated by ritual:



A scene from the much-acclaimed and much-hyped *Ipi Zombi?*

The space must be prepared physically and imbued with the vibe. A week before the festival opens, the rest of the cast will move in and live there too.

The spirit of the site is crucial to the work. Early rehearsals for the current zombie play were held in the sangoma's cave near Clarens. Inside is a maze of mystics' shelters and stone altars. The zombie troupe prayed and chanted and did candlelit run-throughs of the work, bonded with one another and the spirits during night hikes, and hobnobbed with *amaqika* and the *ama-Zion* who also frequent this ecumenical neck of the woods (Knox, 1998:2).

In the final analysis, however, the production emerged as slightly less successful (on a critical level) than had been anticipated. Comparisons with the previous year's *iMumbo Jumbo* suggested that this show "seemed often to be a shadow of its predecessor" (Watson, 1998c:10). A less complicated tale than *iMumbo Jumbo*, the play was similarly imbued with "a great deal of declamation, drums and drama" but lacked the humour of its predecessor thus creating a "feeling of disturbed uneasiness" (Watson, 1998c:2).

The show, which is musical in nature, "with 14 major numbers adapted from the songs of Mali, Pondoland sangoma chants and gospel favourites" (Knox, 1998:1), and apparently suffered somewhat as a result of its overwhelming use of dance and drums – "a device which certainly oils the theatrical flow but which eventually begins to feel like padding" (Watson, 1998c:2). In a dusty, herb-scented atmosphere, the audience is drawn into a world which is at once alien and familiar. Ironically, however, it was perhaps this familiarity which proved most disturbing to many of the show's most vehement critics. Was the show not perhaps a over-typification of the "African" way? *Daily Dispatch* reviewer, Ines Watson (1998:2), commented that "*Ipi Zombi?* is good theatre but it is also exploitative of black culture and has extremely worrying aspects about it.... Beating drums, chicken feathers and violent

death – is that really the reality?" *Sowetan* reviewer, Zaheda Mohamed, was even less impressed:

IPI ZOMBI? – another Bunfight saga told by real life blacks to real life whites who sit with gaping mouths and googoo eyed at performers in trance-like states moving and talking like doped-up freaks. Black people who are essentially portrayed as morons. The deeper part of their story obliterated for crude sensationalism in order to achieve maximum shock effect. If you are into seeing black people portrayed like savage morons tinselled with cross-dressing in calabash boobs and a dance on a coffin, then go ahead, indulge.

Just what is Brett Bailey trying to prove? To create theatre that is creative and provocative is one thing, but to denigrate people's stories and selves in the process is a cheap trick that whities can now get away with all in the spirit of reconciliation. They have the legitimacy to say as they please when they so please and dare you call that racist (Mohamed, 1998:3).

On the other hand, black South African writer, Zakes Mda, praised the production as a "work of genius that maps out a path to a new South African theatre that is highly innovative in its use of indigenous performance modes" (In Snyman, 1998:11). Fred Khumalo, writing for the *Sunday Times*, compared Bailey's creation to the dark comedy of American filmmaker, Quentin Tarantino: "Like Tarantino, Bailey takes a horrifying subject and gives it a funny twist" (Khumalo, 1998:3). It is evident that the show which received the most publicity at the Festival, was also central to much of the debate surrounding the (un-)changing perspective of the Festival. According to the festival's press officer, Marguerite Robinson, "Some people have complained that the festival has become too black, while others are saying it's still lily-white" (In Khumalo, 1998:3).



Brazilian performer, Denise Stoklos, who presented her critically-acclaimed *Mary Stuart* as part of the Main Drama Festival.

Believe in Brazilian brilliance

First she takes you in. Like a wise old storyteller, she takes you by the hand and leads you into her world of fantasy. Within moments, Mary Queen of Scots is alive and she's one hell of a character – complete with twitches, quirks and idiosyncracies. It's only later that Stoklos (in the character of a desperate, imprisoned Mary) declares: "I am Ulrike Meinhof. I am Nelson Mandela. My name is the name of any political prisoner on earth" (Dodd, 1998b:1).

Denise Stoklos – according to every source I could come across (for I could not come across a ticket to her show) – was sheer brilliance, described as "all the rave in her *Mary Stuart* production" (Snyman, 1998:11). With degrees in journalism and social sciences, she began working in the theatre in 1968, and is now Brazil's most renowned actress. Her multi-talented achievements include choreographing and teaching, and she developed her first solo work, *One Woman Show*, in 1979. She has had seven of her plays published and has won several awards for her work. She calls her personal choice of performance as "Essential Theatre" – a form in which the actor must rely on his or her personal instruments, namely: the body, the voice, the mind and the intuition.

Stoklos presented her one-woman show, *Mary Stuart*, as part of the Main Festival programme. The work was written, directed, choreographed, designed and performed by Stoklos herself. And the result, it seems, was nothing less than phenomenal:

Black curtains drape the stage, and her only prop is a chair. She launches her monologue at a peak, which she maintains through 90 minutes of controlled discipline in an over-powering show of dramaturgy, the likes of which has not been seen here before, and will probably never be seen again (Herbst,

1998:10).

Seeing is believing: brilliant, bizarre, Buckland

Andrew Buckland has proven himself as one of South Africa's most exciting and creative spirits. Based in Grahamstown, where he lectures at the Rhodes University Department of Drama, he has shown his theatrical verve year after year at the National Arts Festival, and 1998 was no exception. *The Water Juggler* is a superb piece of theatre. Absurd, physical, hysterical, profound and challenging, the one-man show was directed by Buckland's wife, Janet.

Dealing with a myriad of issues and using water as a clear point of inspirational departure, "the narrative unfolds as a complex saga suffused with profound messages and deep musings relayed at almost break-neck speed" (Lippert, 1998:8). Vivid images and sophisticated symbolism combine in a theatrical tale which is at one fantasy and an honest evaluation at some of Mankind's current crises: "Water Juggler poignantly deals with so many issues and ideas – sexuality, virtual reality, materialism, ecology..." (Lippert, 1998:8).

...make no mistake, this is a complicated story. It is fatal to let the concentration be distracted for one moment by, for instance, that strange collection of Gardena garden fittings on a stand because then all is lost.

We would never be able to follow the strange journey of Walter, who is sucked helplessly into the ruthless plans of a businessmen [*sic*] intent on conquering the universe. Or is this potential world player merely a 37-year-old man without much of a life, who lives in a fantasy world of virtual reality, desiring only to be the favourite of that seductive computer siren, the Profit Queen? (Watson, 1998d:2).

To embark on his fantastic voyage, Buckland adopts numerous

personas, "juggling" from one character to the next with the utmost ease. Similarly, he flits casually from location to location, using the simplest of set and prop devices to aid his illusionary journey. While imaginative text, mime, movement and suggestion help to concoct the bizarre (but fathomable) worlds of Buckland's playing area, further performance skills are thrown in for good measure to enhance our visual interpretation of the scene as being a long shot or a close-up, for example. With the help of hose-pipes and taps, the performers rapidly transforms himself into a machine-like creature that spurts water across the stage, and just when the effect threatens to seem comically exaggerated, Buckland eases into his equally powerful subtle body movements, giving the overall performance texture and rhythm.

A remarkable artist with a remarkable gift for creating universally salient theatre, Buckland certainly delivers the goods, and his shows make for ideal Festival entertainment. Finding the balance between good fun and pertinent reflection on the plight of Humankind is surely the mark of true talent:

The Water Juggler has a lot to say about the environment and who controls it, but it is done lightly. Humour, both physical and verbal, is the main weapon here and Buckland uses it to the full – until the perspiration drips from his body and the mesmerised audience strive to follow his frenetic tracks (Watson, 1998d:2).

Believe in the body

So-called "physical theatre" and "physical comedy" have been enjoying various degrees of success as performance forms at the Festival over the years. I recall first raving about Gary Gordon's First Physical Theatre Company several years ago when I was treated to *The Unspeakable Story*. Since then I have worked with one or two members of that cast, and my understanding of the genre has grown somewhat. But the terrain remains somewhat formidable, and continues to evade absolute

definition and categorisation. For physical theatre is not simply dance, and the term "physical" more often than not confuses audiences, critics and academics who subscribe to the word's more obvious limitations. The fact is that "physical theatre" is anything but limited. Rather, it is a theatrical form which – in many ways – allows for greater freedom in terms of communication and expression.

At least four of the shows which were on offer at the Festival stood up to this "theory". Three were physical comedies, and the fourth, *A Fridge too Far*, manages to inject some humour into the heavily tragic tale of the Greek heroine Medea. Directed by University of Stellenbosch Masters' student Jaco Bouwer, *A Fridge too Far*, at times seemed like a parody of the original story, but more often than not, it was heartfelt rediscovery of the female psyche. Four young women clad in white dresses undertook the symbolic "journey" which symbolised not only Medea's emotional torment, but the experience of women in general. A "cold-hearted" fridge stood in for the absent Jason, and bricks – used in a selection of exciting scenes – represented the stone hearts of the men in these women's lives. At one point in the production, the actresses mingle with the audience and share personal moments from their pasts using photographs as points of inspiration. Imaginative and brave, this "physical theatre" production suggested the remarkable creativity of a talented up-and-coming director.

The Killer Grannies was conceived and performed by three former First Physical Theatre Company performers, Lanon Prigge, Samantha Pienaar and Craig Morris. By taking the journey into old age to "explosive proportions", an absurd tale of elderly women (played by the two males in the company) was remarkably brought to life. Human voice-created sound-effects, intense physical action and various mime techniques were combined to concoct a bitter-sweet tale of revenge and senile lunacy. *Lunar Spasm* and *Liverspread* were another two outrageous physical creations which used the body – in all its limitless glory – to create absurd yet satisfying black comedy. In *Lunar Spasm*, created and

performed by Bevan Cullinan and Rob van Vuuren, a science-fiction soap opera is taken to its horrific extremes as numerous characters and scenarios were etched using the simplest of props. *Liverspread* – a solo performance by Bevan Cullinan – was an equally funny, yet much darker look at the extreme effect of a mind-altering substance and its influence on the body.

Less rewarding, but extremely well-received by audiences and critics alike, was the First Physical Theatre Company's three-piece show, *Icons*. While much of the work was well executed and suggested certain artist conviction, I found the pieces less than satisfying and difficult to grasp. *Icons* came across as if the journey of the cast to some esoteric hinterland were more important than the experience of the audience. An unexpected entrance and uplifting comic performance by Bevan Cullinan did inject some spice into the production, but in the end one could still detect the dank mustiness of indulgent self-worship on the eventually water-soaked stage.

One wonders which direction "physical theatre" will lead us to next. Will the body be used as a shrine for self-important meditations on the prosaic, or will it be used to honestly reflect the need to laugh and cry which is inherent to all of us?

Can you believe...?

While the Festival had no theatrical "scandal" to compare with Oudtshoorn's *Boklied* furore, there was serious "outrage" over an art exhibition by Rhodes University lecturer, Mark Hipper. His "child porn" paintings came in the wake of a huge legislative battle in South Africa to plug the loophole in the Publications Act which had "allowed for trading of child pornography on the Internet" (Sundstrom, 1998:1). The exhibition featured a number of canvases which depicted young children in various states of undress, some revealing the subjects' genitalia, one showing a naked young boy engaged in an act of masturbation. Indeed, a written or verbal description of such work sounds disturbing and

shocking, but in reality, it is the attitude of Hipper's critics which is disturbing. Far from being base or sordid, the paintings and drawings are fine works of art – inspired studies of human reality and emotional truth. While the works suggest an interest in the flesh, it is the feeling which is created internally (in the viewer and in the subject) which is at the core of the work.

Journalists, who obviously exploited the shock-scenario which erupted after the exhibition was opened, spared no adjectives in their highly subjective reporting of the "incident". The *Weekend Post's* Kathy Sundstrom, in a front page leader article, wrote: "At the centre of the storm are shocking life-like paintings of young children engaged in sex acts and sitting in lewd positions. Weekend Post has photographs of the so-called art which are unfit for publication, even censored" (Sundstrom, 1998:1). It is this type of judgmental, and unconsidered journalism which serves as nothing more than garbage-for-the-masses. Hipper's more graphic depictions of lewd conduct are far from realistic and in fact, the artist uses both colour and form to comment on the personal experience in each of the works. Hipper, whose address at the opening of the exhibition made it quite clear that his paintings and drawings were intended to elicit a particular reaction in the observer, said:

"Because of who we are as South Africans and given the history of censorship and moral taboos around the exposure of the human body, many viewers are likely to be unsettled, though not unexcited I think, by these images.

"Realising that the artist employs similar devices to those used in pornography increases the unease..." (Hipper in Sundstrom, 1998:1).

At a Film and Publication Board discussion, however, it became quite evident to me that the controversy raised over the exhibition had arisen as part of a much more sinister political agenda. Arriving back from Grahamstown, I found myself a member of this Board which had been

asked by the Deputy Home Affairs Minister, Lindiwe Sisulu, to ban the exhibition on the grounds that it constituted child pornography. In retrospect, of course, one discovers a far more plausible explanation for Sisulu's overwhelming concern in this matter. What better way to win votes in a forthcoming election than to ban an exhibition which the majority of the country will never see, based on the fact that it could be alleged to be a form of child pornography?

What hope will there be for freedom of speech in this country if political interference and hype-media stupidity continues to be an ever-present threat? One critic's comments regarding the exhibition suggest the need for greater cultural education in South Africa:

Viscera is, soos die hooffees-tentoonstelling Bringing up Baby, 'n reeks werke wat dringende en dikwels geprivatiseerde sosiale kwessies rondom kinders in die openbare en politieke sfeer wil bring. Diegene wat nie bereid is om in visuele gesprekke te tree met die gegewe van die tentoonstelling nie, gaan 'n belangrike boodskap mis [Viscera is, like the Main Festival exhibition, Bringing up Baby, a series of works which aim to bring urgent and frequently privatised questions concerning children into the public and political spheres. Those who are not prepared to enter into a visual discussion with the elements comprising the exhibition, are going to miss an important message] (van Bosch, 1998:5).

Believe in the Big Screen

A number of film festival focus points and retrospectives represented Grahamstown's largest international influence and most diverse flavour. A variety of world cinema as well as a concentration on a number of countries and particular directors suggested the wide-eyed interest of the Festival organisers. Three Scandinavian directors, Ingmar Bergman, Lars von Trier and Bo Widerberg, were honoured. Not only were

examples of their work shown, but two documentaries, *The Voice of Bergman* directed by Gunnar Bergdahl, and Lars Jonsson's *Transformer*, a film about the acclaimed and controversial Danish filmmaker, von Trier, were also screened. A selection of contemporary Scandinavian films, including *My Life as a Dog* (directed by Lasse Hallstrom), Kjell-Ake Andersson's *The Christmas Oratorio*, and Pal Sletaune's 1997 Cannes International Critics' Prize-winning film *Junkmail* were also shown. A Czech film focus included films by Milos Forman, Jiri Menzel and Juraj Jakubisko.

An African film focus included the Zimbabwean movie, *Neria*, directed by Godwin Mawuru, and the South African films, *Letting Go* by director Bernard Joffe, and *Sexy Girls* by director Russell Thompson. Several long-awaited international films received their South African premières at the National Arts Festival. These included Adriane Lyne's *Lolita*, Johnny Depp's *The Brave*, and Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson*. Interestingly, the somewhat controversial *Lolita*, failed to draw the type attention one might expect from a politician like Deputy Minister Sisulu, despite the fact that the film glamourises the sexual relationship between a middle-aged man and a young girl. Numerous South African and international documentary films also formed part of the Film Festival.

Leon van Nierop, well-known South African film critic and lecturer at the Pretoria Technikon's Cinema and Television School, introduced and discussed a number of films screened at the Festival. These included the enchanting local movie, *Paljas* (directed by Katinka Heyns, 1997), *L.A. Confidential* (Curtis Hanson, 1997), *Kolya* (Jan Sverak, 1996), and *Wilde* (Brian Gilbert, 1997).

All in all, an extremely pleasing and satisfying array of cinematic art made for an impressive Film Festival.

Belief in the future

There was a vast array of theatre, music, cinema, comedy, food, fine art, debate, education and atmosphere to indulge in at this year's Grahamstown Festival. Other exciting offerings included a repeat of Greig Coetzee's brilliant *The Blue Period of Milton van der Spey*, and the highly successful *Pick Ups*, an hysterical comedy about mating rituals and being single. *Zombie Hands* is surreal black comedy staged by the University of Western Australia. Written by Andrew Lippiatt and directed by Neil Wurmel, the play represented some of the better dramas on offer amongst a barrage of musical tributes and stand-up comedies. It is sad that as the quality of the Festival continues to grow and as greater numbers of overseas performers attend, audiences appear to be shrinking and even disappearing. With the unbelievable amount of talent on offer, it seems obvious that some serious rethinking will have to be done. Whether the Festival planners will have to re-evaluate their marketing strategy or find ways of scaling down the magnitude of the Festival, change is inevitable. In his overview of the Festival, *Cue Arts* Editor, Peter Frost, expressed some concern:

... it has become clear that the Festival is in the middle of an adjustment phase, down-scaling and still searching for a solid identity, post-apartheid....

But for the most part, it is audiences, not artists that are staying away. Standards have been high in many areas; witness *Iva Bittova*, *Love Child*, *Mary Stuart*, *Not With My Gun* and *King Lear* on the main stage alone – work that is as dedicated to entertainment as it is to quality, and which makes you remember just why we all come to Grahamstown in the first place.

The Fringe ... suffered most from the drop in attendance – a number of shows were cancelled, artists went home, money was lost. There needs to be action to stop this bleeding, but it

is a complex matter not easily solved. Artists are still learning who their post-apartheid audiences actually are and what they really want. Quality needs to improve, but desperately, so do venues. Better marketing and better support is needed for artists.

The Fringe is the Main of the future, and without financial help, there will be no Bucklands, Mhlopes or Nododanas to entertain, provoke and inspire (Frost, 1998:1).

Certainly, money is one thing which cannot be considered *make believe*, and while it would be the realisation of a wonderful fantasy if artists could forget the constraints of economic and financial reality, this is far from probable. There are ways, however, of creating great art which is at once entertaining and provocative. It will be the next great step forward if we are able to find that fine (and quite unique) balance which will make *believing* a realistic possibility well into the future. If the love of theatre and the spirit of creative energy which Grahamstown '98 demonstrated is anything to go by, then one can certainly *believe* with great optimism. And Festinos have a spectacular 1999 event to look forward to. The 25th anniversary of the Festival will be celebrated with a special two-week long programme. I cannot wait.

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Farewell to the old Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown?

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The 27th Standard Bank National Arts Festival from 28 June to 7 July 2001 at Grahamstown was definitely the last one to sail under the flag of the Standard Bank. It had been made known well before the Festival that Standard Bank as the main and almost only sponsor would withdraw and many people seemed to fear that the future of the festival and its continuation on an annual basis was seriously endangered. At a press conference which Manni Manim (Chairman) and Lynette Marais (Director of the Festival Committee) called, Manni Manim, together with Dr. Henderson from the Grahamstown Foundation, succeeded to brighten the skies over the festival in assuring the journalists present that the festival will definitely continue. The withdrawal of Standard Bank was not quite as total as had been feared, and together with Paul Bannister of Ignite Strategies, other sponsors and financial resources from South African finance and business have already been located, a new system of sponsorship for the festival had been brought on its way. The principal decision to continue with the Grahamstown festival has been taken, the details how to organise and fund the festival are still under discussion. The most likely possibilities would be that the Grahamstown Foundation and the Festival Committee split up into two separate organisational units, with the Committee running the artistic side of the festival while the Foundation provides the space, the venues and the infrastructure. The organisers made it quite clear that the festival will have to change considerably, although it was not indicated into what direction change should go. It became, however, obvious that a reduction in size was inevitable. So far, the festival seemed to have a triple function:

1. As an annual stock-taking of the state of the art in the Arts, of the current trends in South African arts, including the artists responses to their political and social environment with its many challenges.
2. As a spring-board for the top-class productions to move on from Grahamstown to the international festivals and international tours, as was the case with a number of Fugard's plays, with *Woza Albert* and the Handspring Puppet/William Kentridge productions of *Woyzeck* or *Faustus in Africa*. Thus, the internal showcase also served as the showcase for the outside world to see what was happening inside the cultural field in South Africa.
3. As a rehearsal stage for young and upcoming talents to present themselves to a national audience, i.e. the festival served as platform where talents could be screened, where careers were started and shaped.

Any of these three functions has been important both for the festival itself and the arts in South Africa, but it is obvious that not all three can be maintained at the same level. One line of thinking is definitely to charge participants on the fringe programme, thus inviting the already current criticism that the festival has always been and still is too elitist, too British, too colonial – too white. (Timm 2001:6 & Matshikiza 2001:15) So we look forward to what new profile will be developed for next year's festival within the next six months.

This year's festival saw several remakes and second comings, i.e. productions that had been on the festival programme previously, productions that have since been reworked, reshaped and reproduced. While Zakes Mda launched his new prize-winning novel *The Heart of Redness*, the Cape Town Opera production of *Love and Green Onions*, subtitled *A jazzopera* (sic), premiered at the Monument Theatre as one of the highlights of the main programme. It featured Gloria Bosman and Fikile Mvinjelwa, two award-winning singers, in the roles of Toloki, the professional mourner and Noria, whose son had been necklaced. Scripted and directed by Michael Williams, based on Mda's novel *Ways of Dying*, the music written by Denzil Weale "covers a wide variety of styles but reminds one most strongly of the romantic Hollywood musical movies" (Randall 2001:6). Ina Randall also criticised Sophiatown nostalgia. Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* had been seen earlier (1999) in a dramatised version, directed by Lara Foot-Newton. She also directed the revised version of Andrew Buckland's *The Well Being*. Andrew Buckland and Lionel Newton create with streams of newsprint, a watermelon and a few pebbles (dripping on the newsprint to signify the deluge) an unsavory fairytale about rape and betrayal (*Flo Deluge* and *Rev. Caketin*), about romantic love and fulfillment (*Flo* and her dolphin lover), about social segregation, scapegoating and male overlordship. Clad in poorly fitting and unbecoming dungarees, Buckland and Newton watch and comment as frogs (we hear Aristophanes!) on the stuffiness of a small town community that undergoes the trials of drought and floods, only to blame poor *Flo Deluge* for each and every mishap that befalls the community. Minimalist in prop and set, reductionist in dialogue, Buckland and Newton exemplify under Foot-Newton's direction physical theatre at its best, displaying a richness in character, narration, atmosphere through mime, movement, body and physical acting only.

This brings me to one feature on which Adrienne Sichel (2001:2) justly remarked:

Women writers and directors continue to make an indelible mark at this festival. And Lara Foot-Newton's *Waiting for Godot*, presented by the Collective Theatre Company, has been drawing packed houses.

Lara Foot–Newton directing *Godot* and *The Well Being*, Janet Buckland directing *Makana*, Yael Farber directing *SeZaR* and *Amajuba – Raising like Doves*, Phyllis Klotz writing and directing *The Stadium* with Smal Ndaba, Reza de Wet's *On the Lake* shows an impressive presence of women artists with some of the most remarkable productions of this year's festival.

Another intriguing feature is that of the international co-production with which South African arts consciously go beyond purely national productions. International cooperation can remain at the level of financial assistance (by HIVOS and Pro-Helvetia) as with Brett Bailey's *Big Dada*, or it can be on a purely personal basis as with Ensemble Refugium. This is a binational group of young musicians performing period music and their own new compositions, They met at the conservatory in Munich, Germany and have since cooperated and performed in South Africa and Germany.

A large-scale international co-production between the Market Theatre and the Stockholm Stadtsteater was presented with Jean Genet's *The Blacks*. The Swedes provided the set, costumes, masks, the one white dummy, which according to Genet's directions, has to be placed in the first row and two Ugandan actors, William Ddumba and Stephen Lwanga (who trained under Robert Serumaga, the African Stanislavsky.) The Market provided an international set of black actresses and actors who – again following Genet's direction – played all the parts including the white masked queen, governor, missionary. Genet's farcical play about the racism behind colonialism, about the confrontation of black and white, inspired by a trip to the Congo, acquires new meanings and quite disturbing immediacy when performed in the new South Africa, rather than 1959s Paris, where it was first performed. It would be interesting to compare the reception by the Stockholm Stadtsteater audience, where the play shows from September 2001.

The coconut syndrome of Franz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks* also inspired Lesego Ramplokgeng's *Fanon's Children*. Ramplokgeng, so far known as poet and performer of his own poetry, mounted for his first play a collage of impressionist scenes, video clips, documentary footage (Lumumba's murder) touching in quick succession on forced removals at home, the refugees next door, military and guerilla atrocities and the CNN creation of a derogative and fully invented image of Africa. Ramplokgeng's language is fast, rude and poetic, his approach highly intellectual and visually direct, exposing the myths of Africa (including South Africa) as they are invented abroad and at home. *The Blacks* and *Fanon's Children* belong to a whole group of productions at this year's festival that look at South Africa as part of the African continent, that thematise the polity, good governance, power and resistance with a much broader and fundamental approach than the earlier topical political plays ever did.

SeZaR, Yael Farber's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, illustrates this approach. She changes the spelling of some names (Porshia instead of Portia), she trims down the cast to eight actors, but she retains the key notion of "the ides of March", "the senate meeting", the "battle of Philippi", and yet, she makes it perfectly clear that the characters on stage are not dead white male Romans, but that they are modelled on the Mobutus and the Kabilas, that the civil war which Mark Anthony ignites is a war like that in the Great Lakes region, in Ruanda, Burundi or Angola. Hope Sekgobela's *SeZaR/Cesar* was criticised as being out of tune, resembling "more a buffon than a conquering hero" (Eveleigh 2001). True, *SeZaR* is not Caesar, the level-headed general and political tactician; he resembles more the "heroes of Independence", the Nkrumahs or Mugabes, who quickly lose sight of the political ideals for which they allegedly once fought. *SeZaR*, who toyi-toyis his victory dance, who wallows in the entrails of the sacrificial goat slaughtered by the witch-doctor/soothsayer, who refuses to listen to the senators alerting him to the AIDS epidemic; this reflects a composite image of African leadership. It is not modelled after one single head of state, as we have witnessed only too often.

Brutus and Mark Antony have more rewarding roles to play. Menzi Ngubane, with the physique of a youthful Yul Brynner, portrays convincingly the straightforward soldier, who lives, thinks and speaks his ideals and therefore easily falls victim to the conceit of his friend Cinna. Tony Kgoroge performs Mark Antony with bravura, particularly the famous memorial speech "Friends, romans, countrymen". More than by this speech, I was impressed by the physical dynamics of Kgoroge's acting in the final act (Farber's version has only one intermission, otherwise an ongoing action on an open stage without curtains or pauses). In preparation for the battle at Philippi, Octavius and Mark Antony warm up with a traditional war dance. The physicality of these two *knobkierrie*-wielding generals signifies the brutality of the impending civil war. Yael Farber's direction plays on the stylised dance movements into the following battle scene, where the fighting – the agon – blends the expressiveness of modern *Ausdruckstanz* and the rigidity of traditional war dance choreography. Yael Farber seasoned the original dialogue with Xhosa phrases, which were unfortunately lost on me, but from the audience reaction I could gather that this must have been a highly effective supplementation of Shakespeare's imagery.

Farber's production has impressive moments, but beyond the oracle scene, Caesar's murder and Brutus's suicide, she presents the audience with sustained and structured imagery. In the climactic final scene, we see Octavius and Mark Antony presenting themselves as victors on the higher level of the stage symbolically backed by the apparition of *SeZaR*'s spirit. In their victory over Brutus they seem to shed their freedom and willingly become dependent again on the spirit of autocratic rule. At the same time, street cleaners pile up parts of dead bodies on the lower

stage, showing how the political leaders victimise the common people in their endeavour to retain their power. The street cleaners in their orange overalls and latex gloves, cleaning up the mess caused by politicians and stuffing it away in plastic bags is one of sustained images that recur throughout the production. In addition to the Shakespearean topics of regicide, the timeless dilemma of the moral justification of killing the dictator, besides the issues of honour, betrayal, power struggle among the political elite, Yael Farber introduces a democratic issue: the silencing of the masses, of the common people by the politicians. This is illustrated when SeZaR and the entire political elite of Rome/Azania refuse to listen to the street cleaner who warns against the Ides of March. This shows how much the politicians have severed their contacts with the real base of the polity, with the common people. This is repeated in the final tableau when Octavius and Mark Antony triumph, while the victimised masses mourn their dead. The associations with Ruanda, Burundi, Congo in recent years are only too obvious.

The complementary play to Yael Farber's *SeZaR* is probably Bongani Linda's *uShaka Kazulu – The Gaping Wound*. It is a newly written and produced play, but another old story about the abuse of power, about the killing of the autocratic ruler and about the failed promises of the alleged liberators Dingane and Mhlangano. The chronology and sequence of events is common knowledge. Thus, the interest of the spectator is directed towards the motivations behind the action, the reasons and causes behind the events, towards the way in which the author retells the story.

Bongani Linda aims to tell his story essentially through a structured succession of dances, through physical movements rather than spoken dialogue. This implies a fair dose of abstraction in the narration of the plot and a specific type of *Verfremdung*. Dance represents the events of the plot in the ritualised and stylised form of movement, in the symbolic imagery of the choreography and the visual images created on the stage. Bongani Linda further strengthens the ritualistic aspects of Zulu history as it is recorded in the way he conducts the dialogue. He puts most of the verbal communication into the mouth of the *imbongi*, the praise singer. It is only the conspirators Mkabayi, Dingane, and Mhlangano (the aunt and the two brothers of Shaka), who converse in direct dialogue. This means that the whole narration of the plot is brought to the spectator in two forms of representation:

1. in the poetic/verbal representation in which the *imbongi* has re-shaped the events; and
2. in the form of the dances in which the events are transformed into mimetic representations of the body and its movements/actions.

Particularly Thembinkosi Chagwe as Shaka italicises the ritualistic aspects of this performance. He hardly speaks, his movements are always fully controlled, even when he is stabbed to death by his brothers, he retains that calmness, that forced dignity with an entranced look in his eyes. In his playbill, Bongani Linda stresses the role of Shaka as the king who unified the nations of Southern Africa and enjoyed popular support. The bloodshed that followed his death "continues to haunt our country to this day." Referring to the debate about another "African Renaissance", Bongani Linda concludes that "Renaissance in Blood is an Effort in Vain".

Brett Bailey's *Big Dada – The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin Dada* is another excursion into the recent history and tradition of political leadership on the African continent. The show had been advertised in a rather ostentatious publicity campaign with a strong claim to authenticity, since Brett Bailey travelled to Uganda to do the field research for his show. (In a discussion between Robert Greig from *Sunday Independent* and Darryl Accone this is referred to as "Bailey's three weeks in Uganda to research sounds more like a CNN fly-in than anything else.") (Cue, 06.07.01, p. 1). So the expectations were quite high for the way that Brett Bailey with his record of his previous work would deal with one of the most sinister characters of post-independence Africa. The playbill cites the Ugandan dramatist Charles Mulekwa saying, "Everything he [Amin] did, he did for show", and that is exactly the line which Brett Bailey followed in his production.

Bailey lists all the major facts, from the early bullying of Ugandans and the international community – the provocations of the British, the arms deals with Israel and Libya, the "economic war", viz. the expulsion of the Asians, the humiliation of all his ministers, the dismissal of the director of the Bank of Uganda and the Chief Judge – to the later butchering of any suspects, the murder of the Archbishop of Uganda, Amin's alleged cannibalism or the feeding of the crocodiles in Lake Victoria. If Amin did everything for show, he suited the Western media so well, because he satisfied their voyeuristic greed for a blood dripping Africa – the dark continent.

Bailey denounces journalistic voyeurism in his show, but follows exactly the same voyeuristic line. The play opens with Amin presiding over a cabinet meeting, where the ministers are lined up as if they were sitting on a chicken run with a big cloth between them. This image has been seen before in Nicholas Ellenbogen's *Khaya Afrika*. Bailey chooses to approach his "hero" through various forms of travesty. During the first part of the show, the scenes on the expulsion of the Asians, arms dealing and police harrassments reveal the simplicity – even the triteness – of a Punch and Judy puppet show. The figures of the Chief Judge, the boss of the Special Branch and even Amin himself appear with the flatness of newspaper cartoon or comic book heroes. A scene, probably meant to illustrate the frightful combination of sex, violence, sodomy

and killings, combines the “sophistication” of the freak show and the peep show. If we assume that Bailey tried out these different varieties of travesty that transgress the grammar of the theatrical idiom with the intention to provoke the spectator, to challenge his/her viewing habits, and to expose the crimes and atrocities of one particular historical figure and representative of the political class, then he failed in his intentions. I found most of these travesties to be in bad taste and, what in my view is worse, Bailey made the crass violations of human rights and the disdain for human dignity and human life a laughing matter. It becomes a topic for farcical comedy mocking the victims, rather than exposing the perpetrator.

Amin’s sexual prowess and showiness are used for yet another form of travesty. Since the cast is all male and the plot line requires lots of dancing girls, we witness male actors slipping – not into skirts but – into tangas, garters and bras. One of the highlights is a song extolling the potency of Amin, presented in a Tina Turner style of song/show, culminating with hot-panted Tina, played by a male actor, hailing from the shoulders of Sello Sebotsane as Big Dada, surrounded by male acted bottom-wriggling dancing girls. So we see Big Dada enjoying himself in the middle of a drag show. In his finale, Bailey repeats this heavy borrowing from American showbiz and pop-culture, when he makes Sello Sebotsane with his full voice and strong stage presence sum up Amin’s lifetime achievements with the Frank Sinatra song “I did it my way”. Another instance that appears to me more in the category of moral malapropism and bad taste than in that of unmasking, transgressive, exposing travesty. The show remains sensationalist, voyeuristic and never rises above pure spectacle in yellow press style.

Brett Bailey would have been well advised to have taken a glance at e.g. Robert Serumaga’s renderings of Amin’s rule in his plays like *Renga Moi* or *Amayirikiti*, written from inside Uganda, or at Soyinka’s farces about African dictators in *A Play of Giants*, *Opera Wonyosi* or the most recent *King Baabu*. In the playbill Bailey asks “Who was this charismatic General who burst on to the African stage...” and that is exactly the question he does not even come near to answering. He only shows us once more the bloodthirsty clown, that we have seen so often in the media and even in a Kenyan film of the 80s, but he does not give us the faintest clue of the reasons, motivations, structures supporting that clown that would bring us a little closer to an understanding of the Amin phenomenon.

While Brett Bailey’s *Big Dada* is the one show among many dealing with the African polity and leadership that failed and disappointed the spectators, Andrew Buckland’s *Makana*, revisiting and revising Grahamstown’s local history, was one of the acclaimed successes. Andrew’s script and Janet Buckland’s direction of the play do not aim at a historical documentary, a good old

“history play” with period costumes, as was the case with a rather flat performance on Ntsikana in 1996. If one wants to look for models in the past, it would be *Piekniek by Dingaan* in the 1980s. The Bucklands also use farcical elements, perhaps even travesties – of ritualised military routine, boxing matches, of baptising and circumcision rituals – but they counterpoise the farces with other perspectives, e.g. Makana’s recollections while imprisoned on Robben Island, the missionary’s lack of concern for the “natives”, the British commander’s soldier-like professionalism and colonialist convictions. The Bucklands unravel the complexity and the humanity of Makana, and do not get stuck with the “perceived simplicity” of African leadership as Bailey did. “Bheki Mkwani, who plays Makana, turns him into an ironic and mild kind of man, possibly invested with more wisdom and humour than the original character might have had, but certainly more complex than the history books would make out” (Randall 2001:6).

Makana’s life story from a Xhosa upbringing to an early Christian convert, pentecostal preacher, traditionalist Sangoma and leader of the AmaXhosa in their fight to defend their land against British settlers and British troops, culminates in the famous battle of Grahamstown and ends by his drowning when he tries to escape from political imprisonment on Robben Island. The myriad of places of that story are condensed into one single and simple set with a backdrop of corrugated iron, suggestive of today’s Xhosa habitat Nombulelo in – or rather outside – Grahamstown. Only four actors, Noxolo Donyeli, Nyebho Swaartboi, besides Buckland and Bheki Mkwane, manage to fill the stage in quick succession with crowds of prisoners and warders, Xhosa warriors and British infantry men, sangomas, Xhosa initiates and Christian worshippers and all that – true to the Buckland credo in physical theatre – with very little talking, but lots of acting and miming on stage.

The actual battle scene is a case in point: a mixture of a *pas de deux* between Makana and the British commander, of a war dance and a boxing match with the Koi marksman speaking the running commentary of a sports reporter. Buckland ironically subtitled Makana as “the missing lynx”, i.e. he never claims to uncover “the whole truth behind the story”, as Brett Bailey did, but he tells us so much more about an African leader than Bailey’s yellow press version of Amin.

Lara Foot-Newton’s production of *Waiting for Godot* remains perfectly true to Samuel Beckett’s original, and yet strikes out into a new direction. It opens the spectators’ minds to a South African reading or rather viewing of the play. Beckett’s original was written and performed when the memories of World War II and the Holocaust were fresh, when a new start in European post-war societies was needed, and the play hit the nerves of the times in describing the lack of direction and orientation pertaining in those days. When Seputla Sebogodi as a jocular Vladimir

enters the stage – Gerhard Marx's stage design strongly suggests drought and barrenness – to join Lionel Newton as Estragon, frantically trying to pull off his boots, we immediately accept that this play is set in South Africa. We see a male bi-racial couple that has always been living in an uneasy, strained, and tense relationship, where the wish to end the partnership for good is strong and recurring regularly with heated arguments and unwarranted reproaches. At the same time both know that they can and will not part, not because they got so used to each other, but because they are subconsciously aware that they identify themselves mainly in their relation to the "other", just like *Boesman and Lena*.

Together with the psychological limbo, in which Seputla/Vladimir and Lionel/Estragon seem to talk away the time, the unspecified expectation with which they wait for Godot to lead them out of this transitory stage in their lives all seem to fit the South African situation like a glove. When Robert Whitehead as a full-bellied Pozzo drives Bheki Vilakazi as his beast of burden with the ironic name of Lucky across the stage, this appears like a visitation by the ghosts of the recent past. Seputla Sebogodi and Lionel Newton emphasise the comic aspects of the script; they conduct their dialogue with instant repartees as in a cabaret sketch, but they also maintain dramatically effective silences. They always make a strong undercurrent of seriousness, of sadness, perhaps even existential *angst* shine through their comic antics. Adrienne Sichel (2001:2) justly remarked:

When Vladimir talks of man as being "astride of a grave and a difficult birth", with a gravedigger waiting below with forceps, the graveyard is not London, Belfast, or Paris. It is in Soweto, Pretoria or Cape Town.

We mentioned the role women playwrights and directors played at this year's festival: Lara Foot-Newton directing *Waiting for Godot* and *The Well Being*, Janet Buckland directing *Makana*, Phyllis Klotz presenting *The Stadium*, Yael Farber scripting and directing *SeZaR*. Yael Farber produced yet another show with the North West Arts Drama Company, *Amajuba – Rising like Doves*, "based on the true lives of the performers". *Amajuba* takes up the dramatic style which Fugard popularised with *My Life* and which had appeared on the South African stage with the Theatre of Resistance in the *Asinamali* style and gained prominence with the TRC plays: the narration and re-enactment of individual life stories that share common features and can thus be combined to propose a general thesis. In *Amajuba* Yael Farber went beyond pure documentation; she stripped down the narrated biographies to their bare essentials, highlighting stylised and symbolic key experiences, which she arranged in such a way that she achieved a poetic structure from prosecution to redemption. The stages in this process are symbolised by

the four elements: fire, air, earth and water. The fire of the necklacing, the air after the tear gassing, the earth that has turned into dust in the streets of the townships or the barren fields of the homelands, that is the dirty legacy of the past which the younger generation washes away with water in a cleansing ritual to *rise like doves* into a new future. Yael Farber and her actors succeeded in conveying the sordid experiences of the past, the determination to overcome, and the optimism of being ready to enter into a new and positive future.

But it is not only the women playwrights and directors who made a strong imprint on this year's festival. There is also the impact made by a number of actors/writers through the major productions of the festival. We admired Lionel Newton not only in *Waiting for Godot* at the side of Seputla Sebogodi, but also together with Andrew Buckland in *The Well Being*. Buckland performed brilliantly in his own play *Makana*, together with Bheki Mkwane, who in turn received enthusiastic responses for his street theatre production *iLobola* together with Ellis Pearson. This performance on the lawn behind Drotsky Arch of Rhodes University produced a maximum of enjoyment from an absolutely minimalist set and equipment, which the two actors compensated for by an exuberance in theatrical inventiveness and mimetic brilliance.

It seems obvious that the most impressive productions and performances of this year's festival were achieved by a relatively small group of artists, writers, directors, actors who cooperate closely. One definitely noted a trend towards a concentration on a few artistic personalities with their particular theatrical styles and idioms. Whether this should also be the direction into which the organisers of the new festival should go from next year onwards is a different but also a difficult question.

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Appendix C

African modes.

In fact I've been wanting some people from Chicago's Second City to come out and run workshops. I believe that's a wonderful form for here. Because sometimes you can go through hell in rehearsals of people not turning up, but with satire or cabaret, you can work in sections. So practically it's an excellent thing too. Those are some of the things that are most valuable about South Africa that people overseas don't even begin to smell, like paradox, living in paradox, the transparency of hypocrisies.

What about Peter Dirk-Uys's work?

Yes, but people are still intrigued by the fact that he's attacking the government. I'm talking about in general, in life. You know, humour is a weapon of survival in this country. Laughter.

What is your central interest in theatre here at the Market?

You know, there's a Hasidic saying, 'God created man because he loves to listen to stories'. That's as close to religion as I get. I'm fascinated about the stories of people.

An interview with Gary Gordon, Rhodes University, October 1994.

Ilona Frege

University of Stellenbosch

It is interesting that Grahamstown, which is a small rural town in the isolated eastern Cape, should be the location for some of the newest and most experimental dance works emerging in South Africa. Judith Lynne Hanna mentions urban areas as being a centre for new dance, but here there seems to be an inversion of that theory. To what extent does your location affect and influence the work that you are doing?

I think that the place where we're at has a lot to do with the way that we work and the amount of work that we do. I know that whole idea of the arts and the metropolis, but I think that the opposite is also true. If you look at dance in America, at, say, Martha Graham's time, the work was generated at Bennington College and then it went back to New York City. The same with Merce Cunningham and John Cage - it was at Black Mountain College. So I don't think it's always the fact that the new takes place in the city. Perhaps you have to get out of the city to be able to reflect on it. I also think that colleges, and I'm using colleges in the sense that that's what the American equivalent was at the time, or universities, are a place where people come together. I think that what is special about Rhodes University Drama Department is that staff and students do like working together. I think that collaboration is a term that is easily used, but it's not a very easy process. You've actually got to want to, you've got to listen, you've got to discuss, you've got to be criticised, you've got to be critical. It's a dialogue, but I think that people here are very receptive to that and that's why the making of new works flourishes here.

The other point is that a lot of us on the staff, and the students too, haven't always been here: we've been in Johannesburg or Cape Town or London or wherever and then we bring that with us here and create here. Our focus and attention is on making work rather than on travelling around the city, going here, going there. The courses also have a large role to play in that. It's not just Grahamstown, it's the way that we have worked on shaping the choreography course and in generating new works. Each term the Masters and Honours students present a new work. The accent is very much on being artistically productive.

So, for me, there are a lot of factors contributing to Grahamstown being quite rich. The other point is that it's become the centre for the biggest arts festival in the southern hemisphere. Although at other times of the year it might be quiet, there's still a sense that if you live here, you are a part of that, so we are not existing in an artistic void.

Your work is deeply rooted in education as opposed to training dancers. Does the fact that you are working in a drama department, as opposed to a dance institution, have any specific relevance for you?

That's quite an involved question. There are a lot of issues at stake. I suppose I have to be personal and talk about myself. My background has always been in drama and dance. I don't like to separate them. When I went to university, I did Rudolf Laban and we did dance drama, which already was bringing those two together. It had an expressive element, it dealt with communicating content. Dance drama as Laban had it is based in German expressionism, which has to do with the human psyche and emotions and what expressionism has - fragmentation and distortion, intensification of the emotions, so there's always that content to do with the interior landscape. When I went to the Laban Centre, a lot of people were quite interested in my work as a performer because I had a strong dramatic ability and they enjoyed that you can move and act and that is what dance theatre is about - bringing together motion and emotion. When I returned, I thought that we should focus on that and not think I'm trying to do drama and always excusing the dance, but rather make that a feature of our work.

So, for me, physical theatre is really updating dance drama. I think it's dealing with a current direction in England and Europe, but I also think that it is a part of Africa's heritage. If you look at dramatic ritual and practices here in a rural context, for example, that whole idea of bringing together the arts and communicating to people - communicating intent or social commentary is part of Africa and there you use dance and movement and drama and text and song and poetry. So I think it has a basis here as well. I don't only see it as an import.

In terms of the educational policy of the ANC, they are introducing a general education certificate, which is the right of every young child until about fourteen years old and part of that is a combined arts programme, which would be a course subject. Physical theatre is wonderful for that because it is already bringing together drama, dance and design. And that

is something which we focus on very strongly, as well as creative writing. Certainly, in creating a physical theatre experience, you tend to draw on the different arts and you need to collaborate with other artists, which is probably what arts educators should be doing in a combined arts programme, so I believe it could play a very important role in that way.

The term "physical theatre" has strong political implications. Could you discuss why you've called your repertory company the First Physical Theatre Company?

It's a terrible question because everyone always wants to know what it is. It's a lot of things. The political agenda is crucial to it. I think that, historically in this country, we have a sense of art with a capital A and that there are only certain kinds of ways that you can perform or make works. I think that physical theatre really changes that (our brand of physical theatre). I think that it alters peoples perceptions. To be political, you don't always have to be screaming and shouting. In fact, it can often be the hidden agenda and I think that, sometimes in our work, it is that. One of the strongest things that seems to confront people when they see our work, has to do with gender. They see our treatment of women in particular as quite different, although I think it's our treatment of women and men, because as much as women do the supporting and sharing of weight, the carrying, they have another kind of strength and that's what we've been investigating. In the same way you're also allowing men to be sensitive, vulnerable and delicate. You need to look across our repertory, though, to appreciate that. If you look at "Shattered Windows", you might think who's being fragile or delicate there, but if you look at another work like "Dialogue", which is about male relationships, then I think we are.

The other thing about physical theatre and its political implications, is that it is the process that's important, so it doesn't deal with a dictatorial process where the choreographer would come with the given vocabulary and that's how you must do it. There is an investigation, an interaction with a theme by the choreographer and the performers, and this affects the material. So there's a dialogue and that's very different in terms of making work and that process, to me, is absolutely crucial. The other thing is, that when we do our work, we don't present the narrative or idea - we don't display. It's far more tactile and kinetic. The focus is on each other, so, in a way, we're shifting from a patriarchal viewing of bodies to one in which people are in interaction. It is visual in a way as well because theatre works like that,

but you're not presenting the body and displaying the body. You're also concerned with bodies' interactions. It's bringing together the tactile with the visual aspect. To me, that's a very strong shift in the way that you make and present a work. Seldom in our work do people come and "show" the audience or flirt with the audience or seduce the audience, unless it's an integral part of the work.

One of your works, "They Were Caught Waiting", challenges peoples' perceptions about the body in age by placing an elderly person as a strong focus in the work, something which is not often seen in dance in this country.

It's quite interesting that, because if you go to something like the Dance Umbrella, it's a very young performer and I think that that brings with it young concerns and that is why the work in this country tends to be "high energy" all the time, because you're not really having a mature voice. Not that young people are immature, but it's a different experience. You need to address your whole community and there are young people and there are old people.

The art of choreography appears to be quite neglected at some dance institutions in South Africa. A new work is often a stringing together of different classroom combinations as the outer expression of how the choreographer is feeling or likes to move.

Yes, the emotional content is almost superficial to the vocabulary. There's not a research into a language that is appropriate to that particular theatrical experience. It's not actually peoples' fault: it's the history of choreography in Western theatre. I mean, if you were a choreographer, you were one of the lucky men, because it was very much the men that made the dance. It was only a very few people that could choreograph those ballets in the old days. It's only in this century that people thought about teaching it. Doris Humphrey is the person who's really central to that. Her work was published in the late fifties - obviously she was doing it before that, but it's fairly new. You're looking at forty, fifty years, so it doesn't have a long history. I don't think I'm actually teaching someone to be a choreographer, but I think you can set up an environment that is creative and critical and that you educate people through and about dance. That's always been a problem: dance education has always been the training of a dancer before this. What we're doing is shifting there again. When you're dealing with educating people, you're also dealing with an experiential aspect, which might

be performance, but it will also be with creativity, with improvisation and the making of works. That, to me, is absolutely crucial in educating people and that should be a core area. To just keep it on performance, you go back to the idea of dance training. I am more interested in educating people through and about dance.

What would you classify as truly South African in your work? Is there a greater influence from your experiences overseas or is there a mixture of the two?

Just to be contentious, I don't think anything is South African. I don't know what it is anymore because there are so many influences around us - the television, the radio, the music, literature, the magazines, that impinges on us. I know that people are looking for a South African aesthetic. I don't know what it is. Is it me as a white South African or is it Boyzie Cekwana who's a black man in ballet? There are superficial things I suppose. You can find music that is made by a South African composer or drumming or sounds that come from black African dance. I always think, to really deal with an aesthetic, you need to go more into form than into content. It's very easy to take a South African story and say this is South African, but you could be using a Western format in the structure. Perhaps you have to work democratically, through process, through incorporating people, but that's not necessarily South African - that could be American. It's an impossible question to answer, but I do feel that people that look for it, tend to go for superficial things - some traditional African dance steps combined with modern or jazz.

I suppose that, over a period of time, things evolve. The trouble with dance and with any kind of theatre-making, is that it's also individual, but individuals are also part of a society and a setting - perhaps that is being South African. Perhaps you have to look at many people and many different groups, dealing with many diverse possibilities. I, myself, as a choreographer, wouldn't strive to be South African - you can also be quite fascist! I think you should just make works. Obviously, as an artist, you're sensitive to where you live and to what's going on around you, otherwise perhaps you wouldn't be an artist.

I think the critics have really set up this idea that we must have a South African aesthetic. When I use the word South African dance, I think it's more a place where you are, rather than something that you just plaster on and say this is South African dance. I don't think you

should try and do it. I think it evolves and it doesn't happen overnight. It's probably in about ten years time that you're going to see a synthesis - dance forms coming together.

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REPORTS

Journey to Grahamstown: the 1995 Standard Bank National Arts Festival

Peter Larlham

San Diego State University

Watching Athol Fugard's *The Island* at the Rhodes Theatre yesterday was like the completion of a long journey which started in New Brighton decades ago, seeing the fathers of South African theatre close the circle of their vision.

Sandile Memela in *Cue*, Tuesday July 11, 1995.

Just over a year ago the first democratic elections took place in South Africa. What changes have come about during this transitional period? What economic, political and social conditions prevail? And most of all, what effect, if any, has this monumental change made upon theatre in South Africa?

The miracle of the peaceful transition to democracy, accompanied by relief and goodwill by almost all South Africans, has given way to skepticism about the economic future of the country. Doubts centre around a mediocre growth rate in a country with an estimated 43% unemployment, and a union push for stricter government regulation of the labour market which is likely to deter foreign investment, already low due to political uncertainty and a high crime rate.¹ Other concerns include the state funding of primary health care services, the provision of education and the creation of more employment that cannot keep pace with current population growth.

The July 1995 two-day meeting of Socialist International - the council of the world federation of social democratic, socialist and labour movements - in Cape Town scrutinized problems common to most African countries; spiral of debt, soaring population growth, dramatic loss of share in world markets - not to mention war, famine and disease epidemics.² The negative image of Africa in much of the rest of the world is characterized by media emphasis of these

Appendix D



Physical Imaginings: the translation of memory in the danceplays of First Physical

By Juanita Finestone, Winter 2001

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"The dancing body in the relentlessness of its motion and the inevitability of its evanescence leaves in its wake so little from which to reconstruct its presence, either in the imagination or in history. Whereas choreographers have accustomed themselves to this disappearance act, historians have typically focused on projects informed by more permanent kinds of records. They have privileged information that moves within the textual field from historical document to historian's text and tended to ignore events and actions outside the textual that are unavailable or resistant to the process of translation." (Susan Leigh Foster, 1996)

Introduction

Reconstructing the appearances and disappearances of bodily memory through time and space is the choreographer's proposition and undertaking. Belgian choreographer, Wim Vanderkeybus has created a work entitled, *What the body does not remember* (1987). I have found myself repeatedly mesmerised by the idea of memory as it is presented in this title. Given the work's context within a Physical Theatre, it seems to express an irony in relation to the body's inevitable nostalgia and reflection within a context of formally choreographed movement. Moreover, it attempts to confound the logic which regards bodily memory as 'truth'. The incongruous juxtaposition of intimacy and estrangement that we experience and express through our bodies daily seems to embrace the incongruous, and in Vanderkeybus' title, it becomes uncanny. The uncanny can be conceptualised as a return of an experience of familiarity within an unfamiliar context which makes the familiar, as Freud suggests, "unheimlich" or unhomely. Vanderkeybus' reference to a disappearing, amnesiac body or body of memory seems somehow 'unhomely' - the known body returning to a now disguised, or consciously unknown body. His title hints at this duplicity of bodily memory, commenting on the way the body disguises its responses in order to re-invent its history. This 'forgetting to remember' is partly how the body re-constructs its own gestural history of habit and defense against its more rational narratives of autonomy and control.

The plight of poor Bottom as he emerges from his dream with Titania in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* is recalled. With an ass' head superimposed on his own, he stumbles back to his companions, who are utterly aghast at his transformation,

at how he has been 'translated'. The metaphor of translation assumes a comic reference here to the uncanny - the familiar Bottom now, unfamiliar Bottom - as the curious relation of Bottom's double visage questions the relationship of the known to the unknown. In a sense, the act of translation here becomes uncanny in its presentation of an "unheimliches" moment of transference. Bottom's 'unhormely' appearance signals his disappearance.

The notion of translation also provides a centralising conceptual context for the discussion of creative interpretations and choreographic transformations through processes of writing the body

This diffuse and somewhat ghostly disappearance of bodily memory suggested by Vanderkeybus' title and the disappearing choreographic text referred to by Foster, seemed to me to have something of this uncanny recall in common. This relation of presence and absence through the body seems to be one of the defining moments of the choreographic process. Here, it has become a departure point for translating the idea of 'concept to concert'. The notion of *translation* also provides a centralising conceptual context for the discussion of creative interpretations and choreographic transformations through processes of writing the body in the work of First Physical Theatre Company. With close reference to particular works within the repertory of First Physical, some of the creative choices, working processes, inspirations, crafting principles, training methodologies, and intuitions from source to final product will be reflected upon, assessed and analysed.

Within this research process, the role of researcher becomes one of *translation* - to change in form, to transform, to decipher and unravel the choreographed text. The researcher begins to translate, witness, document, remember and interpret the evanescent memories of these choreographic moments. This question of translation is a vital one for dance given its lack of easy documentation and sad history of illiteracy. Experiential knowledge via participation in the processes described is based on personal investment in many of the works, via alternating roles as choreographer, performer, teacher, fund raiser or researcher. Reference to both researched and experiential modes of enquiry may coax these seemingly resistant choreographic texts into appearing, helping to make the absent processes more present.

Somatic expressions of memory, history, and narrative

... one of the greatest obstacles to memory is in fact, memory itself ...

Postmodern and postcolonial discourses have elucidated the multiple voices and subjectivities of history, revealing that history is not about facts or truths but selective interpretations and translations of events and people. As Jenkins suggests, the past is gone, it has disappeared and historiography is what historians make of this past: "*the past and history float free of each other*" (Jenkins, 1991: 5). Historiography is an inter-textual, linguistic construct. If we agree that history is about interpretation and story-telling, then similarly, we must concur that memory consists of constructed acts of selective recall. Memory is not personal truth, or authentic revelation. Adam Phillips in his text entitled, *On Flirtation ... the telling of selves ...* discusses how one of the greatest obstacles to memory is in fact, memory itself. As he suggests, by imaginative acts of substitution, we repress and replace whatever has been unacceptable in our experience and hence our memory is often a defense of memory. He cites Freud's suggestion that memory is akin to dream in the sense that it is neither logical, rational nor chronological. Freud noted that "the falsified memory is the first that we become aware of". Until this memory is interpreted, it remains a "screen-memory", a waking dream of the past (Phillips, 1994: 65). While Phillips compares and contrasts acts of writing the self through autobiography and psychoanalysis, it is useful to examine this conundrum in relation to writing the self/body through dance performance.

One of the most useful processes of unearthing potential responses to source material is via *improvisation*. The use of improvisation is one method that can be used effectively by the choreographer as a *source* for developing fresh, innovative movements and responses from performers. It provides individual physical statements and images with which the choreographer can then interact.

"Improvisation as a source generates material which, in its complexity and unexpectedness, could never be planned or arrived at by logical means". (Tufnell and Crickmay, 1990: 194)

Improvised responses to a given source can provide the catalyst for unleashing unconscious responses to material that emerge through a dreamlike logic. Briefly returning to Phillips, he states that like dream, free association is one way of tapping into or behind defensive memory:

"free-association is memory in its most incoherent and therefore fluent form; because of repression, the past can only return as disarray in de-narrativised fragments." (Phillips, 1994: 67)

Choreography via an improvised process can become a rich site for the meeting of collective and personal histories. Gaps or fragments of memory are released that can be shaped and played with by the choreographer to create compelling images of the body and its relation to narrative, identity and history. As Sandor Ferenczi notes, *"the patient is not cured by free-associating, he is cured when he can free associate"* (quoted in Phillips, 1994: 67). Phillips concurs that the aim of analysis is not to recover the past, but to make recovery of the past possible. For the choreographer, this journey to source an authentic response from the performers, involves, via the body, such a return of the repressed. It becomes an attempt to allow the body to remember what it has forgotten to remember. The process of writing the body becomes an intertextual process of translating in order to re-invent. This is much like postcolonial discourse which seeks a re-invention of the past for the purposes of the present. This intriguing relationship of collective versus personal memory raises valuable questions for a contemporary understanding of identity, history, and memory as it is explored and presented through South African performance and dance. The complex and playful relation of memory to choreographic impulse and process will be examined and presented here as a series of vignettes, each examining different aspects of the choreographic ethos and imagination within a Physical Theatre.

Public Vignettes - biographies and/as collective memory

Two of Gary Gordon's danceplays provide a valuable source for elaborating this dialogue between creativity, history, transformation and interpretation. In *The Unspakable Story* (1995) and *Bessie's Head* (2000), Gordon becomes historiographer - he calls both works **documentary** danceplays. In both, Gordon translates the lives of two historical figures, re-inventing narratives from their lives for a contemporary context. His working processes include an attention to source, artistic collaboration, an integrated and intertextual approach to devising texts (aural/physical/visual/sensual) and the mobilisation of the body's presence.

While not denying the mysterious alchemy that is transmuted through and by the creative process, the company ethos strongly affirms processes of research.

In his inaugural speech at Rhodes University, Gordon identifies the struggle of Physical Theatre as having a commitment to *transformation* - the transformation of ideology, and to the notions of theatre/drama and dance (Gordon, 1996: 17). This idea of transformation retains a provocative questioning of mainstream aesthetic and political views. It re-reads and re-invents contents, forms and performance modes in its attempt to find inventive approaches to devising theatre. While not denying the mysterious alchemy that is transmuted through and by the creative process, the company ethos strongly affirms processes of research. Embodied in this vision is a challenge to assumptions that creative impulses are innate talents that one either possesses or not - the idea that works are inspired by a benevolent Terpsichorean muse and those creative acts are feeling things rather than thinking things. In a paper entitled, *The Muse and Archaeologist* (1997; and which can be read on the company CD Rom), I have discussed at length the play involved in this research where the artist becomes the archaeologist who must discover, dig and sift through sourcing and delicate working processes to eventually exhume his/her artifact, or parts thereof. This process brings together many of the concerns of a Physical Theatre - the idea of an integrated, holistic approach as well as the notion of artistic collaboration. In Physical Theatre, each artistic medium/collaboration

(music/text/design/physicality) becomes an integrated yet *independent* aspect of the work. Each medium adding a layer of meaning to the work through its own interpretation of the images and concepts being explored. As a result, the range of creative sources that go into the work ensure that all the artists involved in the collaboration have contributed fundamentally to the final product. And this, I believe, is what makes the work an original collaboration - the creative input of a range of individuals permeates the work providing it with a rich, multi-dimensional and multi-media texture. The work becomes a collaborative remembering.

A public and intimate landscape is re-constructed using Bessie Head's past as a source to assemble images and design responses to questions of power and identity.

In *Bessie's Head* (2000), Gordon becomes cartographer as he begins to map out a site for the excavation of the imagination. This historical evocation of creativity is figured in South African writer, Bessie Head. A public and intimate landscape is re-constructed using Bessie Head's past as a source to assemble images and design responses to questions of power and identity. Head's novel, *A Question of Power*, deals with the psychic disintegration of a woman and her struggle to free herself from the controlling, tormented voices she hears in her head. Resonances between Head and this female protagonist bear resemblance. Head's own history appears to have been a battle with mental instability and a deep longing and nostalgia for her origins (represented in Gordon's danceplay by the focus on her mother). These repressed emotions form the spark from which creativity is birthed. The programme note sets this up:

"A documentary danceplay that dissects the events surrounding the birth of the writer born in South Africa: Bessie Head. Facts and storiesdance and drama....words and songs....music, design and imagination collude in this interior viewing of an artist's private domain. A theatrical vision that reveals sights of passion, tenderness and power." (Gary Gordon; March 2000)

Head's memories and multiple voices emerge through Gordon's interpretation in the form of an illogical and fragmented narrative. Phelan points out that this western myth of narrative order is not something shared by the body, or in fact, even the mind. She declares:

"The body, in short, does not share consciousness's faith in narrative order. The uneven join between the body and consciousness is packed with the expansive ooze of the unconscious ... the body's movements are the roaming rooms in which psychic 'truths' are lodged". (Peggy Phelan, 1996)

In *Bessie's Head*, both the choreography and the text share this lack of chronology. The work evolves through a number of disjointed and episodic fragments. Gordon interprets Head's dream of the mother she longed for, but never knew. The work pursues this narrative deconstruction of Head's history - how Bessie Head herself had re-constructed a narrative via stories about her mother and her own wish-fulfillment in order to make sense of her abandonment as a child. Head's physical and imagined exiles from her own history - first as a child and later as a political refugee living in Botswana - became poignant stories from which to translate her presence in the work. The working process included a range of strategies for interpreting Head's obsession with origins as we too performed our reading of what her body did and did not remember.

The echoes inside Bessie's head, her imaginary compositions of her mother are juxtaposed with and re-constructed in relation to the voices of reason and power - the somber voices of male authority and rational discourse.

The opening image is of a group of bandaged people wandering lost onto the stage - they enter from the audience and then stare out at them and into a blinding spotlight. The audience sees only their chest and faces. They present a *Prologue* which becomes a succinct and economic chronicle of the work - through gestures and voice, the unconscious emotional residues of the danceplay are conjured up. The echoes inside Bessie's head, her imaginary compositions of her mother are juxtaposed with and re-constructed in relation to the voices of reason and power - the somber voices of male authority and rational discourse. This is elicited through De Wet's text which performs itself in a voice-over.

ENQUIRIES INTO PHYSICAL THEATRE

Woman's Voice: *In the dark. Quietly and brokenly.*

My mother is my private goddess. I alone adore her.

Slowly lights up on head

Man's Voice: *Deep and resounding*

My purpose is to clarify - to verify. Since I am the senior member still living, being of reasonably sound health of mind, and with my knowledge, it is my duty to compile an official record of the white antecedents of Bessie Head. In particular, I wish to give true information about Toby, my sister - mother of Bessie.

Woman's Voice: *Broken.*

"Minds crack, they say, sometimes shatter."

Man's Voice: *Now sounding quite normal and rather "proper".*

Who the father was, is completely unknown, and speculation is a waste of time. A brief encounter? A misuse of her mental state? Was she enticed somewhere?

Short silence

Was she ... waylaid?

Woman's Voice: *Quiet and tearful.*

I never knew my mother. Never. To me she remained ... an utter ... utter ... mystery.

Whispers Almost fearful.

Who is she?

Chorus of wailing voices: *Who ... who ... whoooo ... is ... she?*

AND/OR Sound of retreating, resounding footsteps. Many heavy metal doors being slammed. Cries - close and far off. Cries of women, of birds, of animals.

The work provides very different and subjective accounts of events surrounding Head's conception and birth, dispelling any notion of a fixed or official historical 'truth'.

We are drawn into Bessie's head through the set which is a large perspex re-construction of a head - big enough to move in. In moments throughout the work, it becomes a metaphorical locale for the performers - they literally become Bessie's thoughts. At the back of the stage hang three shrouded heads which are grotesque, mask-like visions. At the end of the work, these collapse and crack open, an image that is echoed throughout the work.

ENQUIRIES INTO PHYSICAL THEATRE

Woman's Voice: "Minds crack, they say, sometimes shatter."

The costume design is dynamic in the way it transforms from a clean, virginal white at the start of the work to a sweeping tide of blood (red). The rising red stains on bottom of the performer's dresses and pants gradually spread upwards to consume them. This accumulation of colour throughout the work evokes the violence and emotional flood that is wrought by the anguished memories of the female characters.

The final dance is Gordon's celebration of Bessie's fantasy of her mother. A tall, elegant female performer enters the empty stage, clad in deep red velvet. As she walks on, clearly looking for someone, the famous Albinoni adagio for Strings in G minor sounds out its exquisite sadness. Anticipating nostalgia, the composer has cheekily adapted the score, transforming its themes into a sumptuous tango. The woman relinquishes her yearning and acquiesces to an ecstatic remembrance. The chorus from the opening provides a brief epilogue in their reactions to her. An exhilarated dance becomes the resounding expression of the creative impulse. The final image returns to a mother and child, embraced in each other as the faint sound of heartbeats return.

With the premiere of a film adaptation at the 2000 National Arts Festival, *Bessie's Head* is now featured as "the country's first dance-in-camera production".

"As it grows and is documented, so too is it documenting itself ... Bessie's Head, as an artistic, theatrical expression combines fact with imagination and takes us into a realm where past and present collude - a realm of the beyond, an 'in-between space' where negotiation on cultural meaning and interpretation, as well as signs of identity and innovative collaboration, can take place." (Rob Murray, 2000)

It was always interesting for me to hear responses from the audience - especially those who believed the work to be an inaccurate and jumbled account of Head's history. The need for a legitimate and chronological history confounded, the mystery of Head's birth remains. The programme presents a quotation from a letter sent to Dottie Ewan, a mutual friend of Head and ours:

"The world has to change perhaps subtly, and the times of change are fascinating. The eyes that capture the new and unusual open many doors for others." (Bessie Head in a letter to Dottie Ewan, 30 September 1972)

This letter, discovered in the New English Literary Museum during our research makes it possible to say that perhaps, the point of reclaiming or re-inventing histories makes it possible to allow the repressed and silenced voices in our own heads to bear witness to themselves. In the resultant fractures, perhaps a new space is cracked open.

Utilising similar strategies of narrative fragmentation and deconstruction, Gordon's *The Unspeakable Story* (1996), sets out to imaginatively re-interpret an event in the life of surrealist painter, Rene Magritte. Using his paintings and various biographies on Magritte as source, Gordon isolates one event in his life - his mother's death by suicide - and re-presents this woman's story. South African dance critic, Adrienne Sichel has called this work a "choreographic splicing of fact and magic" (Sichel, *The Star*, March 7, 1996).

Gordon provokes a questioning of the creative, of social and of personal memory in this documentary danceplay. The borders between the personal and the public are blurred with each episode providing a different perspective into this woman's suicide.

ENQUIRIES INTO PHYSICAL THEATRE

The story migrates in a nomadic way between the past and the present - her story is re-constructed and re-presented as stories about dance, art, life and death.

Gordon notes that during his research for the working process, he recalls reading about Magritte's obsession with cheap detective novels and he interacts with this thrilling idea by incorporating it into the work as mystery. The danceplay becomes a thriller - a mystery that is being unraveled. The programme note reflects on Magritte's own words:

"the mysteries in those books can be unlocked with a key ... I mean, if there is a mystery in my work, it's a matter of the unknowable". (Magritte, 1898 - 1967)

There are six episodes in the work and each archetypal episode represents a different view of the *unspeakable fact* of this woman's tragic death. *The Mirror* is a nostalgic journey of reflection - the young boy's memory of his home and of his parents. Utilising the music of the popular 1940's band, The Inkspots, Gordon here recalls Magritte's obsession with cheap detective novels. To place this information in period, he uses the popular music to take the audience back. *The River* explores a more expressionist vocabulary and narrative. It becomes the "emotional heartland of the dance - into which the woman plunges her deepest oblivion" (Finestone, 1995: 65). *The Funeral* is a grotesque and macabre funereal ritual - here we are witness to a vaudeville act and singer's floorshow, a macabre fashion parade and a duet that questions the speed and power play of Latin American dance styles like the tango. In this scene, the memory of the dead is shown up to be what it sometimes socially is, frivolous and pretentious. *The Dream* is more surreal and takes the audience into the boy's unconscious - into his dream of his mother. The distortion of film images adds this surreal dream-like experience. Finally, in *The Cycle*, the dancers all become representations of Magritte's mother. The woman is never represented by one character, but each performer becomes one of her myriad representations.

The different artistic styles and conventions also make the work a postmodern dialogue with art itself - with questioning the choreographic creation and with representation. For example, the set becomes such an intertextual play with Magritte's own creative strategies. The box-like structure of the set (The House) is painted with Magritte's famous clouds and at the bottom of the set, the following words are painted: "*C'est n'est pas un Magritte*". This is a playful interaction with Magritte's painting, *This is not a Pipe* which serves to question the authorship, authenticity and origins of acts of representation. For a full analysis of this work, see Finestone's unpublished thesis, *The Politics and Poetics of Choreography: The Dancing Body In South African Dance*. 1995.

The idea that memories become cauterised, sanitised and obliquely forgotten or lost in the body allows for the body to become a prime site for remembering.

In the above works, we see how the choreographer has translated histories, how memories can be constructed and retrieved via narrative through the choreographic process. The idea that memories become cauterised, sanitised and obliquely forgotten or lost in the body allows for the body to become a prime site for remembering. The body becomes a place to unearth these dusty memories. The landscapes of the mind, emotions and spirit are traversed and felt through skin, muscle and bone. It is to this physical aspect of the creative process that I now wish to turn.

In 1996 I created a work called *The Passion of Judas* for the National Arts Festival as part of a First Physical programme called *Abundance*. In this work, the idea of storytelling via collective history and private memory became source for the exploration of the biblical story of Judas - his betrayal, guilt and absolution. At the time of creating the work, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the Eastern Cape had just begun. It became a place of reflection and acute questioning for most South Africans as we struggled to recall the most vile excesses of Apartheid. The work attempted to respond and reflect on some of these processes of remembering. David Alcock, in a paper for the *South African Theatre As/ And Intervention* conference held in London in August 1996, has written the following about the work:

"During the performance, one male performer is in a bent kneeling position while two other male performers, one carrying the other, proceed to stand on the kneeling man's back. The tension of the moment caused by our sense of the endurance of the kneeling performer is felt in

kinaesthetic sympathy by the audience to the point of being unbearable ... it explores the impact of human beings 'telling their story and collapsing under the weight of it' (programme note), as well as other related issues, such as the tension between public and private experience; the process whereby inner motivations become public information; and how individuals in the present desperately seek absolution from their personal stories of crime in the past. (Alcock, 1999: 56)

Ann Cooper Albright in her prolific account of the body and identity in contemporary dance cites the use of a term by Audre Lorde - "*biomythography*" - to describe a process where narratives "weave the historical facts of people's existence elaborating visionary sagas of social and personal survival" (Cooper Albright, 1997: 151). Albright suggests that in order to be effectively and potently embodied in performance, history has to be recast

"situated in a different light and taken up by different bodies. The importance of history here is not the importance of historical fact or artifact; such documents, authorized in the service of white dominance are rightfully suspect. Rather, history for so many African-Americans is located in the story - in the telling again and again ... It is this creative element in retelling the story that makes this history - the history of peoples and their stories rather than the history of facts - inherently performative." (Cooper Albright, 1997: 151 - 153).

While Cooper Albright's text obviously refers to the Afro-American experience, the South African experience echoes similar strategies of story-telling as survival. Mjabulo Ndabale, in an article entitled, *memory, symbol, and the triumph of narrative* notes how at a certain point during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 'testimonies' transformed to become 'story':

"and so it is that the stories of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission seem poised to result in one major spin-off, among others: the restoration of narrative. In few countries in the contemporary world do we have a living example of people re-inventing themselves through narrative." (Ndabale in Kellner, 2000: 24)

Cooper Albright highlights the idea that re-interpreting history needs to be creative rather than static. This notion of creativity embraces the idea of translation as transformation. In *The Passion of Judas*, the working processes and training of the performers' bodies became vital to the remembering - our own "*biomythographies*" were created by exploring the performer's personal responses to ideas of betrayal, both intimate and public. We read texts from the bible, newspaper articles from the TRC, wrote stories about personal betrayals and played with the meanings of where these evocations collided. Via improvisation and the choreographic manipulation of the emerging material through crafting, a language for the content emerged. This way of working has become part of the ethos for a Physical Theatre. With regard to choreographic process, it provides a vital role for the performer to collaborate with and to translate the choreographer's vision.

Ana Sanchez-Colberg, in her ground-breaking article, *Altered States and Subliminal Spaces: charting the road towards a Physical Theatre*, begins to conceptualise the eclectic production displayed in Physical Theatre. She argues that the term itself denotes a hybrid character and suggests that this is testimony to its double legacy in both avant-garde theatre and dance. She further states:

"The locating of physical theatre within the avant garde must be given to issues of anti-establishment within the context of alienation and transgression common to both forms." (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996: 40)

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Re-examining the role of avant garde dance within a Physical Theatre, Sanchez-Colberg has noted the process of language devaluation that occurred within avant garde theatre and highlights a *'parallel mistrust of codified 'languages of the body' ... present in the history of contemporary dance from Duncan to Bausch'* (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996: 44). She examines, for example, the impact that German expressionism and the innovative choreographer and dance theorist, Rudolf Laban's approach has had for contemporary dance and Physical Theatre. She examines the influence of Laban's study of choreology on a questioning of the accepted role of movement within the dance medium which supports the development of most dance vocabularies and techniques. She argues that Laban's guiding principle, that of the 'body in space' before movement, appears a simple concept to grasp, but that carefully re-examined, it provides a new context for understanding the move away from codified techniques utilised historically by various avant garde artists (for example, Wigman and Bausch) and many Physical Theatre practitioners today. Succinctly re-reading her proposal, Sanchez-Colberg argues that to accept that dance is about the 'body in space' through movement is a shift from the assumed notion of reading dance as the 'body-in-movement' through space. In this way, movement becomes effect and not cause. Laban's claim that "empty space does not exist" has provided a critical interrogation of dance languages. He theorises that we move in order to fulfill a need and that when the dancer moves, the movement becomes the mediator between two areas of experience - internal space ("land of silence") and the external world ("land of action"). Movement always has intention.

Extending this discussion in relation to Ausdruckstanz and Tanztheater, Sanchez-Colberg suggests that this viewing provides a new context for understanding the way that

"these artists proposed a devaluation of the 'language' of technical virtuosity in which the body is bound to ideal forms which exist outside it and which leads to the body's objectification and reification (exacerbated by its links to music) and eliminates the a-priori relationship between the body and space." (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996: 45)

As Sanchez-Colberg suggests, movement becomes relevant only in as much as it may express aspects of the body-space nexus and hence the boundaries of what can constitute dance movement are opened and hence also the boundaries of what constitutes the dance medium (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996: 45).

Within a process of improvisation and experimentation, the physical vocabularies found, are often created from and by the performer's own bodies thus providing a space for creative collaboration ...

The above conceptualisation explains why the choreographer for a Physical Theatre would need to translate very differently from mainstream dance, the needs for training, skills, body type, performer, crafting strategies and theatricalities. Within a process of improvisation and experimentation, the physical vocabularies found, are often created from and by the *performer's own bodies* thus providing a space for *creative collaboration* and contributing to an *enriching experience* for the performers. They are not "docile bodies" (Foucault's term) passively learning steps but *actively* participating in the creative process of translating ideas into the physical or the physical into the visual. They are participants in these physical imaginings. Through *creatively* interpreting movements and ideas, the participants learn to trust their judgments and to make choices. The context of exploration sets up a creative continuum that is not formulaic. Its fundamental ethos lies in the way it provides an imaginative context for a very individual and personalised creativity which can assume a wide range of stylistic and media choices. Performers are given the opportunity to explore what it is that their own bodies have to say without the censorship of specific technical or choreographic structures. Without being prescriptive, a Physical Theatre training allows creativity and originality to be fostered within a context of collaboration and empowerment. In this sense it is possible to call the performers, interpreters or translators within the choreographic process. As Carol Brown argues,

"reductive definitions simplify the role of the dancer into the image of the Dancer as Body ... Dancing bodies are beginning to leak, to betray the illusion of a chaste, hygienic and contained body ... I would suggest that the acquisition of a stereotypical dancer's body is to some degree an inevitable aspect of the physical demands of training ... but this body is only a stereotype if it continues to reproduce the tired gestures of a classical inheritance which assumes the harmony of form over matter. What matters now is the matter of bodies, their instabilities, imperfections, pleasures and deceptions. We need to see beyond the surface imagery of the body to the play of forces and intensities at work within and through it, and to how these

movements invent new understandings of the body, as well as varieties of the body which exceed the existing typologies." (Brown, 1999: 14 - 16)

A work like Gordon's *Lilith* (1998) exemplifies such an attempt at new understandings of identity and the body. In this bruising work, Gordon returns to an expressionism reminiscent of earlier works like *Shattered Windows* (1993). Here, the identity of Lilith is refracted and reflected as her historical tale is re-interpreted. An archaic and archetypal underworld is evoked through the text which describes the mythic betrayal of Lilith by Adam. The text also contemporises the narrative tracing clear historical and cultural threads to contemporary life, and pointing to the marginalisation of Lilith's story in religious discourse. The text of a contemporary court case depicting a divorce settlement re-iterates the age old battle between the sexes for autonomy and identity.

It was Artaud who called for a theatre to be "cruel" in the sense of being demanding for the performers and the spectators alike.

The work is a primitive rite which approximates an Artaudian theatre of cruelty. It was Artaud who called for a theatre to be "cruel" in the sense of being demanding for the performers and the spectators alike. He wanted metaphysics to enter the mind through the body (Artaud in Schumacher, 1989: 105), for the body to perform its subjectivities. Artaud's focus on reclaiming the body has made his writing accessible to dance practitioners and it is interesting to note how often he is referred to within contemporary dance discourse (Steinman; Gordon). His image of theatre as plague is called to mind in *Lilith* as Gordon takes this primitivism into the realm of myth and the collective unconscious. It scratches beneath the veneer of social morality and body etiquette. This work calls on the universal - the characters are mythic, immense and god-like. Their costumes are carthy, sensual in a pagan way and scant, exposing flesh and isolated body parts. The set design by Cupsa, colludes with the physical and verbal texts to add another layer of

visual meaning to the volatility of Lilith's instability. Inspired by Dantesque sculptures, the set consists of a labyrinth of metal crutches about a metre high.

The opening image is of Lilith walking over these crutches carrying what appears to be a baby. The dangerous and difficult task of balancing on these crutches for a prolonged period of time is another example of the raw, uncompromising physicality that the choreography demands from the performers - a certain volatile presence and risk. Tim Echells, in his examination of trends within contemporary performance, speaks of a shifting relation between the spectator and performer relationship within contemporary work. He perceives, in certain instances, the audience to be present in an act of witnessing, which he argues, occurs when a particular kind of investment or risk is being taken by the performers.

"Investment is what happens when the performers before us seem bound up unspeakably with what they're doing ... we are watching people before us, not representing something but going through something. They lay their bodies on the line and we are transformed - not as audience to spectacle but witnesses to an event." (Echells, 1999: 49)

Cooper Albright, in her reading of contemporary performance, particularly dance, argues that shifting the dynamics of the traditional gaze is one of its hallmarks. Her insights into the idea of witnessing refer to responsiveness, the response/ability of viewer to performer, which she argues, is unlike the "consuming" gaze of the spectator. Witnessing is more interactive dynamic, a "mutual dialogue". (Cooper Albright, 1997: xxii).

In *Lilith*, the physicality comes from this investment and presence of the performers to the movement material. At one point in the dance, the body of a nearly naked man is seen crawling over and along the obstructive maze of crutches. Beneath the ladder, Lilith awaits him:

"Love has lit a flame in my heart;

It burns like a candle that no-one can put out.

Though I carry it in the wind, against the fury of the east and the north,

I can find no peace or rest, it cannot be blown out." (De Wet: Lilith, 1998)

The language of the text reveals Lilith's power and status - she can command the spheres. The duet that follows is a tempestuous and passionate dream - it is her memory of Adam and the enormity of their passion. The duet is a bruising and violent outburst bordering on the edge of pleasure and pain. The two performers collide, sweat, and contort as their epic battle is waged. The duet's concluding energy residing in exhaustion - and the onset of their separation. It is also at this point that Lilith commits to and calls up her curse on Adam:

"May you be filled with an ever-lasting unfathomable longing for me. Not only you - but all of your progeny. Even when they have forgotten the name of Lilith ... may you burn in the profane and in the sacred fire." (De Wet: Lilith, 1998)

Then her world explodes and the set transforms into an anarchic, volcanic surge with the rise of the operatic Schnittke score. Flesh collides, bodies hurtle through space, falling and impacting against other bodies. Primal moans resound through the clutter of bitterness that is wrought through the bruising clashes with floor and metal. A ritual of catharsis and deliverance ensues. Lilith's vengeful wrath is finally combusted and, exhausted, she gives birth to the moon.

Personal Vignettes - profiles in translation: the autobiographical imagination

French psychoanalyst, J.B. Pontalis claims one shouldn't have one autobiography but "ten of them, or a hundred because, while we have only one life we have innumerable ways of recounting that life to ourselves" (cited in Phillips, 1994: 73). These multiple identities that we embody are all the stories that we tell ourselves about who we think we are. Our self narratives are constructed a little like our dreams, with a circular and inscrutable logic. As Phillips suggests,

"Dreaming may be our only truly solitary form of autobiography." (Phillips, 1994: 73)

Pontalis' suggestion debunks assumptions about autobiography as it is conventionally presented - as essential personal truth. His comment highlights this elusive, embellished nature of memory and reveals autobiography as the re-invention of what we imagine our most intimate memories to be.

In a work like *Can Baby John Fit Into Big Daddy's Shoes?* (1994), Gordon questions this idea of memory and truth. In the programme note we read that the work is:

"A past modern dance charade in the manner of the grotesque - the story of Baby John with Big Daddy, Mother Mary, the Nutcracker, Little Jimmy and of course a Dancing Master and two very big Men About Town."

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In the opening scene of the work, we encounter the narrator, a contemporary Merlin figure (or Salieri at times). He is sitting in a wheelchair in his boudoir, staring at his aged and myriad reflections in three mirrors. He begins to laugh with an uncontrolled and raucous abandon. It is only when he becomes aware of having an audience that he turns to address them, first having to breathe into a bag to catch his breath. Using the rhyming couplets and rhythms of pantomimic verse, he proceeds to narrate his story. He uses flashbacks to the past in an attempt to recall his memories from history and to recreate his narrative fiction. He commands all the 'facts' and action throughout the danceplay through his control and manipulation of the text and the music. He is, as Gordon suggests, the "deus ex machina" - it is he who informs the actor/dancers of the roles they ought to adopt in his story. Through his conscious and visible manipulations on stage, the audience witness how the little 'fictions' of his story are pieced together from recollection. Is he telling the truth? Are we to believe his charade? The exposure of his auto/biography as fiction, not fact, is left open to interpretation - just as the title itself suggests an open-ended questioning.

A circular narrative tells a number of stories simultaneously.

The narrator invites the audience to enter his charade, which is at once ironic and macabre, and in which no single or 'legitimate' narrative essence prevails. His play with fantasy and magic, as he conjures up his tales, refer endlessly to the world of the imagination and art. Allusions to fairytales (Cinderella's shoes), and to mythic realms (dragons and damsels-in-distress) all serve to distort linear time structures. A circular narrative tells a number of stories simultaneously. The story of bourgeois morality embodied in the nuclear family with its patriarchal hierarchy of power - Big Daddy and his chorus, the Men about Town, 'meek' Mother Mary and Baby John - are the caricatured, cartoonesque family. He tells the story of the corrupt and sterile social 'manners' of this bourgeois world - through the grotesque 'bird-like masks' that society wears. The pretensions, arrogance and vanity of their behavior and psyches are exhibited and exposed in their preening and fashions. The story is told of the 'sexually deviant' Baby John who is forced to live with these expectations - social pressure causes him to deny his true homosexual feelings and needs.

Gordon states that there is no presiding choreographic style in the work. Like the design and music, the choreography "jumps cheekily from one style to another" (Gordon, 1994). There is no purist or "pristine" language. There are numerous allusions to other dance styles throughout the work - the gavotte, the gumboot, ballet, contemporary. Both the family and Big Daddy's chorus use pedestrian and gestural vocabularies, while mime is the mode of performance for Baby John. The Men about Town use a more athletic Physical Theatre - their movements are bold and strong, using fists while also obliquely alluding to sports like fencing and duels. Though more lyrical, the love duet between Baby John and Little Jimmy explores an athleticism fragmented by short gestural phrases which echo the traditional 'positions' of romantic love - lying head in lap, for instance. Theatrical allusions abound - "I am not Hamlet" or "lend me your hand if your eyes be not wet", both Shakespearean sources juxtaposed out of context and hence they become comic elements. The text has a prologue and an epilogue in the tradition of many theatrical texts.

This is the dancing-masters story - a tale of treason, decadence and intrigue. It is also Gordon's personal questioning of the constructions of sexual identity in a South African society - lessons in cruelty and conformity. It questions the binary strictures set up by phallogocentric discourse that places dancing, the body, the feminine, and the homosexual within a derivative and submissive status. The fragmented narrative in the work displaces and disrupts the construction of a legitimate, coherent truth of identity for the dancing master.

Cooper Albright points to the way that traditional theories of autobiography struggle to dislodge the binary which constructs the white male body as universal and the black female body as other:

"the universal self transcends all racial/sexual and class differences to assume that every subjectivity is made in his image - that his readers share the privilege of not having to account for their difference ... If, as so many theorists are quick to point out, white male identity has traditionally been predicated on a psychic disembodiment, the body might just be the right place to begin to dismantle that privileged 'I'." (Albright, 1997: 135)

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Or that disenfranchised 'other'. For if one destabilises the binary structure, the hierarchical ordering of a prime/derivative relationship between self/other also collapses. Annette Kolodny proposes the following view on the status of the female voice in autobiography:

"Women internalised a picture of themselves that itself precluded the kind of self-attention that might generate autobiography." (Eakin, 1992: 80)

Perhaps this is what makes attempts at auto-biography so provocative - it is where two areas of public and private experience either collude or collide. It questions the known relation between bodily experience and cultural representation, tracing relations between body and identity. It is this resonance, this meeting of the socially inscribed body (culture) with the individually inscribed body (experience), that may question the constructions of gender and identity within dance.

At the 1998 Standard Bank National Arts Festival, Jeanette Ginslov presented a work called *Hinterland* (1998) for First Physical Theatre Company in the programme called *Icons - Portraits*. An interview with Ginslov after the work was created and performed, established my conviction that the work was in many ways an attempt to present an auto-biography. I shall briefly discuss the work as an example of a solo autobiographical voice in South Africa.

Hinterland is a dense and powerful work that sets up a confrontational dialogue with discourses on dance, language and gender. It is at once both intensely cerebral and expressive. An examination of the programme notes indicates the range of sources that have inspired the work. These include a passionate response to J.M.Coetzee's novel, *In The Heart of the Country* and most specifically to the heroine's struggle to unearth a voice through language that is her own. Coetzee has captured the idea of this search for a true language and it is this aspect that appears to have fascinated and inspired Ginslov in her own search for a language both personal and artistic.

"The idea of searching for a language, a South African language that is neither White languages or ancient languages or African languages but something from the interior, a personal language and it's got to do with that landscape where that woman is ... she is in an ego-less state... a pre-verbal state ... so she's stripped down ... all she's got left is this wildness, this chaotic temperament that is passionate and it's anguished and its looking for a means to communicate truthfully." (Ginslov, Interview: 1998)

Ginslov's vision becomes a parallel battle to communicate a personalised struggle for recognition and for a vital choreographic voice and in this sense the work becomes an autobiographical account of her experiences as a female artist working in the current South African context. A discussion of the title, *Hinterland*, illuminates these explorations into the personal. *Hinterland* is a remote area removed and isolated from mainstream activities, organisation, sophistication - it echoes a mucky, out-on-the-edge terrain, an unnamed, wild, untamable place. As Ginslov argues, it also links to Coetzee's own title, *In The Heart of the Country*. As she suggests:

"It's remote places ... and with my work I sense that I've pushed myself into this Hinterland ... up against mainstream forms of dance which are still Afro-fusion, or very Graham-inspired, Limon, and not much dance theatre or issue-based theatre ... the superstructures and institutions that govern and more or less control us are not well versed in these new forms of dance that are happening ... we stand with this knowledge but we are in the Hinterland ... this sense of injustice is something that drives me always forward." (Ginslov; Interview: 1998)

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Ginslov has created a sparse yet effective theatricality for the work which coincides with 7 short chapters. The different performance modes and known dance vocabularies explored are jumbled about, deconstructed, resurrected, splintered in the attempt to find a "true language of the heart" (Coetzee: programme note).

The work begins in darkness. From this silence, the desperate, murderous whisperings and hoarse moans of a woman can be heard, punctuating the stillness. This chapter is called *words*. Chapters three (*words in the paint*), four (*letters in the body*) and five (*body as medium*) form a conceptual context dealing with the themes of "communication, the medium and the message of the medium" (Programme Note). The sixth chapter, *dance as metaphor*, begins with the woman putting on a dress, shoes, and placing onions into the dress. With deliberate confidence, the laden dress is proudly hoisted up and tantalisingly transformed through the Shostakovich score which becomes a reverie for her seductions as she tempts the audience with her bitter fruit. The sexual persona is placed on display and we are thrown into her chaos. At one point the onions are let loose onto the stage and she pursues the waltz alone. There is an elated, erotic state of transformation. Ginslov describes this:

"... when I perform it, it is the chaos inside me and all the contradictions ... this woman in the novel, in this egoless state, is marching toward with total abandon and it's so liberating and to perform it is so liberating ... breaking down preconceptions...why can't a woman roar onstage, why can't a woman break down the dictates of language which have set up by these bloody patriarchal systems and get down into this murky sludgy place that is there and its to find the vehicle." (Ginslov; Interview: 1998)

The final chapter, *action with and without reflection*, returns to a more pedestrian performance mode where the woman begins to chop the onion with a carving knife, weeping as she performs this task. Ginslov remarks on the note:

"an outside force is motivating the tears, totally without reflection and yet done with reflection when I conceived of it." (Ginslov; Interview: 1998)

The chapter returns to a poignant arena of isolation and unconsummated passion. The light fades on her frantic, desperate chopping and a voice-over echoing the initial whispering is her last resonant attempt to communicate. We are left in the murky residues of her Hinterland.

Referring to American choreographers like Bill T. Jones and Johanna Boyce, Cooper Albright examines the audience/performer dialogue that utilises a more intimate 'I'.

"Claiming a voice within an art form that traditionally glorifies the mute body, these choreographers used autobiography in performance to change the dynamic of an objectifying gaze. Almost overnight, dance audiences and critics had to contend not only with verbal text in dance, but also with personal narratives that insisted, sometimes in very confrontational ways, on the political relevance of the body's experience ..." (Albright, 1997: 121 - 122)

Albright notes the way that their work expands notions of autobiography and re-organises the boundaries of the self/other dichotomy. Ginslov's work is such a provocation. It insists upon self-attention and the complex subjectivities of her experience - both of her body and of the representation of her body-as-woman.

In our most recent work, *lake ... beneath the surface* (2001), a collaboration in which Gordon and Finestone have co-choreographed, the complex subjectivity and multiple identities of the female protagonist, Arkadina, is created through the use of a double character. The work abounds with intertextual references as it is a response to Reza De Wet's play, *On The Lake*, itself a response to Chekov's *Seagull*. *lake ... beneath the surface* is a response to both, with the character of Arkadina simultaneously played by two female performers, similar in appearance. In the scene, entitled *Arkadina's Monologues*, Arkadina appears, disheveled and tired. She looks ravaged, not the picture of a youthful, famous and beautiful actress from Moscow. The double solo attempts to depict the transformations of Arkadina from young girl to the now aging woman. In order to capture this terrifying duplicity and changeability of the body as her memories collide, the two performers evoke different aspects of her psyche - one talks and the other dances - though they do keep bleeding into and through each other's movements. Later, when her identity disintegrates and fragments even further, all five performers re-enact her nightmares in an anarchic and grotesque ritual called *Arkadina's Shadows*. All five performers re-invent Arkadina in an erotic and surreal dance of death, desire, neurosis, and dream. In this work, a complex image of subjectivity is created while any sense of a fixed and immutable truth of memory is obliterated.

Concluding Image

"Memory is the song which we sing to ourselves, a path of hieroglyphs and perfumes with which we draw nearer to ourselves" (Barba, 1995: Chapter 6)

The choreographer transforms relationships of collective and personal history as bodily memory is translated, re-read and interpreted through processes of rehearsed transformation and the transference of sources and signs.

The choreographer transforms relationships of collective and personal history as bodily memory is translated, re-read and interpreted through processes of rehearsed transformation and the transference of sources and signs. In these creative imaginings, bodily memory is given a primary focus and attention. The translations of source - the transference of material from source to choreographer, performer to choreographer, texts to meaning - become the intriguing visage of the choreographic process. In my discussion on *Bessie's Head* (2000), *The Unspeakable Story* (1996), *The Passion of Judas* (1996) and *Lilith* (1998), I have argued that the choreographers have utilised historical source to re-interpret public narratives. The choreographic imagination has engaged with collective memory and biography to re-invest these histories with a contemporary presence. In works like *Can baby John Fit Into Big Daddy's Shoes* (1994) *Hinterland* (1998) and *lake ... beneath the surface* (2001), auto-biographical memory is re-invented as the choreographers question identity and the absence of a fixed, authentic subjectivity. The delicate interface between notions of bio-graphy (the public) and auto-biography (the intimate) as an evocation of memory - the wild water of the choreographic unconscious - are part of the choreographer's collective and personal recall.

Barba's poetic image evokes the ephemeral traces memory leaves behind - like a scent, it is always disappearing. Similarly, the choreographic process, in its evolving path from concept to concert, echoes the mysterious alchemy of the dream, performing its presence in a series of disappearances.

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Appendix E

Umdudo Views

FNB Vita Dance Umdudo: *The Eastern Cape's Foremost Festival of Dance*

On Tonight

Contemporary dance and physical theatre featuring:

- Rhodes University Drama Dept
- Home Theatre Productions
- Free Flyer Dance Company
- First Physical Theatre Company
- Disabled Integrated Group

Long Live Miss Thandi!

By Fred Hagemann

miss thandi's journey is both painful and celebratory. We are introduced to her and her creator, Raymond, through a collage of video images as the company of musicians stand in tribute to her life.

Raymond's journey begins in innocence. Tiny finger movements test the air while pictures of dolls float past his head. He tries out his body, which seems not to move in ways expected of a man. Balancing on one leg, he precariously reaches out further into space, twisting and stabbing at the air. Instability turns to confusion as Raymond stares at an unfamiliar image of himself in the mirror.

Make up and a wig save him and Miss Thandi, the drag artist, is born. This is no chorus-



Gregory Vuyani Maqoma in last night's performance of his latest work *miss thandi*, at the FNB Vita Dance Umdudo. Pic by Elsabé van Tonder.

line lovely –she stoops and struts, but as the reality of *miss thandi* takes hold, Raymond becomes free to cele-

brate the lives of Xhosa women as only a drag queen can.

Continued on page 3

Meeting point for diverse South African cultures at the FNB Vita Dance Umdudo

The FNB VITA DANCE UMDUDO 2002 opens the doors to a free for all fringe programme on Thursday 18 April.

The fringe consists of four programmes featuring contemporary dance and physical theatre, fusion, traditional dance and youth groups. This festival

is a meeting point for diverse South African cultures to come together in a festival celebrating our differences through dance.

The first contemporary dance and physical theatre programme features new works by Daluxolo Papu's Disabled

Integrated Group, Bongani Diko, Nyaki Tsana, Rhodes University Drama Department Honours Choreography students, the First Physical Theatre Company's Professional Training group and the First Physical Adult Education Group.

Daluxolo Papu's Disabled Integrated Group integrates disabled performers with able-bodied performers. Vukuhambe, St. Thomas and individuals from local Eastern Cape groups will perform this work.

Continued on page 2

Eastern Cape Provincial Arts and Culture Council sponsors groups to participate

The Eastern Cape Provincial Arts and Culture Council seeks to promote and develop dance throughout the Eastern Cape. The Council have provided ongoing support for the FNB Vita Dance Umdudo since 1998, to encourage the opportunity to create dance, but also to promote the appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of dance.

In 2002, the Arts and Culture Council supports the costs of a number of dance groups travelling to Grahamstown from every district of the Eastern Cape. These groups include:

Eastern Cape Ensemble, Amacele (Sudens), Uphondo Lwe-Afrika, Senzeni Cultural Group, Border Youth Dance Theatre, Umtata Happy Dancers, Fighters of Peace, Abaxolisi, Lingelitale Dance Group, Disabled Integrated Group, Velwano Traditional Dancers, Sikhululekile Dramatic Society and Mount Ayliff Modern Dancers.

The Council has also supported the presentation of this year's guest artists.

In a speech by Ms Lindiwe Msengana-Ndlela, at the FNB

Vita Dance Umdudo 1999, the Council expressed:

"Through these festivals we can liberate ourselves emotionally, intellectually, and in our capacity to fulfil our potential as human beings. By so doing, our people are able to take their rightful places in the social, political and economic life of our communities".



Eastern Cape MEC of Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture, Nosimo Balindlela, at the reception held after the opening night of the FNB Vita Dance Umdudo, chatting to Dr Colin Johnson, Vice Principal, Rhodes University. Pic by Claire Reddie.

Long live Miss Thandi continued from page 1

miss thandi sits on edge of the stage, balanced between the reality of the auditorium and the unreality of the theatre space. Her body starts to fall over and Miss Thandi's frightened and confused eyes dart over the audience. We realise she is fading.

In a most skilful dance sequence, Gregory allows Raymond to reappear through Miss Thandi's mask. In an exquisitely constructed dance of

fragmented gestures that play between rest and action, Raymond tries to force Miss Thandi's body back to life.

Miss Thandi takes the stage urging the musicians to play but under the mask we see Raymond weeping for her passing. He reaches for a roll of cellophane and wraps this around Miss Thandi's legs, desperate to hold her together. In forcing her to live he hastens her painful walk towards her end.

The importance of this work is in its construction of a masterful psychological narrative. Maqoma's movement technique is based on Miss Thandi's favourite routines flavoured with his own body impulses. It is clear in style and meaning.

Miss Thandi does not need to be wrapped in cellophane. Through repeated performances of this work, she will become a living history. Long live Miss Thandi, long live!

"He reaches for a roll of cellophane and wraps this around Miss Thandi's legs, desperate to hold her together."

Workshop till you drop

By Zingisani Mkefa

Performers and choreographers have a chance to share their skills and to broaden their dance experience through a variety of workshops on offer.

The three guest artists invited to the festival will set the tone for this year's workshops.

Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, from Johannesburg, will take partici-

pants through an exciting contemporary African dance experience, which should be popular at this dance festival.

Bevan Cullinan, who some may remember from the well-known breakfast television show, *The Toasty Show*, will be introducing mime and physical theatre in a workshop entitled "The Physical Clown".

Thabo Rapoo is the third guest artist and he offers a work-

shop on Afro-Contemporary Dance.

Other workshops include "Integrated Dance", which explores the interaction between abled and disabled bodies; Contemporary Jazz by the Guild Theatre Dance Company; and e-MOTION, which explores the body through everyday movement.



Daily workshops are on offer at the Rhodes Theatre complex during the FNB Vita Dance Umdudo. Pic by Elsabé van Tonder.

Appendix F

Stuk leer jou niks oor wie Bessie was

WALDO MÜLLER

BESSIE'S HEAD, 'n dansdrama uitgevoer deur First Physical Theatre Company. Geskep deur Gary Gordon. Teks deur Reza de Wet. Musiek deur Leonard Praeg. Ontwerp deur Roux Engelbrecht.

ONDANKS 'n span knap dansers wat hul uitmuntend van hul taak gekwyt het om Gary Gordon se innoverende choreografie vir *Bessie's Head* teatraal en liggaamlik te realiseer, was hierdie stuk 'n teleurstelling vir diegene wat 'n insiggewende biografiese blik op – of selfs net 'n fragmentariese verkenning van – Head se lewe as gemarginaliseerde vrou/skrywer verwag het.

In die promosiemateriaal en program word dit as 'n "dokumentêre dansdrama" beskryf, maar dit was moeilik om iets meer oor Head te leer uit hierdie produksie. Dit is asof die gegewe vassteek by die feit dat die skrywer in 'n tehuis vir sielsiekes gebore is en by geboorte van haar ma geskei is. Die toestand van kranksinnigheid word so omvangryk verken dat dit 'n oorheersende teenwoordigheid in die stuk verkry. Daar is soveel toespelings op geestesversteurdheid dat 'n mens byna vergeet Head was 'n begaafde skrywer.

Steminsetsels oor luidsprekers – deur onder andere Andrew Buckland en Reza de Wet – verskaf sleuteldata's uit Head se lewensverhaal en lewer ander verbale insette, maar van 'n duidelike verhaal-uiteensetting is daar min sprake.

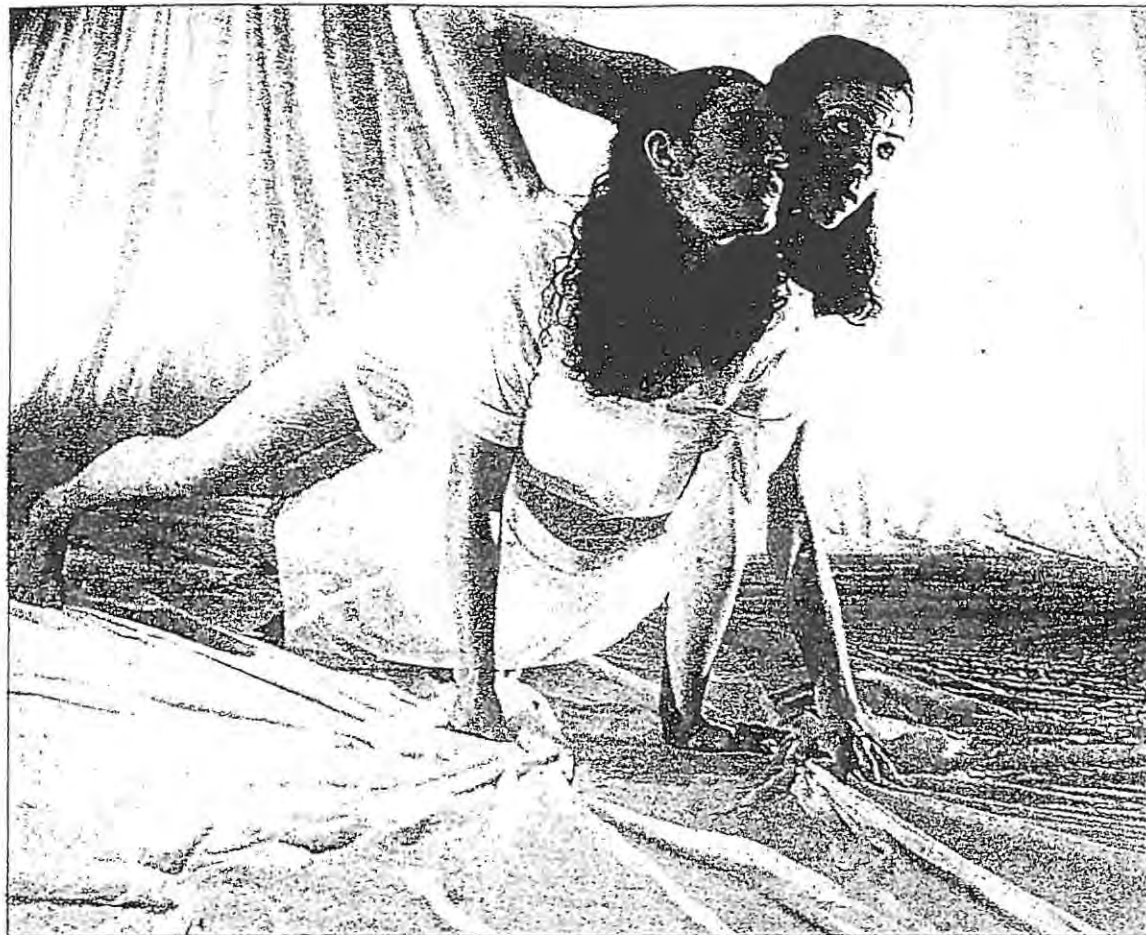
Head was 'n Afrika skrywer, maar die stuk gaan mank aan 'n Afrika identiteit. Hoekom Cesaria Evora se weergawe van "Besame Mucho" en Eric Satie se "Je Te Veux" ingespan word in 'n stuk oor iemand wat haar lewe lank in Afrika gewoon het en oor die ervarings van Afrika vroue geskryf het, weet nugter alleen. Daar is immers 'n skatkis van inheemse Suider-Afrikaanse musiek.

Die agt dansers – Juanita Finestone, Martin Gylling, Zingisani Mkefa, Jane O'Connell, Daluxolo Papu, Helen Seaman, Tanya Surtees en Acty Tang – het almal in eie reg geskitter in solo- en groepdele met choreografie wat wissel van sensueel tot bisar.

Dit was egter nie altyd duidelik hoe die dansonderafdelings met Head se verhaal verband hou nie. Dit is ook moeilik om 'n motivering te vind vir die steurende half-skalkse, half-sardoniese uitdrukings wat in sommige dansdele op Gylling se gesig te sien was.

Die dansers se gebruik van stem verdien wel spesiale vermelding. Op spesifieke tye het hulle met uitstekende tydsberekening gesis, geblaas, gefluit en gehyg om merkwaardige ritmes en klanke voort te bring. Stilte het egter net so 'n belangrike rol as klank gespeel en die slim aanwending daarvan het die stuk se dramatiese impak heelwat versterk.

Dit is net jammer dat baie van die minder ingeligte lede van die gehoor na afloop van die stuk die selfde vraag bly vra het waarmee hulle by die teater opgedaag het: Wie op aarde was Bessie Head?



INTRIGUING: Juanita Finestone (bottom) and Helen Seaman in *Bessie's Head*, Gary Gordon's new documentary dance play choreographed for his First Physical Theatre Company. It runs at the Baxter Theatre Centre until Saturday.

PICTURE: ELSABÉ VAN TONDER

NOT FOR FAINTHEARTED

Sensitive, gripping

BESSIE'S HEAD. A documentary dance play by Gary Gordon for his First Physical Theatre Company. Music selections by Satie, Evora, Leonhard Praeg and others. Original Texts by Reza de Wet. Michael Carlin designed the lighting, Roux Engelbrecht the sets and costumes. At the Baxter Theatre Centre until Saturday March 25. SHEILA CHISHOLM reviews.

AS Gary Gordon's First Physical Theatre Company has become synonymous with cerebral and engaging theatre fans will welcome this visit after an absence of nearly two years from the Baxter.

Bessie's Head is a taut, 70-minute journey through South African-born writer Bessie Head's filial fantasies surrounding a non-existent relationship with her mother Toby who, while permanently committed to an asylum, conceived her, then was cloven apart at birth. Interlaced with that mind-ache was an insight into the grimness of life when sanity is irretrievable and the old colour-bar a spectre (Bessie's mother was a white, her father black).

Not a salubrious tale, yet choreographed and danced with such sensitivity it gripped and held attention throughout. *Bessie's Head* opens against dimly lit black velvet curtains and a grotesque, translucent, cavernous-mouth bust off-centre downstage. In silence, eight men and women clad in brief tops and shorts slowly shuffle

across the stage into a two-line huddle. Then their own multi-various voice sounds begin, pianissimo, moving their feet gradually and rising to a great crescendo of body movement. It is as this group dissolves into sequences of duets, solos and further ensembles, with musical interludes and recorded voice-overs backing up the intimate personal interactions Gordon explores, that his choreography is at its most innovative.

Dancers intertwining then parting emphasised closeness, passion and cracks in these relationships, while the kinetic sculptures the bodies carved flowed fluidly from one into the next. Gordon's use of fingers and hands spoke volumes. Flat hands, either shaking or still, turned up or down, concealing eyes, ears or head and curled or spread fingers, brought home feelings of despair, hope, fear, panic and psychosis.

Keeping his dancers earthbound and covering space economically added to the introspective feel. But there were also moments of great beauty. Tanya Surtees and Martin Gylling were poetic in their pas de deux, set to Satie's *Je te Veux* as was the long-limbed, beautifully trained Helen Seaman in her final solo. Although the dancers are not equally well-endowed technically, meticulous rehearsing, dedication to detail plus strong commitment from everyone, makes *Bessie's Head* into a marvellous piece of physical theatre. But it is not for the fainthearted.

Classified advertising ☎ 743-4343

Fascinating but flawed

BESSIE'S HEAD, at the Guild Theatre.

THE SIMPLE way that a person moves, every detail that is incorporated into one single movement, is manifested in Physical Theatre.

Fascinating to some and incredibly boring and obscure to others, it attracts eclectic audiences which probably explains the poor turnout at the Guild Theatre on Wednesday night for The First Physical Theatre Company's performance of *Bessie's Head*.

Before the performance began, a large incongruous head sat off-centre. It presented a bit of quandary – the point was made but the vehicle presented like a drama student's set design piece. Enough said.

Bessie Head was born of a white mother who was committed to an insane asylum. She was someone whom *Bessie* never knew and yet who profoundly affected *Bessie's* life.

Gordon and his company have focused largely on the insanity of both *Bessie* and her mother, but with some stunning sequences devoted to the mother/daughter relationship and male/female relationships.

The simplicity of love and dependence, fragility and inspiration was made so much more tender by the fluidity of Juanita Finestone's and Helen Seaman's performance and was enhanced by the backdrop of fine, frail hanging lace.

Jane O'Connell was inspiring. Her facial expressions and sheer vivacity on-stage all but made everyone else disappear.

Tanya Surtees, too, has an interesting presence on-stage. She breathes an aura that demands attention.

The fast-paced, drum-crashing, do-some-steps-all-together-and-look-intense sequences fell short of the mark. Physical theatre has prided itself on not conforming to the strictures of jazz and ballet.

Rather it incorporates elements from other styles of dance which enhance a piece and throws out that which places boundaries on what a performance can do which is why the little chorus number came as quite a surprise.

Bessie's Head comprises a cast of exceptionally good performers – they have yet to build up an on-stage dynamic.



FLUID FORMS: Martin Gylling and Tanya Surtees in a scene from *Bessie's Head*.

The piece is also a lot less fluid than previous productions and lacks the experimental air which makes physical theatre so interesting.

Gary Gordon is a brilliant choreographer who has the ability to draw

inspiration from his performers, which is why it's unfortunate that *Bessie's Head* came off as a little jaded and too old-hat.

Toni Müller



Adrienne Sichel reports

Cries & whispers



First Physical Theatre Company's Juanita Finestone cushioning Acty Tang, flanked by Martin Gylling and Helen Seaman in Gary Gordon's *Bessie's Head*. PICTURE: JOHN HOGG

Bodies whisper hidden memories. Voices rasp moribund passions. Minds mouth resonating psychic impulses.

The psychological and metaphysical conspire with the physical in Gary Gordon's *Bessie's Head*, created on a special FNB Vita Dance Umbrella commission. The conception and birth of South African writer Bessie Head in the Pietermaritzburg Mental Hospital in 1937 is the touchstone for this documentary danceplay.

The choreographer-director focuses on Head's cross racial origins, then ventures off into realms of mental and creative madness springing from the agony of separation and dislocation. More specifically Gordon probes mythical mother-daughter relationships and male-female bonds by exploding gender and racial stereotypes.

The opening sequence profiles a mix of men and women, lit only to their waists. They tremble, hope, dream, laugh, cry, in unison. The eight First Physical Theatre

performers function as vocal and highly physical witnesses and conspirators in Gordon's inquiry.

Recorded voices provide snippets of biographical information on Bessie's mother Toby, "my private goddess", from whom she was removed at birth. Toby is portrayed by Reza de Wet, who wrote the original texts and lyrics. Leonhard Praeg's score and arrangements and impressive performer Zingisani Mkefa's songs provide substance to the scenario.

Unfortunately Roux Engelbrecht's melodramatic set design detracts from the aesthetics of this piece, despite the effectiveness of Michael Carlin's lighting.

The true impact of this 70-minute work lies in how Gordon articulates his researched choreographic vision. Herein lies the heart of human biography.

There are breathtakingly crafted duets and ensembles which side-step the predictable and produce fresh vocabulary stamped with integrity and intimacy. The

sensuous simplicity and complexity of romantic love and sexual lust is lyrically woven into the bodies of Tanya Surtees and Danish dancer Martin Gylling, coupling to a Satie song.

Gylling epitomises liquid athleticism, and the male libido, in a solo accompanied by recorded whistling. In contrast Acty Tang embodies the tragedy of mental incoherence.

First Physical, a combination of students and professionals, is spearheaded by the expertise and seasoned artistry of Juanita Finestone and the technical wizardry of Helen Seaman.

Together these two women create a mesmerising partnership in a seminal sequence which conjures with the tracteries of shattered umbilical ties.

Bessie's Head is less documentary, in the literary sense, than a journey into the intimacies, vulnerabilities, secrets and lies of the mind, the heart and the tortured soul. And the silences in-between.



From the source



Adrienne Sichel

Review

- **WHAT:** FNB Vita Dance Umbrella Programme 10
- **WHO:** Rodney Place and the Inzalo Dance and Theatre Company, Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe, David Gouldie, Sylvia Glasser, Robyn Orlin, Moeketsi Koena
- **WHERE:** The Wits Theatre, tonight at 7.30pm

So many of the sources and tributaries of South African dance are reflected in this aesthetically varied programme which is studded with major premieres.

Chief among them is Vincent Mantsoe's *Barena* (to be repeated at the gala evening on Saturday), the fifth in a series of landmark solos.

If you are at all interested in the notion of the African Renaissance, this 25-minute foray into traditionalism and Africanism is compulsory.

Barena (Chiefs) is a brilliant articulation of cultural alienation and reconnection through the use of material symbols of power – a *kierie*, a mantle and a



carved stool – and of Mantsoe's extraordinary creative artistry as a choreographer and a performer.

This highly eclectic, quality, evening features a number of commissions. Sylvia Glasser's *WoMooniCity*

for *Moving Into Dance*, in collaboration with designer Sarah Roberts, plugs into many of her Afro-fusion roots. This work for three women – Constance Kau, Talia Jacob and Joanne Rutter – and four men, plays with the dualities Glasser attributes to the militaristic man-made city and the femininity of the moon in nature.

In her ritualistic quest, which culminates in the ability of the female/moon to heal violence and restore holistic life rhythms, the choreographer uses signature symmetries, familiar body and arm weaves and other movement motifs.

These, however, tend to be restrictive and not

Image cycle ... Moeketsi Koena and the silhouetted personae of Lawrence Nkosinathi Mncube and Robyn Calvert in *The Washing of the Soaps: Coming Attraction*

PICTURE: JOHN HOGG

WoMooniCity, which is locked into a tight structure and the use of props signifying buildings, has moments of beguiling beauty, but at its premiere lacked the choreographic scope and spiritual thrust of Glasser's *Stone Cast Ritual* and *Tranceformations*.

Robyn Orlin, in her creative work with National School of the Arts students, has a formula based on satirically deconstructing dance issues which she again uses in *Lamb Dressed as Mutton* (which will not be repeated tonight). Familiar as this ploy may be – the ballet girls doing zany things with point shoes and music teacher Louis Maritz leading the mayhem from a baby grand – there is a fresh twist: Rapper Vuyisile Mdeleleni takes on the plight of dancers trapped in classical stereotypes and giant fur-trimmed padded coats that render them headless.

David Gouldie imaginatively elaborates on the same themes of scarred femininity and artistic flux in *When the Shadows of Your Past Have Finally Faded*, a collaboration with visual artist Tamlyn Martin. The versatile women of Durban's Fantastic Flying Fish Dance Company are battered baby dolls, on pointe, whose pretty Western selves disintegrate. Yet they survive any which

original musical score interwoven with Amanda Strydom songs in Afrikaans.

Collaborations are the cornerstone of *The Washing of the Soaps: Coming Attraction* which is part of an ongoing project, titled *Retreks*, by visual artist Rodney Place, who produces and directs, with Inzalo Dance and Theatre Company.

The language of body and image, both human and video, is niftily explored in the context of packaged consumer realities.

Inzalo also does its own multi-media inquiry in Moeketsi Koena's commissioned *Thought of Thoughts*, which is an ambitious interplay of verbal, physical, intellectual and visual concepts.

House of Truth

I HAVE a serious weakness for intelligence, a fault of mine that has taken a major bashing this week. It's been a week in which I've been exposed to several very intelligent things. At the Baxter last night, I got to see *Bessie's Head*, a "documentary dance-play" by the First Physical Theatre Company. Running until tomorrow night, it ranks, in my mind, as one of the most intelligent dance pieces to be seen in Cape Town in a long time.

The reasons for this are many. The piece is based on the early childhood of Bessie Head. She was born in an asylum in 1937, the offspring of a white woman who had been committed and an unknown black man, and went on to become one of South Africa's most eloquent writers.

Departing from such a fascinating South African story, the eight highly talented dancers of First Physical, choreographed by Gary Gordon, take the audience on a lyrical, sometimes disturbing, journey into Bessie's dreams and nightmares.

Besides the organic confluence of music, body movement, facial expression and storyline, what lends *Bessie's Head* its force is the fact that the dancers seem to sincerely believe in the story they are telling. And why not? They are not obfuscated by some trendy esoteric theme, such as urban terrorism in Cape Town or millennium madness, or hamstrung by the flowing costumes of a work conveniently culled from the European canon, but have achieved the feat of getting into the heads of real people caught up in the topsy-turvy world that was, and is, South Africa.

It's a feat achieved by the fact that Gordon appears to have given his dancers/collaborators lots of freedom to experiment, and then put in the many hours of work required to hone the piece into its final, thought-provoking, and quite beautiful, form. In my layman's opinion, First Physical is streets ahead of any other dance group I've seen in these parts in over a year.

It's a pity, though, that Cape Town's theatre-going public chose to do the dumb thing and fork out between R150 and R350 to see *Lord of the Dance*. Nothing like fireworks, smoke machines and mega-decibel sound to haul in the crowds, eh?

But then again, I figured, intelligence is relative. If South Africans choose to make some Irish guy stinking rich while

neglecting their own homegrown talent, who am I to raise a whimper? After all, underestimating our own resources is something for which we're world famous. Just look at how the Americans have overtaken us in the ostrich market — a bird in the hand of a South African is a bird quickly flown away...

But the funny thing is, Lenny Kravitz said to me over drinks in the early hours of Wednesday morning, being a sucker is a matter of choice. He was busy doing the maths after the last of his three shows in South Africa. Over 70-thousand people had paid between R195 and R250 rand a ticket to see him. That's a total of around R16-million rand, not to mention the giant leap his royalties would take once those teenyboppers rushed out to buy all his previous albums, a huge chunk of them possibly turning into life-long fans. Looking up from the gold-lined serviette on which he was scribbling with his diamond-studded pen, he flashed me that sexy smile: "Not too bad for a black, Jewish dude who dropped out of high school to play the electric guitar, eh?"

And here we sit, I thought, blissfully content to hand over all our dosh to Lenny and Janet and Bono and Michael Flatley, while remaining wilfully ignorant of the sea of raw talent in which we wallow. Yup, it's a veritable goldmine out there, of young people of all creeds and colours who have all the potential in the world to be stars in the global industry known as pop music, swelling the coffers of the Receiver, and providing work for an army of musicians, publicists, road crews, record companies, agents, music video makers, dancers, visual artists, hair dressers, costume designers and caterers.

But potential means less than nothing unless fulfilled, and talent goes nowhere if left to wither on the vine. South Africa, country of suckers that it is, provides no facilities for the young citizen with the raw talent and heartfelt desire to challenge Lenny, Janet or Michael Flatley. And so, while the rest of the world races ahead at full throttle, joyously jangling its electric guitar, we choose to trundle along in our horse and carriage, fiddling with our violin strings.

That's what Lenny told me over drinks the other night...

— Ryan Fortune

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World-class show from Gordon

BESSIE'S HEAD, First Physical Theatre Company (Opera House):

BESSIE'S Head is a documentary danceplay that dissects the events surrounding the birth of the writer, born in a South African mental institution, known as Bessie Head.

Choreographer and artistic director Gary Gordon has conceived a fascinating dialogue between the spoken word, dance drama and music, to tell

DANCE

the story, with great depth and insight, of this intriguing woman.

First Physical has now brought together dancers of quality with a dramatic ability alongside theatrical players. The result is a cohesive whole that was lacking before, they have now grown their genre into an exciting art form, which is world class.

The refined movements of the dancers as they weave their intricate patterns, adding layered dimensions to the unfolding story, is captivating.

The love duet between Tanya Surtees and Martin Gylling, to music *Je Te Veux* was beautifully evocative and well executed. Gylling, a dancer of great breadth, is visiting from Copenhagen,

Jane O'Connell in *Besame Mucho* had a saucy quality.

The interlude on piano, with members of the cast adding the sound instruments, was humorous.

Helen Seaman delights throughout, with a magnificent body that can do anything and amazing dance quality, she has now developed a depth of the dramatic that adds another dimension to this very talented artist. Her final piece in red shorts and top, against the rest of the cast in white, was exquisite.

The music at all times was well chosen and the acting, facial expressions and musicality poignantly related the tale.

The minimalist set and costumes gave atmosphere to the drama unfolding.

- ANN KNIGHT

PHYSICAL THEATRE

Breaking dance limits

THE FIRST PHYSICAL THEATRE COMPANY's season in the Baxter Theatre starts tonight until Friday March 24 at 8.15pm, and Saturday March 25 at 6pm & 8.30pm. ANDREW GILDER previews.

THE advent of physical theatre onto the South African contemporary dance scene has been due largely to the efforts of Professor Gary Gordon, currently Head of Drama at Rhodes University in Grahamstown.

Gordon's brainchild, The First Physical Theatre Company, is due for a week of performances in Cape Town as part of a national tour of their latest offering *Bessie's Head*.

The performers of the UK-based company DV8 are perhaps the foremost exponents of physical theatre internationally, and with director Lloyd Newson booted the often genteel art of dance into a new dimension with works such as *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* and *Strange Fish*.

In this spirit of extension of the dance aesthetic comes First Physical. The company was formed in 1993 on Gordon's return from a three-year study and lecturing sojourn at the Laban Centre in London. The impetus for its formation is Gordon's knowledge of the Laban Centre's own resident company, Transitions.

This ensemble gives fourth-year performance students the chance to work professionally for a year, on a full-time basis with choreographers from the UK, America and Canada.

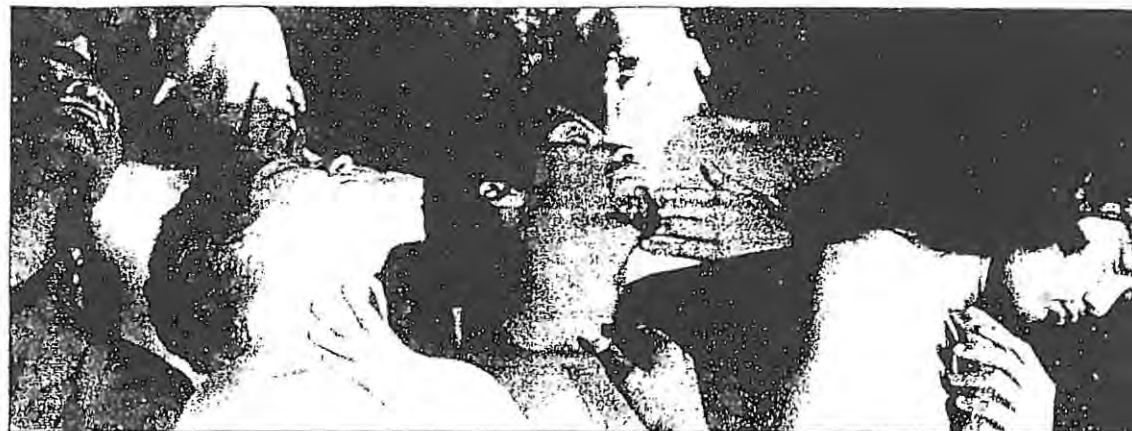
The 1993 Standard Bank National Arts Festival in Grahamstown served as the platform for the official launch of First Physical, at which the company's manifesto was outlined in three programmes of physical theatre — aptly entitled *Manifesto I, II and III*.

From this statement of intent comes the following definition of physical theatre — a movement-form often maligned by more traditional observers of dance:

"Physical Theatre is not a separatist performing art, but an artistic manifesto that includes fact, fiction, movement, mime, text, song, dance and design. It is a plea for a holistic theatre experience that draws together mind, body, emotion, thought, action and word."

Under the auspices of First Physical was launched the *New Voices* programme which gave young choreographers a platform to present their own work. The list of South African modern dancers and choreographers who have passed through the portals offered by First Physical reads like a who's who of the local profession.

Jeannette Ginslow (Artistic Director of DNA Dance Theatre), P J Sabbagha (Artistic Director of Forgotten Angle Theatre Company and lecturer at Wits), Sarah Tudge (Artistic Director of Cape Town-based Heel Arts Collective), Samantha Pienaar and Lanon Prigge (co-directors of Theatre body in Stellenbosch where Pienaar is also a lecturer in



GETTING PHYSICAL: The First Physical Theatre Company performs *Bessie's Head* at the Baxter from tonight until Saturday, March 25.

the Drama Department), Gladys Agulhas (one of only a handful of young, black, female choreographers).

This list is by no means exhaustive. Gordon's latest venture, *Bessie's Head*, a work commissioned by FNB Vita, had its first performance at this year's Dance Umbrella at the Wits Theatre on March 11 and 12. Hot off the Gauteng stage, the piece is to enjoy a week's run at the

Baxter Theatre from tonight.

Inspired by the events surrounding the birth of South African-born writer Bessie Head, the work is the result of a collaboration between Gordon and a variety of other artists — renowned SA playwright Reza de Wet was responsible for the text, Koux Engelbrecht for the designs, Corinne Cooper, Leonhard Praeg and Zingisani Mkefa have made

the score, and Michael Carljin has designed the lighting. Not to mention, of course, the current crop of First Physical performers.

Typically for Gordon the process of creating the work began in extensive research, at the English Literary Museum, into the enigma surrounding Bessie Head's birth.

All the writer Piersel could discover

about her origins was that she was born in an asylum, her mother was mad, her father a "native", and that she was in danger, so she was told, of ending up like her mother.

In the words of Head, "I only love what is fresh and wild and new." First Physical's work could also be described in these terms.

Not to be missed.

Spotlight on...

Dancer

'Bessie' displays depth and insight

THE *raison d'être* behind the annual commissioning of new works by the FNB Vita Awards is to provide a choreographer with sufficient time (resulting from financial freedom) to explore ideas with maximum creativity.

Too often, though, the commission which results looks as if little new thought has gone into five minutes or so of "take the money and run" choreography.

It is therefore entirely appropriate that Rhodes University's Gary Gordon should be given an hour-long programme for his Bessie's Head, for he real-

ly shows the value of the process when tackled with depth and insight.

Although Gordon insists that this piece has been more extensively workshopped with the students than any other he has done, it has been strongly guided to probe the unquiet mind of mental disorder with restraint and integrity.

Last year he touched on the fevered mind of Edgar Allan Poe in his *Eye of the Shadow*, when the performers manipulated heads hung with red ribbons of blood. This time the heads hang from the flies, and the ribbons are worn by the living whose white muslin over-cos-

FNB VITA DANCE UMBRELLA: Programme 9 (Wits Theatre)
CHOREOGRAPHER: Gary Gordon

By Marilyn Jenkins

tumes become increasingly tainted with a blush of blood.

All her life, authoress Bessie Head keenly felt her lack of roots, both geographical and familial, for she was born in 1937 in the Pietermaritzburg Mental Hospital, four years after her white mother had been institutionalised. Her father? An unknown black man.

The programme note indicates that Bessie herself had a different percep-

tion, that the pregnancy came first and that her mother had been considered insane as a result of a liaison an apartheid society could not countenance. Confusion and flashes of sanity, driven by a universal need to love and be loved, are explored in this work with a gentleness and sympathy. There's also a restlessness about the process as the performers switch personae.

After an opening lineup of deep rasping breaths,

whistles, laughter and sudden head turns, the texture changes. Movements are hung out to dry like cormorant wings, leaps are lightly made in vaulting over or onto another's back, and there are tender ducts with the husband she divorced four years before being committed, with her unknown black lover who is shown as the seduced rather than the seducer, and with her son who died in a taxi accident when only four years old.

Again, Gordon has

shown a supreme command of the use of weight and bodies as fulcrums, but this time it is fluid, dream-like and imbued with a sense of inevitable despair.

Upstage, a transparent model of a skull gazes with empty eye-sockets and cavernous mouth, and a split cleaved down its nose which gapes wider and wider as the mother's madness takes firmer hold and performers seek refuge within it. The two halves of her personality finally open up completely, freeing her to slip totally into the peace of total dislocation, dancing the red-clad tango of an

altered mind. It takes two to tango, after all.

The danced text is fleshed out here and there by pertinent voice-overs and the score, which is surprisingly eclectic, includes Satie, hit paradars like Besame Mucho and original music by Leonhard Praeg. At one point, there's even an echo of Marat-Sade as the performers gather beside a side-stage piano to howl and squeak their injunction to "keep her on therapy - give her a pill".

Yet there's no real discord in Bessie's Head. Despite the context, it has a strange tranquillity ... and it works.

Gordon delves into Bessie's Head

by Cathryn Pearman



Acty Tang and Zingisani Mfeka perform in *Bessie's Head*. Pic: by Elsabe van Tonder

It is very rarely that you are blessed by watching a theatrical event which moves you as deeply as Gary Gordon's *Bessie's Head* moved its audience on Saturday night at the Wits Theatre.

The work, commissioned by FNB Vita for the Dance Umbrella, reinforced Gordon and his *First Physical Theatre Company* as the masters of physical theatre in SA.

You would think that if you discovered a winning formula, you would stick to it, but choreographer Gordon certainly does not believe in this philosophy. He simply continues to look for better means, better dance vocabulary, new formulas, new dancers, and the result is physical theatre which is at the cutting edge of South African choreography.

Gary Gordon's piece deals with author Bessie Head's writings about her mother - a woman who was put in a Pietermaritzburg Mental Hospital because of her sexual relationship with a black man which resulted in the birth of Bessie - born in the mental hospital.

Gordon has managed, through a mixture of acting, music, audio clips, and dance, to create a touching and beautiful collage about Bessie's head - what she envisaged her mother to be like, the man she had an affair with, her husband, the tragedy of losing her first child, and how she felt when her second child - Bessie - was taken away from her in the mental hospital.

Through clips of Bessie Head's own writings, and other texts written by Reza de Wet, a story is created, and the audience is thrust inside Bessie's head.



jo!

A large white head is set in the back, right-hand-side of the stage, and during the work, three more heads drop down into audience view, but unlike the first head, they have long, flowing veils attached to them. The dancers use the space in, under and around these constructions to weave the life of Bessie Head.

The work shifts from the mechanical and chilling motions of the first part of the work, to the beautiful creation of a story - with secrets, romanticism, wonderings, fear, misunderstanding, pain, and most strongly, motherhood.

Performers Juanita Finestone, Martin Gylling, Zingisani Mfeka, Jane O'Connell, Daluxolo Papu, Helen Seaman, Tanya Surtees, and Acty Tang fulfilled every ounce of the work's vision, each playing various roles and dancing with dedication and feeling.

Where *First Physical Theatre* used to perform with deadpan expression, they have now incorporated facial expression, and the use of it has created a new expressive dimension to their work. Along with this, one cannot help but notice a new element to the vocabulary used by the company - moves and steps unlike anything we have seen from Gordon's choreography, were spellbinding.

With wonderful performances from Juanita Finestone, the longest standing member of *First Physical Theatre Company*; Martin Gylling who has come from Denmark to perform with *First Physical Theatre Company*; and Helen Seaman, FNB Vita Norminee (for Most Outstanding Female Performer); *Bessie's Head* is taken to talented heights.

The work encourages a deep sense of imagination as the audience is left wondering, as Bessie Head did, about the mother figure, left in a mental hospital and grieving for her daughter who was so unkindly removed from her.

Bessie's Head is a Dance Umbrella highlight. It is wonderful to see such impeccable choreography merged and working together with talented performers and intriguing subject matter. This is one of the best works I have seen from Gordon and the *First Physical Theatre Company* . . . and I have seen works which I thought could not be topped.

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DIE BURGER MARCH 23 2000

Intieme dansteater prikkel

EDUARD GREYLING

BESSIE'S HEAD, 'n dansteater-aanbieding deur die First Physical Theatre Geselskap. In die Baxter Teater. Tot Saterdag.

DIS 'n dokumentêre werk met as uitgangspunt die Suid-Afrikaanse geboorte van die skrywer Bessie Head in 'n hospitaal vir sielsiekes in Pietermaritzburg in 1937.

Met 'n wit ma en swart pa is sy op soek na haar identiteit in die apartheidsera. Ondersteun deur 'n teks van Reza de Wet neem Gary Gordon ons op 'n reis deur die emosies van 'n gemartelde siel.

Tweepasse van liefde en leed, intieme gevoelens en oomblikke van eensaamheid is die tekstuur waarvan die bewegingsimpetus direk kom uit die emosiegedrewe teks.

Die interpretasie van die kunstenaars is eerlik en onpretensieus en sonder om erg dramaties te wees. Die onkonvensionele lywe van nedansers (veral van die vroue) is nie die stereotipe wat dikwels in die

danswêreld verwag word nie, en die werk se teer en streng vroulike "ge-daante" word nog meer daardeur ge-aksentueer.

Die inhoud word nie aan jou opgedring nie, maar jou simpatie word uitgelok. *Bessie's Head* gaan nie sommer in jou klere sit nie.

Een opmerklieke aspek van die bewegings in dié fisieke teater is dat dit hoofsaaklik egalig vloei van die een tot die ander. Nooit word 'n beweging skielik gestop om 'n verklaring te maak nie. Die oplossing lê in die beweging self.

Die teks, musiek en ander klanke is subtiel onderdanig aan die beweging, maar vorm wel 'n steunpilaar in sommige gedeeltes. Onder meer is die oorspronklike musiek van Leonhard Praeg en stukke soos Evora se *Besame Mucho* en Satie se *Je Te Veux* belangrik in soverre dit die drang om liefde te gee en te ontvang onderskryf. Dit is die middelpunt van die werk.

Die dekor is eenvoudig met 'n groot beligte deurskynende kop in die een hoek waardeur die dansers

in en uit beweeg. Teen die swart agterdoek hang lang wit stukke materiaal waarvan 'n paar stukke teen die einde neerstort op die grond. Teen daardie tyd is die kop oopge-vlek. En hierdie byna kalm afronding kom ná sowat sewentig intieme minute, asof iemand in daardie tyd jou rustig 'n hartseer storie vertel-het.

Die First Physical Theatre Gesel-skap bied die geleentheid vir jong studente en professionele kunstenaars om saam te werk en dit is mis-kien juis in daardie respek vir me-kaar dat die groep sy volwaardige plek op die hedendaagse verhoog vind. Die onreëlmatighede wat nou en dan in sommige van die kunstenaars se bewegings te bespeur is, doen nie afbreuk aan die geheel nie, maar die enigste danser wat soms opsigtelik onseker op sy voete voor-kom, is Martin Gylling.

Gary Gordon se ontwikkeling as 'n vername choreograaf op die Suid-Afrikaanse verhoog bereik met *Bessie's Head* 'n nuwe hoogtepunt in die aanbieding van fisieke teater.

reflections of life in a dance step

the dance umbrella draws attention to issues of the day, writes **vuyo mntuyedwa**

There is a time for everything. Indeed, the Dance Umbrella at the Wits Theatre was the platform for remembrance, celebration and praise.

This was evident in *Lucy*, a piece by Valery Berger, a choreographer from Reunion.

In *Lucy*, a work inspired by the discovery of the hominid *Australopithecus africanus* in the Tadar region of Ethiopia in 1974, Berger is awe-inspiring and deeply focused, using minimalist movements to capture the vulnerability of this human ancestor.

In the production notes the choreographer says she is striving to define the importance of research into humanity's origins so as to overcome the present-day difficulties of living in a multi-cultural society. She says he also wants to speak out against ethnic cleansing.

The work is a protest against racism and all forms of segregation, says its choreographer.

"*Lucy* has no colour. She is universal, a symbol of peace and unity," says Berger.

Gregory Maqoma, the recently appointed associate artistic director of Moving Into Dance, presented *Miss Thandi*, a moving tribute to the late Raymond Matinyane, a drag artist and the founder of the Afro Vibes Foundation, which is based in Amsterdam, Holland.

Avid followers of the Grahamstown arts festival might remember Matinyane, who used to regularly present his drag show, *Miss Thandi*, there.

Maqoma clearly shows that he lost a dear friend and the work is powerful and moving, touching as it does on issues of identity and repressed sexuality. Video footage of Matinyane is used to good effect.

Music was provided by The Vuyani Ensemble, which mixes maskandi with traditional Xhosa music. Martin Machapa rounds off the mix with haunting yet melodic vocals.

Maqoma becomes the embodiment of Matinyane, prancing around the stage mimicking the drag artist, complete with make-up and wig.

Jan Blom, who lived with

Matinyane, wept after the performance.

In *Ek Se Hola*, a work performed by the dazzling Moving Into Dance Mophatong (MID) and choreographed by Maqoma, the energy of kwaito music and its dance styles such as manyisa, twalatsa and kwasa-kwasa are celebrated. It's a pity that these styles are not fully explored as Maqoma chooses to fuse them with classical ballet.

In Natalie Fisher's *Moya wa Lerato - Spirits of Passion*, Lorna Maseko of Ballet Theatre Afrikan proves that she is ready for solo work. She combines well with Russel Cummings in a moving piece about the power of love.

Nhlanhla Mahlangu, Lesole Maine and Constance Kau are proving to be essential cogs in MID's machinery as was evident in their performance of Canadian Joe Laughlin's *Sonke Sisonke-Every Body*.

The work showcases Mahlangu's other talent, singing, and questions the perceptions of beauty and physical differences.

Moeketsi Koena's *Awakening - Tsoha*, which features break dancer Moshe Mobe, and other new members of the Inzalo Dance Theatre, Maropeng Seage and Delbrah Shabangu, drove home the message of Africa's need to assert itself. It also featured poetry by Thokozani Mthiyane and music by saxophonist Karabo Mohlala.

The problem of the ever-present township rubbish dumps came under the spotlight in Jackie Semela's *Matlakala*, with the slightly nervous dancers doing a convincing job.

The master of shock, Steven Cohen, drops onto the stage in *Chandelier*, a work that sees him wrapped in a lit chandelier that sounds like a wind chime.

The dancer-performance artist says it is a work that explores the cliché of "civilised Europe meeting darkest Africa".

Master of shock number two, Elu, presented "Broken Bird" a thought-provoking piece in which, ostrich-footed, he limps on stage while a video shows him hobbling along a pavement among the pigeons near the Home Affairs offices in Commissioner Street.



In memory:
Gregory Maqoma,
in Miss Thandi, a
tribute to
late drag
artist
Raymond
Matinyane

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Dancing like a movie

Robert Colman

Gregory Vuyani Maqoma is one of the young choreographers commissioned to do a piece for this year's FNB Vita Dance Umbrella. I sat in on a rehearsal of his work, *Rhythm Blues*, at the Dance Factory. At first the dancers are self-conscious, pretending not to be, of the stranger in the rehearsal room. But they soon forget about me and get on with the job.

Maqoma takes Zakhele Nkosi through a solo. "Do you have a jersey to tie around your waist, something that wiggles?" he asks. The rehearsal room is soon filled with the energy of music and movement, and the concentration of Nkosi mirroring Maqoma's steps. A combination of sensuous fluidity breaks into leaps and staccato contractions. If the finished product is anything like the short piece I watched, it promises to be transfixing and exciting.

Talking to the talented 27-year-old afterwards, it is clear that Maqoma is a choreographer to watch out for — an eloquent young man brimming with ideas and optimistic about the future of South African dance and culture.

He is inspired by the broad spectrum of the arts. "I don't look at dance as separate from other art

forms. My choreography always involves music, theatre, fashion, video, visual art and poetry. His other source of ideas is the city. "Its vibrancy. And its 'squareness'. The buildings, the streets, the thinking and the rules are all square. The city is also our playground. There is a constant exchange of energy. It is the city that makes me optimistic about South African culture. We are so fortunate to have such a diversity of cultures to draw on. Cultures to fuse." This is integral to his style that he describes as a fusion of African and Western forms.

Rhythm Blues, featuring a live band and a DJ on stage, looks at the music and dance of the 1950s and 1960s. "I'm looking at how the past has influenced the present. We live in a society of sampling. Today music, dance and fashion are all sampled, but are still influenced by that generation."

Maqoma has come a long way since he started dancing in 1987, doing "street dance", a combination of township dance forms which were mostly American influenced. "We'd see stuff on TV, music videos, Michael Jackson, that sort of thing, and imitate it with a township flavour." His multi-skills training, including dance, choreography and teaching, at Moving into Dance led

to a one-year stint at the Brussels-based Performing Arts Research and Teaching Studios (Parts).

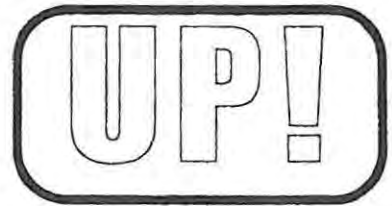
Completing a circle, he has been invited to take *Rhythm Blues* to a festival at Parts after the Dance Umbrella. While studying in Brussels he choreographed *Rhythm 1, 2, 3*, which premiered in Amsterdam. "*Rhythm Blues* is the baby of *Rhythm 1, 2, 3*."

Despite attractive offers from out of the country we're not going to lose this talented young artist. He still wants to work here and to contribute to the development of dance in this country. He has established the Vuyani Dance Project to do just that; to develop and take dance into the community with the aim of attracting audiences in their fullest diversity.

He hopes that *Rhythm Blues* will take his audience on a journey. "Like watching a movie slowly unfold. I also want the audience to create their own story. And I aim to entertain, inform and move them. My work is like poetry. I want to fill my audience and want them to fill me. It's a two-way thing."

Rhythm Blues will be performed at the Dance Factory on March 14 and 16 by Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, Zakhele Nkosi, Portia Mashigo and Shanell Winlock.

Moving on



- EVENT: FNB Vita Dance Umbrella Programme 13, 14(selected works), 15 and 16
- a. miss thandi by Gregory Vuyani Maqoma (Wits Theatre)
 - b. Full Time Fool by Bevan Cullinan (Wits Theatre)
 - c. L'Odeur du Voisin by Guilherme Botelho and Caroline de Cornière with the dancers (Dance Factory)
 - d. The Double Room by P.J Sabbagha (Wits Theatre)
 - e. Chandelier by Steven Cohen

By LINDA PEYTERS

CHOREOGRAPHER Gregory Vuyani Maqoma is really going places, in his artistic vision and his career. Actually, he has already been places. Having trained with Moving into Dance Mophatong (MIDM) and

danced with the main company since 1991, he went on to study at P.A.R.T.S. in Brussels, where he formed his own Vuyani Dance Theatre Project.

Last week he was appointed Associate Artistic Director of MIDM, following in the footsteps of his long time friend and colleague Vincent Sekwāti Maitsoe, who remains with the company as Artistic Consultant. Maqoma's *Rhythm Colour* will be staged at the Grahamstown Festival in July 2002 as his Standard Bank Young Artist's Award commissioned work.

His new work for the FNB Vita Dance Umbrella was also commissioned. Choreographed and performed by Maqoma, *miss thandi* is a sensitive tribute to drag artist Raymond Vuyo Matinyana, an "unconventional cultural ambassador" who died in the Netherlands. The fascinating musical score is performed by quite an oddball collection of musicians: Sipho Nxumalo (concertina), Reza Khola (guitar), Martin Machapa (vocalist) and composer Daniel Hutchinson (organ). The original sound and movement are influenced by the repeating pattern of Maskanda music.

In *miss thandi*, Maqoma has found a truly authentic voice and breaks new ground in terms of dance language. His choreography is refreshingly unselfconscious, unapologetic and distinctly African.

In another successful commissioned work, Bevan Cullinan plays the fool in his ten minute *Full Time Fool*. *Eish, thanks God I'm a freak*. His mime-karaoke to Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* is absolutely hilarious! The well-timed and fluent brand of physical slapstick and comedy thankfully never tips the scale to become just plain silly. And before the dance purists out there complain that this is not "dance", his

curtain call includes a dramatic and brief *entrechat quatre*.

There was a more subtle use of humour in visiting Swiss company, Alias Compagnie's *L'Odeur du Voisin* (the neighbour's smell) choreographed by Guilherme Botelho and Caroline de Cornière in collaboration with the dancers. The first half is set in a restaurant and the second in an office. A series of vignettes puts human relationships in society under a microscope. The characterisations were remarkably detailed and the movement simultaneously spasmodic and wonderfully free flowing. Clever theatrical tricks punctuated the action in an altogether engaging piece.

P.J Sabbagha and the Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative presented *The Double Room*, a tumultuous journey into the mind and memories of a person living with HIV/Aids. The impressive set, which originally looked like something out of a Fugard play, constantly shifts reality as dancers enter through walls and slip away into a couch.

In Steven Cohen's *Chandelier*, the intersection of "art" and life is startling and surreal. In the performance he descended, resplendent in full body paint and dressed in a real chandelier, from the roof of the theatre before teetering and chinking through the audience. As he left the auditorium, a video began to play of Cohen, in the same costume, at the demolition of squatter settlement in Newtown. The reactions of the homeless onlookers almost seemed staged, but, of course, were absurdly real. I found the juxtaposition of images profound and intensely moving.

The FNB Vita Dance Umbrella ends on Saturday 16 March. Tickets at Computicket.



GREGORY Vuyani Maqoma in miss thandi.

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The night SA dance finally grew up

Adrienne Sichel

Saturday was the night South African dance finally grew up. Gender and social politics underpinned the three works presented by Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, Canadian choreographer Joe Ink in collaboration with the Moving Into Dance Company, and performance artist Steven Cohen.

Apart from a few misplaced wolf whistles, the patrons respectfully experienced various perspectives.

Amazingly, all three pieces on Programme 14 at this year's Dance Umbrella set up a dialogue about Africa's relationship to the rest of the world. They also don't pussyfoot around issues of identity and prejudice - racial and sexual - as they accessed and stretched several musical and performance traditions.

Maqoma's *miss thandi* is an unflinchingly honest multi-media biography and autobiography of two black South African artists caught in the crossfire of their sexuality and culturally shredded identities. On video is Raymond Vuyo Matinyana, the actor, singer and Xhosa drag artist who died in Amsterdam in November. On stage, at first in silhouette, is Maqoma clad in a white designer mini dress. Strips of white, red and black cloth designating passages of Matinyana and Maqoma's life demarcate the dancing ground. Daniel Hutchinson's inventive music, drawing on traditional *maskanda* and other forms and performed live on organ, concertina, guitar, percussion and voice, echo Maqoma's wrenching expression of displacement and belonging.

Repressive racial, gender and

cultural stereotyping also surface in Ink's *Sonke Sisonke/Every Body*, a poetic collage about mother Africa and her children. This still under-lit dance theatre work tackles the weight of death and the value of life and language - verbal, vocal and physical.

Cohen, ever the artistic conquistador, emerged from the floor in his crystal chandelier tutu, in his signature killer platform heels as a seraphic symbol of conscience.

Even though the *Chandelier* project has been well and publicly documented by the artist, I wasn't prepared for the raw impact of the footage shot as a settlement was being ripped apart in Newtown. Cohen again redefines the role of the performing artist as a fearless mediator, unrelenting social commentator and magician of metaphor.

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Dance that's got rhythm and blues



Adrienne Sichel
Review

- **WHAT:** FNB Vita Dance Umbrella Programme 11
- **WHO:** Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, Susan Abraham, Valerie Berger, Faustin Linyekula, Sello Pesa, PJ Sabbagha
- **WHERE:** Dance Factory, tonight at 7.30pm

Dark City meets Sophiatown meets Meadowlands meets Jozi meets Eldos in *Rhythm Blues*.

Greg Maqoma's tribute to the black South African musical history of the '50s and '60s, and its continuing influence on contemporary culture, has an amazing mix of influences. Vuyani Dance Theatre Project - Maqoma joined by Zakhele Nkosi, Portia Mashigo and Shanell Winlock - teams up with four musicians (under the direction of Siphon Nkosiyane), poet Kgafelo oa Magogodi

and DJ Puna at his mixing desk.

Following in the spirit of Maqoma's *Rhythm 1,2,3, Rhythm Blues* goes the post-modern route. Texts are fragmented, forms collide and fresh expression irreverently emerges. The rapping poet who "floats like Malombo and stings like a bongo" provides a key to this fusion of aesthetics, styles and



energies. It is the repeated line: "I lay the law of the dance floor".

Maqoma and his performers confront matters - social, political, cultural, musical and choreographic, with a dollop of gender issues - and deconstruct them on this dance floor that symbolises the people's halls, hostels and clubs of the past and present.

Projected images of Sophiatown and Alexandra icons, from Bailey's African Archives, form a context as do the juxtaposed poetry and (not always audible) monologues by the dancers in *Tsotsitaal* and Afrikaans.

Choreographically Maqoma's signature of mutating rhythms that electrify the body, his in particular, is extended in its embrace of traditional and urban African dance melded with contemporary techniques. Certain sections, however, need tightening.

Rhythm Blues, which has terrific performances by the Vuyani foursome and the musos, isn't only nostalgic, it's great fun. The satirical ending takes the form of a post-colonial/apartheid flashback - it's all in the tulle ballgowns and the curtsies.

This programme has a lot to offer in the form of Susan Abraham's *Touch*, which luxuriates in spatial and gentle physical connections; and Valerie Berger and Faustin Linyekula's *D'eux*, a delicately crafted, resonantly textured, tactile duet from Reunion.

Inzalo Dance and Theatre Company strikes again with Sello Pesa's innovative *Same but Different*, which juggles with repetition, shifting space and body-carving rhythm(ology)

PJ Sabbagha's *Whether* is an elaborate teaser which is hard to digest at first viewing, especially at the end of such a demanding evening.



SUNDAY CULTURE

Overriding the African formula

A Congo-South African dance work fuses mud huts and the internet, writes Adrienne Sichel

Africa's silences are as potent as her drums. Africa's spaces resonate with beauty, brutality and exile. A new generation of independent African performers is daring to bring these realities to the stage.

In their quest to express their true identities, the Democratic Republic of Congo's Faustin Linyekula, 27, and South Africa's Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, 28, collaborated to create *Tales off the Mud Wall*.

This conceptual 45-minute dance work had its South African premiere at the Wits theatre this week as part of the FNB Vita Dance Umbrella, and has a final performance tonight at 6pm. It is an Independent Initiative by Maqoma's Vuyani Dance Theatre Project and Linyekula.

Last August the piece was selected to be developed as part of the danceNEXT project at the Tanzwochen Wien festival in Vienna.

DanceNext was created to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the danceWEB - European scholarship programme for contemporary dance that Maqoma took part in in 1997 and Linyekula in 1998.

The two dancer/choreographers originally met in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1996 when Maqoma was touring with Moving Into Dance as a dancer.

They kept contact and met again last year in Johannesburg when Linyekula was performing with Reunion dancer/choreographer Valerie Berger.

Tales off the Mud Wall was largely negotiated and developed by its co-creators by e-mail. In Vienna it caused a stir because it didn't fit the ethnic norm.

Linyekula says: "Why can't we be true to who we are, coming as we do from a mixture of village mud huts and the Internet? Why should we remain true only to a stereotype?"

"Being true to who we are also acknowledges the many centuries of evolving historically, culturally, politically. We can't just erase that."

In Vienna the African ensemble had to deal with being in a country with a controversial right-wing government, where their participation



No to stereotypes of Africa: Faustin Linyekula Ngoy, left, and Gregory Vuyani Maqoma in their collaborative work *Tales off the Mud Wall*, which breaks with tradition and focuses on silence

PHOTOGRAPH: JOHN HOGG

was a political statement. They also felt pressure to present a formula in terms of how the work looked and what it said in the context of a continent riddled with war and ravaged by the AIDS pandemic.

"Our response," explains Maqoma,

"was, 'We don't want to project that picture of Africa.' All we wanted to do was get into a space and share our experiences. Our stories are very similar and very different."

Tales off the Mud Wall was initially described as a piece for five

performers, a wall and an audience. Everyone was expecting energetic, rhythmic, African-flavoured dance. What they got was predominantly silence, with two verbal interventions in English and Lingala.

To the dancers' astonishment the

European audience bought into it.

Maqoma recalls: "They took it over, it was theirs ... they went on their own journey, people cried. At the end we stand on the edge of the stage. After 15 to 20 minutes we hoped they'd get it, that it was over-

they stayed two hours."

One of the comments, adds Linyekula, was that theirs was the only work at the festival with human beings, not just dancers. "We're coming here with the memory of all that," he says.

Both men take their roles as artists seriously. According to Maqoma: "First of all you are black and from Africa and the expectation is always so-called primitive dance."

"I'm trying to find a balance between my own identity and the confrontations I face in everyday life as a South African. That is a burden."

Eight years ago Linyekula, who trained as an actor at the French cultural centre in Kisangani, left Congo and went to Kenya. He worked with mime artist Opiyo Okatch and formed a movement company, La Compagnie Gaara, which created the award-winning *Cleansing*. This opened doors in Europe but Linyekula continues to work in theatre and dance in Kenya and Uganda, and even did a stint in Rwanda.

"Wherever I go, even coming here, I am constantly reminded of where I come from. That puts pressure on me to be an ambassador."

"First of all, as artists we express our little beings and that unspoken status. Last year I was in Paris and the Congolese ambassador said that as an artist I could touch people the way politicians can't. This responsibility is an honour and a burden. This project is all about that."

In June Linyekula is hoping to head back to Congo and give workshops in Kinshasa.

His return will coincide with the biennial Festival International de l'Acteur, which has survived all the turmoil and is now introducing dance. South African Boyzle Cekwana's Floating Outfit Project has been invited. In the long term, Linyekula envisages concentrating on teaching dance in Kinshasa and consolidating his South African connections.

Tales off the Mud Wall has broken down many barriers: artistic, aesthetic and geographic.

Wrapping up the Umbrella

Dance Umbrella 2001 heads into its last week with a flurry of international guests and local commissions:

Durban's Jay Pather premiere his commissioned work *Tata m chance*, performed by the Siwel Sonke Dance Theatre, and Vincer Sekwati Mantsoe unleashes *Motsw Hole* in tonight's programme at the Wits theatre from 6pm.

The mixed bag tomorrow on Tuesday night at the Dance Factor also at 6pm, features Ze'eva Cohen professor of dance at Princeton university, in her *Negotiations*, a duet between the biblical figures Sara and Hagar. At 8.15pm Britain's Akram Kahn makes his South African debut with his company *I Rush* and solo in his *Fix*. (Kahn has a season at the Playhouse in Durban from March 22 to March 24.) Finland's Arja Raatikainen is also guest artist, with her solo *Hapro*.

Soweto's Sello Pesa and Reunion's Valerie Berger present the commissioned *Everyday* at the Wits amphitheatre on Tuesday and on Thursday at 6pm while Reunion's Pascal Montrouge premieres his *Because There is Something About you That Gets on My Nerves* at the Dance Factory at 8.15pm this Friday.

An eventful month culminates with programme 14, at the Wits theatre on Friday at 7.30pm and on Saturday at 7pm, featuring the completed version of Boyzle Cekwana's compelling *Shift* and Gary Gordor's *Rock-a-Bye for a Sleeping Man and Barking Dog* by the Grahamstown First Physical Theatre Company.

The evening ends with the tv FNB Vita young choreographer grant commissions - *Megua/Hal* by Moekeetsi Koena and *Meetings at the Edge* by Gladys Agulhas.

