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Working with Mophato: interrogating and shifting representations of black women in Botswana during performance

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Madume (Greetings):

Black/white. White/non-white. Male/female. Man/woman. Child/adult. Rich/poor. Smart/stupid. Gay/straight. Normal/weird. Success/failure. Upper class/middle class/working class. Strong/weak. Powerful/powerless. Masculine/feminine. Survivor/victim. Master/servant. Authority/subservience. Subject/object. Believer/sinner. Patriot/traitor. I could go on and on. Sometimes looking at the way of the world can be depressing, demotivating, debilitating and everything else in between. Race, gender, income, education, religion, culture, sexuality, etc. It seems like that's what it always comes down to - categories upon categories of where people 'fit'. What have we done to the world? Is there even any point in trying to change things, is it even possible? Where does one even start?

I am a young, black woman from Botswana who grew up in a very patriarchal household. This order bothered me greatly, but I found that it followed me in many of the societies I inhabited from Orapa, Serowe and Gaborone, Botswana to Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa. As I grew older, as I moved among these places, I became more and more aware that these societies are governed not only by a patriarchal system, but by a racial one as well, along with issues of income, age, education, etc. This has set me on a journey which is a response to a social order that has often left me feeling suffocated and belittled because of my race and gender, sometimes because of my social status, my age and/or my education. This journey has manifested itself through theatrical performance because theatre has become a safe space in which to question myself, and the societies I inhabit, in order to challenge the social orders that empower some and exclude others.

I am not the first woman in the performing arts to interrogate issues of race and gender. Many have come before me; others are coming with me and yet more are coming after me. I say many, but in my view the voices that have so far been heard are few and far between. My influences thus far include the likes of Mamela Nyamza, Mwenya Kabwe, Sara Matchett, Jessica Lejowa, Asanda Phewa and Nondumiso Msimanga, to name a few. Of particular interest to me has been how Kabwe and Lejowa draw from both dance and theatre, with Lejowa taking an approach to theatremaking that places her in the dual role of facilitator/choreographer and sometimes performer. Furthermore, Lejowa (2010) has begun to explore ways of dismantling the boundary between audience and performer, in an effort to use theatre as a site for transgression. This similarity speaks to me from a common thread that connects us to a wider community of artists borne of our skin colour and our gender. I speak of gender in the biological

sense to refer to sex, taking into consideration the concept of gender as a performative act (Butler, 1990); however I will touch on this further in the next chapter, 'Ke utlwile eng, ka mang?' For me, what has given our voices multiplicity is our different backgrounds and experiences. I am not saying that all those who are interrogating issues of gender and race are, or must necessarily be, black (or necessarily be or work only with women) but these are the most immediate and the ones whose work resonates most strongly with my line of enquiry around issues of blackness, womanhood, and black womanhood. This is also not to say that I have not had male influences in exploring the possibilities of using performance to interrogate issues of race and gender. The ideas of Boyzie Cekwana in fusing different dance styles to examine contemporary social issues come to mind. There are purely artistic influences such as the work of Pina Bausch with regards to 'Tanztheather' and its influence on the development of Dance Theatre, as well as Jerzy Grotowski's development of 'Poor Theatre'. There are theoretical influences such as Edward Soja's theories around space/spatiality as well as Elaine Aston, Lizbeth Goodman and bell hooks' views on feminism and, more specifically, black feminism. I have drawn inspiration from these people and others I have not mentioned – lecturers, friends, family etc. – to interrogate and shift representations of black women through performance. As I have continued on this journey, as much as I have grown more confident in my processes, I have come to realise that it is a continuous journey that will take many forms over time. In reflecting on this process, I shift between different voices in order to reflect *on* and *reflect* my process in an effort to give the reader both an account and an experience of this process.

This journey began in 2008 when I "attempt(ed) to locate myself, as a black woman, in the theatre. By 'myself' I mean representations of black women, in a sense one could say that I am looking for familiar faces and familiar stories" (Disele, 2008: 1). My feeling then was that representations of black women often fail to give voice, or fail to allow them to give voice, to their individual life experiences. Instead, they are often represented as a homogeneous black female, an exoticised, sexualised and/or impoverished entity that is often spoken for or about, but never speaks for herself. In the past year, I have sought to develop for myself an approach to theatremaking that would allow me to interrogate and shift representations of subjugated identities, focussing on black women. I refer to this process as 're-presenting', to mean moving away from existing representations which perpetuate negative stereotypes in favour of presenting subjugated identities in a new way. This journey has so far led me through three projects:

- A Practice-as-Research Project titled *Reorganising Theatrical Space to redefine Representations of Black Women* (*Reorganising Space*), presented in June 2011.
- A Master of Arts directing project titled *In/Out*, presented in October 2011.
- A creative research project in collaboration with Mophato Dance Theatre, *Unskin Me*, presented in February 2012.

Although this report is entitled 'Working with Mophato', referring to the process of *Unskin Me*, all of these projects have been part of my interrogation in my efforts to re-present black women and have helped me develop my approach to theatremaking. When I began I did not know how I would go about developing my own approach to theatremaking and it seemed necessary to cast my net wide in order to be able to carve out my own path. However, I often felt lost amongst the many voices I have referenced, wondering if I was making a worthwhile contribution to the efforts of those who have come before me. As such, this process has become as much about finding my own voice as a researcher-theatremaker as it has been about developing my own approach to theatremaking. I use the term 'theatremaking' to capture the multiple roles I wish to engage with in performance. In these three projects I have assumed the role of facilitator, director and sometimes performer (*Unskin Me*) while in others that have helped me streamline my thoughts and ideas in developing an approach, I have also been a choreographer, actor and dancer.

From the beginning of *Reorganising Space*, I decided to use physical theatre as an approach to theatremaking as I believed that it empowers the collaborator-performer to use all the resources available, rather than favouring the written and spoken word. I also chose to use a collaborative approach in which I can be a co-creator with those working with me in an effort to highlight and celebrate multiplicity, which has become a key to re-presentation. I believe that taking a physical theatre approach permits such a collaboration by allowing everyone to bring their voice into the discussion, be it physically (dancing, moving, imitating/acting, miming etc.), vocally (singing, poetry, vocal scape, humming etc.), textually (writing, speaking), visually (drawing, photography, videography) or a combination of any of these elements. This is why I have chosen to adopt the role of a facilitator-director. I believe approaching the process as a facilitator allows for an engagement with my co-creators, in which I draw from their thoughts and ideas, and accommodate their strengths and preferences allowing them to voice themselves. At the same time, the role of the director is to stand outside the work in order to maintain a vision of the bigger picture and shape the final work. In this way

I hoped to develop 'conversations' rather than 'performances'. I have come to view performance as a top-down presentation in which one group – the performance creators – develops a work for a particular purpose and presents their ideas to another group – the audience. There have been instances when the audience have been given the opportunity to contribute in some way, such as in the work of Sara Matchett with the Mothertongue Women's Arts Collective (2004) and Mamela Nyamza (Watermeyer, 2011: 31-35). Matchett (2007) argues that:

> ...when one merges personal stories with master narratives, a conversation occurs. It is in the act of conversing that the potential for remapping old narratives to create new narratives, emerges. This conversation affords one the opportunity of changing the old dominant prescriptive narrative that invariably places women in the role of victim or destroyer... (6).

In particular, Matchett was reflecting on the process of the Mothertongue Women's Arts Collective's 2004 production, *Uhambo: pieces of a dream,* which invited the audience to share their own thoughts and ideas. These are the kinds of processes that have led me to the idea of a conversation, which I consider to be a two-way engagement which breaks down the boundary between audience and performer, allowing for an interrogation or a discussion of different issues. This is the trajectory I have followed in developing a theatremaking approach for myself.

My motivations for following this trajectory have been many. I wanted to be able to empower my co-creators to assume multiple roles in the process of performance. This is partly as a result of working mostly with inexperienced performers who were just beginning to find their own voices, define their own identities and develop their own ideas, but also because the issue we have been dealing with has proven very sensitive to all of us and has forced a lot of us to challenge our own thought processes. By developing conversations, I also wanted to break down the boundary between audience/performer and stage/auditorium. In so doing, I have taken the theatre, or theatrical performance, as symptomatic of a society that emphasizes separation for the sake of simplicity in categorizing subjects. I have been guilty of this and, in my experience, such simplification often results in narrowed definitions of difference and negative stereotypes. In following this trajectory, I have taken as my starting point the idea that binary oppositions create a framework for the marginalisation of certain groups in favour of others. It is my view that in order to re-present subjugated identities we need to break down the boundaries that perpetuate these binary oppositions, thus creating an open space in which different identities can co-exist alongside, rather than in opposition to, one another. Breaking down the boundaries between audience/performer and stage/auditorium is a figurative way of creating this open space, while

developing a conversation allows the audience to collaborate with the performers in interrogating the proposed topic, thus allowing for re-presentation.

When I began this process, I thought I would be creating a new mode or style of performance, following in the footsteps of Grotowski with his 'Poor Theatre', Brecht with his 'Epic Theatre' or Pina Bausch with her 'Tanztheater', but I have since realised that this is something that develops over time and the scope of this process allows me to locate myself amongst the varied approaches and styles of theatremaking to which I have been exposed. This is the journey I have embarked on, and this paper is a reflection on the process thus far.

Ke utlwile eng, ka mang (Who were my influences)?

Feminism. Feminist. I don't think I'm a feminist, really. To call myself that feels like I'm placing myself in a category in which certain women belong but that can't be right, can it? I think we live in a post-feminist era, we have all been affected by this movement although the end is not nigh. In theory we are equal, but in reality we are still other – sex object other, victim other, possession other, inferior other; seen but not quite heard. We are there, but not yet there. We are still fighting a battle of the mind...

Feminism and Otherness

When I began this journey in 2008 I was influenced by theories of feminism, otherness and objectification. These influences have remained and are the source of my desire to use performance to re-present subjugated identities. My understanding of otherness draws heavily from Etienne Balibar's (2005) definition which describes the other as a double of the self; the self being a subject position that holds the power of agency, while the other is an imaginary figure which stands in opposition to the self and becomes an "object of domination and knowledge" (25). This has gone a long way in developing my understanding of systems of power, leading to my overall desire to re-present subjugated identities.

In this process I have focused on black women as a starting point for this larger project as a result of the influence of feminist thought on my initial attempt to locate myself in the theatre. Mark Fortier (1997) states that feminism is predominantly political and "works toward the unravelling and overthrow of patriarchy" (108). With regard to the arts, and theatre in particular, he explains that feminism works from the premise that culture is imbued with a male perspective and is thus concerned with cultural representations of women with a view to overturning traditional systems of representation (110). More specifically, black feminism considers theory in general to stem from a white perspective and is "concerned with the position from which anyone speaks" (Fortier, 1997: 115). Patricia Hill Collins (2000) describes black feminism as criticizing the assumption of white feminists of a 'universal woman' as this presupposes that all women are the same and have the same problems (12). Furthermore, she argues that black women are interpolated in discourses of a black struggle which favours the interests of black men (12). Elaine Aston (1995) argues that women have been constructed as the other from the male subject, resulting in representations of women as silent, often sexualised, objects of male power (35). In

beginning to locate myself as a researcher-theatremaker, these ideas resonated strongly with my experience of the world, and have shaped my understanding of the systems of power that have mediated that experience. As a result, my desire to develop a theatremaking approach for myself is an attempt to break out of the existing social order to create new, inclusive modes of existence.

Further, the ideas of black feminism, in working towards voicing the issues of black women, point to the issue of multiple otherings. When I first began this process I was of the view that black women are doubly othered, in that they are neither white nor male and are thus twice removed from dominant patriarchal culture. As I have continued on my journey, however, I have become aware that systems of power operate not only on the levels of race and biological sex, but are also mediated by issues of income, sexual preference, culture, etc. Using collaboration in my approach, to allow those involved to voice themselves, stems from the realisation that although we may have certain things in common, we are not the same and neither are our life experiences, hence my focus on black women in Botswana.

I also differentiate between biological sex and sexuality to take into account Judith Butler's destabilisation of gender. Butler (1990) suggests that gender is performed and posits gender roles as a social construct. By extension, this calls into question the idea of womanhood and destabilizes heteronormativity. I have so far not touched directly on the issue of sexuality as it has not emerged during any of the projects I have undertaken, from my own or my co-creators perspectives. However, in our attempts to interrogate issues of gender we have questioned the notion of socially constructed gender roles. Although my reference is predominantly focused on biological sex, I do take into account the performative aspect of the concept and urge the reader to remain aware of the multiple levels on which it operates.

I have sought to break down the boundaries between audience/performer and viewing space/performance space in order to avoid objectification. Laura Mulvey (1984) argues that narrative film objectifies women in order to nullify the threat of castration that women present to men, portraying them as "bearers of meaning rather than makers of meaning" (361). In the theatre this occurs particularly in the proscenium arch/end stage which echoes the conventions of narrative film by keeping the viewer in the dark, presenting an other world into which the viewer is allowed to look without the knowledge of the characters. According to Mulvey these viewing situations place power with the viewer, rendering the performer as a passive object and directing the viewer to identify with

the male performer, often portrayed as the active hero, who rescues and is rewarded with the passive, female object (361). It is my view that this form of objectification not only applies to women but extends to subjugated identities as a whole, who are exoticised and presented as the antithesis to dominant culture. Further, although I cite the proscenium arch as mirroring the conventions of cinema, I would also argue that these conventions often extend beyond the proscenium arch to encompass theatre performance as a whole. My aim to reconfigure the performance space and my move away from characterisation are motivated by a desire to break out of these conventions in order to give power to both the performer and the audience, moving away from a passive object/active subject duality.

My endeavour to re-present black women is also an attempt to break away from existing theatre language. Henry Giroux (1992) proposes the formation of new languages in interrogating existing systems of power. He argues that "it is in language that human beings are inscribed and give form to those modes of address that constitute their sense of the political, ethical, economic, and social" (1992: 19). He further suggests that existing language, as a construct of dominant hegemony, maintains and perpetuates existing systems of power. Thus, the formation of new languages allows for a rethinking of the world around us and, therefore, a restructuring of the existing systems of power in order to give voice and political power to subjugated identities. My interrogation takes theatre as a construct of dominant culture. Thus, my attempt to reconfigure the performance space, the move away from characterisation and the dismantling of the audience/performer and viewing space/performing space binaries allows for the creation of a new language in order to allow subjugated identities to voice and assert their difference and experiences. While Giroux uses this as a way to allow subjugated identities to cross the border from the margin to the centre, I am trying to dismantle those borders completely in order remove the margin and the centre, and to open up the space to accept and celebrate difference.

My initial enquiry sought to explore how women theatremakers are transgressing boundaries of otherness in the theatre to re-present black women. I used Sara Matchett and Mwenya Kabwe as case studies for this enquiry. Both move out of the conventional, Western theatre building in order to create a liminal space in which subjugated identities can voice themselves and encourage new ways of seeing. Liminality is a term coined by Victor Turner (Bial, 2004), referring to traditional rites of passage when an individual, for example a young initiate, passes from one status in the community to another, often higher, status. The liminal space thus exists between the two states of being. Henry Giroux's notion of

border crossing has influenced me to move away from Turner's liminal space and I have instead opted to create a 'thirdspace' (Soja, 1996) in and through performance. The reason I have chosen thirdspace as opposed to liminal space is because, for me, the liminal still operates between the margins and thus inadvertently maintains the systems of power that result in marginalization, whereas I seek to dismantle these systems, and thus eliminate the border between those that marginalise and those that are marginalised. Thirdspace allows for this dismantling by encouraging a "both/and logic" (Soja, 1996: 5). A detailed explanation of thirdspace is given below.

Space and Semiotics

Theatre performance is governed by a set of codes and conventions that direct the audience's way of seeing in order to interpret the meaning intended by the director and her or his collaborators. Semiotics calls this encoding and decoding, and theatre semiotics in particular posits the theatre as a text that can be read. At the beginning of this journey, I thought my exploration lay within the field of semiotics. However, in coming to this writing process there are parts of it that I have come to view as a form of 'textocentrism' (Conquergood in Bial, 2004: 317) as it maintains an ordered logic which limits the meanings possible in any theatrical event. Having said that, I acknowledge that the codes and conventions of theatre performance create certain expectations within audiences, such that the boundary between audience/performer and viewing space/performance space is always maintained, regardless of whether the performance takes place in a conventional theatre space or in a found space. In *The Political Organization of Space*, Edward Soja (1971) supports the suggestions of semiotics by proposing that humans organise space in order to gain control of economic and political processes. I have come to understand this as meaning that we act out power spatially both in a physical and figurative sense. When I underwent the process of *Reorganising Space* at the beginning of this journey, I sought to reorganize the conventional theatre space to reorder the codes and conventions inherent in theatrical performance to direct new ways of seeing. I believed that this would empower subjugated identities to organise space in such a way that gave them access to economic and political power.

However, going back to the idea of textocentrism, such an approach would also favour the dominance of order and logic, thus maintaining the boundaries that perpetuate subjugation and marginalization. This is what has influenced me to adopt the thirdspace. Soja describes thirdspace as "both a space that is indistinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental, or first and second) and a transcending

composite of all spaces" (1996: 62). For me, this presents an open and inclusive space that is the melting point of difference. Soja goes on to list a number of different spaces including the ideological, imagined, political and real. I believe that this process has involved layering different spaces for each individual thereby politicizing the real, imagined and ideological spaces (at the very least) of the audience. Further, thirdspace, in the imagined sense, is a mindset which, in Soja's terms, is a critical awareness that operates within a 'both/and logic' (1996: 5). In the real sense, it is a space that allows for openness, critical exchange and multiple perspectives. In essence, thirdspace is a process of delimiting the possibilities, constantly seeking to break down boundaries and resist getting caught in or creating new dualities. By breaking down the boundaries between audience/performer and stage/auditorium or viewing space/performance space I hope to create such a space in order to resist and challenge the dominant order.

I speak of breaking down boundaries in a shift away from *crossing* boundaries as I believe that seeking only to cross the border means that the oppressed can only become oppressor, marginalised can become marginaliser or subjugated can only become subjugator thus navigating and perpetuating the existing system of subjugation. I believe that the structures of dominance and marginalization are borne out of a need for uniformity; it is a process of separating and excluding those who are different so as to create order and logic through sameness. Dismantling the border, on the other hand, negates the existence of such systems, thus creating an open space which accommodates and celebrates difference, a space of inclusion. Creating such a space requires a move away from a semiotic ordering and reading of performance to allow audiences to create their own meanings, allowing their views into the space. Soja, elaborating on thirdspace, speaks of counter-hegemonic politics which use "difference as a basis for community, identity, and struggle against the existing power relations at their sources" (1996: 89). Thus, an acknowledgement of difference defies strategies of dominant hegemony which seek to create uniformity, thereby creating the boundaries for marginalization and a platform for discrimination.

To create a thirdspace in and through theatrical performance, I have drawn on the ideas of Jerzy Grotowski. In developing his concept of 'poor theatre', Grotowski focused primarily on the performer and on the audience, insisting that the theatre "cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, 'live' communion" (1968: 19). He believed in what he termed the 'holy actor' who, through a process of *via negativa*, is stripped bare of superficial blocks and undertakes an act of self-penetration, using his role as "an instrument to study what is hidden behind our everyday mask – the

innermost core of our personality – in order to sacrifice it, expose it" (1968: 37), making a gift of himself in performance. I have drawn on this idea of the holy actor in the process of developing conversations, opting to move away from fictional characters. I have rather adopted what I term the 'heightened self'. This is an identity in performance which is not a fictional character, but allows the collaborator-performer enough objective distance from their story to be able to share it with the audience. A large part of the process of creation involves reflecting on and questioning our own ideas and thought processes, in order to express our own responses to the subject matter. The heightened self allows the collaborator-performers to maintain their individuality even within a group and to continue the process of interrogation during the conversation. As such, it is a way of enabling the collaborator-performer to break down the barriers between themselves and the audience in order to be able to engage them in the process.

Speaking of the actor-spectator relationship, Grotowski states that "for each production, a new space is designed for the actors and spectators... The essential concern is finding the proper spectator-actor relationship for each type of performance and embodying the decision in physical arrangements" (1968: 19-20). This constant exploration of spatial designs was motivated by a desire to make the audience active in the process of performance, rather than encouraging passive identification as in the 'rich theatre'. In the poor theatre, the holy actor's self sacrifice was intended as an invitation to the audience to undertake their own process of self-penetration. During the past year I have shifted between trying to reorganise the space and trying to reconfigure the space in an effort to use space to break down the boundaries between audience and performer. As a result of being exposed to and exploring different spaces over the course of my journey, I have come to favour the idea of reconfiguring the space as it accommodates a variety of spaces, from found sites to conventional theatre spaces as well as designated performance spaces. It is my view that reconfiguring the given performance space allows for a breaking down of the viewing space/performance space binary and thus facilitates a breaking down of the audience/performer binary, allowing for an open space in which two-way communication can take place. Although I draw heavily on Grotowski's ideas, I recognise that his process was one which sought to show something to the audience, whereas I am interested in using theatre and performance as a safe space in which to identify and bring forth issues for discussion.

Ke dirile jang (What did I do)?

No one was born knowing what kind of theatremaking processes they would follow, or even the aesthetic that would result from those processes. They developed those processes and those aesthetics over time because, quite simply, practice makes perfect (well most of the time). Ok, I'm not looking for perfection, except maybe in the world we live in - who doesn't dream of utopia? But perfection implies a set formula, a particular way of doing things to get a particular result. In any given process I may not know the outcome, I don't think I should know, otherwise what would be the point? My point is, the only way to develop a theatremaking approach for myself is to make theatre, see what works and what doesn't and how it varies from process to process...

The process of developing a theatremaking approach for myself began with *Reorganising Space* (Disele, Mogolola, Mokoatle, Mpisi and Mzozwane: 2011). This was the outcome of a course which sought to introduce Masters of Arts in Dramatic Arts students to the use of practice as a research method. As Nondumiso Msimanga (2011) points out when reflecting on her own process, "Practice-as-research is a term that has complicated definitions as it is sometimes called Practice-based-Research and Arts-informed-enquiry *inter alia*" (19). I have chosen to use the term practice-as-research as I feel it best describes this research process. Inspired by the idea that "knowledge is derived from doing" (Barrett in Barrett and Bolt, 2007: 1), it seemed fitting to undertake my own process of discovery in terms of theatre and practice, hence the decision to work on a theatremaking process for myself.

I have already explained in the introduction to this report that one of the key tools of re-presentation has become highlighting multiplicity. I began with a particular view of my world but, no matter how strongly I felt about the issue, I could not assume it to be a universal truth. Lejowa (2010) states that "very few of these women, of us women who are so often seen, described, studied, aided, donated to, are present in the making of academic discourse that pertains to us" (13). This emphasizes the dangers of speaking for others rather than creating a space for them to speak for themselves. As has been highlighted by the ideas around black feminism, I believe it would have been wrong of me to assume that all black women consider themselves marginalized and, if they do, that they consider themselves marginalized in the same way. Narrative enquiry thus seemed the most suitable method through which to undertake my practice-as-research. The attempt to interrogate and shift representations of black women is essentially about how we perceive the world, ourselves and others in the world, and how we

are perceived. This process is also about exploring how to use theatre not only to point out issues that affect society, but also to become more aware of our own prejudices, and how these maintain the structures of oppression and marginalisation, in order to begin dismantling such structures. In order to do that, I needed to derive the content from the performers, focussing on their perspectives of themselves and their worlds. By allowing for such an excavation of individual stories, narrative enquiry also allows for a collaborative process in which I, as the facilitator-director can be a co-creator with those involved in the process and which creates space to engage the audience in the process of re-presenting.

I have also stated that this process has involved the use of physical theatre as an approach to theatremaking, an undertaking that has been influenced by Keefe and Murray's (2007) term, "physical theatres/the physical in theatres" (6). The term attempts to move beyond the polarities that have been set up between physical theatre as a style of theatre and mainstream or conventional theatre. This term has also made me aware of the dualities that exist in my mind between dance and theatre. This has led me to shift from the use of the term dance (and) theatre to performance to break out of that polarity. Keefe and Murray also trace the origins of physical theatre in avant-garde dance as well as avant-garde theatre. The varying heritage of physical theatre has made it a very broad term which is difficult to define. I believe that using an approach that resists easy classification creates a space for new languages, allowing for new ways of seeing and reading performance. Foregrounding the body as a site of knowledge and a resource for theatre production and performance alongside the written word also allows for the embodiment of personal narratives, thereby allowing for the inclusion of subjugated knowledges in the space, again highlighting multiplicity. Thus, it provides a platform for constant exploration and questioning, finding different modes of expression through each process, creating the potential for new questions, new ways of questioning and new insights.

In order to allow for collaboration, I chose to shift my role as the director. Matchett (2007) speaks of using collaboration to create a multi-authored script, moving away from "the concept of the lone playwright, who once the script has been written, hands it over to the company of actors and director to stage. I would argue that this notion of the lone playwright is intrinsically linked to and typifies patriarchal discourse" (11). My view is that the role of the director as the author of the stage production further continues this discourse. However, I recognise that in the process of theatremaking

whatever stories are told need to be brought together in the space to be shared with the prospective audience, hence the choice to define my role as that of a facilitator-director.

This briefly describes my starting point, but I will go into more detail when I speak of each project individually to describe the processes I have undertaken in fulfilling my aims:

- to re-present black women by using performance to challenge existing binaries in the theatre and
- by re-configuring the theatrical performance space to break down the boundaries inherent in theatre performance and thus,
- develop a theatremaking approach that will allow me to interrogate and shift representations of subjugated identities.

Reorganising Theatre Space to Redefine Representations of Black Women:

Being the starting point of this journey and thus the first project, *Reorganising Space* (Disele, Chetty, Dube, Ngcobo, Titus and Zysle: 2011) came with the most uncertainty as it is where I first began to develop my ideas – I did not know how I would do what I was trying to do, and choosing where to begin was difficult. I undertook the project as part of the course 'Theatre Studies and Performance Theory', which is where I first encountered the concept of practice-as/led/based-research. It was here that I decided to continue on the trajectory I started in 2008. At that time I had considered undertaking a creative research project but, being more comfortable in the familiarity of the written word, I opted to use case studies instead. Being forced to undertake a creative research project to generate new knowledge put pressure on me to find my own mode of expression.

Having used Kabwe and Matchett as case studies for new directions in theatremaking, I felt my exploration lay in the organisation and use of theatre space. Both women had opted to move out of the conventional, Western theatre space to create a liminal space; Kabwe to break out of the pre-existing relationship she felt was set up by that space (2008) and Matchett because she felt it was a construct of patriarchal culture (2007). However, coming to the process of *Reorganising Space* led me to interrogate this further and I began to feel that a move out of the conventional theatre space was an admission that subjugated identities, in this case black women, did not belong in that space. I therefore undertook to explore how to reorganise the conventional theatre space so as to re-order the sign systems that

perpetuate this pre-existing relationship between audience and performer, keep the conventional theatre entrenched in the patriarchal centre and perpetuate the binaries of self/other, subject/object, hero/victim, etc. This located my exploration in the field of semiotics.

Keir Elam (1980), along with Elaine Aston and George Savona (1991), suggests that theatremakers encode theatre with particular signs and signifiers to direct their audiences' ways of seeing. As such, in conventional theatre performance the theatremakers tell the audience how to interpret what they are seeing and hearing, although that is not necessarily to say the audience will interpret any work in the exact way the theatremakers intended. Drawing from Soja's (1971) views on the organisation of space, I felt that in the same way that the sign systems used in the process of theatremaking uphold the conventions we are familiar with, they could be used in the creation of new processes to encourage new ways of seeing. The idea of a both/and logic seemed to me to carry all the possibility of breaking down the barriers that perpetuate subjugation, hence the shift to thirdspace.

Henry Giroux's (1992) idea of border crossing, wherein he argues for the restructuring of language or the creation of new languages to allow subjugated identities to express and celebrate their difference, stems from a critical pedagogy point of view. However, he shifts his focus from educators to cultural workers as agents of empowerment. My belief that theatre and performance are a form of cultural work is what compelled me to create a process that would empower the collaborator-performers I worked with, as well as the audiences we engaged with, to voice themselves.

Drawing on the idea of the theatre as a construct of patriarchal culture, I felt that the use or celebration of canonical texts maintained the exclusion reinforced by the hierarchy of power that has led to subjugation and marginalisation. I felt that contemporary theatre and performance needed to create new work because the constant reprisal of texts created at a time that validated exclusion and oppression was a way of upholding oppressive systems of power. I thus felt that the path I followed needed to draw on current experiences of subjugation, marginalisation, objectification and/or oppression, locating my research in the paradigm of narrative enquiry. I decided to derive the content of my presentation from the performers and their perspectives of themselves and their worlds by asking them to weave their own personal narratives around their experiences of blackness, womanhood and black womanhood to share with the audience. I thus opted to devise the work rather than stage an

existing text in order to accommodate multiple voices in the space. This meant allowing them to decide what they would share and how they would share it, a method I maintained for *Unskin Me.*

For me, allowing for multiple voices in the space meant working in a collaborative manner. I thus chose to undertake the role of a facilitator, rather than a director. I felt that this would allow me to shift from having complete control over the process, and thus becoming the author of the work, to giving the performers equal say in the creative process and the final outcome of the project, thus creating a multi-authored work. In this regard, I drew on the ideas of Ntozake Shange, particularly her choreopoem *For Coloured Girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is not enuf.* Having read about the work in my previous research, I was able to watch two versions of the work; a film adaptation by Tyler Perry, *For Coloured Girls* (2010) and a video reproduction directed by Oz Scott (2002) based on the original Broadway production. My appreciation of the works stemmed from the attempt to voice the struggles of black women. However, I also felt that it perpetuated a binary in which women suffer at the hands of some figure of authority, usually male. This binary was even more explicit in Perry's 2010 adaptation which I felt posited the women as victims of men. Despite this binary, I felt that the work's strength lay in its move away from linearity, exemplified in the Scott version. There are no clear characters and the work did not attempt to follow a narrative structure. Going into the process of *Reorganising Space*, I felt that one way of re-ordering the sign systems of the theatre lay in the structure of the final presentation.

Reorganising Space was also located very firmly in a female perspective. I approached five female performers, some because they had a strong physical vocabulary, some because of their voices and others because of their poetic nature. I thought these attributes would make it easier for the collaborator-performers to start breaking away from conventional modes of communication and allow them to begin to play with language. However, in taking a new and unfamiliar approach, I was unsure of my role in the process and sometimes felt intimidated by the collaborator-performers. For this reason, I chose to theme each rehearsal as a way into the work, in the hopes of creating a common ground from which we could begin to interrogate the issues of blackness, womanhood and black womanhood. The themes we looked at focused on:

> self-identification, where I asked the performers how they identify and define themselves; black womanhood, where I asked the performers what a black woman is, what is black and what is a woman; binary oppositions, what binary oppositions (if any) exist in the performers' worlds, which have they perpetuated - how, how can they be broken down, should they be broken down; objectification/oppression/victimisation, where the performers considered how they had

> been objectified/oppressed/victimised as a result of their colour or their gender (difference) and how they had objectified/oppressed/victimised others (Disele, 2011: 14).

This has formed the starting point for each project, allowing my co-creators to first reflect on the theme of each rehearsal, and then explore ways of expressing their thoughts, feelings and ideas physically, vocally and/or textually. This is done in the first few rehearsals, and the material developed in these early days usually grows to form the content of the final presentation, as I ask the collaborator-performers to form their own personal narratives based on the themes we have explored. This has become a way of allowing my co-creators to voice themselves, negating the homogenised black female whom I feel often leads to misconceptions and to the subjugation of black women. I would suggest that it has also become a way of further developing a "shared vocabulary" (Callery, 2007: 163) amongst us as collaborators, an idea which I discuss further when I elaborate on the process of *Unskin Me.*

However, with *Reorganising Space,* the individual nature of this process made it difficult for me to build a rapport with and among the collaborator-performers which then made it difficult for me to structure their stories and bring them into the space. In exploring the issue of blackness, womanhood and black womanhood we did not explore a group response which made it difficult for the collaborator-performers to find the moments at which their responses overlapped or intersected. This struggle lasted until the final presentation, during which the collaborator-performers were not only uncertain of how to respond to each other, but to the audience as well. This has led me to include explorations of a group response in the process of *Unskin Me.*

During *Reorganising Space* we kept each collaborator-performer's response short in order to allow for repetition. I felt that this would challenge the audience to consider the same thing from different perspectives. This did not work effectively in the final presentation, with the feedback being that the repetition seemed to keep the women in the same positions which they were trying break out of (Mills, 2011). I still believed that repetition could be used to present the same issue from different angles and thus attempted its use again in *In/Out.*

For *Reorganising Space* I chose to work in the Wits Amphitheatre because of the fixed seating in the auditorium. In trying to create a new relationship with the audience we placed chairs on the stage in an effort to make the space at once a performance space and a viewing space, thus making everyone performer and audience. This did not work as well as I had intended primarily because the audience did

not believe that they could sit anywhere, and they felt that they were not led into the process adequately enough to allow them to feel welcome to partake in the presentation beyond just watching (Meadows, 2011). This was also the case, although to a lesser extent, with *In/Out* and I have since realised that it stemmed from my inability to locate myself in the process and from a resultant failure to take ownership of my part of the process, something which I feel was borne from taking on the role of facilitator. While this allowed me to illicit the collaborator-performers' responses it left me unsure of how to use them to create a conversation. This began the shift to the role of facilitator-director which I adopted in the process of *Unskin Me*.

The process of *Reorganising Space* is also where the idea of the heightened self was born, and I thus opted to have the collaborator-performers wear their own clothes rather than choosing any kind of costume. The collaborator-performers walked in with the audience in a further attempt to remove the distinction between performer and audience. In trying to create a space in which everyone could see and be seen, we opted to use the house lights rather than having any theatrical lighting. I felt, at that time, that such a move away from theatrical conventions would further re-order the sign systems of the conventional theatre and facilitate the formation of new relationships with the audience. The audience's reluctance to participate, however, highlighted the fact that the potential for conversation lay within the entire process, not just in the way we set up the space. The process of *Unkin Me* thus focused on finding ways to make the audience part of the process, not just the space, in a way that would empower them to share their own thoughts, ideas and feelings as well as question other responses in order to create a conversation.

It was also suggested that I could not (should not?) use improvisation to break convention (Nebe, 2011). This led me to consider the use of a pre-existing text in undertaking a process of re-presentation. In allowing my co-creators to develop their own personal narratives for the final presentation, I felt that the presentation should not be set in order to allow the collaborator-performers the flexibility to shift their narratives and be able to respond to the audience and each other. However, because we did not spend much time in the space, we were unable to explore how these narratives could shift each time we entered the space; something I feel becomes part of the conversation as it reflects how our own identities are constantly shifting because of our daily experiences. In presenting *Unskin Me,* this became a part of the process because the collaborator-performers had more time to sit with their responses and

to bring them into the performance space during the rehearsal process. Thus, the shifts also manifested themselves in each conversation.

Drawing on Giroux's call for a move away from existing modes of language, the written component of *Reorganising Space* challenged me to explore new ways of writing. I opted to experiment with performative writing in an effort to break away from more formal styles of academic writing and have attempted a similar style in this report. In so doing, I took academic writing as a construct of dominant culture in its need and use of certain conventions. While I understand that this is a way of creating a kind of universal language which can be understood by a variety of readers, I also feel that this pursuit of uniformity favours a language that does not accommodate difference.

In/Out:

My directing project, *In/Out* (Disele et al, 2011), began as an attempt to use a physical theatre approach in a found site to respond to an existing text. Keefe and Murray's (2007) idea of physical theatres/the physical in theatres expressed the variety of ways in which the physical is part of theatre performance. I wanted to use an existing text to further explore ways of foregrounding the body in performance without subjugating the word and thus perpetuating the very binaries I am trying to break down. Having come out of the process of *Reorganising Space,* I felt that it was necessary to expand my exploration to include the use of a pre-existing text, rather than favouring only devising, to avoid setting up yet another dichotomy between devised work and script-based work. Further, I came to feel that my ideas about space needed to be extended to found sites as well because, even in those spaces, the pre-existing relationship between the audience and the performer remains. Thus, I have come to use the term 'theatrical performance space' to refer to the variety of spaces that may be used for a theatre performance.

Having been drawn for some time to the work of Federico García Lorca, a Spanish poet, playwright, artist, writer and musician, I chose to use his play, *The House of Bernada Alba* (*Bernada*) (1976), to undertake this part of my exploration. I felt that Lorca's use of symbolic characters gave his work a universal quality that allowed the issues he dealt with to resonate with aspects of other cultures, even though he focussed on Spanish society.

I chose *Bernada* because it dealt with similar issues to those I was dealing with, namely the societal perceptions of womanhood. For me, *Bernada* created an opportunity to highlight multiplicity by exposing the power struggles inherent among women based on age, wealth/income, social status, sexuality, etc. Focussing on the tyrannical way in which a matriarch, Bernada, controls her household, especially the lives of her five daughters, the play highlights an important aspect of oppression and marginalization: there are no innocent victims and thus the seemingly clear line between oppressor and oppressed is destabilized, emphasizing the many levels on which marginalization operates. Bernada oppresses her daughters who, in turn, oppress each other and, in so doing, begin to self destruct causing their family unit to collapse.

The sisters' oppression of one another, for me, calls attention to the roles we all play in upholding oppressive systems in an effort to fit in or to belong. Bernada rules her household in a tyrannical fashion, in order to uphold a respectable family name, i.e. to live up to societal perceptions. Through the theme of mourning, *Bernada* exemplifies how tradition can be used as a tool for oppression or marginalisation, as this is what Bernada uses to keep her daughters locked up. The play also draws attention to issues of gender and class division; women have their place and role separate from men, and each class has its role. I felt, and still feel, that this is reflective of contemporary society where divisions based on gender, race, wealth/income, education, sexuality, nationality, culture, etc. continue to exist.

Although my original intention was to work closely with the text and use the characters it presents, a lack of performers led me to shift my focus. Thus, our response became based on the themes presented in the text. This allowed me to strengthen a collaborative approach as it created the opportunity to use the collaborator-performers' voices by highlighting the themes that they identified and to which they responded strongly. These themes formed the basis of our exploration, shifting from the text to devising our own work. As such, we only drew on the script for inspiration and ideas to use as a starting point for the work.

At the beginning of the process I asked each collaborator-performer to bring music that inspired or moved them in some way. This was something I had developed from the process of *Reorganising Space* which I felt allowed the collaborator-performers to take ownership of the process, paving the way for collaboration. I did not use this method in the process of *Unskin Me* as I felt the induction process we

undertook did not allow for this, however we used the ritual of building a fire as a way of entering the space – a strategy I gleaned from Mwenya Kabwe – and I feel this was an adequate substitute for the use of music. Finding ways of allowing my collaborator-performers to take ownership of the process has become part of my approach in developing conversations.

Some of the themes that appealed strongly to the collaborator-performers were rebellion, secrecy or the idea of the unspoken, oppression, façade, physical appearance, control, power and sexual tension, the idea of authority and money vs. love. We explored each theme physically and vocally over the first few rehearsals, allowing the collaborator-performers to explore these ideas individually and asking them to reflect on their explorations and write about their ideas at the end of some of the rehearsals. Having explored the themes individually, I started incorporating improvisations around the themes into the warm up in later rehearsals which I used as an introduction for group discussions and improvisations.

These explorations led us to the idea of always being caged, with the collaborator-performers arguing that our lives are dictated from the moment we are born in the sense that we are told what is right and wrong, how to think, how to act, etc. This idea informed the set design. I asked the designer to create cages which could be used during the performance, but also to extend the theme into the space so that the audience could share that experience as well. At the designer's suggestion we layered the walls with paper so that they would not be so solid and still. We chose to use the Downstairs Theatre foyer for the performance because the collaborator-performers had responded most strongly to that space during our explorations. It also seemed more accommodating of the set design in terms of transformation and had ease of access to power sockets for the lighting. For the costume, I decided to dress my co-creators in white as a play on the idea of the expectation of feminine purity, as white is often representative of purity. The idea behind this was to add another layer to questioning how we see things and our expectations of other people based on what we see. I believe that this formed the beginnings of using performance space as a site of response as we did in *Unskin Me*, which I discuss in detail later.

The process of *In/Out* presented a challenge to my own notions of theatre, raising questions around the use of theatrical elements such as costume and lighting. When I worked on *Reorganising Space* I felt that in order for a real conversation to take place these needed to be removed, as I viewed them as maintaining or contributing to the barriers that separate the performer and the audience. However, I

found myself wondering if that is necessarily the case and if they might not provide a safe space in which a conversation could take place.

These thoughts led to a shift away from trying to reorganise the theatre space to an attempt to reconfigure the performance space. Having chosen to move out of the conventional theatre space, I thus decided to explore how to use set and lighting in the process of reconfiguring the found site. I felt that this would strengthen a re-presentation by creating a new relationship with the audience and further opening up the possibilities for a conversation. I was also encouraged to consider the possibility that these elements may help enhance the storytelling aspect of the project and the theatre experience as a whole. This is what has led me to opt for reconfiguring the performance space in the process of creating conversations. I believe this is really what creates the opportunity to break out of the pre-existing relationship between the audience and the performer.

Again in this process I struggled to locate myself, although to a lesser extent than in *Reorganising Space.* This was partly due to foregrounding the collaborator-performers' voices as part of the process of collaboration, but also because I lacked a clear direction at the beginning. However, being a directing project, *In/Out* made it easier for me to take on the responsibility of structuring the final performance to bring the collaborator-performers' responses into the space. This is what has led me to adopt the role of facilitator-director in approaching future projects, starting with *Unskin Me.*

In/Out also emphasized the need for a structured rehearsal process, as I have often found myself navigating and negotiating around the availability of collaborator-performers, rehearsal space and performance space. The process of *Unskin Me* has not been exempt from these problems but having a structured rehearsal process has allowed me to work past these limitations.

With *In/Out* these constraints meant that we only worked with the set the night before we opened, the downfall of which was that I was not able to consider how the performance would work within the set and settled for the strength the set added to the performance aesthetically. At the end of the process I felt that the set overpowered the collaborator-performers and that we needed to have explored how the space could accommodate the collaborator-performers', which may have created more room for the presentation to engage the audience in conversation. Instead, we spent so much time trying to weave together the performance that not much time was left to consider how to develop the performance into

a conversation. It was only in the last few days of rehearsals that we decided to invite the audience to write their own responses on the walls. Both this project and the previous one have emphasized the difficulty of engaging the audience in a theatre event. On the one hand I believe it is an issue of confidence and structure; being able to guide the audience into the process confidently. On the other hand, I realise that some audience members do not want to participate – they want to come and watch. Embarking on the process of *Unskin Me* I faced the challenge of creating a conversation that would both accommodate and embrace this.

The biggest failing for me in this process was getting the feedback that the performance felt didactic (Munro, 2011). The reason I want to create conversations is because I want to use theatre to tackle issues that plague our societies. To do this, I feel the presentation must allow the audience a voice in the process rather than preach to them. This feedback presents a challenge for me in terms of being critical of my own work and being able to see it objectively.

This process has also led me, as a researcher, to reconsider my understanding and use of subject and subjectivity as these have been problematised by Louis Althusser's writings on interpellation. Using Christianity as an example, Althusser advances two definitions of the subject:

> 1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; 2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission (1984: 56).

I have been using the word subject according to the first definition and, although I have acknowledged that oppression and subjugation operate on varying levels, I have also been dealing with the ideas of the subject and the subjugated as separate entities. The second definition emphasizes the overlap between the two, which problematises my notion of attempting to re-present subjugated identities. This second definition further destabilises the idea of the subject as Althusser suggests that we are taught through various institutions, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) as he calls them (1984: 17), to obey and uphold existing systems of power. This stresses the need to question our own thought processes in order to become more aware of our own prejudices, and thus our role in upholding such systems. It also highlights the need to create new languages and new ways of seeing in order to break out of these systems. Acknowledging the multi-layered nature of subjugation has meant working with this second definition in order to remain critical of power systems and the way they mediate our life experiences

and views of one another. As a result, reflection and discussion have become part of the process of creating conversations as I feel these tools allow the collaborator-performers to articulate their own ideas, and interrogate these ideas, as well as other people's ideas, with others in the space.

Both *In/Out* and *Reorganising Space* involved using the performer as creator. This idea is derived from Callery's (2007) description of the actor-as-creator, as opposed to the actor-as-interpreter, to describe a move away from viewing actors as tools for realising a director's vision towards an acknowledgement of the role they play in the process of creation (160-164), hence my reference to them as collaborator-performers (Crewe, 2012). I find this allows co-creators to take ownership of the creative process by building their own confidence as theatremakers as well as helping them to develop a rapport with one another. However, it also made it difficult to structure the final presentations as it meant we were often unsure of our direction for the majority of each process. This was also due to the fact that the processes depended heavily on the collaborator-performers' thoughts and ideas. This reliance has, so far, made it difficult for me to locate myself in the work. Going into the process of *Unskin Me,* a big challenge has been finding my own voice and locating myself clearly in the process, as I feel a lack of confidence has often resulted in my over reliance on my co-creators. This has meant learning how to draw on past practitioners and ideas to strengthen and enrich my own ideas and processes, rather than allowing myself to be intimidated by them.

Jaanong ke fa kae (where am I now) - *Unskin Me:*

Finally home... All my life I have been running, running away from what has felt like a trap. From the expectation of womanhood. Perhaps my defiance has always been a way of trying to encourage new ways of seeing, trying to get people to see blackness, womanhood, black womanhood differently. And yet, here I am pregnant, in a stable relationship... Have I conformed? Sometimes it makes it hard to be in a relationship and have these thoughts. It is ironic that I am questioning issues around perceptions of black women at a time when I find myself in one of the many roles that often feel like they have been cast upon us. What will I tell this girl when she grows up...?

The Process:

My decision to undertake my creative research project at home was a personal one. Coming from Botswana, where the theatre industry is still young and developing, has influenced me to develop an approach to theatremaking for myself. The women I mentioned in the introduction (who are based in South Africa, although not all of them are from South Africa) have been motivated to create theatre in response to a white, male dominated industry in an attempt to move away from the prevailing European tradition. This same tradition is already evident in the burgeoning industry in Botswana, threatening, in my view, once again to marginalise indigenous voices and forms of performance. Having spent two years working here, I have found that the patriarchal centre that had led to my initial enquiry in 2008, along with issues of race, culture, income/wealth, social status and so on, still mediated the life experiences of many people. It is particularly my teaching experience that made me want to be able to create my own work; work which challenges the way we make and view theatre and the representations made through theatre, challenging a status quo that favours some at the expense of others. This made it necessary for me to locate my research in Botswana.

I chose to undergo the process of *Unskin Me* with Mophato Dance Theatre, based in Gaborone. Founded in 2009 by Andrew Kola, the company specialises in Afro-fusion and contemporary dance although the members come from a variety of dance backgrounds including Hip Hop, Ballet, Latin American and Setswana Traditional dance. The company has mostly been commissioned to create work for conferences, product promotions, schools, corporate events and have thus performed in a variety of spaces besides the theatre (Mophato Dance Theatre, 2011: 1-2). The desire to work with Mophato was

motivated by this broad background of dance styles and by the group's experiments with the fusion of different forms. Logistically it was also motivated by my previous involvement with the company, making it easier for me to find a group of performers to work with and a rehearsal space to work in.

The company comprises about fifteen members, both male and female, of whom I worked with seven. In the previous two projects I worked only with women but I have always felt that in order to be able to re-present black women effectively in the theatre through conversation, the process needs to involve men and interrogate everyone's perceptions. I had hoped to work for at least three hours a day over an eight week period, nine including the week of conversation. However, due to the company's involvement in other projects, we only worked together for six weeks, including the week of conversation. Although this did not leave us much time to work in the actual space, it did not worry me as the previous projects were undertaken in a similar time frame which had led me to develop a clear outline of what I would like to achieve each week.

Since we began working during the festive period, the process was divided in two to accommodate the end of year holiday season. The first stage of the process was meant to be an induction period to introduce the members to some of the major theatre innovators who have influenced my views and approaches to performance. We explored different approaches, focusing on Konstantin Stanislavski, Bertolt Brecht, Jacques Lecoq and Jerzy Grotowski, and touched briefly on Anne Bogart's 'Viewpoints'. Due to the time constraints, I asked the collaborator-performers to research dance practitioners individually in the hopes of giving them sources of inspiration in the process of creation. In this way I hoped to take a dual approach to the work, using the familiarity of dance to navigate the less familiar mode of drama. As such, I used the process itself to break down the superficial binary between theatre and dance, first by highlighting it and then moving away from it by incorporating varying modes of expression to create a conversation. The practitioners we explored have influenced me to use an approach that allows collaborator-performers to work from the inside-out (e.g. Stanislavski) and the outside-in (e.g. Lecoq) simultaneously, accessing their various knowledges. I also asked the collaborator-performers to use the break to observe the interactions around them between people of different races and genders and their own conversations with other people to get them to start developing their ideas around the concept.

At the time I wondered if it might not be wiser to do away with this part of the process and begin working on the concept immediately. This feeling was made acute by the fact that the company had just been involved in a performance that incorporated different dance forms, drama and oral storytelling. This raised the question of whether an induction was really necessary. I chose to carry on with the induction as planned because of my desire to use the performer as creator. When I worked as a teacher, I found that a similar induction with students working towards their IGCSE exams was beneficial in helping them develop their own ideas and create their own work. In the same way, I found that it gave the collaborator-performers the confidence to bring their thoughts, ideas and experiences into the space. As we come from varying backgrounds of performance, I also felt that this allowed us to start the process on a similar footing. Callery (2007) notes that "a shared vocabulary is what fuels devised work" (163). For me, the induction was a way of creating that shared vocabulary.

We resumed the process early in January to begin our exploration around the concept. Drawing from the processes of *Reorganising Space* and *In/Out*, I chose to theme each rehearsal in order to raise specific questions at different points. These focussed on the collaborator-performers' views of black women and how these views are influenced by their own backgrounds (such as culture, education, economic standing, religion and political views) as well as the representations of black women they have been exposed to. Before we broke up for the holiday, we explored these ideas individually with the collaborator-performers improvising and experimenting with different modes of expression. I first asked the collaborator-performers to reflect on the themes in their journals in order to give them time to develop their own responses. I would then ask them to improvise around their responses in an effort to explore ways of bringing them into the space. Each rehearsal ended with a discussion of the work that had been done, sharing the thoughts and ideas that had come up in each improvisation.

When we resumed we spent the first few days of rehearsal exploring the themes as a group. At this point, I felt it was necessary to give the collaborator-performers an opportunity to work together in order to exchange ideas and to see how their responses fit together in one conversation. Although I was already beginning to realise that the strength of this particular conversation would lie in the individual responses, my experiences in *Reorganising Space* and *In/Out* had shown me that it was necessary to develop a group connection so that we could bring the individual responses together to form a group response.

This process of eliciting my co-creators' responses has pointed out strong, albeit unintentional, resonances with the work of Pina Bausch. Bausch is popularly quoted as saying she is not interested in how people move but what moves them (Huxley and Witts, 2002: 58), an idea that can be linked to the process of excavating personal responses that I have undertaken under the paradigm of narrative enquiry. In order to explore these responses further, and to allow each collaborator-performer to shape their personal narrative, I decided to spend one week working with each collaborator-performer individually. Although this approach risked breaking the group connection, I felt it necessary to focus on the co-creators individually to strengthen their responses so as to be able to locate them in the conversation, i.e. to find their heightened self. This way of working allowed the collaborator-performers to begin to find their heightened self by locating their responses and exploring how to bring them into the space to be shared with other collaborators (the other performers and the audience). Further, it gave the collaborator-performers an opportunity to explore their own responses from new perspectives when we all came back together in the rehearsal space. For the most part, each co-creator had a very individual response to the concept, which raised some issues for further interrogation for me, both from a research perspective and a facilitator-director perspective. In structuring the conversation and trying to see how the responses fitted together, as well as for the purposes of this paper, I named each collaborator-performer's response according to the issue (s) they were dealing with:

'Journey to (my) self': As a young, coloured woman coming from South Africa, this collaborator-performer had found that she had often been ranked as 'better-than' or 'more beautiful' because of her light complexion. She pointed this out as something that she had been dealing with in her own community, where the aspiration was to be lighter-skinned and to have the straightest hair. She recognised in this a denial of Africanness or blackness in favour of an aspiration to whiteness. As a result, her response was very introspective, leading her to seek a definition of herself, for herself, where she was not aspiring to anyone's standards and could just be comfortable with herself. This response spoke to me, once again, of a false hierarchy that stems from a white, heterosexual male view where anyone who does not fit that description is rendered other, and therefore inferior. This leads to a view of people based on what they are not rather than acknowledging what they are, creating binaries based on where we fall within the hierarchy of sameness. In trying to bring this response into the conversation, I asked the collaborator-performer to reflect on the times when she felt most herself and used these to map herself, i.e. to connect these moments, items, thoughts and ideas in her efforts to begin to define herself for herself.

'Kino Eye': This particular collaborator-performer struggled in the early stages of the process to locate himself and his own response. His contention had always been that he was not sure why we were discussing this issue as it seemed to hark back to a negative past, rather than focussing on a present in which things have changed. In response, I challenged him to answer that question for himself, to observe interactions with people and see why, if there has been so much progress, questions of marginalisation and subjugation still arise. Coming into the rehearsal space alone, he realised that his response had been closely tied to his mother's life experience who, having been raised in a culture where the man provides and the woman follows, left her marriage to pursue her education and to work in order to support her children, as she felt her husband was not living up to the role she had been raised to expect. As a result of his experiences with his parents, this collaborator-performer felt that he wanted to highlight the possibility and multiplicity of choice, touching on the idea of a both/and logic. Throughout the process we had focused primarily on body, voice and text as modes of expression but I felt that this was, in some ways, limiting for the collaborator-performers and used this time to allow them to find the modes of expression that they felt best suited their particular responses. This collaborator-performer chose video recording so I asked him to record footage in which he could highlight or delimit choice. The idea of delimiting choice resonated very strongly with me because I felt that it spoke back to the idea of encouraging new ways of seeing. In the end, he focused on recording each conversation while we played footage of previous conversations on a laptop. This was a way of bringing his response into the space, but I also think that juxtaposing a previous conversation with an ongoing conversation reflected this sense of needing to see ourselves and each other differently, rather than trying to limit definitions of ourselves. Acknowledging the various modes through which my co-creators could express themselves has become a part of the approach I wish to take as a theatremaker, particularly because I feel this can also contribute to creating new languages based in various modes of perception, rather than just the spoken and written word. This allows for re-presentation by allowing a multiplicity of voices into one space, multiplicity in the sense of different people but also in the sense of different aspects of one person.

'Remembrance': Like the previous collaborator-performer, this co-creator's response was closely tied to his mother. He pointed out that when he thinks of women, particularly black women, it always takes him back to his mother. When he first mentioned this within the group there was an outburst from some of the women in the room, but he pointed out that it was because she had shaped the way that he sees other people, women and himself. For me, the initial outburst highlighted an assumption that men

automatically categorise us according to accepted gender roles, so in a sense we expect to be seen that way, again pointing out a need to delimit the choices we allow ourselves to consider. In coming to the story of the collaborator-performer's mother he told us that she was born shortly after independence – at the time Botswana had very few economic prospects and was still firmly rooted in our local traditions – but she took it upon herself to get work, put herself through school and support her family, working as a taxi driver. Moreover, and perhaps as a result of her journey, she did not believe in traditional gender roles and raised her sons to do everything for themselves, moving away from the expectation and belief that a woman must take care of the house. In bringing his response to the space I felt perhaps the best way would be to retell the story of his mother, as he said the best mode of expression for him in this process was the spoken word. In highlighting her story I hoped to give him an opportunity to honour his late mother as well as demonstrate that we can construct our own order rather than subscribing to systems of power that do not empower us as individuals. For me, telling the story of the mother was important because it contrasted the heaviness of the other responses by moving away from the predominant perception of woman as victim, weak and other negative aspects, rather celebrating the accomplishments that have been made.

'A site/cite of confusion': In this response, the collaborator-performer was interested in how girls go from being asexual to sexual in the moment of their first period, and the trauma associated with that first period. She found herself questioning why it is that the first period automatically makes one a woman even though it may occur at as young an age as ten, something borne from a similar experience in her childhood. She spoke of the body as a site of confusion in this regard because she felt that young girls were not given the chance to grow into womanhood, but rather had it thrust upon them because of a biological change in their bodies, pointing out how gender is socially constructed and performed as Butler (1990) suggests. Being a writer, she tried to develop the stories of two young women, a 'tomboy' who preferred to wear pants and was not interested in being a woman and a 'girlie-girl' who had grown up playing with dolls and dreaming of having a husband and children of her own one day. Through these stories, the collaborator-performer hoped to question the idea and expectations of womanhood, for example, do you necessarily have to get married and have children, do you have to wear a dress to be a woman, does not being able to have children make you less of a woman, what happens if your marriage fails, does that mean you have failed? Because she is a photographer, I asked her to bring photographs that she felt reflected the core of her response, namely the confusion that comes with

having a female body. This response, in particular, has underscored the performativity of gender as something that needs to be interrogated further in the process of re-presenting women.

'In-flux': As the title suggests, this collaborator-performer was trying to capture an identity or identities that seemed to be in flux. His response during the process was that he felt that black women seem uncomfortable with themselves, and so are always trying to change themselves to fit in, to be accepted, to be seen, resulting in a cycle of perpetual discomfort and change. This response was particularly reflected in an earlier rehearsal where he spent the duration of his exploration playing at the mirror. I asked him to consider why he feels this way, and why he thinks that these women feel so uncomfortable, and use that as his starting point to formulate a response he could share with others. This brought us back to the mirror and resulted in a movement sequence in which he seemed to be trying to find his true reflection, in his words, to "find myself as a black woman" (Disele et al, 2012). As a black woman, as much as I found truth in what he was saying when we first discussed it, I was not sure whether or not to be offended by this response. However, this process has been about challenging our own thought processes and my initial response raised questions of whether I am undertaking this interrogation because I see myself as other, less than and/or as object.

'A prayer of worth': "I started out a blank canvas" (Disele et al, 2012). Here the co-creator explored the effect of labelling on people, inadvertently touching on Althusser's second definition of subject, that of a "subjected being who submits to a higher authority" (1984: 56). The collaborator-performer used a sheet to reflect the many ways in which she had been labelled, and her response became about trying to break out of those labels and to find comfort with herself – overlapping with 'In-Flux' and 'Journey to (my) self'. In so doing, she stated that some of the labels were borne from her behaviour and that sometimes her behaviour was a result of the labels, pointing to the fact that there are no innocent victims i.e. we uphold the very systems of power that oppress us. This response became about realising self worth and taking ownership of that self. In trying to bring the collaborator-performer's response into the space, we first looked at a poem she had written in one of our earlier explorations which was drawn from a prayer. I felt that the poem would be a good starting point in mapping her trajectory, but she felt that she could not come into the space and pray. At first I agreed, possibly as a result of my own bias as a non-Christian, but upon further reflection I had to question why not, considering that this process was about interrogating and shifting representations in order to re-present. This, for me, was another challenge to my thought processes, highlighting the need to allow everyone in the space to

speak for themselves and locate the conversation in individual responses, allowing for multiple perspectives.

'Find me (black) woman': The title of this response was drawn from a poem written by the collaborator-performer which touched on the many labels she felt were placed upon black women. As we drew towards the end of the process, it became an attempt to find the self, reflecting a sense of being lost. Rather than reciting the poem in full it became fragments of words written in the space – on paper, on the walls, on the sheet for 'A prayer of worth', on the floor boards and so on. It also became embodied through gesture – different poses/tableaux, dance phrases, running, sitting and so forth. This, for me, raised the question of where re-presentation is located, whether it is something we must all find for ourselves (is it internal) or whether it is in the way we carry ourselves, the way we speak, do we find it in and with those around us or is it a combination of all these things? The desire to develop a conversation was borne out of a feeling that re-presentation involves everybody because we are all marginalised and marginalisers in some way, at some point in our lives. I believe that dismantling the boundaries that perpetuate binary oppositions, and thus uphold the current systems of power, is about interrogating our own thought processes because we have been conditioned to think in a certain way. It is also about taking action to overhaul those systems. This emphasizes the creation of thirdspace as both a real and imagined space and, in creating conversations, I have dealt with the imagined space (trying to create a critical awareness) in the hopes that it will begin to reflect in the real space.

Working with the co-creators individually allowed me an opportunity to better locate myself in the process. The induction process and our initial explorations around the concept located me as a facilitator as the focus was on the collaborator-performers, empowering them to take ownership of the process and eliciting their responses. Having elicited those responses, it was now time to explore ways of bringing them together and structuring the conversation. It is at this point that I began to assume the role of a director. During *Reorganising Space* I felt uncomfortable trying to bring my voice into the work, however locating myself as a facilitator-director has since allowed me to find the shift from eliciting the responses of the collaborator-performers, to taking enough ownership of the process to be able to structure the conversation. I have had to realise that collaboration doesn't mean removing my voice, as I did in *Reorganising Space*, but rather bringing forth my proposals for the direction we are taking and allowing my co-creators input into the final outcome so that we make the final decisions together. Thus the leadership aspect of the facilitator-director is never completely removed because the collaborator-

performers still look to me to shape the final outcome of our work. So far I have not located myself as a performer in the projects I have undertaken, but in the conversations of *Unskin Me* I found it difficult to continue standing outside the work and began to share my own responses, becoming a performer as well. As a theatremaker, this has been an empowering process because it allows me to engage with the processes I undertake from another aspect, hence my use of the term theatremaking.

Individual work also allowed my co-creators to take ownership of the work, strengthening the process of collaboration and creating a multi-authored work, which is reflected in the layering of multiple texts. This is in keeping with Matchett's (2007) suggestion for moving away from the dominant modes of theatremaking. Further, allowing each collaborator-performer to map their own trajectory in sharing their response with future collaborators highlights the possibility of having multiple selves in any one space at any given time, negating the necessity of the self/other binaries we often adopt and which often result in negative stereotypes. This creates an opportunity to highlight and celebrate difference as the natural order of our world rather than the hierarchy of sameness to which we tend to subscribe. The title of the conversation, *Unskin Me*, was borne from these responses and attempted to capture the sense of not wanting to be defined by our biological make up.

I chose to use the Moving Space at Maru-a-Pula High School because it is an empty space that lends itself to being reconfigured to accommodate the responses of those in the room – a black box. In allowing for a conversation, we agreed to use minimal set and create a gallery space, similar to that of an art exhibition, allowing the audience to move freely around the room to engage with the collaborator-performers in a way that best suited them. This meant there was no formalised seating, moving away from the stage/auditorium divide, although there were black boxes around the room on which the audience sometimes sat. In my view this allowed for everyone to see and be seen in an attempt to break out of the conventions that create a passive object/active subject binary, thus negating the semiotic codes that would signify the presentation as a performance merely to be seen by the audience. I hoped that seeing and hearing the collaborator-performers share their responses would give the audience confidence to explore and share their own responses.

In light of this, I found it fitting to use elements of the collaborator-performers' responses to reconfigure the space, making it a site of response. This included hanging up photographs in the space ('A site/cite of confusion'), the use of live video (Kino Eye), tying the black curtains in the space with white cloth to

reflect the constraints created by the white sheet (labels) used for 'A Prayer of Worth', as well as the use of full length mirrors for 'In-flux' (which he moved around the space as part of his response). This resulted in the conversation being multi-modal, resonating with the idea of 'Live Art'. Kabwe (2007b) cites Catherine Ugwu in her use of the term, which refers to work that is conceptual and driven by the expression of ideas, thus utilising different mediums (15). The use of blue and orange gels in the lighting as well as candles provided a soft alternative to the harsh fluorescent lights usually used in the space, creating a more intimate atmosphere which I felt was necessary as we were asking people to share their innermost thoughts with us. As a result of the lighting rig, half the room was cast into darkness, except for the light of the candles. Upon this realisation we thought about having this changed, but coming from the processes of *Reorganising Space* and *In/Out*, this answered the question of how to accommodate all responses, including those who did not want to speak in the conversation, by creating an opportunity to remove themselves from the conversation and rejoin it when they felt more comfortable.

In keeping with Grotowski's (1968) views that each space must be reconfigured according to the needs of the presentation, a site of response seemed the most appropriate way to reconfigure the space as it sought to accommodate and encourage new explorations with each conversation. Constructing a site of response created an opportunity for the audience to share in the collaborator-performers' responses even if they did not encounter them directly. I also hoped that configuring the space in this way would make it an open space in which the audience could feel involved enough in the process to share their own responses. By reconfiguring the space as a site of response, I hoped to give power to both the audience and the collaborator-performers to undertake a new exploration of the themes interrogated in this conversation. A site of response thus created an opportunity for all present to inhabit a thirdspace by resisting easy categorisations of audience/performer or stage/auditorium and, by extension, self/other to break out of an either/or logic.

What resulted was a space in which each conversation was a new exploration of the themes we interrogated, which could be reconfigured to share individual responses. Sometimes there were overlaps or intersections in co-creators' responses and sometimes the responses remained distinctly individual. What resulted, then, was a conversation that was constantly shifting because each day brought with it new insights borne from the experiences of that day, highlighting the perpetual nature of this conversation. That is to say, the process of re-presentation is a continual one. For some of the

co-creators, I believe it has allowed them to explore personal issues that they had previously not paid attention to, while for others it has highlighted thoughts and ideas they already had – some of them positive, some of them negative. The responses from some of the audience members from each conversation suggest that the experience was similar for them. Further, wanting to be in conversation with the audience meant we could never know the outcome until we shared the space with them. The process can never really end because each new insight calls for a further interrogation of the themes, a challenging of our own prejudices and a reconsideration of our own thought processes; and every new person has the potential to offer new insight by raising questions we have not considered. In short, I believe this project may have begun the process of re-presentation but it is not something that can be completed.

The Conversations:

In concluding the process of *Unskin Me* we had three conversations, mostly attended by students from Maru-a-Pula High School. I have continued to explore ways of playing with structure and the process of *Unskin Me* has continued the move away from a linear progression. Each night we began with a soundscape to allow the collaborator-performers to regain their group connection while also going into their own personal responses. The soundscape also allowed the collaborator-performers to find the shifts in their responses as a result of their daily experiences, new things they had discovered in the space, new insights they had found and so on. This worked as part of the idea of the heightened self as it gave the collaborator-performers confidence to share their responses with the audiences, while also exploring new nuances and shifts in those responses. The heightened self in this regard, functioned as a bridge between the everyday self, who has worries and experiences from the day, and the performative self who is there to be seen by other people and share something with those people. I felt this helped maintain authenticity in the responses, rather than having the conversation shift into a rehearsed presentation, as it allowed the collaborator-performers to respond to their daily experiences and incorporate them into their response in each conversation.

In moving from the soundscape to the conversation, the collaborator-performers would find their starting places and find the impulse to stop their sound and bring their responses into the space in their own time. Some co-creators started in the performance space, others outdoors with the audience and others indoors, but outside the performance space. The audiences walked in on some of those

responses while other responses began with them in the space. This meant that there was no real beginning and no real end. Although the collaborator-performers had outlines of their responses, I did not tell them what to focus on, resulting in shifts of what they touched on or how they touched on it each night. Moving away from linearity allowed multiple voices and subjectivities to exist in the space without favouring one at the expense of another. This, I believe, also allowed the audience to follow the responses that resonated with them, rather than being directed to follow a particular response and interpret it in a specific way. The conversation was thus open ended allowing for a critical engagement with the work, challenging the audience to question both themselves and what they had seen.

The strength of *Unskin Me,* for me, was being able to bring the audience actively into the conversation. In *Reorganising Space* I shied away from a full introduction of what we were trying to accomplish with the belief that the audience would understand, while in *In/Out* I tried to use the ushers to demonstrate the need to move through and explore the space. As a result, in both projects the audience/performer and stage/auditorium binaries remained unchallenged, which resulted in performances in which the collaborator-performers had the space to explore and share their own ideas while the audience were not as empowered to do so. Thus, it was very important to me to focus on challenging these binaries. To do so, after going through the soundscape with the collaborator-performers and allowing them to find their starting points, I took the time to introduce the audience to the concept and explain the process to them. This served to move them away from the idea of coming to watch a performance as well as to give them the opportunity to start exploring their own ideas before joining the collaborator-performers in the process. In trying to bring the audience into the creative process, the conversations ended up in three parts beginning with the collaborator-performers sharing their responses, then everyone in the space exploring and expressing their own thoughts and ideas and closing with a discussion. The last two parts echoed our rehearsal process, which locates the audience as collaborators in the conversation and further breaks down the audience/performer binary. The discussion, in particular, allowed us to interact with the audience as collaborators in the work, unlike in *In/Out* where they were only able to write down their thoughts without entering into conversation with others in the space.

Having undergone the process over a period of weeks, I felt that allowing the audience to see and hear the collaborator-performers share their responses first would ease them into the topic and give them time to explore their own thoughts and ideas. People are different and because of this each audience

responded differently. Some participants felt more at ease moving around the space and engaging with collaborator-performers' responses, mostly reading some of what was written and helping to put up pictures, while other participants preferred to find vantage points from which they could observe, only moving around occasionally. During these conversations I found it difficult merely to observe and began sharing my own responses which located me in the conversation as a facilitator/performer. I believe that this was in keeping with the idea of conversation as it allowed all of those present to assume multiple roles, demonstrating how our identities are constantly shifting. For me, this acknowledges and accommodates the multiplicity of the subject, negating the possibility for stereotyping that is often borne from the categorisations of people we try to fit ourselves into.

Having shared our responses with the audience, I would ask the collaborator-performers to pause in order for us to take the audience through the process of interrogation that had led us to these responses. I revisited the questions I had asked the collaborator-performers about their views on blackness, womanhood, black womanhood and how these may be influenced by their own backgrounds – culture, race, gender, education, community etc. – as well as the representations to which they had been exposed. This may seem leading, and to some extent it is, however the idea of creating a conversation is to break out of the distinction between performer and audience, and for me this means allowing the audience to undergo similar processes to those undergone by the collaborator-performers. This part of the process was about allowing the audience to locate and explore their own responses, making them part of the conversation.

In sharing our own responses we had markers and chalk that we had used but I also made pens and paper available for everyone to use. This part of the conversation tended to serve as a period of reflection for the collaborator-performers, and I believe seeing them respond anew to the questions allowed and encouraged the audience to express their own ideas. Most, if not all, of the participants (audience and performers) reflected through writing, again locating the strength of the conversation in the individual response. At the end of the conversation most people left their responses behind, which further established the space as a site of response. This was best carried across by one of the audience members who later reflected that, for her, the lighting made it seem like she was in a different space which made it easier for her to share her own responses. Coming from the process of *In/Out*, I was afraid that the space might overpower the conversation. However, treating the space as a site of response allowed it to lend strength to and form part of the co-creators' responses. For 'Journey to

(my) self' and 'In-flux', the collaborator-performers moved the objects in the space around: 'In-flux' focussed on the mirrors in his attempt to find his true reflection while 'Journey to (my) self' focussed on personal items she had brought with her as well as the floor boards and the black boxes we had in the space in her attempts to map her journey. The collaborator-performers' interaction with the space in sharing their responses is really what allowed it to become a site of response as it created room for the audience to interact with the space in exploring their own ideas and developing their own responses. This is also what allowed the conversation to shift each night.

Having shared their responses, and having experienced and lived with the emotional disturbance that comes with interrogating the issues of black women and how they are represented and viewed, particularly in Botswana, I have always felt it necessary to find ways of allowing co-collaborators to relocate themselves in a place of stability before ending any process. With the collaborator-performers we used a fire which we lit at the beginning of the rehearsal and put out at the end. In the conversation, after giving the participants time to explore and express their thoughts and ideas, I would ask them to imagine a place of safety that they could go to in order to be able to carry themselves forward. To close each conversation, since we had not lit a fire at the beginning, we used an imaginary bag in which everyone could leave anything they did not want to take with them, take something they felt they needed to carry them forward and/or leave something positive for others to take. This was also borne from my desire to develop and utilise a theatremaking approach that empowers the participants of each process.

As previously discussed, the idea behind creating conversations was to have a presentation that allows for two way communication between those present in an effort to allow them to interrogate the issues presented and voice themselves, hence the discussions at the end of each conversation. These were an opportunity to raise questions, concerns, observations, etc. We sat in a circle as much as possible in order for everyone to see and be seen, again trying to avoid favouring any one response over another. These discussions touched on a variety of topics, from what people had observed when the collaborator-performers shared their responses, to what my inspiration was in raising these issues and trying to create conversations, to issues facing young people in Botswana and Africa, to the issue of globalisation, to what it means to be a Motswana. This further allowed those present to voice themselves, returning to Lejowa's (2010) contention with the dangers of not creating space for different

identities to be part of the discourses that pertain to them. This was particularly evident in the discussion about the interaction between 'In-flux' and 'A prayer of worth'.

The interaction began as a poetic movement sequence when the collaborator-performers met at one of the mirrors, but each time this encounter occurred it became increasingly frenzied as a struggle between the two, with the collaborator-performer from 'A prayer of worth' struggling to free herself from her counterpart, insisting that is not who she is. By the time of the third conversation this struggle led some of the other participants to conclude that she was being raped. This was a shock to her, as she said she was fighting because she felt trapped in the labels presented by the sheet, which was still wrapped around her during the encounter, and was trying to break free from that whereas it felt like 'In-flux' was trying to keep her there. At the same time, he responded that he was trying to find himself as a black woman, and her presence at the mirror presented another aspect of enquiry for him, which is what led him to interact with her. These responses challenged our ways of seeing in the sense of gender, once again raising the question of what a woman is, touching on Butler's theory of gender as performance. This further challenged our thought processes as observers of that interaction by highlighting a bias towards binaries and categorisations, in this case male/female, abuser/victim. Had we not had this discussion, creating a space for everyone to share their thoughts, the female collaborator-performer would have been posited as the victim of a more powerful subject, whereas having the discussion moved us away from pursuing an ordered way of seeing and created other possibilities for us to consider.

One of the reasons I chose to move away from the role of the director, as the author of a theatre work, and towards conversations was to create space for multiple perspectives in the creative process rather than directing other people's interpretations of what has been presented. This is also what has moved me away from the idea of re-ordering the sign systems of the theatre because I feel that order promotes the view of ideas as either right or wrong, thus limiting the possibilities of interpretations. This limitation of ideas is one way of negating multiplicity and difference, rather than highlighting and celebrating it. Allowing individual responses to exist in the space, as well as reconfiguring the performance space into a site of response, was a way to highlight the experiential aspect of theatre rather than positing it as a text to be read. By so doing I sought not to appeal to the logic and ordered thought processes of each individual, but rather to their instincts as it is the concept of order and logic that often results in either/or perspectives.

The third conversation highlighted one of the key findings of this process, which is that the conversation can never really be complete. In the first two conversations, which were almost entirely attended by high school students, our discussions were very short. This may have been because the participants had not yet explored these issues and were still processing their experiences and responses. It may also have been because the audiences were smaller; each had ten or less people. In the third conversation however, some participants from the previous conversations returned, bringing with them a larger group of people. In addition, the age range expanded to include people in their twenties, thirties and forties. I think this broadened the scope of individual experiences, and thus responses to the issue, resulting in a longer discussion at the end of the conversation. This allowed us to share our ideas on issues of race, gender, sexuality, nationality and culture, with a particular focus on the ways in which our cultural identities have been affected by popular culture. Part of my desire to develop a theatremaking approach for myself was based on the feeling that theatre, as a construct of Western culture, is inherited. Although we cannot change the past, we can determine its influence on our present, giving us an opportunity to create systems that empower us rather than trying to fit ourselves into systems of power that do not acknowledge and accommodate our difference. I believe that part of the reason why there is still so much marginalisation and subjugation is because, as a society, we have not yet created systems that reflect our diversity as people, and perhaps we are unwilling to do so. As a theatremaker, I have sought to re-present subjugated identities in an effort to use performance to begin to dismantle existing systems of power in order to reflect contemporary society, which is marked by diversity and thus a multiplicity of experiences. Creating a thirdspace is about creating a space that acknowledges, accommodates and celebrates this multiplicity and is always open to new possibilities and new experiences borne from our constantly shifting identities.

Going back to Althusser's definitions of the subject, this process has been about exploring how we are subjected to systems of power and creating a space where we can begin to reclaim power and locate ourselves as subjects with agency. Althusser's (1984) definitions of the subject are based on the idea that ISAs are used to direct people's thoughts in a way that encourages loyalty to existing systems of power, thus interpolating them in maintaining a status quo that does not necessarily favour them (6). This supports Giroux's call for the creation of new languages to challenge these systems of power. Creating conversations to allow room for multiple voices in the space is a way of allowing people to voice themselves in their own way, and thus encourage new ways of seeing themselves and their worlds. This was best expressed by the collaborator-performer of 'Find me (Black) woman', who

described her journey as a process of trying to find herself within people's expectations as well as within her own expectations, which is what led to the response of being lost (Disele et al, 2012). In using this process to challenge our own thought processes I was trying to create a space in which we question how the way we think is determined by our backgrounds – social, educational, religious, political, etc. – all of which are ordered by pre-existing ideologies which we were not part of creating but have been part of upholding. The process of re-presenting is thus an attempt to provide a space for the creation of our own ideologies, formulating an understanding of the world based on our own, real experiences and assuming roles of agency in our lived experiences.

Having been so heavily influenced by Grotowski (1968), I originally thought that these conversations should focus on the use of the performer's resources, their voice and body. However, coming into the process of *Unskin Me*, I felt that the conversation should allow my co-creators to voice themselves using all the methods available to them, hence the process of allowing them each to choose modes of expression that best suited them. This was in an effort to allow them to bring their various selves into the process, and thus the conversation. This meant a move away from focusing solely on the collaborator-performer's body and incorporating other arts such as photography, poetry, music and live video, making the conversation a form of live art. I believe that this was born out of using physical theatre as an approach to theatremaking. The resistance of physical theatre to easy definition allows for a continual rethinking of what theatre performance is or can be. It thus operates in thirdspace in the imagined sense by encouraging critical awareness of the way that we create performance. The use of multimedia is not new in theatre performance. I believe that this is a result of the multiplicity it lends to performance work, thus creating the opportunity for new ways of seeing and delimiting the possibilities available. I believe that this allows for the creation of a thirdspace in the real sense as it allows for the reconfiguring of existing spaces into new spaces, thus breaking down the boundaries that maintain binary oppositions.

Ke tlaa fetsa ka gore (In Conclusion):

So far I have been intimidated. Before I didn't understand why I felt so unsure, I thought it was a lack of confidence because I'm not an experienced director, and now I am an inexperienced director trying to break away from convention, trying to do things differently. I now realise that I was intimidated by the power of emotions, thoughts and ideas entering the space. How do you take someone's innermost thoughts, their feelings and lay them bare for strangers to see? There seems to be some cruelty required in that, but I'm not looking for cruelty I'm looking for honesty and openness, to whatever extent the respondent feels comfortable sharing. It's a conversation, sometimes people will feel compelled to bare their souls, sometimes they'll only want to share a little bit and other times they won't want to speak at all, and that's ok – to each their own.

In the past year I have embarked on a journey to develop a theatremaking approach that would allow me not only to challenge, but to break down the boundaries that perpetuate binary oppositions. In so doing, I have focused on re-presenting black women through performance by creating a space in which they can voice themselves and assume agency as subjects rather than being subjected to existing systems of power, particularly in Botswana.

I cannot say that I have re-presented black women as that would imply that I have completed the process, which is not the case. The process of *Unskin Me* has made me realise that the process of re-presentation is a continuous one, whose strength lies more in the process than in the final conversation. As such, I have developed an approach to theatremaking that is both a process of creating work and a process of interrogating and shifting the issues that affect the societies I inhabit. A key aspect of this interrogation has been highlighting and celebrating difference by creating a space in which multiple voices can exist, allowing for different perspectives. However, seeking to highlight and celebrate multiplicity has made me more aware of the multi-layered nature of subjugation. The process of re-presentation requires the interrogation of these layers, something which cannot be done in one conversation because each conversation is based on the individual responses of its participants.

In creating a thirdspace in which this process can take place, in the real and imagined sense, I believe that the performance space needs to be reconfigured rather than re-organised in order to move away from ordered thought and logic. That is to say, I believe that reconfiguring the performance space

according to the issues that are being interrogated allows for 'both/and logic' rather than 'either/or logic', thus breaking out of the polarities that result in marginalisation. Further, in reconfiguring the space I have found that creating a site of response allows for the creation of a thirdspace as it accommodates the voices and perspectives of multiple identities without favouring one at the expense of another. In so doing, the space encourages and becomes open to new explorations, new responses, new voices and is thus constantly shifting. This creates a space for continued conversation, thus allowing for new insights and avoiding new categorisations that may result in subjugation. The site of response thus negates binary oppositions as it allows those inhabiting it to assume subject positions alongside one another rather than in opposition to one another.

Since part of creating conversations involves engaging the audience in the process, I have sought to find ways of introducing the audience to each conversation. In *Unskin Me* I did this by explaining the process to the audience before they entered the performance space. While I am happy that this introduction allowed the audiences to become part of the conversation, I also feel that there is room to explore other ways of doing so that are drawn from the process. For example, in hindsight I now wonder what effect it would have had to have the audience create a soundscape of their own before entering the space, or building a fire with everyone before the collaborator-performers shared their responses, in keeping with the idea of having everyone in the space become both performer and audience at the same time. I believe this kind of engagement would further challenge a linear narrative structure because looking at the way the conversations were divided I now realise that they actually echoed the classic narrative of beginning, middle and end: the individual aspects of the conversation moved away from linearity, not the overall conversation. The process is thus a continuous one of experimenting with structure, responding to the voices in the space and ways of sharing those voices with others coming into the space.

Previously I believed that further projects would also need to explore the use of existing texts in the process of re-presenting. However, having been through the process of *Unskin Me*, I have mixed feelings about this because of the strength I have found in locating the conversation in the individual responses of the participants of each conversation. Drawing on the idea of live art, I believe that there is room, and perhaps even a need, to expand the idea of existing texts to go beyond scripts and include, for example, cultural symbols, media and images of the time, music and books, as these mediate our lived experiences and often form part of the way we define ourselves, our worlds and those around us.

I am reluctant to say that I have developed a theatremaking approach for myself but will rather say I have a direction to follow that I feel will allow me to continue to interrogate and shift representations, to re-present, subjugated identities. So far this has meant taking the role of a facilitator-director to elicit responses from my collaborators, both audience and performers, to allow those involved to interrogate their own ideas as well as their lived experiences and how these are mediated by the systems of power in which they exist; the use of various modes of expression to create new languages through which these responses can be shared; reconfiguring the performance space into a site of response to allow for the creation of a space that accommodates the responses of those involved in the process as well as incorporating methods through which to empower the participants such as the use of ritual (building the fire, taking or leaving things in the bag, bringing music). Neither can I say that I have re-presented black women; rather I have begun a process of re-presentation which requires an interrogation of the multiple levels of subjugation and thus creates an opportunity to access many voices.

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