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The significance of Barney Simon's theatre-making methodology and his influence on how and why I make theatre: an auto-ethnographic practice as research

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INTRODUCTION

Barney Simon began working in theatre as a backstage assistant in London in Joan Littlewood's *Theatre Workshop*. He returned to Johannesburg in 1960 and became part of the ''non-racial Rehearsal Room workshop … part of the African Music and Drama Association at Dorkay House …" (Tucker, 1997: xiii). In 1961 he directed Athol Fugard's *The Blood Knot* in the Rehearsal Room and, in 1965, the international premier of Fugard's *Hello and Goodbye*. He subsequently staged plays in a rented room in a commune, by-passing racial laws by establishing it as a theatre club in order to play to 'invited' multi-racial audiences. In 1970 he ran applied theatre health education workshops in KwaZulu Natal and in 1971 he started a theatre company ''Mirror One'' which performed plays in various venues. In 1976, with co-founder Mannie Manim, he opened the Market Theatre with a production of Anton Chekov's *The Seagull*.

The rest - as the cliché says - is history.

In 1989 I workshopped the play *Score Me the Ages* with Simon and in the same year he asked me to teach at the Market Theatre Laboratory which he co-founded. It is from this convergence in mine and Simon's histories that this PaR examination originates. I am examining how Barney Simon did what he did in order to answer the question: how and why is his methodology still useful (40 years later)? Through this examination I am also examining my own methodology; directly influenced by Simon.

Let me resort to another cliché: the sum is greater than the parts.

This PaR examination is perhaps the opposite: the parts are greater than the sum. A figure like Simon, whom Athol Fugard called: ''…the most significant theatre talent to have emerged in South Africa'' (Tucker, 1997: xiii), can all too easily become mythologised; his methodology remaining confusing and enigmatic. I am attempting to present 'the parts': the stages of Simon's theatre-making process, as I experienced them.

Recording my embodied knowledge of a 'step-by-step' of Simon's methodology is an attempt to expand the archive on Simon; arguing that his methodology is useful 40 years later because it is rigorous enough to *evolve;* and that rigorous methodologies are 'starting points' – blue-prints that work – to be repeated, adapted – or even rejected – but in order to do so they need to be acknowledged and understood. An underpinning motivation in my PaR is the difference between empty traditions blindly kept alive out of dogma, obedience or good manners; and useful traditions kept alive because they work. In order to be 'kept alive' they have to be passed on, which I attempt to do.

Importantly, Simon's methods ''emerged in South Africa.'' While not unique methods, they were developed in the context of - and to make work in opposition to – apartheid. The content, context and possibilities of South African plays have definitely changed but Simon's methodology is one way of making them.

Structure

I begin this paper with a story to demonstrate the core of Simon's methodology and to explain why I wanted to work with him and why he became a primary influence.

Then I explain the theory of ''archive and repertoire'' underpinning and deepening my exploration of Simon's and my own methodology, and then provide an overview of the three core impulses (the personal, archive, loss) I have identified in my methodology.

Following this is the main body of this paper: a reflexion on the process of devising *Batsamai* in which I will weave present (*Batsamai* – my PaR project: a play I devised with the Market Lab students: 2013) and past (*Score Me The Ages* – the play I devised with Simon: 1989). I have organised this reflexion according to the stages I identify in Simon's methodology: sensitisation; gossip; research; biography; improvisation; writing. The main purpose of this is to demonstrate the evolution and usefulness of his methods.

Then, referring to critical responses, I will trace my core impulses in a sample of my body of work.

Finally, I will state my main arguments in conclusion.

DETOUR

An observation on a train journey

I am on a train – hi-tech 1st world public transport – a South Asian mother, possibly an immigrant, plaits her daughter's hair with the care and expertise of embodied knowledge; arguably passed down through centuries of generations by her mother, grand- and great-grandmothers and more. Her fingers know what to do. Carefully she separates the long hair into three thick plaits, each of even breadth, and begins weaving them together; her fingers gently pulling, adjusting and weaving.

I interpret this embodied act as a tradition the mother keeps alive. The linked chains of hair like the link between mother and daughter; linking them back to generations of mothers and daughters. The calm and peace I perceive, almost like an air-bubble on the train – a separate universe created by this ritual - also suggests a strong love between mother and child. And love is one of the possible (positive) motives for keeping tradition alive. Another

reason is because it works; it is useful; a head of long hair in one plait is arguably easier to manage.

I begin my report with this story to introduce some key ideas I will explore:

- What I got from Barney Simon and why I use his methodology.
- Weaving past and present to record a methodology.
- The value of embodied knowledge and tradition.

WHAT I GOT FROM BARNEY SIMON AND WHY I USE HIS METHODOLOGY

Detail

If an actor had related this story to Barney Simon he would have asked for *detail*: the colour of the train seats, walls, floor? Time of day? Did the mother look tired, sad, happy? What was she wearing? Expensive, second hand, new; modern or traditional? Only one child? Did she enjoy having her plaited? How could you tell? How did you feel watching it?

With these questions he would have begun, and have got the actor to begin, thinking about politics/class (second hand, new, expensive clothes: class); textures (colours); emotions and character biography (the daughter's response, my response, tired, sad, happy), etc. He would have begun looking for the potential complexity and layers of story in an *ordinary event*.

In *The World in an Orange* (Hernriques & Stephanou, 2005), actress Vanessa Cooke, one of Simon's long-time collaborators, says: "The more uninteresting the better he liked it. He didn't like dramatic things about people." (2005: 52) The point I make is what he did with the non-dramatic, the "uninteresting"/ordinary: how much he extracted from it through attention to detail.

From the story of the plaiting he may have also reminded an actor of one of his theories about acting: that people, and therefore actors, are most interesting, compelling, erotic - when they are *doing something* as simple as plaiting hair, eating, reading, watching TV. These activities can tell major dramatic narratives about good and evil; oppressor and oppressed. In the words of one research technique I learnt from him: all of South Africa is in everything one examines.

Simon's almost insatiable curiosity for *detail* and my response to him as an actor begins to articulate why he had such an impact on me.

Being paid attention to

I craved the attention Simon paid to detail and it extended to paying attention to actors: his collaborators. I craved the *attention he paid to me. 'Being paid attention to'* is, I believe, at

the core of how and why his methodology is so effective pedagogically. As I will explain later, the students I worked with on *Batsamai* all responded positively to the attention paid to them as young actors.

The personal

Key to 'being paid attention to' was his use of the *personal*: in essence using the actor's biography to create character and story.

His use of the personal was not frivolous or invasive, it was political (were the mother's clothes old, new, traditional?): the 'personal as political': details about a character's (and the actor's) social background and circumstances and how this affects their worldviews and identities.

A sense of belonging

Working at the Market Theatre (co-founded by Simon and Mannie Manim) was political; it was an oppositional voice; an alternative to working for the apartheid state arts councils and/or the South African managements who staged the colonial versions of the 'hits' of the West End and Broadway. The Market opened its doors in 1976, the same year as the Soweto uprising, and did predominantly original South African plays.

And so it was also *a sense of belonging* I got from Simon. Other actors talk about this. Actress Bo Petersen says: "The Market was a subversive place … Barney gave many actors … a way to work and a sense of self as a South African" (2005: 133). Terry Norton says: "Suddenly I was acutely aware of the value of … where I was living, and the dignity … (it) came from being truthful" (2005: 184).

And so he also gave me a place I wanted to belong, an artistic and political home: others may have joined the underground struggle; I worked at the Market.

Finding a voice

Norton mentions: "being truthful." This was another thing I got from Simon, which I would call *finding a voice*.

My first 'meeting' with Simon was circuitous: through his colleague Athol Fugard. When I was 15 I won best actor in the role of "Millie" in Fugard's play *People are Living There* (in the grand colonial tradition of single-sex-school drag). This was my first exposure to colloquial South African vernacular in literature; to South African English as I spoke it, as opposed to the 'Queen's English'. Soon after this I read Simon's monologue *Joburg Sies* as a short story. The title itself connotes the power of the language, the voice Simon 'wrote' in: a voice

of the streets, a truthful South African dialect I related to, wanted to tell stories in, and about. This voice was the direct result of Simon's character research and development methods.

When I finally got to work with him in 1989, the combination of these experiences: being paid attention to; the personal; a sense of belonging; and finding a voice made me want to do what he did. As a result this is my theatre-making and teaching philosophy.

WEAVING PAST AND PRESENT

2013: Batsamai – An overview

Blackout: a kwaito song plays and fades out into a radio DJ announcing the name of the song. He continues:

DJ: *''And now we have a brother from Joburg city centre who wants to tell his story, go ahead my brother…" Lights up on Morena.*

Morena: *Heita DJ Spider. My name is Morena Mokoena. I want to tell your listeners a story about a young man. At the age of 16 … he got into trouble – drinking, up to nonsense – you could say he was a teenage alcoholic…*

The ensemble enters singing ''I am young so I can fly like a bird.'' Each actor ends the song with a personal statement about what it means to be young ... Cut to:

5 young women wait for a municipal clinic to open. One has a large handbag…

I devised *Batsamai* with a cast of 17 Market Theatre Laboratory (Lab) students (the entire 1st year class). The seed of the play was the question: how has South Africa's democracy travelled? Where are we '20 years later'?

The title – *Batsamai (tr. Sesotho: The Travellers)* – emerged as an apt metaphor for my PaR:

- How has Simon's methodology travelled 20 years later?
- How have I mapped a methodology from it?
- How has my role (a middle-aged, middle class apartheid 'survivor', white South African) working with the Lab students (born-frees, predominantly working-class, black South Africans) travelled?[1]
- How do I travel from idea to play in my own methodology?

1989: Score Me the Ages/working with Simon – an overview

''Gentle classical music plays from … James' lounge. Lights up on James …

[1] Race is not a central issue in this PaR but I do deal with it under ''Gossip'' (pg: 15)

The theme song of a popular television soap opera fades in … Lights up on Alan in his flat … watching television …

Over the soap opera theme, the sound of electronic video … games from a pleasure arcade. Lights up on two boys, lying sprawled over a pool table …" (Simon 2001: 132).

In 1988-1989 I devised Simon's play about male sex-workers (rent boys) - *Score Me the Ages.* I played Alan, a gay man, for which I was awarded Dalro's Best Supporting Actor.

My working relationship with Simon continued as a teacher, appointed by him at the Market Theatre Laboratory, which he co-established in 1989 and I acted in one of his last productions: Stephen Berkoff's *East* in 1994.

THE VALUE OF EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE/TRADITION

The archive and the repertoire

I am using Diana Taylor's hypotheses from *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003) to deepen this exploration of Simon's methodology and to throw light on mine.

As a theoretical framework Diana Taylor's hypotheses apply to multiple aspects of my PaR. In it she distinguishes between:

> …the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e.: texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e.: spoken language, dance, sports, ritual) (2003: 588, her italics)[2]

She elaborates on the repertoire:

> The repertoire enacts embodied memory: performance, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing - in short all those acts normally thought of as ephemeral, non reproducible knowledge … (it) requires presence, people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there' (2003:599).

This describes my reading of Simon's methods of personal biography: actors' participation "in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there'."

Taylor also asks:

> If we were to … look through the lens of performed, embodied behaviours, what would we know that we do not know now? Whose stories, memories and social

[2] I used the Kindle version of Taylor's book. It is exactly the same text as the hard copy but page numbers are given as ''location number''. Therefore the 'page' references supplied do not match the hard copy. For example location no: 588, may be page no: 15 in the hard copy.

> struggles might become visible? What tensions might performance behaviours show that might not be recognised in texts and documents? (2003: 220)

To reiterate: Simon's use of the personal was political. His plays about South African realities (apartheid, race, class etc.) made "stories, memories and social struggles …" visible.

It is also interesting to note Taylor's comment about her own work and how it relates to the process of autoethnography and PaR: "... my reflection comes out of my role as participant in or witness to the events I describe …" (2003:181)

To return to the story about the train journey: the mother plaited (performing the ''repertoire''– embodied knowledge) while her child read a book: a ritual of the "archive" - knowledge transmitted as a written document. I teach and create from my embodied knowledge of Simon's methods (repertoire). This documentation of my practice is archive.

MY CORE IMPULSES: "WHEN WE UNDERSTAND THE MYSTERY RATHER THAN THE FACT."

The personal; archive; loss

In her personal memoir *Athol Fugard and Barney Simon: Bare stage, a few props, great theatre* (1997), Mary Benson quotes Simon:

> Camus said that a man's work is often a journey through his life in order to rediscover through the detours of art the two or three great and simple images that first found access to his heart … *when we understand the mystery rather than the fact*; it's when we become aware of the life of the thing that it stays with us. (1997: 55, my italics)

Aside from a clue to Simon's core impulses this describes the use of core impulses in a creative methodology, "… when we understand the mystery rather than the fact …"

The Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines ''impulse'' variously as: ''the act of impelling … a disturbance traveling along a nerve or a muscle; an outside influence on the mind: a sudden inclination to act'' (1973: 658).

I read my core creative impulses - the personal, the archive and loss - as the ''outside influences'' on my mind, the forces that impel me to ''act'' – and importantly – embodied forces that travel ''along a nerve or a muscle.''

Benson records one of Simon's possible core impulses which I will investigate. She quotes his comment on the results, early in his career, of using personal biography in his drama-for-health-education with nurses in KwaZulu:

> …it gave me a totally new meaning to theatre as communication, as a weapon. I took this to my work in theatre, this spirit and … energy. I had no doubt of theatre's importance and that, if it's not going to inform a member of the audience, *it might inform an actor or a playwright in a way that will fill them with something for somebody else* (1997: 87, my italics)

The personal

I begin with this impulse because it contains the other two: archive and loss. It is arguably the starting point for any creative work. Filling an empty stage (or page/canvas) with bodies, a story, characters, images and ideas is an unknown journey that starts with a gut feel: it is a personal, embodied act.

As a director/writer, this impulse manifests in devising from actors' personal biographies which shape their worldview and the stories they tell; and as a performer my work has been largely self-written work as opposed to interpreting others' texts – drawn from my personal biography.

The personal as a core impulse, also raises questions pertinent to my central research question. In reviewing how and why Simon's methodology (and by evolution mine) is still useful I also question what I will call the 'ethics' of story-telling – the question of 'who's telling whose stories' and what it means to locate myself personally through facilitating and telling others' stories (an aspect of my working experience with Simon). I explore this question in the devising process of *Batsamai*.

Archive

The personal informs my choice to favour the creation of original South African work over interpreting the 'Western canon': an act of searching for and claiming an identity, as well as attempting to contribute to a shared identity: integral to archive as a creative impulse.

In *Refiguring the Archive*, Graeme Reid, founder of Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA), writes: "The archive is a place of safe-keeping, preserving and imagining. In its broadest sense, the archive provides the source material for the creative arts." (Reid 2002: 206)

Following Reid's description – which provides an apt meeting point for archive and theatre-making - I use both archival material and repertoire to create work. In some instances I have devised plays directly sourced from the archive. For example *Your Loving Simon*, was written and created from late gay, ANC, HIV activist Simon Nkoli's prison letters - housed at GALA; added to this however, were the personal reactions and biographies of the two actors I devised the play with and my personal knowledge of Nkoli.

Dramatic license and conventions play with the archive: '*Simon*', set in the present, used the past to comment on the present. *Batsamai* archives the present experiences of 20-something South African youths in a particular context in 2013; it is informed by their (present) repertoires; making a comment on past and future.

Archive as an impulse to create theatre uses what has been preserved and gives it a new life; it is a 'live' manifestation of the archive: physically enacted - making the archive repertoire.

Loss

As a PaR outcome this impulse was the most enlightening and surprising and therefore it takes on a significance over and above the previous two impulses – both of which I was more aware of going into the process.

Out of all three this is seated in an extremely private and *personal* part of my repertoire. This research outcome – an instance of "understand(ing) the mystery rather than the fact" possibly provides the strongest tool I have discovered as theatre-maker and teacher; and a possible addition to my teaching repertoire.

Loss as an impulse requires some explanation. In my personal repertoire I have inherited loss: my father was an orphan; my mother 'lost' her home and religion as an immigrant and convert to Judaism.

Historically, my devised and self-created work/performance was initiated by a deep personal loss that changed my course from a trajectory of becoming a 'conventional' actor, for which I had trained and at which I excelled. The person I lost symbolised the fun of 'showbiz': performing for the joy of it; the mimetic; the camp and playfulness. With his death my easy connection to that also died. For the first time in my life I experienced stage fright. In *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis writes:

> No one ever told me that grief is so much like fear … the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning, I keep on swallowing (1961: 5).

All these muscular, physical reactions and restrictions are the opposite of mimetic skills: to embody a character you need the ability to get out of your body but be solidly grounded in it at the same time; to use fear as energy, not a debilitating muscular attack; to relax and release.

This is how I trace the change in my performance style to one far more personal: I began to find ways to embody characters in a non-mimetic way; 'presentational' rather than 'representational': it was the only way I could be on stage. This arguably affects how I direct

and teach. I look for the ‘blur’ between the person and the persona; for a truth where the actor is not so masked by technique.

I believe that an actor’s power is their vulnerability and fragility, delivered with playful confidence: a combination of the ‘fleeting-ness’ (vulnerability) of life and the powerful, invincible energy of life (playfulness and confidence). Using personal biography aims for the heart of this power. Pedagogically, learning to ‘use’ vulnerability – to be fragile and vulnerable - as much as actors learn to control voice and other technical skills, is I believe, a powerful outcome.

Cultural commentator Joan Didion calls her book about losing her husband and daughter in the same year: “The Year of *Magical Thinking*” (2005, my italics); *magical thinking* is a description that could be used for making theatre.

One of her descriptions is: ‘’Life changes in the instant. In the ordinary instant’’ (2005:89). While not a profoundly original statement I would argue that seeking those ‘’ordinary instants’’ is a quality in the experience I try to create on stage and has informed choices in *Batsamai*.

But theatre is heightened, not ordinary life. It plays with time and space – a day can pass in five minutes, and one space can change to a myriad spaces. Using the ‘ordinary’ can therefore be made extraordinary.

This impulse also informs a ‘’poor theatre’’ – ‘ordinary’ - aesthetic as a choice; as opposed to the spectacular – the antithesis of ‘showbiz’. In losing my ‘ease with showbiz’ I found what I would call ‘the seeds of showbiz’ – what the audience never see in a glitzy, high production-value extravaganza – how it looked on the rehearsal room floor. The production-value and aesthetic I work with *is* the power of fragility and vulnerability.

C.S. Lewis echoes Didion’s description: “The tiny, heart breaking commonplace” (1961: 22). An apt description for the power of ordinary vulnerability.

Finally, there is a dynamic tension in loss as a theatre-making impulse. Eugenio Barba, in arguing against the necessity to record and archive performance, writes:

> …the spectator…continues to have a dialogue with memories of these performances sown deep in his/her spirit…In the age of electronic memory…theatre performance also defines itself through the work of living memory, which is not museum but metamorphosis (Barba, quoted by Reason, 2003: 86).

Taylor questions whether performance is “that which disappears or that which persists, transmitted through a nonarchival system of transfer that I came to call the repertoire?” (2003: 201). With this she problematises Peggy Phelan’s notion of performance “becoming

itself through disappearance" (2003 Phelan quoted by Taylor: 324). Taylor 'complexifies' Phelan's argument that performance only occurs in the present; the repertoire is an embodied, repeated record of performance/s.

I read this complexity as part of the power and dynamic possibility of working with loss as a creative impulse. If live performance ''disappears'' (Phelan) (is lost/dies) until the next show, but it still lives in memory (Barba) and body (Taylor), and if living memory is used to create/repeat performance (Taylor), then rather than a stultifying, moribund, possibly self-pitying impulse, loss can create a powerful tension.

Performance is also a way of remembering instead of losing; recording. The classical Western canon and African oral tradition for example have recorded stories that may otherwise have been lost.

Loss is an impulse in how I put on stage what I put on stage and it is also a universal/known/embodied experience; if used consciously in creating work it potentially therefore - in light of these layers and frictions - provides a powerful energy, a subtext and 'sub*texture',* and resonance that can reach any audience. In my section on ''Scenario'' (pg: 21) I provide some examples of how I did this in *Batsamai*.

BATSAMAI: THE JOURNEY FROM IDEA TO PLAY

This reflexion on devising *Batsamai* weaves the present (2013: *Batsamai*) and the past - (1989: *Score Me the Ages*). I have structured it into sections, according to Simon's devising process: sensitisation; gossip; research; biography; improvisation; writing.

Detour

In 1980 director Hilary Blecher accompanied Simon to the Winterveld, in KwaZulu Natal, and wrote an account of Simon's health education workshop: *Goal Orientated Theatre in the Winterveld* published in the journal *Critical Arts*. This information about his early work in applied theatre is, I believe, incredibly valuable information about the formative years of Simon's practice, arguably when he was developing his methodology.

She recorded how Simon workshopped his Winterveld health-education play in seven days, I therefore used this as a model for devising *Batsamai* as I had similar time constraints with the Lab students. Unlike 'Winterveld' however I didn't have seven consecutive days: I had five full day rehearsals – once a week – and two and a half consecutive days in the production week. I will explain the resultant choices.

SENSITISATION

Actors' political agency; who we are and how we see the world shapes our unique stories

The idea of "sensitisation" comes from Blecher, the word she uses to describe Simon's initial exercises and games, to sensitise participants to his way of working and engender openness and trust.

2013: Batsamai

On the first day of rehearsal I used Simon's 'orange exercise' (from which *World in an Orange* takes its title). It aims ''to discover and look at the multiple reality of all things … that nothing is simply one thing'' (Blecher, 1980: 27, quoting Simon). Exploring shape, texture, taste, the infrastructure of an orange (skin, segments, small sections of each segment etc.), uses for an orange, the biography of an orange etc., participants experience that everyone has a unique story to tell; an awareness of ''multiple reality''; and of detail, listening and looking. The outcome: that to describe an orange as round and orange in colour is superficial and inadequate, is applied to character, story and performance.

I discovered the students had done this exercise before and so adapted it, focusing on two aspects:

1. The exercise ends with a pile of orange peels in the centre of the floor.
2. At a stage in the exercise students walk around the room with an orange tucked under their chins or held between their knees.
3. Out of their responses to the above I suggested character and emotion for improvisation.

The second sensitisation exercise I used – "Looking at Thando" - was a version of an exercise Blecher recorded as "Looking at Pauline" (1980: 30).

This is an example of the simplicity Simon used to achieve nuance and complexity. One student (Thando) stood in the middle, the other students in a circle around him. Each was asked to explain exactly what they saw - with constant side-coaching to only explain ''what you really see …for some people Pauline only had a face but no back, a profile, a ¾ view. For each person … she presented a different…reality'' (1980: 30). The outcome of the exercise, a simple, direct experience of how we all have different perspectives and ways of seeing, informs the rest of the process: character observations, improvisations and performance.

Blecher's report throws more light on the significance of these sensitising exercises:

> Through … (Simon's) … exercises … the group opened themselves to a new way of looking…They … developed the confidence that whatever they came up with was valuable and relevant … that everything had a story to tell … It was also important for them to understand that communication is not information but THE PROPER COMMUNICATION OF INFORMATION (1980: 32, Blecher's capitalisation).

She further notes Simon's explanation that: ''An awareness becomes a weapon in … life. Practically, socially, politically'' (1980: 29).

I read these exercises as 'establishing-tools' – to lay the ground for how a devising process will proceed. The awareness of each having a unique story to tell and multiple realities is a way for the students to experience their equal importance in contribution to, and shaping of, the play; more powerful than merely interpreters. This awareness is of *embodied* experience (the repertoire); "whatever they came up with was valuable and relevant … that everything had a story to tell." And it is political.

Taylor's description of moving from her childhood home in Parral, Chihuahua (Mexico) to her grandmother in Canada – to be Anglicised and 'civilised' offers an insightful definition of embodied knowledge and the personal/political aspect thereof:

> I also had to learn a new body language…I learned to eat sitting up straight with a book on my head and newspaper tucked under my chin…My body, my head, my heart and my tongue were in training (2003: 2604).

Her explanation of what she was forced to *unlearn* can be used to explain what the students were made aware of: the knowledge in "their body… head, heart and tongue." Her point about the forced unlearning (to be civilized) encapsulates the political nature of this knowledge: On a primary level – our physical behaviour, instinctive thoughts and emotions – are shaped by our social circumstances. By extension: who we are and how we see the world shapes our unique stories.

1989: Score Me the Ages

When I worked with Simon he no longer used such exercises and games at the beginning of the rehearsal process. I would argue this was a combination of deadline pressure as artistic director of the Market Theatre and taking it for granted that a cast of experienced actors had received and used this kind of training.

GOSSIP

Being paid attention to; trust; problematising the truth

Detour

The dictionary provides one archaic definition of gossip as a ‘’a woman who comes at birth’’ (linked to being present at baptism). Variously, other definitions include: “one who goes about telling and hearing news, idle talk, easy familiar writing” (Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, 1978: 563). I will explain how Simon’s use of ‘gossip’ as he called discussion, took this much deeper but this definition makes an obvious connection between gossip and the repertoire: the ‘’woman present at birth’’ suggests a lifelong knowledge (memory) of another, and “idle talk”, “familiar writing”: is the stuff of stories passed on, folklore, memory.

Another of Benson’s accounts of Simon’s explanation of his healthcare workshops throws light on this:

> First thing I did was to get the nurses to *gossip* in Zulu and they kept me informed... I got the nurses to investigate their lives as black woman, to forget everything they knew as nurses…I got them to go out into the villages and look at the people with new eyes, new self-respect and respect for the people…to listen to gossip in buses, stores and market places (Benson, 1997: 85-86, my italics).

Actor Dawid Minaar extends this idea of “forgetting everything you know”: ‘’It’s not so much innocence (he wanted) as a sense of not having experience…an openness and wonderment…’’ (2005:251).

Leading gossip (discussion) as a means to an end engages actors in a process with potentially multiple outcomes. It engenders self-respect because everyone is listened to (paid attention to); listening is therefore established as primary to theatre-making (applied later as a technical acting skill). The process of engaging with multiple ideas creates the possibility for actors to hear or think about perspective they had not considered; a potential for “wonderment.” Constant questioning, probing and curiosity problematises the truth.

This is a dynamic process, allowed and encouraged at this stage to be ‘chaotic’ and organic. It is not an easy process for the director because it generates a lot of material; to be sifted and selected for the final script; requiring the skill of listening, observing and slowly intuiting what each actor wants; can bring; and what may lead that actor to “a sense of not having experience.”

Like the nurses the actors are “investigating their lives…” not their acting skills and techniques; those are a given. This is the beginning of “inform(ing) an actor or a playwright in

a way that will fill them with something for somebody else." And the actors are the playwrights in a devising process.

It is also not an easy process for the actors. I believe it can be confronting as it demands and builds a different kind of trust than that which actors require to begin 'acting' in front of each other and relating to the emotional relationships their characters may have. In this process the actors are more vulnerable: a dynamic process for student actors and teacher. It is well described in pedagogical terms by bell hooks in *Teaching Community: a Pedagogy of Hope*: "Conversation is the central location of pedagogy for the democratic educator" (hooks, 2003: 44),

2013: Batsamai

Following the 'orange exercise' I began the devising process with gossip. The choice of beginning with a physical (sensitisation) exercise set a tone of physical work on the floor alongside discussion; provided opportunity for me to observe actors in physical action, their improvisation and concentration skills and engendered gossip.

The gossip established trust with this group of students with whom I had no previous relationship. It fulfilled another of bell hooks' pedagogical methods: "Creating trust usually means finding out what it is we have in common as well as what separates us and makes us different" (2003:109).

This brings me to my previous point about 'who's telling whose stories'. I would argue this as an area of potential 'commonality/separation/difference'.

As previously stated, race is not central to my PaR but informs my question. In his master's thesis on South African workshop theatre in the 1980s Mark Fleishman describes some of the practice from which Simon emerged as: "… a white 'culture broker' in a powerful central position. Much of the work consists of a dialogical interaction between this white director and the essentially black group …" (Fleishman, 1991: 61).This could describe the (racial) demographic of *Batsamai*. How has this travelled?

In my ''Introduction'' I wrote about how the content and context of South African plays have changed, and in questioning the usefulness of Simon's (my learnt) methodology I also question my own 'usefulness' as a South African theatre-maker and this, I would argue, is where race needs to be considered. The ''white 'culture broker' '' is no longer – thankfully - ''in a powerful central position''. The current artistic director of the Market Theatre, for example, is James Ngcobo. In the past Simon often used his (unasked for) privilege to give access to those legally denied a voice; used his voice to (partly) tell others' stories. This once served a purpose but is no longer necessary.

As part of the gossip therefore, I asked questions about 'who's telling whose stories'? The students concluded that: "Stories are stories - your story is my story." "You can't steal stories." "Actors must be acknowledged in collaborative work."

Responses to the question: "Are all South African stories all our stories because we are all South African?" included: "Yes, if you write from your point of view." "In the end it is co-creation." This relates to my archival impulse to contribute to and discover a shared identity; and to claim and locate myself within a context: co-creating a story with the students provides an otherwise inaccessible context (their first-hand experience is separate to mine).

One of the students' interview responses offers an answer to commonality. To the question: What do you think of working with someone (i.e.: myself as the director) from a different cultural background, he responded:

> It helps because we're living in a new country - now we are united, so when we do things we think about how the other part will feel, how other people will feel, we watch each other's toes. So I think the chopping and changing helps, we are on our way but we do not have to step on each other's toes (Student 5, 2013)[3]

Student 5's response pedagogically applied suggests that Simon's methods have travelled well and are useful; sensitively and ethically applied – without "stepping on each other's toes." Applied to theatre-making the "chopping and changing" – a combination of my and their contexts - arguably makes powerful theatre.

My methodology therefore in this young man's eyes has an *evolving* usefulness – ''we are on our way.'' This was embodied both in the narrative of *Batsamai* – travelling – and in my PaR intention: to examine my methodology – an evolved version of Simon's - and the 'passing on' of that tradition to student actors, directors and writers – an act of 'the repertoire'; which, potentially, will evolve as they use it.

Continuing this truncated gossip session (in *'Score'* we had approximately two months of irregular meetings to gossip) we gossiped about HIV, addictions, sexual abuse, corruption, unemployment, among other subjects. The challenge going-ahead is to use metaphor, image and 'personalising the political' to make this 'issue-heavy' list playful, complex and nuanced; resulting in dynamic text-based theatre.

Among responses I recorded in my journal were:

> We need to tell about apartheid and how it still affects us. Tell political stories as long as they are true and interesting. Barney told stories of that time, we must tell of our time (2013: rehearsal journal)

[3] As per my ethics clearance, students remain anonymous. All interviews were conducted by a 3rd party.

Stories (of our time) such as:

> Paying a bribe; getting a job because of who you know; 'I own power'; ''if ANC govt. does to you what apartheid did, do to ANC what you did to apartheid''; beggars with stories; beggars are good actors; selling ARVs to addicts; in Joburg your sympathy will kill you (2013: rehearsal journal)

Another point: gossip as a process is 'harnessed' by notation and journaling – from day one.

For example: the last two ideas (ARVs and 'sympathy will kill you') made it into the final play. In reflexion it is also possible to see how most ideas contributed; informed the 'repertoire' – subtext – of the play. Early images and themes I journaled, e.g.: 'chaos' and some poems about youth and poverty, were not used 'literally' but informed either staging and/or elements of the play.

In reflexion I also realise how gossip *consciously* used as a starting point on a journey creates space for "wonderment" before decisions are made. It creates momentum and can yield rich ideas fast.

To make a final point about role and hierarchy in this early stage of devising: the awareness, from day one, of the division between the roles of facilitator and director. In *Batsamai* I was *facilitator* of the gossip but knew that I would have to take responsibility for making some speedy choices as the *director*; choosing a few ideas from myriad ideas. With regards to this role of making choices it is also important to note that some ideas I had were dropped as a result of the outcome of further gossip and collaborative ideas.

1989: Score Me the Ages

The gossip process was similar but more intense. We had more time on '*Score*', and my responsibilities (ethics) to students were different to Simon's with a group of professional actors who chose to work with him. Simon could be 'freerer' and more probing in questions than I felt was appropriate in a teacher/student relationship.

I read my experience of gossip on '*Score*' as arguably part of Simon's adaptation of Grotowski's ''via negativa'' (one of his influences as reported by Benson): unlearning instead of using the learnt bag of tricks, "forgetting what you know"; starting the process by exposing yourself to create a character as opposed to character first (masked/tricks) and privately drawing on yourself.

The gossip (as with the nurses) continued into the character research process –we gossiped with people for character material and brought these observations and conversations back to Simon and the cast; gossiping about what we had heard and who we had met.

The following quote, extracted from minutes Matthew Krouse kept in his role as assistant director on *Score,* gives an idea of how Simon steered and informed the gossip, so that it became more investigative and problematised issues:

> ‘’December ‘88
>
> Our first meeting. We gossiped about:
>
> Rents are also involved in acts of innocence, in human encounters. Prostitution is linked to a person’s sexual awakening ... Barney explained about the process: it was important to talk to rent boys; *to overhear the unpredictable, to research the acts of innocence.* He also said the first step is to thoroughly talk things through, to tell personal stories and explore the theme ourselves, before researching ‘’in the streets’’ (Krouse, 1989: GAL 0066)

This goes back to Blecher’s “… proper communication of information.”

Simon’s primary role, as opposed to sharing information about himself, was constant curiosity and questioning: a method to dig up the complexities of the ‘truth’; to problematise the truth; in order to discover *proper communication of information.*

The intensity of his curiosity is one aspect of my ‘ethics’ with students: I did not believe it was appropriate to be as ‘curious’ as Simon could with professional actors.

RESEARCH

‘’Something in the core you need to release – asking lots of questions to get it out’’

Detour

The research process I used in *Batsamai* was a significant departure from Simon’s methodology. He famously sent actors out ‘into the streets’ to observe and find characters: the urban version of getting the nurses ‘’ …to go out into the villages and look at the people …”.

My departure - taking a ‘short cut’ - was an instinctive creative choice in response to a ‘mistake’.

Briefly: I combined character research and personal biography into one session – focusing on personal biography. This was due to a misunderstanding: I set the students a task to return to the next rehearsal (day two) with an idea of a character they would like to play; they all presented a nearly complete, short biography of a character they knew well; some were family members and some people they knew in their communities.

I made the decision to work with this mistake for a number of reasons:

1. As an effective way to use the limited time available for workshopping.
2. To overcome the lack of momentum in working once a week.
3. All the students had prepared in this way: the fact they had chosen these particular characters was significant; it connected to our gossip – all the characters told a story related to the issues we had gossiped about and therefore a bigger story about the students' world and their responses to '20 years later'.
4. Given the limited time, I set myself the realistic goal to achieve the 'first draft' of a devised play.

The fourth reason relates to my question of how Simon's methodology – as used by myself – has travelled – and to my point about ethics. Simon had sent his casts into streets he understood and could read; he was aware of the safety issues involved. And if an actor did experience a personal threat they were not students to whom the teacher and institution has a certain responsibility, including the students' personal safety in school hours and tasks. I can no longer 'read' the streets of Johannesburg, even less the various townships the students live in. Considering the issues raised in discussion – such as addiction and abuse – I did not feel safe sending students into situations in which I couldn't determine the risk.

This, arguably, is one of Simon's methods that has not travelled – or more importantly - it has not travelled as *used by me*, and to which I must add – *in this situation*. I can read certain 'South African streets': middle class and of my known world. I could therefore use this to tell my own stories – a point that links to my question of 'who is telling whose stories'.

Two research outcomes of this decision are important to note. It links to Simon's methodology as evolving; a collection of methods – a 'toolbox' – as a base from which to adapt – specifically in this instance: I adapted to a more 'instant' route to achieve results, as opposed to Simon's deeper, lengthier processes. This adaptation showed how effective the use of personal biography is (minus research 'on the streets'): in itself it yielded rich and complex characters and story.

Having noted these research outcomes however I believe that in a devising process with more time, the 'premature' presentation of character biographies may have provided only the first layer of character research. Simon may have explained the mistake and discussed the meaning, uses, lacks etc. of this method of choosing characters.

2013: Batsamai

The research and one-on-one sessions on the students' personal and character biographies was, as explained above, combined into one stage. I worked with 17 students on this process over two days. The work on personal biography, on which I will focus was therefore the more concentrated process.

I read the following student response as an indication of this 'mistake' as an effective creative choice in leading the students to a performance in seven days:

> (Working on my personal biography) helped me a lot to find the character, the workshopping process worked because normally you get a script and it takes a long time to find the character, like this you throw yourself in and you can try different things (Student 3, 2013).

The students' personal biography presentations were between one paragraph and a few pages in length. They also brought family photographs they had chosen. I investigated their personal and character biographies with all or some of the following questions:

- where were you born?
- where did you grow up?
- who did you grow up with?
- a life event that made you the person you are today.
- what do you feel when you look at pictures of yourself as a young child?
- your dream?
- why do you want to play the character you chose?

The best way to describe the outcomes of this process is in the students' words:

> "The character's been developed not just as a 'put on' but as an extension of myself. It brought elements of myself to the character ... it is important for a director to know an actor, to understand where he comes from" (Student 10, 2013).
>
> "I'm not an open person so at first it was uncomfortable but he made me be loose and let go, I can be free with his guy … it made our job easier – because now he knew 40% what T is like … now with this character I just play her, it's like I know her" (Student 4, 2013).
>
> "I have learnt how to start from somewhere and get somewhere, we have a play now" (Student 5, 2013),

I read these responses as the pedagogical efficacy of this method: overcoming limited time; students experiencing a process of "how to start from somewhere and get somewhere." By extension: in a full rehearsal process this suggests its efficacy for play-making.

Personal biography and core impulses

Using personal biography relates to all three of my core impulses and perhaps the two more obvious impulses – the personal and the archive – are a route to accessing loss as an impulse.

The act of sharing personal information and history is a vulnerable act, requiring trust from both actor and director. It could be described as a shortcut to an intense intimacy. This intimacy/vulnerability can then be carried onto the stage: the director has set a tone, a benchmark, for the relationship between themselves and the cast. What occurred in the privacy of the one-on-one session is not lost in translation to the space the actor occupies, and how s/he does so, on stage.

This is an essential aspect of using this tool. Not unlike, perhaps, a therapist and patient (although this method is definitely not therapy – it is a creative means to reaching a deadline). The director however has similar responsibilities to a therapist: trust, ethics and confidentiality. Also possibly similar to a therapist, the director is involved in his own personal process of looking at and listening to himself as s/he does that with the actor.

This process requires a different listening to the gossip stage (listening to sift through an overwhelming amount of information and ideas); this phase of listening is highly intuitive.

Once again student responses illustrate this:

> You become free when you tell him because to his ears it is new. It was beneficial to tell him because if I tell someone from the same culture or background, most of things he already knows. But Robert hears new things, the more you tell him the more he asks (Student 1, 2013).
>
> He pushed me, but the work I did myself, he was like a light and I had to follow and make sure it stays on (Student 4, 2013).
>
> It gave me an opportunity to look with a different eye. He brought an outside perspective and I brought the inside (Student 10, 2013).
>
> … he taught me that there is something in the core you need to release, as an actor there is something within you have to take out, something that is hidden inside, he asks a lot of questions that will get it out (Student 9, 2013).

This last remark addresses a question I had about the use of personal biography: the possibility that it reveals too much of an actor that would better be kept 'secret', private from the director, as part of the actor's unconscious – or conscious- 'arsenal'. However this student's response suggests the 'something hidden' remains private to the actor. He does not name it, does not reveal what is in the ''core'. Arguably then, correctly used, personal biography is constructive, a tool that helps the actor to find a ''core'': a particularly useful pedagogical outcome.

To return to loss as an impulse: actors are alone on the stage; they are 'lost', the director cannot hold their hands or 'save' them: in this I believe the emotions of loss are experienced.

Actors move through this, overcoming the muscular constrictions of grief C.S. Lewis writes about; they sink or swim. The more vulnerable a director can allow an actor to be – and vice versa – the more vulnerable an actor can allow a director to allow them to be! – the more powerful this invisible experience (in Peter Brooke's analogy) is made visible and the more powerful the life force of performance becomes. Overcoming 'fear' leads to the life affirming, celebration, of live performance.

I would argue that the on-on-one personal biography sessions confronted fear; they created an emotional experience similar to those of Lewis' grief. This potentially took the 'weakest' students beyond their fear: "I'm not an open person so at first it was uncomfortable but he made me be loose and let go … it made our job easier…''. And with the more confident students it achieved a new depth: "as an actor there is something within you have to take out, something that is hidden inside, he asks a lot of questions that will get it out.''

On another level loss presented itself as a theme in the students' personal biographies: at least half of them have lost a single parent or guardian at a young age, some of them orphaned; some of them have been abandoned by a parent.

Finally: I would argue that loss is part of the South African zeitgeist and psyche. Loss of life by violence and/or disease/poverty; of identity, direction, hope, privilege, familiarity, morality. Lost expectations – liberation promises unfulfilled. If Barney Simon was telling stories of his time about racial politics, I would argue that one of the South African narratives of my time is loss.

Following their personal biographies we discussed their character biographies and I gave each student a monologue to write - as their chosen character. I made a link between their personal biographies and characters, based on my intuitive response, incorporating their experiences of loss, abandonment, disappointment, achievements and aspirations.

1989: Score Me the Ages

Character research was divided into two phases which I will call initial and detailed research.

Initial research

> February 1989
>
> We started going 'into the streets' and bringing back stories about experiences with people we met and observed. We told stories that people we met had told us about themselves. We spoke about observations of behaviour between people … the 'dance'; the rituals and rhythms of the street.
>
> I spoke about some of my own anonymous sexual encounters.

> My experience of these first research and observation exercises was that I was developing empathy and sympathy for people I may otherwise have viewed cynically and satirically (1989: GAL 0066)

It is interesting to note here, an overlap in Simon's terminology ''the 'dance'; the rituals and rhythms of the street'' and a comment Taylor makes about repertoire: ''…the actions that are the repertoire do not remain the same. The repertoire both keeps and transforms *choreographies of meaning*'' (2003: 602, my italics). Simon's ''rhythms of the streets'' expresses a keen sense for ''choreographies of meaning,'' – the embodied meaning and material he observed – and taught actors to – in the streets.

This initial research phase was:

- unstructured and therefore more 'by chance'
- shared in the group as opposed to one on one sessions with Simon
- we sometimes went out in pairs or as a group
- we were not yet researching 'in character'.

Simon taught me, amongst other key research methods:

- When researching, one must learn not to 'invade' dialogue.
- By participating (opposed to only observing) the actor will learn to identify material and discover the unpredictable.
- Character research is a means to 'bear witness'.
- Don't look for ''major dramas'' in character research.
- Seek to experience the people you meet (e.g.: in the case of *Score Me the Ages* – the loneliness of people in bars in the daytime).
- Write down any dialogue and observation as soon as possible after any encounters.
- Go through *a struggle to comprehend.*
- To be truthful makes work relevant.
- Reality is not always as simple as politics.
- All of South Africa is in everything one examines.

Detailed research

The detailed research involved finding a specific character, the choice of which originated in the gossip and initial research stages. Detailed research was distinguishable from the initial research in that:

- it was done solo

- it involved one-on-one sessions with Simon during which all the actors shared their personal biographies
- we went out dressed ‘’in character’’
- discussion was private.

January 1989

> Barney has asked me if I would like to play a working class character, and I agree. It links to my own parents’ working class origins …
>
> I spent the day at the General Hospital. They must have thought I was mad to want to ‘try the job out to see if I liked it’ ... And then at lunchtime I glimpsed him, we hardly spoke, only enough for me to get a feel of him and find out that his name is Morris … he was very shy but very curious; not part of the gang of boisterous macho porters showing me around, who didn’t know quite what to make of me (1989: GAL 0066)

An important observation at this stage is the playfulness of Simon’s methodology: dressing up as a working class man and pretending to want a job as a hospital porter was exciting, risky and fun. (The risk I didn’t have the trust or time to take with the students).

My character biography that follows provides some examples of how Simon wove the personal and fictional:

> Alan: based on Morris, a hospital porter at Johannesburg General Hospital
>
> Trusts people, no suspicion or malice; in a state of struggle.
>
> Vulnerability: Easily swayed and believes people. Polite and kind – with a guest he would try to please nervously – concerned. (*All the above similar to my own emotional state at the time of working with Simon*)
>
> Home: … Bullfighter picture made from stones glued to velvet that he made himself (*I had described these to Simon from a childhood friend’s parents’ house*)
>
> He was born on a farm: dreamlike in his mind. Death of mom – funeral on the farm, beginning of the end of family life. Moved to city and brought up by his aunt. (*From my personal experience of loss; although I hadn’t lost a parent)*
>
> Personal icon: His aunt might have brought him up (I had told Simon stories about my favourite aunt). Dead mom: Memory of great beauty, touched up wedding photos, mother like a star (*What pictures of my own mom evoked for me)*
>
> Work: Porter, he’s been in and out of jobs. He has done dinner service and encyclopaedia sales, knows some trivia (*My own experiences of filler jobs in between acting*) (1989: GAL 0066)

IMPROVISATION AND WRITING

Metaphor; exposing a raw nerve

I have grouped these two methods as they lead directly into each other. This stage is connected to all the stages of the process, from day one.

2013: Batsamai

To break down inhibition and establish an ensemble I began with all 17 actors on stage, improvising at the same time. This was also an opportunity for me to start finding possibilities of images, shapes and staging.

As previously mentioned (under Sensitisation) the first group improvisation was an instinctive choice in response to the students having previously done the “orange exercise”. To reiterate my adaptation:

1. The exercise ends with a pile of orange peels in the centre of the floor: from this I asked the students to describe images evoked.
2. At a stage in the exercise students walk around the room with an orange tucked under their chins or held between their knees. I asked students to recreate some of these body postures I observed.
3. From their responses to both questions I suggested character and emotion for improvisation.

In my own methodology I would argue that the more physical use of the orange for improvisation relates to the contemporary use of physical theatre, and that shifting the focus from the ‘depth’ of Simon’s original exercise to an impetus for ‘instant’ improvisations is also significant: it possibly relates more strongly to a contemporary ‘post-psychology’ culture of ‘instant’ information. Simon’s ‘deep’ work with sense memory, method acting; psychodynamics - these techniques – once ‘’subversive’’ – may have lost their edge in 2013.

These ‘instant’ improvisations led directly to gossip. The cast explained their characters and improvisations. To provide examples of the rich images and ideas that came from observing a pile of orange peels and assuming body postures:

- a taxi queue marshal; disabled/voiceless character; a seed bringing new beginning; soundscape of a refugee camp; stereotype of femininity; abuse; an old man singing about his observations of being fed up with government; woman who lost husband and 2 sons in the struggle - so traumatised she can only sing about it. (2013: rehearsal journal)

I previously mentioned how and why Simon's methods are useful as a creative tool for issue-based theatre; to summarise:

- it uses metaphor (orange peels)
- and images (physical distortions caused by oranges) to spark imagination
- it replaces political discussion with gossip
- personalises politics
- thus opening actors to more creative possibilities in dealing with issues.

I used two other 'instant' improvisatory exercises.

1. One involves the entire group contributing character details to each other:
2. Everyone writes a character detail such as favourite song; an emotional characteristic; favourite colour etc. on a sheet of paper.
3. That characteristic is hidden by folding the paper, and the sheet is passed around the circle.
4. A new characteristic is written, folded, passed etc., until it arrives back at the originator.

The outcome of this particular exercise added useful character texture to those students who chose to use this for character information.

Finally, I used an 'instant' Noel Greig exercise in which the group plots the journey of an object (Greig, 2005: 26). This exercise had a direct impact on the final play. We followed the journey of a bag: left behind, then stolen, then the final image of the play: the bag left on stage with an abandoned baby in it.

Unsupervised improvisation

Another departure from Simon was leaving actors to prepare unsupervised improvisations. In '*Score*' all Simon's improvisations were watched and side-coached by him.

I divided the students into groups – also a time-saving device - with the instruction to devise a song beginning with "I am young so…"

In my rehearsal journal I noted about these songs:

> Automatically, instinctively (in their songs) they all went for the positive, in contrast to the chaos/problems/challenges that came out of previous discussions. Their songs expressed a desire for how they wished life to be. Escape from how life is via smoking marijuana was a recurring theme.
>
> Stage picture from one group's improvised song: bodies spread across the stage; jazz improvisation feel and shape; one student with a drum (2013: rehearsal journal)

Broadly, they devised four different songs covering:

> ‘’I am young so don’t kill my dreams; leave me to follow my destiny.’’ “ … so I’m free, so I care.” “ … so what; I can fly like a fish; to smoke marijuana is to fly.” “ … so I am liberated, fresh, creative; I have all the power.” (2013: rehearsal journal)

By this stage we had agreed on queues as a metaphor for journeys and as a structural device. In the second unsupervised improvisation, groups prepared scenes choosing where the queue was set and the journey of the bag.

The quality of the unsupervised improvisations was appropriate for 1st year students: literal, self-conscious and over explained, but there were useful elements from each. There are points to note from this.

My ‘hope’ with these improvisations was for ‘instant’ material. The outcome however was possibly more valuable: deepened vulnerability and mutual trust; their willingness to risk and expose themselves in these improvisations, and my role in watching and holding/respecting that, links, I believe, to my previous points about loss.

Improvisation and core impulses

Part of how I use and express loss is by attempting to achieve a ‘raw edge’ on stage; like exposing a raw nerve; a ‘rawness’ not in terms of visual spectacle or shock value; it is rather a spectacle of witnessing the ‘ordinary’; leading an actor to that place; attempting to create that uncomfortable situation for the audience – sometimes best achieved with ‘non-actors’. It is an embodiment of the directorial and pedagogical instruction to ‘not act’. Watching students ‘fumble’ through an improvisation, expose themselves, helps me to lead them to that place.

Another benefit of the unobserved improvisations was the tried and tested pedagogical result of natural leaders emerging within groups.

Supervised improvisations

Improvisations conducted and side-coached by me began with a structured sequence in which students started as characters (developed from biographies) existing in their own spaces; they then start moving – sharing the stage space (no interaction); they exaggerate body and voice; begin interacting with other characters; come back down to normal (loose physical exaggeration). The sequence ended with the students forming a queue and, in character, asking the person behind them: ‘’what are you waiting for?’’

Their recorded responses to ‘’what are you waiting for” were used in the final play.

The other supervised improvisations were recorded and transcribed, specifically done to write scenes of the play, already agreed on:

1. Women in a queue at a clinic.
2. People in a queue at an ATM.
3. Three guys smoking grass at taxi rank; one has the ARVs from the stolen bag: (waiting for the joint to be rolled, waiting to get high; to escape)
4. A rape scene (waiting in a queue to rape; waiting to be abused)

Improvisation carried on into the second last day of rehearsal to refine and fix scenes that were not yet working. Not setting certain scenes and/or beats until the last possible moment was another method learnt from Simon, one which creates 'rawness'. The 'uncertainty' the actors experience allows their personal biographies – repertoires – to potentially show through the masks of rehearsed persona.

1989: Score Me the Ages

Improvisation began when character and personal biography was completed and the plot structure was more developed; character biography led to material for improvisation.

Improvisations were variously:

- private, internal situations with all the characters in their own spaces, with no dialogue
- inner monologues of characters prompted spontaneously by Simon
- scenes between characters

In his interview in *The World in an Orange*, Lionel Newton makes a pertinent point about Simon's method: "… from [improvisations] the play … grows and starts forming a life of its own." (2005: 243).

In summary: improvisations – which result in the text – actually begin in the first stage. Suggestions of ideas for scenes begin during gossip; character research; character biography/personal biography. These stages all contribute to improvisations.

The improvisations lead to the first formulation of a possible scene structure - which in turn can be altered, refined and formulated - in response to ongoing improvisations.

WRITING AND STAGING

"The proper communication of information''; scenarios

Similarly to the section above - I have grouped these methods because the process happens concurrently. The writing process, as indicated, began in ""Improvisation". This last stage is also connected to all stages of the process; from day one.

2013: Batsamai

The physical writing process began when scenes were improvised for transcription and when the students wrote character monologues based on the meeting points between their personal and character biographies. At this stage I also started sifting through ideas and possibilities that would affect the final structure and narrative.

From this point my role shifted primarily to that of director/decision maker – as opposed to facilitator - including making decisions based on, or directly from, choices made by the ensemble. The main decisions at this stage are which monologues to use as monologues in the play, and which to weave into scenes, and/or to use as source for scenes.

Some of the above happened on the floor with actors. For example a group would be instructed to incorporate elements from a monologue/s into the improvisation of a scene. Some editing – and interweaving of monologues, previously discarded or missing information - was done by me at a later stage – with a greater overview of what was being communicated and what was still missing or overwritten – "the proper communication of information.''

One structural challenge was transitions: how to balance and weave between monologues and scenes. I dealt with this by using 'radio phone-ins' as a monologue device; inspired by listening to the radio and the role of radio phone-in in political/social debate. Structurally this overcame the problem of how to 'locate' the monologues; providing a context. It also represented the reality of youth culture on radio.

This editing process was ongoing, until the last possible moment, and informed by staging choices. For example - a monologue that became a radio phone-in: a young lesbian publicly reading a letter to her grandmother was performed simultaneous to a rape scene, which was performed as a dumb show. These decisions could only be made in the process of staging and discovering what was powerful and possible. The sequence of scenes could also only finally be worked out in staging; according to some practical considerations as well as intuitive decisions in response to rhythm and story.

Scenarios: a structural device

I would like to return to another theory of Diana Taylor's: a significant research outcome concerning structure, the use of 'scenarios'. I read this as short 'sketches' (cabaret/revue style) woven together, as opposed to one continuous story. This was a device Simon favoured; he used it in *Score Me the Ages*, as well as in *Black Dog/Inj' emnyama* (1984), *Born in the RSA* (1985), *Cincinnati* (1979) and *Woza Albert* (1981).

Taylor writes about how scenarios make meaning, in terms of the archive and repertoire. Her definition: “Scenario: ‘the sketch or outline of the plot of a play, giving the particulars of a scene, situation etc.’…” (2003: 764). And she elaborates:

> Its portable framework bears the weight of *accumulative repeats*. The scenario makes visible, yet again, what is *already there*: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes. (2003: 766, my italics)

Her argument originates in the scenarios (motifs) of Western imagination of colonial conquest and subjects such as: “the discoverer, conqueror, ‘savage’ and native princess” (2003: 767).

This is the “*already there*” she refers to; one of the ways in which scenarios structure meaning – we already know the symbols/motifs/metaphors/stereotypes – and so the meaning is conveyed in a short scene, minus explanation or exposition. It contains “features of narrative and plot” but it also demands that we “pay attention to corporeal behaviour such as gestures, attitudes and tones not reducible to language” (2003: 776).

This was the structural device of *Batsamai*: scenarios linked by a common motif/metaphor (queues) and the journey of a bag that appeared in each scenario; I would argue that monologues can also be termed ‘’scenarios’’. Taylor comments that: “Scenarios may consciously reference each other by the way they frame the situation and quote words and gestures” (2003: 823). In *Batsamai* the queues ‘’consciously reference each other’’; and queues could be called ‘’gestures’’ – performed by a group of people.

In relation to archive and repertoire she says:

> …the transmission of a scenario reflects the multi-faceted systems at work in the scenario itself, in passing it on we can draw from various modes that come from the archive and or the repertoire – writing, telling, re-enactment, mime, gestures, dance, singing (2003: 836).

“They conjure up,” she explains ‘’past situations so internalised that no one remembers the precedence” (2003: 846).

Taylor explains scenarios in terms of ‘social actors’ “assuming socially regulated patterns” but adds that:

> Whether it’s a question of mimetic representation … [or social actors] … the scenario … allows us to keep both the social actor and the role in view simultaneously, and thus recognise the area of resistance and tension. The friction between plot and character (on the level of narrative) and embodiment (social actors) make for some of

> the most remarkable instances of parody and resistance in performance tradition in the Americas. (2003: 800)

I read the above quotes in relation to *Batsamai* (and most of my theatre work), as follows: the scenarios in *Batsamai* – as well as some monologues delivered in the third person - distanciated the audience from the action while drawing them in. The ‘’friction’’ was the blurring of the line between character and personal biography: it is obvious when you watch a young person talk about and embody a story about being a young person in South Africa in 2013 that they are drawing from their own lives – but how much is fact, how much fiction? (Another dimension of ‘whose telling who’s story’).

The closing image of *Batsamai* was the bag, with a light shining from inside it and the sound of a baby crying: an image of an abandoned baby. Although this did not achieve the sensitivity I intended due to lighting and timing problems, it fits Taylor’s definition of “past situations so internalised that no one remembers the precedence”: e.g.: abandoned by the state, loss of land, human dignity, longing – all expressing deep loss; and hope, optimism, life.

People queuing for identity documents and birth certificates, waiting for money, waiting for abuse (rape) to end, waiting to escape reality (get high), for respect and recognition also resonate with “past situations”, as well as reflect present reality

These and other similar moments and scenarios in *Batsamai* transmitted archive/repertoire of past and present: at once forgotten (the abuses and memories of apartheid – variously remembered, inherited, buried and/or forgotten depending on audiences’ and actors’ ages); and very much present ‘20 years later’.

The linking device of the journey of the bag is in itself a scenario – it is a ‘’sketch’’, and ‘’outline’’ with a larger known meaning. The bag also took on a ‘repertoire’ of meanings by what I chose to place in it: condoms; ARVs; cell phone; ID documents.

All these objects tell a larger story: HIV, abuse, a changed world, technology, youth culture, an evolving/lost/new identity, etc.

The inspiration for the bag came from the archive. It was a device I saw used in the Vittorio de Sica movie: *Miracle of Milan* (Vittorio De Sica, 1951). And so, the bag itself is a ‘stereotype’, a known device that organically led to the scenarios of the objects and the abandoned baby.

The ‘queues’ was a suggestion from a student: the repertoire of a ‘born free’: her interpretation (embodied experience) – her ‘known’ metaphor/scenario for present day South Africa.

These notions of scenarios also link to my use of Didion's "ordinary moments" and Lewis' "heart breaking commonplace." Stripped away staging, dialogue and performance that express my impulse of loss as a continual subtext(ure).

For example: I interpret the opening sequence of the play, the song that originated from the "I'm young so..." improvisation (written about under "Improvisation") as a scenario with the subtext(ure) of loss.

It had a plaintive bluesy-jazz arrangement – Taylor's ''forgotten" known ('blues' is a centuries old repertoire). Young South Africans singing about being free, and making statements such as "I am young so I am free; let me make my own mistakes; I can motivate for change; I will vote EFF etc.") communicates a complex truth. It is as vulnerable and sad as it is hopeful and joyous; the joy of youth who have the right to careless freedom, to make mistakes; and the sadness of youth in a society with many social challenges robbing them of those rights. As an opening scenario this set loss as the tone of the play.

I decided to add 'my voice' into the play - appearing as a disembodied head through the curtains at the back of the stage - as part of my PaR question regarding my own usefulness and feelings of irrelevance; this was also staged as a scenario – a brief sketch involving me asking questions about where I was, expressing my fear of the city, my loss of place, my delayed intention to learn an African language in order to "feel at home"; leading to the question: "what are you waiting for?"

Thus a seed that was planted long before day one was worked into the play; the seed of this inquiry: how and why Simon (and me) are useful. This was my own journey – and repertoire – expressed in the play.

1989: Score Me the Ages

In essence Simon's writing methodology involved the transcription, and editing, of tape-recorded improvisations. This method relates directly to the archive and repertoire. As already mentioned – the embodied, instinctive process of improvisation (repertoire) becomes archive when recorded as text. The transcriptions, similar to archival oral history recording techniques, were word for word, including any vocalised hesitations ("um", "ah", etc.) and notation of pauses. This notation of 'silences' relates to the repertoire: capturing rhythm and content/meaning that may come from the unspoken. This sensitivity to the unspoken also contributes to the unspoken subtextual communication between actors and audience. The audience intuitively 'knows' a character or situation - before text.

The final scripting and staging of *Score Me the Ages* was a similar process to the one described for *Batsamai:* editing, eliminating and adding text as necessary; reordering a

proposed scene structure according to practicality, instinct and rhythm; process taking precedence over product until the last possible minute – even beyond opening night.

Although I worked with extreme time constraints in *Batsamai*, the time constraints Simon worked with also enhanced the writing process: providing an external process of elimination – some decisions had to be made quickly circumventing ambivalence over choices.

bell hooks makes an interesting observation that puts my challenge in *Batsamai* into a different perspective – an advantage rather than a lack: "The classroom is one of the most dynamic work settings precisely because we are given such a short amount of time to do so much" (2003: 14).

This concludes my comparison of how my use of Simon's methods in *Batsamai* and how I experienced them in '*Score'*. In the next section I will give brief examples of my core impulses, and Simon's methods, in a sample of my work prior to *Batsamai*.

MY BODY OF WORK

Memory activism

Generally I have used and adapted all of Simon's methods, as itemised in this report so far, as well as other learnt and instinctively developed methods in all my work, besides *Famous Dead Man*, created prior to working with Simon.

A significant adaptation of what I learnt from Simon (and possibly similar to his early health-education work) is my use of games and improvisation not only as a theatre-making method with experienced actors or students, but as a 'crash course' in acting for the plays in which I have worked with 'non-actors'.

Famous Dead Man

''…one of the shows central investigations (is) the politics of sexuality.'' (Jeff Zerbst, 18 August 1986: Weekly Mail).

This cabaret, about Prime Minister H.F Verwoerd and his assassin Demitrious Tsafendas, banned by the State, used a strong queer voice (drag, satire, shock, camp) to express opposition to apartheid. This 'voice of opposition' was already mine as a gay man, using ''the politics of sexuality" to express, among other things, opposition to apartheid. This was the voice for which I found the aforementioned artistic home in Simon's Market Theatre. It is evident in my cabaret work which all features drag (e.g.: *Famous Dead Man, Fuck Politics lets Dora, Dinner and a Show with Shirley and Mrs Horowitz*) and in my predominantly gay-themed plays (*Two Straight Queers, Afrodizzia, After Nines, Your Loving Simon*).

Additionally, *Famous Dead Man* originated from archive and the personal as core impulses. It drew on the history of Verwoerd and Tsafendas and on South Africa's apartheid history; and was inspired by my - and my co-creator's - rage at compulsory military conscription. Taylor's ''scenarios'' were used as a style.

Afrodizzia

''His comic lines are reframings of the way people actually speak …" (Robert Greig, 1995: Sunday Independent[4]).

This was the first play in which I experimented with Simon's methodology. The critical note of ''the way people actually speak'' was a direct outcome of devising, improvising and transcribing. The impulses in this play were personal and archival – it was based on my experiences as a waiter (repertoire). Loss was expressed as a reaction to the transformation of Johannesburg's inner city – the story was set in a once grand inner city restaurant, now failing, and ended with the beleaguered white owner giving the business to the black head chef with whom he had fallen in love.

The Story I'm About to Tell

> In true workshop style they unashamedly create out of chairs a taxi taking a group of people to TRC hearings … The resulting dialogues … create a poignant yet no-hold-barred depiction of a peace-making process … Cringe making? Careful, this is one of the most remarkable pieces of theatre I have experienced … in which actors and real life convincingly unite. (Nick Awde, July 1999: The Stage)

I read this response in terms of loss. The play combined three 'real people' telling the real and tragic and painful stories they had told at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings (TRC). I attempted to dignify stories of unbearable pain by directorial choices in which the ''ordinary'' was paramount. Potentially ''cringe-making'' but by ''unashamedly'' stripping masks of not only actors but also aesthetics the result (according to this response) was powerful. Awde goes on to say that combining actors with the 'real' story-tellers was like ''using actors as midwives'' – which resonates with the method – or 'sense' - of gossip (arguably also a gay genre) I learnt from Simon and the derivation of gossip as ''a woman who comes at birth.''

[4] I do not provide exact dates for critical responses from ''The Star'' and ''Sunday Independent'' newspapers. My attempt to get the exact dates from the archives (Johannesburg Library) was unsuccessful. The microfiche is broken, the papers are bound in heavy volumes, mostly stored 3 floors below the room to which the public has access; the pulley- system is broken and an elderly man has to physically carry them up three floors: an argument for the value of repertoire (embodied knowledge passed on 'live') instead of reliance on archive.

While I don't lay any claim to originality in this theatrical genre (verbatim theatre is an established genre), a further response is worth noting in terms of my PaR arguments. "…the play … is not a dramatisation of the TRC … we are as much part of the story being told … as the rest of the cast is.'' (Lerato Kojoana, 02-15 December 1999: SABC Intercom).

I relate this to Taylor's ''repertoire'', especially as a powerful (and necessary) alternative to the televised (electronically archived) TRC hearings, and the now archived (and controversially inaccessible) documents and transcripts from the TRC. This also resonates with Barba's argument for live performance that: ''In the age of electronic memory…theatre performance also defines itself through the work of living memory, which is not museum but metamorphosis" (2003: 86).

No Room for Squares

> … when Coco asked (Bobby) Merkel, the elder (the protagonist's father and saxophonist in the show) what it is was really like back then … (he) … responds with a series of riffs on the sax … as descriptive as spoken word in their depiction of anguish in the extreme (Garalt MacLiam, 2000: Star Tonight).

In '*Squares'* actor Coco Merkel told his family's story of forced removal from Sophiatown to Westbury and about his life in Westbury; using material from Coco's family's repertoire and from researched archival material. Bobby is a well-known musician in Westbury, so his presence on stage already carried history and connection for much of the audience. In Taylor's terms this is the ''repertoire require(ing) presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there'; being a part of the transmission.'' (2003: 607). It was also – as it differed in every performance - a moment that "both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning." I read this as an example of what I aspire to achieve – and is possible to achieve – with the personal, archive and loss as core creative impulses.

Another response clarifies this statement: ''Merckel and Colman have … hit on an interesting new mixed form of theatre – part cabaret, part play, part confession, part musical recital.'' (Robert Greig, 2000: Sunday Independent) The playfulness and entertainment (camp and music) of cabaret can create powerful irony in dealing with ''anguish in the extreme''/loss.

Your Loving Simon

> In many ways *Your Loving Simon* and other socio-politically driven Colman plays, are highly accessible theatre providing historical reparation in an artistic form. Lest we forget (Adrienne Sichel, 2003:The Star).

This response to the (archive- sourced) play *Your Loving Simon* about late political activist Simon Nkoli speaks strongly about archive as an impulse. In ‘*’Jacques Derrida meets Nelson Mandela: Archival Ethics at the Endgame”* archivist Verne Harris writes: ‘’Far from being an impartial custodian, the archivist is a memory activist…” (Harris, 2011: 114).

I would call Simon a “memory activist.” Borrowing this phrase of Harris’ – and acknowledging Simons’ influence – I characterise much of my body of work as that of a “memory activist”. The memories are both personal and sourced; memories of others through personal biography; and loss as a strong personal (cellular) memory of my own. I use memory to archive past and present (as with *Batsamai*).

CONCLUSION

Rigour, ‘evolving’, tradition, core creative impulses and celebration.

To argue how and why Simon’s methodology is useful ’40 years later’ I have organised it into stages and attempted to record and formulate it as a collection of methods used in a particular sequence; what has emerged is a rigorous methodology.

Rigour

In *Actor Training Second Edition (Hodge, A, ed: 2010)* Clive Barker writes in the chapter ‘*’Joan Littlewood”*:

> The unfortunate result of Littlewood’s reluctance to set down her working method and their theoretical backing has been that she has been accused of being a dilettante who somehow managed to hit the right button on some occasions – which is a long way from the truth. (Barker in *Actor Training Second Edition, Hodge, A, ed* 2010:130)

I would argue that this is a common misconception of devised theatre – as hit-and-miss, not quite as legitimate as the ‘well-made-play’. The rigour of Simon’s method, as notated in this paper, is anything but the work of a ‘’dilettante’’, and provides an excellent approach to the ‘well-devised-play’.

In a South African context: this could greatly benefit ‘community’ theatre – largely devised, educational and issue based. It offers a rigorous methodology that has tools; stages; processes and techniques to ‘transform’ the didactic; to create meaning out of metaphor; work with the personal as political and develop complex subtext through the structured (rigorous) use of repertoire.

These tools make issue/message/educational theatre not only three dimensional and nuanced but also playful; they transform melodrama into the ordinary; optimise the

aesthetics of ‘poor theatre’ staging (an economic reality in community theatre); and offer a style incorporating ‘’scenario’’ – one workable solution to devising.

Evolving

This emerged from the student comment that ‘’we are on our way but we do not have to step on each other’s toes.’’

My use of Simon’s methodology, and indeed this documentation thereof, is an interpretation. Arguably then: this is my methodology - as influenced by Simon (and acknowledged as such).

In this way methodologies evolve. The student comment that: ‘’I will leave here with a lot of information, when it comes to Barney Simon’s work, even before I came here, it is something you do – you don’t realise you are doing most of the things he did, but now you find more ways to do your work,’’ suggests further evolution.

Importantly, it is a uniquely South African methodology that is evolving (while not a unique methodology). His workshops with nurses were a response to the problems of apartheid-created illiteracy. In his Stockholm radio interview Simon said: ‘’… in the apartheid days we were … saying on the stage what newspapers couldn’t say …’’ (Simon, 1995: radio interview). His methodology, arguably, was therefore originally developed to find ways to do this.

Tradition

This relates directly to ‘evolving’ and to applying Taylor’s ‘’archive and repertoire’’ as a lens on Simon’s methodology.

To return to the mother on the train: she plaits her daughter’s hair because it is a useful tradition, it has survived; not out of ‘respect’ to an empty tradition. Nor does she cut her daughter’s hair short because she is ashamed of her tradition; because long plaits may be old-fashioned in this 21st century high-tech society she is part of; she bridges the gap between past and present.

One of my reasons for this PaR was to bridge the gap between past and present with my embodied knowledge – to pass on a tradition because it is useful and necessary.

I turn once again to the final image of *Batsamai*: the abandoned baby. To extend the metaphor I believe we need to be careful not to ‘throw the baby out with the bath water’ in how we view contemporary South African theatre-making.

On this note I turn to some of Anton Krueger’s arguments in *Experiments in Freedom: Explorations of Identity in New South African Drama* (2009).

In his conclusion Krueger writes:

> South Africans are in the process of unlearning the grand narratives of the past … which aligned them separate races, classes, genders, ethnicities and nations ... (t)here is now … the opportunity to experiment with the exploration of performances of identities which are syncretic, minoritarion, fractured, unstable and uncertain. Perhaps being permitted to develop paradoxical identities is what is meant to be free. (Krueger 2009: 230,231)

I would argue that Simon's art was to tell 'grand narratives' by exploring "a myriad of alternative histories and experiences" via detailed character research and personal biographies. I also believe that the use of repertoire in his methodology develops characters, and story-dimension that is ''fractured, unstable and uncertain,'' and ''paradoxical identities.'' My point is that this was already happening in Simon's work – a result of his methods – in the past. It exists and can (and should) be drawn on to fulfil what Krueger identifies as needs for contemporary South African theatre.

While the stories that need to be told on South African stages, and ways of telling them, may have changed, using Simon's methods as a way of telling these stories is still powerful and useful.

Krueger talks about "unlearning." As theatre practitioners I believe we must beware of "unlearning" our unique theatre-making traditions. The risk is that the legacy of a practitioner like Simon is either forgotten – just another old white man from apartheid with a street and a theatre named after him - or it becomes mythical, inaccessible and enigmatic; instead of useful.

I have written extensively about the pedagogical and theatre-making uses of Simon's methodology, so in conclusion I offer a summary and an elaboration of some points.

Pedagogical uses

- Being paid attention to.
- Teaching the principles of ensemble work.
- Rigour.

Building the confidence of student performers.

In this respect some final student responses are worth noting:

> "I have learnt and achieved a lot as an actor and writer ... it brings in a confidence to us as actors/students: we are also creators" (Student 10, 2013).

> "… the imagination of this process was easy because we know the characters well, it makes it easy" (Student 8, 2013).
>
> "… you really engage with your character, you know your character to the core… you are in synch with everything" (Student 2, 2013).

This experience of 'ease' can be applied to the elusive and almost impossible to teach 'being' instead of 'acting' that they can take to interpretive roles. It can enhance other techniques and approaches to interpretive roles.

Students' role as co-creators.

I return to one of Blecher's observations:

> Mr Simon explained the approach and procedure of his work: … to discover within … [yourself] … the potential for independent thought and action. This knowledge and confidence was the tool … [whereby] to assess, consider and finally act on problems that confronted him. (Blecher, 1980: 29)

To ''finally act on problems that confronted him,'' applies to life (not art) in this quote. Applied to play-making: the students are actively involved in ''assess(ing), consider(ing)'' and ''act(ing) on" the problems of devising a play.

Use as a theatre-making tool

Providing a structured approach to develop the quality of 'community' theatre.

In response to a question about my role in the process, one student expressed his frustration:

> … he doesn't give us freedom to express ourselves the way we want to – he says don't improvise – stick to the lines – so what would happen if we had to run for four weeks, what if I lose my line – we are artists, we are taught to improvise – if I mean something it doesn't matter how say it – as long as it means the same thing. He has developed the character so much but he has limited us in some ways … I cannot say what I feel in that moment, you give me a burger but you don't want me to eat. (Student 7, 2013)

The important difference this raises between Simon's methodology and some community theatre is the choice between using rigour and limitations to enhance performance (the freedom that comes from being able to play within set boundaries (the simple discipline of learning and repeating the same lines is only one of those limitations; an even greater challenge with self-created text); or the loosely improvised style of some community theatre.

The value of this student's response, I believe, is in a challenge to community theatre that uses the style of 'free improvisation' in performance: to claim that as a style. This young theatre-maker now has something to compare his known style to: this in itself can strengthen community theatre.

Mainstream theatre

I would like to add one reservation to the points I have made about the uses for this methodology in mainstream theatre:

I would argue one aspect that has not travelled well: for a white director in 1976 to explore the world hidden from white South Africans, to look for the reality beyond the kitchen (as he did with the song he wrote for Sophie Mgcina *Madam Please* 1980); to look to tell the story behind the 'faceless' black men and women, to respond to a political reality (apartheid) with a theatre that was about ''witnessing the lives of others'' (Simon, 1995: radio interview) was appropriate: it had a meaning and a purpose that has changed. This I would argue remains a challenge for white South African theatre makers.

This links back to my points about 'who's telling whose stories' and not being able to 'read the streets'. One challenge for contemporary white theatre-makers is to tell our own stories, and Simon's rigorous methodology is useful to explore the new South African racial/social complexities.

Core impulses

Identifying core impulses as a way of creating is also a way of ''unlearning''; of finding a 'universal', and possibly timeless language. This, as a PaR outcome, is something I believe could be developed into an integral part of my teaching repertoire: to develop methods to make students (particularly directing and writing students) aware of their core impulses; to focus on core impulses and clear intentions besides (and/or to enhance) 'message' issue-based work; as a route to discovering the personal in the political: what do you want to make meaning out of as an artist?; what do you need to make meaning out of, and why?

Why and how I make theatre has been an underlying question in my PaR. I conclude that working with **personal**, shared and researched memory (**archive**), I make theatre because it is the other side of **loss**: it celebrates life; an extraordinary version of the "ordinary" and the "tiny, heart breaking commonplace." I have found a way to do this through Simon's methodology.

Celebration

A final quote from Simon's Stockholm radio interview:

> Interviewer: I think that I could guess that you are not only a storyteller, you're also an educator.
>
> Simon: I think maybe I'm a celebrator! I suppose the best educators are celebrators and they excite celebration in others. (1995: radio interview)

Simon's methodology, for all its rigour, is playful: it celebrates. Simon ''excit(ed) celebration in me'' and I attempt to do the same in teaching and theatre-making. Finally, I view live performance as a celebration of life: the other end of loss.

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