

**Corporeal Tales: An investigation into
narrative form in contemporary South
African dance and choreography**

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Alan Charles Parker

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Abstract

In the years following the fall of Apartheid in South Africa, dance and choreography have undergone considerable transformation. This investigation stems from one observation relative to this change that has been articulated by two of South Africa's most respected dance critics, Adrienne Sichel and Matthew Krouse. Both critics have noted a growing concern for narrative in South African contemporary choreography, coupled with an apparent propensity for narratives of a distinctly personal and 'autobiographical' nature.

In Part One: 'Just after the beginning', the proposed preoccupation with narrative in South African contemporary choreography is discussed in light of the relationship between narrative and the notion of personal identity. The use of the performed narrative as a medium to explore questions about identity is offered as one explanation underpinning this increased proclivity, where the interrogation of the form of the danced narrative provides a site for exploration of personal identity.

Part Two: 'Somewhere in the middle' interrogates the notion of form through an in-depth discussion of the experimentation with form within theatrical and antitheatrical dance traditions over the last fifty years. Specific works by three selected South African choreographers (Ginslov, Maqoma and Sabbagha) are discussed in terms of their general approach to narrative form. This provides an illustration of some of the approaches to narrative form emergent in contemporary South African choreographic practices.

Part Three: 'Nearing the end' offers Acty Tang's *Chaste* (2007) as a case study to illustrate the practical application of the dance narrative as a means to interrogate questions relating to personal identity. A detailed analysis of Tang's particular approach to forming the narrative of *Chaste* is conducted, exposing the intertextual, multimedia and multidisciplinary approach to creating the danced narrative.

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Narrative Form – In three parts

It has been over a decade since drastic political, social and economic change swept through South Africa, initiated by the fall of Apartheid in 1994 and fostered by the introduction of democracy and individual rights under the political rule of the African National Congress (ANC). So too has the practice of choreography in South Africa experienced many significant shifts as these social, political and economic factors continue to bear strong influence on the development of various artistic aesthetics and tendencies. In terms of a South African theatre aesthetic (to use a broad term), the new era of democracy has served to open up many formerly barricaded doors and has removed certain historical boundaries previously implemented on racial and/or gender distinctions.¹ Contemporary South African dance (as an aspect of the broader umbrella term 'South African Theatre') has also experienced an opening of certain freedoms and performance opportunities in this emerging context (Krouse, 2006; Pienaar, 1999).

It is this process of exploring new artistic territories that has caught the eye of many local dance and theatre critics and researchers, who continue to concern themselves with conceptualising the direction and development of South African theatre in the post-Apartheid era (Bain & Hauptfleisch, 2001; Blumberg & Walder, 1999; Flockemann, 2001; Hauptfleisch, 1997; Hutchison,

¹ These 'doors' and boundaries were both literal and figurative. While many opportunities were made unavailable to many black performers, certain spaces were also made unavailable. As suggested by Pienaar (1999: 136), during Apartheid it was problematic for black performers to perform in exclusively white theatres, with white companies, since the largest theatres (those in urban areas) were demarcated and reserved for white audiences, even though they constituted a smaller segment of the national population.

1996; Jamal, 2003; Mda, 1996; Pather, 1999; Pienaar, 1999; Purkey, 1996).

This attempt at conceptualisation has given rise to numerous theories and expressed opinions suggesting where dance and theatre in South Africa are heading, where they should be heading, as well as where they are *not* heading and subsequently falling short². In an article after the 2006 FNB Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg, Mail & Guardian arts journalist Matthew Krouse (2006) acknowledges the “infinite possibilities” (2) and the “potential waiting to be unleashed” (2) in the dense programmes of predominantly local dance. Krouse (2006), however, also notes an apparent struggle to “move forward” (2) in the development and realisation of this ‘untapped’ potential. From Krouse’s comments it appears that despite living in a ‘free’ context, where previously locked doors (both literal and metaphoric) are now there for the opening, “new choreographers are fumbling for the keys” (Krouse, 2006: 2).

In Krouse’s article an interview is conducted with critically acclaimed, Amsterdam-based choreographer, Emio Greco, where he offers his observations of choreography in South Africa³. Greco corroborates Krouse’s own observations and articulates an apparent ‘holding back’ and an inability to find “freedom” (2) in much of South African choreography. Greco attributes this to “the need of the choreographer to talk about the social aspect and the political aspect” (2). This observation seems to imply an apparent imbalance in the relationship between content and form in South African choreography,

² In Bain, K & Hauptfleisch, T (2001), this is discussed in two sections entitled “what the f... is going on in South African theatre?” (9) and “During apartheid we had protest theatre – now we have crap” (15).

³ Although Greco is an international choreographer, he is familiar with South African dance to a certain degree, having worked with choreographers at numerous international festivals, such as Gregory Maqoma, and has appeared twice in the FNB Umbrella in Johannesburg (Krouse, 2006; Sichel, 2006c).

with an emphasis on what a dance means, or what it is about, rather than how it is formed. Pienaar (2002) notes further imbalance in what she calls the “tug-of-war between the needs of heritage and innovation” (36), where an emphasis on cultural identity and “renewed national pride” (36) contradicts processes of expansion and experimentation with form. It is this ‘tug-of-war’ between *what* a dance means, and *how* it is formed, that ‘forms’ the crux of this investigation.

An observed preoccupation with content is further strengthened in light of the growing propensity for narratives in South African contemporary dance. The dance narrative is an affinity in South African choreography that has increasingly been articulated by numerous dance and theatre critics (Ballantyne, 2005; Fleishman, 1997; Sichel, 1996; 1997; 2001; 2004b; 2006a; 2007b). The 2007 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, a festival regarded by many as “a barometer, not only of the state of the performing arts, but of the state of the nation itself” (Sichel, 2004a)⁴, displayed a strongly narrative-based selection of dance on both its main and fringe programmes. The Festival, in fact, highlighted this surge of narrative dances in its media release prior to the festival, stating: “Dance tells stories at the National Arts Festival” (Hemphill, 2007b). Beatty (1986) argues that it is this principle of relaying a ‘story’ that distinguishes “narrative dances” (31) from “abstract dances” (31). The dance narrative can thus be regarded as a form originating from a position based in content, where the dance is ‘about something’ and the

⁴ The majority of published articles used in this thesis have been accessed from archives available on the internet, and page references for specific quotations are therefore not available. A detailed reference with the relevant internet addresses is provided in the bibliography of this thesis and copies of the articles quoted without page references are also attached as Appendix G.

objective of portraying that meaning to the viewer is central to the creation of that dance.

A preoccupation with narrative in South African dance is not, to use a colloquial term, 'a bad thing', nor is it erroneous or 'backwards' as an artistic trend. There is, however, as alluded to by Greco and Pienaar, a certain 'danger' in placing an overt focus on content without an interrogation of form, since it is through innovation of the 'how' that artistic progress occurs. The way in which a narrative dance is formed, and ultimately performed, must therefore become a site for experimentation where compelling and innovative approaches to making meaning through narrative can be located.

It must be noted that due to the multitude of dance traditions practiced in South Africa, the observations and views expressed by the above critics, as well as those articulated within this investigation, are specific to choreography in the style of contemporary dance. It is important to note, however, that in South Africa the contemporary dance style has a meaning distinct to an American or European interpretation. In South Africa, the term 'contemporary dance' is often applied to companies and practitioners working in numerous other contemporary styles such as physical theatre⁵, Afro-fusion, and contemporary African dance. For the purposes of this thesis the term 'contemporary dance' is used in its broadest sense, referring to all of the above-mentioned styles but excluding ballet (both contemporary and classical), traditional dance forms, and other social dance styles such as Hip-Hop, Kwaito and Pantsula.

⁵ Meersman (2007b) suggests that physical theatre in South Africa can be seen to inhabit two schools: "The mime-based artists, such as Andrew Buckland, and the dance-based school of Gary Gordon" (2) and The First Physical Theatre Company. It is the dance-based school of physical theatre referred to here.

Selected works and practitioners located specifically within the field of physical theatre are particularly pertinent to this investigation and will be discussed in greater detail. As a relatively young performance form in South Africa, physical theatre has emerged in the country alongside the nation's own socio-political transformation. This concurrent emergence provides scope for certain correlations between the development of the form and the context from which it arose to be made. In addition, by engaging with theatre-based traditions in conjunction with dance, a propensity for narrative (which is commonplace in the theatrical tradition) is particularly prevalent within this form. It can also be argued that, in terms of significant experimentation with form, physical theatre choreographers and practitioners seem to dominate in South African contemporary dance practice. This proclivity for experimentation can be seen as characteristic of physical theatre with its aesthetic foundations influenced by the innovation of both *avant garde* theatre and *avant garde* dance (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996: 40). In addition, physical theatre in South Africa bears a strong association with tertiary institutions, with the majority of its practitioners either teaching in local universities or having gained their training while reading for performance degrees⁶. Professor Gary Gordon, artistic director of The First Physical Theatre Company and Head of Drama at Rhodes University, suggests that "just as experimentation, invention and discovery are valued in other academic fields – as in science and

⁶ South Africa's first official physical theatre company, The First Physical Theatre Company, is connected to Rhodes University where both its artistic director (Prof. Gary Gordon) and assistant artistic director (Juanita Finestone-Praeg) lecture in the Drama Department. Similarly, The Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative, originally established as an associated project of the University of the Witwatersrand, is headed by former Rhodes graduates and First Physical Theatre Company performers PJ Sabbagha and Tracey Human. Other prominent physical theatre practitioners and choreographers such as Jeannette Ginslov, Athena Mazarakis, and Samantha Pienaar, all hold teaching positions at universities and tertiary institutions around the country.

technology – so it is valued within the performing arts” (*Theatre in Motion*, programme, 2007: 1). With critical thinking, innovation and invention encouraged within the university environment, the approaches to making theatre by those choreographers emerging from this academic background can be seen to reflect these concerns.

In conceptualising ‘narrative form’ in South African choreography, each component of this term will be considered separately, discussing the notions of narrative (Part One), then form (Part Two), followed by their combined application, illustrated by reference to the production *Chaste* (2007) by South African choreographer Acty Tang (Part Three). While maintaining a theoretical through-line, the disjointed, categorised narrative structure of this investigation (in keeping with current trends) does not delineate a rigid narrative progression of beginning, middle and end. This blurred approach to the structure of this argument is reflected in the title of each chapter, ‘Just after the beginning’, ‘Somewhere in the middle’ and ‘Nearing the end’. These titles are sourced from Gary Gordon’s autobiographical dance performance, *Go* (2007), performed at the 2007 FNB Dance Umbrella. The phrases are spoken by Gordon in the performance and are projected in written form on stage, and serve to outline the non-linear narrative of the work, as is their intention within this investigation.

Methodology and Research Procedures

Central to this investigation is the observed preoccupation with dance narratives in South African contemporary choreography. In responding to this premise, gauging its accuracy, and analysing the application of the dance narrative in the work of selected prominent choreographers, the observations and opinions articulated by local dance critics are most informative. These sources, although located in the field of journalism and not academic discourse, provide insightful description of specific productions and articulate emerging trends and tendencies at various national festivals. Due to a significant lack of extensive dance criticism in South Africa, with few critics actively writing about dance performance, and where criticism often takes a backseat to review, the published articles of Adrienne Sichel (The Star) and Matthew Krouse (The Mail & Guardian) are predominantly sourced. Both of these critics hold high regard in the field of performance criticism and are published extensively. Sichel, in particular, with a long and established history as a critic of dance in South Africa, offers insight that is grounded in substantial experience and knowledge of local dance history. It is through interpretive analysis of selected writings by these critics over the last decade that the observations expressed in this investigation emerge.

In conceptualising the notion of narrative, narrative theory (narratology) provides the basis for the investigation. This examination is complimented by research resources relative to the fields of performance discourse, dance history, and choreology, which are also applied to the discussion of form.

Four prominent South African choreographers (Gregory Maqoma, Jeannette Ginslov, PJ Sabbagha and Acty Tang) have been selected for analysis. The selection of these particular individuals is grounded by an observed interrogation of narrative form in their work, either by local critics or by the researcher on viewing specific productions. The analysis is located within specific choreographies by these individuals and focuses exclusively on those aspects of each work that are relevant to narrative form. Interviews with each choreographer, conducted by the researcher, are used to access primary information relative to each choreographer's distinct approach to engaging with narrative form⁷.

Tang's most recent production, *Chaste* (2007), is offered as a case study and is examined in detail as a means to illustrate the discussion of narrative form conducted in the preceding chapters. This analysis is complimented by non-participatory observation of the rehearsal process, conducted by the researcher, prior to the performance. Through this observation of the creative process a strong familiarity with the production, in terms of its action, structure and theatricality, has been gained to facilitate in-depth analysis. Interviews with Tang and Awelani Moyo, the production's co-author, provide further insight into the process of creating both the written and performed narratives.

⁷ The interview with Gregory Maqoma is conducted by Snyman (2002).

Part one: 'Just after the beginning'

On Narrative

1.1. Discerning the dance narrative in South Africa

Roland Barthes suggests, "Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural... present in every age, in every place, in every society" (in Sontag, 1982: 251). If one accepts the ubiquitous nature of narrative, the question then arises: Why should a propensity towards narrative in South African choreography, post-1994, be a concern worthy of investigation? The answer is two-fold. The first response concerns the extent to which narrative has emerged in South African contemporary dance since 1994. As this thesis will show, a significant increase in the dance narrative has occurred, the extent of which suggests a derivation beyond the mere fact of simply being 'there', but rather one relative to the socio-political change experienced in the country. Secondly, the medium of dance expression can be seen as a form that is arguably less predisposed to narrative than other performance forms (such as traditional theatre and Opera), thereby positing a proclivity for narrative as a significant factor to be considered.

Sichel (2005a) has noted the striking growth of contemporary dance in South Africa in the 1990s, positioning the form as "the flavour of the post-democratic day" (Sichel, 2005a). This association between contemporary dance and post-democratic circumstance posits an increased interest in narrative within this form as indicative of a changing social, economic and

political climate. It is therefore also significant that these narratives, as Krouse (2003a; 2003b; 2007a; 2007b) observes, are often of a distinctly personal nature. Krouse has consistently articulated the investigation of “private territories” (Krouse, 2003a), on both a biographical and autobiographical level, as dominant themes at multiple FNB Dance Umbrella programmes. In addition, he has regularly acknowledged specific works where choreographers are questioning issues of personal identity and the position of the individual in a shifting environment. Speaking of the 2003 FNB Dance Umbrella, the premier platform for both new and established contemporary choreographers in South Africa, Krouse described the dance festival to be “a grand-scale exercise in navel-gazing” (Krouse, 2003a), emphasising the extent to which not only narratives featured on the programme, but more specifically, those narratives bearing a distinctly personal focus. Similar observations abound amongst other dance critics and reviewers (Ballantyne, 2005; Hagemann, 2002; Sichel, 1997; 2006a; 2006b; 2007b; 2007c) in reference to numerous seasons of the FNB Dance Umbrella, as well as the Jomba! Contemporary Dance Experience in Durban, the now defunct FNB Vita Dance Umdudo in Grahamstown, and the National Arts Festival.

Similarly, Sichel has also articulated a growing concern for personal narratives⁸ at many of these festivals. Sichel (2007b) described the 2007 FNB Dance Umbrella as “a collision with history and identity” (12); an observation concurred by Krouse (2007b) who pinpointed an apparent focus on “childhood as it prefigures and mirrors adult experience” (3) as an

⁸ The term ‘personal narrative’ is used here to refer to narratives that are ‘autobiographical’ in nature, where ‘autobiography’ refers to the creative performance of personal memory and/or experience specific to the performer/choreographer.

overriding theme of the festival. The selection of works commissioned by the festival for the main programme showed clear evidence of this concern for personal narratives. Established, mature choreographers such as Tossie van Tonder, Gary Gordon and Gregory Maqoma, all performed deeply autobiographical work, delving “into their own biographies as dancers” (Sichel, 2007d: 10). Van Tonder’s *Alfabet* (2007), performed in and amongst her childhood dance costumes, recalled memories of her own childhood and her place as a mother, “cavorting as the creative conduit between her own mother and her child” (Krouse, 2007b: 3). Gary Gordon, dubbed “South Africa’s grand old man of dance” by Krouse (2007a: 3), offered *Go* (2007). Described by Sichel (2007c) as “exquisitely poetic dance theatre” (6), the work presented the mature dancer pondering his life between motion and stillness and his position in an art form pervaded by youth. Similarly, Maqoma’s *Beautiful Me* (2007) centred around the choreographer reflecting on his own history as a dancer and the influences fundamental to that history.

From this brief synopsis it seems feasible to suggest that there is an apparent tendency amongst established South African choreographers to engage with narratives in their choreography and that, in many cases, these narratives are used as a means to consider the self, to investigate personal identity and to position the artist in a changing socio-political environment.

As noted earlier in this discussion, the 2007 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown (hereafter abbreviated as the NAF) featured a wealth of dance narratives on the main programme. The Dance Factory, in collaboration with the Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative (FATC), presented PJ Sabbagha’s *MacBeth* (2006), a contemporary dance reworking of Shakespeare’s “timeless

classic" (Hemphill, 2007a). Jazzart Dance Theatre/Magnet Theatre performed their "multi-layered exploration of slavery" (Hemphill, 2007a), *Cargo* (2007). Acty Tang, the 2007 Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner, also showed a distinct interest in narrative in his production, *Chaste* (2007), a re-interpretation of the biblical tale of Salome. It is clear from the selection of commissioned works that dance did, in fact, "tell stories at the National Arts Festival" (Hemphill, 2007b).

Examining past programmes of the NAF it becomes evident that the dominance of the dance narrative at the 2007 Festival is not merely a chance occurrence (however fortunate for this investigation) but rather the result of a pre-existing and emerging concern amongst many South African choreographers. Souvenir Programmes for the 1993 and 1994 NAF show a striking lack of dance performance on the main programme compared to the relatively substantial programmes offered today. In both years the two contemporary dance companies featured, namely Moving Into Dance (in association with the now defunct Johannesburg Dance Theatre) and Free Flight Dance Company respectively, present concert programmes comprised of various smaller works. The majority of these smaller performances do not, however, appear to have a strong narrative basis. The programme notes for the particular works refer more to emotions and images than specific stories: "A vivid depiction of moods, nuances and colours of life forms on an African plain" (NAF Souvenir Programme, 1993: 36); "Portrays the human ability to overcome extremes and to continue life through cycles" (*ibid*); "Combines contemporary, jazz and rap as well as rhythm and blues forms of dance" (NAF Souvenir Programme; 1994: 44); "A combination of neo-classical,

contemporary and jazz dance in four movements” (*Ibid*). From these descriptions provided by the companies, it is apparent that the choreographic concerns are situated within the form of the dances and the combination of various dance styles rather than a narrative preoccupation.

With the growth of contemporary dance in South Africa, a significant shift towards narrative becomes particularly visible in the late nineties and into the 21st century, with strongly narrative-based choreographic productions achieving high acclaim. The introduction of the “documentary dance-play” (Gordon in Programme note, *The Unspeakable Story*, 2004), particularly in the work of Gordon’s First Physical Theatre Company (FPTC), combined theatrical elements with physical performance and dance in works such as *The Unspeakable Story* (1995), “a response to an event in the life of surrealist painter Rene Magritte” (production programme, *The Unspeakable Story*, 2004), and *Bessie’s Head* (2000), a work exploring the birth of South African author Bessie Head. These ‘dance-plays’ utilised narrative in conjunction with movement in exploring ‘biographical’ questions⁹. Similarly, dance narratives emerge strongly in the collaborative work of the Jazzart Dance Theatre and Magnet Theatre. Productions such as their 1994 staging of Euripides’ *Medea* (1994) as well as *The Sun, the Moon and the Knife* (1995), and *Rain in a Dead Man’s Footprints* (2004), the latter two based on the history and myth of the /Xam people of the Northern Cape, show a clear narrative interest.

The 2000 NAF, in particular, suggests a growth in the application of dance narratives, featuring the Durban-based Fantastic Flying Fish Dance Company’s production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1995). Presented as

⁹ As Gordon & Tang (2002: 33) note, these biographical explorations were not concerned with presenting a historically accurate portrayal of the events surrounding Head’s birth, but rather offered a performed “fabrication” of these events through a creative response to existing facts.

the dream of a company member after being hijacked, the work is a reinterpretation of the well-known Shakespearean narrative (NAF Souvenir Programme, 2000: 51). The following year, the 2001 NAF again features a prominence of dance narratives on the main programme with FATC's *The Madwoman's Underclothes* (2001), choreographed by Young Artist Award winner Tracey Human as a response to the story of the seventeenth century female Pope, as well as The Dance Factory's version of *Oliver* (2001). The programme also features another FPTC dance-drama *Lake... beneath the surface* (2001), a choreographic collaboration between Gordon and Juanita Finestone, with text by award-winning playwright Reza de Wet. In 2002 the NAF presents a strongly South African dance narrative with *The Suit* (2002), choreographed and performed by Boyzie Cekwana for the Fantastic Flying Fish Dance Company. Based on the short story by South African writer Can Themba, the work explores the theme of lost love, as told through Themba's narrative, articulated through Cekwana's Afrofusion style.

It is at the 2004 and 2005 NAF, however, that narratives of a personal, 'autobiographical'¹⁰ nature become notably visible with a substantial range of narrative-based dance productions present on both main programmes. Sabbagha's *There's no room in this bed* (2004) and *Petra* (2005), both deal with human relationships in the wake of HIV/AIDS, a recurring theme that bears personal connection to Sabbagha who is HIV positive himself (Sichel,

¹⁰ The term 'autobiographical' is used loosely here, referring to those narratives that bear a strong connection to the choreographer or performer expressing them. These narratives are not representations of complete 'life histories' but are autobiographical in the sense that they are sourced from the performer, or that they are constructed from personal memory and/or experience. This use of the term accepts, as Finestone-Praeg (2001: 15) notes, "the embellished nature of memory" connected with autobiography, where the expression of the self emerges from a process of re-invention and imagination rather than 'historically accurate' or factual representations.

2005b). *Petra* (a corruption of 'Peter', the choreographer's first name) was presented as "a deeply personal response" dedicated to "the many other unspoken and silenced South African stories and the people to whom they belong" (Sabbagha in NAF Souvenir Programme, 2005: 39). Finestone-Praeg's *37 Degrees of fear* (2004) also features on the main programme at the 2005 NAF. Reacting to the murder of a local Grahamstown woman, the work presents a series of "memory collages" (production programme: *Red Crushed Velvet*, 2005), drawn from various sources and the performers themselves. Through these collages of memory, the work explores the ways in which violent incidents affect an individual's body, surveying "the subliminal space where the inside and outside collide" (Tipping-Woods, 2005).

Jeannette Ginslov's *Part 1: Fear and Laughter* (2005), featuring on the Fringe at the 2005 NAF, also displays an overt engagement with personal experience on the levels of both its content and its form. The work presents an investigation of emotion, delving into the human experience of both fear and joy on a personal and corporeal level. Comprised of a series of short narratives drawn from the performers themselves, the work reveals "personal insight into their fear and joy" (production programme, *Red Crushed Velvet*, 2005). Ginslov's approach to forming the personal narrative in this work is discussed in greater detail in Part Two.

This initial survey is by no means exhaustive and focuses predominantly on works located in the style of physical theatre or "cross-over theatre" (Hauptfleisch, 1997: 69), where theatrical distinctions are challenged and narrative investigation is arguably more apparent. There are, however, many more instances featured at various festivals by companies outside of this

focus that have not been mentioned¹¹. The growing visibility of dance narratives, and more specifically, of personal narratives, at both the FNB Dance Umbrella and the NAF over the last decade, suggests that many choreographers are engaging with narrative in exploring personal territories and questioning their own identities.

This position, however, exposes an abundance of new questions: Why are these choreographers being drawn to narratives in their dance-making? Why is there a distinct interest in personal enquiry when engaging with narrative? Does narrative encourage this interest? How can a personal enquiry occur through a narrative investigation?

The field of narrative theory offers some likely explanations and responses to these thorny questions.

1.2. Conceptualising narrative

To consider narrative theory, it is useful to contemplate narrative in terms of literary theory. As Vanhaesebrouck (2004) notes, however, there are certain methodological and terminological problems inherent in applying narrative theory (narratology) to a performance discourse since narratology is “a traditionally literary paradigm” and has “always been associated with a logocentric approach to performance analysis”¹². Narrative, however, is not

¹¹ Moving Into Dance Mophatong, for instance, working in the style of Afrofusion, combine elements of traditional African dance and contemporary dance. There are, however, often strong narratives in many of their productions, particularly in their structure and staging. Glasser’s *Passage of Rites* (1997) and *Blankets of Shame* (2006), for instance, both display a strong narrative interest. The former presents a journey from a loss of identity amidst urban violence to an awakening of the self through a return to ritual. The latter work explores instances of abuse, violence and rape through a series of episodic narratives.

¹² This paper was sourced from an online journal and page references are thus unavailable. The URL for the paper is provided in the bibliography.

unique to the written word, but rather, as Cobley (2001) notes, concerns “the showing or telling of events and the mode selected for that to occur” (6).

Narrative can thus be regarded as a mode of illustration, where a single medium (or multiple media) is utilised with the aim of conveying, describing or recreating an event. From this perspective, as Vanhaesebrouck (2004) concurs, “The viewing of the actual performance – and not the reading of a text – acts as the drive for interpretation”.

Cobley (2001) defines narrative as “a form of representation implementing signs, sequence, space and time” (3). In literary terms, narrative comprises of the sequential structure, semantics and chronology of the story being written, incorporating character, narrator, events and situations and the ways in which these are relayed for the reader. These narratives can be linear, non-linear, or episodic in structure, incorporating either a grand narrative or multiple, parallel or meta-narratives (Cobley, 2001: 174). As Porter Abbott (2002) explains, narrative in the 21st century can also be “electronic” (28), incorporating various media such as text, graphics, image and sound. The realm of performance, whether dance or theatre, while approaching narrative along a similar understanding, is positioned in such a way as to incorporate a broader range of media in the creation of a narrative. In terms of theatre, it is not only the composed play-text that creates the narrative, but the many theatrical and performative elements available to live performance as well. In this understanding the performing body, the voice, the particular style or genre, or combination of styles and genres, design elements (including lighting, digital projection, and sound equipment) and staging (the space it is performed in and how) all collude to form a narrative. This collusion is

particularly prevalent in the realm of dance, where the voice is traditionally positioned as subordinate to the moving body, placing the written or spoken word as a less influential force in the creation of narrative.

The position of narrative in dance is a complex one in light of the close relationship traditionally held between narrative and the written word. As Beatty (1986: 31) has noted, dance is a form of performance where narrative is neither a prerequisite nor a necessity. Unlike traditional theatre, where one expects to encounter a story (of some kind), dance (in the western world) has traditionally been less associated with the literal telling of stories, and more with the expression of a specific technique or the abstract expression of images, concepts and emotions. As noted earlier, Beatty (1986: 31) suggests that it is possible to categorise two forms of theatrical dancing, irrespective of the specific style of the choreography: Narrative dances and Abstract dances. These categories, however, are not exclusive but rather act as two poles at opposite ends of a choreographic continuum, with “infinite possibilities of blending” (Beatty, 1986: 34) in-between. She suggests that on one level all dance movement is essentially abstract, and that it is therefore the way in which movement is used that determines whether a dance is narrative-based or an abstract choreography (Beatty, 1986: 33).

Foster (1996: 74) and Au (2002: 29) suggest a similar categorisation of choreography by noting the profound shift evident in the history of ballet, initiated by the advent of the *ballet d'action*, or narrative ballet, in the 18th century. Foster (1996) argues that the introduction of the narrative ballet initiated a “radical redefinition of choreography” (74), positioning the choreographer and the dancer as performers of both technical virtuosity and

theatrical expression. By repositioning the ballet aesthetic as a form capable of relaying “the passions, manner, ceremonies and customs of all nations of the globe” (Noverre in Carroll, 1992: 319), the dancing body succeeded in establishing itself as “a legitimate vehicle for dramatic expression” (Au, 2002: 43) divorced from opera and the need for words, “constituting ballet as an autonomous art form” (Foster, 1996: 253). As Foster (1996: 100-101) notes, this shift resulted in drastic developments within the form itself with a new emphasis on distinctive characters, motivated action, emotion and facial expressions, as well as an increased focus on stage design and musical accompaniment. Whereas ballet had, in the past, functioned primarily as a dialogue with the musical score, both music and choreography now became jointly involved in ‘writing’ the “story of characters and feelings” (Foster, 1996: 113). The dominant thinking at the time was, as Carroll (1992) succinctly states, that “dance must become theatre – rather than a collection of charming steps – if it is to be taken seriously” (320).

During the Romantic period the narrative ballet was embraced with immense rigour, producing the majority of today’s canon of classical ballets. Works like *La Sylphide* (1832), *Swan Lake* (1895), *Coppelia* (1870), *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890), and *Giselle* (1841), which are standard in the repertoires of ballet companies around the world, all position the narrative as paramount in the work.

From this origin in the 18th century, the dance narrative has featured strongly outside of the ballet style, and has recurred (to varying degrees) despite numerous stylistic developments and artistic rebellions in the dance world. The advent of modern dance in both Germany and America in the

early 20th century, rebelling against the patriarchal and codified traditions of classical ballet, also engaged with narrative to a large degree. Epic narrative titles abound in the repertoires of both pioneering and established modern dance choreographers. Martha Graham's *Clytemnestra* (1958), while using a modern dance aesthetic and vocabulary, tackles the ancient Greek tale of a murderous wife. Similarly, *Ausdruckstanz* choreographer Kurt Jooss' *The Green Table* (1932) depicts stories of war, death and human loss. Even the radical *Tanztheater*, emerging in Germany in the 1970s and proposing the combination of any and all theatrical forms, engaged quite distinctly with narratives. As Mulrooney (1999: 297) notes, Pina Bausch, perhaps the most prolific *Tanztheater* choreographer, utilises narrative extensively in her work, evident in her "unprecedented removal of traditional narrative form" (297). By integrating multiple narratives with a physical language, Bausch and her company *Tanztheater Wuppertal* revolutionised the application of narrative to dance expression. Works like *Bluebeard* (1977), *Orpheus and Eurydice* (1975) and *The Rite of Spring* (1975), display an intertextual, multi-disciplinary approach to performing, creating, shaping and expressing the dance narrative.

It is important to note the significant influence of intertextuality on the application of the dance narrative. As Adshead-Lansdale (1999: 8) explains, intertextual thinking has re-positioned the performance text (whether written, danced or spoken) as an amalgamation of numerous other texts, "a series of traces, which endlessly multiply and for which there can be no consensus of interpretation" (8). An intertextual approach to dance theatre (as evident in the work of Bausch) can thus be seen to encourage the collusion of multiple

texts in a performance in such a way that “the reader’s activity becomes one of unravelling threads, rather than deciphering fixed meanings” (8). For theatre and dance, intertextuality and intertextual approaches to narrative, have encouraged the use of multiple, parallel, non-linear and often contradictory narratives in performance. The emergence of intertextuality has also drastically amplified the traditional definition of ‘text’, positing an interpretation of narrative form where “any element of a performance - an image, a movement, a sound - can be treated as a text” (9), and can be ‘read’ by an audience as they create meaning. The creation of narrative form, through an intertextual application, thereby combines all elements of theatre, dance, art and media in the formation and expression of intricate and complex narratives¹³. The influence of intertextuality on narrative form is thus particularly significant, the effect of which has broadened the perception of those theatrical elements available to the choreographer and revolutionised the ways in which these elements are utilised in the formation of narrative.

As much as an inclination for narrative has often survived many stylistic rebellions, it has also been completely shunned. Certain modernist choreographers, such as Merce Cunningham (in American modern dance) and, to a lesser degree, Balanchine¹⁴ (in modern ballet), both refused narratives in their choreography, supporting a formalist approach to dance-making. Similarly, the early American postmodern choreographers, such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton, completely withdrew the

¹³ The work of Pina Bausch and Robert Wilson, in particular, show a profound engagement with an intertextual approach to forming narratives. For more information on their specific applications see Mulrooney, D. (1999) [on Bausch] and Holmberg, A (1996) [on Wilson].

¹⁴ It is important to acknowledge that Balanchine did utilise narrative in some of his ballets, essentially creating two categories of ballets in his repertoire, his narrative dances and his abstract dances.

performance of narratives from their work. Rainer, in her infamous 'No Manifesto', expressed a position that held the abolition of narrative, spectacle and theatricality as central to their working aesthetic. These specific approaches to choreography and their relevance to the position of narrative form are discussed in greater detail in Part Two of this dissertation.

Carroll (1992:319) suggests that dance history in itself can be viewed as a recurring battle between these two prevailing concerns: The propagation of theatricalism (where narrative is embraced) versus that of antitheatricalism (where narrative is refused). In this view, the various developments throughout dance history can be seen as the result of a constant, circular battle between these two camps. Carroll (1992: 319) argues,

Theatricalism is followed by antitheatricalism, which is followed by theatricalism in, to change metaphors, a constant reinvention of the wheel, as successive generations discover that dance is theatrical or that it is not theatrical, depending where one situates oneself in the cycle.

Writing in the early nineties, and with a focus on a dance aesthetic particular to the western world (specifically Europe and America), Carroll's observations are not directly relevant to dance in South Africa. However, if one considers narrative as an aspect of theatricalism and the negation of narrative as antitheatrical, then an increased fascination with narratives in South African choreography can be considered, in light of Carroll's argument, as the inevitable response to a period of overt antitheatricality in the country's dance practice.

This position is problematic within both the general context of South African dance performance as well as the realm of contemporary dance. As noted earlier, contemporary dance and physical theatre are relatively young

forms in the South African dance landscape, having only gained considerable growth in the last decade or so.¹⁵ It is thus problematic to argue for an era of antitheatricalism preceding this growth since the form itself has insubstantial history. As Sofras (1998: 191) notes, during the Apartheid years in South Africa, dance, not unlike the nation's society, was divided and segregated according to race. Since the white 'European' culture constituted the national hegemony, their dance tradition, ballet, was the dominant form of dance. Even ballet during this time was relatively isolated from the rest of the world, due to sanctions imposed on South Africa and the country's exclusion from the Commonwealth. This meant that it was particularly difficult for ballet dancers to tour or collaborate with companies outside of South Africa and to encourage international dancers and companies to perform here (Cooper & Allyn, 1980: 10). Ballet in Apartheid South Africa thus remained strongly classical in its tradition, reflected in the predominance of narrative ballets in the repertoires of its two major companies, PACT and CAPAB¹⁶. The dominant form of theatrical dancing prior to the abolishment of the Apartheid government in 1994, then, seems to propose an overt focus on theatricalism, and not an established antitheatrical tradition integral to the application of Carroll's theory.

¹⁵ It is important to note here that the term 'contemporary dance' emerges in South Africa prior to physical theatre (emerging with the establishment of The First Physical Theatre Company in 1993) and can be considered to have a slightly longer history in the country. Cape Town-based dance studio and company Jazzart, established in the early 1970s by Sonje Mayo, became the Sue Parker Contemporary Dance Company after Parker succeeded Mayo as artistic director in 1978. In 1982 the name was again changed to Jazzart Contemporary Dance Company before becoming Jazzart Dance Theatre in 1986 under Alfred Hinkel's directorship (Jazzart Dance Theatre website). This application of the term to a style based in the fusion of Western styles (such as modern, tap, ballet and jazz) and traditional African dance can be seen to account for the broad nature of the term in South Africa evident today.

¹⁶ This observation is based from an analysis of the works performed and produced by the PACT and CAPAB Ballet companies, the dominant ballet institutions functioning in South Africa during the Apartheid regime, in the years 1962-1980 (Cooper & Allyn, 1980).

A degree of antitheatrical performance is evident, however, in the formalist work of modern, jazz and fusion-based companies and choreographers such as Adele Blank and Christopher Kindo for Free Flight Dance Company, and the early work of the Jazzart Contemporary Dance Company (now Jazzart Dance Theatre) in the eighties and early nineties. As Sonje Mayo (in FNB Dance Umbrella Souvenir Programme, 1997) notes, however, it was only with the establishment of the FNB Dance Umbrella in 1989 that modern dance in South Africa experienced a “veritable dance explosion” (23) due to the exposure and opportunity afforded by this platform. The timing of this ‘explosion’ further problematizes the application of Carroll’s theory to the South African dance context since it occurs almost concurrently with the growth of contemporary dance and the emergence of physical theatre.

While relative and applicable to a western understanding of dance history, this theory seems overly simplistic in accounting for an increased preoccupation with narrative in South African contemporary choreography. A more likely explanation can be found in narrative theory, and towards this end, this investigation returns to a literary discourse and the application of narrative in this field.

1.3. Connecting narrative and identity

Cobley (2001: 21) proposes two perspectives when considering the origin of narrative, one located in psychology and the other in anthropology. He suggests a psychological basis underpinning the human need to structure events and experiences, stemming from an innate “need to store knowledge”

(184). Cobley (2001) argues that this need is, in turn, connected to the anthropological mystery of comprehending the “riddle of life” (27). In this understanding, narrative concerns identity and functions as the “fundamental feature” (117) in the storage of memory and the “formation of human identity” (117). This identity can be understood in terms of the individual as well as the individual’s society, nation or culture. The way in which a nation or society records, stores and ultimately narrates its history is therefore indicative of that specific society and serves as a means to define a collective identity.

Similarly, Porter Abbott (2002) posits narrative as “a way of knowing ourselves” (123), and argues that the structures in which personal experiences, events and situations are narrated are fundamental to the identity of the individual within a greater society. The act of narration is thus a process for an individual to define, discover and clarify personal identity.

It is important to emphasise that it is not what is narrated, or the content of the narrative, that is fundamental to the formation of this identity but rather *the way in which* the content is narrated: its narrative form. As Raggatt (2006: 15) notes, “The telling of a definitive life story presents some serious dilemmas” (15) since it is impossible to assume that one’s life story can be summarised and relayed as a single, uninterrupted monologue, however insightful it may be. Similarly, it is equally problematic to speak of a definitive identity since, as Jamal (2003) notes, identity is not an “inviolable given, but [an] ‘impure’ syncretic field of contestation” (39). It is perhaps more appropriate to speak of ‘aspects’ of an identity, since identity is itself fluid and elusive. This inevitably gives rise to certain problematic questions: Which life story should be narrated? Of which self? It is therefore not only the events themselves within

the narrative that reveal aspects of identity but, more importantly, the “form of representation” (Cobley, 2001: 3) and the particular way in which specific “signs, sequence, space and time” (3) are implemented in the creation of the narrative.

The use of narrative as a means to explore personal identity is an aspect central to psychotherapy (Almond & Almond, 1996; Etherington, 2003; Mills, 1998) as well as drama therapy (Gersie, 1997; Jennings, 1996; Jones, 2005) and educational drama (Bolton, 1998; Johnson & O’Neil, 1984; Wagner, 1976). The “talking cure” (Almond & Almond, 1996: 11), proposed by psychoanalysts, suggests the ‘answers’ to an individual’s problems lie within themselves and their past experiences, and that through the verbal expression of these experiences, mental and emotional growth can be discovered¹⁷. Etherington (2003: 34-35) explains,

Putting stories of traumatic experience into words can itself become another step towards healing and transformation... In telling our stories we are also reaffirming and re-educating ourselves, our experiences and our lives as well as creating new stories.

Drama therapy utilises the self-exploratory function of performed narratives for therapeutic needs. By using theatrical performance through the creation of short dramas, simple narrative situations can be created. These ‘mini-dramas’ function in much the same way as the spoken narrative would in psychoanalysis. As Gersie (1997: 74) suggests, Therapeutic Story-Making, a method for using drama as a medium for therapy, employs performed narratives which allow participants to express in a creative, imagined and

¹⁷ Phelan (1996) notes the role of the body within this traditionally verbal ‘therapy’, and suggests that it is through the physical representation of these narratives and not only verbal performance, that “temporal order” (92) is established. For more see Phelan, P (1996). “Dance and the history of hysteria”.

fictional context experiences or situations that may have been personally traumatic.

Similarly, educational drama utilises the dramatisation of fictional narratives as a means to create meaning, and thus learning, for those participants implicit in the narrative. Educational drama practices, such as those formulated by Dorothy Heathcote in the 1970s, often employ fictional narratives in order to convey to the participants a meaning that is relevant outside of the fictional world, which resounds in their own lived experience.

As Wagner (1976: 45) notes,

As a child sees the relationship between one experience and others that are like it in some important respect, the experience is illuminated, as in an apt metaphor, by the light of that comparison – and a way into a new situation is provided.

Narrative then, within educational drama practices, is employed not only as a medium for learning, but as a tool encouraging personal development as well, where participants can express and explore their own emotions, experiences and beliefs.

Whether regarded as means to define the self within society, as a therapeutic door to the unconscious, or as a developmental and educational tool, the ways in which stories are told ultimately contain complex systems symptomatic of those expressing them. The narrative form of human expression can therefore be regarded as more than the simple relaying of true or fictional stories, but as a composite mode of expression integral to the understanding of individual experience.

1.5. Narrative identity in South Africa

If one accepts that narrative stems from and encourages an exploration of the self within a greater society, then the proposed prominence of personal narratives in South African contemporary choreography is particularly significant. As established earlier, South Africa has undergone fundamental transformation since the dissolution of Apartheid in 1994. These transformations have occurred not only on a political level, but have had considerable ramification on cultural, social and economic levels as well. Feelings of uncertainty are often the result of drastic change, as those intrinsic to that change are faced with the task of reconceptualising their society, themselves and their position within that society. In South Africa, where the foundation of Apartheid concerned the separation of racial identities, its demise represented a considerable shift in the way in which people perceive not only cultural identity, but personal identity as well. Within its segregation of racial identities, Apartheid propagated a system of value attached to these identities, positioning the politically dominant white identity as separate and superior to a politically subordinate black and, therefore, inferior identity. An example of this, as Marlin-Curiel (2001: 164) notes, can be seen in the instance of the white Afrikaner after the fall of Apartheid. Emerging from a past where the “cherished Afrikaner martyr role” (153) was portrayed as superior to other racial identities, after 1994 this identity was confronted with its “less-than-favourable international representation” (150). Marlin-Curiel (2001) notes that after the dawn of the new democracy, the old Afrikaner identity was invalidated, and young white Afrikaner youths found themselves

having to come to terms with “feelings of marginalization, criminalisation and general nervousness” (152), as they began to encounter contradictory histories.

It is therefore not surprising that narrative and personal investigation are prominent features amongst artists and choreographers producing work in South Africa today. As Marlin-Curiel (2006: 38) notes, the use of narrative as a therapeutic tool and medium for redefinition has permeated the country since the advent of the new democracy, with “people reinventing themselves through narrative” (57). Through governmental initiatives such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), where those affected by the Apartheid regime were invited to tell their stories, narrative recollection of the past has been encouraged in order to promote unity in a new society. Central to this procedure has been the understanding that “processes of truth-telling and aesthetic realisation are both necessary to carry out the promotion of unity and reconciliation” (Marlin-Curiel, 2006: 39).

Thirteen years into the new democracy, it is problematic to assert that this identity crisis still holds as much weight as it did in the 1990s. The ramifications of this political shift on social and economic levels, however, continue to bear influence on the individual within the new democracy well into the 21st century. As Fleishman (in Rudakoff, 2004: 151) notes, other issues relative to the political upheaval still resound in a contemporary South African society. He suggests, “Apartheid fermented violence and created a culture of violence” (151), and it is within this violent society that the individual must now reside. Violent themes have consistently been acknowledged as central to the work of numerous theatre and dance practitioners, such as

Peter Van Heerden, Steven Cohen and Paul Grootboom. Both Sichel (2007a; 2007c; 2007e) and Krouse (2007a; 2007b) have noted themes exploring personal experiences of crime, violence and abuse. Sichel wrote of the Stepping Stones programme at the 2007 FNB Dance Umbrella, a platform designed for young dancers and choreographers, "Some politicians may be in denial about the effects of crime, but not the young dancers and choreographers – across communities. Work after work reflected this painful fact" (Sichel, 2007a).

As much as a "culture of violence" (Fleishman in Rudakoff, 2004: 151) permeated through Apartheid, a resultant culture of prejudice is equally evident in contemporary society. In addition to the racist ideals instilled by the Apartheid regime, discrimination in the form of homophobia, xenophobia and sexism still saturate South African society. In the face of this prejudice stands a constitution that declares equal rights and freedoms for all cultures, genders and sexual persuasions. The reality of this inconsistency presents a conundrum for personal identity.

In addition to distinctive changes on a social level, economic shifts have also had considerable effect on artists producing work in South Africa. As Sichel (2004a) notes, the lack of substantial funding for the arts, coupled with the lack of a choreographic centre in South Africa, has resulted in an overwhelming uncertainty amongst dancers, choreographers and companies with regards to their future and function in society. Insufficient funding for contemporary dance companies forces dancers to find work in large-scale western musical imports, which are financially well supported. Similarly, the lack of substantial funding has resulted, in recent years, in the closure of

numerous contemporary dance companies, such as the First Physical Theatre Company and the Fantastic Flying Fish Company in 2006, with other well established institutions like the Tshwane Dance Theatre and Vuyani Dance Theatre “teetering on the brink” (Karras in Sichel, 2007d). Sichel (2007d) suggests that this instability has had significant influence on established choreographers, encouraging them to “delve into their own biographies as dancers”, where questions about identity and their unstable future are reflected in their work¹⁸.

Emerging from a context of political, social and economic uncertainty, with violence, questions of identity and feelings of alienation common to everyday experience, the engagement of narrative in contemporary choreography can be seen as a response to these unstable times. As choreographers continue to consider their personal experiences and locate themselves within this context, a propensity towards narratives in dance provides an artistic and body-centred medium for this exploration to occur.

Thompson (2004) notes that it is important, in places of conflict and those in recovery, to consider not only the content of these narratives but “the structure of their telling and retelling” (150) as well, since “the forms by which stories are retrieved and told reveal complex value systems that need to be closely considered” (150). If one regards narrative form as a defining element of cultural and social traditions, then this must also be questioned when redefining an identity through narrative. This is particularly essential to

¹⁸ An example, as noted earlier in this section, is Gary Gordon’s autobiographic dance production *Go* (2007). As Foss (2007) notes, the work was commissioned by the FNB Dance Umbrella in August of 2006, the same time Gordon’s First Physical Theatre Company was forced to close due to insufficient funding. As Gordon explains, the title of the production stems from the question that arose after the closure of his permanent company: where to go next? (Foss, 2007).

theatrical narratives where certain theatre forms and traditions are often specific to particular cultures and nations. As Thompson (2004) notes, “Theatre in places of conflict can too easily strengthen narratives that maintain the differences sustaining the conflict” (158). He proposes the formation of “meaningful narratives” (151), where the form of the telling is carefully interrogated in order to complement the personal investigation central to the content of the narrative. In this understanding, traditionally western and ‘African’ styles of dance and theatre need to be closely questioned in order to explore new ‘South African identities’¹⁹.

This questioning of theatrical form has, as Jamal (2003: 39) suggests, resulted in a discernible “crisis of identity” (Gunner in Jamal, 2003: 39) for South African theatre, as old conventions are rendered redundant in favour of new content and new forms. This profound probing of form has permeated the country since 1994 with numerous choreographers and theatre practitioners (many of whom were mentioned at the beginning of this investigation) questioning theatrical divides by employing both theatre and dance traditions in their work (Alcock, 1999; Fleischman, 1997; Gordon, 1999; Hauptfleisch, 1997). Fleischman (1997) notes that the growth of dance in South Africa in the 1990s has seen a “narrowing of the gap between dance and theatre” (208). Beneath this interrogation of theatrical forms lies a belief that was itself central to the formal experimentation characteristic of the German *Tanztheater*, that “reality cannot always be danced... it would be neither efficient nor believable”

¹⁹ It is important to note here that this distinction between Western and African theatre forms was also a division upheld during Apartheid, with the exception of political protest workshop theatre in the 1970s. As Rudakoff (2004: 128) and Hauptfleisch (1997: 119) note, theatre in South Africa was largely categorised along racial lines, understood as a series of dichotomies: English/Afrikaans, black/white, indigenous/imported, text-based/workshop, popular/political, ritual/performance, etc.

(Bausch in Sanchez-Colberg, 1997: 46). This does not imply that an attempt at realism is required but rather asserts that traditional theatrical divisions limit the expression and questioning of complex identities and lived experience. As Fleishman (1997) suggests, fundamental to both physical theatre and dance theatre in South Africa is the centrality of “the physical image” (199). He argues that the body in performance (as opposed to the spoken text) is “multivalent, ambiguous and complex” (Fleishman, 1997: 207), and thus appropriate for a South African society that is “struggling to deal with the uncertainties of a changing reality” (207). This “somatic emphasis” (Alcock, 1999: 50) in dance theatre, as Alcock (1999) explains, does not reject the use of text and spoken words but rather “relegates it to just one of the expressive elements to be utilised in the construction of the work” (55).

With an apparent embracing of theatricalism, South African choreographers are dealing with narrative on a significantly personal level and collaborating across theatrical media in realising the form of these narratives. The work of choreographer Jeannette Ginslov, which uses a multi-disciplinary and multimedia approach to the creation of her dance theatre, is an example of this shift towards narratives of a personal nature. Speaking of her early career Ginslov explains,

I was very caught up with the political times we were living in... And I was reflecting back what society’s problems were all about, issues I suppose. And then the big issues, big political issues; what was wrong with the country at that time. (Personal interview, 2005²⁰)

Later works, like *Hinterland* (1998), *Written in blood* (1998), *Part One: Fear and Laughter* (2005), and *Breaking the Surface* (2006), however, display a

²⁰ This interview was conducted by the author and is unpublished. A transcription of the interview is attached as Appendix B.

growing interest in personal territories as sites for investigation in her work. Ginslov notes of her work, “The concerns are becoming more and more about the small self and what drives that person” (personal interview, 2005). This approach treads the boundaries of autobiography as she places the performing body as a central thematic and expressive element. With reference to *Written in blood* (1998), a response to a gruesome murder Ginslov had read about in the newspaper, she explains,

The work is not *the* story of violence in South Africa. I cannot claim to write it. We are all a part of a story and we are making it up and part of it as we go along. Each person has a her/history that is personal and part of the whole. (Ginslov, 1999: 67) [Emphasis hers]

She emphasises here the role of the performing body in the creation of narrative and explains, “The choreographer attempts to engage the body differently. The choreographic process incorporates the individual texts of the dancer’s body and personal history” (69).

In a similar vein, critically acclaimed choreographer Vincent Mantsoe describes a choreographic approach that is also concerned with the relationship between the personal narrative and the expressive body of the performer - what he calls “personal legend” (Mantsoe in Barnes, 2004: 33).

As Barnes (2004: 32) elaborates,

The dancing body whether it is black, white, brown or yellow, is not biologically different but is imbued with individual lived experiences and varied embodiments of dance knowledge... For Mantsoe, this particular encounter with alternative culturally specific dance aesthetics, coupled with reflections on his childhood experiences in dance with his family in Soweto, form his choreographic inspirations.

In this way, Mantsoe’s work emerges from a process of ‘translation’, where lived experience and bodily experience (of various ways of moving) come together through the act of choreography and are interpreted within the body

to be expressed *by* the body. The connection between Ginslov's notion of the 'small self' and Mantsoe's 'personal legend', can therefore be seen to suggest an acknowledgement, and an emphasis even, of the performing body and the way it is engaged in the 'telling' of personal narratives.

1.5. Towards narrative form

Thus far, this investigation has concerned itself with providing a greater understanding of the notion of narrative and, more specifically, the position of narrative in dance, choreography and performance in South Africa. The social, political and economic context of South Africa, post-1994, has been discussed and offered as an environment that can be seen to encourage and propagate an engagement with narrative in dance and choreography. It has been shown that, in addition to this apparent propensity for narrative, there is a distinct inclination for personal narratives in the work of numerous choreographers active in the realm of contemporary dance. This inclination, in turn, has been proposed as further evidence for a profound questioning of identity amongst choreographers that is connected to the shifting environment of the country after 1994, as well as the historical development and application of narrative in numerous forms.

Similarly, this chapter has suggested a distinct interrogation of the forms by which these narratives are constructed, with a growing number of companies and choreographers questioning traditional theatrical divisions in their work by combining both theatre and dance elements in their work. It is

this investigation of form that Part Two of this thesis will consider in greater detail.

Part Two: 'Somewhere in the middle'

On Form

2.1. A question of form

In his interview with Krouse, Greco proposes that a hindrance to experimentation and the development of contemporary South African choreography is this "need of the choreographer to talk about the social aspect and the political aspect" (Greco in Krouse, 2006: 2). As discussed in the previous section, the questioning of the socio-political climate is, however, also valuable as a means to explore identity in a shifting socio-political context. Rudakoff (2004: 127) suggests that it is necessary for a changing society to re-interrogate the forms by which its stories are represented and told, and to discover new forms, situations and audiences. The 'freedom' from this apparent conundrum therefore lies in the combination of these two concerns, where socio-political content is coupled and complemented by an interrogation of form. It has been established that experimentation with form has occurred alongside the collaboration of theatre and dance aesthetics in South Africa in recent years. But is this enough? Does an integrated dance theatre prove adequate for the expression of individual experiences within a complex society?

Sichel and Krouse have, in previous years, articulated a need for greater experimentation with regards to form in South African choreography (Krouse,

2006; 2007b; Sichel, 1999; 2000; 2004a). Speaking of the 2004 FNB Dance Umbrella, Sichel (2004a) posed the question: Are SA's dancemakers treading the bored? At this particular festival Sichel (2004a) noted a distinct "lack of individuality and process" where "no matter how creative the work and technically secure the dancing, the choreographer couldn't transcend her or his own influences". Krouse (2007b), speaking generally of South African choreography, legitimated this observation and noted: "Unfortunately some local choreographers see the opportunity to perform primarily as an opportunity to design new frocks" (3).

There are, however, several contemporary South African choreographers who do display a distinct engagement with form in their recent work, some of which are discussed later in this investigation. Recently, growing evidence of experimentation with form has been observed. Sichel (2006b) noted of the 2006 FNB Dance Umbrella that "barriers [were] broken by what dancemakers had to say, and how they said it" and declared: "There was enough innovation... to justify the terms 'art form' and 'dance industry'". Of the 2004 Dance Umbrella, Krouse (2004) noted significant experimentation, specifically in relation to performance space, and suggested,

Choreographers seem determined to break out of the confines of their medium. With each passing year the FNB Dance Umbrella advertises more and more of its programme away from sanctioned theatre spaces. (Krouse, 2004)

From these initial observations it seems that, although notable innovation is becoming more prevalent in South African contemporary dance, there is room for further experimentation. This poses a call for an extensive interrogation of form in which the mere combination of theatre and dance-based traditions is

transcended to include a creative and intelligent questioning of the forms by which stories are told.

It must be noted that the relationship between content and its form is fluid and shifts between various art forms, performance styles and, as Carroll (1992: 319) suggests, historical periods. Conceptualising of the notion of form thus requires focus on those choreographic practices relative to both antitheatrical and theatrical traditions. The interrogation of form within an antitheatrical tradition is particularly informative for this investigation as it is within this approach that formal experimentation is considered paramount to the overriding aesthetic.

This preliminary investigation of form is situated predominantly within those choreographic practices occurring in Europe and America, where attention to form is arguably stronger, and where the distinction between specific artistic 'movements' is clearer (Barnes, 2005: 25). The context of this deliberation is also useful as a means to locate Greco's own position (as a foreign choreographer working in the international context) and reveal the specific frameworks underpinning his observations. The purpose of this investigation is not to value European and American choreographers against South African choreographers, but rather to a) gain a greater understanding of the notion and workings of form, b) to consider the various ways in which experimentation with form has occurred in specific artistic contexts, and c) to investigate the implications of an increased awareness of form in South African dance practice.

2.2 Questioning form

The position of narrative in dance has shifted alongside numerous stylistic and formal transformations throughout dance history. Similarly, the notion of form has also undergone considerable change. In the past, form has been understood as the “material object” (Bourriaud in Allsop, 2005: 1), that is, the effect of composition and “fixed structural frameworks on the materials and contexts of performance” (Allsop, 2005: 1). This conception is echoed by Minton (1986) who, writing two decades ago, equates this term with the “overall shape of a piece of choreography” (6). She suggests,

In learning to choreograph, you need to develop a sense of how to give overall form to a composition. One way to describe the development of a dance is to say that the choreography has a beginning, middle and conclusion or end. Each of these parts fits together to form a whole, with each part essential to that whole. (Minton, 1986: 1)

Minton (1986: 14) goes on to include other concerns when approaching form, such as compositional structure, intention, style, subject matter and title. While these are certainly true of form, this conception is excessively narrow and ignores certain fundamental aspects associated with the form of a dance work, especially in a context where integrated theatre forms like performance art and physical theatre are continually pushing the boundaries of ‘traditional’, or perhaps mainstream, performance.

Allsop (2005) suggests a significant shift in the association of the term and defines form as “the how, where, with and for whom performance takes place” (1). Allsop argues that this conception opens up the notion of form to include an emphasis on the process of sharing an artwork or event, which he suggests occurs in

an always wider and more complex set of associated processes and contexts that make connections (in terms of performance) between texts, histories, political economies and psychodynamics. (Allsop, 2005: 1)

The form of a theatrical performance then refers not only to the finished “material object” (Bourriaud in Allsop, 2005: 1) presented to an audience, but to the processes of transformation and translation that constitute the performance and the context in which it is created and performed. This understanding of form implies a significant relationship with time - what Allsop calls the “yet-to-come” (1) - namely its relation to politics, to space, and to cultural environments. He suggests,

Performance then can be understood as a fully contextualized and contextualizing process of which ‘form’ is a dynamic, a point of visibility (rather than a fixed repeatable framework) that gives rise to the question ‘how does it work?’ rather than ‘what does it mean?’ (Allsop, 2005: 1)

This understanding is of particular relevance to contemporary process-based performance, where the dynamic between audience and performer is often one of collusion and interaction, and reflects the shifting nature of form as a notion relative to changing modes of performance.

As dance aesthetics have changed over the centuries (along with the application of narrative), so have their particular approaches to form. As Levin (1983) suggests, “for the modernist aesthetic, the ‘form’ of the work and its ‘content’... are one and the same” (127) where the revelation of the artwork’s own defining conditions constitute a significant concern of that artistic period. In this way, the question of ‘how does it work?’ dominates over what the artwork essentially means, where “the subject of art is itself” (Banes & Carroll, 2006: 52) and what it reveals is itself. Clement Greenberg, whose writings on modernism in fine art are perhaps historically the most influential,

maintained that the essence of painting is that it is a flat surface, and as Banes & Carroll (2006: 51-52) suggest,

Most of twentieth century painting became the story of bringing this fundamental fact about painting to light. The cubists shattered the putative illusion of depth in realist pictures and called attention to the painted surface until, step by step, the surface of the canvas and the picture plane became as one.

In dance, the abstract ballets of George Balanchine (such as *Duo Concertant* [1972] and *Symphony in Three Movements* [1972]) displayed a similar concern with form and its blurred, synonymous relationship with content. As Levin (1983) explains, Balanchine's fascination with the form of choreography saw the exclusion of overt narrative and theatricality in many of his abstract ballets²¹, to reveal the "hidden beauty of its simpler, quintessential structure" (125), emphasising the "classical syntax of human mobility" (131). Banes & Carroll (2006: 55) suggest that this focus on the syntax of classical ballet ultimately reveals the fundamental concern of ballet: the phenomenon of grace and the corporeal body's simultaneous engagement with gravity and apparent weightlessness. Balanchine regarded form as intrinsically expressive, and therefore capable of conveying quality and expression without content and without narrative. He maintained that expression was in the choreography itself and that dancers "have only to dance the choreography to express it" (Copeland, 1986: 7).

Banes & Carroll (2006: 56) suggest a similarity between the choreography of Balanchine and Cunningham in their respective approaches to form. While both engage with the physical language of ballet, the connection lies in their withdrawal of narrative and the subsequent emphasis on movement and its

²¹ It is important to note that not all of Balanchine's ballets are abstract. Certain ballets, such as *Apollo* (1928), did engage with narrative and a more 'classical' structure and style.

qualities, a concern that is central to Cunningham's aesthetic (Acocella, 1997; Banes & Carroll, 2006; Copeland, 2000). As Acocella (1997: 3) explains, Cunningham's choreography has no narrative and no intended emotionalism (despite claims to the contrary in the early eighties), where choices are made according to the movement and form of the dance. There is a profound questioning of form in Cunningham's choreography, and more specifically, a questioning of the medium. Banes & Carroll (2006: 57) suggest that Cunningham's blocking in his choreography, that is, the way in which the choreography decentres attention from any one fixed area in favour of multiple centres and focal points, "calls attention to the constructed nature of traditional compositional strategies... [as well as]...the artifice of Cunningham's own movement designs" (57). They argue that by presenting the spectator with shifting, often simultaneous, points of focus, attention is drawn to the idea that our means of perceiving dance is traditionally an aspect that is orchestrated and composed, thereby revealing the artifice and encouraging conscious awareness of the "basic structures and conventions that constitute the medium" (Banes & Carroll, 2006: 57).

The extent of Cunningham's insistence on form distinguishes his work from other 'historic' modern dance choreographers like Graham and Humphrey, whose dances still displayed a distinct engagement with content and narrative. Copeland (2000: 43) suggests that Cunningham's experimentation with form can be seen to stem from the choreographer's own attempt to liberate himself from meaning. He explains that Cunningham's utilisation of a

ballet movement vocabulary (as a source²²) and the employment of chance as a compositional strategy, both serve to distance the choreographer (and his personality) as well as any distinctive meaning in the choreography (Copeland, 2000: 43). As the ballet vocabulary is relatively “ready-made” (43) and pre-exists his own personal movement preferences and tendencies, Cunningham is able to distance himself and “subvert his own tastes, inclinations and subconscious habits” (43). Similarly, the use of chance methodologies in the form of specific works prevents any kind of narrative or prescribed meaning from informing the choreography²³.

Cunningham, however, does not suggest that his choreography is not expressive, but rather that the movement and form of his dances do not express any particular thing. As referred to earlier, in the early eighties there emerged considerable debate regarding a perceived “new emotionalism” (Acocella, 1997: 6) in Cunningham’s work. Cunningham’s response to this was: “It’s just in their eyes... I don’t put it in the piece. My choices are made in the movement” (Cunningham in Acocella, 1997: 7). Acocella (1997) notes that in Cunningham’s choreography, dance is not simply the medium but the story as well, and while there is perceived meaning in the movements, this is a kind of “pre-meaning” (15), not devoid or isolated, but rather stemming from the movement of the body in space. Acocella (1997) suggests that meaning within the form of Cunningham’s choreography is there, but “*in statu*

²² It must be noted that while Cunningham’s choreography does exhibit elements of a ballet vocabulary and a ballet style, the movements themselves are not directly transposed in Cunningham’s choreography, but rather manipulated, altered and shifted. This is what is meant by the use of the word “source”.

²³ For more on Cunningham’s use of chance in his recent choreography see Reynolds, D. (2004). The possibility of variety. *Dance Theatre Journal*, 20(2), pp.38-42. This article also expands on the way in which Cunningham engages with technology in his choreography to further complicate prescribed meaning.

nascendi" (15), that is, in the moment of creation. This notion of perceiving emotion through form is of particular interest to this investigation, and is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The extensive experimentation and questioning of form central to the American postmodern dance movement in the 1960s is also a particularly pertinent period to consider. Banes (1994) notes that this period "represents a turning point in dance history...and signified a changing of the guard in terms of generation...and a cultural shift in authority" (211) as it was during this time that many choreographers like Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton (known as the 'Judsonites' or 'Judson Church Group') began a significant questioning of form and of the nature of performance. As Banes (1980: xvii) explains, these early postmodern choreographers tried to pry open the defining boundaries of what constituted dance and choreography, asking the question, 'what makes one movement a 'dance' movement but another pedestrian', and exploring questions of "time, space and the body" (xix). The Judsonites questioned performance traditions, spectator-performer relationships, interdisciplinary connections, and the methods and devices employed in choreography. They proposed that "a dance was a dance not because of its content but because of its context – i.e., simply because it was framed as a dance" (xix). Burt (2000) argues that this period of experimentation with form and its search for "pure dance" (26) was underpinned by notions of freedom. He explains,

The freedom to discover new formal possibilities when unfettered by the outmoded expectation of telling a story or expressing psychological motivation; and the freedom to find new ways of motivating movement when released from the constraints of conventional dance techniques. (Burt, 2000: 26)

The experimentation with form during this time concerned the movement language specifically, which was fore-grounded and scrutinised to reveal choreographic structures (Banes, 1992: 10). Everyday tasks and actions - what Banes & Carroll (2006: 62) refer to as “found movements” - were placed in the context of dance performance so that they could be questioned and appreciated. In this way, the action itself is not important but rather how the action is performed (Banes & Carroll, 2006: 62), illustrating Allsop’s observations of form discussed earlier. Banes & Carroll (2006: 62) argue,

By recruiting the danceworld frame – an optic strategy that categorically showcases movement as worthy of attention for its own sake – the postmodern choreographer invites us to nurture a fascination for the kind of movement that surrounds us every day.

At the same time, however, this notion of ‘performing the mundane’ was also problematised in the casual, unimpassioned manner in which the choreography was performed. Copeland (1986) describes this anti-expressionistic feeling as “the objective temperament” (6), and suggests that it is a sensibility shared by both choreographer and audience that is objective (rather than subjective) and emphasises form and the optical (rather than tactile) (7).

Banes (1980: xvii) suggests that this recontextualisation of the mundane was also highlighted in another of the Judson’s innovations within the form of dance, namely space. Dance performance rejected the conventional theatre and denounced the presentational framing of the proscenium stage, opting instead for nontheatrical performance spaces like galleries, lofts and church halls (Banes, 1980; 1993; 1994). Brown, in particular, revolutionised the role of the performance space, making dances in conventionally unused spaces like walls, rafts, rooftops and the sides of buildings (Burt, 2000: 28). Similarly,

space was explored in terms of its articulation, as many choreographers like Brown, Childs and Rainer applied geometric and mathematical patterns as choreographic devices and structures (Banes, 1992: 10).

One needs only to consider Rainer's *Trio A* (1965) to observe the significant engagement with form during this time. As Banes & Carroll (2006) suggest, *Trio A* represents Rainer's "attempt to include all the movement possibilities she could imagine" (65), creating a vocabulary that appears ordinary but is not directly associative of any particular pedestrian gesture or activity. The impetus behind this work stems from the choreographer's questioning of the relationship between process and performance (Banes, 1980: 41) and an attempt to challenge the elitism of dance as a performing art. Robertson & Hutera (1988: 216) maintain that the creation of *Trio A* was largely concerned with forming a work that could be suited to all body types, ages, degrees of training and ability so that each performance had a distinct manner while still remaining essentially 'right', thereby revealing the performer's individual sense of movement.

The form of *Trio A* is open to alteration and can be performed as a solo, as a duet, or as group dance, in unison, canon, relay fashion or as an improvisation, to music, without music, naked, clothed, in a large space, or in an intimate space (Rainer, 2005: 3-7). As Rainer explains,

Two primary characteristics of the dance are its unmodulating continuity and its imperative involving the gaze. The eyes are always averted from direct confrontation with the audience via independent movement of the head or closure of the eyes or simple casting down of the gaze. (Rainer, 2005: 3)

By employing non-virtuosic movement, with no variation and no discernable phrasing, and by breaking the performer-spectator dynamic in not

acknowledging the presence of an audience nor a defined 'front' - what Copeland (1986) calls "the natural doer" (7) - Rainer questions the defining conditions of dance and challenges modes of signification.

Similarly, the revelation of the process of choreography in the work raises interesting questions about performance and its form, and shifts attention to "what's being performed rather than... who's performing it" (Copeland, 1986: 7). As Robertson & Hutera (1988) note, many performances of *Trio A* have directly involved the rehearsal process, where, in addition to the almost 'rehearsal-like/marking' quality of the performance, the performer is shown learning the movement on stage and being corrected, or marking the entire dance in view of the audience before actually 'performing' it (Banes, 1980: 53).

As Briggins (1988: 12) notes, the American postmodern choreographers' preoccupation with form and formal structures gave rise to a degree of abstraction particular to postmodern dance and fundamental to later developments, such as New Dance and contemporary European dance (Briggins, 1988; Burt, 2000; Jordan, 1992; Lepecki, 2004). Many of these concerns continue to be explored today in the work of many contemporary European and American choreographers.

Rosemary Butcher is one such choreographer, working in Britain, where an overt consideration of form is particularly evident. Having spent time in New York in the late sixties and early seventies, Butcher's choreography displays a clear Judson influence in terms of its "minimalist approach... [and] simple, economical movement vocabulary" (Jordan, 1986: 7) and clear questioning of form (Anderson, 2006; Butcher, 1998; Dodds, 1997; Jordan,

1986; Jordan, 1992; Meisner, 1997). Anderson (2006) describes Butcher's work as "sparse, seemingly devoid of statement and without the theatrical kicks of crescendos and surprises" (32) and suggests that her rejection of "traditional spectacle" (32) and challenging of barriers between art forms, have placed her in a grey area, somewhere between dance and performance art. This blurring of definition is not surprising since the artistic ethos of the choreographer is based on the idea that "dance could be anything, be performed anywhere... [where]... the idea behind the work [is] important and not the finished work itself" (Butcher, 1998: 19).

Meisner (1997: 25) suggests that Butcher's constant re-considering of the performance space provides evidence of her efforts to reform her dance aesthetic. Like the Judsonites, Butcher performs her work in "untheatrical locations" (25) like art galleries, studios and outside spaces, and combines various art forms (visual and aural) to establish numerous inlets for an audience to engage with the performance. Jones (1998: 86) proposes that these nontheatrical settings expose the nature of Butcher's work and reveal its presence in real time, thereby "focusing attention on the subtlest of movements or even stillness" (Davis, 1984: 37) for the viewer. This approach encourages active engagement by the audience and a "refreshing experience... [of]... deep, quiet pleasure" (Jordan, 1992: 167). This is evident in Butcher's *Hidden Voices* (2005), performed in the Turbine hall of the Tate Modern in London, as one of three solo performances. Mallinson (2005) notes the benefits of this space for the work, suggesting that the various noises inherent in the space (such as ventilators and electric sub-stations) ultimately contribute to the forming of the performance. Butcher's approach to

form (in this case the solo form), her focus on simple, pedestrian movements, and an engagement with a nontheatrical performance space, combine to create a performance that Mallinson (2005) recalls as “intensely felt”, “truthful” and “sincere”. In this way the form, while not necessarily positioned as more important than the content, is shifted in such a way as to challenge accepted boundaries of performance and to complement the conceptual idea behind the performance.

Jonathan Burrows is another contemporary British choreographer interrogating form in his work. At the heart of his aesthetic, suggests Boxberger (1996), is “a new faith in the ‘medium’, the conviction that dance needs no heavy significance or high-tension dynamics” (46) but requires a constant challenging “of conventional boundaries... the reformulation of a movement vocabulary and the reconfiguration of the dancing body” (Perazzo, 2005: 2). Burrows approaches choreography as a process of layering, revealing layers and cutting holes in these layers (Meisner, 1996: 4). The aim is thus to encourage a two-way communication between audience and performer, in the present moment of performance, by investing in a precise movement vocabulary and by exploring questions of space and time (Meisner, 1996: 5). Burrows (in Greenfield, 2004) argues that dance, as a performance form, is “fundamentally flawed” (10) due largely to the fact that, unlike music where the drive to listen is stronger than the drive to play music, the world essentially dances, but does not watch dance. He suggests that the western tradition of dancing for a static audience is particularly absurd and maintains that audiences need to be engaged, challenged and compelled by dance performance (Greenfield, 2004: 10).

In interrogating form, Burrows insists on dance's "ability to be relevant to and expressive of the human condition without the trappings of theatre" (Duerden, 1995: 48) and employs a significant amount of abstraction in the creation of a movement language and physical images. He explains:

You start with a 100% solution which would be say 100% image... Then, as in homeopathy, you dilute it by one hundred times – the actual solution gets weaker but the potency gets stronger. So once the images were found, the idea was to dilute it by concentrating more and more on the physical sense of it and letting go more and more of the emotional sense of it. Thereby producing something which was less confrontational, less demanding and therefore more powerful. (Burrows in De Marigny, 1994: 9)

This process places a strong emphasis on the form of Burrows' choreography and displays a profound faith in the ability of form to convey expression without overt emotional investment. In addition, Burrows champions a dynamic approach to making dance, what he refers to as "playing the game harder" (Burrows, 2002: 29). By this Burrows proposes a constant questioning of form by "digging around... and pushing hard in different directions" (29), staying with an idea and going "deeper" (29) by exhausting its possibilities, thereby unearthing the optimal expression of that idea.

The Quiet Dance (2005) is one such work where this engagement with form is particularly strong. As Burrows (in Perazzo, 2005) explains, the work evolved out of meticulous interrogation of the action of two bodies walking, what Burrows calls, "finding the 'music' of it" (5). Although the movement material in the piece is minimal (in the sense that there is not a lot of it), it is the stillness and slowness of the journey that invites an audience to enter into the work and to "look carefully and quietly at small differences" (6), rather than leaping out from the stage and "pushing you back into your seat" (7).



Similarly, Burrows' engagement with film shows an equally considered approach to form, where the dance is never merely filmed as it is, but rather formed in collaboration with the camera. In Burrows' *Blue Yellow* (1995), choreographed for the Royal Ballet's Sylvie Guillem and directed by Adam Roberts, the dancer is filmed from the perspective of the audience, from the outside through a door, as though "eavesdropping" (Constanti, 1995/96: 4). The camera does not move with Guillem as she dances, but remains relatively stationary, never venturing too close to the dancer, so that an interesting dynamic between the "appearance/disappearance of the dance and of the dancer's body" occurs (Perazzo, 2006). As Constanti (1995/96) suggests, the work is both "intimate and austere" (4) and, by not manipulating our focus (by close-up frames, for example), Burrows and Roberts emphasise the "expressive range of other parts of the body" (4).

Blue Yellow, with its careful approach to form by both Burrows and Roberts, constantly draws attention to the interplay of opposites, of appearance and disappearance, central to the work. Perazzo (2006) suggests that this is achieved by combining both "pedestrian and virtuosic" elements in the choreography, using the opposing colours of blue and yellow in the setting (Guillem dances in a yellow room, but is viewed through the frame of a blue door), and by the interplay between music (a score by Kevin Volans) and silence.

The choreographers discussed thus far all display a distinct engagement with form and a distrust of the expressiveness displayed by other modern choreographers (such as Graham and Wigman) and, in some cases, a clear rejection of narrative and theatricality. While some of these choreographers

position form as a solitary concern and completely reject content and narrative, others can be seen to engage with both content and form, but with a discernable and significant interrogation of form. For the choreographer working with narrative, these formal innovations, although often rooted in antitheatrical endeavours, are valuable in the formation of narrative and the creation of meaning through narrative for an audience.

2.3. Perceiving form

The previous discussion may seem somewhat tangential to the original investigation, especially since an analysis of South African dance history would arguably reveal differing developments in relation to form. Its purpose in this investigation is to illustrate the innovation and experimentation with form in dance in the western world, a concern largely unparalleled in South African dance practice. The reasons for this proposed lack of formal experimentation are plentiful and would constitute a thesis in itself. Certain obvious explanations, however, have already been suggested in this paper and concern the isolated and segregated history of the country under Apartheid governance. As mentioned in the first chapter, international sanctions and exclusion from the Commonwealth limited exchange with foreign dance companies resulting in a substantial restriction on South African dancers and choreographers in terms of their ability to witness and experience the artistic experiments of international dance practitioners.

Similarly, as Kealiinohomoku (1998) suggests, a significant lack in “scholarly interaction among dance scholars from South Africa and the rest of

the world" (177) further hindered local choreographers from participating in current international dance discourse. In addition, there was a distinct lack of "established dance scholarship and discourse" (Finestone-Praeg, 2001: 13) *within* South Africa, what Finestone-Praeg (2001) calls "our sad history of illiteracy" (13). With dance forms segregated, undervalued and isolated from the innovation in the rest of the world, combined with a silent theoretical and critical discourse, it is not surprising then that South African choreography has been tentative in its experimentation with form.

But why is an interrogation of form necessary in the expression of personal narratives? Thus far this thesis has proposed the discovery of new forms as essential to the expression of shifting identities. But this proposal only leads to another question: How can an interrogation of form be seen to assist the process of expressing a personal exploration?

Metheny (1968: 38) proposes a possible answer to this query, situated in the way in which an audience perceives performance. She suggests that the act of perceiving dance produces "kinaesthetic perception" (Metheny, 1968: 38). In this way, by observing danced movement, the body of the observer is able respond directly to the form of the performance. Metheny proposes two ways in which this response can occur. Through visual experience of the performance, the observer can be

prompted to... construct a miniature replica of the observed patterns by contracting [their] own muscles or by increasing the tension in the muscles which would be involved in creating such an action. (Metheny, 1968: 38)

The observer, in this sense, experiences a personal kinaesthetic sensation rooted in the visual stimulus. Alternatively, as Metheny (1968) suggests, the observer can be promoted, either by a sound, image or smell, to evoke a

“kinaesthetic sensation” (38) of something they have experienced themselves in their own lives.

Fenemore (2003) suggests a similar hypothesis, and proposes that appropriate experimentation with form (in terms of space, time, and performer-spectator dynamics) can encourage a “somatosensory or somaesthetic experience” (107) for an audience member. As Fenemore (2003) explains, this is a sensory experience that is not specific to a singular sense organ, but one that can occur “anywhere in the body” (107) and be localised outside of the body. The somaesthetic experience is most accessible when traditional distinctions between performer and spectator are challenged, where both parties are active participants, aware of and responsive to each other. The performer is thus ‘seeing’ and ‘being seen’ to the same degree as the spectator is ‘seeing’ and ‘being seen’. This theory also applies to the other senses, where both performer and spectator are active in ‘hearing’ and ‘being heard’ and ‘touching’ and ‘being touched’ (Fenemore, 2003: 110). Through experimentation with form (that is, where the performance occurs, who the performance is for and how the performer/spectator dynamic occurs) the audience can be displaced from being “hypothetical members of a wider group in a darkened auditorium” (110) and become, instead, intrinsic sensing and experiential factors within the performance. Fenemore (2003: 109) argues that for spectators the very act of sensing is, in fact, a somaesthetic act, and suggests that this is often discouraged because it can be associated with discomfort or physical anticipation. By approaching form as “visceral-visual” (111) performance (as opposed to an “optical-visual” (111) performance), the content of a

performance becomes less crucial in producing meaning for an audience, and the form of the performance can be used, instead, to 'touch' or 'move' (physically, emotionally or *potentially*) the spectator and their experience of the content (Fenemore, 2003; Boenisch, 2003). This approach to form in performance therefore promotes interaction with an audience rather than a proscenium-framed display where the tendency to 'escape' is more readily available as an option (Fenemore, 2003: 110).

In the points raised above, Fenemore (2003) refers to the actual, physical inclusion of the spectator: bridging the gap between the performance space and auditorium, so that those observing the action have a point of access to experience the action in a sensory way. Fenemore refers to a performance by choreographer Meg Stuart, *Highway 101* (2000), to illustrate this point. During the performance the spectators are physically led from space to space, placed in close proximity to the action of the performance so that, at certain moments, the performers become obstacles to the path of the audience and a physical, tangible connection is made. At one point, Fenemore (2003: 110) explains, performers in a separate space, visible to the spectators through a window, supply a commentary on the audience who are watching them, emphasising this blurring of traditional roles. It is through this creation of a somasensory experience that the form of the performance succeeds in communicating, or perhaps sharing, meaning with the spectator.

The sensory interaction does not, however, need to be as obvious as the example above illustrates. Fenemore (2003), in concurrence with Metheny (1968), extends her argument to suggest that through visceral-visual performance certain somaesthetic sensations "can be developed where

kinaesthetic sensations of movement can begin to exist *without* touch or direct physical manipulation” (112) and can be felt purely on a visual basis. She explains this in relation to Stuart’s work:

The ‘experiencer’ of the ‘visceral-visual’ performance of *Highway 101* might see a performer struggle, sweat or fall heavily and *feel* these evoked in their body through a distribution of certain tensions ... ‘Experiencers’, then, can experience *visual matter muscularly* and be moved by visual input. (Fenemore, 2003: 113)

This idea is concurred by Di Benedetto (2003) who suggests that “theatre is not merely a form of visual art, but also a form of mediated sensory stimulation” (100), where the shaping of the actor/dancer’s body in the performance space becomes a phenomenological experience involving the emotions and the mind, processing a wide range of different stimuli (such as light, sound, touch, smell). Di Benedetto (2003) argues that performance is more than words or feelings, but rather “is a web of cognitive and visceral reactions” (106) accessed via the senses and experienced physiologically.

The importance of form in contemporary choreography, where those steadfast boundaries delegating the politics of performance are continually challenged, is thus far-reaching. Boenisch (2003: 33) suggests that in the 20th century, and continuing into the present, a significant paradigm shift has occurred as digital culture and mass media have become commonplace, an occurrence he dubs “electrONic culture” (33, emphasis his). Connected to this, Boenisch (2003) suggests a profound and increasing interest in the body (its physicality and corporeality) in the field of performance, what he calls the “electrONic body” (34):

ElectrONic bodies are thus alienated bodies – no longer representing any character nor serving any architectural function, but still becoming anything but authentic, real and present. These bodies insist on their *presentation*, which one might even term *presencation*: their

authenticity is constituted only by the fact that they are presented (Boenisch, 2003: 36).

The crux of Boenisch's argument is that as the world and 'culture' change alongside technological developments, theatre (and more specifically, the performing body) assumes the task of "re-programming the spectators' cognitive sensorium" (34) by challenging, subverting and inverting the emerging frameworks of the new 'culture', "distributing new ways of seeing and perceiving the world" (34).

Boenisch refers to Belgian choreographer Anna Teresa De Keersmaeker to illustrate his argument and suggests that her choreographic *oeuvre* presents the spectator with "electrONic bodies" (34) that "explicitly re-programme our [the spectator's] perception of dance" (34). He argues that the bodies in De Keersmaeker's choreographies introduce "new and unfamiliar concepts of bodies...escaping from and contradicting the traditional logic of the spectatorial gaze" (Boenisch, 2003: 36). These bodies are not "moving body-objects" (36), they do not represent characters, nor do they appear as real, natural bodies either, but rather exist in an "in-between field...the gap or fissure between subject and object" (36). Boenisch (2003: 35) argues that the choreography itself, which references abstract minimalism, combines with an unusual expressive quality completely separate from the 'natural' expressiveness of German *Ausdruckstanz* or American modern dance, and presents the dancers not as characters, but not as themselves either. Similarly, the form of her choreography continually challenges accepted structures and boundaries of performance, thereby "re-programming our perception of dance" (Boenisch, 2003: 34). Burt (2004) suggests a significant blurring of the distinction between content and form in

De Keersmaeker's choreography where, through the use of minimal movements, abstracted gestures and repetitive structures, the "resulting tension between the dancers' loss of individuality and the intensity of their performance" (38) creates an "affective quality" (38) as well as "disturbingly intimate moments that challenge preconceptions about the division between public and private" (38). In *Rosas Danst Rosas* (1997), for example, the performers (at one point) come forward and stare at the audience, only to delicately reveal a bare shoulder, while at other times, the dancers make eye contact with each other and exchange secretive signals and knowing smiles (Burt, 2004: 39). As Burt (2004: 39) argues,

De Keersmaeker sets up boundaries and works with clear structures ... but ... her dancers transgress these in an irrepressibly rebellious way to create, or at least give the impression of creating confusion and instability.

Burt (2004), in concurrence with Boenisch (2003), notes that "coping with confusion and instability is, of course, a familiar part of the social experience of globalisation" (39). De Keersmaeker's engagement with form in her choreography can thus be seen to affect the audience's bodies as well (Boenisch 2003: 40). Boenisch (2003: 40-41) argues that in doing this the dancers are

no longer dancing *in front* of our eyes, but *in* our head and *with* our body. But they do not re-programme the audience according to the standard ideologies. They bridge and blur distances, oppositions, roles, and other hegemonic frameworks. ElectrONic bodies thus, above all, tell stories about bodies, about corporealities, not the least about my own body's reality – its own neglected potentialities, and responsibilities. ElectrONic performance hence literally touches the audience – and the audience becomes experience.

In this way, form becomes substantially more than the mere shaping of a dance in a way that compliments and enforces its meaning, but emerges

rather as an active element involved in the transference of meaning on both experiential and sensory grounds, with considerable potential to challenge a politics of perception within a context of global transformation. The way in which a choreographer chooses to form a narrative can therefore be seen to create this meaning to a greater degree than what is essentially being 'said' in the narrative.

2.4. Narrative form in South African choreography.

Returning to the context of South African choreography, it is possible to discern two approaches to forming narratives by companies and choreographers. These approaches operate at the levels of content and form and use narrative as a medium to explore questions of identity. The first approach involves an overt engagement with personal experiences, through narrative, that are relevant to the choreographer and/or performers themselves. This 'Self Narrative'²⁴ has connections with autobiography²⁵ and often involves the performance of personal thoughts, experiences and/or feelings of the performer and/or choreographer within the work. The second approach concerns a re-interpretation and/or response to an 'external' narrative. These 'external' narratives can take the form of existing narratives, whether in the field of dance or literature (such as well-known narrative dances, novels, stories and poems), or as biographical responses to events

²⁴ The terms used to describe these two approaches are unique to this investigation and are the researcher's own.

²⁵ These narratives are autobiographical in the sense that they concern the individual. As noted earlier, the multifaceted nature of 'identity' problematises a conception of autobiography relative to issues of truth and historical accuracy. The use of the term here echoes Cooper Albright (1997: 120) where "autobiography is treated less as a truthful revelation of a singular inner and private self than as a dramatic staging of a public persona... acutely self-conscious".

and/or experiences of *other* people, living or not. Within this 'Sub-Self Narrative' the choreographer creatively responds to these external narratives and in so doing reveals a personal connection *beneath* this greater narrative. The extent of this personal connection can vary from a process of reinterpreting the narrative to reveal its 'common relevance' to an individual or a particular group of people (for example: South Africans, black women, homosexuals etc), to a position where a one-to-one connection is made between the external narrative and the individual expressing it. Both of these applications of the 'Sub-Self Narrative' are illustrated below by reference to Sabbagha's *MacBeth* (2007) and Maqoma's *miss thandi* (2002), respectively.

In order to examine these two categories further, specific works by three prominent South African choreographers engaging with these suggested approaches will be discussed. The analysis of these works and of these choreographers is not extensive, nor does it constitute a critical appreciation of the works themselves. Each work will be discussed only in terms of its general approach to forming narrative, as a means to illustrate these proposed categories. A detailed analysis of Acty Tang's *Chaste* (2007) is conducted in the final chapter of this thesis, and it is here that an in-depth examination of narrative form will be offered.

2.4.1. The Self Narrative - Personal experience as personal narrative

Jeannette Ginslov's *Part 1: Fear and Laughter*, commissioned by the First Physical Theatre Company for the 2005 NAF, can be seen as a fitting illustration of an overt engagement with personal narrative, akin to the 'Self

Narrative' approach articulated above. The work itself, as noted briefly in Part One, is also particularly interesting for analysis since it represents a distinct shift in Ginslov's own choreographic *oeuvre* towards narratives of a more personal nature. As Ginslov clarifies:

I'm fascinated with what human beings do, what we do as a society, and what stories are created around us, even the little ones. They used to be big stories, political stories. What moved South Africans? Now it's like, what moves the person in Grahamstown? What is your story about and why do you find that significant and why is it then significant for an audience? (Personal interview, 2005)

The work is based on a simple conceptual exploration: the expression of basic human emotion. Intended as the first section within a broader investigation, the work deals specifically with the emotions of fear and joy, and references embarrassment, "the mixed emotion arising out of mixing fear and laughter" (Programme note, *Red Crushed Velvet*, 2005: 7). These emotions are presented as a series of short, personal narratives (drawn from the memories of the performers), providing insight into their own experiences of fear and joy for the audience.

An integral aspect of the work is the shared experience of emotion between the performers and the audience who witness the work. For Ginslov, ensuring that "what moved me will move them" (personal Interview, 2005) is crucial to the work so that the narratives shared in the performance are in turn shared by those who see, hear and perceive them. Towards this end, Ginslov employs a multidisciplinary, multilingual, multimedia and intertextual approach to forming the narratives. Multiple theatrical signifiers are employed in forming each narrative, as each story is told verbally, physically, emotionally and visually by all of the six performers. Each narrative is spoken by the performer to whom the story applies, in their language of choice, spoken into

a microphone, while the other performers 'tell' the story using a dance language and physical images. These physical 'tellings' are complemented by the augmented physical expressions and movements of the teller's face, filmed in close-up by an on-stage cameraman, projected onto the cyclorama.

The verbal expression and choreography in the work are geared towards creating a visual and visceral performance, and thus a "somaesthetic experience" (Fenimore, 2003: 107) for the audience. To achieve this effect, Ginslov employs an acting technique (in both rehearsal and performance) called Alba Emoting™. This technique draws on the body's ability to remember, and thus replicate, specific physical and breathing patterns to invoke 'real' (in a physiological sense) emotion (personal interview, 2005). In so doing, Ginslov is able to use the body (and its effect on vocal delivery) as a primary source in accessing these stories located in the past. Formulated by Susana Bloch, Alba Emoting™ involves the recalling of basic emotion by mimicking specific respiratory, postural and facial patterns, called "the effector patterns of emotion" (Bloch *et al*, 1995: 199)²⁶. *Part 1: Fear and Laughter* utilises these patterns in the verbal delivery of each narrative and references these patterns in its choreography by correlating the specific breath rhythms with the rhythmic qualities of the dancing, thereby creating 'real' experiences of fear and joy for the performers and the audience.

The use of multimedia in the work, namely the microphone and projected image, constitutes an integral aspect of the narrative form. By magnifying the aural experience of the verbal delivery of each narrative, and the specific facial expressions and movements associated with its telling, the audience is

²⁶ For a detailed explanation of the workings of this technique see Bloch, S *et al*. Effector patterns of basic emotions. In Zarrilli, P (ed). (1995). Acting (Re)considered. (pp.197-218).

provided with multi-sensory stimulation, and are thus able to interpret each narrative on a distinctly sensory level.

Although presented as a series of short narratives, each individual narrative in the work remains distinctly personal to the person telling it. Each performer thus articulates their story in a personalised way, in their own language, or in a manner suited to the event itself. Stories are told in English, Afrikaans, Zulu, Xhosa and Cantonese. They are whispered (sometimes barely audible), shouted, gasped and delivered lyrically. It is unlikely that any member of the audience is thus privy to the details of the content in its entirety (unless they possess a particularly impressive command of multiple languages). The result of this approach is that a single, purely content-based interpretation of the work is denied, since portions of the actual content are rendered inaccessible either by language or delivery. At one point, a performer (Noni Makhatini) softly whispers her story of embarrassment, which is itself a mixture of English, Zulu and Xhosa. Even though amplified by the microphone, her exact words are difficult to discern. At the same time the story is danced by another performer (Penny Ho Hin) within a make-shift tent created by the other performers with a large piece of red velvet. Makhatini's story of embarrassment is hidden from the gaze of the audience, whose only access to the dance is provided by the onstage cameraman who sneakily films the timid dance from within the tent.

In order to ensure a shared experience with the audience, the end of the work is constructed in such a way as to create a sensation of embarrassment for the audience themselves. As the performers line up along the front of the stage, the audience is bombarded by the sound of all six

performers enthusiastically retelling their stories, as the camera pans across each face, halting briefly to allow each distinct facial articulation to be amplified on the cyclorama. The camera is then turned onto the audience, scanning the crowd, capturing their expressions as they recognise their own faces projected on stage. The performers then burst into laughter, becoming more and more hysterical, as the camera slowly zooms closer and closer onto one, now embarrassed, audience member, thereby allowing him/her to experience the combination of fear and laughter for him/herself.

Both in terms of its content and its form, the work engages with narrative on a personal level, creating an emotionally evocative, often amusing and sensually stimulating experience. Through the forming of each narrative, whether physically, visually or sensually, an attempt is made to convey the emotions themselves for the observer to experience and interpret.

The process of discerning form for a personal narrative, however, can also be approached from a seemingly contradictory perspective, thereby emphasising the problematics associated with self representation and the performance of a multifaceted autobiography. This 'playful' approach to forming the personal narrative is evident in critically acclaimed choreographer Gregory Maqoma's most recent choreographic exploration. As briefly alluded to in Part One, Maqoma's *Beautiful Me* (2007) is presented as the third instalment in his trilogy on beauty, following *Beautiful* (2005) and *Beautiful Us* (2006). The title of this solo performance implies an autobiographical interest, and Maqoma has consistently articulated a distinct interest in history and personal exploration in his work. As Maqoma explains:

My interest in the genre of movement allows me to reflect on my history and the history of my country as well as reflecting on my own Xhosa culture and cultures of others. (Maqoma in Anon, 2007b)

Despite this interest in exploring his own personal history in his choreography, *Beautiful Me* does not tell his 'life story', nor does it attempt to recreate a single lived experience or memory. As Winship (2007) notes, the work is "more a series of conversations", an approach articulated by Maqoma in the performance itself: "I am Gregory Maqoma, an African dancer. I have plenty of exotic stories to sell. Which one would you like to hear tonight?" (Winship, 2007). In the work Maqoma acknowledges the multifaceted nature of identity, and gives testimony to the contributing external forces that have had influence on the creation of this identity as a dancer. As Sichel (2005a) notes, the creation of the work is founded in this acknowledgement of outside influence, comprising choreography by three influential people from Maqoma's own past. In creating the work, Maqoma engages three of his peers; Akram Khan, Faustin Linyekula and Vincent Mantsoe, each to choreograph a two-minute phrase for him in their own particular style. From this external material Maqoma choreographs his 'autobiography'.

This approach to forming an autobiographical exploration is a concern particularly evident in the work of certain contemporary European choreographers, such as Jerome Bel and Xavier Le Roy. Although their investigations stem more from a questioning of issues related to authorial ownership and the commodification of dance, the implications for an investigation of autobiographical form are substantial. As Ploebst (2001: 202) observes, Jerome Bel's work entitled *Jerome Bel* (1995), again a title that implies autobiography, does not actually feature the choreographer himself,

nor does it make any attempt to tell the story of a person named Jerome Bel. The work presents, instead, a multitude of personas, none of them truthful or real. As Ploebst (2001: 201) explains, the work begins with a man who announces to the audience, "I am Jerome Bel". This claim could easily be believed as truthful, unless one knew the 'actual' Jerome Bel. The claim is then problematised by other claims of a similar nature. An older woman claims to be Thomas Edison, another Igor Stravinsky, another announces "I am Hamlet". The form of the work itself thus begins to reveal the ambiguities intrinsic to a claimed autobiography, and in a sense, by not presenting himself, Bel succeeds in making a comment about his own identity.

Similarly, another of Bel's works, entitled *Xavier Le Roy* (2000), presents a further exploration of identity through a playful approach to form. The work is essentially conceived, owned and 'authored' by Bel, but is choreographed by Le Roy, about himself. *Xavier Le Roy*, the work, explores the "dual existence" (Ploebst, 2001: 62) of its choreographer, who exists both as a dancer/choreographer and a molecular/cellular biologist. Le Roy performs himself without ever revealing his face, covering his identity with his hands, clothing or a wig. Constantly emerging from behind a screen, the audience is shown a multitude of characters: Hitler, Charlie Chaplin, Michael Jackson, Marilyn Monroe, and Jesus. As Ploebst (2001: 61) explains, throughout the work the observer witnesses all these characters, but never the performer as himself. At the end of the work the audience is surprised to witness, for the first time, two identically dressed figures emerge from behind the screen, a cheeky allusion to the complex, dual identity of the choreographer.

Maqoma's approach is similar in that he choreographs and forms the performance of himself through sources external to himself. As Winship (2007) notes, however,

Rather than simply demonstrating their work... Maqoma seems to be absorbing their ideas and hanging them on his body, or using them to inspire his own words. You can spot moments that look like they might have come from Akram Khan... Movement, words, memories and remembered email exchanges are all part of the fabric of the piece.

This process of absorbing and translating movement resonates Mantsoe's notion of "personal legend" (Barnes, 2004: 33), where the body of the performer translates past experience, and in this instance, learned physical movements and styles into a renewed expression that is infused with an individual expression and affected by the individual's bodily interpretation . The investigation of the self in *Beautiful Me* is thus also an investigation of the influences contributing to the self. As Maqoma suggests,

I had a challenge of tapping into their adrenalins to discover a part of me, but also a part of themselves... I have a long history with them, but that history never included me looking deeper into their spirits, beliefs, aesthetics and choices. This work gave me a window into their lives... The work resembles a part of them. (Maqoma in Munro, 2007)

Beautiful Me, while engaging with the choreographer's own history and identity through a personal narrative, extends beyond the mere presentation of personal stories by engaging, on a level of form, with the influences connected to the formation of that identity.

2.4.2. The Sub-Self Narrative - Re-Interpretation as personal narrative

In contrast to the 'Self Narrative', the 'Sub-Self Narrative' concerns a process of narrative reinterpretation. In this approach, choreographers respond to and reinterpret existing, external narratives as a way to create a personal

narrative. In a sense, this is a biographical approach, but where the term 'biographical' implies an interrogation of an exterior, impersonal narrative as a means to explore personal connections. This can occur through the narrative representation of another person's experiences (who is either known or unknown to the choreographer), or by reinterpreting an existing narrative as a means to explore issues of experience and/or identity that resonate on a personal level with the choreographer *and* the audience. This is a process of interrogating personal issues through the consideration of someone else's story, or through a narrative that is, on the surface, disconnected from the individual expressing it.

Swedish choreographer Mats Ek is a dance-maker renowned for his reinterpretation of existing narratives, specifically in the realm of ballet. As Poesio (2003) notes, Ek's choreography proposes "radically new, contemporary-flavoured" interpretations of the ballet world's classical canon, such as *Giselle* (1982), *Swan Lake* (1987) and *The Sleeping Beauty* (1996), that often have "little or nothing in common with the structural, technical and stylistic layout of the ballets' standard version". This process, however, does not entail merely transposing mystical swans and fairy princesses into metropolitan settings with contemporary urban personas, but implies "the investigation of narrative alleys, epic paths and metaphorical tunnels... [as] the primary stimulus for re-telling those stories" (Poesio, 2003). Ek uses the term 'magic doors' to describe this approach to narrative form, where multilayered and intertextual narratives (akin to the magic doors in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, which can lead one anywhere) are created to expound the interpretation and relevance of the original meaning. An

example of this interweaving of diverse narratives, as Poesio (2003) notes, can be seen in Ek's 1987 version of *Swan Lake*, where the relationship between Prince Siegfried and his mother is reinterpreted by Ek to reference the relationship between Hamlet and his mother Gertrude in Shakespeare's well-known play. Poesio (2003) suggests that this intertextual reference is not overt but rather is subtly implied, and if spotted by the spectator, provides another layer of meaning and a point of reference for the interpretation of the work by the audience.

This reinterpretation of existing narratives is particularly relevant for a South African dance aesthetic. As cited in Part One, a substantial degree of narrative reinterpretation occurs within the realm of contemporary dance, with institutions like Jazzart Dance Theatre, the Fantastic Flying Fish Dance Company and The Dance Factory, frequently presenting reinterpretations of established narrative texts (*Medea* [1994], *Oliver* [2001], *The Suit* [2002]). Robyn Orlin, an internationally renowned South African choreographer, has noted, "We can't dance about pretty sunsets" (in Sichel, 2006d) in South Africa where violence, poverty and uncertainty are regular occurrences. Nor then does it seem appropriate to dance about swans, sylphs and wilis without a relevant interrogation on both the levels of content and form. Mackrell (2006), speaking of British ballet, voices a similar concern and warns of the "real dangers for dance in this trend". She suggests that choreographers inclined towards storytelling need "to figure out what stories are really theirs to tell" (Mackrell, 2006). For the South African choreographer drawn to narrative dance-making, the reinterpretation of content is particularly important for

these narratives to have any relevance to a contemporary South African audience.

Mackrell (2006) isolates the work of British choreographer Matthew Bourne as an instance of an inspired approach to reinterpreting existing narratives in terms of content and form. Like Ek, Bourne is renowned for his narrative reinterpretations. Possibly the most well-known work in this regard is his gender-bent interpretation of *Swan Lake* (1995). In this work, Bourne presents a present-day interpretation of the story, but one that explores issues of sexuality and love from a contemporary, and subtly homoerotic, perspective with male swans and an 'emotionally challenged' prince (Macaulay, 2004: 162²⁷). Bourne, while maintaining a balletic vocabulary, shifts the choreography in order to express this reinterpretation. The male swans in his ballet are aggressive, portrayed as "creatures of the wild, exuding an aura of danger" (Au, 2002: 202), in stark contrast to the ethereal and fragile swans of the classical ballet. Similarly, the *pas de deux* between the Prince and the male 'Odile' is intimately choreographed but charged with a dynamic sense of aggression and eroticism. By shifting its interpretation and choreographic quality, the *Swan Lake* narrative no longer concerns fairytale love and mystical creatures but refers, instead, to a modern conception of love (between two men), in a contemporary setting, where the complex nature of the relationship stems from the psychological and emotional circumstances of the characters rather than the malevolent interference of the evil sorcerer, Von Rothbart. The original themes of the narrative are thus made accessible to the individual observing the dance *today* by presenting an interpretation

²⁷ For more detail on this particular work refer to Alistair Macaulay's interview with Matthew Bourne in Carter, A (ed). (2004), pp. 157-169.

that references, and emerges from, a more 'realistic' and socially relevant contemporary perspective. By re-locating the themes to a more 'familiar' context, audiences are provided with an opportunity to draw from their own experiences in their interpretation of these themes. It is through this re-interrogation of existing content and forms that the 'Sub-Self Narrative' is thus able to resonate personally, from beneath the external narrative, with both choreographer and spectator.

PJ Sabbagha's *MacBeth* (2006) is a recent work that can be seen to engage with the 'Sub-Self Narrative' in this way. As Sabbagha explains, the reinterpretation of the original Shakespearean narrative was initiated by an attempt

to try and locate *Macbeth* in all our lives; to try and find how *Macbeth* relates and how we relate, as South Africans living in Johannesburg at this time, to the narratives or the issues, and the themes... of *Macbeth*. (Personal interview, 2007²⁸)

Sabbagha's *MacBeth* pursues the story of Lady Macbeth (danced by Dada Masilo), presented as the wife of a successful South African BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) businessman. The work is staged as a cocktail party, spanning a period from sunset to sunrise, where the guests, intoxicated with alcohol and narcotics by the three 'witches', slowly fall prey to moral decay through their own greed and insatiable ambition. Sabbagha's narrative thus presents "the fearsome power dynamics of the business world, where stakes are high and sex is part of the currency" (Sassen, 2007: 2). As Sabbagha explains, this interpretation was "the clearest choice because in this way, this *Macbeth* becomes a morality play for South Africans" (personal

²⁸ This interview was conducted by the author and is unpublished. A transcription of the interview is attached as Appendix E.

interview, 2007) and presents an experience both familiar and topical to a local audience. Sabbagha's reinterpretation of the original narrative emerges from his own personal connection to the themes of the play, living in Johannesburg in the 21st century where stories of political and corporate corruption abound. In terms of its content, this reinterpretation can therefore be seen to encourage the spectator (with similar experience of local stories of corruption) to locate a personal connection to the themes expressed in the work.

Sabbagha also attempts to create this connection with the spectator at the level of form. In forming the narrative Sabbagha, quite uncharacteristically, employs a ballet aesthetic in terms of the work's structure, staging and theatricality, while using a contemporary dance vocabulary. In this way, the work (at first) maintains a classical, linear narrative structure, with a clear beginning and sequential development of the events of the story. The work also incorporates clear characters (Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, The Boss [Duncan] and the witches) who are backed by a chorus of men and women, and utilises a continuous musical score (by Michael Gordon) in conversation with the choreography. In so doing, Sabbagha aims to entice the audience into the work by offering a 'traditional' and therefore familiar atmosphere, thereby inviting the audience to experience a narrative journey in watching the work. He explains,

It starts in a very ballet tradition, which is quite distanced and disconnected in a way, and then it kind of drops into quite a dark, heavy, emotional headspace. Even though you are keeping a classical tradition going, I think that is also the power of the journey. That you go from the disconnected narrative to a very personal and intense place. (Personal interview, 2007)

The narrative itself is formed in such a way as to create this connection with an observer, and to encourage a sensory inclusion in the intoxication and degradation occurring on stage. No words are used, and the choreography and character physicalities (as expected in a ballet aesthetic) have the task of creating the narrative. The work begins with Lady Macbeth, assisted by the 'witches', deciding on an outfit to wear. She is presented as a strong woman through her assertive and idiosyncratic physicality. Other guests begin to arrive, drinks are served and the party begins. Through the clear (and therefore inviting) linear narrative structure of these events, the audience is enticed into the work. However, as the narrative progresses and the characters begin to get increasingly intoxicated, the linearity of the narrative also becomes 'intoxicated' through fragmentation. Similarly, the distinctive characters become progressively anonymous as costumes are discarded and the dancers perform in uniform black underwear.

To create this sense of intoxication visually (and perhaps viscerally as well), Sabbagha employs multiple mini-narratives which often occur simultaneously. Performed on an open stage with no legs or wings, the performers, once on stage, cannot exit. Multiple narratives thus unfold all over and at the same time, confronting the observer with multiple focal points, creating a visual-visceral experience of the intoxication and "hallucinations of this vision of the future" (personal interview, 2007).

The choreography, comprising of four movement phrases which are repeated in various combinations by the thirteen dancers, increase in speed and become progressively more 'savage' in appearance. Sabbagha employs repeated unison in the choreography, either in smaller groups or with the

entire cast. To further the sense of degradation in the work, the unison is not executed with counted precision but is boisterous and volatile, as bodies (and groups of bodies) charge, retreat and collide with each other. Driven by “a turbulent and climactic” (Sassen, 2007: 2) score by Michael Gordon, the intoxication and moral decay central to the narrative are created and expressed through the rapid and explosive movement of the dancers and their irregular, shifting spatial dynamics on stage.

miss thandi (2002), another work by Gregory Maqoma, (where the first word of the title can also be read as a verb) also illustrates an engagement with the ‘Sub-Self Narrative’, but where the connection with his own personal experience is more direct. As Snyman (2003: 73) notes,

The work is a biographical tribute to the late Raymond Vuyo Matinyana... [who] was better known to the performance world as Miss Thandi, an African drag artist, of Xhosa tradition.

The work “celebrates and laments Matinyana’s life in an attempt to immortalise his significance” (Snyman, 2003: 73) as an artist and a man who, through drag performance, “challenged convention, culture and tradition” (73). *miss thandi* is not just a biographical narrative, however, but distinctly autobiographical as well. As Maqoma explains,

I know Miss Thandi and I’ve know 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... I draw a lot from that character of Miss Thandi but I also 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. (Interview, 2002²⁹)

It is in layering the narrative of Matinyana and Miss Thandi that Maqoma forms his own narrative about his personal experiences of being a gay man,

²⁹ This interview was conducted by Bailey Snyman in 2002, and is unpublished. A transcription is attached as Appendix F.

and the challenge to convention, tradition and culture that this represents. In a sense, Matinyana challenged convention through his creation of Miss Thandi, and it is through Maqoma's dancing of Miss Thandi that he expresses his own position within this challenge. Maqoma insists, "Through reflecting Miss Thandi's biography I'm also reflecting my own autobiography... [and] at the same time I'm reflecting a society" (interview, 2002).

Maqoma employs multimedia in conjunction with choreographed movement in the "construction of a... psychological narrative" (Hagemann, 2002: 3). The performance begins with a video collage of images of Matinyana and Miss Thandi in performance, as the musicians stand, amidst flickering spotlights on stage, "in tribute to her life" (Hagemann, 2002: 1). Maqoma sits at a dresser, dons make-up and a wig and transforms himself into Miss Thandi. In dancing Matinyana's memory, Maqoma becomes his body and through his movement, the audience witnesses and follows the "painful and celebratory" (Hagemann, 2002: 3) journey of both Matinyana and Miss Thandi, experiencing with Maqoma their attempts at co-existence and their efforts to hold together. The choreography is eclectic, comprising elements of ballet, traditional African dance, contemporary dance and "Miss Thandi's favourite routines flavoured with his own body impulses" (Hagemann, 2002: 3). Maqoma uses these various dance influences to depict a body struggling to find an identity as he "tries out his body, which seems not to move in ways expected of a man" (1). Maqoma is acutely aware of the audience throughout the performance, offering defeated glances into the auditorium as he both toils with and relishes in the act of dancing. In conjunction with this heartfelt "journey... in innocence" (Ibid), the work seems

to raise significant social issues, relevant to both the choreographer and his subject, presenting a confrontation with convention and “a challenging of repressive racial, gender and cultural stereotypes” (Snyman, 2003: 72).

2.5. Consolidating form

The task of locating an adequate expression for South African narratives can thus be seen to require a certain degree of formal experimentation. If narrative is indicative of the individual expressing it, and the form of that narrative the primary expression of its content, then it is imperative that each personal narrative be approached with innovative, critical and experimental thinking. Similarly, as noted in this section, it is through the form of performance that the spectator is enticed and/or challenged in their own perceptions of identity in a globalised, digital culture. In this way, questions of identity resultant from socio-political change can still be explored within the progressive innovation of dance and choreographic practices.

The choreographers discussed above illustrate ways in which these two concerns, content and form, can co-exist. By interrogating both, dynamic and provocative performances can be created where this questioning occurs on the levels of both the content of the dance narrative as well as its expression through form.

Part Three: 'Nearing the end'

On Narrative Form

3.1. Introducing Acty Tang

Acty Tang is a prominent Grahamstown-based choreographer who can be seen to couple the use of narrative with an interrogation of form in his work. In applying Tang's approach to narrative form to the discussion thus far, this investigation will first contextualise Tang and his work in light of the argued propensity for narrative in South African choreography, and then discuss the ways in which Tang employs the dance narrative as a means to express and comprehend the complex issue of identity. His most recent work, *Chaste* (2007), will be analysed in detail, illustrating the ways in which Tang can be seen to engage with narrative form on both experimental and experiential levels.

Born in Hong Kong, Tang immigrated to South Africa in his pre-teen years. He completed his tertiary education at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, receiving his Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and Master of Arts degrees in Drama under the tutelage of acclaimed dance theatre practitioners Gary Gordon and Juanita Finestone-Praeg. Here he trained in physical theatre, mime, contemporary performance, directing, contemporary dance and choreography. Tang has worked both as a freelance choreographer and as a member of the First Physical Theatre Company, performing in numerous

productions with this company, such as *Lake...beneath the surface* (2001) and *Bessie's Head* (2000). Tang has also taught extensively in physical theatre, movement and choreography, and worked as a lecturer in the Drama Department at Rhodes University. As an independent artist Tang has created a substantial body of work, presented at numerous dance and theatre festivals around the country including the National Arts Festival, the FNB Dance Umbrella, the FNB Dance Umdudo, and the Out The Box Festival in Cape Town. His repertoire includes *And the empty space of his shadow* (1999), *Ndilinde-Wait for me* (2004), *The Beloved* (2004), *amaQueerkwere* (2005), *Apology for a Stranger* (2006), *The Silent Wail of Melisande* (2006), *Protect* (2007) and *Chaste* (2007).

Many of Tang's works are often described as 'butoh-inspired', incorporating qualities of physical theatre but with an aesthetic inspired by this *avant garde* Japanese dance form³⁰. As Au (2002) notes, butoh is often "characterised by economy of movement, with time frequently slowed to a rate that appears glacial by western standards" (198). Movements in butoh are often highly stylised, incorporating detailed articulation of the body and facial expressions, with the body of the performer often painted white (Au, 2002; Fraleigh, 1999; Fraleigh & Nakamura, 2006). As Au (2002) notes, "butoh's primary aim is the expression of the inner life of a human being, usually presented from a universal rather than an individual point of view" (198). This 'inner life' is disconnected from identity but echoes a conception of human existence that is 'primordial' and impersonal. Tatsumi Hijikata, a founder of the butoh form, maintained that movement in butoh originates from within the

³⁰ Not all of Tang's works display this connection with butoh. It is most evident in *The Beloved*, *The Silent Wail of Melisande*, *Chaste* and *Protect*.

body of the performer, “initiated from the feeling of being a corpse” (in Fraleigh & Nakamura, 2006: 51). This ‘dead’ body deconstructs traditional conceptions of dance, the performing body and of conventional beauty by appearing grotesque, distraught, and non-human. As Disemelo (2007: 16) notes, however, Tang does not claim to be a butoh artist, but merely uses the form as a “major inspiration” (16) in his work. As Tang (in Disemelo, 2007: 16) explains, “Butoh draws attention to the sense of the body, a sense of being in the body, so that you can feel and tune into the body”. In this way, Tang’s choreography often engages with poignantly slow, meticulously controlled, and internally-sourced movement, with the dancer naked and painted white - qualities characteristic of the butoh form.

Tang is an acclaimed choreographer making work in South Africa today and has been acknowledged both for his innovative approach to choreography as well as for the *avant garde* nature of his work by numerous dance critics and researchers (Hemphill, 2007c; Jordaan, 2007; Meersman, 2007a; 2007b; Sichel, 2007f), an acknowledgment epitomised by his selection as the 2007 Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner for dance³¹. Tang recognises the influence of experimental dance groups, such as the Judson Dance Theatre, whose “continual innovation and originality within the confines of traditional dance” (Disemelo, 2007: 16) find resonance in his approach to creating a dynamic physical theatre. In June of 2007, the Mail & Guardian offered Tang as one of its “100 young South Africans you must take to Lunch” (Anon, 2007a), referring to Tang’s choreography as “some of the most provocative and cerebral work in the country today” (Anon, 2007a) - further

³¹ In 2002 Tang was also nominated for the Daimler-Chrysler Award for Choreography.

evidence of his emerging stature in South African contemporary choreography.

Tang's *Chaste* is, in many ways, illustrative of his choreographic and aesthetic approach and displays a strong engagement with narrative as a means to interrogate personal identity. Tang's experimental and *avant garde* reputation position him as a relevant artist for analysis in light of the concerns central to this investigation.

3.2. Tang and personal identity

The question of personal identity is emergent within many of Tang's choreographic works, with the themes of love and belonging often recurring in his productions (Hemphill, 2007; Jordaan, 2007; Meersman, 2007b). As Hemphill (2007c) notes, the theme of love in Tang's work is not necessarily concerned with romance but rather "a sense of belonging, or connection or identity" (Tang in Hemphill, 2007c). She argues that "the sense of being a member of a Diaspora, never really belonging, but attempting to make a kind of emotional home on foreign soil" is a central concern in his creative psyche (Hemphill, 2007c). Tang (in Meersman, 2007b) acknowledges this observed interest with identity in his work:

Here [South Africa], Hong Kong and the idea of China – my heart will always straddle those different places; therefore I think I identify with people who have experience of the Diaspora, who are migrants, the marginalised.

In response to a question posed in the *Research in Drama Education Journal*³², “What do you perceive to be the challenges and/or opportunities for your work when applied to place/site and ‘communities’?” (93), Tang (2007:

93) answers:

I made a site-specific piece this year. I did so with guilt...

My pen hesitates over the funding application for the National Arts Council.

Male			
Black	Coloured	Indian	White

Which box says: I was born in the thriving economy of Hong Kong, and lived in a high-rise housing project, where the lifts stank of urine?

Which box says: I don’t have struggle credentials; I arrived in the country after Mandela was released?

I feel like I’m in a ‘struggle session’ in Maoist China. Is my work in line with government policy? Do I come from a sufficiently disadvantaged background to received state funding? Do I have the right history?

This sense of struggling to position the self within society can be observed in many of Tang’s works, where the choreographer presents his struggle with his own uncertain standing in a society that is both foreign and familiar. He suggests: “I’ve resolved that I don’t fit squarely into being a South African. I don’t know what it means and I don’t think I really fit into that category” (interview, 2006³³). It is this marginalised impression of identity that often echoes in Tang’s choreography as he explores the complex conceptions of the foreigner, the homosexual, and the marginalised ‘other’. In *amaQueerkwere* (2005) Tang explores this question of identity through the creatively engineered meeting “of South African and Chinese histories” (Tang, 2007: 95). The work, performed in an old Grahamstown prison, presents a

³² Vol. 12, No.1, February 2007.

³³ This interview was conducted by Nicola Elliott in 2006 and is unpublished. A transcription of this interview is attached as Appendix A.

meeting between a jailed Coloured man and a Chinese refugee. The title of the piece is a witticism on the word 'amakwerekwere', a derogatory Xhosa term applied to foreigners, with an added semantic slant which resonates with homophobic prejudice. The work therefore interrogates identity on the levels of both geographical exclusion and sexual persuasion, simultaneously.

Similarly, *Protect* (2007), performed initially as a solo at the FNB Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg and later as a duet with First Physical performer Tshegofatso Tlholoe in Cape Town, further illustrates Tang's interest in the thorny issues of cultural identity. Sichel (2007b), speaking of the initial solo performance, describes the work as a navigation of Tang's "Asian cultural heritage through the violent contemporary South African realities" (12). The work itself is a response to personal events experienced by Tang's family and friends living in a crime-ridden Johannesburg. Working from these sources the naked Tang, his body stamped with Chinese calligraphy and red paint, travels "through planes of sound, Tibetan monk chants and internalised movement... his articulate body... a conductor for terror, surrender, suffering and spirituality" (Sichel, 2007b: 12). Without any overriding spoken or danced narrative, the work presents a series of fragmented visual images using sound, spotlights and a dramatic length of red fabric.

A later version of this work, extended to include another performer, hints more clearly at an underlying narrative. Presented as a much longer work (almost double the original length), a relationship between the two performers is able to evolve. Tang's partner, Tlholoe, appears small and vulnerable and needing protection alongside his height. The two bodies communicate with each other and with the audience, illuminated by various spotlights. During

the performance Tang slowly approaches Tiholoe and wraps her tightly in red cloth, as though to shield her from the cruelty and violence around them. Although no words are spoken, images of consoling, holding and shielding imply a narrative in the work as these two anonymous bodies struggle to protect each other.

Chaste (2007), Tang's work presented at the 2007 National Arts Festival after receiving the Standard Bank Young Artist Award, offers a clearer narrative in its structure and formal qualities, integrating dance, text, image and vocal soundscape. The work offers a creative re-working of the biblical tale of Salome, the seductive Judean princess who demands the beheading of John the Baptist in return for dancing the Dance of the Seven Veils. Tang's *Chaste*, however, does not simply retell this well-known tale but instead loosely depicts the events of the original version while also making reference to Oscar Wilde's play, *Salome* (1891), Wilde's persecution as a homosexual, and a multitude of other sub-narratives concerning global occurrences of sexual and/or gender discrimination. As Tang (in NAF Souvenir Programme, 2007: 43) explains in the programme note:

I want to tell the story of Salome. But which Salome? When I first read Wilde's play, I intuitively knew that this was not a moralist tale about the punishment of unbridled, indecent lust. Its music – its seductive and tragic arias – sent tremors through the heart of a gay boy: She is singing my song, and oh what a beautiful song of love and longing! Yet it is a deformed beauty, having been sealed within me, decaying for so long. Herod's soldier-bullies crushed me under their shields of laws and social norms, separating the perverted from the morally chaste, hiding me from sight.

This explanation highlights the intertextual nature of the narrative as well as the personal connection to the choreographer within the work. *Chaste*, then, is not so much the narrative of Salome as it is a creative response to

'Salome-like' situations, experiences and narratives. For Tang, a gay man himself, his personal experience of homosexual love resonates strongly with the story of Salome and her 'dangerous' love of Iokanaan (John the Baptist). Tang insists, "It's quite a thing as a gay man, [that] what you see as beautiful many other people see as monstrous" (personal interview, 2007³⁴), and it is this co-existence of the monstrous and the beautiful that emerges as a dominant theme in the work. *Chaste*, however, does not only make the connection between the biblical tale and homosexual affection, but broadens its relevance for a conception of love irrespective of sexual persuasion. Tang (in NAF Souvenir Programme, 2007: 43) explains,

I think that everyone loves, and makes love, from that same place of hurt, of loss. That's why, for me, *Salome* is not about the gruesome re-telling of a lascivious, bloody and, frankly, sensationalist plot. Salome is the prophetess of generations of people who came after her.

For Tang, the story of Salome resonates on a personal level with his own experiences of love, and the feelings of guilt and perversion associated with the repression of such feelings. The narrative of *Chaste*, however, does not tell his personal story, nor does it provide detailed depictions of his emotional and/or sexual repression or his 'coming out' as a gay man. Tang explains,

I wanted to move away from that one-to-one relationship with Salome and me... The idea of telling a story is there, but it's not necessarily the meaning of the story. It's the pose; it's the approach to telling your story that is embedded in the piece... *Chaste*, hopefully, serves as a criticism or an intertextual development of the Salome story, opening it up, unpacking it, and making it reach further to speak to other kinds of echoes and such. Again trying to move away from a one-to-one, 'this-is-my-personal-story'. Yet it has personal resonances. (Personal interview, 2007)

³⁴ This interview was conducted by the author and is unpublished. A transcription of the interview is attached as Appendix C.

Tang's approach to forming the narrative here is akin to the 'Sub-Self Narrative' discussed in Part Two, where the external narrative of Salome is reinterpreted, re-worked and reformulated to reference, rather than represent, a personal connection experienced by the artist.

3.3. Chaste and narrative form

Tang's *Chaste* employs an intertextual approach to forming an "electronic" (Porter Abbott, 2002: 28) dance narrative, drawing from multiple sources in the creation of the written narrative, and integrating numerous performance styles and artistic forms in the theatrical expression of that narrative.

Engaging with the body and the voice as signifiers of meaning, the narrative form of *Chaste* relies on the combination of these (as well as other theatrical elements) in its creation.

The intertextual approach to constructing the narrative of *Chaste* is perhaps most evident in the layered, non-linear amalgamation of sub-narratives that comprise the spoken narrative. Tang's reworking of the Salome story does not attempt to retell either the biblical or Wilde's version of the events. The narrative of *Chaste*, in fact, loosely concerns events occurring subsequent to the end of the known story. *Chaste*, thus, begins with the summoning of Salome from the dead, by the Narrator (Heike Gehring), after her execution by Herod:

Narrator: Bid her to rise from her tomb!

Beautiful Salome, let not your dance be veiled.
From beneath the shields of Herod, your shattered skin
shall be retrieved, and your tears of longing shall be
collected to tell your tale. Look, here rises the moon; its

beams of silvery light, cold and chaste, shall soon fall upon you. The moon shall christen you with holy fire, so that you may speak our sorrows, and guide us towards the Son of Man. (*Chaste*, unpublished script, 2007: 1)

In response to this call, the character of Salome (Tang), lying prostrate on a glass platform suspended from above, begins a deep chant amidst a whispered soundscape of piercing insults: “bitch”, “whore”, “slag”. The narrative has a clear beginning, establishing from the outset that the story to unfold is not the traditional version, but a fabricated narrative occupying a space that is neither representational nor realistic. From this beginning, the narrative does not, however, maintain any sense of plot or linear progression of ideas, but rather offers a series of fragmented episodes which refer to several sub-narratives. Tang explains:

I'm very aware of the danger of being tied to the plot, and my strength is in letting the images speak and so on. So I was really trying to get away from the plot of Salome. At the end of the day it's the image and theme and the emotional core that is the most important. And that allowed freedom to make echoes ...to switch between Salome, us as performers, what we experience, and other people outside in today's world... This way the resonances are embedded in the text. (Personal interview, 2007)

The plot of Salome, or rather, the actual events embedded in the original story, are not overtly relayed in the written text but are, instead, sparsely referenced within the work as physical images. The audience thus observes the games of seduction played by the two central characters in the danced duets of Salome (Tang) and lokanaan (Sifiso Majola). Similarly, the audience witnesses lokanaan's tragic beheading in an intensely slow, stylised, physical representation. Interspersed between these occurrences are a plethora of sub-narratives which are separate to the Salome story yet still relevant to the

overriding theme that love comes from a “place of hurt” (NAF Souvenir Programme, 2007: 43).

Awelani Moyo, who co-wrote the text for *Chaste with Tang*, explains the process of creating the intertextual narrative:

The basic idea was to try to unlock the relevance of the original Salome story with everyone, and because of the issues Acty wanted to deal with, we had to try and move beyond just one voice and one story and to try and get as many different perspectives. (Personal interview, 2007³⁵)

Each story, whether written in the style of documentary, poem or memory, was thus created in response to a common theme. As Moyo explains, the initial task of writing text for the production originated from a creative response to two sources provided by Tang: a series of images and drawings, including illustrations sketched by Aubrey Beardsley for Wilde’s *Salome*, and sensations related to touch. Moyo explains:

We talked a lot in the first meeting about the idea of touch, and then divided touch into different categories: the ability to feel heat, the ability to feel texture, to feel shape. And so when I went away and worked, I isolated each one of those and tried to respond to them. (Personal interview, 2007)

In addition to these responses, Moyo also used the original Wilde text as a source in determining the style and tone of her response. Selected, recurring images from Wilde’s play, such as the moon, the mirage and the disembodied head, were used as inspirational sources in Moyo’s creative process.

Moyo also drew from her own life and experiences in writing the text; including news reports and documentaries she encountered. Poetry and prose she had previously written, and that she felt were conceptually and thematically relevant, were also adapted and included in the final manuscript.

³⁵ This interview was conducted by the author and is unpublished. A transcription of the interview is attached as Appendix D.

The resultant narrative of *Chaste* comprises various short recollections of imagined memories, poetic interludes, documents of real, contemporary events and composed dialogue. At one point the audience is privy to the Narrator reminiscing on seeing a beautiful man bathing in a pool, transfixed by his muscles and “the prominence of his girded loins” (unpublished script, 2007: 2). Soon after, the Narrator, speaking directly to the audience, tells of occurrences of abuse and gender discrimination in Pakistan and in parts of Africa. A conversation between a man and his scab (where the scab replies) soon follows, as well as other short narratives documenting instances of contemporary violence against homosexuals and women. The work concludes with a tribute to Wilde himself as the Narrator-turned-persecutor, encircled by the audience, pronounces judgement on Wilde for “acts of gross indecency with another male person in public or in private” (unpublished script, 2007: 9). Seamlessly strung together, interspersed and complimented by both visual and physical representations, these sub-narratives give structure to the work, spanning a vast landscape free of the rigid constraints of geographical space and chronological time.

In as much as the text and the voices of the Narrator and Salome are utilised as a means to form the narrative, the bodies of the performers are equally integral as signifiers of meaning. Tang’s choreography is particularly eclectic and draws from numerous styles, exhibiting elements of butoh, ballet, traditional African dance and contemporary release-based techniques. By interrogating the process of creating the choreography and the way in which specific movements and rhythms encourage certain interpretations, Tang is able to use movement and physicality to both create and sustain the narrative.

Tang's approach to the discovery of the dance language echoes Jonathan Burrows' process of "playing the game harder" (Burrows, 2002: 29) discussed earlier. This choreographic approach encourages a meticulous interrogation when creating movement so as to discover a vocabulary that is not only innovative, but specific to a particular work and connected on a level of form to a specific theme, emotion or meaning. This is perhaps particularly relevant when dealing with a narrative of a personal nature, where the themes expressed are personal to the body expressing them. As Tang, speaking in reference to *Chaste*, concurs,

Because the content is so personal, or has such personal resonances, the movement invention is also partly drawn from the individual performers themselves... to develop a language that is appropriate to that production rather than relying on a preset, pre-learnt physical language. (Personal interview, 2007)

Tang's choices in the choreography of *Chaste* are also closely linked to the written text and to the particular theme of each scene. The process, while drawing from the individual dancer, also requires an understanding of "what will make the scene speak in the freshest and most awakening way to the audience" (personal interview, 2007). In choreographing the movement, Tang works closely with the performer, creating a language that adequately expresses a specific idea while still allowing the personal inclinations and individuality of the performer to influence and physically *translate* that idea.

To capture the choreography for the character of lokanaan, Tang draws loosely from traditional African dance codes, using the high kicks and stomping of the legs characteristic of traditional Zulu dances, as well as daring leaps and *grand jetés* of a classical vocabulary, to imply a sense of 'traditional' masculinity. As Cooper Albright (1997) notes, the performing body

is “culturally-mapped” (31), where the presentation of the dancing body “carries meaning regardless of the narrative or conceptual theme of the dance” (33). She argues that, even though the “Romantic image of the ballerina as the embodiment of feminine grace and beauty has been displaced” (35), these engendered perceptions of the body, and how the body moves, remain. In traditional African dance, as in classical ballet, there are certain ways of moving than are specific to a particular gender. Tang uses these stereotypical perceptions of what is ‘masculine movement’, to imply the strength, restraint and aggression of Salome’s unrequited love interest. These stereotypes, however, are also subverted and questioned. As the character of lokanaan transforms in the work, Tang alters his language and thus his expression. He explains,

I’ve used contemporary dance release techniques, to find, again, the physical sensation. In my head that’s when lokanaan transforms from that preaching prophet... into the beautiful man who is actually comfortable and able to express desires and sensuality. So I use the release techniques and even classical vocabulary to help Sifiso [Majola] reach that sensation of loftiness, of sensuality. And then I invest in the vocabulary through, say for instance, using curves, of looking at how momentum and swing with the body can find and invoke those sensations. (Personal interview, 2007)

The character of Salome, in comparison, oscillates between a butoh-esque controlled contortion and a relished freedom of released movement. Tang’s approach to the butoh-inspired aspects of his choreography for Salome subtly echo Kazuo Ohno’s dancing of *La Argentina* (1976)³⁶, with a slight “feminine sensitivity” (Fraleigh, 1999: 57) in the quality of the movement. Through the butoh-inspired vocabulary, Tang’s Salome appears otherworldly and subtly

³⁶ As Fraleigh & Nakamura (2006: 90) note, Ohno’s dancing of the Spanish dancer, *La Argentina*, presented him in women’s clothing, but with a physicality that did not caricature a stereotypical representation of a female dancer. Fraleigh and Nakamura suggest that Ohno instead “evokes the spirit of *La Argentina*” (90) in his movement, thereby displaying a subtle femininity where “he is not conscious that he is dressed like a woman” (91).

feminine, bordering on the androgynous, reminding the observer of her ethereal presence in the work. Salome's dance on the glass terrace at the beginning of the work is slow, delicate and articulate as the dead Salome rises from her tomb. The movement in this section shows a clear butoh influence, incorporating slow and contorted articulation of the fingers, toes and face with an unhurried unfurling of the body. Her dance of resurrection seems to emerge from an inner source, as the movements of each limb bear a strong internal connection. Similarly, the deep chant sung by Salome sounds genuinely resonant and deeply connected to the body. As Salome speaks for the first time, her words, like her precise movements, seem to struggle to exit the body, finally gasping into the space: "If thou hadst looked me in the eye, though wouldst have loved me" (unpublished script, 2007: 1), a phrase that is repeated and referred to throughout the work.

Following Salome's resurrection, the audience is introduced to lokanaan and, through a considered approach to the choreography danced by Majola, the character appears to the audience as strongly 'masculine' and burly, and yet tormented at the same time. The audience sees a man, "bathed in light" (unpublished script, 2007: 1), standing proud and assertive, holding a length of rope that is wrapped underneath a bent knee. Majola moves slowly at first, isolated in the space, with fluid and languid movements of the spine, shoulders, head and arms. Progressively, Majola becomes more daring in the space, leaping and swinging the rope around his torso as he 'flagellates' himself. Tang's use of impact rhythms and bound energy create a sense of aggression that is expressed in the movement itself. There is a sense of mystery created as the audience is shown this aggressive yet languid man

flogging himself. They are not told who he is, or why he flagellates himself. The flagellation itself is subtly portrayed in Majola's graceful and sweeping movement with the rope, creating grand arcs and spirals that ultimately make contact with his skin. The choreography does not tell the audience anything about the character directly; it only implies a sensation and a complex state of mind through the shape and dynamic of the dancer's movements, and the connection of the movement language to the content of the scene.

Tang's use of integrated styles and dynamic choreography therefore creates two characters, both danced by male performers, which appear mysterious and ambiguous. The varying physicalities of Salome and lokanaan both exude and problematise archetypal gender distinctions. The audience is never unaware that both these men are, in fact, men, but the style and dynamic of the choreography consistently contradict *and* reinforce these gendered distinctions. The character of Salome straddles the androgynous, while lokanaan seems, at times, aggressive and manly, while at other times gentle and graceful, traditionally feminine attributes. This ambiguous approach to physicality serves to broaden the interpretation of the narrative beyond the mere depiction of a Judean princess and the man she desires, and implies an affection that extends beyond the distinctions of gender.

In this way, the characters of lokanaan and Salome are not always present in the work, as both performers shape-shift from depicting these characters, other unnamed characters and themselves. The bodies in Tang's *Chaste* echo Boenisch's concept of the "electrONic body" (Boenisch, 2003: 34). The performers in *Chaste* are not explicitly character, nor are they overtly themselves, but rather shift between multiple physical representations as they

“bridge and blur distances, oppositions [and] roles” (Boenisch, 2003: 40). The result is that the audience is never certain of what they are observing, who these bodies are or how they are related to each other. The creation of meaning occurs for the spectator through interpretation of the signs offered in the physicality and dynamic of the dancing bodies.

The narrative of *Chaste* is thus formed by the integration of the verbal text, heard by the audience, with the physical interpretation of the sensations within the text, by the dancers. With expression deeply imbedded in the dynamic and shape of the movement, Tang experiments with the audience-performer relationship as a means to allow the observer to interpret and respond to the physical aspects of the narrative on an intimate level. Tang brings the audience inside the work, and places the performance in and around the observers, who move with the performance and are placed in close proximity to the moving bodies. Unlike traditional dance theatre practices where the audience observes the action from within the darkened safety and seclusion of the auditorium, Tang has his audience on the stage, excluded from this passive comfort.

The performance space itself is unconventional, with the performance taking place on a proscenium stage, enclosed by the front curtain. The audience stands on the stage, first in the recess and then on the stage proper. This utilisation of the performance space is acutely linked to the formation of the narrative of the work. Tang’s fondness for site-specific work and outdoor theatre is well known. *Chaste*, however, required another approach to space and, as Tang suggests, the original story of Salome necessitated an indoor and architectural space (personal interview, 2007). Tang notes,

Salome is a princess of an opulent court. It has to be an urban space, a built architectural space. It's not a natural space, that's not what Salome is about ...and because the symbolism was so overtly theatrical it seemed right to go into a space that is dedicated to making art. And then to try and make it speak in unconventional ways, to make it speak out of it's habit. (Personal interview, 2007)

By having the audience on the stage, Tang transforms the familiar theatre into a different space, thereby placing the audience in an unconventional, slightly uncomfortable, and unfamiliar relationship to the work they observe. The design by Ingrid Gordon further transforms the space, using multiple textures and digital imagery to create a space that is 'other', unreal, and visual-visceral. The audience enters the space from the dock adjacent to the theatre in complete darkness. The experience is unsettling, as spectators, unable to see, are ushered into the recess and encouraged to line the walls. The first image the audience encounters is of the Narrator, standing on the stage proper, summoning the ghost of Salome, who lies suspended above their heads. The Narrator, lit dimly from above, is viewed through a hanging veil. Projected onto the veil is an image of a stony, tomb-like wall. As the stage proper is revealed, the space is again transformed, subtly referencing a lavish tent, with long white draperies of varying textures suspended from above. Images are projected throughout the performance onto these veils, each image a text to be interpreted within the narrative. Images of forested landscapes, of Hebrew writing, of the starry sky, of Oscar Wilde and of the performers themselves appear and disappear on the tent-like walls.

By transforming the space into a visceral and textured environment, Tang creates a performative atmosphere suited to a "somasensory experience" (Fenemore, 2003: 107), where "kinaesthetic perception" (Metheny, 1968: 38) is encouraged. As discussed in the previous chapter, this experience

concerns the interpretation of expression on a sensory and kinaesthetic level, where meaning and experience are gained through responding to non-verbal, often corporeal, stimuli. By integrating the audience within the action, and by placing the performance in a richly textured setting, the observer experiences the movement expression up-close, and is provided with the opportunity to scrutinise the intricacies and dynamics of the moving bodies around them and respond, on a sensory level, to what they see and experience.

Similarly, other sensory associations become accessible to the audience by shifting the relationship with the performer. The sound of the rope whipping through the air as Majola flogs himself becomes an aural stimulus the spectator would not experience if they were seated in the distance of the auditorium. Likewise, the physicalised sounds of the dancers moving in the space, breathing, falling, jumping and stepping, become signs within the narrative that can be interpreted by the audience, shifting the experience from the purely visual to the sensual. Towards the end of the work, as Salome returns to her tomb, the audience sees Tang again suspended on the glass platform. Small white stones line its edges, surrounding the prostrate body of Tang. As Salome begins to slowly unfurl her body, writhing on the glass surface, the stones begin to drop from the platform, pummelling the ground below. The intimate relationship with the audience allows the spectators to witness the choreography closely, with Tang's body pressed against the transparent surface, while at the same time experiencing the jarring sensation caused by the aural stimulation of the stones as they plummet to the floor.

Stimulation for the olfactory senses is also integrated into the performance. Banes (2001: 68) notes a distinct disregard of olfactory stimulation in

traditional western theatre, but suggests that “aroma design” (68) can offer performance “a way to engender an impression of authenticity – a way to supply the spectator with a vivid slice of ‘the real’, whether or not the theatrical style is realistic” (74). Olfactory stimulation is particularly useful in framing a performance as a ritual, where the use of scent shapes the ways in which the audience understands and experiences the performance. Banes (2001) suggests that by using scent in the creation of a performed ritual, the sense of smell “suggests that this is a sacred, not a secular, event” (71). This use of olfactory stimulation is evident in Tang’s *Chaste*. At one point, the Narrator kneels at a low table as though it is an altar, with Tang’s body spread across its surface. A kind of ritual begins to take shape as the Narrator lights incense and circles Tang’s body, placing Tarot cards on his bare skin. The exact scent of the incense is unclear, but the space becomes filled with ‘the scent of a ritual’, transforming the space into a sacred space.

Touch, while existing as a dominant theme in the narrative, also plays an important role in establishing the dynamic between the audience and performer, and in creating a performance context where intimacy is required for the interpretation of the various narrative texts. The performers are always acutely aware of the audience. At times the Narrator speaks directly to the observers, often addressing a single individual in particular. The spectators are also physically touched by the performers as they guide and lead the audience around the performance space. At one particular moment in the work, the performers calmly approach the audience and take hold of a hand, placing it somewhere on their body. The performers say nothing, only making gentle eye contact as though trying to pass on some secret, unspeakable

message. Spectators are able to feel the physicality of the performers as well as the effects of the performance on their bodies. One is thus able to feel the heat radiating from beneath their skin, the coolness of their sweat, or the rapidity of lokanaan's heartbeat. This single moment of direct, choreographed interaction produces a visceral, sensual and deeply emotive connection between the performer and his/her observer.

From within this performer-spectator dynamic, the narrative of *Chaste* can be seen to take shape through the combination of multiple sensory and theatrical stimulators, each existing as a layer within the narrative for the audience to interpret. Every aspect of the performance is utilised as a text, which then complements, complicates or introduces other layers to the meaning and construction of the narrative. As mentioned earlier, for Tang, the theme at the core of *Chaste's* narrative is the blurred perception of love and the complex notion of a "deformed beauty" (Tang, NAF Souvenir Programme, 2007: 43). The work can thus be seen to inhabit an uncertain and ambiguous space. This is not a real space, where clear-cut binary oppositions can operate unchallenged. Throughout the work, the audience is constantly reminded of this inability to find definitive distinction between the monstrous and the beautiful, the pleasant and the jarring, love and hurt.

The vocal delivery of the text and the creation of vocal soundscapes consistently tread the boundary between the beautiful and the monstrous. The spoken text, while composed with a poetic language, often describes unpleasant and violent imagery: "serrated skin", "nipples torn by invisible razor-edged teeth" (*Chaste*, unpublished script, 2007). For the vocal soundscape, Tang employs both a classically trained Opera singer (Jess

Levy) and a Jazz vocalist (Babalwa Kakaza) who serve as guides to the audience and who create vocal texture within the work. The vocal score is often musical and melodious but at times becomes jarring as the vocalists eschew technique and training to shriek, cough, and wail. The first encounter between Salome and lokanaan portrays the two bodies engaged in a seductive game of touching, but where actual contact is constantly missed. This playful duet is accompanied by a repetitive, ear-piercing cry by Levy's powerful soprano voice. It is at first strident to hear (especially for those spectators standing close by), and seems to unsettle the visual image of the two men dancing. The shrill cry, however, soon loses its jarring effect and alters for the observer, becoming strangely 'musical' in its repetition. Soon after this encounter, Kakaza, softly humming, leads the audience onto the stage proper, encouraging them to form a circle around her. Moving gently inside the circle, she exudes a subtle sexuality, making eye contact and offering flirtatious smiles to the observers as she begins to sing a jazzy rendition of Burt Bacharach's "The Look of Love". The sound is pleasurable, gentle and in stark contrast to the vocal soundscape experienced to that point. While Levy's shrill cries present a layer of contradiction to the interpretation of the playful dance of Tang and Majola, Kakaza's soothing love song has no danced accompaniment and encourages the audience to absorb the words of the song as signifiers of meaning. As Kakaza sings the opening phrase "The look of love is in your eyes", the audience is reminded of Salome's first utterance: "If thou hadst looked me in the eyes, thou wouldst have loved me" (*Chaste*, unpublished script, 2007).

Tang articulates a strong Brechtian influence in his approach to forming the narrative of *Chaste*, with its amalgamation of both traditionally beautiful and monstrous elements. He explains,

It's about giving the audience a role, or to use a Brechtian term, to alienate the audience from their naturalised role, to make their role strange, *verfremdung effect*, so that they are aware of the act of viewing and the act of participation in the performance moment... . Hopefully by taking them away from that convention, the piece allows the possibility of being moved, of engaging with their personal sense of being rather than being able to just tuck the parable safely away in a box after they have walked out of the theatre. (Personal interview, 2007)

The narrative of *Chaste* is therefore created with a two-fold understanding: to present the ambiguous relationship between the beautiful and the monstrous, and to create this ambiguity in such a way as to resonate with the audience.

Tang notes of art in South Africa,

In the last couple of years it's become very clear that people do not accept the premise of art. They accept the premise of mass media, movies and TV, sound bytes and quick messages and clear, short images dictated by urban and market economy tastes. So their attention span switches off very quickly if it is not something that is recognisable or comfortable or somehow titillating or funny, or conventionally beautiful. So the hook is, at this stage in 2007, it is necessary to have the hook of recognised beauty, and once that hook is established then something can be done about it to produce subversion. (Personal interview, 2007)

Through narrative form, Tang juxtaposes conventional images of beauty and the grotesque, thereby subverting, connecting and questioning these notions and their relevance to an understanding of love.

By adopting an intertextual approach to the narrative, Tang creates an interpretation of the Salome story that extends beyond the known plot to reference a complex understanding of love that resonates with his own personal exploration of sexual identity. The careful integration of multiple theatrical elements and sensory stimuli in forming the narrative, create a

performance where the expression of that narrative is intricate, convoluted and open for an audience to interpret and discover meaning on both a cognitive and corporeal level.

In conclusion

The dance narrative is, and has been, a strong force in contemporary South African choreography. Whether these narratives are overtly personal or merely stem from a personal exploration, it is apparent that many South African choreographers, working in the contemporary style, are drawn to narrative dance-making.

While the exploration of questions relating to identity in a changing socio-political environment can be seen as inevitable and even, imperative, it is crucial that this narrative exploration does not occur within a stagnant and 'safe' creative context. The political isolation of South Africa during the Apartheid era and the lack of substantial cross-national discourse within the local dance community have slowed the extent of significant experimentation with regards to form. It is thus the task of South African choreographers making work today, to combine these emerging questions of identity, both personal and communal, with critical and innovative approaches to forming these journeys through narrative.

The application of narrative form has shifted greatly from those first narrative dances created by Taglioni, Perrot and Petipa. Stylistic rebellion by modern and postmodern choreographers in the western world have also significantly altered the ways in which narratives are formed (if they are even formed), by breaking traditions relative to the chronology, structure, physicality and theatricality of dance performance. Similarly, intertextual thinking has expounded the definition of a text, providing for the contemporary choreographer a smorgasbord of theatrical, corporeal and sensual signifiers in

their creation of “electronic narratives” (Porter Abbott, 2002: 28). An intertextual approach to narrative form has also introduced the use of multiple, parallel and fragmented narratives, thereby positioning the dance narrative in line with a contemporary “electrONic culture” (Boenisch, 2003: 33) of digital communication and mass media. The contemporary choreographer working with narrative thus has boundless freedom in the creation of their narratives, uninhibited by rigid traditional constructs of space and chronological time.

While the *process* of creating and performing personal narrative provides a site for choreographers to ask questions about personal identity, it is the way in which these narratives are *formed* and *performed*, that enables this questioning to translate to the observer. Through the integration of various corporeal signifiers and theatrical ‘texts’, the narrative form of a dance work is able to create an experience for the observer that extends beyond the cognitive interpretation of content and encourages a corporeal and “somaesthetic” (Fenemore, 2003: 107) interaction *within* that interpretation. This interrogation of narrative form thus has the potential to enhance, subvert, challenge as well as complicate the interpretation of narrative dances, offering questions to the spectator and presenting “new ways of seeing and perceiving the world” (Boenisch, 2003: 34). It is through form that these questions of identity, underpinning the narrative exploration, are able to *transcend* the choreographer and *affect* the observer.

The previously ‘locked doors’ of political principle and artistic convention have been swung wide open, revealing a wealth of new, unexplored, creative spaces. Within these spaces, dance performance can conceivably occur ‘anywhere’, in any place, where contemporary choreographers can engage

with a plethora of bodily and theatrical influences in the creation of 'corporeal tales'.

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Appendix A

Nicola Elliott interviews Acty Tang, on and around the subject of his 30 minute theatre piece *The Silent Wail of Melisande*, which premiered at the 2006 National Arts Festival, Tuesday 15 August, 2006.

Venue: Tang's office at the Rhodes University Drama department.

NE: What inspired the work? Where did it come from?

AT: I came across Maeterlinck's play *Pelleas and Melisande*, a couple of years ago when I was doing my Honours directing exam – that's the play I did. That production I did it very much as a play – a whole theatre production - a 5 act play – it was crazy. I always thought I never really fulfilled the creative visions I had for it; I was very much bound by the text – the story particularly. And 2 years ago I made a solo – a dance solo, a Butoh style-inspired solo [called] *The Beloved*. It seemed... it's something I'm very interested in and always wanted to pursue and eventually I went ahead and did it I painted myself white and did the slow movement and so on.

NE: That was the first Butoh [inspired] work?

AT: It was the second actually. I really like it – it seemed to work very well and for this year's festival, I thought that perhaps the two could be put together and that's how it really came about. My original creative vision for *Pelleas and Melisande* a couple of years ago was actually less the story than a couple of images in my head. I always saw Melisande very high up in a tree – I always saw trees – and the pouring of water – for some reason – I don't know where that comes from. And so I thought actually through a Butoh aesthetic those images could come to the fore more powerfully. It was really just putting the two together.

NE: yes. And just also in your directing piece, I seem to remember (I never saw it), you also subverted the audience and the performing space as well. Do you think that's something that's inherent in the play or is that a personal interest?

AT: I think its both. It's a personal interest definitely but with the Symbolists came the beginnings of the revolution in theatre scenography. The forerunner of symbolism would be Wagner and he was the one who really took theatre out of just painted flats and The amalgamation of [different? disparate?] art into a synthesis of art and the symbolists really fulfilled the Wagnerean vision. People like Appiah and Craig very much inspired by...very much worked along the Symbolist line... and I think Symbolism has a – ja – it's inherently – if I may so boldly state it – that Symbolism inherently reconfigures the theatre space. Butoh as well. Think of the provocative start to Butoh with Hijikata. With all the different... You know – walking in from the back of the stage or swinging over the audience's head and then Min Tanaka doing improvisatory Butoh outdoors and travelling through Japan. And so I think in both those art forms there is an inherent kind of reconfiguring, a provocation of what theatre space could be.

NE: Ja. In the *Silent Wail of Melisande* you combined various theatre texts and styles: the Maeterlinck play, the Butoh-inspired physical language and design and the outdoor space. Do you think – and I think the way you are speaking as well – that it is more a natural marriage of these styles rather than an ungainly juxtaposition?

AT: Hmm. I don't know to what extent we can still have that synthesis that Wagner proposed but yes they seem to resonate with each other quite well. So ja.

NE: The particular space that you chose was on the Rhodes University campus near a place called the Blockhouse, right next to a road – not a particularly picturesque environment necessarily. And right next to it there was a whole excavation – sort of - renovation site going on. What made you choose that particular space?

AT: So it's partly practicality. It's an available space.... And partly – yes - it is the trees and when it comes to site-specific work a lot of practical considerations have to go into it: The availability of electricity for lighting. The availability of the venue. Whether I can climb those trees or not. You know all those things come into... Accessibility for audiences. So, actually a lot of practical considerations govern it and it wasn't the perfect space. Because of that building that's happening next door but I think when it comes to night time a lot of that visual noise is pared down - hopefully. And eventually I think just the experience of being in the trees. I think that's what the main experience that stays in people's memories, hopefully.

NE: And do you think that that particular space informed the piece? I know that you had a different space in mind, initially. How did that shift when you changed your space?

AT: well the thing with doing site-specific work is that the site always informs the piece. (True site specific work – that's what I mean). And, when I proposed my initial space, I didn't have like a script. I might have a couple of images – one or two images – but it's not like I have this idea about what this piece will be and then suddenly when the space is no longer available I have to redo the whole piece. The process starts with the space so only when I've decided what the space is then... *then* the piece grows from that. And so – ja – I'm always reminded of William Kentridge talking about a practical epistemology. In the sense that it's the working – it's in the rehearsal – in the working with what you have – *there* the meaning grows out of the work. The images grow out of the work. I arrived at the site. I saw that there were tables there so ok well I tried to get rid of the tables – I didn't succeed totally [chuckles]. I saw that one tree I could climb. I saw that there was a house – a shop, a coffee shop – looks quite a bit like a house with a veranda. And so I thought what I could do with the space and by and by it grew like that. It's totally... Kentridge calls it... it might seem... inauthentic but it can result in something very interesting.

NE: And on that note, how much rehearsal did you do in the space itself and how much in the rehearsal room? Approximately.

AT: [chuckles] Well lets see, I had a month of rehearsal time and...

NE: Not full-time, though.

AT: No, not at all! I think at the beginning I worked a bit more indoors, in the theatre, in rehearsal rooms. And I also... I go visit the space. I try to hold the space in my memory and I try a few things, I come back to the rehearsal room. 'Cause I think it's very hard to go into the space right away, with confidence and do the trial and error process, which is what a rehearsal is. It's easier to be in the privacy of the rehearsal room. So I think once [one's] got the confidence to see 'ok no this won't work – this will work better' –once I've got *that*, then I take it back to the space. So it's always a constant going back and forth between the two and gradually moving more and more to just being the space itself, at the end.

NE: And with it being a public space as well, it's not always available.

AT: It's not always available and conditions change all the time. So, in a sense I mean, I don't know if that's true site-specificity but I prefer to think of it as being flexible [chuckles].

NE: How does this particular work fit into your greater artistic vision? Is it a development of concerns or does it break away?

AT: Uh, do I have a great artistic vision – I don't know! [laughs].

NE: Ja, you definitely do! [laughs]

AT: Well I mean, I think, I mentioned a Butoh style of work, which I'm interested in. It seems to... it got very good responses, *The Beloved*. So it is... I am trying to pursue that line of work. But, also I don't claim to do Butoh. I do Butoh- inspired physical theatre. And physical theatre is the amalgamation of movement and voice, movement images... all those things. So, in a way I brought in the spoken text – the spoken *English* text - to a... frankly, a Japanese imagery, an image iconographic system – although an avante garde Japanese system but a Japanese system. And that was quite a... that would be one interesting experiment as far as Melisande – *The Silent Wail of Melisande* - pushed into new territory. One of the audience members who came after the show to chat was a German student who did her Masters thesis in Butoh and she said that there are now new Butoh groups in Japan also exploring incorporating spoken text and she seemed to locate my work in that [strand?] of experimentation so flattering so I suppose it does push into new territory in a way. And also in terms of my growing interest in site-specific work - also. Although, that's not too new.

NE: Yes. You've been doing that for awhile.

AT: Well, also Min Tanaka in Butoh has been doing that and Sankai Juko has done that and also site-specific art – there's a couple of decades of history. So I suppose I'm participating.

NE: Also then - as you say - a practical means of getting towards meaning, towards a piece. I mean it's quite practical and financially-viable to use a space that you don't have to hire.

AT: That too. That too. Absolutely. Again, back to the practical concerns.

NE: who was your target audience for this specific piece in terms of what you wanted to deliver as a product. Who were you aiming it at?

AT: I call it the 'cosmopolitan' audiences who are familiar with art and theatre and especially contemporary new art, new music, new dance. I think that with this piece I finally stopped pretending that I appeal to a mass audience and that that's not the point, I'm going into a 'niche' market, I suppose. People who are not... because if you don't know theatre...if even stepping into a theatre space is going to intimidate you [then] this is going to blow you out of the water completely. So ja I do niche into the knowledgeable audiences.

NE: So in a sense, despite of the quite- can I say – 'boundary-pushing' [AT chuckles] emphasis of your work, you're not trying to 'blow people out of the water', you're trying to access quite a specific audience.

AT: Because boundary-breaking takes two to tango, really [chuckles]. Gone are the days when the artist can just provoke, provoke, provoke and the audiences are so generous that they just give space for the artist to do that. The audiences aren't so generous anymore so you need to hone down to an audience who is willing to give, who is willing to travel along with you.

NE: I think you answered this next question: In the light of the fact that your work frequently deals with otherness/strangeness/foreignness, who is your general target audience and why?

AT: Well in terms of generally – you know what I mean? [Not just] in terms of *Melisande*. In my general audience I create quite different pieces. I do my avante garde pieces and I do my more classically-inspired pieces. You know, even though they don't look quite classical. For instance, I'm now choreographing a solo on Alan [Parker].

NE: The Kevin Volans one?

AT: Yes, with Kevin Volans music. It's quite classical in a lot of ways. And I think there that's a different audience.

NE: Who is that audience? Where will that be performed?

AT: A contemporary dance setting. But hopefully being able to be appreciated by a wider dance audience. Ja, different works, different audiences, for me.

NE: The show, *The Silent Wail of Melisande*, was eventually sold out and there was audience for another show plus interest to take this show elsewhere in the country. Were you expecting such a positive response?

AT: Um, I didn't think about it consciously. I don't know whether I'm repressing sort of subconscious fears or optimism. I think I made a pact with myself before [the national arts] festival that the acceptance or rejection – not that one can gauge these things so clearly – but the *apparent* acceptance or rejection by audiences is not going to be on the top priority for me. I'll pursue my artistic vision in this piece. That is the top priority. So it was very gratifying to have gotten positive response but I wasn't thinking about it.

NE: With the...um, working on your own, you don't have to pay an enormous company and not having to hire a space makes that more possible, I suppose.

AT: Yes, I had far less financial ground to make up from audience members.

NE: The sound of cars and non [paying] audience onlookers, frequently disrupted the final scene, performed on the pavement was well in view of the road to the Monument. To what extent do you think that affected the show? Was it good advertising? Did it kill the mood? What...how did you feel about that?

AT: Um, sho. It depends on what premise we want to work from. If I want – which I don't know what I want (what a thing to say as an artist!). Um, if I wanted the purity of a vision or of an experience, or if the audience member wanted the purity of an experience then that does distract. But if the audience is happy to go with a dystopian kind of experience or a heterotypic – if I borrow a theoretical term – a heterotypic experience, in which the otherness, the strangeness of a performance can be located within an urban space, then that is another meaning that they are very welcome to read into the piece. I think I'm also...I suppose I'm ambivalent about these things as well, which is why I don't insist on, you know, taking it away to the...you know, away from the road, into the Bot [Botanical] gardens, away from cars and so on, because I think partly practical concerns once more: the lack of electricity supply. Partly because – I am ambivalent about these things – and I don't know if I should insist on purity of vision or not. So, for some people I suppose it killed the mood and for some it didn't matter.

NE: I think, having taken part [as the viola-player, providing the musical score] and watching the piece again and again, for me – and getting a sense of the audience... in that moment. I think it increased the pity and that connection between the performance and the audience member so I think in that sense it was successful – and I do think it was good advertising.

AT: OK, well, ja!

NE: The blue flower – what does that symbolise?

AT: It came from – um, I saw on your [written] question, it also [says] ‘where does the image come from?’ it came from Mr Price Home Stores! A couple of props have recurred in different pieces. The blue flower was in this piece and in the *amaQueerkwere* last year. Obviously a lot of overlap between this piece [*Melisande*] and my *Pelleas and Melisande* production. The pouring of the water came from my first Butoh-inspired piece in 1999, *Your Proximity*. Where I also invited...it was done on stage so I couldn’t invite the audience in but I also had water poured over me. The dress was supposed to be used in the First Physical [Theatre Company’s] work *Lake Beneath the Surface* in 2001. It’s a bit sort of re-hashing or re-introducing previous scenes into this piece. But the blue flower specifically also...flowers aren’t usually blue. There are some flowers that are blue but usually they’re not. And there’s a slight sense of strangeness when one comes across blue flowers. And also blue is a colour often associated with sadness, with depression. Even in *Pelleas and Melisande*, in my director’s notes, I actually wrote about Melisande... I actually dedicated the production – I can’t remember my exact words but – to people who have tasted and felt the darkness of depression. Because I think that’s what *Melisande* is. It’s the coldness of being alone. And a blue flower echoed nicely with that theme for me and it’s also I suppose again that ambivalent thing of...it’s a really sort of cheap plastic flower, really. So again that...it’s not the sort of sacred ritual object at all but it can bounce off each other quite nicely.

NE: The same with the space as well, I think, in that it wasn’t necessarily the most picturesque...it’s quite a functional space in a sense, as well. And to create...to make beauty within that space is perhaps one of the strong points of the piece, I think. Also juxtaposing the plastic flower with the organic for me was quite a strong interplay.

AT: Right, ok, well that’s nice to hear.

NE: In making the work, how much did you rely on concept and how much on theatrical expression or technique?

AT: Um, both. One has to rely on both, I think. Without some kind of driving image or, you know, by which, when you say concept it can be an idea or image – which is both. I wanted to explore the idea of Melisande being a symbol of... an embodiment of a sadness, of this profound primeval sadness, darkness. I had – as I mentioned – the images of the woman high in the tree. I had the images of the water. Those are starting points but also those are vague. Those aren’t...that can’t be communicated to the audience. And in a way they don’t even have shape, they don’t even have existence until – they only have existence in my head until I actually go to the rehearsal room, go in the space and move to it. Or to compose a visual image in my head – or [rather] in the space - and try to see what works and what doesn’t. It’s again a co-operation between the two. Certainly for instance the three-part structure of the piece. That...I didn’t start with that. That wasn’t the concept. That came because of the thing that I was doing. The things I was dancing or speaking. And then suddenly they started to make sense in that way. So it’s both.

NE: So in a sense maybe it's a conversation between the concept that you have and your practical work. Once again, the practicalities of theatre...

AT: Ja. I suppose necessarily it has to start with concept or image. But, as the creative process carries on it sort of goes back and forth between the two and both of them change all the time. The practice changes the concept; the concept then informs the practice, and changes it and edits out and then it goes back to the concept and it becomes different... So, you know, it's always a back and forth.

NE: In the piece, the character of Melisande, who loves and who is desired but who cannot live in this world happily, is the one who will – to quote - 'open the door into a new era'. This strikes me as very Kushnerian. Is that the driving ideology behind the work?

AT: I don't know. I *am* interested in Kushner – *Angels in America* – but I didn't consciously think of that. The idea that Melisande opens the door to a new era is actually a quote from the play. It has a couple of ways... there are a couple of readings that are possible. One is ironic in that, in the original story, people in the castle think that this young beautiful princess will finally add a spot of lightness, of happiness to this gloomy, doomed place of death and stench and unhappiness and decay and sickness and so on. And the irony of that is eventually she doesn't prove to be that. In fact, she brought about – she was the culmination of the doom and that she started it. And in a way she's attracted to the castle, mysteriously, because she's in a way the harbinger of death, which is Maeterlinck's obsession. But, again with Maeterlinck's obsession is that after the doom there is always a birth. And it's not necessarily a happy birth. In a way, more often than not, the baby is the next cycle of tragedies, the next generation that will bear the sadness, that will face the unpredictability of the world. And it's...but it's still a birth. It's still...there's still a movement of after the death, the outbreath to nothingness, to death. There *is* an intake of breath. There *is* a rise towards the light but that is never eternal. It will drop back. The cycle will continue back to degeneration and death again. I think *that* more than Kushner's response to the philosophy of history - Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history – that's more the driving force behind *Melisande*. But there are parallels in that it is very reason that I performed the Melisande figure at all, I suppose has a Kushnerian politics behind it. Because, why perform sadness? Why show...why take an audience [through] an experience of sadness. And the idea in *Angels in America* is that, through the disease, and through death, a new social configuration can come out. And I suppose, by performing *Melisande*, by delving into the darkness of depression and sadness, maybe these kind of things can be worked through. So I'm not sure...this is far less explicitly political than Kushner's vision in *Angels in America*. But there are parallels.

NE: There's something I'd like to pick up on...something that you've just said. [That is] the sense of the baby being born who will continue the sadness. Is there maybe a sense in the work or in this idea that there are people who need to take on that role? And could that possibly be related to the performer's role in society? Does that make sense?

AT: So the baby – let me just clarify your question. The baby being born, the baby being the next person – people – to carry on the confrontation with sadness. You are asking, ‘how is that manifested in the production’?

NE: Ja, how is that manifested in the production and also could that possibly be related...well, let’s start with that question first.

AT: Sho!

NE: The sense of inevitability...of her role, of this child’s role...

AT: The difference, I think, I didn’t bring the child...a continuation...in my piece. I don’t know that’s... the gay man sensibility [laughs], I don’t think about children [laughs]. (Anyway, that’s another story altogether!). But, I was very aware that the Melisande character that I performed was very final in the sense that she dies in the end and that’s it. If there was a continuation it might be the audience, there might be individual audience members... but in the performance text itself it’s not there. I have some issues with that sense of finality. It’s theatrically effective. The pathos works. I’m not sure if that’s really what I want to say. Not that [?]....necessarily only have one thing to say. I might say...think this and then change my mind later but the sense of finality...the sense of Melisande having performed essentially a...the water washing being both a crucifixion and a baptism ritual, having performed that for the community of the audience and then goes on to die...I mean I’m not sure if that is really what I want to say, an adequate response to sadness. But in this case, it worked out that way. It has some parallels with the Maeterlinck story so I just went with it. Ja, that would be my response to your question.

NE: I think also where I’m going is that for me also a reading of the work was...as the audience washed away the white paint, so the soul of Melisande departed. And that’s where I find the connection between the role of Melisande as the bearer of sadness and the confronter of sadness and the role of the performer. Because, once again, the next night, you’re going to put that paint back on and you’re going to wash it off again, go through this experience with the audience.

AT: Ok.

NE: Is that a connection that you would find perhaps appropriate within the work? Or is that not where you’re going in terms of relating the work to the role of the performer?

AT: Ja, um, there is a sense [that] Melisande in the Maeterlinck version is the harbinger of death. Whether Maeterlinck intended her to be a figure of transformation and salvation, I don’t know, I’ll have to think about that. I gave it a very strongly a messianic bent, which is, I suppose, why you picked up on the Kushner thing, ‘cause that’s also very messianic. And, I suppose, there is a strong...at the moment of pouring the water...that intersection between the Melisande character and the performer is...that is the point of intersection

because the water's on *my* skin. That's a (quote unquote) 'real' - a moment of the 'real'. And, I mean, I'm not sure. My Masters thesis is all about...I'm just reading it now...it's all about writing *against* this promise and impossibility of the performer as a shamanic...as a shaman for a community, to cleanse the community. I actually wrote against that - and here I am doing it! I suppose, once again, the ambivalence there. Because, there's a very powerful case made for it... in whatever style one works...Tim Miller, who's work is probably very far removed *now* from the kind of deep, dark, strange-looking kind of work that I do. I mean he's much more accessible, talking to the audience, [?] comedic, quirky...but he also configures his role as performer to be a shamanic healer to the community. So, that role of the performer is not necessarily tied to an aesthetic or a style. Whether I'm comfortable with that role or whether I think that role is ethical or not - that's another debate. And, I'm not sure. It's theatrically-effective but I'm not sure if I believe in it. I don't know.

NE: On that note, did you aspire to be 'cutting-edge' -if I can give you that label? Do you think your audiences expect strangeness from you and, if so, to what extent is that a pro or a con?

AT: I don't think I aspire to be cutting-edge so much as I just accept the fact that I look strange to people. Full stop. And [whether?] some people seem to have gone for it and like it and find it exhilarating and think it's inspiring and some people think it's strange and laughable and so on, that's fine. I think in this piece it's more about me not aspiring to but actually saying, 'This is what I do, for better or for worse, for pro or for con'. And I mean I'm not trying...I suppose, part of that question is am I trying...in the vein of so many avant garde artists, performers etc trying to provoke the audience or antagonise the audience, which is what Innes's - Christopher Innes's - conception of the avant garde is. No. that is not my explicit intention. I think that time -again - that time is past. The audiences aren't generous with that anymore. So that's not my explicit intention.

NE: Primarily you work solo. Is that part of your artistic ideology and what is it about the solo form that draws you?

AT: It's a form that I work most comfortably with at the moment. It all came out of that year when I did *Pelleas and Melisande* as well in the theatre form and then I did my piece for the DaimlerChrysler award which was *Songs that Seep into Forgetfulness* [2002] - that was a group piece of eight, including myself in it. And I actually found that I don't know how to communicate my artistic vision to a group of people. I was actually chatting to another person yesterday and I haven't found anyone who does what I do, really. That kind of Butoh-physical theatre thing. Vincent Truter does Butoh but...I think he also likes solo work but we also go slightly differently. I go very...I'm almost quite promiscuous in my approach to Butoh and theatre - he [Truter] is very purist. And those two visions don't really match and I think I respect the kind of purist pursuit into Butoh that he goes into. And so I don't find that...I don't collaborate easily. Partly because of my personality and partly because of the kind of style that I've found myself in. If I work... If I make a piece of dance theatre more down

the line of contemporary dance theatre or physical theatre [?] it's probably...I'll go into group work quite easily. Ja, probably. If I work in a realist theatre piece, which was my first term work for my Honours Directing year – I did an Anthony Magella piece and there I have an established code, an established method of working that I can just tap into and I can actually do that very successfully. That was actually my best piece of that year. But as far as establish[ing] my own code of working, my own – there are a couple of things: my own way of working, 'modus operandi' and also the kind of iconographic system that I... the visual system, the kinetic system that one sets on stage, my own system – I don't quite know yet how to communicate that to other people, to other performers, other specifically dancers and actors. I think, because we collaborated on music, I'm starting to find a way to communicate that to a musician. That's great. That's very liberating to know that I can do that. But, it will probably take me a few more years to experiment with how can I communicate my ideas to a dancer. At the moment I've worked with Alan. I'm experimenting with how I can communicate my movement ideas to a single dancer...to a solo dancer. I will probably do a few more solos, try to teach myself. And then maybe in a couple of years onwards I can do...maybe even as soon as next year – who knows? – I'll do...I'll move away from the solo piece, come back to it. Who knows?

NE: Finally – you were talking about the future – where to from here and also where would you like to see South African theatre go in the next 5-10 years?

AT: Ok, I'll speak for myself mostly. I think I've given up the idea of speaking for South African theatre because I think I've resolved that I don't really...I don't fit squarely into being a South African. I don't know what that means and I don't think...People – even though it's plural, it's pluralist, I don't think I really fit into that category. So I won't speak for South African theatre. For myself, I want to make work and I want to continue pursuing the kind of multiple styles that I mentioned. The Butoh-inspired style seems to be working well so I can pursue that. More contemporary dance style – there is a market there so I can pursue that. Also because in terms of teaching work there's a market there easier than with Butoh-inspired work. Making physical theatre pieces. And also pursuing site-specific work; to continue to push that. I think a couple of people, in this country – now that I've said that I won't speak for South African theatre [laughs] – but I don't know...they...I don't know how they identify themselves with the idea of South African, there are a couple of artists in this country who are keen to work in that way – Jay Pather, Boyzie Cekwana, Juanita [Finestone-Praeg] and visual artists as well - who are interested in the site-specific and... I mean Gary [Gordon]'s been teaching the site-specific course for years here so I feel that that is something that can develop. So, I'll pursue that.

NE: Well, thank you very much.

AT: Thank you.

Appendix B

Interview with Jeannette Ginslov.

Conducted by Alan Parker, in conjunction with the 2005 Honours Physical Theatre class. Rhodes University.

11 May 2005.

How would you define or describe your style of dance and choreography?

Another very difficult question to answer because first of all as an artist to define or describe your own work is one of the most difficult things to answer, because you try as much to do, and just to allow whatever it is that intrigues or fascinates you, what you've been taught with, what you're wrestling with at the moment, to express it truthfully in that moment where you are is probably the way to go.

But so saying, I'm starting to notice things I do do and that is to look at personal stories rather than big political stories. So it's also defined as being eclectic...what does that mean? It means putting a whole lot of different things together and see what comes of it...and that is true. Some also say it's Postmodern Deconstructionist (laugh). Who came up with that? But I suppose it is a bit like that, it doesn't have a one on one relationship with the idea and the piece that comes out of it. What happens in between the initial idea and the piece that comes out is a lot of teasing and a lot of investigation in terms of "let's try this, no it doesn't work". But I always come in with quite a big sketchpad, and I know the conceptual relevance and I understand the concept, what must happen, with a beginning, middle and end. Not that it's a linear narrative, with beginning, middle and end in its structure.

Definitely the work is expressionistic, but it always comes from an idea, an intellectual thought, and it always comes from true stories. I'm fascinated with what human beings do, what we do as a society, what stories are created around us, even the little ones. They used to be big stories, political stories. What moved South Africans? Now it's like, what moves the person in Grahamstown? What is your story about and why do you find that significant and why is it then significant for an audience?

Maybe I'm growing up a bit...the other important thing is to think about the audience more, and I think that comes from working at AFDA, because they're involved in the film industry and that's about entertaining and engaging with an audience, and so you are going to think about your audience. Are they going to get this? In the past it was "Ag, who cares?" just do the thing. Now I'm more guided by asking, "Will they get that, as best as possible, that has intrigued me?" So that what moved me will move them. In today's world I think we need to dumb down. I'm not saying make it easy...you will tease, will scratch at their noses, but you don't want to offend them because then they walk out and never come back again, because then you won't run a theatre. It's a difficult play to have.

In what ways has your approach to dance evolved during your career as an artist?

Well I started out as a solo performer. I was very much caught up with the political times we were living in and the first piece I ever made I was banned from performing again, because I performed at RAU. So immediately I was on the front page of the Sunday Times, nationwide coverage, it was great. And I was just reflecting back what society's problems are all about, issues I suppose. And then the big issues, big political issues. What was wrong with the country at that time? Then it moved into the nineties with so-called liberation but I still find there are problems, still huge, major problems. I've done pieces about sex workers in Hillbrow and their crack addiction. And what happens to them. They were kind of allegoric in some way. My group pieces were like that and then concurrently I've been working with my strange solos where I've looked also at stories. JM Coetzee is one particular source, news articles... seeing wherein lay the truth in that and how can I reflect that? I'm very concerned about justice.

I want to evolve more as a dance filmmaker. My next piece is a dance film and here my concern is women and women's issues. I would say that as South Africans we still have a problem with female rights. This piece is about abuse to women and how to get out of this vicious cycle. It's horrendous the statistics today.

My work is funny like that, something sparks me intellectually but also emotionally, and I jump at the cause. But so saying, this new work, because it's about personal emotions, about Alba Emoting, and is more about the self and personal stories, I'm evolving from a very political animal to one that becoming more and more personal. And not such a fighter for the cause, a bit more playful. And then evolving into film eventually, which is largely a financial choice..., it sounds cynical, but there's some truth in that.

Is there a market for that?

Yes. I think dance people are extremely visual and I think they understand the moving body much more than a normal filmmaker. So they come up with very intriguing stuff.

What concerns would you say have been most influential in the formation of your dance aesthetic, and what concerns are intriguing you at present?

I have pretty much answered that. The concerns are becoming more and more about the small self, and what drives that person. What problems is that person solving at that moment and what emotions come out of that? Political to personal.

So would you say it's moving from the general to trying to focus specifically on one aspect or goal in every piece you do?

It depends. Sometimes an idea just hits you, like with this new piece. And that's about personal emotions. But it's also about not my emotions, but other people's emotions, and they are very particular, very personal. But yes, going

from the general to the personal, becoming very small little narratives. And seeing what are the binaries in all those moments, emotions, playing with them...wrestling with them.

Where would you place yourself and your work within South African dance practice? Also, which other practitioners or companies inspire you?

I don't locate myself anywhere. I just am. I do my thing and get along with what I'm doing. But so saying, I'm often interviewed and they say "Oh so you're the outsider"...and I go "What?" I'm not on the mainstream, so therefore I must be doing something that is classified 'off-centre' and out on the peripheries. It is because some of my pieces have been considered by the mainstream as weird because I don't just put on the music and dance, or make dancers just dance. There is always some very significant thing that I'm dealing with. Whether it's a problem for me or for everyone at large. And then sometimes probably when I do the stuff, people can't read it. Maybe that's why, they've never seen that before and it's difficult to read. However, there's still a lot of intrigue and impact, and still get funding so I must be doing something right. There's always got to be an 'outsider' to pull the centre. I've tried to make pretty dance pieces, but I can't do that. My head is too busy, it's not good enough for me to just dance to the music, and it's just too simple. The worst thing at the moment is that, after 1994 the effect of so-called liberation and democracy, the world's fascination with South Africa is still present but now it's enforcing a certain aesthetic in the arts world and making us think "oh this is the way we capture the world's imagination". I think its fallen into a rut. It's a bit like creating a souvenir of the country. It's becoming more and more generic and if you don't meet those criteria you must be on the outside, you must be somebody weird. It's very modernist, very formulaic, it doesn't scratch at the surface, destabilise the form. It keeps it pure, so that nobody's upset at the end of the day. I don't hold a gripe; I just understand the political forces that are involved for these dance companies to maintain themselves. In order to receive funding and in order to be within that centre, there's a certain prescribed manner they have to work in.

Sometimes I think "wouldn't it be wonderful if my work was wonderfully popular?" but then it wouldn't be the same. But so saying, I did a work at last year's Umbrella. It had a bit of hip-hop, a bit of contemporary dance, and a video by a graffiti artist. And I thought, "I'm going to make you guys a work now that you're all going to love", and they did. And I thought, "well ok...well done...I can do that".

Are there any other dance practitioners you are drawn to or inspire you?

Well, obviously Gary Gordon is a mentor of mine and his work has inspired me a lot. Robyn Orlin to a certain extent. Steven Cohen to a certain extent. But no, not really. Overseas, Lloyd Newson definitely. Mary Wigman. Wish she were still alive. William Forsythe, the Stuttgart Ballet...an amazing man, uses a lot of formal technique but juxtaposes it with expressionism. That friction is wonderful, extreme classicism with expressionism right next to it. The clash of that is wonderful. He takes a lot of risks like that, and he uses

multimedia as well. Anna De Keersmaeker, Vandekeybus. He uses multimedia in his solos to such an extent it looks like he's got a whole corps de ballet on stage. Beautiful work.

Your new work for the First Physical Theatre Company explores the use of Alba Emoting™, could you comment on this technique and tell us a bit about the new work?

Alba Emoting™ is a technique used by actors to gain emotional intelligence and to display emotions purely on a physiological manner. So you don't use method technique to use memory in order to evoke an emotional response in the present, whilst you're acting. It also provides the actor with a way of stepping out so that you physiologically step out of the emotion you are in. The technique trains young actors to fast-forward them in the six basic emotions. Those are fear, anger, joy, sadness, tenderness and erotic love, and then there's the step out which is neutral. So you learn these basic emotions and for every basic emotion there is a breathing pattern, posture, tension in the body and a facial configuration. And so you learn those. When you go into anger, Susanna Bloch (who developed the technique by studying many subjects) looked at what people do when they're angry. For the most part, universally, we flare our nostrils and breath through our noses rapidly and become very tense, drive ourselves forward and frown. Literally, that is what you teach. People get so angry and that's all they are. There is no psychological reference, no cultural reference, and no historical reference. You are only teaching then on a physiological level. It becomes a tool for the actor. Your body remembers its own language of emotion and it's a fast and easy technique to go into different states of emotion.

I also teach them to calibrate it. To go from Anger 1 to Anger 5. Then you learn where Anger 3 is. They become emotional athletes. It's a bit like a *Tendu*, the next time you lift the leg higher, and then it can go a bit higher. Physiologically this is what you do. When they are acting, they put this on top of their character.

Being a dancer I thought, how can I use this with choreography? When I was in Chile learning this from Dr. Bloch, I performed a bit of this at a conference and people found it very powerful. And it is very powerful to use when you dance, although I must say if you overuse the breath you get very dizzy. But you can use it at certain points in the dance and this is what I try do here in this new work. It's going to be part of a series I think. At the moment its title is "Part 1: Fear and Laughter", and looking at what is fear, who do you read it on the body, and how does an audience see fear? What is laughter, what makes us laugh? And finally, what is the mixed emotion? Fear and laughter mixed gives us embarrassment, and that's fascinating to me. It's what inspired the work. To find stories that were either fearful, I asked each dancer to write four stories, fearful stories, embarrassing stories, in real life. I selected the best stories and they each tell a story in a different way. One person whispers, another shouts, but they all go into an emotion and dancer on stage react.

I don't expect the audience to feel fearful, but they read it on the dancers very clearly. That is Part 1; the next might be love and sadness, bereavement, aloneness. There could be many combinations.

How long did you do the course for?

I did a private course for a week. Every morning and afternoon, for six hours a day. Everyday we did a different emotion and the mixed emotions. Then I taught, so she could see me teaching, so about three weeks in all.

What relevance does a work like this have for South African audiences?

It's multilingual. I've got some speaking in Cantonese, English, Xhosa and Zulu. So immediately it's dealing with multilingualism. It's multicultural because we're looking at different people residing here, telling stories about when they were in Johannesburg. It all rests well within a South African context. Who are we as South Africans? Why do we tell these stories? What makes us emotional? What makes us feel fear? What makes us, as South Africans, laugh? What makes us feel embarrassment? I hope the audience sees a bit of themselves in it. Emotional relevance...and cultural relevance.

Your work is often very 'visual', utilising multimedia and technology, in conjunction with theatricality and choreographed movement. Could you elaborate on your views regarding this relationship and the ways in which this relationship is approached in your work?

Well, well done on writing something so succinct about my work, it's spot on. Technology is another medium to use. The eye of the camera can explore and amplify further, and poetically amplify, what you are trying to say. Live voice on microphone, trying to amplify the sound of the voice. If a person whispers on stage you won't be able to hear a thing. It's using different media to pull out different threads that perhaps normally you won't see so that small movement in the face, now you will see. Plus it gives many different viewpoints. I like to do that. It makes you work.

You see a cameraman on stage, making it happen while it is happening. Microphone is taking in sound while a person is speaking. It's not all one before in a studio. I suppose that's where all the deconstructionist stuff comes in. You are seeing the work being made while the process is happening.

The dance is very choreographed. It's so hard to get audiences to watch improvisation. Theatrically is very important. I don't like big sets. That's it, a camera is a set. What does that say about the piece? Very simple, minimal.

Appendix C

Interview with Acty Tang

By Alan Parker, 8 July 2007, Rhodes Drama Department, Grahamstown.

***Chaste*, as articulated in your programme note, is a significantly personal work. What in particular drew you to the story of Salome in light of your own personal story and how much of the narrative is based on your personal story?**

I first read *Salome* in 2000 and immediately I was struck it. I instinctively knew it's not about the consequences of unbridled lechery, and desire. I think now that I've done the work and spoken about it, I realise it's quite a thing as a gay man, what you see as beautiful many, many other people see as monstrous. It can boil down to something as simple as that. Within that there is of course a lot of emotional and political dynamics as well. If you had to make it simple it's that: the monstrous and the beautiful, and how they often co-exist. And I suppose, in the programme note as well, how you often collude with that as well. The repression and fear of coming out.

And the narrative itself? It's a very intertextual narrative. Were any of the stories specific to any experiences that you've had, because you did have a hand in writing the actual script...

I did ask Awelani [Moyo] to come up with her responses. So in fact the programme note is very personal but the narrative itself is not necessarily so. What I wanted to do was to move away from saying that one to one relationship, with *Salome* and me. It was what I was trying to do. I suppose it does have a lot of resonances with other people's experiences, the documentary sections that we liked interacting with the personal and poetic sections, which are not necessarily tied down to any one particular story. I did consciously, in my brief to Awe, want the balance between the two. And then in the rehearsal process I asked each person to, towards the end after we had developed the scene's language and the cues, I asked each person to tell a story that *Chaste* evokes for them. A story of their own or a memory in their own lives, or a story they had heard about from someone else. So I would tell the story of my coming out and Babs had a story about her and a relationship in her past, and Jess wrote a poem. The idea of telling a story is there, but it's not necessarily the meaning of the story. It's the pose; it's the approach to telling your story that is embedded in the piece.

The other aspect of it is... I was trying to figure it out the other day, but I haven't fully thought about it yet, is that Oscar Wilde had this idea of criticism, that criticism, and I might be misquoting him, fulfil the work the art. And that the work of the critic is artistic in itself. Which is actually, I suppose, a precursor to the idea of intertextuality in today's jargon. *Chaste*, hopefully, serves as a criticism or an intertextual development of the *Salome* story, opening it up, unpacking it, and making it reach further to speak to other kind of echoes and such. Again trying to move away from a one-to-one, 'this-is-my-personal-story'. Yet it has personal resonances.

Was there a reason why you chose to tell the Salome story now? Was it purely because you had the opportunity to?

It's partly because I had the opportunity to. I have been wrestling with the Salome thing and the extracted theme of desire and hurt, I've been wrestling with that for the last few years, since I did my Honours really. In various ways. So when an opportunity comes across, I chose to do it.

You've clearly said 'sod off' to the plot, both Wilde's version as well as the biblical narrative of Salome. What influenced the structure of your narrative?

Again the idea of intertextuality and the idea of fragments. It's very poststructuralist notions, approaches, narratives. I encountered the same with *Melisande* last year, but more so with Salome because it's so dependent on...they it's a symbolic text, a Buddhist text, and it's imagery, but actually it's got a very tightly woven plot to it. I tried to free myself from it because the first time I did *Melisande*, which was *Pelleas and Melisande*, Maeterlinck's text; I was so tied down to the plot. So I'm very aware of the danger of being tied down to the plot, and my strength is in letting the images speak and so on. So I was really trying to get away from the plot of Salome. At first I had the idea of inverting the plot so it starts with Salome coming from the dead, which is I suppose that element is still there, and then making Lokanaan come alive. I was trying to be clever with the plot. But at the end of the day it's the image and theme, and the emotional core that is the most important. And that allowed the freedom to make echoes with Pakistan, with Iran, New York and so on. To switch between Salome, us as performers, what we experience, and other people outside in today's world. If I stuck to the plot that freedom wouldn't be there. It becomes more of a parable-like structure, where you stick with the parable and then the resonances in the audience's mind. Whereas this way the resonances are embedded in the text.

Your use of the performance space is also very interesting. The work is in the conventional theatre but in an unconventional way. What was your thinking in taking this approach? A lot of your work has been clearly site-specific, outdoors, but this time you chose to do it in the theatre.

It's the comfort factor. It's the technology that the theatre can offer. Its silence, and focus and darkness that the theatre can offer. I didn't start thinking of choosing the theatre. I was looking around town and I was going to go to St Aidan's where there is a big fountain. I think I always want to go back to the work, what's does the work demand, what does the work say to you? *Melisande* said outside to me, partly because of the images that are already in the play, forests, birds. Salome is a princess, of an opulent court. It has to be an urban space, a built architectural space. It's not a natural space. That's not what Salome's about. So that's why I stuck to architecture and then partly because of that and partly due to logistics, the practical kind of demands of the production, it suddenly became clear that the theatre is the

architectural space I should engage in. And because the symbolism was so overtly theatrical, kind of artist, it seemed right to go into a space that is dedicated to making art. And then to try and make it speak in unconventional ways, to make it speak out of its habits. There is also the dimension that the Young Artist always performs in a theatre, so I said "ok cool, I'll work within the tradition, but how can I twist it around?" Again, how do I make the audience see in a different way? The core of site-specific work is actually about shifting the audience's way of seeing. Or at least that's what it should be about.

And the space is transformed because you forget that you are on a stage.

Yes. And so hopefully the kind of expectations and mental habits, and psychological habits, of seeing a piece of theatre, hopefully those are disturbed. Which came about quite interestingly, because I forgot how ingrained these habits are sometimes for a lot of audience members. And how people derive comfort and they how they should behave and how they should think and feel. Even from Drama I, we enter the space and we don't, I lie, even before that, when I was in high school, the idea that theatre and art, writing and literature, should push you out of your comfort zone. And take you out of your habits, because habits can block positive change. So actually before Drama I, even before reading Peter Brook, I had that idea. But I think reading Peter Brook very clearly crystallised the idea that it's a valid approach to making theatre, to make it immediate. Now I'm not just talking specifically about *Chaste*, I'm talking about my general approach that I can do a lot of the work, but the audience has to do it with me. It's *The Empty Space* again, it's the performer-audience, and they are a very important part of the equation. Now I can't rehearse the audience but what I can do is set the performance situation that encourages the audience to shift in what they bring to the performance moment. Which is where, again, the site-specific thing comes in, and it's to shift the role the audience plays. In the theatre architecture the audience has role, they think they don't but it's just because it's so naturalised. Their role is to sit passively, and absorb and think and feel and consume. And then doing something like that in the theatre space, the bastion of the convention itself, to twist it around and to make them behave differently. I forget that for a lot of them it's very uncomfortable, but suppose the discomfort is... um... I was telling in another interview, any psychologist or therapist would tell you that to grow you have to move out of your comfort zone, and you have to confront the uncertain to arrive somewhere else. It's all part of thinking and of reading an image.

It seems to me also a bit of a cheeky nod to Oscar Wilde, because of course when he wrote *Salome* it wasn't allowed to be performed on a British stage because it was depicting biblical characters, and yet now, a century or two later.... I found it quite interesting that you chose to perform it in a theatre.

Yes, I mean *Salome* has inspired a lot of people, and a lot of people have paid homage to Oscar Wilde in so many different ways. And Oscar Wilde's

artifice (in its ambiguous sense not its negative sense) is so important his aesthetics that again it seems wrong to go to the fields of the streams. The decadence and it's so much about the beauty and the ornate beauty, which is also decadent and ominous but within that you can also find the beautiful etcetera. It's all about that, and to honour that you have to go into a clearly artificial space, a theatre space.

The movement language draws from many styles, with elements of Butoh, contemporary, modern, African dance. The character of lokanaan moves very differently from your Salome character. How did you approach the development of a movement language in relation to the content of the work?

Because the content is so personal, or has such personal resonance, the movement invention was also partly drawn from the individual performers themselves. I suppose it's both ways, because I like to draw from the body of the performer I work with content that has personal stance. And then I also look at what the serves the scene. What will make the scene speak in the freshest and the most awakening way to the audience? So for instance, in the execution scene, I went into rehearsal not knowing how the scene would play out. In most other scenes I had some notion of how it might look or, what I usually do is go in there with an idea: What is the physical sensation of the idea I am trying to capture? And then through the rehearsal it might change, it might develop and so on. You know, I'll give suggestions to Sifiso [Majola] and he will offer something back or say "no it doesn't gel with my body" and then he'll offer something else. With the execution scene I really just did not know. I knew the execution has to happen, but how specifically? You were at that rehearsal I think. It was that one where I didn't know how to approach him. Do I crawl? Do I *jetè*? [Laughs] And then finding the solution in the moment of rehearsal, in the context of how the audience sees it, in the context of the whole piece, how to make the scene have life and then the solution of that *Noh* theatre, slow approach with the highly symbolic gesture, became the solution to the scene. Like I was saying earlier, it's not earth shattering or new at all in its approach. Grotowski, for example, talks about his productions in poor theatre; he aims for each production to develop a physical language that is appropriate to that production rather than relying on a preset, pre-learned physical language. Which again then becomes a bit 'back in your habits'. I'm not claiming that the whole piece, *Chaste*, works in that principle. I do reference so many other dance languages, but hopefully let it speak, not only because that is the dance language used to make an impact or make a moment. In some instances I used it probably a bit simplistically, using the idea of the step, which for a lot people associates with traditional African dance. It wasn't a specific dance code that I drew out but the idea of that. And that equates very much with the masculinity, which is what the text of that scene, the spoken words of that scene, deal with. I think that relationship between the movement and the meaning could be developed more fully, in more complex ways, but I think it spoke.

On the other hand, contemporary dance, you know release technique, those kinds of things, I'm very familiar with because that's my training, and I've used that to find, again, the physical sensation. In my head that's when lokanaan

transforms from that preaching prophet, that repressing kind of like 'you sinful sinner' [laughs] into the beautiful man who is actually comfortable and able to express his desires and sensuality. So I use the release technique and even classical vocabulary to help Sifiso reach that sensation of loftiness, of sensuality. And then there hopefully I invest in the vocabulary through, say for instance, using curves, of looking at how momentum and swing with the body can find and invoke those sensations.

Similarly in the rope section, hopefully by using impact or using bound energy to convey that sense of aggression in the piece. So I suppose having spoken about that I suppose also a Laban analysis of movement does help me choreograph as well. How do I shape the dynamics of each new section to let the movement language go towards the content?

The audience in *Chaste* are overtly present in the performance, often touched and spoken to directly. What was your intention here in shifting the performer-audience dynamic?

We've spoken about that a bit earlier regarding the site. It's about giving the audience a role or, if I use a Brechtian term, to alienate the audience from their naturalised role, to make their role strange, *verfremdung effect*, so that they are aware of the act of viewing and the act of participation in the performance moment. And hopefully then the divide between the performer and the audience, not that it can be eradicated because ultimately they have paid for a ticket, they came there to watch, and they are not rehearsed. But what the divide use means in the conventional sense of the audience gaze, being the consumerist gaze, they are structurally unable to shift and be implicated in the action. Hopefully by taking them away from that convention the piece allows the possibility of being moved, of engaging with their personal sense of being rather than being able to just tuck that parable safely away in a box after they have walked out of the theatre. So it's really just developing on that whole *Verfremdung effect* idea.

In developing a piece I try to consciously ask myself what is the role of the audience, what is their journey? And, in fact, if I use a Stanislavskian term, what is their super-objective? Not in a very clear, very marked out sense, but I just try use that question to keep reminding that they're not there as the omniscient eye, the audience, to watch all the action and pick it apart, but they also have a journey. A literal journey in the space, but they also have a journey through the piece of transformation like any character in the piece should have a transformation. Therefore they are involved, and what action should I structure to allow them to go on that journey, to reach towards that super-objective. In *Chaste* that hasn't been very clear because it's so complex. The journey is unclear. In a piece like *Melisande* it was quite clear, leading through the forest into the deep dark, then coming out of it and that moment of transfiguration I suppose with pouring water on my body. *Chaste* is less clear, but hopefully the sense of the audience having some kind of objective on the action is still there.

The work is particularly sensory incorporating sounds, visual images, smell and touch. The design of the production also uses many textures,

velvet, veil, glass, and stone, digital image. Is there a particular way in which you wanted to appeal to the senses of the audience?

A lot of these ideas also come from Ingrid [Gordon] as well. She really pushed the sense of space into the sensual, the visual, and the textual. But I think for me, I am interested in, and I'm not saying that I succeed all the time in doing that, but I am interested in making theatre that works on the sensory, and therefore leading to the sensual, and even the erotics of meaning, which is a Susan Sontag term I think, I might be misquoting her, but I think the idea that meaning doesn't work through the rational, it can also work through the erotics of texts. It's what I was talking about earlier as well. Because I work in physical theatre, and the idea that the physical can speak other than through cognitive and linguistic signification, I think that's important. But then also how words themselves can speak beyond the linguistic, the rational, in context of the larger production, when it collides with sound, it collides song and image, can it reach beyond verbal communication. And I think that there is constantly a paradox here because I'm actually quite a 'head' person, and I think the complexity of the ideas in *Chaste* of intertextuality and linking Salome, the bible and Oscar Wilde and my interpretation of them, linking it to contemporary experience, to personal experience, leaping from poetry to documentary, it's very complex for the audience to take in. I think the paradox I need to negotiate is that I'm not calling on the audience to switch of their minds, in fact, they have to work quite hard intellectually, but at the same time we receive things sensually. And I think that is the ideal and I'd like to achieve that, but I don't know how successful it was.

The work for me seems to tread the narrow line between pleasure and discomfort, the beautiful and the harrowing. Certain images are beautiful, others are jarring. Some sounds are conventionally pleasing, others disconcerting. What does this juxtaposition mean for you in creating the work?

I think it not only reflects the decadence of the beauty and the monstrous, which again then comes from the work. What the work speaks, what the work demands. With the theme that I'm dealing with, that's what it is: the dichotomy, the full moon and the sickle moon, the beautiful Salome, virgin and chaste and the monstrous lecher, no not lecher, seductress, femme fatale in the original Salome story. You know the Beardsly, the blood coming from Iokanaan's head and a lily grows from the blood on the ground. So that juxtaposition is structurally in the source, which is then why I tried to surface that as well. On the other hand it also reflects the pressure of being a Young Artist Award winner and having to place the work in a larger audience who will not be knowledgeable of the *avant garde* and who might not think theatre should challenge and that dance could be anything other than the classical, or modern dance. So I suppose I consciously made part of the piece potentially conventionally pleasing, and then subvert that with things that push the audience's perception. I suppose in a similar way, of choosing to use the Rhodes Theatre, but then not using it conventionally, I tried to straddle between what is the comfort zone and the discomfort of the audience. So I

don't totally lose them, but I don't make them totally unchallenged. The larger context of that is a reaction to the conditions we find ourselves in in making art. The last couple of years it's very clear that people do not accept the premise of art. They accept the premise of mass media, movies and TV, sound bytes and quick messages, and clear short images dictated by urban and market economy tastes. So their attention span switches off very quickly if it is not something that is recognisable or comfortable or somehow titillating or funny, or conventionally beautiful. So the hook is, at this stage in 2007, it is necessary to have the hook of recognised beauty. And once that hook is established then something can be done about it to produce the subversion. Three years down the line that might change. But at the moment, yes, that's one of the strategies that I've chosen to make *Chaste* speak to the audience.

Thank you.

Appendix D

Interview with Awelani Moyo

Conducted by Alan Parker, 7 August 2007, in Rhodes Drama department, Grahamstown.

In writing the text for 'Chaste', how did you go about writing the story of Salome?

Well, essentially we just started from an idea. I chatted to Acty and we spoke about the angle we wanted to take and ideas that he had and images that popped out at him. So we just worked from there, from the images themselves and then found the links with the text almost after the fact. So the original text wasn't the real basis for it, we wanted to go beyond it and imagine this world after the story that Oscar Wilde tells. And that's where we found our text.

So based post-her death?

Yes. It was what happens to Salome after she is murdered, after the play ends. Which is why it didn't follow anything particularly recognisable from the original play because we decided to make up our own landscape and fill it up with our own images.

Your narrative is non-linear. What choices did you make in structuring your narrative?

I think the most important thing was to stay true to the themes that Acty had identified from the beginning. So once we'd both gone away and come back with some text, a draft text, which was basically a free brainstorm, then we sort of went through the text and found key images that stuck to the themes and so we stuck to those piece and threw other pieces away that didn't seem to be concerned with the main themes. And also we wanted pieces that could be quite open, that didn't have a very sort of strict interpretation, that could be universal in a sense (that's a horrible word) but open enough for the audience and for everyone else to be able to relate to. I think that's where the structure came from. We tried not to stick to a narrative format of beginning, middle and end, but just to draw a thread through so that each piece as it came along built on an image from the last piece.

There are many subtexts and sub-narratives in your text: stories from Africa, Pakistan, personal diary extracts, poetry and an interesting conversation between a person and a scab. Where did these sub-narratives originate and what was your thinking in adding them to the 'grand' (if I can use that word) narrative?

The sub-narratives I think originated mainly from the first meeting I had with Acty, because we talked a lot in that first meeting about the idea of touch, and then divided touch into different categories: the ability to feel heat, the ability

to feel texture, to feel shape. And so when I went away and worked, I isolated each one of those and tried to respond to them. And then I thought it might be nice to try and contrast the free poetic stuff with something more concrete. So that's where the African and Pakistan stories came from. To try and ground it in a more tangible context if you will. What was the other question?

What was your thinking in adding them to the 'grand' narrative?

I think the basic idea was trying to unlock the relevance of the original Salome story with everyone. And because of the issues that Acty wanted to deal with, we had to try and move beyond just one voice and one story, and try and get as many different perspectives. So I think that was why I personally wanted to add as many different voices as well. but from my side it was also just wanting to give Acty as much choice as possible, to pick the stuff he wanted, and if he didn't like it we didn't go with that. So we ended up having a lot of choice. So I think that's how it happened.

How did you come across these stories? Did you then go off and do research on your own? I remember you said something about something your mother had written?

Yes. I just tried to think from my own context, what I could relate to, what I had been thinking about. So the story about the African woman and the widower rituals where she gets inherited. That was from my mother's research for her Master's thesis, so that was right on top of my list just in terms of what I could relate to. The story from Pakistan came from a BBC radio story that I had heard and I thought "oh, that actually has to do with what we're doing". And then a lot of the other extracts were from stuff that I had started writing before and had left and as I was going back through I thought "well, this could work nicely with the images that we're using". The scab actually came out of me trying to think of a different way that I could tell the story, of dealing with the idea of touch and the acceptance or refusal, because we were dealing a lot with that sort of in-between space, between yes and no. I was just trying to get out of that internal monologue type of writing and use a very concrete theme metaphor that was almost comical, because it had quite a quirky thing about it and I thought well everything else I've written is quite depressing so I wanted to try something a little bit more light-hearted but that made the metaphor quite easy to relate to and quite clear. That's where that came from.

In what ways did you respond to the other Salome texts; both the biblical story and Oscar Wilde's version?

Well I had read the Oscar Wilde version two or three years back and had sort of forgotten it but I had a vague idea. And the thing that stood out to me about that was the images in the text. I've forgotten who they were drawn by, but the text came with very stylistic, almost art nouveau drawings, and that was the one thing I remembered. The biblical story I actually went back to read after I had spoken to Acty, and I didn't really feel like I got much from there but I think that's probably what made me jump to the African and the

Pakistan stories because I had a sense of this kind of third world type of atmosphere where things are done by social laws and cultural customs and stuff. So I think that the biblical story probably affected that aspect of the text. In terms of Oscar Wilde's text, it just helped to give me a sense of the style of the writing because a lot of the time some of the poetic parts were written almost in a style trying to evoke that grand landscape and that biblical language. And because I thought it really located, in terms of setting, everything surreal and put it in an other world. Because we wanted an other world so that it would be open. We didn't want to do a concrete context with modern characters. So the biblical language really helped me to do that. Also a lot of the images that I took from Oscar Wilde's play, like the image of the moon, the image of the mirage, the head, the disembodied head, images like that, stayed quite strongly with me. So I started jotting them down as I read them and elaborated upon them so they figured a lot in terms of the atmosphere of the pieces and the language.

Would you say the text is personal?

I think inevitably it became very personal because when Acty approached me about it; it was quite clear that if you're dealing with a thing about touch, and about yes and no, and a lot of identity issues in a sense you have to go on personal ground. I didn't think I could be true to it without somewhere going into the personal. And so some of the pieces did have a lot of personal value from myself, because some of them were things I had written without the intention of being put in a piece, and suddenly they were relevant. And so it was very personal on that level.

And the production itself?

Yes I did feel it was personal. What was strange about it as well was that I think everybody on the production team managed to bring the words out in such a way that they seemed real; I mean there was the possibility that they might have seen something completely different in what I had written. But for me, it actually brought it to life, to visual life, exactly what I had envisioned and imagined in my mind as I was writing the words. In terms of the movement that was used and the quality of it, as well as the lighting and the images that were projected, a lot of it just evoked the very atmosphere that I had been feeling. So it was still very personal, in fact possibly more personal because it was shared at that level.

Before I go to the last question, you mentioned that Acty gave you lots of images to respond to. What kind of images did he give you?

There were various images, mostly around the idea of touch. So there was an image of an old woman in an orchard with these white flowers falling down on her and that had quite a clear association with soft touch and the texture of the flowers, so I worked with that. There was an image of a monk, sitting and being burnt and I played with the ideas of flames and that sensation of heat. Then there were several paintings, quite abstract paintings of couples in embraces, which were quite interesting because it wasn't just the image of the

people themselves but it was an interpretation and a more abstract look at it that made it interesting. There were also a couple of forensic images of bodies that had been found murdered or whatever. And just looking at the textures of the skin and stuff. It was all very sensory related imagery, and so I tried to just imagine more than the image and work with textures and feeling.

That's interesting because it was a very visceral text. The one you wrote. The image that always sticks in my mind is the "serrated skin". Just as an image it's such a tangible, visceral image. So it's really interesting that those two corresponded.

Yes.

What did you want to achieve in re-interpreting and re-imagining the story of Salome?

Me personally?

Yes, you personally.

I think I wanted to find a place for dealing with those kinds of issues as well. Of identity, sexual identity, relationships, and how those outside eyes kind of impose, because it's something that I also have been dealing with, well not so recently, but have been thinking about. Some of the stories were things that I have cared about for a long time, like the Pakistan and African stories, the position of women spoke very directly to me. The issue of child abuse and things like that. The yes and no issue, rape issues, that was a big theme generally for me. So I definitely had been attracted by those things as well. And also by the challenge of trying to create a piece about those kinds of things without being cliché or preachy or very sort of 'protesty'- "Lets protest for people's rights!" Trying to actually get it on a real creative level, so that's what I wanted to achieve. And I think we did do it.

Thank you.

Appendix E

Interview with PJ Sabbagha

By Alan Parker, 21 July 2007, The Dance Factory, Johannesburg.

What drew you to the story of Macbeth?

Well, do you want the honest, direct answer? The piece was essentially commissioned by Suzette and the Dance Factory and then co-produced by Forgotten Angle and the Dance Factory. So Suzette has been obsessed with Macbeth for a very long time, so Suzette is what drew me to Macbeth. She commissioned a Macbeth, and I resisted quite a lot, because I wanted to do a Hamlet, because I enjoy the kind of internal narrative of Hamlet. But Macbeth is a fabulous play, because so much happens. It is very much an action piece. So it's quite an easy one to attempt. The issues are not terribly existential. Everything is quite externally placed, all the battles are external, the issues are quite obvious, and so it was an easy one to start with. I mean I have always been a bit of a Shakespeare nut. When I was at high school and varsity, my passion was always Shakespeare, before dance or anything like that. So it was essentially Suzette but then I kind of fell in love with it as I committed myself to it.

Your Macbeth is largely the story of Lady Macbeth, but with a modernised and reinterpreted narrative. What was your thinking in reworking the narrative of Shakespeare's play?

Well, I think what we wanted to do was not just to do a dance-drama version of Shakespeare's Macbeth. The thinking was to try and locate Macbeth in all our lives, to try and find how Macbeth relates and how we relate, as South Africans living in Johannesburg at this time, how we relate to the narratives or the issues, and the themes rather, of Macbeth. And the only person we had kind of cast in a character role was Dada as Lady Macbeth. And because she is such a powerful performer, and also in terms of my reading of the play, I have always read it as her story, as Lady Macbeth's story, and she is the real tragedy, for me, in the play. And I suppose that's the combined effort of a collaborative team, looking at the texts and trying to locate through various, very short, process work (because we only had three weeks to create it originally), how we locate the Macbeth in our lives, through my fascination with lady Macbeth, and it being her tragedy and not Macbeths. And then also the power of Dada, who kind of drove it. The previous cast wasn't as strong as the second cast so it was very reliant on her in many ways. For most of the cast it was the first time they had worked in the style, the first time I was working with them and we only had three weeks, so who you work with creates a lot of problems so Dada really drove a lot of it. She drove it in terms of the kind of vocabulary that she was creating, and also in terms of the story-telling. The two of us have worked together for a long time. So it was a combined and multifaceted way of arriving at the story of Lady Macbeth.

And in terms of it being placed in a commercial setting?

Well I think the first thing that jumps out in terms of any kind of reading that you do around Shakespeare's Macbeth, and the play itself, is that in essence it is a morality play. So it's a warning by Shakespeare to his society of the dangers and the trappings of ambition and of greed. And so the relationship to this kind of very heavily focused capitalist society that we are living in now, for me was clear. It was obvious; it was the clearest choice because in that way, this Macbeth becomes a morality play for South Africans. And I think especially for artists, or people working in the NGO sector, or doing any kind of social development work, its very clear that the country and people are focused on personal wealth, personal power. There is very little care and concern for society by the people. And that's something that always worries me about South Africa and that's why in the three weeks we had it was the most direct and clearest way to go.

In terms of the time we had to plan the piece as well, I mean the Lottery funding literally came through four weeks before we opened, so we hadn't even started conceptualising. But we literally said "well we're doing it, we start next week". So it was a very rushed job. Very rushed, so there wasn't time to really, on the first version, to get into it.

Did the piece change quite drastically?

Well because it was an entirely different cast. There were four cast members that were the same. So nine new cast members shifted the piece dramatically. Just in terms of individual interpretations, if there were any. And also in terms of individual ability, on an emotional level, on a psychological level and on a physical level as to what you can explore. So Macbeth was a far stronger performer this time so we could go far deeper with his narrative. And with everybody really. It also gives Lady Macbeth far more to deal with when she is being presented with a whole lot more stuff from the other performers.

Despite working in the realm of contemporary dance and physical theatre, the structure and form and Macbeth seems in many ways of the ballet aesthetic, using mainly character physicality and choreographed movement to relay the story, while working with a single composed score. What was your thinking in choosing this approach?

Well I wanted people to recognise Macbeth and the narrative of Macbeth. We wanted people to come and watch it because it was Macbeth. We wanted people who were not necessarily dance literate to be able to find the narratives, to find the stories. It's not abstract, it's not in a conceptual space, it's in a real space and it's a real story of two people and their tragedy. And so, I think the elements of the tragedy that we explore and our interpretation was maybe a little different to what other people may choose or what they may see. I mean I resisted because its very ballet form and I still don't like it because it feels like a ballet. So I resisted that process but I think it was important to use those conventions and set them up and break down and set them up and break them down. And also, it starts in a very ballet tradition, which is quite distanced and disconnected in a way. And then it kind of drops into quite a dark, heavy emotional headspace. Even though you are keeping

a classical tradition going, I think that is also the power of the journey. That you go from the disconnected narrative to a very personal and intense place. Don't know if that answers your question?

Yes it does. You use a Michael Gordon score. What drew you to this particular composition?

Do you want the honest answer? [Laughs] I have had that score for years and years and I've used it once for a piece called *Zero Conversions* for the Daimler Chrysler, the first track. And once for the Dance Umgugu. I used the second or third track for *Sirens* and for *Petra*. I have always wanted to do something to the entire score. And the way it was conceptualised was very different to the way it ended up. It was going to be a far more 'physical theatre' type work, with a montage of music, in far more of a contemporary space, and it wasn't working. And we just, one Sunday a week before we opened, Dada and I said, "Well let's just see if it fits? We can make it fit; we can force it to this music". And it did! So we said ok. But if we make the decision to make it fit, with four days left, to get this thing to opening. If we make the decision now to go with Michael Gordon it's going to kill us because it's horrifically intense and unbelievable to try and sustain the kind of endless climactic builds, then we have to commit to it and just fucking do it. And that's how we ended up with Michael Gordon [laughs]. And it from the moment we started it just started meshing very nicely and became very exciting. In fact, it then became the thing that began to construct the narrative as well for us. We had all the bits and pieces and I had an idea of how it should be structured. But once we started working with the Gordon it guided us a lot as well. It didn't leave too many options. It's choreography by accident [laughs].

So the choreography wasn't as fast-paced originally?

No. Well from the moment it was set to the Gordon it had to be. But no it wasn't that fast originally. And it was going to be far more formalist. More of an actor-dancer piece as opposed to a dancer-dancer piece. The other thing that kind of drove it in that way was that I realised when I working with the performers that I was working with, didn't have (besides Dada and one or two of the others) the ability to work in a non-dance tradition. And so I was forced to make it a dance piece. If I had had six months I could shifted it. But because of time constraints and the range of the performers, because we had such a short time together. The choreographic process, the creative process is always a training process. And when you have time you can work as a company and a group towards a certain aesthetic. But when you have three weeks you have to identify very quickly what is going to be the most successful aesthetic for that particular group of people. And just go into that space.

The movement language is rich, often complex and fast-paced. What was your process in creating the movement language?

Gosh. We had a very short period of process work and improvisation, trying to identify the issues of the kind of sexual politics, of sex currency, but again

very few people were able to generate anything out of that because they had never used improvisation ever before. And so Dada and I spent a lot of time creating in the studio before hand, remembering things that had come up an improvisation or that she had found or that somebody else had found, and making little phrases and teaching them. And then turning them upside down, doing them backwards, going this way and going that way. So we spent maybe three or four days doing improvisation. The original duets, all the Macbeth/Lady Macbeth duets, were improvised in performance. We didn't have time to set them. We had identified a kind of structure for the improvisation and they improvised. And the other duets, people just made and I just plonked them in, literally the day before we performed. So they were quite disjointed. This time around obviously we've had time to think about the piece, since October last year to May this year, not to actually work on it. Again we've only had two weeks to put it together with an entirely new cast. So it's literally been teaching what we had originally and then three or four days to make small alterations. Unfortunately there isn't the time to go into a deep process work and to find vocabulary and images and partnering work that is totally unique and fresh. You are relying to an extent on what's familiar to your body. And that's the danger with working at that kind of pace. The other thing with working at that kind of pace is that there is a great intensity and urgency, all the time. Everybody is frantic to get done, to get it performed and to get it right. There's no time to get sloppy about anything.

And yet you lose quite a lot of unison in the piece.

Yes.

It is quite tricky when you have so many people, and such a short time, and movement that isn't necessarily familiar to that particular dancer.

Yes, absolutely. I mean that's the nightmare with the piece, is the unison. If you look at the piece, there are only three or four phrases. Short phrases that the entire thing consists of. Repeated in various ways and in various forms and they are short phrases. It'd take about twenty minutes to teach each phrase. And because we are using that as the base, for a lot of the things, for duets, for group sections, for all sorts. So even if you are working a section which is not in unison people are still dealing with the same vocabulary. So after two weeks it's really in their bodies and then the unison begins to gel. And I think so long as people are performing, if they all have identified the connection or the source of the movement, the intention of the movement, then unison isn't a problem. When you try to work to beats and timing then it becomes quite nightmarish.

The choreography is very vibrant, with thirteen dancers, often all on stage at once. In many ways the work becomes a visual treasure-trove, with multiple focal points and numerous images to gaze upon. What was your intention here?

Well the way the piece was originally conceptualised was a sense of a party that kind of goes wrong. If you can imagine a more kind of theatrical version,

or a physical theatre version, of a party that goes wrong. People get drunk, high on all sorts of things. A nightclub kind of scene, where there are endless, many narratives unfolding all over. And so that kind of sense of confusion, not confusion, of many narratives unfolding at the same time, many different focal points, is part of the intoxication, part of the hallucinations of this vision of the future which is bright and full of promise. And where you are in power and in control. So that was the kind of feel we wanted to create. This slight debauched evening, the moment from sunset to sunrise, where as they journey into their party, the witches intoxicate them and the witches bring on the hallucinations. I'm speaking of this in very kind of obvious way, but that was the thinking behind it.

It's like a pastoral approach to narrative and to images. So it's like a pastoral image when you look at a picture and there are multiple focal points, so you are asking your audience to make choices about where they look, what they see and how they join the dots and how they construct narrative. You are working within such a definitive narrative and a definitive text, I think it was important to loosen up a little bit so that the audience has space to construct their own narratives. And I think that by giving people multiple focal points, it's all relating to the original text in some way. The audience may not necessarily recognise that, but it gives them the opportunity to join their own dots but also to create a layered text, a layered narrative, where you are exploring subtext, where you are exploring all kinds of things and not just a single line.

Speaking about the witches. One thing that I thought a lot about after watching the piece was the fact that the three witches were white.

Yes. Originally again it was a casting thing. In the first cast we had three white girls and that was the cast. I didn't cast, the cast was given to me.

Oh ok.

So I said, "Ok the three white girls will be the three witches". Or I could have said "the three boys will be the witches". I had lots of threes. Three white girls, three black girls, three black boys. So it was quite fun in the original version. But because the focus is the BEE corporate environment, it didn't make sense to have black witches. And it's all about 'bling', and it all about the obsession with black business prestige in this country. And I know exactly why, what do we expect from people who have been underprivileged and under-served for such a long time? Suddenly there is all this opportunity and so of course people are needing to secure their futures because they know where they come from. And so it would've disrupted the severity of the statement if anyone but. If you had a white person in amongst the black mob it would have just disrupted the 'severness' of the statement. And a black person amongst the witches, who are the evil hands, or who are the intoxicators, and maybe the drivers of the capitalist system. Then it would've also disrupted the severity. And that's what the piece is, is severe. There's not much compromise. Well there's lots of compromise, but for our audience we don't allow terribly much space.

Your use of the performance space is also interesting, with its lack of wings and thus entry and exit points, the chessboard dance mat and onstage forest. The space seemed transformed from a conventional performance space. What was your thinking in both designing and choreographing the space?

Again we didn't have any budget, so I had this little lovely design kit on my computer and I created the Dance Factory space with all the windows and doors, and then took everything out and just began to put in the floor. What drew me to creating a space like that originally was the way the sun fell through the windows, and the extreme shafts of light that were happening literally in the space. Not theatrical light.

We also wanted to create a sense of being in the exterior of a building but very close to the building. In the Dance Factory we've got the brick wall, so the feeling we were creating was that we on the patio, or on the garden area of the Macbeth's home. Because we are working with multiple visual points and a confusion of hallucinations, to frame it with legs and proscenium arch convention, focuses your audiences' attention a lot. And also it determines the way in which you stage and light things. It was huge challenge for the lighting tech to light it because there are no side lights. They can't light it from the side, so for dance it's always side lighting. I just wanted to peel the whole space away, to strip it away, to make it quite bare and to make it quite exposed, to make the audience feel quite vulnerable in a way, as opposed to being the dominant mass staring at a small focal point. They are confronted with this huge black space, which is either inside or outside, you're not sure whether it's an internal space or an external space. And depending on how it's used choreographically and how its lit shifts. So one moment it looks like they are in a dark corner inside somewhere, and the next moment they look like they are outside in a forest. To create freedom of shift and openness. Does that make any sense?

Yes it does. One final question though. From my experience of your work, and I haven't seen a lot of it being in Grahamstown, but from what I've read, you often work a lot with the personal...

Yes.

...dealing with themes that are personal to you. What was it like for you, working with something prescribed narrative?

Well the point is we found the personal themes. That was our task. To take the story that everybody knew and to find it within ourselves, and to find the personal relationship to the story. Even though me and the performers I am working with work from a personal perspective, I hope that most of the statements that are conveyed and the audience's experience is a personal experience for them too. That they relate on a personal level to what's happening. So in that sense it becomes quite a universal statement. There's that journey from the personal to the universal, so we are not making broad sweeping statements about society and about human behaviour. But we are making statements about ourselves and in that, hopefully, one person has a

revelation. So that's the thinking and that's the approach. It was daunting initially because the challenge was to find our personal relationship to the story and our personal experiences. And not necessarily use them, but allow them to inform how we thought about Macbeth, Lady Macbeth and how we approached creating the work itself.

You work a lot with narratives, and if you look at the National Arts Festival this year, in terms of contemporary dance, there is Acty's piece based on Salome, yours on Macbeth, Magnet theatre/JazzArt with Cargo. There is a lot of narrative choreography coming out. Why do you find yourself drawn to narratives?

I think it's important to say something about something. And because the only thing I have is myself and the world I live in and who I relate to. And it's not academic. It's nothing but living, real people living. And that's difficult sometimes I think in terms of choreography because I'm not interested in the academia of choreography, or in the academics of dance, or theatre. I used to be, that's where I started. My excitement and what I enjoy and what I love seeing in performance, and what I love doing, and what I love getting out of performance is exploration of the real. It might be presented in a totally surreal or hyper-real or nightmarish environment when the audience experiences it, but it comes from very real places and everybody's accessing very real things. There's no performance happening. You know what I mean? Maybe it's a bit, kind of, (what's the word?) torturous for a performer but it's also incredibly liberating because we are all constantly dealing with our own issues. And we live narrative in whatever form, so I don't relate to academics [laughs].

Appendix F

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 G

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Given Nkosi Lunch spot: Primi Piatti, Claremont New opera star on the block is tenor Given Nkosi. He started singing at school and in youth choirs, participating in various competitions. In 2001 and 2002, he was chosen as the Tirisano School Choral Eisteddfod national champion and, in 2003 and 2004, was national champion of the Post Office Eisteddfod. Nkosi has appeared in numerous opera productions and concert performances, among others as soloist with the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2005, he won first prize in the Schock competition at the University of Cape Town. He is currently studying towards a performer's diploma at the university under the direction of Professor Angelo Gobbato and Professor Brad Liebl. Last year, he made his mark at the Miagi festival of classical music, devoted to the life and works of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and performed with the Tirisano National Youth Choir at the Choir Olympics in Bremen. He has recently performed in *Così fan Tutte* at Artscape, as well as Handel's *Messiah*, Mozart's *Solemn Vespers*, Vivaldi's *Magnificat* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. Earlier this year, he went to Verona, Italy, for the Monteverdi competition, where he made it to the second level. **Louv Venter**



Lunch spot: The Olive Station, Muizenberg Louv Venter is a 31-year-old writer, director and performer. He hails from the West Rand of Johannesburg and now lives in Cape Town. Since completing his schooling at the National School of the Arts in 1993, he has worked as a designer, writer, actor and clown, to mention but a few of his ventures. Venter's most notable achievements include his role as co-creator of *The Most Amazing Show* starring Corne and Twakkie, various film roles opposite the likes of Juliette Binoche in *In My Country* and, more recently, in *Bunny Chow: Know Thyself* and two original and critically acclaimed plays. He has won several awards, including a bronze medal at the New York Festival.



Fanney Tsimong Lunch spot: Ocean Basket, Rosebank Fanney Tsimong, a gay filmmaker, has brought to life issues confronting youngsters in the townships. His eight-minute film *Mountain Shade* sensitively traces the journey of an urban youth -- who goes to a rural area to be circumcised -- as he tries to make sense of the values of his family. Tsimong began working as a dancer at the age of 15 and later acted as choreographer and event manager for the late pop star Brenda Fassie. He received the 2003 Vuka award for raw talent and studied at Afa, the film and drama academy. He conceived and directed the talk-show series *Intimate Connectionz* for SABC1 in 2005, hosted by celebrity Somizi Mhlongo. *Mountain Shade* was screened at the Out in Africa Gay and Lesbian Film festival in 2006. In the same year, Tsimong joined supergroup Malaika as choreographer and stylist, and contributed his creative talents to the television miniseries *After 9*. This year, he served at the Berlinale Film festival as a jury member. **Gabeba**



Baderoon Lunch spot: Perima's, Claremont; Saigon, Bukhara, Cape Town Born in Port Elizabeth, Gabeba Baderoon grew up in Cape Town. She uses her poetry to comment on the life journeys of women in South Africa and received the prestigious DaimlerChrysler award for poetry in 2005. Her latest volume, *A Hundred Silences*, explores love and loss; her previous collection, *The Dream in the Next Body*, traces her five-year odyssey from Cape Town to Sheffield in the United Kingdom -- where she studied -- to Pennsylvania in the United States. Her work appeared in the UK anthology *Worldscapes* in 2005 and translations of some works have been published in Sweden, Spain and Germany. Baderoon has delivered readings of her poetry at festivals in Bremen, Berlin, Stockholm and Durban and, last year, she appeared in Rotterdam, Bristol and London. She is also a literature and media scholar and holds a PhD in English from the University of Cape Town. **Fokofpolisiekar Lunch spot: Royale, Cape Town**



Cape Town's radical rockers Fokofpolisiekar came together in 2003, resolving to produce new music "their own way". Francois van Coke, Hunter Kennedy, Johnny de Ridder, Wynand Myburgh and Jaco Venter, as Fokofpolisiekar, are a household name -- not only because of the outrageous name of their act, but also because their songs speak to the feelings of post-apartheid Afrikaans youth. The band has played at just about every major music festival in the country, as well as the Pukkelpop festival in Belgium in 2004. To date, Fokofpolisiekar have released five albums, won numerous awards, including *Blunt* magazine's rock act of the year in 2004 and best album in 2006. They have appeared in a number of music magazines, including the alternative British publication *Dazed and Confused*. **Jeremy Arries Lunch spot: The Red Leaf, Beyerskloof, Stellenbosch**



Jeremy grew up on Kanonkop Wine Estate and always wanted to become a winemaker. In 1998, with assistance from Kanonkop, he became the first African to matriculate from the acclaimed Boland Agricultural High School near Paarl. Soon afterwards he joined Kanonkop and, in 2003, won the Patrick Grubb Bursary, which gives people from previously disadvantaged communities a chance to gain international experience in some of the finest wineries in the world. For nearly six months he visited Quinta Nova de Nossa Senhora do Carmo in the Douro valley of Portugal, where port wines under the renowned Burmester label are made. Arries has since finished three diploma courses in senior cellar management and various courses in viticulture. He is currently taking maths classes to

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Kat, Sarie and Pursuit and has been featured in international design magazine *Wallpaper*. She is a regular at Sanlam SA Fashion Week. Betz believes that you must be the best at whatever you do, regardless of the field in which you work. She says that a key to her success has been to focus on client service, ensuring each customer feels cherished and special.



spot: Auntie Nisa's house after mosque on Fridays Comedian Riaad Moosa, known as the "comedy doctor", is a silver medallion graduate of the College of Magic in Cape Town. He started doing stand-up comedy while still studying at the University of Cape Town's medical school. He has appeared on just about every major comedy stage in the country, receiving excellent reviews from his parents and critics alike. In 2002, he was part of the largest stand-up show in the history of South African television, *Laugh Out Loud*, and in 2003 he performed at the Edinburgh Fringe festival. For film and television, he has written for the cult programme *The Pure Monate Show*, and he had one line in the movie *Crazy Monkey -- Straight outta Benoni*. In 2006, Riaad had a hit with his first one-man show, *Strictly Halaal*. Riaad's humour is based on his experiences as a young Muslim relating to post-9/11 Islamophobia and growing up in Cape Town. The comedy doctor says he will "split your sides and keep you in stitches at the same time".



David Tiale Lunch spot: The Twelve Apostles, Cape Town Since launching the David Tiale brand in 2002, this young designer has continued to woo local fashion followers with his ingenuity. The Vaal University of Technology graduate has received numerous accolades, including winning the 2003 SA Fashion Week Elle New Talent competition. That same year, he was also nominated as the best designer of 2003 by the *Sunday Times*. In 2005, Tiale was approached by fashion house Carducci to design a women's range for the label. He was nominated for the Marie Claire Prix D'Excellence De La Mode award in 2006. Earlier this year, he was selected to showcase his work at the Paris Couture Fashion Week exhibition, along with three other young designers. Tiale's garments are a favourite with South African celebrities and he has dressed personalities such as international gospel singer Yolanda Adams.



Acty Tang Lunch spot: A dim sum restaurant overlooking Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong Acty Tang performs and choreographs some of the most provocative and cerebral work in the country today. Born in Hong Kong, Tang completed his master's degree in drama at Rhodes University, where he now lectures. His connection with Japan, where he went on a school-exchange programme, continues as his work resonates with *butoh*, the avant-garde performance art that first scandalised the public in post-World War II Japan. The sense of never really belonging, yet attempting to make a kind of emotional home on foreign soil, is strong in Tang's creative psyche. From 1999, he performed with the First Physical Theatre Company and in 2003 he was a finalist for a Daimler-Chrysler award. That same year, he suffered an injury and was forced to focus on choreography and directing. He believes the injury was partly psychosomatic and related to his issues with personal identity. Significantly healed, he returned to the performance space during the National Arts Festival in 2005 and, as a Standard Bank Young Artist award-winner, he will create and perform a celebratory piece for the 2007 festival.



Palesa Mokubung Lunch spot: My home near the Vaal, with a chef on hand to cook whatever my guests desire After starting out at the tender age of 19 with renowned South African design house Stoned Cherry in 2000, Palesa Mokubung created Mansiho, her solo label, in 2004. Since then, this graduate from Vanderbijlpark Technical College has gone from strength to strength. Mokubung's earthy, vibrant garments are sold by national retailer Edgars and have been showcased numerous times at both the Sanlam SA Fashion Week and the Design Indaba. She was named one of South Africa's top 30 women by *Cosmopolitan* magazine last year. But, despite her remarkable success, there is much Mokubung still wants to achieve. "I have accomplished a lot of my dreams, but I need new ones," she says. She believes that a key to success is the confidence to convey "who you are and what you think" to the world. "There is no need to be anything but yourself," she confidently states.



John Barker Lunch spot: The Loft, Melville John Barker is one of South Africa's foremost directorial talents. First noticed for his hilarious mockumentary about a hopeless South African rock band, *Blu Cheez*, Barker is best known for helming the critically acclaimed feature film *Bunny Chow: Know Thyself*. He produced the film along with Kagiso Lediga -- an unenviable task because its funders pulled out and, according to Lediga, the pair were forced to "max out [Barker's] wife's credit card" to make the film. Barker has numerous television writing, directing and production credits, most notably on the *Pure Monate Show* and *Laugh Out Loud*. He has also directed several short films. Future projects for Barker will include *The Umbrella Man*, a feature film which he is currently writing about the Cape Malay minstrel carnival, and *The Dictator*, which Barker will co-write and direct. The film will be produced by Dog Pack Films, the production company co-owned by Barker and Lediga.



Solani Ngobeni Lunch spot: L'Auberge du Paysan, Stellenbosch Solani Ngobeni holds a master's degree in publishing studies from the University of the Witwatersrand as well as an advanced management programme certificate from Wits Business School. After graduating, he joined the Institute for Global Dialogue in Midrand as a publications and projects coordinator. He later joined Juta & Co as a higher education publisher specialising in psychology, political science and education and built a formidable psychology list under the University of Cape Town's Press Imprint. In 2004, Solani was appointed managing director of Juta Learning. After resigning in February 2007, Solani established S & S Publishing, a social sciences and humanities publisher. He was subsequently chosen as the South African finalist for the 2007 Young International Publisher of the Year award. Solani has written and published on issues such as publishing management, the lack of book reading and buying as the Achilles heel of African publishing, and the impact of the dominance of knowledge produced in developed countries on viable publishing in the southern hemisphere. He has also written about the dearth of knowledge production by black academics in South Africa, the fact that 98% of South African knowledge is produced predominantly by white males and the slow pace of transformation in the South African publishing industry. **Joey Rasdien**

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London LIVE

Beautiful Dance

Their feet started moving during the early 1980s to the beats of pop icon Michael Jackson. The pair were so inspired that they started a five-man group called the Joy Dancers sporting tinted hair, faded denims and torn t-shirts. They danced their way into one of the founders of South Africa's contemporary dance scene - Moving Into Dance School - in Johannesburg in 1990. But four years later, they had to go their separate ways.

For Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, living at home with his unemployed parents in Soweto, the reality of living in poverty forced him to abandon his dream of becoming the next white-gloved sensation. "When my mother became unemployed and my father was retrenched from his job, I had no option but to find a way of helping my family ... I left dancing in 1994 to study and work in insurance," Maqoma relays in his online autobiography.

Maqoma had to support his family during those difficult years, but he still held onto his dream and continued to dance on weekends.

Childhood friends Maqoma and Vincent Mantsoe were to be reunited on stage, when Maqoma was offered an opportunity to tour with Moving Into Dance to eight countries around Africa. "From that experience I knew that I had to face my challenges and do what is right - dance," said Maqoma.

His career hasn't gone without challenges - as a black African man involved in dance he was ostracized by his peers and faced disapproval from traditionalists in his community. Being a descendent of Chief of the Xhosa Kingdom Chief Maqoma, hasn't made his transition into dance any easier. Maqoma said that perception has changed with more men showing interest and more African families encouraging their sons.

"In Africa in general we have more men dancing than women, which is the other way around in western culture. The perception though is that if you are male and doing contemporary dance, you become elite. As a result you are termed white or a coconut. That perception is changing though; we find that black parents in South Africa do encourage their sons to take dance either as a career choice or a hobby. They realise that it teaches them something more profound about themselves, especially given the crime rate in our country," said Maqoma.

Maqoma's unique contribution to the genre over the last 17 years can be attributed to his profound passion for South Africa.

"My interest in the genre of movement allows me to reflect on my history and the history of my country as well as reflecting on my own Xhosa Culture and cultures of others ... South Africa is a multi-cultured country. Already we are dealing with issues of a generation that speaks many languages and it is cross cultured, so that makes all the meeting points contemporary, even in our embrace of culture



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we remain contemporary. We see individuals responding in different forms, media and we have to allow that to happen because that is the identity of a South African and that makes us unique and vibrant and new" said Maqoma. Maqoma has won a string of accolades, both as a choreographer and as a dancer and has earned himself the title of a 'visionary'. He has performed to curtain calls across the world including Brussels, Amsterdam, Vienna, Nigeria, United States and London. He would still rate Johannesburg as his number one city to perform in.

"Johannesburg ... I am inspired by this city. I respond to its complexities. It goes well with my audience, they remain with me from the beginning to the end," he said.

He established a school in his namesake, Vuyani Dance Project, 11 years ago to offer formal training to men and women in townships across the country, which leaves little time for other things.

"Shu! I wish I had the time to take up a hobby just for pleasure, I like swimming to keep fit when not in the studio or working. I take holidays in very quiet places in Southern Africa, I like peace and serenity. It is the only time I get a chance to read. At the moment I am reading the Whale Caller by Zakes Mda. I try to give myself one day a week to be with friends and family whenever I am home. I also like going out to a local pub in the township once in a while, this helps me to keep up to date with the social dances which I explore in my works, so everything becomes work related, I guess that is a life of an artist," he said.

This time, the talented pair, Maqoma and Mantsoe, whose training grounds were the dusty streets of Soweto, the fancy footwork of miners in gumboots and tsotsis doing Pantsula, team up with two other celebrated African choreographers (Faustin Linyekula and Akram Khan) to deliver a unique and inspirational collaboration called Beautiful Me at Sadler's Wells. The show explores our social, spiritual and physical environment and its influences.

"Beautiful Me is the last part of a trilogy. The first is Beautiful a duet with Shanell Winlock Khan which explores a relationship in an untouched, unspoiled environment. The second part, Beautiful Us, is about the distraction of this very environment, while Beautiful [Me] looks at humanity as a course, looks at power games and confronts those in power," Maqoma said.

Maqoma has been hailed as a 'formidable talent', constantly evolving his dance forms and choreography, using ground-breaking techniques to appeal to various audiences.

"I have been incredibly lucky that my work speaks for itself ... I have been connected to people who are willing to support my work and nurture it," he said.

Beautiful Me will be showing at Sadler's Wells Theatre on 15th & 16th June 2007 at 7.30pm. Tickets cost £12. Contact the ticket office on 0844 412 4300 or visit www.sadlerswells.com

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Jomba! dance festival

What contemporary dance really means . . .

By Tommy Ballantyne

Venues: Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre; the KZNSA Art Gallery; Ekhaya MultiArts Centre, KwaMashu; and the Dorothy Nyembe Community Hall in Cato Crest

As Lliane Loots said in her welcoming speech at the start of this year's Jomba! Contemporary Dance Experience, "Art is not separate from life - art IS life." And it was Isadora Duncan who, when asked what contemporary dance was, said, "If I could tell you what it was I wouldn't need to dance it!"

And, if you had been attending all the performances on the Jomba programme, and been searching for the answer to that question, you probably wouldn't have found it.

More than likely there will always be more questions than there will be answers, as we discovered at the panel discussion titled "When choreography and visual art meet".

Hosted by the UKZN Centre for Creative Arts (CCA) and chaired by Adrienne Sichel at the KZN Society of Arts (KZNSA) Gallery in Glenwood, there was input from the arts community; such as from Siyanda Duma, Rika Sitas, Jay Pather, Storm van Rensburg, Lliane Loots, Doung Anwar Jahangeer, Mlu Zondi and Vaughn Sadie.

What emerged was a richer understanding of the collaborative journeys artists are taking currently. As one of them commented, "It (contemporary dance) is the product of the complex imagery of each individual choreographer and crosses all boundaries".

But, above all, this year's Jomba! has shown how necessary and vital it is to provide platforms that nurture and inspire local companies to produce contemporary dance works that really speak to audiences and dancemakers alike.

Although the festival had a strong KZN flavour, it also embraced works and input from other parts of the country and Africa as a whole, as seen in the works performed by the extraordinary Kettly Noel from Mali and Germaine Acogny and her Jant-Bi company from Senegal.

We have also seen the welcome contribution by Lab Dance from the Netherlands whose involvement is important in keeping the dialogue alive, sharp and current.

This year there has been a palpable sense of dancemakers, both emerging and experienced, really engaging conceptually with personal and social issues that confront our society on a daily basis.

Sbonakaliso Ndaba's Shadows performed by the Phenduka Dance Theatre is intense and concentrated, providing ample challenges for dancers Sithembiso Gcabashe and Vusi Makhanya, both of whom are athletic, assured and focused.

Ndaba's collaboration with Johannesburg company, Moving Into Dance Mophatong (MIDM), in Once in our life, our journey begins is a tangible reminder of the immediacy of dance.

Bodies contort, ripple and sweat through often complex vocabulary; and dancers sigh and groan, making their own percussive accompaniments.

It is good to see some of the younger members of the company tackling such an advanced work which showed dancers Luyanda Sidiya and Thandi Tshabalala in a good light.

Ndaba and the company worked within a strong African contemporary dance and Afro-fusion framework. But, while the costumes by Veronica Sham were gorgeous, the lighting left a lot to be desired.

Lliane Loots's Transmission: Mother to Child, created with and for her promising Flatfoot Dance Company, contemplates, probes and questions the notion of giving birth.

Inspired perhaps, by three of her dancers having recently given birth to their own babies, Loots's work is richly layered with personal and remembered histories.

Doung Anwar Jahangeer's fascinating video installation gives resonance to the live bodies on stage and reminds us of the loaded term "mother-to-child transmission" and how this defines who is sick and who is healthy. This is a powerful dance work performed by a company that is as assured as it is strong.

Marise Kyd, Caroline van Wyk and Thulile Bhengu become compelling symbols of womanhood, complete with their babies who join them on stage.

As we go to press the Festival is only just past the halfway mark and, if you are lucky, you can still catch the closing performance this evening at 7.30pm at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, a programme which offers a platform to four young Durban-based choreographers to premiere new works.

They are Marise Kyd, Sifiso Majola, Caroline van Wyk and Mlekeleli Khuzwayo.

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THE NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL - UNITING VOICES OF ART

By Gilly Hemphill - 31-05-2007

In a world grown increasingly angry and aggressive, individuals inevitably react by seeking meaning in the particular, the private and the personal. And the arts, harbingers of our inner lives, lead the way. The trend is clear in the Main Programme for the National Arts Festival (Grahamstown 28 June to 7 July) which was announced this week.

Several important new theatre pieces focus closely on the tender moments when two souls find common ground. The music programme is infused with the overwhelming humanity of hundreds of voices singing in unison. A vast embroidered altarpiece celebrates the joy and the beauty of creation. This is pleasure with a deeply healing purpose. Art that helps to fill in what's missing, helps to make sense of our existence.

"The programme offers a representative sample of current creative preoccupations," said Lynette Marais, Festival Director. "Our artists have extra sensitive antennae which enable them to scout out the route ahead, anticipating the way people on the ground deal with the contexts they find themselves in."

Now, more than ever, audiences and artists are turning inward, reassessing value systems, questioning the accuracy of memory, overhauling the power balance in relationships, and trading-in yesterday's hopes and dreams for new ones.

THEATRE

Featuring four world premieres and three South African premieres, the theatre programme keeps the festival promise that festinos can get up to speed with the latest and the best.

Sure to make headlines, a new South African production of Edward Albee's mesmerising *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* features a powerful team in this Baxter Theatre production: Janice Honeyman directs Sean Taylor, Fiona Ramsay, Nicholas Pauling and Erica Wessels.

Two fascinating pieces both based on South African documentary also premiere at the Festival. *The Story of The African Choir*, written and directed by Jane Collins for the Market Theatre Laboratory, relives the painful emotions of a young black church choir on a failed tour of Victorian England. *Every Year, Every Day, I am Walking* is the latest in a string of fabulous creative Magnet Theatre productions. It is based on the real-life experiences of refugee children. Mark Fleishman directs a cast that includes Jennie Reznick and Faniswa Yisa, with music by Neo Muyanga.

Proving yet again that real lives can make great theatre, Roy Smiles' *Good Evening* dramatises the effects of instant fame on the four new graduates who created that smash-hit revue, *Beyond the Fringe*, in the 1960s. A world premiere, this Pieter Toerien Production is directed by Alan Swerdlow with Graham Hopkins, Malcolm Terrey et al.

Described by a critic for *The New Yorker* as "fiery, intelligent, and comedic", *In the Continuum* is directed by Robert O'Hara, written and performed by Danaï Gurira and Nikkole Salter. They each bring dozens of characters to life in the story of two young women who live worlds apart - in Los Angeles and Harare. One crazy weekend they experience darkly funny moments of self-discovery in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Relationships between young black men and older white women are at the centre of the action in another pair of new plays, Lara Foot Newton's *Reach* and Craig Higginson's *Dream of the Dog*. In *Reach*, an unlikely pair makes a genuine connection that results in the miracle of healing. Direction is by Clare Stopforth with Alletta Bezuidenhout and Mbulelo Grootboom. The Higginson drama, directed by Malcolm Purkey, is dark and tense and the power shifts between characters as they negotiate treacherously incomplete memories.

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Interracial, a new play by Paul Grootboom, and Blackbird, by David Harrower, tackle aspects of sexuality that are as topical as they are sensational. When it opened in Edinburgh, Blackbird earned rave reviews for the way it problematises the unpalatable implications of an affair between a man in his 40s and a 12-year-old girl. Interracial centres on the murderous jealousy of a 'liberal' white man who calls in the hit men to deal with an affair between his wife and a fellow dancer who happens to be black.

Brett Bailey's exquisitely imagined Orfeus reaches back into Greek mythology to recall another doomed affair which his production retells in the contemporary African context.

Music is the hero of Orfeus, and language is abandoned in favour of movement in the deliciously watchable *Ascenseur, Fantasmagorie pour élever les Gens et les Fardeaux*, created and performed by French master of mime and juggling, Philippe Ménard. Rémy Balagué directs for the Compagnie Non Nova (France).

And to round the programme off with gusts of laughter, the inimitable Pieter-Dirk Uys presents *Evita for President!* When humour is honed against a powerful intellect, political folly takes a drubbing.

Festivos keen to discover new talent and experience fresh productions can also find a feast of entertainment in the Student Theatre programme, featuring work from 11 tertiary institutions from around the country.

Four lively and colourful productions will alternate at The Studio, a venue dedicated to music, dance and performance - many from far-flung country areas of the Eastern Cape. This is art from places you wouldn't normally get to. The sacred Ingobhe dance (homage to the amaMpondomise ancestors), performed by a group of women from Tsolo, is just one example.

Four free productions on the Street Theatre Programme ensure that every visitor can afford a satisfying Festival theatre experience. Two of the shows come out of Europe/South Africa collaborations.

Kruik (Jar), based on the Pirandello romp, features homeboy Dumisile Mqadi and Dutch actor Paul R. Kooy directed by Roel Twijnstra of Het Waterhuis (Holland). A play within a play, *A Molière in Soweto* sees Soweto Kiptown Youth (SKY) working with French theatre professionals, Neusa Thomasi and Eric de Sarria. Liz Lochhead's *medea - m/other house* is a powerful reworking of a Greek classic. Director Ingrid Wyide has set her new production in and around a gracious old stone mansion.

Fresh from their tour of London and Manchester, the Art of the Street performers from the Eluxolweni Shelter present *Shark*, an action-packed adventure in the depths of the sea ... and of the streets. Direction is by Wesley Deintje under the guidance of Alex Sutherland.

MUSIC

The singing voice soars over the broad landscape of artsound on the Main Festival programme.

Standard Bank Young Artist Award Winner for Music, Bronwen Forbay will appear as the soloist with the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra under the baton of Richard Cook. The programme for this concert includes favourite pieces by Glinka, Elgar, Grieg and Sibelius, and the orchestra can be heard again with the 150-strong Yale Alumni Choir performing Haydn's magnificent oratorio, *The Creation*. The solo passages will feature Bronwen Forbay (soprano), Simon Estes (bass-baritone) and Randall Umstead (tenor).

A second group of internationally renowned US visitors, the Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Choir, will present a programme ranging from Bach to Brubeck.

Throwing hot chillie into the vocal mix, Pieter-Dirk Uys and Geoffrey Johnson's latest cabaret, *Bambi: Vile and Vunderful* features songs by Stephen Sondheim and Kurt Weill, interspersed with raunchy reminiscences from that scandalous Uys alter ego, *Bambi Kellerman*.

Instrumental recitals on the Main Festival Music programme include four concerts by different duos, all world-class soloists in their own right.

Zanta Hofmeyr (violin) and Malcolm Nay (piano) will perform Grieg's three hauntingly lyrical violin sonatas. *Bass-ically Brilliant* is the light-hearted title Peter Martens (cello) and Leon Bosch (double-bass) have chosen for their lively and varied programme.

Pierre van der Westhuizen and Sophia Grobler, who perform as the "Westhuizen Duo", present a recital of the works for two pianos that have earned them renown in the USA where they are both currently studying and teaching. Clarinetist Matthew Reid presents two recitals with pianist Pieter van Zyl, including the premiere of a new sonata by Peter Klatzow.

East Meets West celebrates dialogue between western classical music and the evocative sounds of India. Cello and saxophone join sitar, sarod and tabla to create a new vocabulary of delight.

The Southern African tradition is celebrated in *Uhadi*, a concert of indigenous music featuring voices and ancient instruments from tribal groupings in the Eastern Cape hinterland.

Moving forward through time to the mid-twentieth century, *A Celebration of the Music of*

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Todd Matshikiza pays tribute to the brother who wrote King Kong.

Taking music into a spontaneous future, jazz pianist Paul Hanmer and cellist Francois le Roux (The HalfMan) revisit favourites from their CDs.

Fusion gets an extra spin with Grassroots featuring multi-instrumentalist Dave Reynolds, guitarist/vocalist Louis Mhlanga, bassist Concorde Nkabinde, and vocalist/trombonist Siya Makuzeni in a picnic of popular forms blended with pan-African, Caribbean, the acoustic textures of classical music and the spontaneity of jazz.

JAZZ

Young saxophonist Shannon Mowday is the leading lady for the 2007 programme which incorporates the Standard Bank National Youth Jazz Festival. As Standard Bank Young Artist Award Winner for Jazz, Ms Mowday heads up a strong South African contingent that includes heart-stealing songsters Melanie Scholtz and Judith Sephuma.

As is the Festival custom, the artists will group and regroup for various sessions. In tribute to Mzantsi's jazz heritage, Hctep Galela (piano), Barney Rachabane (saxophone), Stompie Manana (trumpet) and Swiss-based drummer Makaya Ntshoko will join forces for a first-ever concert.

A special programme featuring a selection of top Eastern Cape jazz musicians is sponsored by the Eastern Cape Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture.

Multi-national jazz-birds from Switzerland, Sweden, The Netherlands, France, Germany, Norway, Britain and the US will fly in to roost in Grahamstown for Festival week.

Collaborations between locals and visitors provide those unique musical experiences that have festinos returning year after year. Trumpeter Feya Faku shares the stage with a Swiss trio from Basel, and guitarist Louis Mhlanga jams with Dutch pianist Jeroun van Vliet.

And when the 10-nationality Awesome Big Band pulls out all the stops, even terra firma will get into the swing.

DANCE

At the festival, the dancing body possesses a creative space where cultures and codes meet and mingle to enhance their individual performance languages.

The Cape Town City Ballet headlines the programme with that Russian delight, The Nutcracker. Tchaikovsky's magical score - possibly the greatest ballet music ever written - is performed by the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra.

An equally timeless classic, Macbeth, is the inspiration for a startlingly topical new dance work by PJ Sabbagha, a previous winner of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance. This year's winner of the prestigious award is Acty Taug. He presents Chaste, with his hallmark combination of erotic power and immaculate grace.

Visiting companies hail from Mexico and India. Delfos Contemporary Dance, one of Latin America's leading companies, will demonstrate their excitingly exotic physicality while Vanajo Uday and a Kuchipudi Dance Group introduce the contemporary form of an ancient tradition.

The combined talents of Jazzart Dance Theatre and Magnet Theatre present Cargo, a multi-layered exploration of slavery and its implications for our past, present and future.

Umtshato - The Wedding features a 70-strong Eastern Cape ensemble on a narrative dance journey through time and traditions. Tshwane Dance Theatre writes the traditions of the future with Dansynegy, a programme of three diverse works by company members. Fresh II is a programme of four works by rising dance stars, Dada Masilo (Gauteng), Shaun Acker (Eastern Cape), Sphelele Nzama (KwaZulu-Natal) and Ruth Sacks (Western Cape).

FILM

Current releases, important retrospectives and a focus on the work of Akin Omotoso, 2007 Standard Bank Young Artist Award Winner for Film, are part of the mix for a film festival that caters to all tastes.

Recent releases include Cannes Golden Palm-winner When the Wind Shakes the Barley, Paris je t'aime (made by 20 directors including South Africa's Oliver Schmitz), The Fountain by Darren Aronovsky and Werner Herzog's Grizzly Man.

SMS Sugar Man, shot on cell phones by Aryan Kaganof, John Barker's feel good Bunny Chow and the director's cut of After the Rain by Ross Kettle are some of the South African films on the programme.

A sampling of current Mexican cinema includes Babel and Pan's Labyrinth. A tribute to Germany's Rainer Werner Fassbinder includes Love is Colder than Death and Fear Eats the Soul.

An Andrei Tarkovsky retrospective features Andrei Rubiev and Solaris while contemporary Russian cinema is represented by a Karen Schahnizharov programme including the award-winning The Assassin of the Tsar.

EXHIBITIONS

A major event in the world of visual art, Festival 2007 sees the unveiling of a new magnum opus from the Kelskemma Art Project embroiderers - this time in collaboration with the Nieu Bethesda Art Project. Their awe-inspiring Creation Altarpiece is a thanksgiving for the beauty of the Hainburg environment and its people.

Three important exhibitions of photography all engage in a critical exploration of society.

Standard Bank Young Artist Award Winner for Visual Art, Pieter Hugo is concerned with the peripheral in society so it is apt that he chose life in the border town of Messina/Musina as the subject for his exhibition. More than 30 years after the publication of his controversial book, the grand master of photography, David Goldblatt, retraces his visual footsteps. The resulting exhibition, *Some Afrikaners Revisited*, confirms photography as an artist's medium.

The Caring Namibian Man is a documentary collection of images taken by young men all over Namibia. Each was provided with a disposable camera and challenged to take photographs of male role models.

Two other exhibitions are also preoccupied with gender. In *Mother/Land* Christine Dixie explores the representation of maternity using historical cartography as a metaphor for the terra incognita of the fertile female body. A collaboration with the design team *Strangelove*, Leora Farber's performance/installation *Dis-Location/Re-Location* suggests ways of thinking about women in the context of migration and a polyglot diaspora.

James Webb's experimental installation, *Beau Diable*, places the viewer in the eye of a virtual storm where sound light and architectural space suggest supernatural forces.

Curator Carol Brown juxtaposes work by different artmakers in a variety of media that engage with the multi-layered meanings of *Positive 2007* and argue that a new understanding of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is discernible now.

Imbumba - A Collaboration maps the route on an ongoing journey of artistic discovery that sees new and established Eastern Cape artists share their visions. Artefacts from master craftspeople in the province's seven districts will be displayed for sale in a dedicated venue at the Village Green.

A favourite feature of the Festival, the "Green", along with other craft precincts, offers visitors the chance to browse through scores of stalls laden with tempting collectables from many parts of Africa.

WINTER SCHOOL

The popular programme of lectures, exhibition walkabouts, and tours, offers a change of pace for festivos and new perspectives on the way we live now.

An update on lifestyle trends is provided by Gary Searle (of the fabric house *St Leger and Viney*), artist/foodie Braam Kruger, Peter James-Smith (of SAfm's *Food and Booze* programme), Elmarie Claessens (who tracks the route to happiness), and Gwen Faqan (the grande dame of heritage roses).

The speakers on spirituality include Rabbi Azila Reisenberger, SAfm's Peter James-Smith (wearing his Faith to Faith hat) and Penny Bernard, a specialist on African indigenous spirituality.

Enriching our experience of theatre, two American academics - Marcia Blumberg and Jeanne Colleran - talk about restorative theatre and truth in theatre respectively. Jane Collins discusses her Main Festival production *The Story of The African Choir* and eminent Nigerian playwright Femi Osofisan focuses on his life and work.

Visual art curator Carol Brown speaks on the art of the African continent and UK philosopher/jazz musician Andy Hamilton argues with cultural elitism.

Tackling major national challenges, Ann Skelton provokes debate on juvenile justice, 3P Landman, a consultant to the "wealth industry", talks about the impact of crime, and Zoleka Ngceta reports on progress in the fight against malaria. Judge Dennis Davis chairs a panel, putting judges in the spotlight, and the great defender, George Bizos, shares anecdotes from his new autobiography.

THE FRINGE

There are no pre-selection criteria for participation in the Fringe Festival which features a full programme of exhibitions, music and performances by established artists and companies often working shoulder-to-shoulder with fresh new talents. The Fringe programme is a lucky dip where moments of electrifying "high" culture share the bag with eager-to-please entertainment and affordable take-home treasures.

And for the next generation of festivos, The Children's Art Festival offers youngsters between the ages of 4 and 13 a stimulating creative arts experience in the safe environment of St. Andrew's Preparatory School with adult supervision throughout each day.

About the National Arts Festival: Now in its 33rd year, the Festival began in 1974 and has grown to be one of the leading arts festivals in southern Africa. Its objectives are to deliver excellence; encourage innovation and development in the arts by providing a platform for both established and emerging South African artists; create opportunities for collaboration with international artists; and build new audiences.



Dance tells stories at the National Arts Festival

Strong narrative sub-texts are a feature of many dance works on the main programme of the National Arts Festival (Grahamstown 28 June to 7 July).

Macbeth was the starting point for multi-award-winning PJ Sabbagha and his company. They present a riveting contemporary tale about a capitalist tsotsi and a serial shopper. The story of Salomé as told by Oscar Wilde lit a spark that led to the creation of Chaste in the complex imagination of Acty Tang, 2007 winner of the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance.

The Nutcracker, one of the most popular ballets of all time, spins a web of magic and romance with a girl shrinking to the size of her toys that come alive to defend her from danger. Their leader, a handsome toy soldier changes into a prince. This Cape Town City Ballet treat is produced by Elizabeth Triegaardt with Tchaikovsky's delicious music performed by the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra under the baton of Naum Rousine. Cargo, an innovative collaboration from Jazzart Dance Theatre and Magnet Theatre, engages with some of the core themes of slavery at the Cape. Mark Fleishman directs, choreography is by Alfred Hinkel and musical direction by Neo Muyanga.

Umtshato - The Wedding sweeps the audience off on a festive procession through the Eastern Cape's cultural enclaves, climaxing with the nuptials of a Khoisan princess and a Xhosa prince. The 70-strong Eastern Cape Cultural Ensemble is directed by Skin Sipoko with choreography by Daluxolo Papu and Xolani Sibuta.

Two performances showcase dynamic short works by a cross-section of South Africa's most exciting dance talents. Fresh II resounds with the assertive dance voices of Dada Masilo, Sphelele Nzama, Ruth Sacks, Shaun Acker, Dinkies Sithole, Leila Anderson and Sizwe Zulu. Dansynergy celebrates Tshwane Dance Theatre's entourage of choreographic talents. Songezo Mchilizeli's Sweet Honey Nights has three female dancers on pointe. Landscape of Pain by Mchilizeli and Daniel Mashita questions our morals and the beliefs that inform them. Sporo was created by the seven-strong company and features Kofifi-township jive influenced by Afro-contemporary moves.

Adding to the multi-cultural mix, Mexico's Delfos Contemporary Dance will show festinos why they are one of the best loved and admired of dance ensembles in Latin America. Vanja Uday and her company from India present 80 minutes of Kuchipudi dance, sparkling with gorgeous adornments, this eminent dramatic all-rounder shines in the dance, gesture, speech and song that combine to make Kuchipudi a popular genre.

The Fringe festival programme features more dance work in a wide variety of genres. At The Studio three Eastern Cape groups present a programme of local, contemporary and traditional dance.

The National Arts Festival is proudly supported by The Eastern Cape Government, Standard Bank, The National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund, SABC and The National Arts Council.

For further information contact 046 603 1103 or visit the website www.nafest.co.za

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Standard Bank Young Artist Award winner takes dance to places words can't risk

Acty Tang (27), winner of the 2007 Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance, is an avant-garde performer/choreographer who was born in Hong Kong, where he spent his childhood.

His work disturbs and provokes, often venturing into the deep, strange places of the psyche that words cannot risk. His signature is a refinement and a delicacy that pervades his work and his persona, even when you meet for a chat over coffee.



Love is a central theme, "But not love as romance, rather a sense of belonging, or connection and identity," he says. His fluent, alabaster body speaks the language of improvisation, with layer upon layer of eddying influences from the universe of contemporary movement. The music he uses ranges from Tom Waits, through Xhosa gospel-rock to Janáček.

Acty Tang made his commitment when he was just 11 years old. The family was still living in Hong Kong. He was chosen as one of a small group of children sent on a school exchange to Japan. They were well-rehearsed so they would be proud ambassadors for Hong Kong. When it came to Acty's turn to introduce himself, he found himself saying, "I love theatre." He says now, "I hadn't planned to say it. The words just popped out."

He has never waived, taking extra-mural drama classes during his high school years at Sandringham (Johannesburg) and completing BA (Hons) and Master degrees in Drama at Rhodes University, where he now lectures.

His connection with Japan continues today as Acty's work resonates with *butoh*, the avant-garde performance art that first scandalized the public in post World War II Japan. Once known as the "dance of darkness", *butoh* came out of a rebellious impulse to "empty" the body of cultural preconceptions and allow movement to come from the unknowable depths of the subconscious.

This is exciting and dangerous performance territory where conventional ideas about beauty and dance are stripped away, replaced by improvisation and often grotesque and trance-like gestures. As in some African traditions, the performer's body is painted chalky white.

Inner space is a pre-occupation with *butoh*, so it is no surprise that performance often takes place in unusual places. In an SABCTV1 dance programme this year, Acty took *butoh* to Hamburg, a small rural village in the Eastern Cape where he interacted with young Capoeira dancers. Appropriately for Acty, *butoh* came out of a hybrid world and almost immediately became a diasporic form of expression.

The sense of being a member of a Diaspora, never really belonging, but attempting to make a kind of emotional home on foreign soil, is strong in Acty's creative psyche. Ironically, even Hong Kong culture is seen as hybrid, diluted, diasporic by mainland China, so you could say Acty was born "on the road" with no single-culture homeground. This makes him, in a sense, the archetypal artist for the global village where mobility and an almost a-cultural fusion are the norm.

He notes that Chinese people have moved and found a way to settle and put down roots all over the world, proving that there are strong aspects of the culture that are portable.

He moved to Johannesburg with his parents as a pre-teenager, and has never returned to the East. He is a naturalised South African of 16 years standing, but he says, "Snatches of memories, sounds and ways of moving were embedded in me while I was young. So, as an adult, when I encountered Eastern traditions like Chinese opera and Thai Chi there were special resonances."

His home language is Cantonese and he still speaks with a slight drag on some consonants. He has two sisters and the older one lives in Hong Kong. He would dearly love to visit her there.

His experience of not fitting in is echoed in the recurring feeling of being a stranger which is common to

creative people. The artist often feels alienated, without a comfortable home within a culture or a socio-political system. Acty's way of putting it: "Artists always have another allegiance. The muse, if you wish. Even those who profess to be fully committed to political or didactic causes."

From 1999, Acty performed with the First Physical Theatre Company alongside people like Gary Gordon and Juanita Finestone-Praeg. In 2003 he was a finalist for a Daimler Chrysler Award. That same year he suffered an injury which saw him focusing on choreography and directing. He believes the injury was partly psychosomatic and related to his issues with personal identity. Significantly healed, he returned to the performance space during the National Arts Festival in 2005.

As a Young Artist award-winner, he will create and perform a celebratory piece for the 2007 Festival. It is a work that has been maturing for a long time in his imagination and the Award makes its realisation possible. Acknowledging his gratitude for this life-changing opportunity, Acty also says, "I feel it was a brave award that recognises the diversity of dance forms and dancers who don't fit into the existing concepts of culture, politics or artistic form."

Essentially the Award recognises the increasing depth and maturity of his work which could be partly attributable to his increasingly complex engagement with the sense of belonging, of being at home, of synergy.

Part of this enquiry was conducted through the rigorous academic research that culminated in his MA thesis. The topic had to do with the interface between the language of the body and the logic of words, between physicality and logos. He observes with gentle irony that many theorists argue there is no pre-logical or pre-cultural state. Yes, intellect is the crouching tiger under the supremely fit, silken surface of his startling talent.

The National Arts Festival takes place in Grahamstown between 28 June and 7 July 2007.

About the awards:

The Young Artist Awards were started in 1981 by the National Arts Festival to recognise emerging, relatively young South African artists who have demonstrated exceptional ability in their chosen field. These prestigious awards are presented annually to deserving artists in three to four arts disciplines, affording them national exposure and acclaim. Winning artists, as part of their award, are given the opportunity to perform, direct or exhibit on the National Arts Festival's main programme. Standard Bank took over the sponsorship of the awards in 1984 and have presented Young Artist Awards in all the major arts disciplines over their 23-year sponsorship, as well as posthumous and special recognition awards.

Picture: Yes
Submitted by *Gilly Hemphill*
PR Company: Famous Idea Trading CC
Telephone Number: 021 886 9400
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Dancing alone

The interior world of the dancer arrived on stage at this year's FNB Dance Umbrella, reports **Matthew Krouse**

If the content of this year's FNB Dance Umbrella has been about anything, it's been about private territories — places artists inhabit in the, "um ... ah", subconscious recesses of their heads. For unseasoned audience members, much of what happens on such a platform will appear to be a grand-scale exercise in navel-gazing. And why, one asks, should the belly button not be a valid field of focus in contemporary art?

The preceding decades of globalised culture — ubiquitous Americanisation, pandemics and ethnic wars — have given rise to a cliché: that the human body itself is a "site of struggle". And no form lends itself better to an exploration of this than dance with its language conveyed through movement alone.

Well, almost. If contemporary choreographers were indeed to abandon the accoutrements that have become standard to the genre, then the field would be cleared of thousands of hours of shaky, blurred video footage (of very little) and mountains of over-symbolic props such as sand, wood, fabric and water.

Two pieces at this year's event showed the international standard of extremes. First there was *I Wouldn't Be Seen Dead in That*, choreographed by Elu and Steven Cohen. This well-heeled production had its dancers (of Ballet Atlantique-Régine Chopinot) manipulating stuffed giraffe and kudu heads and legs in what could possibly be construed as a statement against hunting and the more abstract costs, to the brain, incurred by the fashion world.

Much store has been put in the fact that the production arrived with a chorus line of



Steven Cohen in *I Wouldn't Be Seen Dead in That*

CONTACT US

E-mail [Matthew Krouse](mailto:Matthew.Krouse@za.co.za)

European dancers, brandishing its own critique in the programme, signed "Amelie Pailla, French Philosopher".

One can expect no greater accolade in life than to be considered worthy of such a theoretical treatise — almost like having your own praise poet harp on about you before you speak. And while Pailla took great pains in her writing to understand how Cohen and company danced in order to resurrect the very spirit of the dead creatures they "wouldn't be seen dead in", in a very European manner she also took great pains to avoid dealing with Cohen as the self-questioning, transvestite Jew. Pailla didn't exactly ask, in her treatise, what it was about his Jewishness (or his homosexuality) that Cohen "wouldn't be seen dead in".

Surely she could not have missed the booming synagogue chanting or the enormous Star of David Cohen wore on his head? If, as Pailla noted, Elu and Cohen danced "to return moral life to the animal remains by re-imbuing them with what has been taken away: movement", then could not the same be said of what Cohen is trying to convey as a Jew?

Since Pailla didn't deal with the subject, it seems we'll never know. What we can conclude is that, while Cohen has politicised his own body, in his latest piece he has also politicised the bodies of the creatures he resurrected. And so we have dance about "wild animals as a site of struggle". Not bad.

On the far end of the scale was Emio Greco's *Double Points: One & Two*, directed by Pieter C Scholten. This pair of short pieces "questions and at the same time pursues the utopia of synchronicity, or the construction of accidental concurrence of circumstances", according to the programme note. And here we found Greco and co-performer Bertha Bermudez Pascual on an empty stage, uncannily synchronised. They were like bookends, dancing to the kind of house music that kids go mad for in nightclubs worldwide.

In the vast, month-long programme of the FNB Dance Umbrella this work provided a rare interrogation of the void of meaning that exists in the commercially overwhelming world of recreational dance. A subject that, one assumes, will gain in prominence as local choreographers make art out of the real-life happenings around them.

Real-life issues faced by dancers have been the subjects of much Dance Umbrella fare in recent years. This year a smattering of dancer discontent sneaked in. There was Mark Hawkins's *Excerpts from a Ballerina's Life: Stage II*, in which stagehands were employed

to literally remove the platform on which the tutu-clad prima ballerina was cavorting. Here, David Gouldie provided evocatively shot black-and-white video footage of a classical dancer's lot, made up of endless hours of mascara.

Hawkins's piece sat well alongside *Phenomenadic*, a particularly grudging, satirical work by Jeanette Ginslov and Nathaniel Stern, in which actors did unkind portrayals of successful choreographers Jay Pather, Vincent Mantsoe, Gary Gordon and Robyn Orlin. Clearly, these pieces show that there are gaping wounds in the dance community, unhealed, that have left choreographers feeling unrecognised. At the same time, anger vented through satire provides a barometer by which vital freedoms are measured in any art scene.

In her choice of figures to lambaste, Ginslov ignored DaimlerChrysler Award winner Sbonakaliso Ndaba — possibly because Ndaba is a new voice who has not yet engendered a cult of personality around her. Her work, *Gathering*, furthers her obsession with disturbed communities of individuals who fall into and out of trances for no apparent reason.

With her young company, the Phenduka Dance Theatre, Ndaba illustrates how a minimum of technological fuzz is needed to make real meaning. Like a theatre director she has a clear insight into what works dramatically between characters and how intrigue and mystery can be used to maximum effect.

This is important in the framing of what she does, because the unspecified rituals she creates, with no apparent basis in real tribal life, appear to be about dance as a remedy to society's mental illness.

Earthdiving, last of the Spier Opera Season, is presented on March 14 and 15. More information and bookings: Tel: 809 1177/78 or visit the website: www.spier.co.za

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Rites of the child

By using non-performers and video art, local dance is making inroads into real life. It has something to do with the way contemporary South African choreographers construct their stories, writes **Matthew Krouse** who attended the New Dance festival this weekend past.



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When Jeanette Ginslov stepped on to the stage of the Dance Factory last weekend she dragged a platoon of real Stallion Security guards up with her. It was the day after Women's Day and the last day of the Women's Arts Festival. Ginslov was making a satirical statement about how she reacts to being at home alone.

At the climax of her piece called *Wolf at the Door/Cry Wolf* she snapped her fingers and the guards, wearing bright red overalls, marched in to join her in military formation. The title of the piece reflected on a woman's ambivalence at having to call for help every time she hears a suspicious sound.

It was a crowd-pleaser for the festival audience and it signalled the end of a nine-part dance programme that included a power line-up of Gauteng talent.

There was also *Safe Harbour* by Gladys Agulhas, modelled around an uncredited documentary called *Women and War*. Like Ginslov's, her piece also had a twist in the tail. At the end of *Safe Harbour* over a dozen audience members, mostly children, filed solemnly on stage and turned to the auditorium. It was a symbolic moment: potential victims of war staring at potential victims.

Dance is equipped to take on elements of conceptualism. By using non-performers and video art, local dance is making inroads into real life. It has something to do with the way contemporary South African choreographers construct their stories. Unlike actors, dancers don't play characters. Rather, they make dynamic collages about relevant issues. Local dance, like other forms, is issue obsessed.

This weekend sees the launch of a new dance festival for Gauteng called, appropriately, New Dance. Its sparse but quality-driven programme includes a commissioned solo work by Gregory Maqoma, well-known for his special brand of camp. Maqoma's upcoming piece is called *Ketima* and breaks with his previous preoccupation. His new work presents the interior and exterior world of the child.

Maqoma has been "working on the idea of a baby — on the innocence of a child. The movements have been drawn from a playground, and the turmoil of emotions that any child goes through."

Improvising to Air on a G String by Johan Sebastian Bach, Maqoma begins with simple child-like movements which he elevates to a sort of trance. The joy is lost as things become increasingly tense. "It's a portrayal of childhood as a frightening experience," he says. "As a human being you get to a point where you almost lose your innocence. Because you are so influenced by what is happening outside you begin to wish that you did not see what is happening in the world. You long to be a child who relies on natural instincts."

Coincidentally, at the Women's Arts Festival Nelisiwe Xaba — prima ballerina of the Robyn Orlin company — also performed a solo work in the role of a child. Called *No Strings Attached 2*, Xaba modelled her piece around the jumping games that township girls play with rubber bands. Xaba's work reflected on "the fact that children don't play today — they watch videos, they watch TV, they're on the computer. But we used to create our own games."

Xaba doesn't think that access to technology, for the youth, necessarily makes for a better quality of life: "It makes for individuality. But socially kids get messed up, especially single-parent kids. They never get to play with other kids, except at school."

A solo work of international stature that will also evoke the fantasy world of the child is the Finnish Cultural Foundation sponsored multimedia *Keiju* (meaning Fairy) performed and choreographed by Jyrki Karttunen. According to the programme notes: "An ambiguous character is catapulted into a

timeless no-man's land between the world of flowers and everyday reality without being able to hold on to either."

Finally, the themes of childhood and loss of innocence come together in the revival of a collaboration between Moeketsi Koena and Malgache choreographer Gaby Saranouffi. This is the ground-breaking, French-funded *Blame Me Blind* that combines poetry, dance and video by Vincent Boloï.

To research Koena took himself off to rural Venda where he spent time at traditional circumcision schools. The resulting work, Koena says, "talks about the difference of being African and having to grow up in the Westernised world".

Ultimately, for youth the conflict is worsened when they confront the reality of HIV/Aids. "We deal with the concept of shame, confrontation and disorder," Koena says. "We use a corridor of light to show the path that everybody takes — you are born, you grow up and you die. But in this period of history, it doesn't happen that way. You are born and you disappear.

"It's not about giving me a booklet and a condom and saying this is Aids awareness, and saying now go and have sex. Life is not an advert by LoveLife. Life is not a billboard with a naked man and woman, and a box of chocolates.

"We must embrace all these things that we grow up with — do not look at the one as being worse than the other."

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Dancing outdoors

Choreographers seem determined to break out of the confines of their medium. With each passing year the FNB Dance Umbrella advertises more and more of its programme away from sanctioned theatre spaces. They are bent on challenging our notions of what makes for urban comfort zones, writes **Matthew Krouse**

Choreographers seem determined to break out of the confines of their medium. With each passing year the FNB Dance Umbrella advertises more and more of its programme away from sanctioned theatre spaces.

Last year we witnessed Durban's Jay Pather and Siwela Sonke Dance Company take to two shopping malls and a hotel room in *Cityscapes*. The rambling work attempted to disorientate audiences and played havoc with our preconceived notions of what makes up our urban comfort zones. This year Rodney Place and Ntsikelelo Boyzie Cekwana team up to create *Infections of the Void: City Without Walls — Shopping Baroque*. This piece with its impossible title takes place in the heart of the plush northern suburbs in the backyard of Gallery Momo.

While a gallery space is not entirely far from the madding art crowd, the locale of Momo has given Place and Cekwana fertile ground to comment on suburbia, using an alarm system set off by beams linked to recordings of incidental sound effects.

Originally performed in Austria and Poland, the press release for the event is somewhat drowning in "artspeak" and claims that the work "bridges between two post-territories — post-apartheid South Africa and post-communist central Europe.



Gladys Agulhas in *Between Our Worlds Part 2: Portraits*. These works form part of the FNB Dance Umbrella 2004, a major contemporary choreography and dance platform

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"It explores, through two distinct but related photo/video/performance/sound/fashion works, the connections (and disconnections) between the security of a territory and the informing images of that territory — its habits and ideals, virtual and real bodies, video and live sequences and remixed and live sounds."

The manifesto continues to describe the local segment of the work that "focuses on suburbia, its leisure and work habits, and the images that continue to shape it".

It is down to the enigmatic Cekwana to present all these layers of meaning in movement, alone, in a garden. Skeptics would do good to bear in mind that Place has a proven track record. Certainly his 1998 work, *Couch Dancing*, that featured Robyn Orlin's prima ballerina Nelisiwe Xaba writhing about on a reconstruction of Sigmund Freud's couch was witty, intriguing and its complexities were not beyond grasp.

Orlin, who needs no introduction here, is the second choreographer to present work in a non-theatre space. In this instance she presents *The Babysitting Series* at the Johannesburg Art Gallery. The work was initiated in Berlin in 2002 using guards from Der Alten Nasionalgalerie. The title seems to derive from the fact that the performance is presented in the form of a gallery tour, and so the audience is ushered or, rather, mollycoddled while they negotiate the gallery space.

As with much of Orlin's work, things go desperately wrong when her cast members — parading as tourists — make some attempt to bridge the gap between high art and contemporary reality.

The Dance Umbrella's third foray into real spaces is Sue-Pam Grant's *Screen Factor 8*, which features Orlin favourite Gerard Bester with members of the Moving into Dance Mophatong Company. It takes place in shopper's paradise — namely Sandton Square.

One has fond memories of a previous occasion — during last year's Arts Alive International Festival — when the square was ambushed by crowds of pantsula dancers for a township dance drama, the biggest gathering of its kind yet to have taken place.

Of course there was a certain danger attached to the arrival of hundreds of black youngsters decked out in the kind of garb usually associated with gangsterism.

The fact remains, though, that this year's forays into so-called real spaces in Johannesburg are really quite safe. Until choreographers remove

their works from sanctioned, heavily guarded and monitored spaces, those products cannot be taken as boundary-breaking in the least.

Back to the Wits Theatre, where much of the Dance Umbrella programme takes place. Here the month-long celebration kicks off in earnest on Saturday with the first of two Stepping Stones programmes. This is the platform for hopefuls, some of whom we will no doubt hear from in the future. The programmes run on February 21 and 22, beginning at 9.30am. Braamfontein is somewhat void of good restaurants these days — so take lunch.

On February 25 and 26 the Wits Theatre hosts works by Gladys Agulhas and Cekwana. Agulhas's *Between Our Worlds Part 2: Portraits* looks at the life cycle of the dancer. In a stroke of genius, she has each of her cast members playing a dancer at a different stage of their careers.

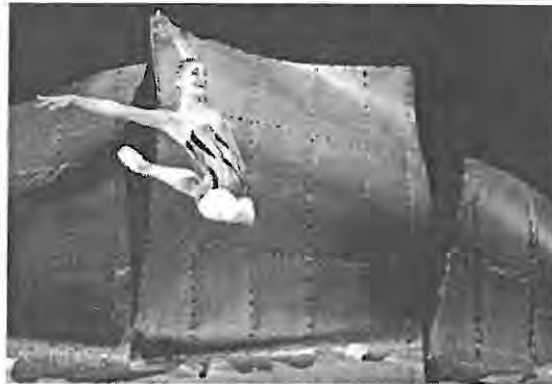
Although there are new values seeping into the dance world, it is comforting that certain choreographers are still preoccupied with old-fashioned things like drama and plot.

For programme updates call Tel: 482 4140 /082 570 3083 or go to www.artslink.co.za/arts

Time to end the story of dance

Surely we're grown up enough to appreciate pure dance, with no need for narrative and fancy dress?

November 28, 2006 3:02 PM | [Printable version](#)



Full speed ahead into a narrative-free future... Marianela Nunez in DGV (Danse a Grande Vitesse) at the Royal Opera House. Photograph: Tristram Kenton

Here's another thought on the significance of the Royal Ballet's White Stripes triple bill. Coming just three weeks before Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* opens for its Christmas run at Sadler's Wells, its success has produced a delicious reversal of box office wisdom. While audiences at the Opera House have been fighting over tickets for a programme of "difficult" abstract dance, "modern dance" choreographer Bourne is about to bring in the crowds with a full-length narrative work. Could this be a sign that the culture of dance is shifting? And in particular could it signify that the full-length story ballet is finally loosening its tentacular grip on British dance?

Since the second world war, audience demand for the two- or three-act narrative ballet has grown. To the special frustration of companies who tour widely outside London - English National Ballet, Northern Ballet, Birmingham Royal Ballet - the only consistent formula that moves tickets is a popular "literary" title coupled with the promise of period frocks. *Wuthering Heights*, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, *Canterbury Tales*, *The Three Musketeers* - there is barely a classic from the bookshelves that hasn't been put on pointe.

There are real dangers for dance in this trend. Firstly, that the quality of the choreography takes second place to the requirement of getting crowd pleasing costumes and characters onto the stage. Second, that the ballet fails to tell the story as clearly or as vividly as it first appeared in book form. And third, that dance comes across as a dumb, parasitic form of playacting.

Of course a huge amount of craft goes into the making of most of the full-length story ballets which flood the market. Distilling a plot down to a few significant scenes, creating character out of a few gestures are rare skills, and when they are brilliantly executed the results are profoundly satisfying. Ashton's *La Fille mal gardee*, MacMillan's *Romeo and Juliet* and many of the 19th century classics are works that merit greatness both as dance and as storytelling. So, too, does Bourne's *Swan Lake* - because, like all the best story ballets, it was created because the choreographer had a fabulous score to work with, and a vision he urgently wanted to stage.

But too few of the story ballets we see today can boast either of these inspirations, which is why so many look as if they have been churned out on a production line. Isn't it time for a concerted push to wean audiences off their dependency on narrative and fancy dress, and on to a more grown-up diet of pure dance? Isn't it time for choreographers, whose natural bent is towards storytelling, to be able to catch their collective breath, and figure out what stories are really theirs to tell?

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NOVEMBER 2005

magazine

REVIEW

*Rosemary Butcher**'Images Every Three Seconds',
'The Hour', 'Hidden Voices'**October 2005
London, Tate Modern**by John Mallinson*

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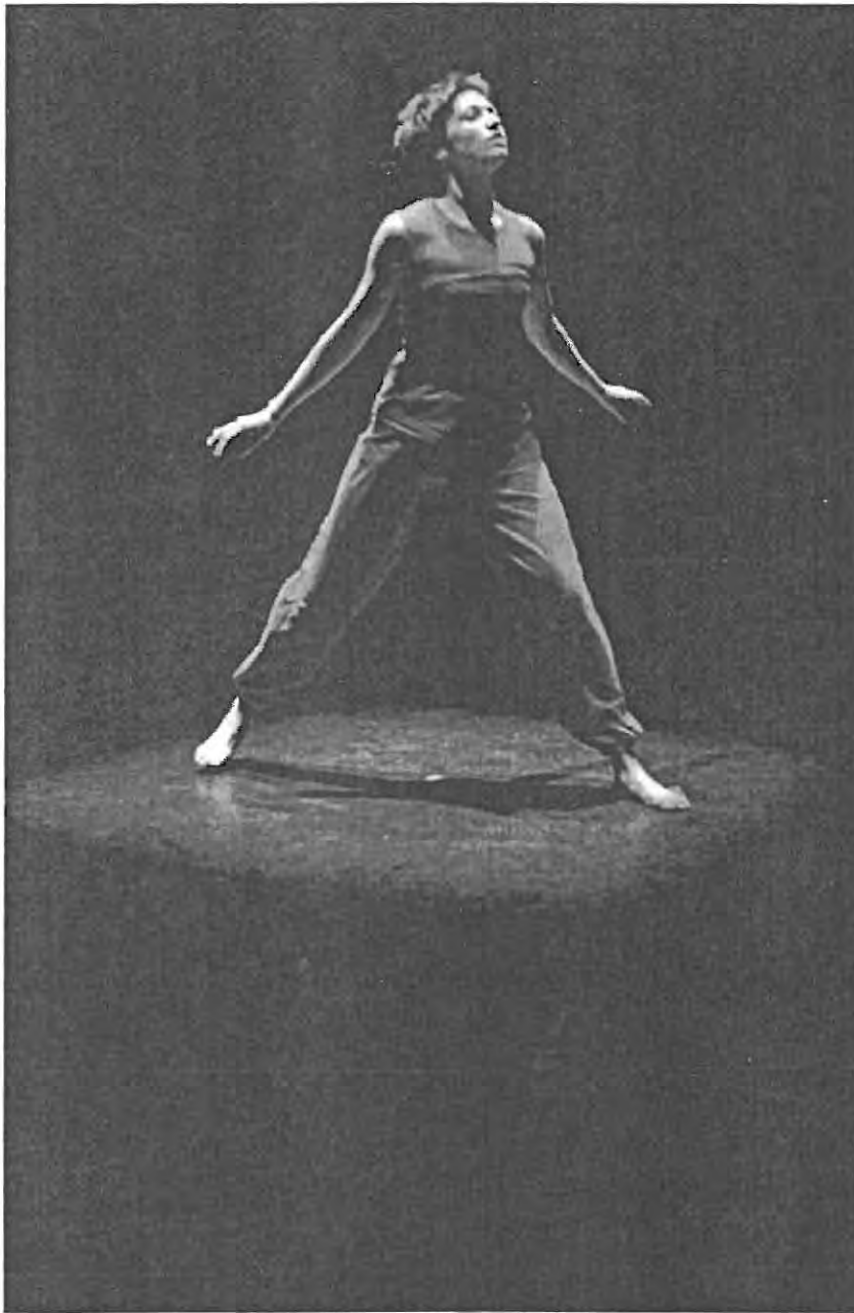
The Tate Modern turbine hall is the largest single gallery space anywhere – 500 feet long, 115 feet high, though from the visual point of view rather spoiled by a broad bridge which runs across it about half way down. Since the gallery opened in May 2000 there has been a series of art exhibits which have attempted to match the scale of the place. Two years ago Olafur Eliasson's *Weather Project* illumined the whole space with orange light from a gigantic sun and puffed fog into the air. This coincided with Dance Umbrella and Merce Cunningham staged a work there using two areas for dancing. It was especially effective as the dance could also be seen reflected in mirrors which covered the inside of the roof and which were part of Eliasson's installation.

Currently half of the space is filled by Rachel Whiteread's *Embankment*, an assemblage of 14,000 translucent white polyethylene cubes, casts of the inside of cardboard packing boxes. The result is a cross between a warehouse stacked high, a

fallen down cathedral and an ice field, with hints of the Giants' Causeway or the grandeur of Staffa (there are crevices but no caves). There is an involuntary resonance here with *White*, Rosemary Butcher's last major piece seen in London, which used ideas of polar exploration and travel, and references to Scott's last fatal journey. Both artists produce work which is characteristically austere.

Into the enormous void of the Turbine Hall Rosemary Butcher brings some of the smallest, most compact and personal work to be seen there. Whiteread's concern with interior space (most of her sculptures are casts of the insides of things) is matched by Butcher's deeply internalised work. Having decided in the last few years to only make solo pieces, Butcher has left behind the abstract structural possibilities (and necessities) which come when choreographing for groups. Solo work, by definition, immediately takes you back to the personal and emotional. The most striking thing about the programme was how intensely felt it seemed to be.

Butcher likes to drop her pieces into non-conventional performing spaces and see what happens. Tate Modern is not a silent building. There is the constant whoosh of the ventilation system, a hum from the electrical sub-station through the wall and, on the night I went, the sound of rain. Butcher accepts all this as forming a significant part of the performance itself and did not, for instance, instal screens for her film projections, preferring to use the irregular concrete of the walls. Her performer/collaborator Elena Giannotti was dancing in an area of not more than a few square metres in front of an audience of 200, standing, sitting on the floor or on stools on the Turbine Hall bridge. Geoff Brown in *The Times* describes Giannotti as having "not an epic presence, but a truthful one". Absolutely right. A very watchable dancer who seemed sincere and unaffected.



Elena Giannotti dancing in *Hidden Voices*
© Benedict Johnson

There were three pieces, independent but linked by tone, each lasting less than 20 minutes, separated by a pause during which the dancer went off to change costume. *Images Every Three Seconds* was performed in and around and through one of those ubiquitous squares of light projected onto the floor from above. This area, about two metres square immediately brought to mind metaphors related to the "outer darkness" and "coming into the light". The piece was inspired by photographs of Afghan women taken in 1997 in Taliban times. The second piece, *The Hour*, had the dancer moving across and along bands of light and then, in the second half, her shadow was projected onto the wall as she held poses and three panels of film showed blurred images that looked like travellers in the desert.

Finally *Hidden Voices*, a piece from last year (when it failed to win the new Place Prize for modern dance in the face of some much more conventional

choreography). It is an extraordinary and repetitive 15 minute work: the dancer rocks back and forth from one foot to the other with just a few changes in tempo and direction. It seems like a kind of impeded walking, a frustrated attempt at progression. In the background is a voice whispering about the seat of memory, so perhaps this is the journey of life in condensed form.

These works are difficult to describe. Butcher choreographs in the vernacular: walking, running, stooping, rocking. Mostly rather reserved, nothing exaggerated. Giannotti gives these mundane constituents an appealing and watchable grace.

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CHOREOGRAPHERS TODAY



Mats Ek

By Giannandrea Poesio

Some dismiss his choreography as “derivative”, others regard him as a genius. Whatever the opinion, Mats Ek remains one of the most intriguing dance makers of our time. Ek was born in Malmö, on April 18, 1945, the son of celebrated Swedish actor Anders Ek and of internationally acclaimed choreographer Birgit Cullberg, founder of the Cullberg Ballet. Yet, neither the ballet classes he took as a child, nor the three months of Graham based technique he studied as a teenager prompted the passion for that art form his mother had dreamt of – even though he was to affirm later in life that the latter experience had left an indelible imprint in his body (1). Ek’s performing career, therefore, started as a drama student at the Marieborg College of Norrköping, in 1965. Two years later he produced his own version of Büchner’s drama *Wozzeck* for the Marionetteatern, using puppets as well as live actors; and in 1969 he was already working with legendary director and producer Ingmar Bergman for a new staging of the same drama. But in 1973, despite being regarded as a promising name of Swedish theatre, he suddenly decided to devote his artistic and creative talents to dance. In his own words, the decision stemmed mainly from the fact that, “after having directed some twenty productions in six years I felt I wanted to interpret something myself, and dance appeared to me as a more natural means of expression than acting” (2). He thus joined the Cullberg Ballet, where he had a chance to absorb the choreographic canons of some of the most significant, innovative and even provocative dance makers of that time, such as Maurice Béjart and Jirí Kylián (3). And it was within and for the Cullberg Ballet that he began to create dance works.

Although works such as *Kalfaktorn* (after Büchner’s *Wozzeck*, 1976), *St George and the Dragon* (1976), *Bernarda* (originally *Bernarda’s Hus*, after Federico Garcia Lorca’s *The House of Bernarda Alba*, 1978) were saluted with enthusiasm by dance goers and critics alike, it was with his re-interpretation of the classic *Giselle* in 1982 that Ek became internationally known, for his work marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of dance.

The idea of re-visiting a ballet classic was not new in 1982, for a number of balletic re-visitations had been created since the early 1970s, with different degrees of success. Yet, no choreographer had yet dared to alter the main means of expression on which each of those choreographic works relied, namely the ballet idiom. Nor had any choreographer dared to alter radically the standard text of any of those works. Ek’s 1982 *Giselle*, instead, proposed a radically new, contemporary-flavoured choreographic text that had little or nothing in common with the structural, technical and stylistic layout of the ballet’s standard version.

Moreover, the work stood and still stands out for the unique way the newly devised choreographic layout complements and interacts with other artistic or structural components of the traditional ballet that remain unaltered. The combination of new steps and movement solutions set to a score that had originally been created for other technical and stylistic requirements is one of the most surprising and captivating features of this work.

The storyline too, though updated and transposed into a world that is nearer to the contemporary reality of the everyday, follows broadly the essence of the original libretto, striving to address, in a non-romantic, late 20th century way notions and concepts similar to those metaphorically expounded within the 1841 ballet. By revising the narrative context of the original story, Ek thus proves that beyond all sorts of theatrical conventions and clichés lay a

number of timeless truths and notions.

Indeed, the interpretative and metaphorical possibilities offered by re-reading an existing plot had and still have a special attraction on Ek, who prefers to have a story to tell – whether it be a fairy tale or more simply the theatrical rendition of everyday events and situations – and who is never too keen on plotless and formalist creations.

For Ek, narrative is what provides the choreographer, the interpreters and the viewers with what he refers to as “magic doors”, which, not unlike those found in Alice in Wonderland, can take anywhere. Perfectly structured stories, such as the various fairy tales on which are constructed ballets such as Giselle, Swan Lake and The Sleeping Beauty, or those proposed by literary, dramatic and operatic works such as Prosper de Merimée’s Carmen and Federico Garcia Lorca’s The House of Bernarda Alba, offer thus a unique array of exits and entrances to explore. And, for the Swedish choreographer, the investigation of narrative alleys, epic paths and metaphorical tunnels is what provides the primary stimulus for re-telling those stories by creating new dances.

Although Ek “revised” The Rite of Spring in 1984, Swan Lake in 1987 and The Sleeping Beauty in 1996, it would be erroneous to label him merely as a “revisionist” dance maker, for he created a number of non-“revisionist” dances as well, both for the stage and the television. Among them it is worth remembering Parken (The Park, 1987), Gräs (Grass, 1987), Gmla barn (Old children, 1989), Rök (Smoke, 1995, created for the television and then adapted in 1996 for the stage with the title Solo för två or Solo for Two), and En slags (A sort of, 1997).

Being a man of theatre, and a man endowed with a considerable knowledge of the various arts, Ek soon found that the paths behind those “magic doors” crossed and intersected each other, thus providing the dance maker with a unique range of different, though parallel, narrative possibilities. Early works such as the now humorous, now bitterly satirical St George and the Dragon, in which the former is depicted as a ruthless colonialist, and Bernarda’s House, in which Bernarda is interpreted by a man to accentuate the tyrannical nature of the domineering widow, relied already on a multiplicity of parallel narratives and a multiplicity of refined textual references. It is not surprising, therefore, that once confronted with the wealth of interpretative possibilities offered by the libretto of Giselle, Ek decided to progress further along the same path, turning the use of parallel narratives into one of the most distinctive traits of his production.

Still, the often intricate web of diverse narratives and quotations that informs most of his dances is never imposed on the viewer, nor are the spectators ever forced to take part in the recognise-where-this-comes-from game. A more than fitting example of this typically “Ek-ian” trait can be found in the first act of his 1987 Swan Lake, where the relationship between Prince Siegfried and his mother “can”, but does not have to, be read as similar to the one that exists between Hamlet and his mother Gertrude in Shakespeare’s play. If the reference is spotted, then new doors can be opened; but the dance can equally be appreciated without establishing any link between the old fairy tale and the Shakespeare text.

Top, Mats Ek.

Below, Talia Paz and Mats Jansson in Mats Ek’s Sleeping Beauty. Photographs by Lesley Leslie-Spinks.



The references embedded in the various dance works are not always derived from or related to existing art works, for Ek likes to quote from a wealth of images that range from familiar, everyday ones, to more culturally refined, though never too elitist. In She Was Black (1995), for instance, the action develops through a series of apparently disjointed choreographic images

created while pondering on the lines of a satirical show, in which one actor, who claims to have spoken with God, describes the Supreme Creator by stating that "she was black". Each image, in turn, evokes all sorts of sources – from television shows, to literary masterworks – in a crescendo of humour and dramatic tension.

Like many other choreographers, Ek too has a detectable preference for specific themes, at least judging by the frequency with which they keep recurring throughout his production. Among them, the theme of "motherhood", in all its sombre variants, is one of the most evident in each of the re-visited classics. In *Giselle*, the eponymous heroine longs for giving birth, for procreation is the main, if not the sole activity carried on by all the other female members of the claustrophobically enclosed rural community she lives within – as is demonstrated by the huge eggs rolled on stage by the peasant women. In *Swan Lake*, the disturbed, sexually immature prince suffers mainly from an Oedipal relationship with his sex-thirsty, domineering mother, while in *Sleeping Beauty* both the act and the consequences of giving birth are two main key issues of the revised narrative.

Gender issues are also typical of the "Ek-ian" production. As it has been said, in *Bernarda* the protagonist is portrayed by a man, while in *Carmen*, the heroine is far more butch than her lover who ends up carrying, "bride-like", the bouquet of flowers in a brief "wedding" dream-sequence. And in *She Was Black*, an entertaining moment is provided by a nude male dancer performing in red pointe shoes. According to Ek, "to cross the boundaries of given gender-specific movements is truly interesting. It is something that, in my opinion, classical ballet missed out. The traditional ballet reinforces rigid clichés and stereotypes according to which the prince and the princess must move differently from each other. She is frail, pretty and longing for help. He is strong and willing to help. Somehow, all this prevents a further exploration of their psychological differences and limits considerably any interpretative shading" (4).

The quest for a movement vocabulary that allows a more in-depth exploration of the psychology of each character is not just related to the portrayal of gender, though, for it represents another constant of Ek's production. Faithful to the notion of theatrical immediacy, Ek has created a language of expressive gestures that manages to convey a wealth of ideas without ever becoming too literal. No arm or hand movement belongs thus to a specific code, and each gesture can be used in a myriad of different ways, with a myriad of different meanings.

An overview of the distinctive traits of Ek's choreography would not be complete without a



Yamit Kalef in Mats Ek's *Swan Lake*.
Photograph by Lesley Leslie-Spinks

reference to his use of humorous solutions. Even amidst the darkest and most poignant moments of a not-so-happy-ending situation, he manages to insert fire-cracking comic sections or references that enhance greatly, instead of detracting from, the dramatic build up by creating a unique game of contrasts and choreographic chiaroscuro. Examples can be found in *Swan Lake*, in which the three jesters and Odile indulge in all sorts of slapstick activities; in *Giselle*, in which the famous "hopping" solo from Act I becomes a rather irreverent dance performed by Hilarion; in *Bernarda's House*, in which the daunting rosary scene is transformed into a hilarious parody of saying grace; in *Sleeping Beauty*, in which both the fairies and Aurora's suitors are comically modelled on female and male stereotypes, and in which the action is suddenly interrupted by a television-style cooking class; in *Smoke* (5), in which the comic components are far more refined and vaguely reminiscent of the smile-provoking trick favoured by some celebrated mime actors; and in *She Was Black*, where the intentional nonsense-like nature of the whole can be read as a splendid tribute to the most hilarious examples of "absurd" theatre.

In 1993, Ek resigned from the post of Director of the Cullberg Ballet, which he had started to co-direct with his mother in 1980. In the same year he returned to drama with *Dans med nästan* (*Dance with your Neighbour*) which he wrote, directed and choreographed. He has subsequently directed one of the most intriguing dance-theatre stagings of Molière's *Don Juan*, performed with great success at the Edinburgh Festival. In November 2000, after a long creative pause which prompted much speculation, he has returned to choreography with *Fluke*, a splendid fusion of

some of his most distinctive formulae and new dance-theatre solutions, which has reassured all his devoted fans that his choreographic creativity is still on the rise.

(1) His ballet teacher was the Russian émigré Lilian Karina and the Graham teacher was Donya Feuer.

(2) In Sjöman, T. Nu är han dansare hos mamma!, AB, 15 March 1974, reported also in D'Adamo, A. Mats Ek, Palermo: Epos, 2002, p.27.

(3) He also danced for Deutsche Oper am Rhein between 1975 and 1976 and for the Nederlands Dans Theater, in the 1980/81 season.

(4) Ek, Mats in Jensen, Gunilla, Intervista a Mats Ek, Omaggio a Mats Ek, Reggio Emilia Danza: Edizioni del Teatro Municipale Valli, 2002, p.38.

(5) Originally created for television and then renamed Solo for Two once adapted for the stage.

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Dancing on apartheid's grave

By Adrienne Sichel

When the National Arts Council and its provincial counterparts finally sit down to decide which projects and initiatives to fund they'll have to be as flexible and creative as the South African artists who are crashing through the cultural barriers and rearranging artistic norms.

Established art forms, including opera, are rapidly being redefined, as writers, directors, choreographers and designers cross-pollinate their techniques and aesthetics.

Recent successful examples of these cross-cultural explorations, involving the reworking of Western classic works, include Opera Africa's Carmen, the Handspring Puppet Company's internationally acclaimed Faustus in Africa and Jazzart Dance Company/Magnet Theatre's Medea.

It's open season as artists get to grips with the clouded past and the chaotic present. Very little is sacred or off-limits.

In the spirit of post-apartheid democracy, inter-disciplinary, multi-media collaborations are increasing.

Who is doing what with whom is turning the tables on traditional definitions of cultural and art forms and breaking down designated parameters.

The choreographer, not only here but elsewhere in Africa, is emerging as an important researcher and historian.

Taking the initiative to restore the missing links and realign South African history from an African perspective is Jackie Mbuyiselwa Semela, the artistic director at the Soweto Dance Theatre.

His dance work Tlhaselo-Attack was triggered by the plight of the Afrikaner women and children in the British concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War.

The show's last performance at the Wits Theatre will be held tomorrow night in a historic collaboration with the PACT Dance Company. It will be transferred to the State Theatre Arena in Pretoria on October 31.

The Evaton-born dancer, teacher and choreographer never studied the Anglo-Boer War at school.

As an adult Semela was astonished to hear about the concentration camps. His attitude, reflected in his choreography, is: "If the Afrikaner wasn't incarcerated by the British during the Anglo-Boer War we would have another history.

"Afrikaners missed an opportunity when they went out on their own without the Africans. They took out their revenge on the British on the wrong people. That was the beginning of oppression "

In researching Tlhaselo, Semela discovered that at one stage there were 60 black concentration camps interning men, women and children which equalled or even surpassed the white camps.

This information, paired with the 1899-1902 war itself, is not represented literally in his choreography. Instead it is represented as a fragmented, non-linear, post-modern idiom.

Aware that this is a sensitive issue and unusual for a black choreographer, Semela is adamant that as a choreographer working in African dance, "it is essential to know the history of all of South Africa's people".

His next project is about the African queens of the south, stretching from Angola across to Zambia and Zimbabwe and then further south.

The recent discovery of the remains of ancient African kingdom in the Kruger National Park has provided him with added incentive.

Part of an African choreographer's challenge, is how to innovate within a tradition without losing the essence of that tradition.

The Tlhaselo score consists of drum rhythms created out of Western and southern African traditions and a building military influence represented by a snare drum.

A Boer commando moves across the stage, their torsos undulating under siege while British soldiers march not on but through the rhythm.

Tribal warriors power stamp and weave their presence. The Union Jack is raised by a British officer represented by Soweto dancer Mandla Mcunu.

At the climax Melody Putu, bearing a ceremonial knobkerrie, stamps his territory indicating the presence of historic African kings.

Finally Susan Abraham, a white woman in regal African regalia, initiates a hip-thrusting dance of celebration signalling Semela's vision of what could have been and could still be.

"If we identify with Africa, everyone can play a role to build a great country. We can all be part of society.

"For Tlhaselo I choreographed Afrikaner and African dancers, some of whom have never had to confront issues in this way.

"This is a way of having a greater understanding and appreciation of our situation. It's not all bad here. Being South African is something to cherish, something to hold on to. To say it belongs to us'."

The collaborative dance season is suitably titled Tshwaranang which, in Sotho, means "hold together".

If Semela uses dance to investigate political history, Mandla Mcunu in *That Day* (In memory of my mother) comes to terms with the pain of losing his mother Ntombi Mcunu (42) who died last year of a diabetic condition.

For months Mandla, the oldest of Mcunu's five children, whose professional career she totally supported, was grief-stricken and couldn't discuss his loss with anyone.

Then he plucked up the courage to deal with his mother's death the best way he knew how through dance.

That Day takes the form of a theatrical dedication and a prayer using classical ballet as well as contemporary and jazz dance techniques infused with African dynamics.

Two dancers depict Ntombi Mcunu. One is Candice Johnstone, and it's quite startling to see the Port Elizabeth brunette evoking the life and memory of a Soweto woman.

"I see a dancer. I don't see a white person," is his explanation.

This memorial exudes jazzy soul and is a true reflection of the award-winning PACT artist who started out as a breakdancer with the Whizz Kids at Orlando DOCC, which evolved into Soweto Dance Theatre.

"I couldn't say it another way. Everything had to be me."

Another example of the cultural and gender crossover, which will keep the national and regional arts councils on their toes, is Candice Johnstone's foray into soccer.

Laduma (A Goal), commissioned by the Soweto Dance Theatre, is danced by SDT aspirants, Nhlanhla Nkosi and S'fiso Mavuso, who are still in high school.

It is an electrifying duet to techno music which incorporates kicks, headers, referee signals, supporters' gestures and goalie tactics by contemporary African dancers who are no strangers to ballet pirouettes and vocabulary. Sport meets art .

Laduma!

The Star

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The noble savage strikes back

Post-apartheid South African culture is definitely one of the international flavours of the decade. This very weekend, our theatre, music, visual art and dance go on show for 10 days at the "Out of Afrika" Southern African Festival in Munich, Germany.

But there's a price to be paid for this adoration and curiosity, particularly when South Africans, across the board, are grappling with constantly shifting cultural identity. Paired with this confusion is the old baggage of colonised aesthetics steeped in expectations synonymous with the exotic.

Last weekend, in direct response to exploitative European directors and festivals imposing their preconceptions on South African performers, choreographer PJ Sabbagha and the Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative premiered *Still Here?* This is not a knee-jerk reaction but a well thought through collaboration between dancers and choreographers exploring their own racial and gender tensions and identities.

Significantly this ground breaking work was created with no pay to any of the performer-creator collaborators from Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg. Noted dancer-choreographer Ntsikelelo Boyzie Cekwana and former First Physical Theatre dancer-actors Samantha Pienaar, Lannon Prigge, Craig Morris and Athena Fatseas joined Forgotten Angle to perform *Still Here?*

This happened at the first South African choreographic platform selecting works for the Bagnolet biennial international choreographic competition in France next May. Five other works competed at the Dance Factory, in front of a national selection panel of South African choreographers, dancers, festival and company directors.

In the programme notes Sabbagha writes: "Dancing bodies are seen as a site of struggle personal, artistic and political a struggle between the physical urges of the body and the demands of a western technocratic society a struggle between the need to be viewed as part of an international community in the late 20th century and our commitment to a very specific cultural and political heritage."

The cherished European image of the noble savage is blown apart with scathing commentary. Lindani Nkosi in traditional Zulu dress, seduced into the spotlight on the stage, leaves his seat in the auditorium and takes off his feather headdress, sheepskin leggings and animal skin beshu. Left beshu-less, in red scants, he tries to do his traditional stamps and steps but his body is out of control, crashes to the floor continuously, his body wracked by spasms of disempowerment and cultural alienation.

This symbolic sequence, performed in silence, is compounded by the arrival of a statuesque white woman in Victorian black crinoline who infiltrates his personal space, wins his trust, then gags him, throttling him into submission. The dispossessed African dancer fights back, initiating a symbolic power struggle of colonised space, embattled bodies and colliding aesthetics.

Still Here? ends 20 minutes later with the woman, Tracey Human, aka Mother Europe, her domineering deeds derailed, snatching the leggings, putting them on her pale legs and the final indignity victoriously wearing the beshu as a necklace, a trophy on her white bosom.

The choreography, in response to American composer Meredith Monk's muttering

music, is rich with relevant metaphors and violent energies. There's vulnerable tenderness and tendon-to-tendon physicality too. It triggers a media memory. During the dark, bomb blast-riven pre-election days of Codesa when word got out that Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer went trout fishing, an image of social rapprochement was born. Two South African politicians, of different races, up to their waists in water and brotherhood.

Sabbagha articulates and takes this social inter-racial relationship even further in a startlingly powerful duet, a vivid moment of artistic truth and reconciliation. Cekwana and Prigge, two strong men, are locked in virile body-wrapping embraces. The touch is not

homoerotic: it is a bonding between a white man, who has shucked off the tangible fear shared by the other white characters, and a black man, who dares to trust. In one sequence Prigge balances on Cekwana's ankles before balancing on the back of his knees. It is an evocative theatrical encounter as fragile, explosive and brutally beautiful as the fragmented society we're living in.

Still Here? was not selected to go to Paris for final selection for 15 prizes spread between choreographers from 29 countries. Jeannette Ginslov's *Walking Against the Wind* was. What would Athol Fugard say about Ginslov's resonant work inspired by his legendary *Boesman and Lena*? Maybe, if the sage of South African theatre saw this post-modern choreographic incarnation of his play, he would say thank you.

Ginslov, who is studying for a masters degree in choreography at Rhodes University, focuses on resistance and identity. The choreographer and her six dancers, men and women, black and white, have extracted the soul and spirit of Fugard's text. Lena's voice sporadically floods the space. White plastic mats and accompanying natural sounds signify the Eastern Cape's vleis which *Boesman and Lena* tramp eternally. A rivulet of red sand on one mat turns into a mire.

Specific in its accented verbal language and earthily textured vocabulary, this dance work is also universal in its portrayal of the loneliness of the battered woman, the despair of the life-bruised man.

For years South African dancemakers have, without much success, been attempting to transpose great South African literature to the stage. Now, at last, triumphantly, it is Fugard's turn, in this rapprochement between artistic sensibilities of the apartheid and post-apartheid eras.

The Star

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Dance hybrids flourish after a decade

By Adrienne Sichel

Legacy. That is the one word that echoed through my mind during the opening night of Soweto Dance Theatre's 10th anniversary performance at The Wits Theatre in a season entitled Ke Nako (It's Time).

Yes, it is high time to take stock of what has been achieved over the past decade by Jackie Mbuyiselwa Semela and his subsequent Soweto Dance Theatre collaborators following the split with SDT co-founder Carly Dibakoane.

The performance of eight works on opening night is of course only one facet of the SDT's activities which largely embrace teaching African dance to children and teenagers in both Soweto and Yeoville as well as training the company.

The annual Step Afrika! festival, linking American and British collaborators, is held in December and has paved the way for SDT's US debut.

In many ways Ke Nako!, which has toured extensively this year from Abidjan to Grahamstown and is heading for Washington DC on December 24, is an artistic watershed.

The fusion choreography, dominated by Semela, showcases the SDT style of melding Southern and West African traditional forms and rhythms with a Western technical bent.

The works also strongly articulate the SDT's social concern. This is evident in Semela's depiction of battered and raped women getting their revenge in Thiba, or the gunshot-plagued and trapped residents in Helpless.

The undertow of traditional beliefs can also be seen in Semela's Ntheowe, one of the most cohesive dramatic works, while trance is explored in Thembinkosi Colleen Hlatshwayo's emotionally charged For The Soul. Mandla Hlatshwayo shows choreographic promise in the experimental Untitled, which incorporates pantsula.

The calibre of dancing by a much improved SDT 2, SDT 3 and Yeoville guests had its strengths, and only unravelled in Semela's Still My Friends.

SDT's developmental roots blossomed in the farewell performance by former dancer and associate Moeketsi Koena who has moved on and formed his own company and choreographic style. He performed his riveting solo Solve 4X accompanied by TC Hlatshwayo's scatting voice.

Koena's participation unfortunately pinpointed the overall lack of discipline in the amateurish staging and presentation of Ke Nako!, as well as the indulgent, unedited streaks in much of the choreography.

The time has come for these ace educationists and percussionists, joined by Senegalese master drummer Idissa Diop and on occasion Richard Carter, to make some serious choices.

When it comes to staged theatre dance in South Africa, there is still an important missing link - it's called sustained professionalism.



Choreographers out of step

By Adrienne Sichel

New moves? Hardly! The two FNB Vita Dance Umbrella 2000 programmes, each performed twice over the weekend, exhibited a shocking regression or stagnation in choreographic and performance levels.

Could it be that the standards have been generally so high in the previous four programmes - and Stepping Stones - that most of these 23 entries looked far worse than they were?

The point is that the New Moves series, introduced very successfully last year, is designed to accommodate dancers, choreographers and teachers who are active but don't perform regularly.

New Moves is also a step up from the community-based Stepping Stones Sundays and could, as was the case with Bopa Dance Forum's debut last year, be a bridge to the festivals across the country.

It was distressing to see teacher-choreographers like Moving Into Dance Community Dance Teacher's Course graduate Timothy Moagi self-destruct. Moagi, who won a 1999 pick of the Stepping Stones awards, presented Emotions Of The Vocalist, a messy piece performed by seemingly untrained Sebokeng children.

Ballet Theatre Afrikan, which excelled in Martin Schonberg's rather obscure yet well-crafted treatment of Lewis Carroll's Hunting Of The Snark, on Programme 1, artistically came a cropper in Paula Kelly's workshopped Life's Certainty.

It smacked of point-scoring eisteddfod fodder. So the list goes.

Busisiwe Ngebulana, ex-Jazzart now studying for a degree at the University of Cape Town School of Dance, performed her Why Not?, with Vuyani Libi, a rambling, retrogressive attempt at gender-sharing contemporary Afro jazz.

Even Dorah Mbokazi's usually dazzling girls looked shabby in The Sky Is The Limit, very derivative of David Matamela's Tsepo, performed by the juniors of Dorah's International Dance Company.

David Lekhobane's usually electrifying Via Katilehong pantsulas also lacked the signature energy and creativity in a work about a township wedding that goes badly wrong - clever ideas not worked through. Both Mbokazi and Lekhobane dazzled on this year's Stepping Stones, so the question is: why was lesser work allowed on to New Moves?

Presentation of half-germinated concepts applied equally to Moving Into Dance's Sue Hall, who experimented with live art and music in Anvil Junction; and particularly to Caroline Mofokeng, performing an untitled piece, under the Bopa Dance Forum banner, which deals with journeys.

Certainly the weekend fiasco was about programming. The entries were, it appears, scheduled mainly "sight unseen", which is not now the tactic for the main programmes where video, where available, is required.

The New Moves disaster also signals a serious wake-up call about training and sustained development. One of the key elements, which has surfaced throughout

this year's festival to a lesser or greater degree, is the necessity for a re-evaluation of and a strategy for training choreographers and community organisation teachers.

Even relatively experienced dancers treat choreography as if it is merely a case of flinging together some (often derivative) steps to a piece of music. Paradoxically, so far this year there has been an emergence of choreographer-performers who not only prove to have developed a process, but create, or present, personalised work with intellectual or even philosophical thrusts. To name some names: Gladys Agulhas, Mandla Bebeza, Steven Cohen, Bevan Cullinan, Elu, Themba Nkabinde, Portia Mashigo, Athena Mazarakis, Craig Morris and Johan van der Westhuizen.

General lack of knowledge of choreographic composition and dynamics is an old South African problem which is now turning into a life-threatening faultline.

Of course, apart from Dance Umbrella, there have been exceptions, and those exceptions, like Jazzart Dance Theatre and Moving Into Dance, have created a lifeline. As has the Dance Factory, which initiated an invaluable community choreographers' course.

Obviously Dance Umbrella and the Factory can't carry the whole burden of training choreographers or extending skills. The National Arts Council needs to target this area to ensure that dance's grass-roots don't wither and die.

It is useful to look at our past, at the old institutions and what they produced, as well as to speculate about what the future holds. The fledgling East London Guild Theatre Dance Company on New Moves provided valuable insights on the subject. The seven dancers, trained in various traditions ranging from African dance to ballet, were challenged stylistically by commissioned works by Gary Gordon and Candice Johnstone, and proved their multi-cultural mettle in Christopher Kindo's classic brand of fusion.

This promising, year-old company is building towards sustaining technically focused performance.

Depressingly, in many ways it is where the State Theatre Dance Company, under current threat of demise, was 12 years ago.

TONIGHT

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South African dance comes of age

By Adrienne Sichel

Don't underestimate the power of the moving body as a powerful divining tool.

To quote Swiss choreographer Katharina Vogel: "Dancing is the attempt to give form to the source of creation for a moment ... Through the body, humanity has access to all information. Movement is know-ledge and expression of personal and human history."

Biographies made flesh. Life's mysteries, joys and miseries expressed and interpreted through muscle, corpuscle, nerve and bone.

For centuries the warp and weft of human tissue, the elemental being, has been camouflaged by convention, layered by cultural practice. The challenge of contemporary dance is to use the thinking body as a medium to connect human beings to their realities, their individual and collective histories, their nightmares and dreams.

'When I dance I like to think it's where I come from'

At the 13th FNB Vita Dance Umbrella the body appeared outside the western stereotype of thin, young and athletic. Who could remain unaffected by Tshwaragano Dance Company's Malcolm Black and Makhotsa Sompane moving in and out of their wheelchairs in Adam Benjamin's *The Querist's Quire*?

Conditioned responses to physical beauty and aesthetics were also challenged in Timothy le Roux's *Immure*, essentially a solo for Forgotten Angle Collaborative's Tracey Human. Human's voluptuous, beautifully articulate torso is juxtaposed against projected images of Roger Ballen's controversial Platteland photographs and a Barbie doll.

A strutting guineafowl-feathered showgirl further textures this exploration of imprisonment through social stereotyping.

South African dance not only came of age at this year's Umbrella, it broke the age barrier. In the 17 programmes the young dancers had competition from veterans like Grahamstown's Gary Gordon (in his late forties) and Princeton university's Ze'eva Cohen (kicking 60). These dance academics, waxing lyrical, also proved to be role models. Gordon initiated excerpts from his whimsical dreamscape *Rock-A-Bye for a Sleeping Man* and a Barking Dog with an intensely physical duet with Acty Tang, proving that there's plenty of virtuoso life after 40. In Cohen's duet *Negotiations*, a biblical take on Arabic and Jewish origins, mature female bodies explore issues of race, culture and gender with intelligence, integrity and fluidity.

For the first time it was evident that a growing number of South African choreographers are researching subject matter influenced by movement techniques and philosophies. Young dancemakers are realising they can't create in an intellectual vacuum. Umbrella 2001 provided surprise after surprise in the cerebral content and advanced quality of the work as well as the size and youth of the audiences.

International guests such as Vogel (aged a mere 39) helped provide a measure and a context for local choreography. In her solo *Chief Josef*, brought to the Umbrella by Pro Helvetia, Vogel's tenets become bared flesh and sound.

In her quest to explore power and powerlessness, this startling work taps into the primal being, revealing a physically articulated psychic landscape. Vogel peels away facades and succeeds in delving deep into torrid consciousness and memory. The finely honed detail of each exquisitely calibrated movement, each gesture, is engraved on the universe.

British-born Akram Kahn is hot property. Thanks to the Britain and South Africa dancing initiative we were very lucky to see him as his career takes off. Kahn's dancing and choreography compresses sound, image and movement. His solo *Fix* draws on the structure of classical kathak and deconstructs its form and spinning motion. His dances are mathematical in construction, physical and metaphysical in execution.

The trio *Rush* sweeps the viewer straight into churning propellers of the imagination. Illusion jostles with sharp synchronicity as the three performers mesh the sensation of free-fall flying with a cycle of nine and a half beats. This is a mind-altering performance as Kahn plugs into centuries of history, cultural practice and spiritual belief, blasting archetypes with a radical yet respectful sensibility. At the heart of Kahn's complexly structured creations are breathing, emotionally and culturally wired, bodies and minds. One of them is Johannesburg's Moya Michael.

The sheer velocity of Kahn's fused invention is astounding. But there is a South African parallel in the form of Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe. His latest Afro-fusion creation, *Motswa Hole*, accesses, then transcends, traditional southern African dance forms and rituals.

Mantsoe created a solo for French-based, Reunion-born dancer/choreographer Pascal Montrouge in Montrouge's *Because there is something about you that gets on my nerves*. Montrouge dances in silence. Those familiar Mantsoe chest contractions and spatial calligraphics look curiously disembodied. The missing ingredients of rhythm and spiritual emotion turn this work into an oddity that instantly becomes a metaphor for cross-cultural currency. Montrouge calls it transmission. The son of a north African father and a mother of Chinese origin, his introduction to dance was through *maloya*, the local indigenous dance informed by slave history. Yet he did not understand what and why he was dancing.

"I wanted to find the source. That's why I worked with a black choreographer from South Africa. He knows why, he understands the complicated traditional dance of South Africa. A black person from South Africa makes a choreography for a white person from Reunion who has made a dance for five persons from Europe. That is transmission - the most important thing in dance.

"When I dance I like to think it's where I come from. At the same time I'm from nowhere. I have a culture, but an artist doesn't have a country."

South African dancers and choreographers are accessing these contradictions and stimulated audiences are learning to read and delight in the body eclectic.

THE SUNDAY INDEPENDENT

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Are SA's dancemakers treading the bored?

By Adrienne Sichel

If ever there was a time that South African dance desperately needed a choreographic centre, diverse training strategies and sustained funding, it is now.

Those are the main urgent messages which have emerged over the past month in the 2004 Dance Umbrella. It was painfully evident to me at Sanga 3, the fifth African and Indian Ocean choreographic platform and competition in Madagascar in November, that the rest of the continent is beginning to overtake us.

This is doubly disturbing since choreographers and dancers from this highly resourced country have set the pace in many ways in the evolution of contemporary African dance.

Another insight provided by Dance Umbrella performances, from community to professional level, is that the achievements of the past democratic decade are beginning to erode badly.

Why? Training methods in various institutions have stagnated or are too one-tracked. Funded residencies by professional artists, in these and other institutions, don't exist. Grants and commissions, outside of festivals, are rare for established performing artists.

Choreographic and other research, outside universities, is largely neglected. Many aspirant as well as mature dancer-choreographers have to survive by dancing in musicals, corporate shows, at casinos and on luxury ocean liners. There is no independent place for new, or established, choreographers to share, or develop, their work.

Independent companies across the country have benefited hugely from the National Arts Council infrastructural funding, but that is at huge risk. Lottery money has also helped keep art afloat, but has strings attached and is not guaranteed longterm.

Above all, contemporary dance is not really recognised as a South African art form which attracts large audiences, or as a profession which has produced internationally recognised artists like Robyn Orlin, Vincent Mantsoe, Jay Pather, Boyzie Cekwana, Gregory Maqoma, Moeketsi Koena, Elu, Steven Cohen, Moya Michael, Andile Sotiya, Sello Pesa and Sbonakaliso Ndaba.

Central to this evolution, for the past 16 years has been the Dance Umbrella - a free platform for all forms of new South African choreography. For the past decade, it has been sponsored by First National Bank and is directed by Georgina Thomson of Arts Unlimited.

In a sense the Umbrella has become a victim of its own success, spawning and nurturing as it has choreographers and dancers, many of whom are now hitting a conceptual and technical ceiling.

There's only so much corporate sponsorship and individual vision can do. Government has to come on board. In the past two years, the Gauteng Department of Arts and Culture has become a partner at community level. The NAC has funded the groundbreaking 2003 and 2004 Umbrella choreographic residencies reaching 26 choreographers from seven provinces.

Where does the Department of Arts and Culture stand on this crucial issue linked to heritage, education and job creation?

The cultural boycott may be long gone, but we are still isolated internationally. Visiting dance companies, solo artists and teachers are a rarity. All these facts were obvious at The Wits Theatre and The Dance Factory as dancemakers expressed their notions of identity, aspirations and frustrations.

Too often, no matter how creative the work and technically secure the dancing, the choreographer couldn't transcend her or his influences.

This lack of individuality and process also disturbed a number of visiting expert eyes. Chief among them was Sophie Renaud, head of dance for the Association Francaise d'Action Artistique (Afaa) with a special brief for Africa.

"Something needs to happen with the training," she observed. As a result, Afaa plans to institute, in collaboration, a series of workshops bringing in French and African choreographers and teachers. Such concern and action is heartening, but it should be coming from Pretoria as well as Paris.

Dance Umbrella 2004 winds up with visitors and commissioned works:

- Israel's Kibbutz Dance Company with Screensaver by Rami Be'er (tonight, 7.30, State Theatre Drama, Pretoria)
- Senegal's Le Compagnie 1er Temps with Pression by Andrey Quamba (tomorrow and Thursday, 6pm, Wits Theatre)
- Durban's Flatfoot Dance Company with The Orion Project by Liane Loots (tomorrow and Thursday, 8.15pm, Wits)
- Tshwane Dance Theatre with Waiting by Mandla Mguni; Lebohang Dance Project with Lets

On the fast track to transformation

By Adrienne Sichel

How to describe the transitional shifts reflected at the 2004 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown?

Amid accusations that the festival was "too white", in terms of audience and showcased art, there were several succinct pointers that there have been changes. Chief among them is the involvement of the local community at every level. But any analysis of the festival is done in the knowledge that it is as complex as the society it reflects.

Closing the cultural chasms which exist everyday in South Africa is a huge challenge for this event which caters, unlike some of its festival offspring, for all South Africans.

The cultural polarisation since 1994 is one of the symptoms of the rainbow nation losing its euphoric lustre. In the past, the festival in Grahamstown has served as a barometer, not only of the state of the performing arts but of the state of the nation itself. In its 30th edition, it displayed another function: as a speedometer measuring the pace of socio-political development and cultural fermentation.

The role of both the national and provincial government in using culture to promote nation-building and address job creation was evident.

Former Arts and Culture MEC Nosimo Balindlela, now Eastern Cape premier, is a force to be reckoned with. The 800 beds project to attract visitors to stay in the townships, was partly successful but there were a lot of growing pains. The profile of Eastern Cape craft, traditional dance and music was very high, reflecting the provincial department of arts and culture's policy to source, nurture and present indigenous resources and cultural treasures.

But what of the broader perspective given to the festival's national status? One way to trace a historic perspective is to look at what happened on the stages.

On the first Saturday, South African Ballet Theatre's classy *Giselle*, unleashed the ghosts of spurned maidens swathed in white tulle, dancing to the KwaZulu Natal Philharmonic Orchestra. A week later in Jerry Mofokeng's *Mpoielle*, also in the Guy Butler Theatre, bare-breasted maidens from Qwa Qwa featured in mythical tales. They joined the famed Tshepo Tshola - The Village Pope; his band; a narrator, a poet, the wonderful Bloemfontein Serenades and Dihoba Tsa Phorong male dancers, in an enthralling exploration of Sotho culture.

How times have changed. In the 1980s a large busload of policemen, soldiers, housewives, teachers, traditional healers and children arrived from the then Transkei at the Grahamstown City Hall (before it was turned into a proper festival venue) to dance on the Fringe. Since last year some of the original dancers and new generations of dancers have taken centre stage at the Monument and elsewhere in the Eastern Cape Cultural Ensemble.

In the early 1970s, John Kani, as his political prisoner character in *The Island*, rehearses the role of King Creon opposite fellow New Brighton actor Winston Ntshona's *Antigone* for their play set on Robben Island. This now classic text, and production, created by the actors, with Athol Fugard, played in Grahamstown in 1995 and toured the world.

Fast-forward to 2004. John Kani dominates the stage as King Creon, not as himself, but as Sophocles. British director Sean Mathias and South African writer Myer Taub envisage him as a power-drunk tyrant with a broken heart.

That same week, in another restorative act completing a cycle, Winston Ntshona, now, like Kani, also in his 60s, received a Living Treasures Award from the National Arts Council.

It will be interesting to see if the Living Treasures series will become more inclusive racially. Mannie Manim, the chairperson of the Festival Committee, which makes the artistic selections for the main programme, provided another perspective: "At the venerable age of 30 the festival is itself becoming a national treasure. Everyone is invested in the Festival which draws various opinions. It has to have a Solomon-like approach. We have to look at the input and to weed out the good from the bad, the developmental from the destructive, while holding the centre."

The racial and cultural inclusivity, which is evident at the festival if you think back and look carefully, has in Manim's view taken 25 years to achieve. He totally disagreed with opinions about the racial split this year and Arts and Culture minister Pallo Jordan's comment about the lack of young people at the festival. "It really depends where you go and what you wish to participate in."

Underlying the political manoeuvring, artists pushing for attention and pushing the limits of expression, are themes which always surface. Writers, directors, visual artists, and choreographers still know how to push the right buttons and expose hotspots in the nation's psyche.

Mike van Graan's powerful play *Green Man Flashing* was deemed by some as being too close to the political bone. The exhibition *Initiation as a Rite of Passage*, curated by Moleleki Frank Ledimo, earned the wrath of traditional Xhosa leaders.

Each of the contributors, like video artist Thembinkosi Goniwe, never gave away any secrets. They merely expressed their informed views on the ritual of male circumcision.

This tension between the traditional and the contemporary, and the past and the present, was acutely captured by Peter Andrew Hamish van Heerden, who describes himself as an African and an English-speaking Afrikaner, in a 10 day installation on Monument hill in an ossewa. Titled *totanderkantuit*, this site-specific installation, with Cape Town artist Andrae Laubsher, included a daily performance "om os te maak maak" which interrogates the emasculation of the Afrikaner.

Down the hill, seasoned actors put faces to the white down-an-out Afrikaners begging at city intersections in Braam van der Vyver's potent play *Straties*. This co-production between the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunste Fees and the National Arts Festival is a deft exposition - peppered with expletives, racism and desperation - of a social reality.

Rape loomed large, and articulating this brutal act very poignantly was Warona Seane in *The Mothertongue Project's Uhambo*, which took the audience on a journey, in taxis, to their prejudiced selves.

Never underestimate the power of intuitive artists.

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Beauty and the bond

By Adrienne Sichel

South African contemporary dance has survived merely being the flavour of the post-democratic day. It's taken seriously, especially in France. Adrienne Sichel spoke to two artists with a beautiful mission

Living on different continents, hectic touring schedules and an impending marriage (to someone else) can't keep these Jozi dancers apart.

Greg Maqoma and Shanell Winlock keep gravitating back to each other. Why? From the time she met him at Moving Into Dance in the '90s, Winlock says they forged a connection, which is why they make every effort to work together.

Maqoma's reason is even more to the point: As a choreographer, he has found it very difficult to find a dancer who really understands his creative process and choreography the way this petite livewire from Eldorado Park does.

"It's an understanding we have," he smiles.

"She always challenges me because she is so unpredictable on stage. I always have to be alert, she changes her mind when she pleases."

Unknowingly, his choreographic chemistry played matchmaker. UK dancer-choreographer Akram Khan first noticed this exceptional dancer, who was giving her partner (and choreographer) a lot of aggro on stage in Southern Comfort when it was performed in 2001 at London's Royal Festival Hall.

Not long after that, Winlock was dancing in Khan's now world-renowned company in works like Ma, and they became a couple. They're to marry here in July and again in London in August.

It's not surprising with her ability to produce electrifying performances charged with spontaneity, single mindedness and rhythmic complexity, that Shanell Winlock has become a muse for Khan and Maqoma. Although a dancemaker in her own right, the bulk of her choreographic creation is contained in their respective repertoires.

There's more ... next week Winlock and Maqoma leave Joburg for Paris's Centre National De la Danse to create Beautiful on a three-week residency funded by Association Francaise d'Action Artistique (AFAA).

They have a special challenge to banish text and focus on pure movement. So the verbal, culturally sensitive fireworks of Rhythm1.2.3, which they made with Moya Michael at the P.A.R.T.S. School in Brussels in 1999; Rhythm Blues (2000) and their signature duet Southern Comfort; will be missing.

The reason is they wanted to find a "new perspective, a new point of departure" for their joint creativity. Despite the seductive title, they are adamant that they will retain the irony and gender tension in their work.

The tug-of-war between modernity and tradition remains. But most important is the relationship of two South African artists, with a joint history, re-uniting to pursue a theme of maturity. They're using the four seasons as a springboard.

Joining in this journey of discovery, which also focuses on the authenticity of African rhythms with heavy emphasis on the Khoisan, is composer George Motaung who collaborated on Maqoma's Virtually Blond.

How do they explain the enduring, even increasing, interest in, and respect for, South African choreography? What is that unique ingredient?

"The tradition for sure," replies Winlock without hesitation.

"Everyone uses it to express something, whether they fuse it or use a pure form. And that's what other countries don't have.

"Also the response to ideas, our own histories, and the fact that the energy is different," adds Maqoma.

Although his work has been always issue-based, Beautiful takes another tack.

"We are trying to create a piece where people leave and say, 'that was beautiful to watch'. It's to experiment with the movement and the music, the beautiful things we can create, the energy we receive from nature."

Beautiful will have legs in more ways than one. Maqoma is currently setting part two, Beautiful

Us, on his Vuyani Dance Theatre to be performed in September during Arts Alive.

The third part is a formidable solo project which starts in a residency at the Bates Dance Festival in July in the US. Maqoma has asked three of his distinguished peers (and friends) Vincent Mantsoe, Akram Khan and Faustin Linyekula to create two-minute phrases for him.

After following their processes, he will turn this material into an hour-long work to premiere in 2006. Khan will be getting married in Mzansi while the three Africans will be collaborating in New England. Making the time to make art together, no matter the continent-hopping obstacles... How Beautiful is that?

- Beautiful will premiere at The Dance Factory on June 23 in a Moving Into Dance/Vuyani Dance Theatre season and be seen in Paris in October.

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Duo hang out our intestinal washing

By Adrienne Sichel

In Peter van Heerden and André Laubscher's Interrogation of patriarchy and masculinity, they grab history by the balls and won't let go.

For Bok, their live art installation, these performers of the erf (81) cultural collective turned the historic site of the Number Four Prison courtyard, on Constitution Hill, into an abattoir of white conscience.

Carefully constructed scenes intersected with the weight of memory, the burden of suffering perpetrated on the black prisoners, who were strip-searched and forced to perform the infamous tausa dance, captured for posterity by Bob Gosani, a Drum magazine photographer.

At times it seemed as if this space, bordering the isolation cells, was overpowering the action with its overwhelming significance, its embedded resonances of a terrible past and a festering heritage. In fact, the entire 45-minute performance was an intricate, uneasy duet with what was and what is.

The naked white man and his bearded partner dressed in a colonial top hat and tails left residues, trails, of their actions as a soundscape, performed live by Adriaan Hellenberg, which reinforced the tactile, visceral acts.

The voices of Eugene de Kock and Eugene Terre'Blanche intermingled with struggle songs, rugby commentary, TRC testimonies and boere liedjies.

The imagery, starting with a simulated execution in which the blindfolded Van Heerden was shot down, was consistently potent. Much of the impact would have been diluted or compromised had the performer not tackled each sequence with such brutal physical honesty and integrity.

At one point, after portraying a rugby-watching, brandy-swigging Afrikaner who then changed into a soldier hooded by the old South African flag, Van Heerden was buried alive under a heap of earth. The scraping of the shovel on the tarmac eerily echoed the digging of many graves for many wars and atrocities committed over centuries.

When the man crawled out of his sandy tomb, his white skin painfully scraped on the black tarmac and made no sound, yet resonated aesthetic retribution.

In effect, in the second scene in which the "corpse" of the executed white man lay rotting on a chalky white heap (echoing the lime used by the British to destroy buried bodies), he performed his own personal tausa as his oral and anal cavities were exposed.

Intermingled with this outpouring of white guilt were the themes of scapegoats and sacrificial lambs (in this instance the goat of the title), represented by a live goat whose presence was not fully used, particularly in the context of ritual.

Blood slobbered out of white gumboots as the nation's dirty intestinal washing was hung out to dry on a clothes horse by a man/woman wearing a voortrekker kappie.

This cynical carnage culminated in a "post-colonial utopia cabaret" in which slaughtered struggle heroes and post-apartheid figures such as Brett Kebble were auctioned off as pieces of meat for a braai.

This vicious slice of satire was the penultimate creative punch. Stripped of any props, Peter van Heerden then donned an ankle-manacle and chain and walked off under the guard house leaving a trail of unresolved questions and contradictions behind him.

While the air was thick with culpability and confrontation on Constitution Hill, at the Wits Theatre, Ignatius van Heerden (no relation) made no apologies for his homosexuality, or the fact that he is HIV-positive, in Stiletto Broer.

For this still-to-be-completed full-length work he chose to avoid shock tactics and took a gentler option in tackling subjects that are taboo in certain communities, particularly the one he hails from.

In the programme note, the choreographer declares: "Living in South Africa, where democracy is our new creed, there is unfortunately another form of apartheid. That is the discrimination against sexual preferences and multiracial relationships."

He sets out to "communicate sensitive issues in a sensitive way" to reach audiences who would otherwise shy away from explicit theatre.

This poignant dance work about "two white farm boys" from Ohrigstad, in Mpumalanga, depicts the lives and cross-racial loves of two brothers - Ignatius, 26, who is gay, and Martin, 23, who is not. Their real-life lovers are represented on stage by dancers Tercia Alexander and Karabo Matufi.

There's nothing declamatory about the choreography. It resonates a bittersweet lyricism through a well-crafted vocabulary that reflects the interface between the classical, signifying in this instance white Afrikaner culture, and the contemporary, which distorts and reinvents reality.

The intimacy of Ignatius's solo with a dissected black male shop dummy, danced to Sondheim's *Send in the Clowns*, is reinforced by the moving duet with his brother. The choice of music, *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother*, runs the risk of being corny but proves to be appropriate.

Stiletto Broer was presented by *move1524*, a new dance company that has begun making an impact on the festival circuit.

The reality of distinguished professional dancers such as the Van Heerden brothers is that they pay the rent by dancing in casino shows, industrial theatre or musicals such as Richard Loring's *African Footprint*.

Ignatius, who is currently rehearsing for Pieter Toerien's production of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, was also nominated for a Fleur du Cap Award for his performance as Zebulon in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

He certainly has realised the potential for which he won the FNB Vita Award for most promising male contemporary dancer in 2002.

Biographical elements and approaches continue to surface in programme after *Dance Umbrella* programme, as dancemakers are noting and researching the society they live in.

Also most engaging this past week was *Bosol (Prison)* by Lucky Kele, an emerging dancer-choreographer of note from Katsieng. Not surprisingly, Kele is a nominee as most promising male dancer for the inaugural Gauteng MEC Dance Awards.

As a member of the Vukani Dance Theatre, he teaches traditional and urban dance in Boksburg prison as part of a continuing rehabilitation programme through the performing arts.

This experience has inspired him to express his observations on incarceration in this piece for his Lucky Kele Dance Theatre.

The fact that the dancer Kele was working with quit days before the *Dance Umbrella* premiere didn't deter him from performing, even though it was to the detriment of the overall choreographic concept.

Clad in an orange prison uniform, he danced a compressed, non-literal solo to a vocal score he had co-composed, comprising conversations between actual inmates.

Using his weight and inner rhythms, this petite dancer, with an extensive movement dynamic and sharp emotional focus, brought to life the debilitating fear and vulnerability of a man caged with other men.

It's gratifying to see choreographers not playing it safe as they shake audiences out of their comfort zones.

South African dancers still have many stories to tell and thankfully they have the skills, determination and courage to create evocative art.

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Real men and do feel

By Adrienne Sichel

The body as canvas. That's not a new concept but that didn't stop choreographers from giving it a go - with panache.

Performers were transformed, via projected video, into living art works by Switzerland's adventurous Nicole Seiler in the striking solos Madame K and Lui. Women were turned into spirited spectres of their abused, selves in Mdu Mtshali's compelling Uprising Souls, from the Durban Institute of Technology.

Moving Into Dance Mophatong (MIDM) trance-formed into beings thirsting for cleansing and healing in Sbonakaliso Ndaba's mesmerising Once in our Life, the Journey Begins.

During the 18th Dance Umbrella programmes bodies also doubled as maps and sites for ingenious history lessons as dancers fused biographies with their own autobiographies. Athena Mazarakis twinned her life as a dancer with that of her immigrant grandmother in Coming To, a notable work in progress.

Nelisiwe Xaba's They Look at Me and that's all They think, her exploration, with Strangelove, of Saartje Baartman and her own life, was one of the hits of the festival because of its teasing, yet lucid, experimentation. Another talking point was erf 81's Bok, from Cape Town, in which Peter van Heerden really suffered for his art, and political sensibility, on Constitution Hill.

No less powerful, yet stylistically more mainstream, was Ignatius van Heerden's moving Stiletto Broer in which he outed his HIV-positive status alongside his heterosexual brother Martin. In Moeketsi Koena's Only Exaggeration is Truthful the three African women have more than scratched the psychological surface.

Barriers weren't just broken by what dancemakers had to say, and how they said it, but by the young, vibey, highly critical, yet perceptive, young audiences.

At the other end of the spectrum Rhodes University graduate Zingi Mkefa, an arts journalist, crossed the "us and them" divide in his bloody duet A Dangerous Dream to Sleep In, featuring Alison Green and a life-size haunch of meat.

Mkefa wasn't alone in his male soul searching. Pain (not always existential) and sadness surfaced again and again as choreographers scoured a collective subconscious in apparent response to the daily headlines reflecting men as rapists and violent monsters spearheading moral degeneration.

Particularly effective were Sifiso Kweyama's dynamic The Language (they understand), superbly danced by Gustin Makgeledisa and Luthando Tsodo, and Sello Pesa's intellectually challenging Thapo, a textured deconstruction of a Sotho mourning ritual.

Conjuring with the problematics of performance space was another Umbrella topic led by Robyn Orlin's although I live inside... for France's Sophiatou Kossoko. In hot pursuit were Acty Tang's intriguingly cerebral solo Apology for a Stranger and George Khumalo's rigorously experimental Living on a Construction Site.

The structure of the festival was the best in years providing as it did a pinnacle of artistry in the form of Emilio Greco/PC's Conjunto di NERO and a platform for developing South African artists. Proof of the Umbrella's nurturing vision was the world premiere of Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe's Men-Jaro, an international co-production.

Above all it emerged that the drought of emergent choreographers has been broken. Significantly these new signatures are mainly connected to dance companies. Making their mark were Vuyani Dance Theatre's Daniel Mashita, Melusi Mkhunjane and Tebogo Thlale (working with the Sizwile School for the Deaf); Tshwane Dance Theatre's Songezo Mchilizeli and Tebogo Khumalo; MIDM's Luyanda Sidiya and Petrus Molekwa and Sibikwa's Lucky Rathlangane.

Among the interesting independent dancer choreographers were Lucky Kele, Zoey Lapinsky, Musa Hlatshwayo, Mlu Zondi and Ntando Cele.

Female dancemakers who made significant breakthroughs were Constance Mcunu-Kau and Roslyn Wood Morris, while, as a company, Moving Into dance Mophatong proved its technical mettle in Marie Brolin-Tani's Catching the Bird.

The most beautifully crafted work of this impressive season has to be Adam Benjamin's Second Time Broken, performed with grace and expertise by Cape Town's Remix Dance Project. In the collaboration stakes Vuyani and Tshwane scored in The Landscape of Pain, co-created by Mashita and Mchilizeli.

There was enough innovation, trained dancers and companies to justify the terms art form and dance industry. How this situation can be developed and sustained depends on financial and infrastructure support.

According to Gauteng Sport, Arts, Culture and Recreation MEC Barbara Creecy, provincial government has noticed South African contemporary dance's "enormous potential" and included it in its official strategy.

Now if only national government would pay attention. Dance Umbrella 2006 would have been an excellent point of departure.

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Impacting on and off the stage

By Adrienne Sichel

Moving (inside) without moving, is how Emilio Greco explained his technique to the participants of the FNB Dance Umbrella's Young Choreographers Residency Workshop last week.

On stage the intensive breathing and stretching exercises made perfect sense in this internationally revered dancer and choreographer's Conjunto di NERO, which astounded Umbrella audiences at the University of Johannesburg at the weekend.

This potent work by Emilio Greco and director Pieter C Scholten, which premiered at the 2001 Montpellier Dance Festival in France, is sheer osmosis of the physical, psychological and the theatrical.

Light and sound meet in a radical chiaroscuro of movement. Greco and his remarkable four dancers are human beings trapped in cones of light before they disappear or speed along dangerous diagonals, to the delicacy of a dripping raindrop, or the force of a freight train.

Greco is a master at conceptually revolutionising the performing body as he and Scholten conjure with the aural, the visual and the emotional. Reality and illusion are aesthetically revealed through blood-pounding breath and the sheer beauty of finely calibrated, intensely poetic choreography.

This Dutch company, Emilio Greco/PC, and specifically Greco, has had a dramatic influence on the development of South African contemporary dance through choreographers like Gregory Maqoma, who Greco taught in Vienna, providing a turning point in his career.

It was significant that when Greco returned to Johannesburg after performing a duet at the Umbrella three years ago, that he met dancers face-to-face.

This happened in the final two days of the residency which was sponsored by the National Arts Council and National Lotteries Distribution Fund.

Eleven young choreographers, or dancers with choreographic aspirations, came from Durban, Cape Town and Gauteng to attend classes and workshops, facilitated by Sello Pesa and then Greco, and attend Umbrella performances.

A feedback showing at The Dance Factory demonstrated how Pesa (who premieres his Thapo at the Wits Downstairs Theatre, on Thursday) orientated the dancers within personal, performance and geographic space, without neglecting internal space.

As Mpho Masilela remarked, "If you find a new space you can identify with, you find yourself".

Zoey Lapinsky appreciated the new approach to finding vocabulary and being exposed to the power of imagination and importance of decision-making.

The other participants were Lucky Ratlhagane, Nokulunga Vilakazi, Obed Setshabi, Lucky Kele, Jeannette Mokhele, Gustin Makgeledisa, Charmaine Mpfo, Funeka Ramorula and Irvan Teme.

As the past two Umbrella residencies have proved, many of the participants had their perspectives shifted to the great enrichment of South African and African dance. Given the Greco and Pesa factors, I can't wait to see what happens.

TONIGHT

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African visions in Paris

Mesmerising, dangerous, intelligent . . . Africa, in all her facets emerged in artistic bulletins from the motherland at a contemporary dance summit hosted by the French government, reports Adrienne Sichel

By Adrienne Sichel

"The dancer is a poet," proclaimed the chubby man with a passion to move. And he should know. Radhouane El Meddeb may look all wrong to be a professional dancer, but this Tunisian theatre artist imbued with wonderful choreographic insight, proves in his solo *Pour en finir avec moi* that aesthetic beauty and physical intelligence aren't the preserve of the thin and the muscle-toned. This moving performer is one of the many reasons why the *Danse Afrique Danse* festival was so challenging, provocative and fruitful.

For once no-one was questioning (out loud, that is) if there is such a thing as African contemporary dance. The participants from 17 African countries just got on with the business of performing, viewing, networking and debating on the International Paris University campus from April 22 to 30. The forums and round table sessions produced intensive discourse around issues such as cultural and artistic identities, artist training, the establishment of Chesafrica, a continental festival network, and available funding strategies.

The contemporary versus traditional argument did surface, especially in the jury's decisions, but the diversity and quality of the 35 works (11 in competition) proved that this theatrical art form is vibrantly conceptual, acutely inventive, highly socio-political and vividly relevant.

To quote juror Robyn Orlin: "We can't dance about pretty sunsets." That's for sure. A solo danced to the rat-a-tat-tat of automatic gunfire accompanied by the rattling chains of oppression (depicted in *Ro-Cogne ou la souffrance du corps* by Chad's Abdel-Rhamane Mbang Bouso Hadji) and the audible dying bodies hanging from ropes (in *Loud Silence*, Kenyan Lailah Masiga's bitterly poetic ode on life eroded by war, hunger and disease) transcended the literal to create the metaphorically conceptual.

The festival, which included the competition of the sixth African and Indian Ocean Choreographic platform, attracted 250 programmers and producers over the 10 days, a cross-section of African dance professionals and an intrigued French public.

We may have been in France but this was like a village with its own dance matriarchs Senegal's Germaine Acogny and Togo's Flora Théfaine and cultural elders the likes of Aminata Traore (the Malian former culture minister and jury president), and iconic actor Sotigui Kouyaté, from Burkina Faso.

No less impressive were the opinionated younger generation of pioneers led by outgoing artistic director Salia Sanou. From 2008, when this biennial event will be held in Tunis as part of the sixth Carthage Choreographic Encounters, the festival and competition will move around the continent with an artistic director in each country.

There was a fair bit of criticism about the festival selection and the competition but ultimately this mix of young dancemaking and maturing signatures, paid off in showing a core sample of what the continent has to offer, ranging from theatricalised hip-hop to avant garde.

The winning works were: *Impro-Visé_2* by Congolese Andrey Quamba; *Dentro de mim outra ilha* by Panaibra Gabriel (director of Culturarte in Maputo, Mozambique) and *Mona-Mambu* by Orchy Nzaba (Congo, Brazzaville).

There were no qualms about the first two laureates but *Mona-Mambu*, which greatly exemplifies the stereotypical image of exotic African dance, recipient of the Radio France International Special Prize, had many choreographers up in arms and programmers scratching their heads.

What view of innovative professional African contemporary dance is this work presenting, was the question. And why was SA's Musa Hlatshwayo not in the top three?

This Durban dancer-choreographer's ritualistic *Umthombi*, a 2004 Jomba! Young Choreographer commissioned duet about the rite of passage to manhood, struck a chord because of its beautifully crafted use of memory fused with traditional cultural motifs and a fresh vocabulary.

Although there is tough competition from amazing development in Mozambique, Kenya and Mali, SA dance made a major impact in and out of competition. The secret ingredient was the distinctly diverse aesthetic identities of the soloists and companies. After Men-Jaro Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe's company and Anthony Caplan's African Music Workshop Ensemble had the audience on its feet.

Nelisiwe Xaba gained a huge following for her solos *Plastization* and the Saartjie Baartman tribute *They look at me and that's all they think*.

Moeketsi Koena was also a presence at the festival especially when he guested in Opio Okach's *Shift... centre*. Hlengiwe Lushaba may not have been able to travel because of her advanced pregnancy but she made it to Paris, anyway, on video.

In the opening sequence of her satiric competition entry *Is this Africa?* Put a cross on the appropriate woman she appeared bare-breasted and bare-bellied. Although this 2005 Dance Umbrella commission had lost a lot of its potency there was no denying Lushaba's talent, courage and originality.

Freedom of expression was the sub-text of *Danse Afrique danse*. There was also a sense of an impending declaration of independence by Africa's dancers who are determined to make exceptional art and economically thrive on the continent without relying on foreign support. Just call them grateful, yet determined, poets in political motion.

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Fringe event sent to fringes

By Adrienne Sichel

Two cars with their headlights on flank the impromptu box office at the top end of Beaufort Street. The venue for Erf {81} cultural collective's Six Minutes is down a dirt road at the back of the Settlers Monument.

The day before the first performance on Sunday night, Cape Town's Peter van Heerden, Andre Laubscher their collaborators - Laubscher's children, a mother hen and her chickens and his dog Droppie (Drop Dead Gorgeous) were asked to leave the original venue of the Botanical Gardens.

It wasn't possible to get the university's official reason for this eviction of a physical theatre Fringe event.

According to Van Heerden, a Rhodes University drama graduate, Colin Johnson, the vice principal of the university objected to the artists "trespassing", camping on-site in Boer war style bell tents and performing their sunrise to sunset live art installation, which is based on the premise that every six minutes a child is abused in South Africa.

At the vice-principal's suggestion they moved to the site in the veld where the graphic staged rape (by Van Heerden of Leila Anderson) happens against the bonnet between the headlights watched by the audience huddled on the road next to a dam.

The action, also depicted on live video shot by Ant Strack, takes place between two trees.

Outdoors, this gruelling work, which premiered as a commission at the FNB Dance Umbrella in March, and was recently profiled in The New York Times, has traded its glossy theatricality for a grainy, shadowy rawer realisation. The imagery becomes totally filmic.

The suspended plastic placenta, out of which the abuser/rapist (Van Heerden) is born in a pool of cow entrail blood, blows in the wind as he, executed by his father (Laubscher) and mother, hangs from his ankles across the sandy stage.

This was Erf {81's} second appearance at the NAF after it performed all day and night in an ossewa outside the monument in 2004.

Gender issues and family violence are all over the festival this year on the Main and the Fringe.

Not all of it is confrontational.

In the Monument the gently holistic The Caring Namibian Man exhibition features fathers, brothers and uncles snapped by children and teenagers who were given disposable cameras.

The men are photographed carrying out traditional womens' work - one changes nappies, another carries water on his head and another rides a bicycle with a baby strapped to his back.

The project by the Ombetja Yehinga Organisation in collaboration with Voluntary Service Overseas and Regional Arts Initiative in Southern Africa was created in response to a wave of domestic abuse and child rape in Namibia.

It was started after the organisers attended a gender workshop in South Africa.

The Caring Namibian Man, which is the flip side of Six Minutes, provides a lot of interesting answers in dealing with education issues on social matters.

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Mow' better jazz

By Adrienne Sichel

Sibongile Khumalo, wearing the hat of chairperson of the National Arts Festival Committee, a position she recently took over from Mannie Manim, was beaming with pride.

Shannon Mowday, the 2007 Standard Bank Young Artist winner for jazz, had justified the committee's choice, and then some.

The jazz fundis, in a packed venue, rose to their feet to salute the saxophonist, band leader and composer, her hair branded African style, dressed in thigh-high boots topped by a red mini-dress.

This 32-year-old Capetonian, who has all the cheeky mama moves, was in the throes of emigrating to Australia when she won the award. She has changed her mind and is committed to staying in her homeland.

No country could afford to lose talent of this magnitude.

Her commissioned concert with Galumphing (her male band) and Burn (a trio of female brass players: Norway's Hildegunn Oiseth on trumpet and goats horn; Sweden's Karin Hammer on trombone; and Mowday) challenged gender and jazz stereotypes.

Khumalo was high profile during the first few days of the festival, starting with the official opening in Joza township on Wednesday night, until she left for New York at the weekend to make her debut in Philip Miller's TRC Cantata at a festival in Brooklyn.

All four Young Artist's have proved their mettle. Cape Town photographer, Pieter Hugo's large prints in his photo essay Messina/Musina astound with their frankness and pathos. Given the space constraints, only half of the photographs, recently shot in this bushveld town, are being shown in Grahamstown.

The full exhibition will be seen in Cape Town and Johannesburg.

The pictures of professional hunters, De Beer mine workers, white bywoners in black-owned backyards and a variety of families, resonate with the contradictions and paradoxes of post-apartheid South Africa.

"I didn't make any conclusions but ponder where we are at," said the artist during a walkabout of his exhibition at the Monument.

"I want to feel that the portraits are given to me. It is the access people give you to their spirits."

That's perhaps the defining factor of these images - which depict white anger, black aspirations and emotions in-between - the dialogue between probing photographer and trusting subjects (and their pets).

In classical mode, Durban soprano, Bronwen Forbay, backed by the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra, the Yale Alumni Chorus, conducted by Yale's Jeffrey Douma, rose to the challenge of Haydn's The Creation. The Young Artist for music was joined by American tenor, Randall Umstead, and world-renowned bass, Simon Estes.

Completing this choice quartet, on a much more avant-garde note, was Hong Kong-born Johannesburg educated dancer-choreographer, Acty Tang. His Chaste occupied the entire Rhodes Theatre. The audience, placed on various intimate performance spaces on the stage, is taken on a roller-coaster ride of sound, image and colliding aesthetics.

The biblical story of John the Baptist and Oscar Wilde's Salome (and Wilde's life) are the hooks for a sensual, intimate confrontation with myth which intersects with trans-gendered sexuality and brutality.

Tang, performing with Durban dancer Sifiso Majola, is an androgynous Salome.

TONIGHT

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NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

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Fear's finesse

A unique collaboration between choreographer Juanita Finestone-Praeg and Brett Kebble award winner Tanya Poole, physical theatre piece *37 Degrees of Fear* explores how violence affects women. **Dianne Tipping-Woods** reports

Women dancing, moving, sweating, breathing, bleeding, dying. There is silence and poetry, the sea, and the sounds and shades of fear as Juanita Finestone-Praeg, in collaboration with Tanya Poole and a cast of 11 extraordinary performers, explores the subliminal space where "the inside and outside collide".

Finestone-Praeg, in association with the First Physical Theatre Company is presenting *37 degrees of Fear* at the 2005 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. The piece, originally commissioned by the Dance Factory for the Women in Arts Festival 2004, is choreographed by Finestone-Praeg. The set is designed by Brett Kebble Award winner Tanya Poole, and the musical score includes work from, among others, South African composer Ronald Peterson.

Poole's set is minimal but intriguing, and works with Finestone-Praeg's concept. "The theme was around a particular violent incident," explains Finestone-Praeg, "and how it affects three women. I explore how they try and translate the experience and how it changes them as people and kind of becomes part of who they are".

37 Degrees of Fear has quite a clear narrative, but the text is fragmented, splintered and broken up. Material from Greek poet Elytis is woven in with a more literal text, spoken by a different dancer, and also incorporates ideas from the performers themselves. "The body



Scenes from *37 Degrees of Fear*.
(Photographs: Daniela Faris)

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National Arts Festival
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texts", however, says Finestone-Praeg, "are the ones that take you into the surreality of body memory and show that nothing is that clear, nothing is that ordered".

"What was very powerful about the process and the concept was that it was a collaboration" explains Finestone-Praeg, "I think the idea was let's share what we all know and see how it changes us".

Dancers from diverse training backgrounds, ranging from physical theatre to classical ballet, come together in *37 Degrees of Fear*, resulting in a dynamic clash of styles. "I normally work with more natural body," explains Finestone-Praeg, "with individual idiosyncrasies and gestural languages so the tensions between these and a more designed body are interesting".

For Finestone-Praeg, the power of the piece comes from working with the spirit and energy of the cast, who Finestone-Praeg describes as "so different, so individual and so potent".

"Watching these 11 women inviting you into a world and saying come and see how we think and move and respond to things" says Praeg, "is extraordinary".

First Physical Theatre Company is involved in three other productions at the 2005 National Arts Festival; New Voices, Red Crushed Velvet, and Brave New Leaps, the official launch of their Youth Company. -RU-NML

THE STAGE

By Lyndsey Winship

Published Mon 18 June 2007 at 09:35

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Beautiful Me

"I am Gregory Maqoma, an African dancer. I have plenty of exotic stories to sell. Which one would you like to hear tonight?" Gregory Maqoma does have some stories to tell, but this hour-long solo offering, *Beautiful Me*, is not a monologue, more a series of conversations. There are conversations with the onstage musicians, a violinist, cellist, sitar player and percussionist. Then there are conversations with three choreographers, Akram Khan, Faustin Linyekula and Vincent Mantsoe, who have all contributed "minutes" of their choreographic material to Maqoma's project. Rather than simply demonstrating their work though, Maqoma seems to be absorbing their ideas and hanging them on his own body, or using them to inspire his own words. You can spot moments that look like they might have come from Akram Khan, a choreographer whom Maqoma performed with recently at the Barbican. For example, a powerful passage where a repeated, stubborn stamping of the feet and a swift kathak-like arm movement swells into a trancelike ostinato. Movement, words, memories and remembered email exchanges are all part of the fabric of the piece. There are conversations with African history too, in one scene Maqoma announces the names of former African leaders and lays them to rest on the stage, burying them in order to create a new history. But while one minute he is struggling to forget South African president PW Botha, ten minutes later he's having an imaginary chat with Michael Jackson, such are the twists and turns of Maqoma's thoughts. *Beautiful Me* is a slight piece, but it's definitely intriguing.

Production information

Management: Vuyani Dance Theatre co-production with Centre National de la Danse, France with the partnership of Tilda

Cast: Gregory Maqoma

Director: Gerard Bester

Choreography: Gregory Maqoma

Run time: 1 hr

Production information can change over the run of the show.

Run sheet

Lilian Baylis London

March 4, June 15-16

