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They were silent: investigating the potential shamanic role of a contemporary theatre performer and how ritual and theatre can be synergized

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1) INTRODUCTION

Allow me to begin by introducing myself in the following manner:

> Ke Motaung wa Ramokhele le kolokotoane la makobasia
> Ke letotoi, le sia ruma
> Etlare ha ke ja ho thehe meriti e moholo le e menngane ya diotloana
> Ha ke ja ha ke gadimane, ke gadima ntweng
> Ke motho wa ha Mmathulo (Thulo 2009)

The above-written stanza is a brief account of my cultural totem, which constitutes the basis of my identity as a black South African male of Sotho origin. I am introducing this Research Report in such a way because its primary basis majorly lies in the expression and exploration of my identity and theatre practice. *They Were Silent*, which is the creative project that constitutes this study's research, is based on the exploration of my journey since discovering that I have the ancestral calling to become a Sangoma (Southern African Shaman). Since I have briefly mentioned what this study's creative project was based on, let me continue this introduction by elaborating on its background, aim and rationale.

> …. Respected Ones, I am a true son of this land. In me flows the blood of two of the most ancient races of Africa – and also of mankind – the Bantu and the Bushmen. Behind me is a long line of witchdoctors stretching far back into the mists of time, and I would be the very last to bare the sacred body of Africa to the scorn and ridicule of this robot-like world. (Mutwa 1998:691)

Credo Mutwa is a prominent Southern African shaman who has written about subjects ranging from the history of humankind to South African pre-democracy politics. His assertion is borrowed to further describe who I am. Within my complex conglomeration of identities, I am a Sangoma or Southern African shaman, theatre practitioner (actor,

director and theatre maker) and postgraduate student. This Research Report is an extrapolation of the complex, yet rewarding journey of my research, which finds its pulse and background in my desire to find a way to merge my spiritual and theatre making practices. Conducting this research has been an attempt to understand myself as a human being whose identity is multifaceted. I began the research process with the intention and hope to mediate my state of liminality; itself characterized by my multifaceted identity- in particular my roles as Sangoma (shaman) and theatre practitioner. In describing liminality, Victor Turner, a cultural anthropologists whose work partly focused on the study of ritual, states that‘‘…, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon’’ (Turner 2004:80). Turner's writings on liminality provide an understanding of how and why liminality is an integral aspect of ritual. This study engages with Turner's notion of liminality both in the context of its creative project (devising, presentation and analysis and/or reflection) and in the nature of my role during the study.

My experience of pursuing a Masters degree has been highly characterized by a continuous liminal state of being. The liminal nature of my life this year is further described by the words of Tupac Shakur, a successful black American/ African American rap music artist. Shakur's life journey resonates with mine because of its liminal characteristic. A study of this artist's life and an analysis or critique of the content found in his literary work are proof of his life's liminal characteristic. His words that encapsulate my state of being during the course of my Masters studies and conducting

this research are found in his poem entitled *In the Depths of Solitude: Dedicated 2Me*, which reads:

> I exist in the depths of solitude
> pondering my true goal
> Trying 2 find peace of mind
> and still preserve my soul
> CONSTANTLY yearning 2 be accepted
> and from all receive respect
> Never compromising but sometimes risky
> and that is my only regret
> A young heart with an old soul
> how can there be peace
> How can I be in the depths of solitude
> when there R 2 inside of me
> This Duo within me causes
> the perfect opportunity
> 2 learn and live twice as fast
> as those who accept simplicity (Shakur 2006: 5)

Shakur's expression finds resonance with me because the process of conducting this research, including the entirety of my educational experience as a Masters student, has placed me in the centre of life's turbulences. I experienced an intense struggle to find peace within ''[My] young heart with an old soul'' throughout my Masters studies due to my uneasy liminal state of being. The cornerstone of my aged soul comes from my ancestral heritage, which has translated itself into my role of being a Sangoma or Southern African shaman. Being a shaman, in basic and general terms, means that I have been bestowed with the spiritual gift of using the power that comes from my ancestral spirits for the purposes of healing. It means that I am an embodiment of an ancient genealogy that has the ability to interact and engage with universal energies in different ways and contexts. These energies can be translated into the natural resources, for example soil, water, plants and the like, which are found on earth. Being a shaman,

theatre practitioner and scholar, has taken my persona through psychological, spiritual, emotional, ideological and artistic tensions of varying degrees and qualities.

Within me, lives not a 'Duo' that Shakur refers to, but forces and spirits that exceed a quartet. The journey of pursuing a Masters degree and conducting this research actualized a dialogue and facilitated the creation of what has now become a harmonious relationship amongst these forces and spirits. The initial facilitation of the harmonious relationship being referred to here came through the staging of an autobiographical theatrical offering entitled *They Were Silent*. This work was a solo performance, which I co-created and performed. Its creation resulted from a collaborative process with Jessica Lejowa, who is my friend and colleague from Botswana. Lejowa played the role of facilitating the creation and creative-framing process of the work to the point where it was ready to be shared with a theatre audience. The 2008 Wits University Drama for Life Festival provided a platform on which we presented our theatrical offering.

Essentially, *They Were Silent* was an expression of my journey since discovering that I have the ancestral calling. It captured some of my innermost conflicts brought about by my realization of being called by my ancestral spirits. This work was a means through which I could practice self-reflexivity as a performer and theatre-maker, while engaging with my shamanistic self. Regarding classification in terms of theatrical form and/or genre, *They Were Silent* rested on the merger zone between ritual and theatre performance. The merger zone being referred to is not a tangible location, or a definitive element. Rather, it is a term I use to refer to the liminal quality that characterised *They Were Silent*, especially regarding its form. Thus, *They Were Silent* was ''betwixt and

between'' (Turner 2004:79) ritual and theatre performance. Adrienne Sichel, a prominent South African theatre critic who wrote for The Star newspaper, stated that *They Were Silent* ''…..redefine[d] the parameters of African and theatrical ritual'' (Sichel 2008:10). In addition to Sichel's interpretation of my offering with Lejowa, Sara Matchett, who is my Masters Research Report Supervisor, engaged me in a brief conversation after watching the performance piece. Our conversation laid the foundation for me to consider reworking the performance piece as the creative project of my Maters Research Report. Days passed after our conversation until I was confronted by the impulse to work on *They Were Silent* as the creative project that would constitute the research that this Research Report is based on. Making the decision to change my research topic was preceded by a phase during which ''I exist[ed] in the depths of solitude [;] pondering my true goal…'' (Shakur 2006:5). The aftermath of this phase led to a reframing of my initial Research Report Proposal, which led to the reworking and performance of *They Were Silent* for the purpose of conducting the research detailed in this Research Report.

My experiential landscape, as articulated thus far, seeks to picture the textured terrain rooting this research. Conducting this research through the devising and performance of *They Were Silent* enabled me to create the type of theatre that speaks to me, provides a container for the expression of my multi-faceted identity, extend my experiential training in the area of practice as research and contribute to the body of work that synergizes ritual performance with contemporary theatre practice.

In addition to what I have stated as this Research Report's background, was my quest to reach a comprehension of the potential shamanic characteristics of a performer within the context of contemporary theatre performance. Plowing a way to reach such a comprehension was also driven by the impulse to arrive at a point of identifying a way or ways in which ritual and theatre can have a contextualized interplay. My motivation for undertaking the enquiries stipulated by this Report's title, particularly with reference to synergizing ritual and theatre performance, stems from my political, ideological, humanistic (spiritual and artistic) urge to propose a means of addressing one of South Africa's societal challenges created by postmodernism, in other words societal fragmentation. Alluding to this fragmentation, Steven Connor's engagement with Baudrillard's postmodernism theory makes a point that ''…- the representations of the social – strive to mask the fact of an emptiness, the masses' refusal to *be* the social in the ways required of them by opinion polls, referenda and revolutionary movements'' (Connor 1989:59). The effects of postmodernism within our South African society have yielded different outcomes. One of the outcomes of postmodernism in South Africa and some other parts of the world, particularly with reference to arts and culture, is illustrated by the emergence of hybrid art forms. An example of this is *21st Century Animal* (2008), which was a contemporary dance theatre production choreographed and devised by Julia Raynham and her cast (Mpho Masilela and Ntombi Gasa). This collaborative dance theatre work fused contemporary performance elements with indigenous South African ritual performance elements. This production and those similar to it in terms of their merger of ritual and theatre performance, raise questions relating to the place of ritual in theatre and the merger of ritual and theatre to some extent. This study's creative project

found its creative inspiration from such theatre productions and its research questions partly stem from my need to explore possible explanations related to the questions that such works pose.

It is incorrect to suggest that the fore-mentioned societal fragmentation can only be attributed to the current postmodern condition, which some developing countries like South Africa have not been able to deter. Our country's history of colonialism and prolonged socio-political fragmentation during apartheid, including the present, is arguably one of the causes of this continued societal fragmentation.

Writing in relation to the influence of western imperialism on South Africa's previous indigenous way of life and forms of cultural expression, Peter Larlham states that:

> Increasingly, the traditional way of life has broken down under the pressure of Western civilization. This breakdown, together with other political, social and economic factors, has resulted in the gradual dissolution of the family unit-the nucleus of traditional society-and a vacillation between the old and new ways of life (Larlham 1985: xvii).

The South African historical period that Larlham refers to could be considered as the seed of social fragmentation in South Africa. Furthermore, his book, *Black Theatre, Dance and Ritual in South Africa* (1985) is a contribution towards the literature that provides a lens into how some South African indigenous forms of cultural expression such as the traditional Zulu rites, ceremonies and contemporary folk dance evolved since South Africa's colonial and apartheid periods. The relevance of his work for this study is found in how it demonstrates the hybridization process of some black South African rituals

(forms of cultural expression) with some Western influences, for example in terms of technology and aesthetics. This Research Report shows how ritual and theatre can merge based on the findings derived from the devising, performance and post-performance processes of *They Were Silent*. Larlham's work also engages with the nature of black urban culture as a result of its Western influences during South Africa's apartheid era.

Larlham continues:

> Western civilization, with its accompanying educational and religious institutions and technological expertise, has permeated the lives of all indigenous African tribes in South Africa, even in the most isolated rural areas. In urban areas, where many Black South Africans adhere to a Western lifestyle, traditional ceremonies and rites are seldom practiced. Indeed, many Blacks reared in urban areas have little knowledge of the traditional way of life and of the ceremonies and rites, the song and dance that were an integral part of tribal life before the arrival of the White settlers. (Larlham 1985: xvii)

Different to Larlham's work, this study was conducted within the context of a democratic era in South Africa. The premise held by this study considers the country's citizens across the board in terms of its referral to a South African society. This is intentional because the study's creative project (*They Were Silent*) partly aimed to address South Africa's societal fragmentation based on racial differences or residential locations in South Africa, in that it aimed to create a sense of social unification through an aspect of ritual performance, which Victor Turner (1982) coined as *communitas*. Based on my reading of Turner, *communitas* refers to a shared experience amongst a group of people who are participants of a ritual performance. Such a shared experience transcends differences that distinguish individuals constituting a particular group. Examples of these differences are gender, culture, language, social status, religious denomination or

inclination, race and ethnicity. *Communitas* is facilitated by ritual performance because it actualizes itself within the zone of liminality that is inherent within ritual (Turner 1982:44). Ritual has the potential of facilitating a shared experience amongst its participants while allowing each participant's experience to be relative. This Report's section entitled Performance expands on communitas by demonstrating how ritual facilitates communitas.

Investigating how theatre and ritual can be synergized through a creative project that also focused its enquiries on the potential shamanic nature of a contemporary theatre performer, defines this study's aim. As indicated earlier, *They Were Silent* constitutes this study's creative project. It is important to bring clarity to the fact that *They Were Silent*, as it was performed during the 2008 Drama for Life festival, did not fulfill the function of being this study's creative project. It was only after consultation with my supervisor that I became aware of the possibility of reworking it for the purposes of this study. This means that I, together with Jessica Lejowa, reassembled and engaged with our initial offering from a new perspective, which was directed by the specific investigations related to what this study aimed to discover. These investigations are encapsulated by this study's research questions that are specified later in this introduction.

This study's research paradigm of practice as research created room for me as a researcher, together with my co-researchers namely Jessica Lejowa and Lerato Sekele (my co-performer during *They Were Silent*), to travel unknown territories guided by its research questions. The devising, performance and post-performance phases of this study's creative project, were focused on grappling with its research questions in terms of

seeking answers that may satisfy those questions. Embarking on the creative project was a way of practically realizing the merger possibilities of ritual and theatre. Specifically Victor Turner (1982) and Richard Schechner (1993), who is a multi-published academic and theorist, editor of *The Drama Review* and Professor of Performance Studies at New York University's Tisch School of Arts, are the primary theorists whose theories on ritual and performance are constituents of this study's theoretical underpinnings.

Furthermore, the process of devising and presenting the creative project shed light on the literature that holds the view of a theatre performer as shaman. The primary source of such literature, particularly in the context of this study, is Schechner's *Environmental Theatre* (1973:174-226), part of which theorizes about the parallels between a shaman and performer. Jerzy Grotowski's performance practice has also provided some of the theory that informed this study's creative project. Grotowski is an acclaimed Polish theatre maker, director and contemporary performance researcher whose work with the Laboratory Theatre (his theatre company) offered a reconsideration of contemporary theatre and performance in the 20th century. Specifically, Grotowski's concept of ***Total Act***, which is briefly engaged with later in this Report, provided the ideological and/or theoretical basis for the performance mode employed in *They Were Silent*.

Schechner in *Environmental Theatre* draws from some of his work experiences with the Performance group, which is his former theatre company. The ritual-based theatre performances that Schechner's company produced, including some theatre productions produced by Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook and other theatre practitioners whose work

synergized ritual and theatre, provide evidence for the existence of such theatre works worldwide, which partly gave this study impetus.

The South African theatre repertoire, particularly within the post-apartheid context, is inclusive of ritual-based theatre productions. South Africa's situation regarding ritual as a form of cultural expression is interesting because in some cases indigenous South African forms of cultural expression, for example sacred ritual performances, are used as a means of exhibiting South African arts and culture to international and local tourists. This happens in cases such as tourist attraction sites like the Basotho Cultural Village in Qwa-Qwa, which is situated in South Africa's Free State province nearby Maseru (Lesotho's capital city). In other instances, elements of ritual performances are framed for theatrical presentations that are mainly offered for the consumption of mainstream theatre audiences during theatre performance platforms such as the FNB (First National Bank) Dance Umbrella and Grahamstown National Arts Festival. Examples of such performances are *Esuthwini* directed by Oscar Motsikoe (2005 National Arts Festival Production based on the Zulu initiation rite of a boy's attainment of manhood); *Ten Bush* directed by Mncedisi Shabangu (2008 National Arts Festival Production based on a true story about witchcraft in South Africa's Mpumalanga Province settlement of Ten Bush); and *It's hectic but pointless 2…* choreographed by Ntsane Mopeli (2008 FNB Dance Umbrella that gave expression to an individual's conflict arising from being called by one's ancestors to become a Sangoma while being ignorant to the ancestral calling). Theatre productions of this nature play a role in contributing towards the body of work that fuses ritual with contemporary theatre performance. The emergence of such

performances could relate to Schechner's prediction that ''… [ritual or] efficacious theatres are on the upswing and will dominate the theatrical world within the next twenty years'' (Schechner 1976:210). This study's creative project also intended to contribute to the existing South African theatre repertoire that fuses ritual and contemporary theatre performance. This study aims to make an academic contribution through this Research Report, which provides an analysis and reflection of its creative project in relation to its theoretical underpinnings and research questions. Although this Research Report will be housed in the University of the Witwatersrand's library, it will also be housed in the Wits-GTZ (German Technical Corporation) Drama for Life Resource Centre where it will be more accessible to parties who are not officially part of the Wits University community.

They Were Silent was devised and performed while being conscious of South African theatre productions such as Brett Bailey's (a South African theatre practitioner) *Ipi Zombie*, which has been surrounded with controversies related to ethical considerations that arise when theatre blurs the boundaries between sacred ritual performance and contemporary theatre performance. The controversies being referred to were related to concerns about cultural and spiritual practice misappropriation since Bailey, who is not a Sangoma, worked with Sangomas who performed some sacred rituals that are only practiced by Sangomas. My understanding is that the ritual-based theatre productions created by practitioners such as Brett Bailey and Vincent Mantsoe (an internationally acclaimed choreographer and dance of South African origin whose performance practice occasionally employs ritual performance and the performance mode of trance) are not only distinguished by their forms, in other words dance and ritual theatre, but by their

contents, contexts and intentions. This study's creative project broadly engages with these three issues that are related to theatre practice without focusing on identifying how similar or different it is from theatre productions created by Mantsoe or Bailey, but with the intention of answering the following questions, which constitute this study's research questions. These are:

- How can ritual performance and contemporary theatre performance be synergized?
- What characterizes a contemporary theatre performer as shaman?
- Can communitas, as facilitated by a contemporary ritual-based theatre performance presented for a modern South African theatre audience, address societal fragmentation?

Grappling with these questions is necessary because these questions' answers might provide a theoretical and conceptual framework for the South African theatre repertoire that fuses ritual and theatre. Additionally, bringing theoretical and practical clarity to the potential shamanic characteristics of a contemporary theatre performer could lead to a consideration of contemporary performance from an alternative perspective, specifically in the South and Southern African contexts of theatre performance ideologies and practice. This study seeks to discover the potential shamanic characteristics of a contemporary performer, which does not mean that all contemporary performers have shamanic characteristics. Instead its enquiry aims to identify characteristics that speak to the shamanic nature of a contemporary

performer. The findings revealed by *They Were Silent*'s devising, performance and post-performance phases, together with this study's theories, are the means employed to grapple with the above-mentioned research questions.

The findings are based on my experiences of this study's research process, *They Were Silent*'s written reflections provided by myself and audio-recorded interviews I conducted with some audience members who witnessed one of the performances of *They Were Silent*. These findings are appropriately engaged with throughout this Report's remaining sections.

2) THEORATICAL FRAMEWORK

This study's theoretical framework is embedded in engaging with particular theories of ritual and theatre performance and the potential shamanic nature of a theatre performer. The specific primary theories grounding this study have been mentioned afore. The process of conducting this research, in other words the devising, performance and post-performance phases, has constantly made me think about the challenging question of whether theory or practice comes first within the context of conducting research when employing the research paradigm and methodology of practice as research. It will be quite ambitious to thoroughly engage with this question because of the limited scope of this Report. Thus, I cannot provide a clear-cut answer to such a question. However, the experience gained from undertaking this study has shown me that practice and theory are dependent entities whose interplay during the process of conducting research could depend on the researcher's intentions, ideology and approach (not necessarily methodology). This assertion is based on my experience. It refers to some research cases whereby a researcher employs the practice as research methodology in the form of a creative project. In my case, I conducted this study based on my grounded understanding of its theoretical underpinnings, which was acquired during this study's proposal-writing phase. My intentions, while conducting the research, were guided by the research questions. My approach was based on my ideology of trusting that my understanding of theory would somehow translate itself into the creative research (*They Were Silent*). Therefore, I did not actively engage with this study's theories during the devising, performance and post-performance phases of *They Were Silent*. As this Report will reveal, my approach of conducting this research is characterized by a grounded

understanding of theory and trust in the creative process's interplay with theory. Such an interplay, as it happened in my case, was not systematically planned, but was realized in different ways and at different stages of my research. This study's initial phases, particularly the proposal-writing phase and first session of *They Were Silent*'s devising phase, were dominated by my direct engagement with this study's theories. As a researcher, I did not engage with theory since the days following the first session of devising *They Were Silent* until the completion of the post-performance phase. However, the study's theories did influence the decisions that were taken during the devising and performance phases. The point being made here, to answer the question that led to this discussion, is that theory and practice are somehow co-dependent in the context of conducting academic research when employing practice as research in the form of a creative project.

The research questions mentioned in this Report's preceding section were, as mentioned, engaged with through a theory-influenced practice. As this study's creative project, *They Were Silent* investigated how ritual and theatre can merge and if ritual performance can facilitate communitas amongst its participants. Defining ritual, as a 'proper' starting point in the context of discussing theory, is something that this study cannot satisfy because providing a definition of ritual is not the core subject matter based on its research questions. However, one cannot deny the fact that ritual is majorly related to this study, particularly because of the kind of theatre performance that *They Were Silent* was.

There are various definitions of ritual, which are reflective of the areas of professional specialization and ideologies of scholars who have investigated and written on ritual both as a concept and subject. One of the advantages of conducting research is that it demands and affords one the opportunity to be selective about the theories that would best assist one to successfully complete their research. Based on my life experiences, being a Sangoma (Southern African shaman) and for the purposes of this study, I offer this definition:

> Ritual is the most ancient way of binding a community together in a close relationship with Spirit. It is a way of communicating with forms of consciousness and beings from countless worlds. It has been one of the most practical and efficient ways to stimulate the safe healing required by both the individual and the community. Ritual has always been the way of life of the spiritual person because it is a tool to maintain the delicate balance between body and soul. [Ritual] is the gathering with others in order to feel Spirit's call, to express spontaneously and publicly whatever emotion needs to be expressed, to create, in concert with others, an unrehearsed and deeply moving response to Spirit, and to feel the presence of the community, including the ancestors, throughout the experience. (Somè 1998: 141&143)

Somè, is a West African (Burkina Faso) herbalist who is also an academic based in Oakland California (Somè 1998). His definition is very appropriate and useful for this study because of its demonstration of the relation between ritual, communal and individual and interaction with unseen forces, in other words ancestors and what he terms as Spirit. This Report demonstrates why it employs Somè's definition in relation to *They Were Silent*. This demonstration will take place within the body of the section following the current one. What is more interesting in relation to theory is the similarities I have found regarding Somè and Turner's claims. Turner's thoughts about the definition of

ritual have shifted over the course of his career as an anthropologist. The basic similarity that I have found between his definition and Somè's is expressed by his assertion that:

> Many definitions of ritual contain the notion of *depth*, but few of *infinite* depth. In the terminology I favor, such definitions are concerned with the finite structural depth, not with the infinite ''antistructural'' depth….I do not think such formulations can be applied with equal cogency to ritual. For ritual, as I have said, does not portray a dualistic, almost Manichean, struggle between order and void, cosmos and chaos, formed and indeterminate, with the former always triumphing in the end. [Ritual] is, quintessentially, a time and place lodged between all times and spaces defined and governed in any specific biocultural ecosystem (Turner 1982: 82&84).

Regarding this, Turner and Somè's definitions concur on the level of their direct and indirect referral to ritual's aspect of the merger of multiple realms of reality (or consciousness), which constitutes their relevance as theoretical lenses of *They Were Silent*. Their relevance lay in the fact that they have provided a theoretical explanation as to how *They Were Silent* brought the world of the seen, in other words the visible performance in a theatre and the world of the unseen, in other words the spirit world or the world of the ancestors, together. As one of the performers of *They Were Silent* and as a Sangoma, I was aware of the co-existence of these worlds or realms of reality. Some audience accounts gave testimony to the existence of these two worlds. While responding to question of what *They Were Silent* was about Mr. Tshepiso Konopi, who is staff member within the Division of Dramatic Art at the University of the Witwatersrand, said that:

…….and again it was more about the communication with the unseen of the world, you know. To really test our perception, to see if we can push ourselves to see beyond the frequency of the now, you know. I think that's what the piece, for me, was attempting to communicate. (Konopi 2009)

Turner's text (1982), refers to the ''antistructural'' nature of ritual. I understand his term as one that refers to the intangible and unplanned experience that is experienced by participants of a ritual performance. It also refers to ritual being characterized by how it orders and affects human behavior outside the norms governed by day to day ordinary human behavior. To clarify this further, Schechner states that ''Ritual and play lead people into a 'second reality', separate from ordinary life. This reality is one where people can become selves other than their daily selves'' (Schechner 2006:52). The audiences of *They Were Silent* were placed outside the context of their daily lives, participated in the ritual of washing their hands before entering the performance space and singing ''in concert with others'' (Somè 98: 141) during the performance, thus being temporarily transformed and experiencing communitas.

Communitas is Turner's term referring to a communal or shared experience during a ritual performance. Amongst other questions, this study investigated whether communitas, as facilitated by a contemporary ritual-based theatre performance presented for a modern South African theatre audience, could address societal fragmentation? Findings related to this question are more engaged with later in this Report. Turner's

notion of communitas influenced the way in which *They Were Silent* was devised and presented or performed in a sense that we (I, Jessica Lejowa and Lerato Sekele) had to find a way in which our project created a platform for our audiences to have a shared experience. Our decision to ask the audience to wash their hands before entering the performance space was partly based on creating a shared experience for audiences. It was also a result of our engagement with the question of how we wanted to prepare our audiences in participating with our performance.

Turner's theory, found in *From Ritual To Theatre: The Human Seriousness Of Play* (1982), makes reference to Richard Schechner's social drama model and Arnold Van Gennep's (a Western scholar whose research undertakings focused on rites of passage) theory of rites of passage, amongst other scholarly works. My understanding is that these scholars share the commonality of theorizing ritual within the broader framework of social composition. Part of their theories looks at ritual performances as a form of cultural expression that has elements of Western drama hence their regard for ritual as social drama (Turner 1982 & Schechner 1976). Turner's inclination to and divergence from Schechner' model is articulated by him when he states that ''This model, though effective, is somewhat equilibrist in its implications for my taste, and suggests cyclical rather than linear movements. But it has merit of pointing up the dynamical relation between social drama and expressive cultural genres'' (Turner 1982: 74).

Despite this difference in ways of theorizing ritual, both Turner and Schechner's theories of ritual performance concur in terms of eliciting the relationships between ritual and

(Western) theatre. This study finds relevance in these theories because its creative project aimed to synergize ritual and contemporary theatre performance. The term contemporary, as it is used throughout this Report, does not mean 'Western'. Instead, it is used to refer to the current postmodern era, an era during which this study emanates and was conducted.

The realization of synergizing ritual and theatre is motivated by Turner's assertion that ''Ritual is, in its most typical cross-cultural expressions, a synchronization of many performance genres …'' (Turner 1982: 75). *They Were Silent* is in agreement with Turner because some of its ritual aspects were singing and dancing. The songs that were sung during the performance were cross-cultural because one of them was a Southern Sotho Sangoma song while the other was a Zulu Sangoma song. These songs also point to the cross-cultural nature of the spiritual practice of being a Sangoma since some Sotho Sangomas, like I am, sing Zulu, Xhosa and Tsonga songs and adhere to practices that are shared by Sangomas who are not necessarily Sotho. The dances that were performed during *They Were Silent* ranged from Pantsula (black urban dance that originated in the 1970s in South Africa), a hybrid of Xhosa and Sotho Sangoma dances and natural movements that were based on my physical, emotional and spiritual impulses.

As mentioned earlier, most of this study's theoretical underpinnings of ritual reveal that there are different definitions and perspectives of ritual. In asserting this claim, Schechner makes the point that:

> To ethologists and neurologists ritual is central both to behaviour and to brain structure/function. But Turner locates ritual ‘‘betwixt-and-between,’’ in cultural creases and margins, making it more like play than anything else… This difference is a version of an old, insoluble argument between determinists and those who assert that humans are free to make their own destinies. (Schechner 1993:256)

Essentially, two factors can be deduced regarding ritual theory and the relationship between ritual and theatre. Firstly, ritual theory has evolved overtime and been propagated by different schools of thought as mentioned by Schechner (ethologists, social anthropologists and theatre scholars). Secondly, the fore-mentioned scholastic projects, for example those by Turner (1982) and Schechner (1976 & 1993), do reach a consensus about the existence of similarities shared by ritual and theatre. Schechner argues for the similarities of ritual and theatre as follows:

> Any ritual can be lifted from its original setting and performed as theatre- just as any everyday event can be. This is possible because context, not fundamental structure, distinguishes ritual, entertainment, and ordinary life from each other... [Furthermore;] In all entertainment there is some efficacy and in all ritual there is some theatre. (Schechner & Schuman 1976: 218)

Schechner’s argument directly speaks to this study’s research question of how ritual performance and contemporary theatre can be synergized. Performing *They Were Silent* proved Schechner’s argument to be correct to some degree. Agreeing with Schechner lays in that part of the performance’s action included the performing of a sacred ritual on a theatre stage in front of a theatre audience. This ritual was drawn from the sacred ritual of what sometimes happens when somebody who has the ancestral calling accepts the calling and undergoes the process of being initiated as a Sangoma. Specifically, I performed the action of taking my clothes off, applying mud to my entire body, putting on sets of beads on my arms, calling upon my ancestral spirits and finally embarking on a

physical (visible/material) and spiritual (invisible/immaterial) journey while looking at the audience and singing a song that gave expression to my fears about the possibility of humanity perishing. Indeed, this is a sacred ritual that is only shared by people who are to be initiated as Sangomas. The performance of this sacred ritual and the entire piece was received in different ways by different audience members. Some audience members were totally appalled by *They Were Silent* due to their disagreement with its aspect of performing sacred rituals as a theatre performance. My response, during the *They Were Silent*'s Post-Performance Seminar (the initial University of the Witwatersrand Division of Dramatic Art's Postgraduate Seminar Series held on 08 March 2009) to the passionately expressed concerns about my performance of the above-mentioned sacred ritual was that the context and intentions of *They Were Silent* justified my performance of a sacred ritual. I, as mentioned during the seminar, believe that the context within which and manner in which *They Were Silent* was presented enabled us not to misappropriate the sacred rituals that formed part of its story. Furthermore, performing *They Were Silent* transgressed the binaries between ritual and theatre and resulted in a performance that had strong elements of both ritual and theatre. *They Were Silent* takes Schechner's argument a step further by positing that ritual and theatre do complement each other by virtue of their shared effects on people, but more importantly ritual and theatre can be but one entity. The distinguishing factors between ritual and theatre can be context, intention, structure and semiotics (signs and symbols), which are not necessarily indicators of the impossibility of ritual and theatre merging. I refuse to term the result of ritual and theatre performance merging (*They Were Silent*) because of the open-endedness needed when one devises and presents a theatrical offering. The term offering is used instead of

production because a production refers to a complete theatre performance product that is characterized by a closed and narrow structure. A theatrical offering, like *They Were Silent*, refers to theatre performance as an open-ended experience that is shared with an audience while affording audience members an opportunity to construct their individual narratives based on their relative experience of the offering. The ending of a theatrical offering depends on what each audience member decides as an ending. Thus, theatrical offerings are not products meant for consumption, but experiences to be shared with people (audiences).

Regarding the performance mode employed in *They Were Silent*, this Report draws from some of the discoveries made through my minor practice as research project, which investigated liminality in performance through Grotowski's notion of ***Total Act***. Essentially, this notion refers to a performer's state of investing himself/herself entirely to a theatre performance. ***Total Act*** is a mode of performance that is facilitated by a performer's rigorous research on his/her being, which requires total commitment to the research process and actual act of performance. The potential shamanic characteristics of a contemporary performer are also brought to the fore by ***Total Act*** as it is show by this Report within its section following this one.

Richard Schechner (1973: 175-226) in his work experiences with The Performance Group, which was a theatre company he established, provides some theoretical insights about the nature and role of a performer as shaman. Schechner posits various points on the subject of the shamanistic nature of a performer, which are partly useful for this

study. During his literary engagement with the subject, Schechner questions: ‘‘Is the performer a shaman? If so, how? If not, why not? If he [or she] is not a shaman, ought he [or she] to be one? If so, how?’’ (Schechner 1973: 187). In answering his questions, Schechner states that:

> A shaman is the transformer = the one who is transformed = the surrogate = the link = the one who connects different realms of reality = the one who facilitates change by embodying change = the one who by changing himself helps others change. The shaman is a professional transformer, and very much like the theatre performer. (Schechner 1973: 180)

Some findings derived from this study’s devising and performance phases are in agreement with Schechner’s views.

Based on my experience of being a Sangoma, I agree with the notion that ritual performance provides a context and container, for example in terms of intention and space within which a performer (shaman) undertakes his/her duties. This is similar to the contextualization function played by theatre in terms of being the space/environment within which a theatre performer can perform. Thus, this study illuminates the shamanic nature of a contemporary theatre performer through a dialogue provided by its theory and the experiential accounts emanating from the devising and performance process of the fore-mentioned creative project. Essentially, this study holds the view that a contemporary performer can be shamanic in their performance practice depending on their mode of performance, intentions and context of their performance. Thus, a contemporary theatre performer’s shamanic characteristics are not necessarily dependent

on whether he or she is a shaman outside the context of their (theatre) performance practice.

3) METHODOLOGY

This study employed qualitative research methodologies. As indicated thus far in the Report, practice as research is the research paradigm and methodology that this study was conducted by. To provide context, this section starts by an elaboration of practice as research as a methodology. This section continues by making reference to the devising and performance of *They Were Silent*. The material that is used in this section comprises of the reflections written by myself and an interview with Mr. Lebang Monnahela (a fourth year dramatic art student at the University of the Witwatersrand). This section also presents this study's findings in relation to its research questions. I am aware of the structural problems that the approach of including and articulating research findings within the body of this study's methodology section creates in relation to the requirements of proper academic narrative construction. My reasons for employing such a problematic and non-orthodox approach are not based on any disregard of the discipline of academic writing, but stem from my need to fully acquaint this Reports reader(s) with the true nature of how my research unfolded and how I have interpreted and realized the practice as research methodology and paradigm. As a theatre scholar and practitioner, I saw value in employing the above-mentioned research reporting approach mainly based on the intention to contribute to body of work that displays the various ways of the workings of practice as research, which is a relatively new academic research paradigm and methodology. Furthermore, this section generally lies short of sufficiently citing scholarly narratives that detail practice as research as a qualitative research methodology due to its infancy status within the context and scope of academic research. Such a shortcoming, particularly with reference to this Report, is also created by the fact that I

did not satisfactorily and rigorously engage with the most recent practice as research literature also due to my limited access to such literature at the time of conducting my research and writing this Report. It is for these reasons that I request this Report reader(s) to engage with this study's research methodology section and other sections, in a flexible yet robust manner that is required to appreciate this section's inherent structural and narrative problematics coupled with this study's subject matter.

Practice as research is a brainchild of the performance studies project (Bial 2004). This research paradigm is regarded as being radical in nature because of how it challenges orthodox research methodologies. The methodologies I am referring to here are those that do not regard practice as a valid means of research and create binaries between theory and practice while also distancing the researcher from his/her research participants. The radical nature of practice as research should not be seen as an arbitrary one because practice as research aims to achieve two essential goals. Firstly, it aims to diffuse the binaries between theory and practice within the academy through its characteristic of facilitating interplay between theory and practice. During the introductory paragraph of this Report's Theoretical Framework section, I have engaged with the question of whether theory or practice comes first when one conducts research through employing practice as research. The conclusion reached in that discussion points to the relationship between theory and practice. That conclusion emphasizes and demonstrates how practice as research diffuses the fore mentioned binaries. Secondly, this research paradigm gives acknowledgement to non-literal and experiential forms of knowledge. It attempts to create the validation of practice (theatre practice) as a construct of knowledge. This

study, as stated within this Report thus far, engaged with its research questions and theoretical underpinnings by means of a creative project, in other words *They Were Silent*. It was through this project that I, as a researcher and artist (performer and theatre maker) managed to source material that provided answers to this study's research questions. Part of this material is also drawn from my personal experiences during the course of conducting the research centering this Report. I am making this point in order to demonstrate how one's personal experience gained from a contextualized and specified research practice constitutes knowledge, particularly within the arena of academic research.

Conquergood (2004) explains the performance studies project, a component of which is practice as research, as follows:

> The division of labour between theory and practice, abstraction and embodiment, is an arbitrary and rigged choice, and, like all binarisms, it is booby-trapped. It's a Faustian bargain. If we go the one-way street of abstraction, then we cut ourselves off from the nourishing ground of participatory experience. If we go the one-way street of practice, then we drive ourselves into an isolated cul-de-sac, a practitioner's workshop or artist's colony. Our radical move is to turn, and return, insistently, to the crossroads. (Conquergood 2004: 320)

As a researcher, I started participating in *They Were Silent*'s devising process with the mindset that saw relevance in employing the practice as research paradigm and methodology. Initially, I thought that would create an opportunity for me as a researcher to have an active engagement with this study's underpinning theories in terms of academic theoretical application during the artistic creative process. My assumption was that the theory grounding this study would provide a lens through which I would engage

with its creative project. Participating in the devising process, which started on 04 February 2009, did not necessarily prove my assumptions wrong, but brought an unexpected reality. There was a change in how I initially envisaged the devising process to unfold, particularly in terms of how I thought this study's theories would have interplay with its practice. As mentioned earlier in this Report, I stopped actively engaging with theory during the very early stages of *They Were Silent*'s devising process. The understanding of theory, gained through this study's proposal-writing phase was all that I worked with. The outcomes of our (myself, Jessica Lejowa and Lerato Sekele) performance in terms of how theory influenced our creative process, is an indicator that the application of theory can happen in ways that might make a researcher doubt their methodology. Factors such as trust, which is a complex and relative state of being, and allowing one's intuition to guide one's manner of conducting research, had a determining effect on how I conducted this study. Beyond this, my ancestral spirits also had a major determining effect on how *They Were Silent*'s devising process unfolded. For example, their presence during our rehearsals yielded results that we would possibly not have attained during any 'normal' rehearsal process, they provided us with guidance regarding the number of days we needed to spend on the devising process and grounded our engagement with the devising process in ways that cannot be explained through written or spoken language.

To further illustrate what practice as research entails, Conquergood categorically and/or systematically explains this methodology as having characteristics, which also define performance studies. These are:

1. *Accomplishment*- the making of art and remaking of culture; creativity; embodiment; artistic process and form; knowledge that comes from doing, particularly understanding, practical consciousness, performing [and/or performance] as a way of knowing.

2. *Analysis*- the interpretation of art and culture [, including theory and practice]; critical reflection; thinking about, through, and with performance; performance as a lens that illuminates the constructed creative, contingent, collaborative dimensions of human communication; knowledge that comes from contemplation and comparison; concentrated attention and contextualization as a way of knowing.

3. *Articulation*- activism, outreach, connection to community; applications and interventions; action research; projects that reach outside the academy and are rooted in an ethic of reciprocity and exchange; knowledge that is tested by practice within a community; social commitment, collaboration, and contribution / intervention as a way of knowing: praxis. (Conquergood 2004: 319)

These characteristics indicate the inherent nature and outcomes of *They Were Silent*. This Report is an account of how *Accomplishment*, *Analysis* and *Articulation*, as defined by Conquergood, apply to this study. What is interesting is that the way in which these three characteristics are presented can give an impression that the practice as research paradigm is systematically linear in nature. However, my experience of employing practice as research, during this study and my minor practice as research project presented in 2008 as well as dialogue with my supervisor regarding practice as research as a methodology, sparked my awareness of how the above-mentioned characteristics function in a circular and non-linear manner. The circular functioning of practice as research would lead to a scenario whereby its *analysis* characteristic feeds into the *articulation* and *accomplishment* and back into *analysis*. Additionally, there is a possibility of experiencing a web-like research structure within the context of employing the practice as research methodology. This web-like structure applies to this study because all of these characteristics interacted with each other throughout the devising, performance and post-

performance phases of this study. For example, the devising process had characteristics of *Accomplishment* and *Analysis*; the performance and post-performance activities, in other words interviews and the post-performance discussion, were characterized by *Accomplishment*, *Analysis* and *Articulation*.

Sharon Grady, a drama and theatre scholar is in support of the practice as research paradigm and further elaborates my point because:

> Ideally, research should be a process symbiotically linked to our practice, thinking, and reflections on both. Sometimes our focus may be on analysis, at other times on practice, but there should always exist a dialectical relationship between theorizing and practice. In this view, theory *is* a practice, and good practice is theorized. (Grady 1996: 61)

The devising process was characterized by some fundamental challenges that were related to the initial tensions arising from my identity and its roles of researcher, Sangoma and artist (performer and theatre maker). One of my initial assumptions before starting the devising process was that its outcomes would provide me with most of the findings related to this study's research questions. This assumption was challenged by the outcomes of the devising process in a sense that it did not necessarily provide me with most findings as I had thought, but brought certain pertinent challenges. The major success of this study, which is beyond the requirements of completing my Masters studies, is that it enabled me to harmonize the tensions that arose from my roles as Sangoma, artist and scholar. The major part of this study has been based on my journey of self-discovery within the context of my multi-faceted identity and its accompanying roles.

Before bringing these tensions to the fore, it is necessary to briefly elaborate on my epistemological stance to this study. This necessity derives its eminence from Lambrecht's reference to Creswell (1994) that ''In qualitative research where the researcher is identical to the primary data collection instrument, it is particularly necessary that the researcher as subject needs to be contextualized'' (Lambrecht 1998: 120). My relationship to this study is marked by a great level of intimacy since I was a co-creator and one of the performers during its creative project. As mentioned within this Report, I am also a Sangoma (shaman). This reality creates a scenario whereby a researcher (myself) is not only ''identical to the primary data collection instrument'' (Lambrecht 1998:120), but is also one of the data collection instruments. The possible tensions created by such an epistemology have been diffused by the practice as research methodology through its (self) reflexivity and analytical characteristic. Therefore, my epistemology to this study, coupled with the multiple roles I played, served as strength because it enabled me to personally relate to a part of the study's data. My relationship to this study might raise concerns about how objective I was as a researcher. Practice as research is a sanctuary that protected me from the fear of being subjective in a sense that it affords my subjectivity to constitute part of the knowledge that this Report imparts. My subjectivities do not provide an objective and technical account of this study, but rest on the realm of experiential knowledge. The failures or successes of this study are constructively judged on whether or not the study satisfied its research questions; how much light the study sheds on its theoretical underpinnings and what knowledge the study constructed, if any.

The following extract, which is taken from my devising process written reflection, details my experience of the devising process. Part of it also relates to some of the findings that the devising process illuminated. It reads as follows:

> The devising process of *They Were Silent* was characterized by a number of fundamental challenges. I started the process with an open state of mind that led to my underestimation of the challenges that the devising process would present to me as an artist and researcher. The first challenge I want to reflect on is that related to the tensions surrounding my role as a researcher, co-creator of the piece, performer and Sangoma.
>
> Based on the experience of having devised and performed *They Were Silent* last year, I thought that I would be better prepared to deal with the challenges of devising it for presenting it as my Masters Creative Research Project. This assumption was proven wrong as I was confronted by the conflicts and tensions accompanying the multiple roles I had to play this time around. The devising process reminded me of the experience of not knowing how to balance my roles as researcher and director/facilitator during my minor Masters practice as research project last year. The lesson I learned from that experience made me engage with the devising process while being conscious of the possible challenges brought about by the tensions of playing multiple roles that could be in conflict with each other. The first session of *They Were Silent*'s devising process started with a brief meeting between me and my co-collaborators and co-researchers i.e. Jessica Lejowa and Lerato Sekele. After that briefing, we proceeded to watching a video of a Sangoma initiation ceremony. During this meeting I assumed both roles of researcher, based on the need to articulate and frame my research (research questions, research methodology, theoretical framework, etc.), and Sangoma, stemming from the need to thoroughly explain the content of the video material i.e. initiation ceremony to my colleagues. At that stage, I was quite confident about my ability to harmonize my multiple roles. Therefore, the potential complexities created by my multiple roles during the process of undertaking my research had not yet dawned to me. I felt like I was really succeeding in terms of practicing the lessons gained from my practice as research project because the fore coming challenges had not yet been apparent. The essence of these lessons are based on the ability of a researcher to see the distinctions and parallels between all the roles that he/she might play during the course of conducting research, particularly when employing the research paradigm and methodology of practice as research.
>
> I remember feeling quite happy with myself as a result of successfully displaying my ability to negate between my roles as a researcher, artist and Sangoma. This feeling of triumph and exhilaration was short-lived by my realization that all of these roles are a part of me, which made me realize that there should not be

separation between them. Instead, the major definitive difference is in what I say, for what purpose and in which context. Thereafter, I was overcome by an epiphany, which made me realize that the Kabi Thulo who is the researcher is the same Kabi Thulo who is also a Sangoma and the co-creator and performer of *They Were Silent*. This epiphany had a liberating and settling effect on my conscience. It was only after arriving at such a realization that I was fully aware of the anxiety that I had about my ability to deal with the tensions that might be created by my multiple roles during the process of conducting my research.

As I was engaging with my co-collaborators and co-researchers during our initial meeting, I had a vision of myself sitting on a fence. I was in the middle of nowhere, maybe I was somewhere but I was not sure. My immediate reaction to the vision was that of forced ignorance because I needed to focus on engaging with the video I was viewing with my colleagues. The vision recurred repeatedly. After some time had passed I found myself having surrendered to placing a substantial amount of my focus on the vision. Surprisingly, I knew exactly what that vision meant without even questioning or analyzing it. That vision was accompanied by a great sense of unease and discomfort within me. The vision and its accompanying emotional state was an encapsulation of my liminal state of being that was caused by the multiple roles I was and would be playing during my research. The visual texture of the dream was that of a mixture between the colours of black, grey and yellow. These colours and the feeling I had immediately reminded me of Victor Turner's theory of liminality. Turner describes liminality as a state of being defined by ''in-between ness''. In my case I was in between the role of a researcher, Sangoma and artist i.e. theatre maker, performer and director.

Turner's infiltration of my thoughts made me think about the extent to which my body/cellular memory had assimilated the theory I was engaging with, which constituted my research theoretical framework. Thinking about that immediately created conflict within me because I was busy engaging with an initiation ceremony, something that was and is very close to me because I have had a lived experience of initiation last year (January 2008). It might sound like it was ridiculous to have such a conflict because what would my experience of initiation have to do with my research's theory. It might not have been reasonable for me to have conflict based on my thoughts about Turner's theory and engagement with a video recording of an initiation ceremony, but I really felt conflicted by thinking about Turner's liminality theory while watching the video. A few minutes passed during which my inner conflict escalated. It was only after the meeting with my colleagues had ended that I realized the nature and cause of my conflict. I realized that my conflict emanated from a subconscious act of betraying my role as a Sangoma due to the need to act as a researcher during the major part of my meeting with Jessica and Lerato. This realization also assisted me to comprehend the importance of finding parallels between all the roles I would be playing during the course of conducting my research, particularly during the research phase of devising and performing *They Were Silent*. Recovering from my inner conflict

sparked my awareness about the importance for me to engage with my research while being aware of the possible challenges related to the multiple roles I would be playing during my researching experience. The first meeting I had with my co-collaborators and co-researchers served as an indicator or forecast of how challenging things might be for me.

The step we took after watching the video recording of the initiation ceremony was to start with rehearsals. Jessica, who was both the co-creator and director of *They Were Silent*, expressed her uncertainty and fear of how to go about facilitating the devising process. I did not spend time on really interrogating the cause of her fear and anxiety because I was also uncertain about how to go about starting the rehearsal process. One thing that remained certain in my mind and spirit was that the devising process will guide us. One of the main reasons why I ensured that we started the devising process by watching a video recording of a Sangoma initiation ceremony was to source possible material that could assist us develop the content of *They Were Silent* in relation to some of the theories governing my research i.e. ritual and performance theories. Another fundamental reason was that I thought watching the video while having a discussion based on questions that it would spark, was a strategic way of explaining a number of core issues surrounding the spiritual practice of being a Sangoma to Jessica and Lerato while also orientating Lerato to the basis of *They Were Silent* since she did not participate in its performance last year. The unfolding of the rehearsal and/or devising process proved my idea of watching the initiation ceremony as a point of departure to be helpful.

The second fundamental challenge that I was faced with during the devising process was related to the tensions arising from my role as a performer and a Sangoma (shaman). This challenge was exacerbated by working with another performer in devising *They Were Silent* as my Masters Creative Project. Generally, two performers working together with the guidance and facilitation of a director should not pose challenges, but in this case it did. Acquainting Lerato with our (myself and Jessica) method of working, which requires a performer to delve into their inner-self without any reservations was a process on its own. This was not because Lerato was not willing to work in such a mode, but because she was not entirely familiar with employing such a performance mode. I placed a watchful eye on Lerato and was thoroughly inspired by her willingness, resourcefulness and commitment to comprehend and engage with our method of working. Each day demanded both of us as performers to delve within ourselves to bring about the required material that would be used to develop *They Were Silent*. Grotowski's notion of ***Total Act***, which refers to a performer engaging their entire being (mind, body, and spirit) into a rehearsal and performance, was our performance mode. ***Total Act*** constituted the essence of our working method and performance mode as performers. We both had different approaches of how to achieve ***Total Act***, but essentially we did.

Our rehearsal process had two phases. The first phase was based on finding ways of discovering each other as performers who would embark on a journey together. This part of the process posed the challenge to me as a performer who is also a Sangoma. As a Sangoma, based on my experience of undergoing initiation and interacting with other Sangomas throughout my life, I am generally not supposed to be touched by ‘‘ordinary’’ or ‘‘other’’ people unless in cases of conducting healing or other circumstances. This is because Sangomas are generally sensitive to energies transmitted by other human beings, particularly those energies that might affect a Sangoma in ways that might have an undesirable effect to their practice. As a performer I needed to trust Lerato as my fellow performer, but as a Sangoma I was not entirely sure about the effects of discovering her through the physical work we did during some of our rehearsals. I remember doing an exercise that required us to roll over each others' bodies while rolling over all the walls of our rehearsal space. This was not an easy exercise because I was very conscious of her touching my body as a Sangoma. My level of self-consciousness became a barrier for me to successfully do the exercise. It became an inhibition that required me to immediately overcome. During the course of doing that exercise, I realized that I did not thoroughly think about the possible challenges of how my role as a performer might be in conflict with my role as a Sangoma. I honestly had an intense internal conflict. My tongue had a sour and bitter taste, which was a physical manifestation of my internal conflict while participating in that exercise. As we rolled over each other from wall to wall the intensity of my internal conflict multiplied. I found myself being on a fence in the middle of nowhere. I knew that it would be totally unfair of me to allow my inhibition to take control of me because that would have been an unnecessary obstacle to our process. I was assisted by two thoughts, which occurred simultaneously. The first thought I had was about the importance of totally allowing myself to surrender to the activity of undertaking the exercise i.e. committing to physical actions (***Total Act***). This thought was facilitated by my inner voice/or intuition, which commanded me to go through the exercise by placing all of my attention on physically discovering Lerato. This thought freed me off my internal conflict and served as an extinguisher of my internal fire. It also sparked my awareness about another thought that I had at the same time. It was a thought about focusing on my felt inner impulses that would propel me to discovering my physical self, while discovering Lerato's physical self. Dedicating all of my being to the process of discovering Lerato resolved my initial internal conflict to the point where I was in a state of synchronicity with Lerato.

After undertaking the rolling over each other exercise, we did another exercise where we had to sit on chairs that were placed in close proximity with each other while looking into each other's eyes and holding hands. This exercise took the previous exercise a step further in terms of requiring us to deepen our discovery of each other through demanding of us to emotionally and physically engage with the immediacy of looking at each other's eyes and holding each other's hands. The exercise's experience was very intense due to the need for us to see and feel each other while communicating non-verbally. Such a mode of communication

was made possible by our ability to allow the emotional impulse(s) we generated between us to be the means of communications. As the exercise proceeded, I stopped being aware of our physical selves. I remember seeing Lerato as a ball of energy. She did not have a face and body, but she was existing. I felt like my body had evaporated and my entire being had transformed into something that only had form in its formlessness. The continuation of our communication shifted from my perspective and transformed into a communication between spirits. I found it manageable to relate to this transformation because of my spiritual practice, which is mainly based on communicating with unseen entities i.e. ancestors. I noticed that my shift was affecting Lerato. Her eyes started becoming full of fear. I asked myself what it was that she saw me as, but could not figure it out. I started feeling my spiritual self (as a Sangoma) coming into our presence. Lerato's fear increased to the point where tears rolled down her eyes. I watched her very closely and managed to observe her crying process from the moment her tears started forming in her eyes to the point they rolled down her cheeks. I observed and experienced this moment by moment. I also started to cry as that experience intensified. I did not cry out of sadness, but out of anger. My anger was a result of the internal conflict I experienced during the previous exercise and my concern about the effects of my awakened spiritual aspect as a sangoma was affecting Lerato. I could not stop the exercise, which escalated my frustration. Once again, I immediately needed to harmonize the performer in me with the Sangoma in me. Fortunately, Lerato seemed able to allow her emotional impulses to reach a climax by not inhibiting herself, but allowing herself to experience what she felt to its entirety. Our connection beyond the physical assured me that she would be able to contain her experience. I cannot further articulate this experience in words other than mentioning that it was a felt experience of a shared connection to Lerato that assisted me not to inhibit my spiritual self during the exercise. Trusting immediately felt impulses, which were gained from the previous exercise, assisted me to discover Lerato both as a performer and as a Sangoma. My interaction with Lerato, particularly in relation to how she reacted to the awakening of my spiritual self coupled with how we connected with each other throughout the exercise affirmed to me that each human being has an aspect of themselves that is spiritual. This realization laid a firm foundation for my journey of working with a performer who is not a Sangoma. I realized that a Sangoma is essentially a human being with a spirit and a performer is also a human being with a spirit, which should theoretically address the problem of working with my spiritual self as a Sangoma who is also a performer in collaboration with another performer who is not necessarily a Sangoma.

It was during the devising process that we laid the foundation of engaging with ritual. Our rehearsals were very ritualistic. Before we started each rehearsal, I burned Impepho or Phefo incense (incense used by Sangomas to repel negative energies and to call upon ancestors for different reasons). Performing the ritual was inclusive of Lerato by virtue of her presence. During this ritual, I called upon my ancestral spirits and the ancestral spirits of my co-collaborators to guide each of our rehearsals. Performing this ritual meant that I was merging my spiritual

> practice with my performance practice since this ritual was our way of preparing ourselves for rehearsals. This ritual was preceded by my daily ritual of burning Impepho/Phefo and asking my ancestral spirits to guide me during the course of each day. These rituals were also performed during *They Were Silent*'s performances. They were integral to the devising and performance phases of our creative project. It was through the performance of these rituals that we started forging a way of synergizing ritual and theatre in a sense that we performed sacred rituals within the context of theatre performance. Our rehearsals also ended with a ritual of sitting down and reflecting on each rehearsal. Continuous performance of the Impepho/Phefo ritual played a significant role in the facilitation of harmonizing my Sangoma, researcher and artist roles. This is because this ritual enabled me as Sangoma to negotiate with my ancestors in terms of requesting their permission for me to engage with my research without separating my multiple roles. There were days when we all felt like we were about to crash due to the intensity of our rehearsals, but we managed to persevere due to the strength given to us by our ancestral spirits. I was the middle-man between my co-collaborators and our ancestral spirits. I was also an artist and researcher thorough the process of devising *They Were Silent*. (Thulo 2009)

The above reflection does not categorically speak to what the devising process revealed in relation to this study's research questions. However, it serves as an indicator of what the performance of *They Were Silent* revealed in relation to some of its guiding research questions. This now leads to the discussion on the performance phase, which will commence by engaging with the questions: how ritual and theatre can be synergized and whether communitas, as facilitated by a contemporary ritual-based theatre performance presented for a modern South African theatre audience, address societal fragmentation? Lastly, the question of what characterizes a contemporary performer as shaman is engaged with.

The performance phase of *They Were Silent* was from 19-22 February 2009. It was staged at the University of the Witwatersrand's Downstairs Theatre. This Report is accompanied by a DVD (digital video disc) of one of the performances, which is meant to provide a point reference for this Report's reader. Apart from the already mentioned synergies

between ritual and theatre, one needs to engage with the kind of theatre that *They Were Silent* was in order to understand how it merged ritual and theatre. Each performance started with the process of us (myself and Lerato Sekele) preparing the performance space by performing the ritual of burning Impepho/Phefo (incense used by Sangomas). The purpose of this ritual was for us to call upon our ancestors with the aim of requesting their permission to commence with the performance. Each performance could not start before we got the permission to perform. One of the attendants of the post-performance seminar asked a question related to what would happen if we did not receive our ancestor's permission to perform. My response was that we were very fortunate to always have our ancestors' permission to perform mainly due to the processes we undertook of requesting their permission. This process of requesting our ancestors permission did not only start before each performance, but started during our devising process and each day before I commenced with my daily activities during the rehearsal and performance phases of this study. Performing the fore-mentioned ritual was also a means of our psychological and spiritual preparation for each performance. This sacred ritual was not done in the presence of audiences, which may disqualify it as part of our performance. I would disagree with such a disqualification because *They Were Silent* was a kind of performance that did not have a definite start and ending. From the audience's perspective, the performance started with the ritual of the washing of their hands before entering the performance space, but this ritual actually followed the ritual I have mentioned. Both of these rituals had a transformative element because performing the Impepho ritual transformed me and Lerato for our performance while also transforming the performance space in terms of setting up the ritual (performance) space, which was

meant for creating an appropriate environment wherein our (the audience and us as performers) ancestral spirits could reside. The audience's hand-washing ritual prepared and transformed them to participate in our performance. Schechner states that:

> Ritual and play transform people into a ''second reality,'' separate from ordinary life. This reality is one where people can become selves other than their daily selves. When they temporarily become or enact another, people perform actions different from what they do ordinarily. Thus, ritual and play transform people, either permanently or temporarily. (Schechner 2006:52)

The point made by Schechner, with reference to *They Were Silent*, is that ritual has a transformative element in terms of how it affects people. The temporary or permanent transformative experience was presumably relative to *They Were Silent*'s audiences, which was one of the challenges we faced during each performance because the hand-washing ritual did not guarantee us that each audience member had undergone the required transformation for engaging with our performance in a way that would assist us in terms of projecting a non-repulsive energy. A non-repulsive energy is the opposite of a repulsive energy, which is the kind of energy emitted by an audience member while experiencing our performance that stemmed from his or her feelings and thoughts of disregard and non-acceptance of what our performance offered. Each audience member brought a different energy to our performances, which sometimes demanded of us as performers to work harder on containing the repulsive energies that affected our performance one way or another. The audience's repulsion to our performance could be a result of different causes, which varied from individual to individual. One of those causes could be related to each audience member's expectations of what a theatre performance should be like in terms of its content and how it should engage an audience. Some audiences I engaged with after our performances were very expressive of their repulsion

and referred to our performance's content (the performance of sacred Sangoma rituals in a theatre), performance mode (***Total Act***) and intimate audience-performer relationship as being the causes of their repulsion. Engaging with the audience's repulsive energies during some of our performances made me realize that ritual, whether it is sacred or secular, requires its participants to be fully engaged with it in order for it to yield its intended results. In Somè's terms, the audience's washing of hands is referred to as a ''Water Ritual'' (Somè 1998: 217), which has intentions of healing a community's or an individual's grief. In the context of *They Were Silent*, this ritual fulfilled the function of cleansing audiences of their unpleasant energies and facilitating their transformation for the purpose of engaging with our performance. This ritual was very necessary because our performance was spiritually charged, which made us vulnerable to being affected by any potentially obstructive energies.

The above described act of us (me & Lerato) preparing the space through ritual and the audiences' washing of their hands, were the primary means by which *They Were Silent* merged ritual and theatre. These acts created a preparatory ground for us as performers and audiences to engage with the performance. The conclusion I draw from this is that, ritual and theatre can merge when the ritual context is not separated from the theatre context, but the two contexts co-exist. *They Were Silent* could have included other rituals that could have further facilitated the merging of its ritual and theatre contexts, for example the ritual of audiences taking off their shoes followed by the washing of their feet before and after each performance. The rituals that were incorporated in *They Were Silent*, which are those mentioned in this Report, placed ritual in the position of being the

performance frame. The notion of framing is both important for theatre and ritual performances due to its function of being a primary preparatory tool for an audience's engagement with ritual and theatre. Framing, however well-defined and executed it is, cannot entirely guarantee that each audience member participates with a performance in the same way. Framing is also open to each audience member's interpretation. Some audiences' responses to *They Were Silent* indicated that framing within the context of ritual and theatre performance is open to interpretation, which may affect how audiences' engage with ritual and theatre performance.

They Were Silent was a contemporary theatre performance that ''…. redefine[d] African ritual and turn[ed] the tables on Western theatrical conventions'' (Sichel 2009:11). The redefining aspects of *They Were Silent* that Sichel refers to, also speaks to the merger characteristic of ritual and theatre that was inherent in our (myself, Jessica Lejowa and Lerato Sekele) project. This aspect can be identified in terms of space, audience participation and the incorporation of sacred Southern African shamanic rituals into the performance.

The stage design of *They Were Silent* can be clearly seen when watching the attached DVD (digital video disc). Sichel provides an accurate and succinct description of the stage design as being ''Two sets of gauze screens and a central red earth [that is made of an inner, outside-inner and outer circles] are visual membranes surrounding the small audience who is seated in a triangular configuration [,] which completes the circle of communal involvement'' (Sichel 2009:11). This stage design was inclusive of lit candles

that were placed behind the screens and the two downstage areas were the audiences set. Placing the audience onstage was deliberate because we (Jessica Lejowa and I) wanted to create an intimate and immediate environment for the audience that would allow them to be part of the performance's action. Our performance required a great deal of intimacy between the audience and performers due to the need to create a communion (communitas) between us (performers) and our audiences. The intimacy was also created to challenge the boundaries set by how conventional Western theatre physically separates performers and audiences. Theatre and ritual are meaningless without the presence and participation of people. Both activities share the similarity of being communal. This decision was also based on part of our project's storyline which expressed my experience of how people were mostly watching me go through the trials of having the ancestral calling, not because they did not want to reach out to me, but mainly because they did not know what to do in terms of helping me.

They Were Silent's stage crafting included the physical elements of fire, water, air and earth (soil). The usage of these elements was our way of creating a sacred space for the performance. Ritual, just like theatre, is partly contextualized by time and space. *They Were Silent* reconfigured the theatre and ritual spaces in a sense that the sacred rituals that were part of the performance were taken from their 'normal' context, in other words the Sangoma initiation site, and reconfigured to 'fit' into the theatre space. Similarly, the theatre space was reconfigured to accommodate the ritual space. The described reconfiguration of space was imperative ''[b]ecause rituals take place in special, often

sequestered places, the very act of entering the ‘‘sacred space’’ has an impact on participants. In such spaces, special behavior is required’’ (Schechner 2006: 71).

Our performance was characterized by the presence of our (performers’ and audiences’) ancestral spirits. There is no empirical evidence that can prove or disprove this. I, as a performer, experienced this. The ancestral spirits’ presence required proper preparation that was also assisted by our audiences’ ‘‘special behaviour’’ (Schechner 2002: 71). The physical elements of fire, water, air and earth were part of the signs and/or symbols used to give our performance space an identity that our audiences might relate to in terms of realizing the sacred nature of the performance and performance space. These elements are also used in different contexts within the spiritual practice of bo-Sangoma (Southern African shamanic practice). Generally, these elements are used by Sangomas for healing purposes, but can also be used for destructive purposes. In the context of *They Were Silent*, they were also used to create an environment that would welcome our (performers and audiences) ancestral spirits, and locate us (performers and audiences) in the multi-layered world of the performance.

Schechner does not see much difference between ritual and theatre because he argues that:

> The basic polarity is between efficacy and entertainment, not ritual and theatre. Whether one calls a specific performance ‘‘ritual’’ or ‘‘theatre’’ depends mostly on context and function. A performance is called one or the other because of where it is performed, by whom, in what circumstances, and for what purpose. The purpose is the most important factor determining whether a performance is ritual or not. If the performance’s purpose is to effect change, then……the performance is ritual. But if the performance’s purpose is mostly to give pleasure,

> to show off, to be beautiful, or to pass time, then the performance is an entertainment. The fact is that no performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment. (Schechner 2006: 80)

This study agrees with Schechner's argument. The only shortcoming I find with his argument is that it does not really answer the question of what could a performance that synergizes ritual (sacred Southern African Sangoma rituals) and theatre be referred to as? *They Were Silent* merged ritual and theatre, which makes Schechner's argument quite simple and narrow in a sense that it still places ritual and theatre on separate ''poles of a continuum'' (Schechner 2006:79) and does not provide an explanation for performances that locate themselves in the centre of the continuum based on their characteristic of synergizing ritual and theatre. If ''no performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment'' (Schechner 2006:80) then *They Were Silent* was not solely ritual or theatre, but a merger of the two performance genres, which proposes a performance model that is not characterized by a ''…continuum'' (Schechner 2006:79), but a liminal centre that relatively shifts between the inner (efficacy or entertainment) to the outer (efficacy or entertainment) locales of the liminal centre.

One of the aims of *They Were Silent*, as a creative research project, was to investigate if communitas can be facilitated by a contemporary ritual-based theatre performance as a way of addressing social fragmentation within society (represented by the audience). This investigation points to the assumption that society, specifically South Africa's society, is fragmented. This assumption is based on Connor's assertion mentioned in this Report's introduction. It is arguable whether society at large experiences social fragmentation, which limits this study's findings regarding societal fragmentation since *They Were*

Silent, was presented for a very minimal yet diverse audience. Therefore, this study's findings related to ritual and its characteristic of facilitating communitas, in other words a shared experience, cannot be regarded as being applicable to each ''modernized'' (as South Africa is deemed to be) society worldwide, but should be viewed as a relative indicator.

Turner elaborates on the concept of communitas by means of providing categories of communitas. It is important to note that Turner viewed communitas as an agent or facilitator of anti-structure in relation to dominant social structures or processes (Turner 1982). This anti-structural component of ritual, through its aspect of communitas, characterizes ritual as a transformative activity. Turner identifies three types of communitas and describes them as follows:

(1) *Spontaneous* communitas is ''direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities, '' a deep rather than intense style of personal interaction. ''It has something 'magical' about it. Subjectively there is in it a feeling endless power.''
(2) ….. ''*ideological* communitas'' is a set of theoretical concepts which attempt to describe the interactions of spontaneous communitas. Here the retrospective look, ''memory,'' has already distanced the individual subject from the communal or dyadic experience. Here the experiencer has already come to look to language and culture to mediate the former immediacies…..''.
(3) *Normative* communitas, finally, is, once more, a ''perduring social system,'' a subculture or group which attempts to foster and maintain relationships or spontaneous communitas on more or less permanent basis. To do this it has to denature itself, for spontaneous communitas is more a matter of ''grace'' than ''law,'' to use theological language. Its spirit ''bloweth where it listeth''- it cannot be legislated for or normalized, since it is the *exception*, not the *law*, the *miracle*, not the *regularity*, primordial freedom, not *anangke*, the causal chain of necessity. (Turner 1982: 47-9)

They Were Silent's conceptual notion of communitas was based on the viewing of a Sangoma initiation ritual by me, Jessica Lejowa and Lerato Sekele during its devising

phase. As a researcher, I was also aware of the different types of communitas described by Turner. Additional to the basic guidelines provided by Turner in relation to this study, our need to create a theatre performance that incorporated ritual (communitas) stemmed from the afore-mentioned assumption (societal fragmentation) and our intention to offer a theatrical experience that aimed to shift our audiences' perspectives regarding their role in theatre. We were not entirely certain about whether our performance would manage to facilitate communitas amongst its audience and did not know about the type of communitas, as described by Turner, our performance would facilitate. Instead, we left all of that to chance, which might be viewed as being risky, but demonstrates how this study tested the parameters provided by its theoretical underpinnings by means of allowing the research process to construct its own theoretical perspective and/or knowledge.

The most immediate way of finding out if the study's creative project managed to engage with its research question regarding communitas, was to present *They Were Silent* to an audience. Generally, our project was viewed by a diverse audience in terms of gender, age, culture, skin colour, social status, occupation, background and so forth. My awareness of this composition is based on my interactions with and observations of some of the audience members after each performance. Three audience members were interviewed about their experience of the performance. The most common characteristic shared by these interviewees is how they found it challenging to verbally articulate their experience of a performance they experienced. These interviews provided the means to discover if and how *They Were Silent* created communitas and whether the creation of

communitas addressed the study's assumption of society (as represented by the audience) being fragmented. Responding to this question Mr. Lebang Monnahela stated that:

> My answer would be yes, the piece facilitated a communal experience because like I said…… it tackled truth and emotions that people feel, real emotions that all the audience members as human beings experience. Each person in the audience experience emotions because all human beings experience emotions…..When the piece happens everybody travels along with the performer because one of the elements in the piece was the song at the end of the performance that was sung. That aspect of ritual theatre which involves audience participation. If I remember, I remember quite clearly actually, there wasn't any audience member who blocked the offer, who blocked that offer of participation in the song. We all sang the song at the end. We all sang the song, even the audience members who I would say did not understand what the song was about [and] what the song said still participated in singing the song and giving back what they can in a way [although] you don't know what the song is saying. That sense of community was there because the piece was an experience and we all had a shared experience….It was a collective experience….no one was puzzled about not knowing the song and what does it mean. I was observing that. It was a Zulu song and there were white audience members. All audience members across all racial groups, I wouldn't say because the piece is ritual it's especially made for black people or [meant] for a black experience only. Judging from what happened in the show, I mean it brings me to the conclusion that it's a shared experience. It's not tailor-made for a certain audience group… (Monnahela 2009)

Monnahela's words are proof of the creative's project's achievement in managing to create a shared experience that transcended racial, cultural and linguistic barriers. What is not indicated by his words, which is similar to some audience members' expressions, is what type of communitas *They Were Silent* created. My analysis of the audience responses I received and experience of performing *They Were Silent*, lead me to the realization that *They Were Silent* did not adhere to one particular category or type of communitas. The complex composition of our audience and the relative nature of their experience of communitas made it impossible for one to particularize the audiences' communal experience. The basic conclusion one can make is that *They Were Silent* succeeded to create communitas and challenge the audiences' initial (before entering the

performance space) fragmented state. This study has not been able to discover the duration of the audience's communal experience beyond the performance duration and the level of each audience member's engagement with the referred to communal experience expressed by Monnahela and other audience members.

Each performance was very different in terms of all its related aspects, including the communitas aspect. I remember a performance during which the majority of the audience resisted to participate in the performance's communal activity of singing. Sometimes audiences did not participate at the same time and in the same way during the singing. I am mentioning this to demonstrate how challenging it could be for ritual to facilitate communitas, especially amongst a group of people that do not share common characteristics. Communitas requires communal participation, which makes it a challenge for ritual-based theatre to fully realize its potential of creating communitas within a heterogeneous audience. The created and experienced communitas, during *They Were Silent*, addressed societal fragmentation temporarily. This was both due to the literal and/or physical duration of each performance and each audience member's level of participation during the performance's communal activities. As the creators and performers of *They Were Silent*, this complex outcome pleased us because of our aim to give each audience members allowance to respond to the performance in their own way. Such an outcome might be problematic for this study's purposes, but was based on the open-ended approach to making discoveries that guided this study. Regarding communitas, this study concludes by asking the following questions:

1) Beyond the physical environment and atmosphere created by ritual, what else facilitates ritual participants' participation in communal activities provided by ritual performance?
2) What sustains communitas amongst those who experience it?

Additional to the creation of communitas, *They Were Silent* also engaged with the potential shamanic characteristics of a contemporary performer. The interesting aspect of this engagement lays in the fact that I am a performer who is also a shaman (Sangoma) who performed with a performer who is not a shaman (Lerato Sekele). Devising *They Were Silent* created tensions stemming from my Sangoma and performer roles as expressed in my earlier quoted devising process written reflection. One of the recurring questions I asked myself during the devising process was how did I being a Sangoma affect my performer role, particularly in terms of reaching very heightened states of being and performing in a dual conscious state of being. The unfolding of *They Were Silent*'s devising and performance processes, made me realize that Lerato was also experiencing what I was experiencing, in other words reaching heightened states of being and a dual consciousness. Some of our conversations after rehearsals and performances confirmed that our performance experiences were mostly similar, which qualifies my role of being a shaman as being a non-determinant variable of a contemporary performers' shamanic characteristics. My referral to a performer's ability to reach heightened states of being and perform while experiencing dual consciousness, does not necessarily point to what characterizes a contemporary performer as a shaman. Schechner (1973) offers a comprehensive attempt detailing what characterizes a performer as shaman and vice versa. His views are based on his ideology, which is presumably derived from his praxis, of performance and what a performer is. The historical background surrounding his ideology is based on the ideological shifts that occurred during the 1970s and 1980s

within the Western (American and European) theatre and performance practice arena. These shifts were marked by the enquiries about, explorations and discoveries of the already existing non-Western theatre and performance practices conducted by Western theatre practitioners and performance theorists such as Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook. These Western theatre practitioners did not essentially introduce something new to theatre, but challenged Western theatre and performance ideologies by researching and practicing non-Western theatre and performance ideologies and modes through practice. Their intentions, which are sometimes not articulated explicitly, were to challenge the then existing dominant theatre and performance ideologies. Schechner's work with The Performance Group and research of non-Western societies' cultures, led to his conclusion that:

> The shaman is in his [/her] way a public [performer]- a man [or woman] who stands for someone, or something, else. He [/she] introjects the fantasies projected on to him [/her]. This introjection is so complete that the shaman often believes he [/she] is the god, demon, person, animal, or thing he [/she] is possessed by. Similarly for the performer who trains himself [/herself] to *accept trance and possession; and to find the ways into and out of [multiple] states of consciousness and doingness*. The performer also originates that behavior because in modern societies self-consciousness is a privileged value, something sought after and trained for. And it is self-consciousness that sets the performer off from the shaman. Something happens to the shaman; he [/she] is ''called''. He [/she] does what he [/she] does and at most assists his [/her] ''calling''. But the performer tries very hard to exist sequentially in two different states of being. During training, preparation, and rehearsal the performer wants to be aware of what is happening to him [/her]-he [/she] wants *to choose to let it happen*. He [/she] wants to compose it himself [/herself], make the performance himself [/herself]: be entirely conscious of his [/her] participation in an event that, beyond its emotional components, has political, personal, and social ''statements'' to make. The performer wants to have effects and to know the effects he has. And then, at the decisive hours of performance, he [/she] wants to be able to let everything go, to perform ''without anticioation,'' to fall entirely into the spell of the performance, to ''give up'' his [/her] consciousness to the ''action''. (Schechner 1973: 191-2)

Unfortunately this Report is not intended to deal with the practice of being a Sangoma, which makes it unnecessary to challenge Schechner's notions of shamanism. My experience of being a Sangoma and lifelong observation of other Sangomas differ with Schechner's view that ''… a shaman often believes he is the god, demon, person, animal, or thing he is possessed by'' (Schechner 1973: 191). This is because a shaman's (Sangoma's) ''possession'' is often beyond his/her belief of either being ''possessed'' or not in a sense that his/her body's occupation by the ancestral spirits transcends his/her emotional and cognitive reception of his/her ''possession'' state of being. However, Schechner's views assist in understating the potential shamanic characteristics of a performer, for example the characteristic of dual-consciousness based on the notion of being present in dual realities, in other words the visible and invisible worlds and being physically present through transformation while embodying and/or representing the invisible. The performer and shaman, in my view, also share the characteristic of undergoing contextualized emotional, physical, spiritual and psychological preparatory processes for the undertaking of their duties. In the context of being a Sangoma, the initiation process would be the preparatory process and the rehearsal would be a performers' preparatory process. *They Were Silent*'s rehearsals had some similarities of a Sangoma initiation process in terms of its elements of ritual, intentions and methodology.

Grotowski's ***Total Act*** was the performance mode that defined our performances. Briefly, this performance mode:

> ….is the act of laying oneself bare, of tearing off the mask of daily life, of exteriorizing oneself. Not in order to ''show oneself off'', for that would be exhibitionism. It is a serious and solemn act of revelation. The actor must be

> prepared to be absolutely sincere. It is like a step towards the summit of the organism in which consciousness and instinct are united. (Grotowski: 2004)

Total Act also characterizes a performer as shaman. Compared to Schechner's shamanic characteristics of a performer, Grotowksi describes the performer as being one who totally commits themselves to action in a very sacrificial and honest manner that also results in the acquisition and expression of a dual consciousness. Such a performer undergoes a vigorous and demanding process of self-confrontation so as to curb being self-conscious. A Sangoma's practice requires self-sacrifice in many ways, for example physical, spiritual and emotional. Such sacrifice defines a Sangoma's performance of his/her duties, particularly for the purpose of healing. A Sangoma's practice, in most cases, is based on guided instinct (by the ancestral spirits) and defined by one's existence in dual realities. The process of achieving ***Total Act*** during *They Were Silent* was realized by my application (as a performer) of the findings I made during my minor practice as research project last year. This project investigated liminality in performance through achieving a ***Total Act***. These findings also illuminate some shamanic characteristics of a contemporary performer, while further elaborating on the performance-related discoveries made through performing *They Were Silent*.

1) *Total act* facilitates *liminality in performance.*
2) *Total act* requires a performer to be entirely focused in performance.
3) A performer needs to trust and allow his/her impulse(s) (physical, psychological and emotional) to guide him/her when performing, as a way of reaching a state of *liminality in performance.*
4) Total commitment to physical action(s) creates emotional impulses that a performer needs to fulfill his/her task(s) in performance.
5) *Liminality in performance* has a tremendous effect on an audience in terms of audience engagement.
6) A performer's adherence to a basic performance structure, which is provided by the performance narrative structure and/or sequence of events, allows a performer

to maintain his\her state of *liminality in performance* without losing themselves e.g. reaching a state if mental or emotional instability.

7) *Liminality* does enhance a performer's level of performance in terms of elevating the level of a performer's honesty and facilitating a high level of audience engagement with a performer's performance. (Thulo 2008: 25-6)

These findings also characterize a performer as a shaman based on the performer's commitment to specific actions that allow for his/her intuition (impulses) to lead him/her to other actions, acquire a liminal state of being (dual consciousness in performance) and facilitate communion with an audience.

4) CONCLUSION

This Report is exemplary of what practice as research entails. It was through practice as research that I have managed to further my understanding, based on my experience of conducting the research that defines this study, of employing the practice as research paradigm and methodology. This study is by no means a rigid and absolute extrapolation of the potential shamanic characteristics of a contemporary theatre performer, how ritual and theatre can merge and how communitas can be facilitated by a ritual-based theatre performance. Instead, it indicates possible outcomes related to its areas of enquiry. Therefore, the potential characteristics of a contemporary performer, as revealed by this study, propose an additional perspective of contemporary performance in terms of performance practice. I regard these potential shamanic characteristics as proposals that add to the vast scope of performance practice and performance modes in Africa (Southern Africa) and worldwide. The purpose of investigating a contemporary performer's shamanic characteristics was to revisit, re-emphasize and propagate the notion of a performer being a medium of healing in the context of contemporary theatre and performance practice. As stated in this Report, a performer's shamanic role is not necessarily and/or entirely dependant on a performer being a Sangoma (Southern African shaman) as I am, but depends on the performance mode, context and intentions of contemporary performer's performance. ***Total Act*** is one of the possible performance modes that illuminate a contemporary performer's shamanic characteristics.

Furthermore, the merger of ritual and theatre has been engaged with by this study. The essential conclusion that I have reached through conducting this study, with specific reference to how ritual and theatre can merge, is that a theatre performance that uses ritual as a performance frame and content (sacred rituals) can be challenged by Western theater conventions of stage design and audience-performer relationships because of how it also challenges such conventions. The interplay between these challenges creates interesting tensions that also lead to the difficulty of defining ritual-based performances. *They Were Silent* merged ritual and theatre in ways that are detailed in this Report and located itself in a centre-characterized theatre performance model, which differs from a

theatre performance model that is characterized by ‘‘poles of a continuum’’ (Schechner 2006:79). This also points to the inefficiencies of restricting a theatre performance to certain definitions and *They Were Silent* challenged being qualified as being only ritual or theatre. Thus, this study posits that theatre performances should not be restricted to genre and/or definition. A theatre audience member’s experience of a theatre performance is not determined by genre or definition. Theatre genre is accompanied by theatre conventions, which may limit an audience’s experience of a theatre performance. *They Were Silent* was in no way immune to its creators’ and performers’ subjectivities, but did not align itself to certain ritual and theatre performance conventions. Its content, performance mode and ways of merging ritual (sacred Sangoma rituals) and theatre performance marked it as a performance that

….. [occurred] as a making visible of contingencies or instabilities, [was] a fostering of differences and disagreements, as transgressions of that upon which the promise of the [performance] itself depends and so a disruption of the move toward containment [, definition] and stability. (Kaye 1994:23)

This study has provided possible answers to its research questions, provided a platform for me to deepen my experiential learning of practice as research, allowed me to explore and create the type of theatre that seeks to facilitate the process of audiences’ return to their selfhood, challenge Western theatre conventions that have robbed theatre of its communal nature and enabled me to merge my spiritual and theatre practices.

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APPENDIX

They Were Silent DVD