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Navigating Liminal Space: Embodied Knowledge within Performance Pedagogies in Archival Reconstruction



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REFLECTIONS AND REFORMED RECONSTRUCTION

I use the word 'reflections' to revisit an archive of performed and devised work, to deliberate on the context from which this work emerged, how it influenced the process of inhabiting character, embracing cultural frames, both public and personal, to identify the essence of that process, outcomes and implications for teaching.

The term 'reformed reconstruction' is used in the creative aspect of the research, where the restructuring of work may serve to identify, possibly reorganise and restore in a significantly different context.

ABSTRACT

I am a performing artist and actor existing in a liminal space because although I am African (in that I was born in, live, and work in Africa), I am caught in an in-between space, somewhere on a continuum straddling Western and African heritages. My practice developed in a culturally complicated context during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in South Africa amid turbulent social tensions and complex, intricate and problematic interactions in a culturally divided society within a political system that legally prohibited cultural engagement. I revisit the archive of my work that emerged during my career to examine the methodology which developed and interrogated the shifts and attempts toward a decolonised practice. Awareness of cultures beyond our own can advance comprehensive views of humanity, promote cultural sensitivity and an appreciation of diversity, encourage rigorous critical thinking by questioning stereotypes, increase global connection and contribute to inclusive decolonised curricula. I am situated in this complicated space on a continuum between identities, and I acknowledge this has contributed to my practice. The premise of becoming or transforming into an 'other' is a fundamental principle and skill of acting in the tradition I was schooled in but less valued in others. Reflecting on the archive of my work, I examine the process that developed and analysed both broad liminal spaces and more focused liminal nodes that facilitate transformations to inhabit and perform various roles. I investigate the disruptions that occur in these when accessing unfamiliar cultural frames. Theatre, specifically, and the arts, more generally, are partly derived from borrowing or laying claim to previous discoveries, and my archive reflects the work out of which my practice has grown. I navigate this continuum and exist in and not independently from this Western and African complexity. I raise contemporary issues that share relationships with theories of identity and a complicated political history. I examine how these shape my practice and how the findings may be included and contribute to developing and refining teaching methods and curricula in the postcolony.

Keywords: Art; character; culture; ethnicity; identity; language; liminal space; personality; self and selves; tradition; voice.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

I confirm that this thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theatre and Performance has

i) been composed entirely by myself
ii) been solely the result of my work
iii) not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification

Signed: **Fiona Ramsay Horsthemke**

Place: Johannesburg

Date: 10 March 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father and mother,
Raymond Louw & Jean Ramsay Louw

I have observed among actors a tradition of acknowledging their master teachers, directors and peers and their influences on one's methodology and techniques developed in practice and teaching. Apart from the respect accorded to all these contributions, this tradition connects an individual practice to a broader practice and the culture of making, performing and teaching theatre.

I have not had a single influence on my work, but I learnt from various directors, teachers, and arts practitioners with whom I have been honoured and delighted to work for many years. My methodology and techniques have been affected not only by those I mention but also by the many students and actors I have coached in classrooms, rehearsal rooms and on film sets for 40 years and whose passion and commitment to their craft, learning and shifting cultural territories fearlessly inspired me.

I want to acknowledge my supervisors, Professor David Andrew and Professor Samuel Ravengai, with whose input and support I was able to complete while teaching and performing my duties as Head of the Department.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

> *The imaginative reconstruction of the past may be a conservative and parochial activity. However, equally, it may be a radical and disturbing activity, reflecting a challenging sense of inadequacy or recalled or… reclaimed images of earlier times and places.*
>
> (Walder, 2011:16)[1]

I grew up in South Africa during apartheid rule, which has informed much of my life, my practice and my political activism. I have been an active member of the professional theatre industry and community for over four decades. During that time, I developed a personal methodology of a performance process that emerged from engagement with various directors and theatre makers in diverse styles and genres. Actors are seldom asked how they act or what they do when they act. I hope to demonstrate how an archive of work can be used as a resource for performance studies and a way of continuing the purpose of the work, driven in part by political protest.

I gradually became aware of nascent similarities in my practice in creating characters across genre and style and journaled these to support my teaching and coaching as these developed. I taught theatre and performance studies informally and not confined by a frame, scheme, or curriculum for twenty years. I devised and designed courses for the needs of individuals who sought my assistance to improve their general acting skills, prepare for a specific audition or seek accent and dialect tuition to enhance their technique and range.

I actively researched my practice, reflecting on how characters were created, what I did to prepare to perform, and what I did when performing. Mostly, I absorbed the ability to act unconsciously through gradual assimilation, which I equate to a form of osmotic transfer. A comparable scientific metaphor is one where solvent molecules pass through a semipermeable membrane from a less concentrated solution to a more concentrated one. The analogy depicts tacit

[1] Dennis Walder cites the potential for self-reflexivity and irony as relevant factors in postcolonial narratives to explore power relations.

knowledge as the solvent which passes through a semipermeable membrane. In my theory, this is the liminal space, from partial awareness (the less concentrated solution) to understanding and comprehension (the more concentrated solution). I needed to examine my process to understand, clarify, and detail what ‘acting is’ and how ‘acting is done’.

My research is in autoethnography, a qualitative methodology using my personal but professional experience as data to describe, analyse, and understand artistic and cultural experience. I was first exposed to the possibility of ethnographic theatre-making by South African director Barney Simon and the authorial voice's role in the process. This encounter has informed my practice and how I create work, engage with it, and write about it, which has shifted and changed over time with experience. In creating autoethnographic theatre, I know shared histories, shared memories, personal and collective, and shared experiences that become the performance being experienced.

Following a qualitative model, I am the instrument of my research and attempt to engage reflexively to identify myself as essential to this research and to investigate the biographical relationship with this research when that subject is me. Self-reflexivity is a process which, as researchers, demands that we critically “interrogate each of our selves regarding how research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives”. (Guba & Lincoln, 2005: 210). By nature, I am inside and outside of what I am researching both subject and object, but I am also in between these binaries. Critics of this form of research have focused on the unreliability of the method, suggesting the blurred boundaries of the researcher and the research that render the account unreliable (Stahlke Wall, 2016) and that it is fraught with ethical concerns (Pelias, 2019:132; Lapadat, 2017:589). Advocates for the approach call for “greater emphasis on how the ethnographer interacts with the culture being researched" (Holt, 2003, p. 18).

John McLeod defined practitioner research as “research carried out by practitioners to advance their own practice” (McLeod, 1999:8). Much of the work I examine in my research is a form of autoethnographic narrative, which I understand, as Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) suggest, seeks to describe and

analyse personal experience to extrapolate understandings about more expansive cultural experience. Some researchers decry self-observation or reflection as inherently biased (Bochner, 2000). I research my practice as an empirical form, where the creative act is not viewed separately from studying the making process and the innovative work. I am both narrator and participant, translating intent to text and vice versa.

What distinguishes the researcher from the practitioner is similar to Steven Scrivener's (2002) argument, which is a crucial difference: practice-based research aims to generate culturally innovative questions that are novel to the creator and observers of an artefact. I appreciate that my filmed presentation may not be viewed as a form of knowledge; however, I intend to communicate knowledge through it. Logical positivist A.J. Ayer (1952) suggests that one has to locate a right to be sure the work will be regarded as knowledge. Others argue that knowledge exists only in the minds of humans and cannot reside in artefacts (Durling & Friedman, 2000). I want to prove that I have created archived work that constitutes knowledge without being justified theoretically.

I am in Africa and practice here; I would like my work to form a contribution to theatre research in this time of post colonies and "a time of entanglement", as Achille Mbembe writes (2001:14-16). His words resonate with personal experiences of the arts and, more particularly, theatre when he claims it is a time when what has fragmented from before interweaves with presents, pasts, and futures and speaks against the persistent accretions of colonialism, slavery, apartheid, and neoliberal forms of democracy (Mbembe, 2001).

To analyse the creative process, I investigated the method I used to access a liminal space I discovered in my practice. Gradually becoming aware of these spaces, I now define them more explicitly as liminal nodes. The node in biology is the point on a plant stem from which the leaves or lateral branches grow and is appropriate to describe what occurs in the liminal space between that which was and that which will be. A transformation occurs in the liminal node, which creates something new. The branches that grow from the nodes are often intertwined and entangled, accurately describing the relationship between tacit knowledge and new knowledge.

More definitively, I identify the liminal space in my process as a space of in-betweenness and possible neutrality where my persona or personae exist on a threshold (the word limina is derived from the Latin word *limina* or thresholds). A 'pre-liminal' space occurs just before entering the 'liminal' space, followed by a 'post-liminal' space as one exits the 'liminal' space. These spaces are fluid and support experimentation, exploration, and discovery, forming connections and transitions. However, as a space stabilises and the experience becomes known and understood, a new space of unknown forms allows the actor access to further zones of discovery. Because of this experience, an actor can perform the same role over many months or years and continue to make discoveries as the performance process affords liminoid spaces for each performance in which various stimuli and experiences occur.

The liminal node facilitates the process, notably when attempting to transform into a character from a culture distinct from one's own but assists the inhabitation of any role. It allows for collisions and explosions of non-binary elements. I cannot be separate from or against either, but I am entangled and inexplicably linked. These in-between spaces must be investigated for their radical potential and their danger in daring and experimentation. They encourage wisdom in uncertainty, discomfort in transition and the space between exploring one thought and another. Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh (2017) spoke of the Nichiren Buddhist view that art is temporary and that the truth exists in the moment. Liminal spaces allow wrestling, grappling, sifting, dismantling, distilling, and failing in these moments.

Actors from a dominant culture (white, straight, able-bodied, English-speaking) are not entitled to the narratives of Black, Indigenous, and other non-white identities. Still, all must acknowledge and potentially benefit from sharing and witnessing information, as it may amplify more authentic and complex personal experiences (Ginther, 2023), the symbiotic exchange facilitated in the liminal space. Several factors influence interaction and exchange in these spaces, such as familiarity with the material content and issues explored, diversity of participants, relationships or histories within the group dynamic and commitment to the process.

At the heart of this thesis is the socio-political context I grew up in and how this shaped my life and practice. Growing up in South Africa, I experienced the brutal autocracy of the apartheid regime, a phase of governance by an Interim Constitution, which introduced a new system of government and new institutions, and the constitutional democracy that followed.

Debate on identity and its societal role was and remains central in the cultural arena. I suspect my locating a value in liminal space emerged during a political period when I became aware of contemporary criticism of cultural issues that share relationships with theories of identity. I was conscious that the society I lived in was perpetually concerned with mitigating the current dangers, such as State violence toward cultural minorities, intra-ethnic warfare, and intra-communal attacks based on cultural differences (Levy, 2000:12).

In South Africa, during apartheid, the preoccupation with curbing a cultural majority enforced by inter-ethnic warfare focused on reinforcing cultural differences. With the evolving multicultural fabric of modern societies, conflicts arise as minorities claim recognition and support for their cultural identity (Kymlicka, 1996). In South Africa, the majority were reclaiming recognition and defence of cultural heritage. My research examines the methods of making theatre work created in conflict, instability, and turbulence and how this informs postcolonial and decolonial engagement, particularly in higher education.

I examine my practice by interrogating some of the work in my archive in the approach positivist psychologist Tony Ghaye (2000:7) recommends that “reflective practices may offer a way of trying to make sense of the uncertainty in our working spaces and the courage to work ethically at the edge of order and chaos”. This solitary introspective self-dialogue investigates my process, focusing on the relational context and practice.

Many of the roles I have performed in my archive have required and often demanded that I step out of my cultural frame into another, possibly into a marginalised or minority space, which has been called a colonising act. The power to narrate or block other narratives from forming and emerging is

significant to culture and imperialism (and colonisation) (Edward Said, 2014:iii). Said (2014) implies that moving out of my cultural territory to inhabit a character from another constitutes appropriation. The term 'cultural appropriation' emerged in the early 1980s when academics examined Western colonialism and its effects on global cultures (Barua, 2022).

Clinical psychologist and educator Suzanne Forbes-Vierling (2018) claims appropriation is a post-civil rights liberal revisionist term. She quotes columnist Kenan Malik (2017),[2] agreeing that what is called appropriation is not as pejorative as theft but simply hijacking, based on the notion that artists need to engage with the experiences of others as part of their creative process (Forbes-Vierling, 2018). Theatre that borrows from other cultures is called 'syncretic' and results from the interplay between Western and Indigenous performance forms.

The term 'syncretism' is borrowed from the discipline of comparative religion and denotes the process whereby elements of one religion are absorbed into another. Syncretism makes it possible to track the encounter between diasporic cultures in a "contact zone" (Pratt 2008:33) where the emphasis is not on the dominance of one culture over another but on the contact front between systems that influence each other. This contact zone is the liminal space or node in this thesis, and encounters in these may result in a collage or assemblage of inputs where divergent sources collide. It is usually a messy space of crossovers and intersections, conflict and collision, but work created in these zones has been used to unite and repair without necessarily being unresolved.

Key to the concept of liminal space as part of a creative process echoes Sarah Nuttall's (2009) use of "entanglements" when she writes about the condition of being twisted together and involved. The intimacy gained in these entanglements, even if resisted or ignored, reflects in the profound racial imbroglios that exist in South Africa. Carol Fischer Sorgenfrai writes of an 'interweaving' between performance cultures of practices and processes and highlights the interweaving of concrete activities, such as actors and power

[2] Kenan Malik writes regularly for *The Times, The Guardian, Prospect,* and *New Statesman*, and made acclaimed TV documentaries.

dynamics, which contribute to the different but interlinked transformations of entangled histories (Sorgenfrei, 2014). I sense that it is in liminal spaces that trauma, suffering and damage caused during an oppressive regime, like apartheid, can be addressed, thus identifying what these entanglements are, how they function in the tangle and their impact on the lives and histories of others. These conversations initiate how to navigate these shared entanglements and weaves and possibly tease out disentanglements where constructive engagement and healing can occur. Recognition and an understanding of the imbroglios assist in engaging possible new forms of performance addressing power imbalances in interwoven histories of individuals and groups.

Given the dynamic nature of engagements and entanglements, we can inhabit fluid or hybrid cultures. As an actor, I want to demonstrate that one can locate techniques to reach into and out to other cultures in these inhabitations of culturally distinct characters. Nuttall's entanglements evoke rhizomatic enquiry and learning as research is inherently multiple, shifting, mobile, composed of singularities, open-ended, and has no determined start or end point. This assists in extending investigation beyond a binary or dualist model (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Successful character inhabitation is fundamental to acting in many methodologies, but the significance of this skill may vary. It is regarded as an accomplishment and an element of a Western theatre tradition that comprises borrowing and laying claim to other cultures to address the complexities of modern life. The term metamodern supports tolerance of different narratives seeking better versions of truth and seems central to how we create work as we advance into a metamodern era.[3]

[3] Scholar Mas'ud Zavarzadeh coined the term 'metamodern' in 1975 to describe a cluster of aesthetics or attitudes emerging in American literary narratives. In 1999, Moyo Okediji applied it to contemporary African American art and extensions of and challenges to modernism and postmodernism. The term suggests an integration of premodern (Indigenous and traditional) cultural codes.

Public intellectual Noam Chomsky (2017) suggests that the negative effect of earlier postmodernism and innate scepticism can be divisive and dangerous because it insists no reality exists anywhere, provides only one narrative, a single perspective and does not embrace the universal. However, scholar Stephen Hicks (1999) advances an objection to postmodernist politics, believing it to be collectivist, hindering individual endeavour, and tends toward authoritarianism. A lack of agency may lead to self-substantiated narratives that do not have to be corroborated, where the concept of truth is denied and subjective belief favoured. Champion of freedom of speech and former professor Michael Rechtanweld (2019) warns that this advances dictatorial rule when coupled with institutional or State power.

Theatre embraces a diversity of forms and histories and borrows from other cultures to examine the human condition, creating a fusion of the actual, fictional, and imaginary. The term ‘metamodern’ unites components of the kind of theatre I make, which includes multimodalities and interplay between images, written and spoken words and a single voice coexisting with a plurality of voices.

My interest lies in how this view can support the performer in researching and inhabiting the complexity of a character from another culture. Investigating the performer's process by revisiting roles I have played and reframing these in different contexts reveals that teaching acting and performance requires re-evaluation. These may be slight shifts, prominent or major inclusions and additions to my pedagogy, and significant modifications to advance and promote cultural sensibility.

As a white performer and teacher, I aim to share my own experiences without centring myself but acknowledging that these may be evidence of privilege and oppression. Moments in my practice and teaching where the spaces have been able to transcend white, colonial identity and where I experienced shifts as an artist and between fellow performers and students led to my theory of the liminal space.

In this introduction and the following chapters, the reader should expect to encounter an interrogative presence to frame critical questions I am trying to

address in the research. Therefore, the writing uses a deliberately curious and questioning style to represent the actor's voice alongside academic positions.

1.1 Acting outside cultural territory

The plays of the 1500s and 1600s by English writer William Shakespeare feature characters from many cultures other than his native England. Much of his work is set outside the place and time of Elizabeth I's reign, and performers then (and since) were lauded for playing a range of characters, from the Egyptian Cleopatra to the Moorish Othello, Italian lovers Romeo and Juliet, and the Danish prince Hamlet, none of whom are English.

Traditional criteria demonstrating performance craft, technique, or skill are often located in a performer’s ability to inhabit a character outside their cultural and social frame and bring them to life. The ability to sublimate explicit personal traits is still considered an apogee of acting proficiency. Of course, Shakespeare’s plays were not performed by or to Egyptians, Moors, Danes, or Italians but by Britons to British society, who had little experience of such people or their culture and served as impressions of characters from ‘other’ worlds.

Audiences, peers, and critics of Richard Burbage, a leading actor in Shakespeare’s company who played many of these characters, noted his expertise in assuming characters' identities (Bettina Harris, 2020). An anonymous ode, written in Burbage’s honour, captures some of the traits and techniques valued in performers at the time.

> *Oft have I seen him leape into a grave*
> *Suiting ye person (which he seemed to have)*
> *Of a sad lover, with so true an eye*
> *That then I would have sworn he meant to die.*
> *Thy stature small, but every thought and mood*
> *Might thoroughly from thy face be understood,*
> *And his whole action he could change with ease*
> *From ancient Lear to youthful Pericles.*

Anonymous 1602[4]

It seems audiences often forgot it was Burbage. An unidentified contemporary remarks that Burbage was capable of “so wholly transforming himself into his part and putting off himself with his clothes, as he never… assumed himself again until the play was done” (Harris, 2020). The worth of an actor’s ability to ‘disappear’ into a role and to inhabit aspects of character and culture was fundamental to critical acknowledgement. Therefore, all evidence of the self and the actor's culture disappeared.

Defining culture is challenging as the word has evolved since its initial use in Latin as a synonym for tilling the land from the verb *colere* (to tend or to cultivate) and broadened to include patterns of human activity. In the 1870s, English anthropologist Edward Tylor (1871, 2016) used “culture” to describe the development of society, which he believes to be universal. Relevant to this study, Tylor developed his theory of animism, acknowledging that the soul existed before demons, deities, and spiritual beings. Performative animism originates in African, Eastern, and Greek histories, and I suggest that it is this animism that we aim to discover in the liminal space (Aristotle, 1987; Diakhate & Eyoh, 2017; Twitchin & Lavery, 2019), indicating the soul may be experienced in the liminal space or node.

Webster’s dictionary defines culture as embracing beliefs, social norms, language, and material traits of a social, religious, or racial group and aspects of human behaviour.[5] Theorist of contemporary cultural studies Stuart Hall is broader in his assessment, claiming culture is a “critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled” (James Proctor, 2004:1). This develops the idea that culture provides ways to cope with the world by defining it in detail and changes in response to a shifting world.

[4] An extract from an anonymous poem titled *The Flower and Life of his Company: Richard Burbage: The Man Who Made Hamlet* (Harris, 2020).

[5] Definition in *Webster's Dictionary* (2004).

My view of culture aligns with writer Kwame Appiah's view of particular customs, languages, and traits evident in people's behaviour and abroader concepts of the arts. Culture is a product of human activity, mainly socially transmitted things, including beliefs, practices, and objects (Appiah 1994:111–112). Appiah (2023) develops this theory of cultural ethics that connects moral obligations with collective allegiances and is critical of received ideas about identity. I highlight the rights of artists from different cultures to portray, paint, dance, or write the stories of other cultures to facilitate and engage in aspects of shared culture. The enquiry is posed in a period when migration, modernisation, globalisation, and inter-ethnic relationships increase cultural diversity. With this expanded cultural contact, many individuals are exposed to ancestries that straddle more than one culture and heritage.

Shared cultures, where people share values, traditions, and beliefs, including language and accent, fall under ethnicity. Emile Durkheim (1893) suggests that culture could be identified in acts of social solidarity, shared consciousness, systems of common morality, and some forms of law. 'Ethnicity' and its meaning have altered over time; for example, members of the various ethnic groups labelled Irish, Italian, Russian, and Greek are predominantly included in the racial category white. Conversely, the British ethnic group includes citizens from multiple racial backgrounds, black, white, brown, and various racial combinations, illustrating the complexity and overlap of such identifying terms. South African society comprises people who speak multiple languages and have a range of cultural backgrounds and diverse heritage, but can South Africans be said to share a culture?

The question I pose is how possible it is to engage in a shared culture, and can artists who share more than one culture portray, paint, dance, or write the stories of other cultures accurately or authentically? Persistent and enduring objections to the accounts of wrongful cultural appropriation raise issues of cultural essentialism, where cultural group membership is defined in terms of a specific set of necessary conditions and essential qualities – a culture (Young, 2005).

1.2 Creative research component

In compiling an archive of my performed and created work spanning 40 years from 1979 to 2019, I have identified roles to revisit, reflect on and reconstruct to examine cultural contexts and where liminal spaces might be accessed. These works from my collated archive are two South African characters: white Afrikaner lawyer Mia Steinman from *Born in the RSA* (Barney Simon & Cast, 1985) from *If We Dig* (Megan Willson & Fiona Ramsay, 2016), first-generation Greek historian Kleio, and white German spy Jewess Stella Goldschlag from *Blonde Poison* (Gail Louw, 2013). However, as part of this research, I performed a black Congolese bar owner, Mama Nadi, for the first time in *Ruined* (Nottage, 2010). In these processes, I am acutely aware of the tacit and embodied knowledge I bring into the rehearsal room and classroom, with the bedrock of this knowledge firmly located in South Africa.

The characters examined in my research are from solo performances (Stella Golschlag from *Blonde Poison* and Kleio from *If We Dig*), performances where the character is alone and isolated on stage and does not interact directly with other characters (Mia Steinman from *Born in the RSA)* or a monologue performed alone but imagining characters in the bar listening to her (Mama Nadi from *Ruined*). Examining what occurs in the liminal space when revisiting these solo performances, the analysis thereof, and subsequent critical reflection did not involve directors, designers, or other cast members who would have been present in the original performances. This may lead to subjective findings, and I acknowledge that the entanglements, conflicts, and engagements in the liminal spaces I explore would have involved creative team members in each production. However, the inquiry focuses on my experiences and a review of my process.

My experience of group engagement in productions was where I was alert to isolated liminal moments occurring intermittently during rehearsing and performance, where discoveries continue to be made. Liminal spaces offer more significant opportunities for group work for the proliferation of entanglements that emerge. I have introduced the theory of the liminal space to unpack interconnections when directing, and the benefits to individuals within the group

have been acknowledged and embraced. Conflicts, differences and suffering were aired, considered, deliberated and recognised.

I engage in a multimodal research model that English professor Carey Jewitt (Jewitt, Bezeman & O'Halloran 2016) suggests by aiming to incorporate language-based and nonverbal aspects of performance resources to examine how these function together to make meaning. Language is a crucial and significant component of theatre currency. However, the semiotic potential of gesture, image, sound, and visual and other aspects of performance are similarly essential indicators of character and culture.

My research embraces three strands of enquiry: first, reflecting on my archive of work; second, investigating how my performance process and methodology have emerged (focusing on characters outside my cultural framework); and third, asking how this embodied or tacit knowledge informs my teaching praxis of voice and performance.

1.3 Pedagogy of acting

My pedagogy has derived from my practice and experience, with a fundamental objective to inspire understanding and appreciation of the world by teaching empowering skills. Therefore, a core focus of my training is to stimulate and encourage observation, to inquire and question all that seems incomprehensible or novel, and to examine how humans interact with the environment and, most importantly, how they see each other. When teaching performance, I begin by assisting students in becoming aware and identifying all aspects of behaviour, expression, and manner that define them. They are preparing to shed as much of their own identity as possible in favour of adopting the characteristics of a character. This transformation requires and depends on techniques that facilitate changes, which include vocal, physical, gestural, appearance, and other factors specific to creating the character. In particular, I scrutinise the role of voice in moving away from one's cultural range and territory as a primary or composite signifier. At first, I taught one-off workshops but developed longer courses when I began teaching in an academic institution, causing me to reflect on what I was

discovering in performances and my own training. This contemplation deepened my belief that certain basic principles underlie multiple performance styles.

The three characters I selected from my archival works explore cultural signifiers in these portrayals to establish if these intersect with any form of cultural appropriation. I explore how one revisits, restructures, and performs these to investigate if re-imagining assists in reshaping and reforming my pedagogy in response to an altered context.

Aligned with a move into a metamodern era, challenging both the tenets of modernism and postmodernism, I examine the influences and impact on the requirements and demands of the performer and the teacher. Metamodern theatre practice integrates premodern, Indigenous and traditional cultural codes with the postmodern (see a full discussion in Chapter 7: Pedagogical shifts).

1.4 Theatre archive

I provide a brief history of South African theatre to frame the context in which my methodology was conceived. Early oral, traditionally created work was seldom documented, whereas the forms of theatre brought into the country by settlers as early as 1652 are well preserved. Therefore, a comprehensive South African archive is still in process as primarily European styles and traditions from Holland, Britain, and France first appeared, and later, American forms appeared in the archive, which is slowly being addressed. Theatres were built in urban cities and rural towns where touring companies performed, wanting to provide entertainment and education. Of course, theatres were formidable devices for developing independent cultures, which is evident in South African theatre's evolution. The theatre was first utilised to promote English values in the spirit of ‘civilising’ missions and later to validate the emerging Afrikaner principle of separate development.

At this time, Indigenous and African cultures were not promoted similarly. Work created during the systematic oppression of apartheid was often not recorded – primarily for fear of its creators being arrested, banned, or detained. Scholar Temple Hauptfleisch (1997) contributes to the history of South African theatre and culture in the late 1900s by examining theatre-making processes and their

impact on the culture. He documents the evolution, nature, and effect of what he calls a “skewed” and unique theatrical system that mirrored the unconventional and fragmented society from which it arose (Hauptfleisch, 1997). Nations worldwide united to form a cultural boycott of South Africa in resistance to the apartheid regime, discouraging artists from travelling to the country to perform and advising playwrights not to sanction productions of their plays.

Arts academic Bhekizizwe Peterson (1990) suggests that much of the archival material gathered during the rule of apartheid was destroyed or disposed of as neither representative nor inclusive and simply evidence of a repressive regime. State cultural institutions, or performing arts councils (PACs), were conceived in 1961 during the apartheid era and fortified Afrikaner heritage and culture. They supported only some English work, but the content was strictly scrutinised and often censored. The PACs, based in each of the then four provinces and Namibia (then South West Africa), were dedicated to fostering the high art or culture of the West by having resident opera, ballet, and theatre companies. These theatres built impressive scenographic stores, including scenery, props, and costume collections.

The State Theatre in Pretoria was built in 1981 to house the Performing Arts Council of the Transvaal (PACT). In 2019, the theatre issued directives to sell off costumes, props, and scenery to international theatre and opera companies for minimal return on investment. The costumes were viewed as symbols of Western oppression that would be redundant and obsolete in the envisioned future cultural landscape. Possibly, the theatre would have been better advised to view these resources as possible contributions to deconstructing the vestiges of colonialism and a form of reappropriation. A pioneering example of such reappropriation can be seen in the Broadway musical *Hamilton* (Richard Rogers Theatre, 2015),[6] in which African American actors are cast as the (Caucasian) American founding fathers in costumes of oppression, anachronistically reenacting history.

[6] *Hamilton*, Richard Rodgers Theatre (2015) Lin-Manuel Miranda is a playwright, composer, lyricist, and actor known for his hip-hop-infused musicals *In the Heights* and *Hamilton.*



Figure 1: Daveed Diggs and the company of Hamilton photographer Joan Marcus

More recently, a production of Ariane Mnouchkine's polemics on the French Revolution *of 1789*[7] *was produced at the Sibikwa Arts Centre*[8] featuring costumes of the period. The images below show that the production would have been better served if it had access to wardrobe pieces that the State Theatre could have provided to lend authenticity to the burlesque parody.



Figure 2: Images from a recent production of Ariane Mnouchkine's *1789* at Sibikwa Arts Centre in 2023 by Bridget Van Oerle

[7] Ariane Mnouchkine founded the Parisian avant-garde stage ensemble *Theatre du Soleil* in 1964.

[8] The Sibikwa Arts Centre is multidisciplinary with experience in vocational training in the performing arts, arts education and community development, situated just outside Johannesburg, South Africa

1.5 Race in appropriation

Despite enormous critical success, concerns were raised about the controversial casting in *Hamilton,* suggesting that it obscured the historical fact that the founding fathers were white, many of whom enslaved people. But perhaps this was the intended irony. A vigorous and necessary debate arose about the lenses through which we view history, which obfuscate or illuminate. The casting of black actors to play the white founding fathers of the United States of America, coupled with musical genres created by black Americans, such as hip-hop and jazz, cleverly uses anachronism and irony to dismantle and disintegrate history. The playwright, composer, lyricist, and star of *Hamilton,* Lin-Manuel Miranda, claims in an interview that intentional inverse casting encourages audiences to divest themselves of any cultural baggage so that they can freely engage with historical figures and not simply as old-now-dead white men (DeMarco-Jacobson, 2022). Miranda claims that using actors of colour rendered the account more immediate and accessible for contemporary audiences and encouraged engagement and critical thinking about history.

The casting of *Hamilton* is a satirical comment on the early problematic practice of 'blackface' in the minstrel shows of the early 1800s, which used white actors ‘blacking up’ to portray racial stereotypes of African Americans. This was a form of “colour-blind casting”, which in any form endorses and reinforces white privilege by denying blackness or playing blackness and is patently racist (Layla Saad, 2020). Casting any actor, regardless of their culture or heritage, may allow for more diversity in theatre, but Saad advances that race must be considered rather than ignored and overlooked.

Saad surveyed Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* for the Broadway production (Hudson Theatre, 2022), in which black actors were cast ostensibly as characters written for white actors. Playwright August Wilson declares in the online American Theatre publication in a volume dedicated to debate on racism that colour-blind casting was unnecessary (Wilson, 2016). Instead, a wide-scale redistribution of space and resources would allow for more work by black artists to be produced because black artists need the space and budgets to tell their stories (Cummings, 2020). Affording black actors, the opportunities to play white

roles did not address the inequities in casting opportunities, raise the visibility of black writers' work, or address the lack of representation on Broadway stages.

In 1997, a project was launched in America to examine racial discrimination challenges in the arts, focusing on theatre, film, and television. The project was called the Non-Traditional Casting Project (Ana Deboo, 1990).[9] Focus shifted from the inadequate term ‘colour-blind casting’ to a more sensitive concept of ‘colour-conscious casting’ or ‘casting without consideration’.[10]

A hybrid form of colour-blind and colour-conscious casting emerged, where the former casts without considering the actor's ethnicity, skin colour, sex, and gender, and the latter keenly acknowledges race. In the 1990 production of *Miss Saigon,* white British actor Jonathan Pryce was cast as a half-Asian, half-white character, which resulted in protests outside the theatre that closed the show briefly. The producers responded by insisting that only the actor’s talent was considered in casting, and the show resumed, but small protests were constant throughout the run.

A similar protest was vented when American actor Scarlett Johansson was cast as the Japanese woman Motoko Kusanagi in the film *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) amidst accusations of whitewashing. Instances such as these are being more carefully monitored and discussed. Although not race-related, in 2018, Johansson withdrew herself from the role of a transgender man after she was cast and already in rehearsal due to gender equality pressure. Gender-sensitive casting occurs when non-binary actors are cast to play non-binary roles. This raises the issue of inclusion in the curriculum regarding playing outside culture and gender impacts on academic development.

[9] The name was changed to the Alliance for Inclusion in the Arts to broaden the scope covered by the organisation.

[10] This emerged in the Delaware Shakespeare Company panel discussion with actors Bi Jean Ngo and J Hernandez (2020), who suggest that colour-blind casting should be cut entirely from the language of the arts.

Shonda Rhimes employed colour-blind casting in the television series *Bridgerton* (2020), where black and brown actors were cast as early aristocrats of the 1800s. The project was initially praised for providing opportunities for actors of colour and making history accessible and hip to younger generations. However, early approval of the show's commitment to diversity later developed into criticism from platforms focusing on race and feminist issues, claiming race was clumsily handled and that black characters exhibited a lack of interiority and context outside of their relationships with white characters (Nylah Burton, *Refinery 29,* 2022). Racially conscious casting had merely become an expedient defence against racism but had not extended the debate or addressed vital issues.

In response to colour-conscious casting, theatre maker and director Lavinia Jadhwani (2021) extends this by embracing identity-conscious casting. She aims to redesign and recreate new processes in casting to embrace not just race and colour but the holistic identities of performers. She calls for a reimagining of the field with an anti-racism lens that confronts white supremacist structures and characteristics unquestioned for far too long. Jadhwani recognises that the term 'colour-conscious' has been used to rebel against white supremacy, and the expression 'colour-blind' implies that only the truths of the text matter and that everything else does not matter (Jadhwani, 2021). Identity-conscious casting encourages conversations at the beginning of a collaboration and continues to opening night and to the end of the run. An audition process driven by the principle of colour-conscious casting presents opportunities to increase the representation and visibility of marginalised identities. It contributes to the unravelling of histories of cultural entanglement.

1.6 Identity and the archive

An archive can indicate individual identity and collective memory of the period in which it originated (Jeffrey Olick, 1999). The archive combines personal stories with analytic reflection, accompanied by an awareness of one's role as an observer. Academic and author Diana Taylor suggests conventional archives become a foil to the "archive" of performative experience, "embodied practice, along with and bound up with other practices, offers a way of knowing" (Taylor, 2007:3). She claims that even though "the archive and the repertoire exist in a

constant state of interaction, the tendency has been to banish the repertoire to the past" (Taylor, 2007:21). I hope to demonstrate the value of the archive in the present to provide important historical context to contemporary issues and can generate new and vital insights about the past to inform future decisions. Looking through a lens of the archive and history-making, I try to evaluate our present to investigate alternative ways of sustaining relevant activism in my practice to pose a meaningful response to issues of ongoing local and global injustice, inequality, and brutality and the incipient damage caused by unjust systems.

The examination of my archive interrogates embodied knowledge to establish how this is accessed and transmitted in the present and whether this knowledge must alter or be re-imagined to be relevant in a different cultural context. This unconscious tacit knowledge from my lived experience includes personal and professional development. Because personal beliefs and values influence it, this knowledge is often informal, subjective, and complex to express and share. It is also challenging to locate precisely how it forms, where it sits, and how to access it. In one's life, one is often puzzled at what one knows but not conscious how one knows. It is a form of experiential knowledge an actor requires and draws on to 'act'.

The term tacit knowledge was coined by Hungarian medical scientist Michael Polanyi (2009:23), who believes that knowledge is public and personal and that "we know more than we can tell". He believes the creative arts are infused with "passions" and "truths" that cannot be communicated in propositional or formal terms. It is the innate knowledge of how to do something without thinking about it, such as riding a bicycle (Polyani & Sen 2009:4, 9 -11, 88). My tacit knowledge is the know-how I have acquired that enables me to act, perform, and transform to portray another character, a process that I grapple with in articulating or sharing but seems akin to an osmotic-like transmission of knowledge.

According to scholars Shan Pan and Harry Scarbrough (1999:362), tacit knowledge is unavailable as a text and involves intangible factors embedded in personal beliefs, experiences, and values. Therefore, multimodal elements that are more than words are needed to convey precisely what this know-how I

possess is, how it was/is formed, and how I use it—my creative project and thesis attempt to convey the process.

However, using tacit or embodied knowledge may not be accurate because memory and recall can be selective. This issue is raised by Pierre Nora, who suggests that our contemporary relationship with the past is caught between memory and history and that memory ultimately allows individuals and societies to understand themselves as memory assists the transmission of value between generations and preserves identity (Nora & Jordan, 1999:7). Nora and Jordan (1999) distinguish between *milieux de memoire,* or events or places of memory located in the empirical, and *lieux de memoire*, which are the sites of or spaces of memory located in the memory's imagination. There is an intersection between these, on which the actor draws history as a modern phenomenon, a reconstruction, and a natural memory process (Nora & Jordan, 1999:8).

In my study, the *milieux de memoire* are the events and places located in the gathering of my research when I first performed each piece, and the lieux de memoire are the characters' memories of each performance. Both are vital to revisiting and reimagining the texts.

Is memory authentic? Is it reliable? Is it a valuable tool for reconstruction? How does one excavate the forensics within memory to substantiate recall? On reflection, much of my archive falls under the umbrella term of protest theatre and was created in South Africa during apartheid minority rule. I have performed, devised and co-created work responding to the socio-political culture. In revisiting these, I note that the primary proposition of each piece was to highlight issues of social injustice and inequality or concerns that were obfuscated or deliberately ignored at the time they were conceived.

I referred to Nuttall's (2009) writing about the complexity of race and social relations in South Africa and how society's legal and political fabric reflects on these imbroglios and intersections. Transitioning from social segregation to integration was not straightforward in postcolonial, post-apartheid engagement because relationships between races had always been intertwined and interdependent and continued to become more entangled. Revisiting the

consequence of segregation, the complicated connections that developed across identities, spaces, and histories, and its profound effect on my perceptions, I became conscious of a subliminal intertwined relationship unique to this country.

I agree with scholar Diane Taylor (2007) when she writes about performing cultural memories and a theory of performance as an episteme and way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis. She suggests that the act of performance is a means of storing and transmitting knowledge, which resonates with my performance experience as a learned, accumulated, and assimilated reservoir of embodied and tacit knowledge stored during my practice. This knowledge is accessed and used to inform both my practice and teaching. As a performer (and voice, acting and dialogue coach), I sense that it holds meaning and significance across multiple modes, where language operates not only as a system of communication consisting of a set of sounds and written symbols but also as an indicator of culture, generally and precisely. Cultural memories are crucial for performance but may not be identified while performing.

Accents and dialects of language can often be defining manifestations of culture in performance. An accent is how people pronounce words; a dialect embraces pronunciations, grammar, and vocabulary used within a particular group. As signifiers of culture, these hold meaning in more comprehensive frameworks and contexts and suggest personal and social identities of nationality, gender, class, and ethnicity. Where accents or dialects are not nuanced or fall into stereotypes, they cease to be accurate signifiers and sound less authentic. They may be viewed as appropriating people's sounds poorly or inexpertly and be heard as offensive.

Throughout my academic and professional careers, I have shifted away from standard contemporary Western traditions and explored dynamic ways of devising forms of Black Theatre and Indigenous performance traditions created in community theatres. This form of theatre interested me because it actively, consciously, and determinedly engaged with pertinent issues, as all lives were impacted politically. Whether or not people were actively involved in political discourse, their lives were affected despite a political or apolitical stance. Theatre practitioner, storyteller, poet, playwright, director, and author Gcina Mhlophe

(with whom I worked on *Born in the RSA* in 1985) suggests that politics could be understood as a word that describes life. Interviewed by scholar and designer Sarah Roberts (2015:17), Mhlophe says, “One does not decide to be in a politically explosive part of the world. One is born there and is governed by what happens”.

In my first year of study in 1976 at the University of Cape Town, my theatre-making and practice were informed and guided by the need to address accelerating socio-political tensions. My early student years were influenced by the political eruptions of the time revealed in my work. The theatre became a mobilising force for me, aligned with the liberation principle that 'culture is a weapon' to spotlight concerns and bring about change. Personal experience could not exist independently of socio-political issues, evident in Nuttall’s entanglements and complexity, which are unnerving and dangerous (Nuttall, 2009).

In *Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality,* American philosophy professor John Perry (1978) cites memory theory as the heart of identity theory. The primary character believes the individual has multiple character traits, splitting them into diverse and complex identities. Alongside memory theory, Perry (1978) names three other fundamental theories of personal identity: “the body theory, the soul theory, and the brain theory”. He promotes this theory of memory as the vital single characteristic of identity based on his findings that memories are the principal mechanism for our behaviour, mannerisms, feelings, and attitudes (1978:24, 109). My memory and how I access it is fundamental to my practice, where memories form and contribute to choices made about the psychological behaviour of characters and influence social interaction in how they relate to other characters. Memory incorporates narratives of the past articulated in the present and may inform how identities are constructed. The intersections of memory and identity influence my approach to inhabiting a character. Philosophers Chiara Bottici and Benoit Challand (2013:10) suggest identity is not merely the product of what we have been in the past but also the projection of how we perceive the future and substitute the concept of “collective memory”

with “collective remembrance”, which seems to capture an ongoing process of elaborating a traumatic past like South Africa’s.

Individual complexity is complicated by composite and integrated societies, which can only be understood if one embraces and understands diversity. The individual locates him, her, or themselves in a society primarily based on cultural identity. Canadian psychologists Catherine Amiot and Rusi Jaspal’s (2007:84-85, 161, 164-165) study examines three different identity configurations and models of social identity integration and defines them as such:

- Categorisation, which occurs when people identify more with one cultural group than another or others
- Compartmentalisation, which is present where individuals maintain multiple, separate identities within themselves which link to cultural orientation
- Integration, where people link their numerous cultural identities.

The research revealed that individuals with integrated cultural identities related greater narrative coherence than individuals who compartmentalised and categorised their cultural identities and endorsed cross-cultural experience. Amiot and Jaspal’s (2007) integrated model might offer a form of social integration that actors could embrace to explore relationships between identities. Studies have extended to bicultural identity as societies comprise and embrace more complex identity integration. Bicultural individuals’ complex attitudes toward their dual cultural heritage were expressed positively and negatively in a study conducted by American psychologists Veronica Benet-Martinez and Jana Haritatos (2005:1038). Two constructs formed part of this study using a sample of bicultural Chinese Americans, and it was found that overlaps, conflicts, and harmony occurred between the cultural identities (Martinez & Haritatos, 2005:1017). The research offers insight into how bilateral heritage may impact communities.

Cross-cultural psychology is shifting away from cultural differences between groups and reconciling different cultural identities. It offers that embracing a monocultural and a bicultural identity is possible, and the criteria for integrating into a multicultural society are fluid. Such societies are often multilingual, and

cultural and artistic landscapes reflect this diversity where intra-lingualism (occurs when one language is used to communicate) and inter-lingualism (when two or more languages are used to communicate) help to bridge communities separated by language identity.

1.7 Language in culture

Early investigations of societal power dynamics by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977:171) claimed that language was one of the primary capitals in maintaining dominance across generations. This is well illustrated in the language policy in South Africa under apartheid, wielded as a tool to exert power and dominance over indigenous peoples. The dominance of Afrikaans and English as compulsory languages of education ensured that the power sat with those for whom these were home languages. Artistic works in indigenous languages were only supported or promoted after 1994, once elevated to official languages.

Education consultant Barbara Trudell (UNICEF, 2016:viii, 64) of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) studies language use in southern and eastern Africa, revealing that classroom practice rarely conforms to pro-local language policies despite the national language policy environment supporting local language instruction in early primary grades. Secondary and tertiary education in South Africa favours English as the medium of instruction, implying a need for further alignment between national policy and classroom practice.

A report on the feasibility of introducing Indigenous languages as the medium of instruction in higher learning institutions was published in 2015 by the Department of Higher Education and Training, and guidelines affirm this role. However, clauses such as “subject to affordability”, “subject to availability”, and “where practical” appear alongside the affirmation, which implies a lack of clarity on any legislation around the regulation and serves to evade the issue (DHET, 2015:37, 43).

Activist and scholar Neville Alexander (1989) promoted a language policy to forge a common South Africa irrespective of race, suggesting English and two standardised languages, Nguni and Sotho, as the *lingua francas*. The student

movements that demanded processes of decolonisation of institutions of higher learning inspired Dr Thulani Mkhize to write on the vital role of African languages. She insisted that this process was not about lowering the status of English or other canons but about opening up dialogue with other epistemic traditions and canons (Mkhize, 2016). She asserts that academic success can be linked to the language students learn, and translanguaging affirms the fluidity of identities constructed within power relations and embodies and reflects ideologies. Translanguaging is present in most rehearsal rooms in South Africa today, whether the text or narrative is in English or not, with many languages used to make and communicate theatre work.

1.8 Colonialism and culture

The impact of colonialism has been widely acknowledged, particularly the decimation of many Indigenous cultures in Africa. Academic Will Kymlicka (2007) notes that politics and identity continue to lead the cultural debate in postcolonial Africa. Debates on territory, appropriation, and ownership are at the forefront of global discourse, highlighting how harmful and immoral cultural appropriation is. Artists often spearhead these debates to shift cultural appropriation from an academic and legal concept into mainstream political and social spaces.

Appropriation is synonymous with colonial exploitation, and therefore, simplistically, to decolonise, one must stop appropriation. Olufemi Táíwò (2021) cites the notion of cultural reciprocity, which argues against an “apartheid in art.” Táíwò (2021:12) suggests one should not submit to the doctrine of apartheid in art, a doctrine whereby an artist is expected to work only within the limits of their cultural and traditional forms.

I interrogate whether my work falls into this category and if my work advocates for the elimination of blanket pronouncements about cultural appropriation. Cultural philosopher James O. Young (2005) argues that a potential source of cross-cultural communication can only be recovered if subject appropriation is allowed. If such appropriation by members of majority cultures is banned, the theatre will emerge as monologic without intercultural dialogue.

Philosophers and scholars promote preserving cultural identity as essential to the decolonial project (Taylor, 2007). This can produce palpable damage, particularly if demeaning images are mirrored back. According to Taylor, nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm (Ziff, 1997). Appropriation can, therefore, constitute cultural degradation, where appropriators steal an artistic or cultural soul, misrepresent, silence voices, and speak themselves. Cultural artefacts and works can be diluted, altered or commodified; sacred practices are trivialised or profaned, resulting in material deprivation (Ziff, 1997). This promotes a damaged and fragmented cultural identity. The cohesion of groups within societies depends on sharing a common cultural heritage.

However, while acknowledging that societies are increasingly global and cosmopolitan, cultures intersect and develop commonalities that might result in hybrid or "mongrel" cultures (a term American literary critic Parul Sehgal (2015) uses in her *The New York Times* article on cultural appropriation) and claims this has blurred the line between cultural appropriation and cultural exchange.

A cultural exchange may have value if it occurs between cultures that enjoy equal status; when they do not, it would be appropriation. However, by sharing some aspects of a culture, can individuals be said to be participants in that culture? In South Africa, the appropriation of culture is associated with the historical appropriation of land, causing populations to be displaced at the hands of settlers and colonialists. Theorist Robert Young's postcolonial theory suggests that "decolonised people develop a postcolonial identity based on interactions between diverse identities and are assigned fluctuating levels of social power" (Young, 2001:60). Although a definition of culture seems straightforward, it refers to abstract objects, customs, knowledge, and morals. Interestingly, foods such as tea from India or Britain, pasta from Italy, or *morogo* from southern Africa,[11] have been shared between cultures throughout history. These have possibly not been called acts of appropriation because they hold no intrinsic power.

[11] *Morogo* or *moroho*, also known as African spinach, refers to a group of at least three dark green leafy vegetables in southern Africa.

To illustrate how appropriation can occur, James O. Young (2001:5) introduces the terms “outsiders” and “insiders”. A member of a particular culture – the outsider – uses an aspect of work, writing, or artefact created by a member of another culture – the insider – for financial gain. I do not find these terms helpful as they are pejorative, define culture in binary terms and seek to freeze standpoints. I favour the idea of a cultural continuum, which is neither binary nor fixed in being positioned either inside or out; instead, it is how far one is from these points. However, briefly refer to the terms to illustrate these positions in this thesis.

South Africa exhibits a syncretic culture, the result of a new culture from a combination of multiple cultures, which London-born Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Appiah (1992:120) favours.[12] The word syncretism describes a context where cultures increasingly overlap and intersect. Kwame endorses the German philosopher and father of existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard,[13] who believes that cultures continuously change their boundaries and are neither transparent nor finite. An example of this synthesis emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in neighbouring Zimbabwe, in dramatic theatre with a robust socialist inclination to produce syncretic theatre at much the same time as this form of theatre developed in South Africa (Samuel Ravengai, 2011).

Therefore, other cultures fall within an artist's experience, and the artist should not be accused of appropriation by representing this experience as the artistic expression is essentially their own. If artists represent their own experience in their work, this means a process of knowledge that is theirs. The processing of cultural information and its presentation is a significant factor in determining whether a work is appropriative.

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[12] A syncretic identity suggests that whatever their religion, sexuality, racial identity or nationality, people ought to treat these categories with sensitivity so that conflicts might be defused.

[13] Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) as an Existentialist Philosopher. Kierkegaard was many things: philosopher, religious writer, satirist, psychologist, journalist, literary critic and generally considered the 'father' of existentialism.

During apartheid rule, activists and their families went into exile, adopting the cultures of their new countries of residence. Indigenous languages tend to be spoken less as people adopt the dominant language of their land of exile. Many children of returning exiles no longer speak their parents' language; in 1960, Oliver Tambo went into exile to England, where his children grew up, communicated, and taught in English and returned to South Africa in 1990, no longer fluent in isiXhosa. South African actor Pamela Nomvete was born in 1963 in Ethiopia, where her parents were exiled. She returned to South Africa in 1990 to forge a career in theatre and television. She no longer spoke an African language. Should we conclude that she no longer belongs to her parent culture, nor can she claim it?

Furthermore, does one willingly belong to a culture, or can one extricate oneself from a culture of which one no longer wishes to be a part? This was a pressing issue during apartheid rule in South Africa when white liberals sought to distance themselves from endorsing laws and practices promulgated by the Nationalist Government and to eschew their cultural heritage.

1.9 Criteria of cultural appropriation

If Young's (2001) outsiders appropriate content from a culture other than their own, they may not necessarily produce inauthentic, imitative, and derivative works, but of course, they may. Authenticity in representation could be crucial in assessing whether an act constitutes appropriation. However, it seems disingenuous to suggest anyone can perform a character as authentic when the act of performing something is fiction. Authenticity can be used to describe the performance and the character, but it could be asked what authenticity is being measured against. Value might be another criterion where a creative interrogation by an artist from a different cultural frame may provide a fresh interpretation of aspects of a culture not yet interrogated. The evaluation should also consider integrity, ethical deliberations, and context.

Using Young's (2001) binary terms, did the black British actor and outsider Idris Elba portray the insider, former president Nelson Mandela, in the film *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2013) authentically and with aesthetic merit? Do these

criteria matter when playing a character outside your cultural ambit? Of course, a work may have artistic merit and appear authentic, but it still qualifies as appropriation. Did the Sesotho-speaking actor Sello Motlaung, the outsider, portray isiXhosa-speaking former president Nelson Mandela, the insider, in the film *An Act of Defiance* (2017) authentically and with aesthetic merit? Some might suggest that, as a South African, his portrayal is less of an act of appropriation as he shares some cultural commonalities. In both instances, one could argue that both are black male actors originally from Africa and that, with research and coaching, they might be able to play the role convincingly. However, do these factors render the portrayals any less appropriative?

In *Sophie's Choice* (1982), American actor Meryl Streep plays the Polish character Sophie Zawistowski, an outsider. Was the portrayal authentic and with aesthetic merit? These may be questions only insiders can answer. However, Streep is a Caucasian performer, and one could argue that with research and coaching, she could do so without demonstrating inappropriateness.

As an evaluative criterion, authenticity is a complex and challenging concept, which is "treated with unease in contemporary literary criticism…as operating as a sign of 'western' individualism (Assmann, 2014). The notion of authenticity harbours two problematic concepts: authenticity itself and that of the work. Authenticity is often attributed to revivals of work and is a form of judgement or recognition of what the performance intends to represent. Therefore, it is not an element contained in the work but attributed to a performance.

Evaluative criteria are also notably affected by the times and culture in which the work is made or created. They are inextricably linked to its history and formed and informed by its previous performances. Writer and director Jonathan Miller proposes a less limited notion of authenticity, suggesting that authenticity is achieved through a commitment to the spirit or principle of a work (Miller, 1986).

Aesthetics arose as a critical reflection on art, culture, and nature. Historically, in *Critique of Reason*, philosopher Immanuel Kant (1790 in Tom Riedel & Michael Kelly, 1999) characterises an aesthetic experience as "pleasures attendant when one judges something to be beautiful". John Dewey (1934:10, 41) details a

comprehensive delineation of aesthetics comprising a continuity between refined experience of works of art rooted in everyday activities, events, and scenes of daily life.

Agreement on a contemporary definition of aesthetics and the nature of aesthetic experience seems elusive; however, theorist and philosopher Antonia Peacock (2021) cites imitationalism, formalism, and emotionalism as three pillars of aesthetic evaluation. This may seem limited and prescriptive, implying that the criteria are that the art object or practice looks authentic and exact. This becomes open to interpretation of whose reality it should be judged against. Peacock's (2021:2, 18) pillar of formalism relates to the work's visual aspect and emotionalism to the level of identification the work elicits, which arouses emotional responses. She maintains that an object's aesthetic value is thoroughly grounded in the value of a correct, complete experience of its sensory features. I agree that aesthetic objects can transform us and open up previously unavailable worlds.

1.10 The aesthetic and deaesthetic

A significant contribution to the philosophy of aesthetics was made by Georg Hegel (1975:221, 222), who introduced spiritual content to studying art forms. Hegel (2014:183) claims it is necessary to distinguish form from content while simultaneously acknowledging it is impossible to do so**.** To suggest that content and form are inseparable dismisses both ideas and is misleading since no two works of art can share content or form, as the form often defines each work's individuality. Changes in fashion, trends, attitudes, and tastes modify the criteria of aesthetic values, leaving some outmoded or superseded by modernist measures.

An anti-aesthetic theory may be defined by rejecting the Kantian notion that the purpose of art is to express beauty. Harsh portrayals and narratives of working-class folk by realists or representational theatre flirted with an anti-aesthetic and evolved in Dadaist art, which parodied aesthetics using vulgar objects. Isobel Armstrong (2000) favoured a responsible radical aesthetic in an unsympathetic critique of the anti-aesthetical position. A robust feminist attitude to beauty

underpins her theory and her belief that a persuasive form of aesthetics should include emotion.

Post-apartheid South Africa produced work made and performed in spaces of dislocation to expose the contradictions of coloniality and the decolonial aesthetic developed. Its goal is not to produce feelings of beauty but rather sadness, indignation, repentance, and determination to change things in the future (Mignolo, 2021).

A theory known as deaesthetic, which is both enlightening and despairing, gained momentum in feminist theory and was called the feminist deaesthetic, where the world is viewed through a feminist filter (Davis, 1994). Aesthetic notions of the sublime, the beautiful, and epiphany are located in androcentric, male-made discourse not able to represent the interests of feminism (Davis, 1994:103). This theory reviews but does not revise; it is deconstructive, not reconstructive. Developing in response to shifting social issues, my archive explores a fusion of decolonial and deaesthetics while focusing on reconstruction. Academics and arts practitioners in South Africa are keen to further the study of 'black aesthetics', which emerged from a movement that encouraged the idea of black separatism, aiming to strengthen black ideals and solidarity and to create art that endorsed black people's liberation. African American activist Maulana Karenga (2011)[14] believes all black art must be functional, collective, and committed to striving to reaffirm and restore African heritage and culture. Black aesthetics is critical of the universalist premise of Western aesthetics or rejects it by contesting implied ideals of beauty and returning it to its earlier formulations, more attuned to sensorial knowledge. The tenets of this theory are persuasive, particularly the aesthetics of 'cool' it favours.[15] Cool is an umbrella term for non-European aesthetic values providing a base for artistic excellence, traceable to African sociocultural functions of art

[14] Following the Watts riots of 1965 in Los Angeles, Black Studies professor Maulana Karenga searched for ways to bring African Americans together as a community and established the holiday Kwanzaa in 1966.

[15] Cool is the ability to be nonchalant at the right moment … it is particularly admirable to perform complex tasks with an air of ease and silent disdain. Women are admired for a surly detached expression and somnambulistic movement and attitude during dance or other performance is considered very attractive (Thompson, 1973:41).

and performance; cool signified poise in a world where one had no authority (Gena Dagel Caponi, 1999:266). Cool was also an aspirational term during my student years when many young people strove to be cool and hip, and ‘cool’ is a term that appears regularly in youth culture.

It seems evident that while cross-cultural pollination occurs in power imbalances, the possessiveness of culture by certain ethnic groups or nationalities is problematic. Social anthropologist Mark Busse (2011), who engages with the intersection of curiosity, creativity, and conversation within the community, suggests rivalry inevitably arises, where one person's ownership precludes ownership by someone else. Non-rivalrous resources such as art and culture are infinite; one person's ownership or use of that resource does not preclude another.

The notion of what can be owned generates conflicts over the ownership of resources, ideas, culture and people. Despite opposing views, many accept that ownership is based on facts about cultural identity. Such facts are culturally transmitted or passed down orally, in folklore or legacy. Is it possible to own the past concerning cultural artefacts existing as public property (Lindsay, 2011:9)? This provokes a potential distinction between the owner of the work of art and the owned work of art itself, and again begs the question: does the art belong to the producer of a work or the artist – the art collector or the artist – or does the work belong more communally to a culture?

Should an artist be prohibited from painting certain subjects, performing specific roles or writing certain narratives based on their origin or heritage? The fluidity of culture should ensure that artists are not necessarily bound by their identities and ethnicities. A person’s performance of a piece of music does not stop another from performing the same music or from listening to it. An artist performing a role should not preclude another actor from interpreting the same role. Non-rivalrous objects become rivalrous when their exclusive use by a particular community is crucial to identity and ability to make a living.

An insistence upon cultural appropriateness may constitute artistic censorship, limiting and restricting the artist's ability to create work. Without regulated

boundaries, it is a matter of individual or personal discernment. A personal narrative is a life story woven from interviews and observation and documents threads and links between social history, anthropology, and artistic endeavour. These are to be revisited as part of the reformative reconstruction of the works in my archive.

1.11 Method of study

For my study, I adapted scholar Catherine Riessman's four methods of narrative analysis she identified in 2007 – a technique described as a dialogic performance. It includes multimodal analysis to track the relationships across and between modes and facets of production, text, verbal and non-verbal language, character, costume, mise-en-scene, and audience. I apply narrative analysis to the data in the archive to investigate the diverse kinds of texts and trace where stories originate, looking at issues of ethnicity, gender, class, groups, and individuals.

Narrative analysis is the result of an inquiry into the situations of marginalised societies based on literature and popular culture, identity politics, and the emancipation of people of colour. The characters I revisit contain elements relevant to the research question: two works I co-wrote and the third I adapted from an original script (these productions are detailed in a later section of the thesis). All three are based on the lives of real people located in a specific culture, with the fourth character fictitious and existing in an extant written text. Through these, I discovered the implications for teaching acting techniques and skills when practices and content fall outside a cultural range.

I use a form of autoethnographic research which uses identities and experiences to create work.[16] In the 1970s, researchers raised concerns about formalising qualitative research to ensure it was as rigorous as quantitative research (Denzin

[16] Heider (1975) described autoethnography as the practice of cultural members giving an account of the culture. Later, Goldschmidt (1977) suggested that autoethnography represented personal beliefs and observations of one's people. It has become an accepted form of theatre-making.

& Lincoln, 2000). Ethnographic research gathers data from introspection on our personal lives and experiences and can be realised in different forms, including a poem, a narrative, or a story (Nekvapil, 2003).

‘Autoethnography’ comprises three interrelated components: ‘auto,’ ‘ethno,’ and ‘graphy’, subjectivity, and personal experience (‘auto’) to describe, interpret, and represent (‘graphy’) beliefs, practices, and identities of a group or culture (‘ethno’) (Adams & Herrmann, 2020:2-3).

In my praxis, critical autoethnography represents shifts to include me as a researcher within the context of culture. The methodology represents a shift to include the researcher and is the product of an introspective anthropological movement where the viewer exists within the culture being explored. Literature has often functioned to make sense of one’s experiences by viewing aspects of one’s experiential narratives. Using the self as a data source is criticised for being self-indulgent, introspective, and individualised (Duncan, 2004:28).

During a ‘crisis of representation' period in the mid-1980s, autoethnography emerged due to "the calls to place greater emphasis on how the ethnographer interacts with the culture being researched" (Holt, 2003, p. 18)

Literature is an interpretation of a scene and a means to capture the complexity of human relationships. In her novel *Dancing Girls and Other Stories*, author Margaret Atwood (1996) writes that everyone assumes writers know more about the inside of the human head than non-writers. “I'm afraid that's not right”, Attwood (1996:171) asserts, “as they know less, which is precisely why they write, to find out what everyone else takes for granted”. Her observation is pertinent and explains why artists, as researchers, explore and interpret the human condition through autoethnography. I use an autoethnographic approach to research and writing to describe and analyse personal experience and embodied knowledge to understand cultural experience.

1.12 Teaching pedagogy

Regarding the third strand of the research, theatre and performance pedagogy, I use features of Geneva Gay's (2010)[17] Culturally Responsive Teaching to evaluate my methods and current academic curriculum. This approach empowers students emotionally, intellectually, socially and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It aligns with my pedagogy, rooted in the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's theory outlined in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire's theories echo Brazilian theatre maker Augusto Boal's (1973) theories, which are used in interactive techniques for rehearsal and performance. These include the role of oppression and dehumanisation of education systems, dialogue, problem-posing education, praxis as the reflection and the role of political and cultural factors in educational change. In South Africa, these were and remain the concern of curriculum developers and teachers.

Freire's (1993) guiding tenet that influenced my teaching is that it is every person's ontological vocation to become more human. Interactive techniques provide concrete theories to deal with and counter a legacy of oppression and are most suited to South Africa's shift from an authoritarian state to a democracy. Freire and Boal shed light on the role of the oppressor, which assists in deconstructing both modes of teaching and theatre-making and frames this research to address any emphasis on one or more social identities over others, such as ethnocentrism.

Theatre studies have been embedded in a Western tradition found in adaptations to the methodologies of Russian theatre practitioners Anton Chekhov and Konstantin Stanislavski, who developed methods in response to changes in society and theatre, Jerzy Grotowski, Sanford Meisner, Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and Tadashi Suzuki.[18] Learning institutions, conservatories, schools, and laboratories advanced these in a shift from the master teacher roles to the

[17] Gay's theory is based on the premise that by many measures of achievement, all students perform better when teaching is filtered through their own cultural experiences.

[18] Methods and methodologies are discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

formation of devising theatre in groups to create verbatim, documentary or workshop theatre.

These variations were in response to political and social change and advances in styles as the craft moved away from declaimed presentational styles to naturalism (representational) and to changing theatre spaces from large traditional theatres to smaller alternative spaces, communities, and societies to contribute to the global pool of methodologies. Internationalism and cross-continental, cross-cultural and cross-lingual collaboration have influenced current popular trends in the entertainment and cultural communities, where reality shows starring ordinary people contribute to and affirm the notion that anyone can act. Internationalism compounds issues of casting to cultural type and personality because they are not required to play anything but themselves. The shift toward reality show formats influences theatre, film, and television by the nature of the artists these mediums draw on and cast. Because individuals in reality shows are not required to demonstrate any skill, art, or craft, the criteria for being cast and performing in this show format are not aligned with an art form.

I acknowledge a method of fusing scholarly research with personal memory as a necessary consequence of engagement with the analysed material. Constructing a narrative account depends as much on personal memories as on archival documentation. The twin focus of my position as a scholar and a professional theatre practitioner suggests a privileged perspective synthesising personal subjective experience with a form of objective academic reflection.

Being in liminal spaces and examining characters from different contexts and cultures, I demonstrate that these spaces are integral to my teaching as a valuable concept to increase cultural exchange, appreciation, experience, and reflection of other cultures. An archive of my work is attached as Appendix 1, including commentary for each production's context, visual references, and reviews. A link to the film of the creative component of the research titled Reflections and Reformed Reconstruction is attached as Appendix 2. I discuss the creative component in detail in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 2: Acting methodologies and approaches

In this chapter, I examine developments and trends, content, and practice in the field of performance globally with specific reference to South Africa, which frames my archive and traces the influences that have informed my process, embracing traditional and innovative, which emerges as a personal praxis methodology.

My work addresses the internal tensions between my deep love for South Africa, the country of my birth, and my strong appreciation of Western culture, which has profoundly influenced my life, my art and my work. A fundamental distinction is that Western ideologies often view art as reality and reality as art. African tradition considers art as art and reality as reality. Western practitioners view imagination, rather than observation, as paramount. African artists expressed the symbolic, spiritual, decorative, or usefulness of their subjects and art, seeking to unearth and find the truth over time and in different parts of the world. However, there are many kinds of truths and ways to express them. Robert Mshengu Kavanagh (2011) believes Africans are so acculturated that many no longer understand artistic non-real expression and search for ways to reconcile it with their realist expectations. However, in the spirit of decolonising university curricula, I have attempted to find an inclusive teaching method from an Africanist approach supported by Western tenets.

I suggest a focused liminal node within a liminal space where traditional forms and approaches of Western and African theatre collide. In these spaces, cultural complexity can be wrestled with and examined to produce a work relevant to more than one cultural context.

How does one train a process that simultaneously combines all the features of living real life? Acting is a holistic bundle of simultaneous activities. Traditional criteria used to evaluate the craft or skill of performance are often located in the performer's ability to bring to life a character or person outside their cultural and social frame. Talent and skill are frequently heralded as essential to good acting, where talent is instinctive or innate and skill is learned and acquired. James Lipton, a former actor and the host of the television interview series *Inside the*

Actors Studio (1994–2018), ponders whether it is even possible to judge performance, asserting that whatever opinion one forms should be located in truths and authenticity because the actor's process is one of trying to be someone they are not. Some words noted frequently in reviews by critics of theatre performance are versatility, authenticity, believability, ease and empathy to define or describe good acting. This implies a relationship between the actor and the audience where each believes, as thoroughly and fervently as the other, a connection evoking mutual belief.

The actor's ability to transform and how the actor embodies the uniqueness of the character has been a criterion for judging performance quality. This embodiment must occur not theoretically but viscerally through something within the actor that the audience responds to – a conditioned reflex born of moments of belief. Once this happens, it is inside the actor, waiting to be awakened again – an elusive truth that an actor translates into tangible belief (Lipton, 2020).

While I may know a great deal about acting, theatre-making and performance makers, these disciplines encompass diverse facets, approaches, and disciplines that cannot be contained in one life. Comparing different actor training methods is complex, as most programs teach actors to engage with a character while encouraging them to work on themselves. However, assumptions about the self and the characterisation process must be updated and more attainable. Ideas of the self vary, even within the same culture, and actors' notions of what constitutes a character shift from one historical period to another are not fixed.

The trajectory of artistic methodologies embraces those of artists who have gone before, building on these, changing and adapting them, revoking, reworking and remaking. This initial act is one of appropriation, and methods or processes in the arts have often been appropriated to contemplate history and reframe ideas to produce new ways of examining, thinking, and doing.

During my undergraduate studies, I was exposed to the teachings of several theatre systems and applied them to rehearsal processes. However, no universal rule or method applies to all actors, just as no two individuals are alike. Possibly,

a single methodology can be cited as superior to others as a guide to acting, but this is almost a contradiction as the actor is the instrument. One needs to examine, understand, and assess one's instrument and, therefore, ability. I am not a proponent of a single methodology but favour an emerging approach that embraces multiple elements of many innovators' methods. I briefly list these influences and processes to provide context for analysing the performed archival work.

2.1 Revisiting methodologies

2.1.1 Konstantin Stanislavski

Systems of acting that originated in the West are bound by the thread of theatre that focuses on the psychological aspects of acting and character. Russian actor and director Konstantin Stanislavski's method[19] was based on a rigorous process of reflecting and analysing his craft, resulting in his *System of Objectives* (1900). The technique defines actions, objectives, and super-objectives that identify a character's wants and needs within a text. There are ten principles: the given circumstances, the magic 'if' (or 'what-if'), the super-objective, the line of actions, the score, endowment, recall, images, physical/vocal choices and the creative mood. The system continues to be central to curricula in drama institutions worldwide, often viewed as the ideal Western entry point into the craft. It is a theory of achievement-based goals, with all actors' decisions or choices contributing to that goal, and where the actor determines choices that reflect the character's journey to a particular end.

Stanislavski encourages a focused and intense atmosphere in the rehearsal room, insisting on this as an integral part of his process, prioritising experimentation and improvisation for self-discovery. This focused and intense atmosphere echoes properties within the concept of the liminal space (though not named) and appears in all mentioned methodologies. The investigation and

[19] Konstantin Stanislavski founded the Moscow Art Theatre and wrote technical handbooks for actors. He developed his system over 40 years, and it continues to be included in curricula in acting training institutions worldwide. Popular publications include *An Actor Prepares, The Actor's Handbook* (1986) and *An Actor's Work* (2008).

improvisation experienced in these focused and intense spaces developed into a technique, the purpose of which was to free talent.

Stanislavski's approach allows me to draw on a sense rooted in imagination and emotional memory, evident in his foundational principle of the magic 'what-if'. The imagination and evoked memories or dreams surface while rehearsing a scene to include a series of magic what-ifs. Discoveries are evaluated to assess which version (if any) serves the character and narrative most authentically and accurately. How do these discoveries inform character intention and choice? How does this propel the actor to arrive at a different selection or interpretation, which may alter how the super-objective was attained? These questions are posed through the process to ensure the actor makes accurate choices. I value this method and use it to compile essential biographic details of the character, as it allows for a fundamental sortie into the character's context and world. This biography begins by listing elementary indications of age, birthplace, education, siblings, and parents, as well as literal information provided often in the text, and the character's history continues to be fleshed out during the process from rehearsals to performance.

2.1.2 Michael Chekhov

In *On Theatre and the Art of Acting*, writer, playwright, and sometime-actor Michael Chekhov (1942)[20] refines Stanislavski's ideology and adds an approach more deeply rooted in psycho-physical properties. He seeks to ground emotion in movement to assist with accessing psychological impulses to connect an inner response evoked by physical action with the outer expression. He acknowledges the value of the mind-body relationship as a repository for embodied knowledge. He adds significant psychological aspects of the character to his method to provide details of inner conflict and relationship with the self.

[20] Michael T'jechof's acting system inextricably intertwined tragedy and comedy. He was the nephew of the playwright Anton Chekhov and student of Konstantin Stanislavski.

2.1.3 Lee Strasberg

Chekhov's ideas were developed further into a process known simply as "the method" by Lee Strasberg (1941). The method lies at the heart of Strasberg's training, which is based on accessing affective memory, expressed as his dream of passion, in his guide to acting with the same title.[21] Strasberg asks actors to relive and recapture a singular event's context and emotional responses from their past and apply those genuine sentiments to support an explosive or volatile moment in the performance. The method uses life experiences to identify more closely with the character, and recalling sensations experienced from personal memory allows these emotions to flow unreservedly and unrestrained as they re-experience that memory. This method seeks to unearth sensations stored in the reservoir of memory and offers an innovative way to access them. However, it shares the basic principles of Stanislavski and Chekhov, which are modified with each new iteration of the approach.

One of Strasberg's primary goals is releasing all tension to facilitate a way into the affective memory. It was crucial to his acting technique, and he devoted the first two hours of his four-hour classes to relaxation and sense memory exercises. These exercises occur in a liminal space, where experimentation with recall and remembering is encouraged. The method was devised for the stage by Strasberg and first applied by those schooled at the Actors Studio. Applying this method, the actor enters a liminal space, much as one does in Stanislavski's approach.[22] As film as a medium became more popular, and as mor theatre or stage actors shifted from theatre streets to the sets of film studio. The method was adapted for training film actors. The intensity one requires on screen is an almost palpable inner energy that causes emotional vibrations that the camera captures and is well served by this approach. Behaviourist in its approach this

[21] Lee Strasberg published a guide to acting titled *A Dream of Passion* (1988). He was founder of the Actors Studio in New York City and Los Angeles.

[22] The Actors Studio is a membership organisation for professional actors, theatre directors, and playwrights founded in New York City in 1947. Lee Strasberg joined in 1951 and ran the organisation until he died in 1982. The Actors Studio is best known for its work refining and teaching method acting.

method acknowledges that what it is to be human is key. Strasberg (1988) wryly warns his actors against “consciously acting” and that the camera is allergic to this and only interested in behaviour.

I attended a Los Angeles Actors' Studio 2018 workshop to observe actors applying this method in rehearsal scenes. Actors perform a scene for an audience, and director Salome Jens facilitates, followed by a note session that includes feedback from both Jens and the audience. The actors perform the scene again, applying valid suggestions. I experienced the magic 'what-if' exercise that Strasberg adapted from the teachings of Stanislavski, which can impact actors’ choices.

In a scene from Conor McPherson’s play *Shining City* (2004), a character relates to a psychiatrist and frequent visitations from his deceased wife. In the middle of the consultation, his wife suddenly appears to him in the doctor’s office, causing him some distress. After the performance, during the note session, the actor was asked what his deceased wife was wearing in his vision, and he replied vaguely, “Oh, I think it was a blue dress” (Grant Killian, 2018). The director then asked, “What if she was wearing nothing?” The actors performed the scene again with this new information incorporated, and the scene became electrifying. The emotional range – grief compounded by confusion, discomfort, and even guilt as the actor ‘saw’ his nude wife’s vision was riveting, and the scene evoked a different and arresting reaction from both the actors and the audience. All were taken by surprise.

2.1.4 Viola Spolin

Stanislavski’s magic ‘what-if’ principle was included in the *Theatre Games Method* of Viola Spolin (1963),[23] who introduced exercises based on improvisation and play in the rehearsal room. These encourage freedom to express and discourage self-consciousness, thus enabling actors to explore and invent fearlessly. Varied forms of improvisation exist, and introducing

[23] Viola Spolin was an American theatre academic, coach, and educator who devised her improvisational method in the 1930s.

games into the rehearsal process is often in the hands of the director. As a performer, I might improvise with a fellow actor around a particular issue in the text, investigating and exploring beyond the literal. Alternatively, I might improvise alone between rehearsals and subsequently introduce the resulting insights into the rehearsal process.

It is important to note that improvisation and games have rules that must be followed to allow for maximum exploration. Actors need to understand the boundaries and guidelines for improvising around a text. This developed into an independent theatre form known as 'improvisation theatre', which was believed to have been founded by Spolin. It is live theatre that relies on improvisation to create the narrative, the characters, and the dialogue in the moment. Often, an audience advances the narrative through suggestions, and improvisers incorporate these into the scene.

2.1.5 Augusto Boal

Extending the centring of play and modifying children's games sourced from around the globe are crucial features of Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Boal's (1973) *Theatre of the Oppressed*.[24] This was in reaction to the military dictatorship that began with a coup d'état in Brazil in 1964. His approach developed from the reaction against the new regime. It was influenced by the teachings of educator Paulo Freire, who encouraged actors to experience freedom through physical play to enliven, release, and tap into community social issues. South Africa enjoyed a similar approach in the mid-1980s, now firmly established as the workshop method (also known as the South African method) favoured by theatre makers in the country. It acknowledges a plurality of voices evident in African traditional theatre forms and allows the director and audience to become part of the process. I was exposed to this method when rehearsing a production of English writer David Hare's[25] (1975)

[24] Augusto Boal's techniques use theatre to promote social and political change and initially aligned with radical left politics.

[25] Sir David Rippon Hare is an English playwright, screenwriter and theatre and film director. He wrote the play *Fanshen* in 1975 that focuses on the Chinese Revolution with Brechtian subtlety.

Fanshen.[26] This process was rooted in Boal's (1973) methodology, which involved improvising and 'playing' around the complex imagery of China, as the play was set just after the Chinese Revolution in the 1940s. Revolutions often create new words, and the word *fanshen* emerged, meaning to turn the body or, more literally, to enter a new world, notes the writer (Hare, 1983:6). In the South African production (as in the original Joint Stock Company production in London), the actors were not Asian. Hare's point was that the text was not a documentary account of China but a play to dramatise the pain and complexity of the universal process of social change very carefully for the West. This casting choice could be considered culturally inappropriate, but being reassured by Hare's defence of his position alleviated any misgivings I might have had.

Fanshen was part of a season featuring the Troupe Theatre Company that was formed in 1978 and produced seasons at the People's Space and Baxter Theatre in Cape Town, South Africa. (The company's mission was to create work that challenged both content and forms of theatre and to engage with physical theatre.) I began to explore the work of the founder of experimental theatre, Jerzy Grotowski, whose pivotal publication *Towards Poor Theatre* (1968) outlines a technique that starts with the actor practising silence.[27] He and the actors would push and extend spiritual, physical, and ritualistic boundaries. His work challenged the performer versus spectator relationship, eliminating all parts of the theatre he considered extraneous. With technological advancement blurring the margins between theatre, film, television, social media platforms, and the expansion of digital arts, theatre should not compete against the overwhelming spectacle of film but instead focus on the root and heart of theatrical arts: the actor. How the actor can interface and embrace other art forms in interdisciplinary practice must be factored into the craft.

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[26] *Fanshen* by David Hare at the People's Space Theatre in Cape Town (1981) by Troupe Theatre Company.

[27] Jerzy Grotowski created the Theatre Laboratory in 1959. His work values the actor's body and the relationship with the spectator and dispenses with costumes, decor, and music. He wrote the acting handbook *Towards Poor Theatre* in 1968.

2.1.6 Jerzy Grotowski

Grotowski demands that acting be completely authentic, focusing on physical and somatic principles (Stephen Wangh, 2000). His method adapts Stanislavsky's emotion memory techniques but extends this to paratheater, a practice that lies beyond performance's special, temporal, and structural form. He enjoys working in unconventional spaces, believing that strange and less traditional spaces allow greater liberty for the actor. These spaces function as liminal, providing a pause or in-between time for the actor and cast to investigate the effects of extreme physical exercise on text. This technique is often valuable when the character and narrative require a deep-seated emotional range, allowing for passionate and excessive physical connection to emotional expression.

I participated in a three-week series of Grotowski workshops while resident in London in 1996. I became familiar with the method's extreme physical demands, where each session began with a prolonged and exacting physical warm-up. Grotowski aims to lead an actor to a state of intense exhaustion to ensure that whatever choices made in the rehearsal room were arrived at, not necessarily easily, but without a complicated cognitive process and trusting intuition or instinct.

2.1.7 Bertolt Brecht

Bertolt Brecht (1997), who believes that theatre has a duty to reflect society and change it, introduces the *verfremdungseffekt*[28] in 'epic theatre'.[29] His work consistently reminds audiences that theatre cannot and should not be viewed through the lens of their own culture and should experience a feeling of

[28] Translating the term *verfremdungseffekt* into English is problematic because the direct translation 'alienation' holds negative connotations. I prefer to use the original word *verfremdung* that describes a process of making the familiar strange as academic David Barnett suggests in his blog on Brecht in Practice.

[29] Bertolt Brecht devised Epic Theatre to encourage audiences to remain objective and rational in responding to social issues in his work. He used technical devices to remind people they were watching theatre and to resist emotional engagement. A presentation of life - not representing life itself but a series of loosely connected scenes interrupted by directly addressing the audience with analysis and argument (Justin Cash, 2022).

detachment or objectivity from events depicted in the work (Brecht, 1997:22, 23, 42). As in previous systems, Brecht (1997) demands that his actors observe how people behave, their physicality and interaction with people, and interrogate the characters' psychological traits. However, the acting style was presentational, reinforcing the alienation or *verfremdungs* effect. Both Growtoski and Brecht favour bold, extended, larger-than-life characterisation to underpin their work.

2.1.8 Steven Berkoff

Physical demands are central to British actor and playwright Steven Berkoff's work, who exploded onto the London stage, shunning naturalistic theatre and encouraging his idea of total theatre that used the imagination. Berkoff (2002) declares that the actor must have the craft to express the genius of the body to support the narrative without a set (Robert Cross, 2004). In *Free Association*, Berkoff's (1997:1) autobiography describes his approach, revealing an intensity and passion for discovering innovative ways to create his form of theatre, which must be freshly minted:

> *I like to create each production as a piece of theatre in a way that has never been conceived or imagined as if there had never been a theatre … I enter another area of my imagination which is not programmed by what has gone before, and that can be quite exciting. I bring areas of my unconscious into play rather than letting them lie dormant like some fetid lake in the base of my skull.*

This description elevates Berkoff's process of a journey into his subconscious imagination, which I suggest occurs in a liminal space. I attended dynamic masterclasses centred on his unique Berkovian style, which influenced my acting approach and became a method I use for projects, specifically those demanding physical prowess. Mime technique is a crucial skill that permeates my work and supplements vocal metaphors. I worked with Berkoff in London in his neutral, empty room rehearsal space. Actors leave their personal belongings and items in a small green room, ensuring actors have no personal residue or accessories in the neutral workspace. There is a sense of intense commitment to the moment,

but nothing is finite. Greek theatre, Japanese Noh and Kabuki, Shakespeare, East End music halls, and his Jewish heritage influenced Berkoff. He embraced the techniques of practitioners such as Antonin Artaud and Brecht; he formed his own company, the London Theatre Group.

Berkoff's company developed an innovative theatrical language using mime, ensemble work and voice. As a theatre maker, he is recognised for staging work with a heightened performance style, combining physical theatre and expressionism elements. Marcel Marceau's mime techniques influenced him and are included in the company's warm-up routine (Bercut-Lust, 2000).[30] Berkoff's text and the performance style he fosters demand intense physicality, immaculate and evocative mime technique, vocal range and power with a facility for metaphoric verse and create a Cockney idiolect in iambic pentameter.

I first encountered Berkoff's work in a student production of *East* (National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, South Africa, 1978). This led to my performing more of his work, *Metamorphosis* and *Decadence*. The heightened style aims to elicit visceral and powerful emotions similar to those of the theatre of Grand Guignol.[31]

2.1.9 Tadashi Suzuki

Concurrent with Berkoff's idea of total theatre, Japanese theatre maker Tadashi Suzuki developed a rigorous physical discipline drawn from similar diverse influences such as Greek, traditional Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre forms, ballet and martial arts. Suzuki's system is discussed in the philosophical *The Art of Acting* (1993). It employs a series of physical disciplines (exercises) to cultivate aspects of the actor's body, focusing on physicality to develop into the 'invisible body'. Each actor possesses in their body a secret that cannot be shared with others in darkness or the unknown. Such awareness of the body allows the actor

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[30] Marcel Marceau was a French actor and mime artist most famous for his stage persona, Bip the Clown.

[31] *Le Theatre du Grand Guignol* (The Theatre of the Great Puppet) specialised in naturalistic horror shows. The name is often used as a general term for graphic, amoral horror entertainment. The audience vicariously tolerate any terror as this reinforced strong feelings. This stirring of emotion and feelings was exciting for the audience. The 'special effects' would frequently be too realistic and some audience members would faint or vomit during performances.

to establish a collaborative expressive activity with others via his unique body. The approach aims to heighten the actor's physical and emotional power and demands that they commit to each moment on the stage.

2.1.10 Sanford Meisner

Established actors often develop their unique approach to acting and become mentors or teachers to aspirant actors and theatre bookshelves are full of accounts of diverse acting systems. In *Sanford Meisner on Acting* (1997:176),[32] actor Sanford Meisner writes that acting is "behaving truthfully under imaginary circumstances" and reproducing honest emotional human reactions. The actor's job is to prepare for an experiment that would take place on stage with a process comprising spontaneous responses to the actor's immediate surroundings.

The repetition exercise features in Meisner's method; the purpose is to emphasise spontaneity and greater listening between actors and to shift the actor's attention away from their own self-consciousness and onto the other actor in the exercise. It is a simple exercise where actors repeat an observation voiced about the other, responding appropriately; each response adds information until a scene is created based only on simply accepting, reiterating and affirming each other's thoughts. This is a form of improvising to deepen the actors' onstage relationship.

2.1.11 Stella Adler

In *The Art of Acting,* American actor Stella Adler (1988:33, 40) elucidates her method, which involves learning her specific technique.[33] She urges actors to study and analyse everything about the character in the text and the world around them to determine the exact place and context in which the character exists. This technique is rooted in an actor's ability to invoke and imagine a character's world. She insists on researching as much of the world as possible to fuel the reservoir

[32] Sanford Meisner wrote several books on his technique, the most popular being *Sanford Meisner on Acting* (1987).

[33] Stella Adler's approach is contained in her handbook *The Art of Acting* (2000) and distilled from the acting coaching she conducted in studio

of knowledge as a resource. Unlike Stanislavski's reliance on personal, emotional memories, which she believes limited an actor's range, she favours a broad-based approach founded on general knowledge to expand a global understanding to create compelling performances. She teaches actors to take a time-out to observe everyday textures in life, aesthetics, and sounds, enabling them to conjure particularised and realistic mental images on stage. These moments of observation exist and occur in a liminal space. She believes that when mental images are nuanced, the actor can authentically express the imagery to the audience and deliver a truthful performance.

The crucial goal of truthfulness is common to both Meisner and Adler's approaches; adding imaginary circumstances allows originality to create and capture the fictional world in one's mind. I understand and use Adler's method, as I believe broader general knowledge is vital to finding the truth about what it is to be human. Adler (1988) urges actors to deeply understand current arts and culture from different periods in history and of various peoples to feed their imagination, which develops into tacit knowledge. In my experience, an actor should strive to attain a permanent state of watchfulness and observation to convey the truth genuinely. Adler differed from Stanislavski and Meisner in not believing in drawing on one's conscious past or affective memory. Instead, she focused on the great asset and inspiration one's creative imagination could provide, as it stimulates one to conceive a history and a world belonging to the character.

2.1.12 Uta Hagen

Uta Hagen devises less of a system and more of a philosophy of acting from her engagement with practitioners and processes she encounters as an actor, director, and teacher. Central to her approach was the notion she first calls substitution and later transference, a process of finding equivalencies from one's own experience for the people, places, and objects one interacts with in rehearsal and performance. She advocates biographical exploration as an entry point, which echoes and refines those in Stanislavski's system. In *A Challenge for the Actor,* Hagen (1991:256–291) cites six fundamental questions to develop the

granular details of their character's backstory or biography and enquire: What does it take?

- Who am I? (includes all relevant details from name and age to physical traits, education and beliefs)
- What are the given circumstances? (includes what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen to a character)
- What are my relationships? (with other characters in the play, inanimate objects, or even recent events)
- What do I want? (the character's desires in the moment or the overall course of the play)
- What is my obstacle? (understand the challenges the character must react to and overcome)
- What do I do to get what I want? (Hagen's (1991) 'do' means physical action).

Analysing the method that has emerged over the years in my practice, Hagen's (1991) suggestions seem most aligned with this and are particularly useful when rehearsing a solo piece. The works examined from my archive are all solo works; therefore, Hagen's (1991) distillation of various acting systems is most helpful in my explorations. I refer to this method later in the thesis when analysing data.

2.1.13 Practical aesthetics of David Mamet and William H. Macy

Several systems unite in the theory of Practical Aesthetics, which rejects methods imposing complications and instead focuses on the innate simplicity of theatricality. This theory was first proposed by actor William H. Macy and playwright David Mamet at the Atlantic Acting School, which they founded in the United States in 1983. The method demystifies the acting process by offering the actor precise analytical and physical tools. It is based on the principle that the purpose of all production elements is to tell the story truthfully. You may perform well or poorly, but by using Practical Aesthetics, you perform truly. Despite rejecting prior systems, this system suggests four pillars for an actor's creative equation, and interestingly, Stanislavski's 'what-if' tenet is one. The literal and implied contained in the text function as a second pillar, with the third being the choice of what the character wants, and

the action in how the character will get this serves as the fourth. The value of the method is that it encourages engagement and discussion among actors and directors to define the four pillars. Practical Aesthetics is a collaborative process where the actor generates choices about the character, including those of the other actor/s in the scene, derived from wants and actions. The practical aspect of this method focuses on the doing, the discussion, and the product.

2.1.14 Black acting methods from Kavanagh to Luckett and Shaffer

When discussing methodologies, I was exposed to during my undergraduate and early career years. I turned to a methodology that emerged in South Africa during years of oppression and was uniquely African. Academic and theatre maker Robert Mshengu Kavanagh (2022) remarks that African non-realism thrives in the theatres of Africa and nowhere more than in South Africa, where Indigenous theatre creates work in the spirit of African realism.[34] He also notes this was not so at universities where the epistemology remained firmly rooted in Western ideologies and he suggests a method based on a statement of intention arrived at by the director and company, which informs which process will be followed in the creation of narrative and the form the production will take. The company of performers, dancers, and musicians must possess a skill or talent in their respective fields developed through their practice to engage with a statement of intention. A productive synthesis of dramatic theatre techniques and Indigenous texts with a robust socialist inclination emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in Zimbabwean theatre to produce syncretic theatre that celebrated and mocked dramatic theatre texts.

An advance in theatre training is discussed in a publication of African theories of acting, *The Black Acting Method,* compiled by American academics Sharell Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer (2016) to provide culturally relevant frameworks for

[34] Robert Mshengu co-founded the Zimbabwean arts education organisation CHIPAWO and is director of CHIPAWO World, the international organ set up to spread and share its arts for development pedagogy and method.

black actors. The foreword by American scholar Molefi Kete Asante (2016:3)[35] provides a view of the movement as a paradigmatic and intellectual perspective that privileges agency within the context of African history and culture, trans-continentally and trans-generationally. It is crucial to centre blackness in education to demand agency in a history vital to identity building. Re-centring blackness is the focus of student protests on arts campuses globally, which includes crucial issues of racial disparities and inequities**,** to claim ownership of their necessary stake in higher education generally and acting theory particularly.

2.1.15 Multiplicity of methods

A 'classical theatre tradition' refers to a more generalised approach, not to any single technique but as an umbrella term for several Western methods. The classical actor technique focuses on voice, body control, and textual analysis in systems such as Mary Overlie's Viewpoints,[36] elaborated on in her biographic textbook *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice* (2016). The viewpoints she identifies are directing, choreographing, dancing, acting, improvisation, and analysis, indicating that her method teaches a range of disciplines. Fredrick Matthias Alexander devised the Alexander Technique (1923) when he experienced chronic voice problems and developed a system that theatre practitioners used when preparing for performance.

Joan Skinner (1963) introduces another approach incorporating somatic release as fundamental to good vocal and physical expression, known simply as the Skinner release technique.[37] It focuses primarily on text and pronunciation of vowels and consonants, diction and articulation. This applies to the demands of heightened theatre and text, where both acting style and text are amplified. Elevated speech is found in Shakespeare's texts and his use of iambic

[35] Molefi Kete Asante bases his entire career on Afrocentricity and continues to defend it despite strong criticisms.

[36] Developed by master theatre artist and educator Mary Overlie in the 1970s, Viewpoints is studied and practised in theatre and dance for decades. The practice and theory facilitate access to the source of inspiration and creativity.

[37] Joan Skinner's release technique is a somatic movement, dance, and creative practice with a core underlying principle of releasing blocked energy held tension and habitual patterns in the body's mind enabling moving with greater freedom while awakening creativity and spontaneity.

pentameter, the works of Ancient Greek playwrights, which includes poetry and praise poetry of the Imbongi in African cultures. Most texts written in previous centuries are labelled heightened, as the language used is no longer spoken and is very different from current or colloquial conversation. This requires specialised techniques to articulate complex and outdated vocabulary and interpret metaphoric speech. It is a technique I value and is evident in my archive, especially in rehearsing and performing works by Shakespeare and Greek Drama.

Foundational principles common to acting methodologies are the making of 'choices' and ‘intention’. When these present themselves to the actor, there are ways and opportunities to make better choices, and these show themselves constantly in an ongoing process. In Strasberg’s method, an actor reads a script, choosing memories as entry points to a character. The Meisner technique focuses on the actor reacting naturally to a stimulus or impulse in a scene and involves choice. Chekhov’s approach is based on the actor’s choice of psychological gestures to create characters.

Formed in the late 1970s and founded at the University of Cape Town, a group of like-minded students, the Troupe Theatre Company,[38] was housed at the Peoples’ Space Theatre.[39] The company's mission was to create exciting, challenging work that exercised all facets of theatre and theatricality. During this period, my methodology and process began to form and develop from the approaches I was exposed to. I do not recall consciously eschewing the principles I had learned during tertiary education. Still, I did focus on those methodologies that spoke directly to the type of theatre I wanted to be involved in and create.

A combination of vocally intensively focused methods, those demanding physical strength and precision and others advocating engaging intuition and

[38] Troupe Theatre Company was founded in 1978 by Fiona Ramsay, Richard E. Grant, Fred Abrahamse, Sean Taylor, Neil McCarthy, and Mike O'Brien.

[39] Started in 1971, The Space Theatre became known as the first non-racial commercial arts venue to operate during the plight of apartheid. The Space Theatre was recognised as the first Pioneer Fringe Theatre committed to a multiracial, democratic practice, exposing inequities of the State, and strongly advocating for freedom of expression.

imagination, interested me. This fusion of acting systems was not fully formed, but I had used it in all the work produced by the Troupe Theatre Company. I moved to Johannesburg to further research this method, where South African writer and theatre maker Barney Simon,[40] and lighting designer Mannie Manim,[41] founded the Market Theatre (1976) and The Company. During this first part of my career, there was a cultural boycott of South Africa under apartheid, not a total boycott, which resulted in a sense that South Africa was not part of the more excellent theatre or art world.

I became aware of a shift in my approach to theatre, where sociological issues seemed precedent to psychological traits. Simon developed his workshop theatre technique, which combined Living Newspaper and ethnographic principles and was based on exploring everyday issues and everyday ordinary lives. His process prods and coaxes actors to explore hunches they feel, allowing them to unearth a personal practice. Simon has a superb exercise called *World in an Orange,* where each cast member is given an orange to explore, using all the senses to investigate the fruit and make discoveries.

One discovers specific and minute details by examining the texture, smell, taste, colour and sounds the segments make as the juice is released, revealing myriad possibilities in a simple orange. These were then analysed, with Simon pointing to their value and the opportunity for metaphor in character creation. This exercise became a firm basis for researching characters to substantiate each detail meticulously, with precision and care, similar to the attention demanded by the orange. In *Peer Gynt* by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen (1876), the title character performs an analogous

[40] Barney Simon is a South African writer, playwright, and director. In 1976, Simon co-founded Johannesburg's Market Theatre, South Africa's first multiracial cultural centre and the birthplace of the country's innovative Indigenous theatre movement. The theatre operated during the racial segregation laws of apartheid without State subsidies and under constant threat of arrest for staging controversial contemporary plays performed by multiracial casts in front of multiracial audiences. Simon remained the theatre's artistic director from its opening until he died in 1985.

[41] Mannie Manim is a dynamic, meticulous planner with a visionary view of South African theatre. In 1976, Manim joined Barney Simon to found the Market Theatre.

process by peeling an onion and using the layers as symbols for the chapters of his eventful life. He remarks:

> *There's a most surprising lot of layers!*
> *Do we ever come to the kernel?*
> *There isn't one! To the innermost bit*
> *It's nothing but layers, smaller and smaller.*
>
> *Peer Gynt (Sc. V:218)* Henrik Ibsen (1876)

This metaphorical excerpt could illustrate how liminal spaces may function to emphasise the cyclical nature of examination and discovery.

2.2 Methodologies of vocal training

The connections and similarities between Berkoff's and Grotowski's methods are seen in the focus on the physical. Berkoff (2019) extended the focus to include vocal ability and technique demands. His plays include extended monologues and short dialogic scenes underpinned by strong rhythmic patterns or choral and ensemble text, and all are exacting on the vocal apparatus. During my exposure to the rigour of performing his work, I realised how vital developing vocal strength was. The curriculum I studied included material from mostly Western voice teachers; Cicely Berry (1973, 1980, 2001) and Virgil Anderson (1977) are only two, but their methods offered broad fundamental principles and rigorous exercises for vocal development. Pioneer and world-renowned voice coach Berry's method is based on the belief that voice is conditioned by four factors: environment, perception of sound, physical agility, and one's interpretation of the previous three factors. She provides a series of exercises to teach how to balance the truth of the actor's free voice and to use it to project feelings through the acting space (Berry, 1973).

In *Training the Speaking Voice*, Anderson (1977) details his scientific approach to analysing how the voice works anatomically. Clear diagrams and practical exercises encourage actors to put the theory into practice. He stresses repetition and constant application as keys to enhancing vocal ability.

I detected the voice's deep association and connection in and with performance and a need to locate an authentic voice for both actor and character. Human truth and texture lie within the voice and are rooted in the act of meaningful breath and profound physical and imaginative connection. In *Freeing the Natural Voice,* vocal coach and director Kristin Linklater (2006) details this method.[42] Linklater worked from the premise that every human being is born with a fully functional, natural voice, which becomes compromised by habits as individuals try to communicate with the world. To use the voice proficiently, human beings need to reconnect with the infantile natural function of the voice (Linklater, 1992). She aims to embed the actors in the freedom of their authentic voice, a principle I incorporate into my praxis.

2.3 Southern African methods

In South Africa, Twist Theatre Development Projects (2016) published a trilogy of handbooks for theatre disciplines, including interviews with practitioners and some guidelines for discussing critical concepts. Initiatives and research focus on African methods of the 2000s, and consultations with experts in the field of drama and theatre are pooled and compiled into resources for reference instead of theoretical treatises on particular processes.

Critics of African drama adopt a positivist tradition that creates binary divisions between text and performance, theatre and ritual, literacy and orality, and entertainment and utilitarianism (Patrick Ebewu, 2017). African drama is rooted in orality and distinct from other forms of drama because of the inseparable connection of cultural and traditional elements.

The focus on community and a plurality of voices in African theatre contrasts with Western methodologies, which often favour a single authorial voice. Traditionally, most African arts practitioners, not simply writers, embrace a repertoire and oral warehouse of verbal and physical stories. Playwrights, directors, companies, and artists contribute to the continent's powerful and vital theatre that emerges from

[42] Kristen Linklater is a Scottish vocal coach, acting teacher, actor, theatre director, and author who retired as professor emerit from the Theatre Arts Division of Columbia.

the traditional role of a festival, storytelling ritual, and masquerade in societies, exhibiting function and purpose. Crucial issues of politics, human rights, sustainability, and development have dominated the postcolonial world and are woven through the arts in Africa.

Body language, mnemonic, ritual, and audience participation intertwine in African traditional theatre and drama, which developed into a powerful vehicle to promote social change and political awareness on the continent. The relationship of theatre in the African worldview is similar in function to the tenets of Greek theatre. Four core elements of worldview systems are essential to African-centred thought that is shared by the ancient Greek worldview: cosmology or *cosmo*s, the Greek word for the universe; ontology from the Greek word *ontos* (being); axiology from the Greek word *axios* (values), and epistemology from the Greek word *episteme* (knowledge) (Azibo, 1992; Carroll, 2008; Kambon, 1996, 2004; Myers, 1987). Artists in South Africa have been united in their passionate belief in the power of theatre to shape our modern world and to celebrate the cultural strength of the past. Often, contemporary Western theatre pales compared to some of these vibrant and stirring works.

2.4 Learning performance

Good actors often exhibit honed technique and exceptional talents, such as voice projection and movement on stage, learned skills, finessed, and constantly improved. I agree with data analyst Will Koehrsen (2019) that one is born with few natural talents or skills and that excellence is not created from any particular innate ability but from practice and repetition. The extra edge that extraordinary natural talent brings is something that cannot be taught, and most learning requires practising repeatedly.

Like many human characteristics, talent demonstrates a high statistical probability of being inherited from our parents or ancestors, implying that practice and talent may complement each other and must be present to develop skill and technique. Cognitive psychologist K. Anders Ericsson (2006) explores the notion of deliberate practice in examining expertise and expert performance compared to ordinary practice. Deliberate practice occurs in theatre rehearsal praxis, an

extraordinary activity that involves more than tedious drills and repetition. This practice must be mindful and goal-driven to identify specific objectives, such as focusing on a particular aspect of the actor's instrument – achieving a distinct vocal quality and tone for a character, experimenting intuitively, identifying how the vocal quality can be sustained, and monitoring this constantly to ensure continuity within a performance. Ericsson (2006:10, 18) contends that intentional practice can affect changes in the mind and body, plus discoveries in muscles, nerves, hearts, lungs and brains that show profound increases in skill level.

Intellectual changes tend to be specific responses to particular skill requirements. Therefore, if an individual becomes excellent at one skill, they do not necessarily excel at others. Deliberate practice can occur in a liminal space where the actor is encouraged to be fully present in the discoveries and explorations made to distil these and retain what is valuable and helpful.

One's current skill level is reinforced in ordinary practice and needs to be sufficient to improve. It requires a unique approach to force one's mind and body into the change necessary to improve. One is often resistant to this change as it leads one out of a habitual behavioural comfort zone and into unfamiliar territories. This endorses the theory that short-term intensity cannot replace long-term commitment and that any crucial changes occur over long periods, suggesting it is impossible to become great overnight (Hochli, Brugger & Messner, 2019).

However, actors practice or rehearse more than the physicality or vocality of character. They need to access emotions and learn a facility to convey them. They require emotional muscularity and flexibility, leading the proponent of Theatre of Cruelty, Antonin Artaud (1958:134), to praise actors as "the athletes of the heart".

There are practical issues of learning text and how this is achieved, and academic Helga Noice (1997) studied methods actors use to memorise lines. She found unanimous agreement among actors that they do not learn lines by rote but instead study them. This means reading the script repeatedly to infer the motivation behind each utterance. Textual information is multilayered, involving

the actors, the characters they are playing, and the relationships between them. Nearly all actors stress the importance of identifying the underlying meaning and why the character expresses that meaning, uttering those precise words. This type of 'active' understanding leads to verbatim text retention and makes word-for-word or line-for-line memorising unnecessary. Obviously, in cases where you have to learn a fictional language, the process is different and might involve learning by rote. I was aware of this in 2012 when playing Levana in Ariel Dorfman's *Delirium,*[43] where he uses the fictional countries of Constanze and Tomas in his examination of border conflict and territorial war to attack the senselessness of wars fought over religion, land, or ethnicity.

In a shift from text-based theatre, English theatre director (2005:5, 7, 53)[44] seeks to remove the focus on literacy to reinvigorate theatre using an innovative theatrical vocabulary not tied to language. In his work, rhetoric would not serve as the primary device for communication so prevalent in Western theatre in the 1900s. Brook (1996) believes that scrutinising humans under a microscope and observing the details unlocked an exciting world where the minute inner movement was almost entirely invisible. I suggest Brook's (1996:36, 49, 51) term 'empty space' could serve as an alternative term for the liminal space because both function as a place, allowing for what he calls magic to happen. I understand that magic will not necessarily occur in this space, but it allows an unspecific and unspecified area to become a liminal space. Brook (1996) suggests one could take an empty space, call it a bare stage, and direct a man to walk across it while someone else is watching, and that was all that was required for an act of theatre to be engaged. Therefore, while the 'empty space' serves the actors and creators, it is liminal and only becomes an act of theatre when the actors are observed.

[43] *Delirium* was performed in South Africa at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg, in 2012 with David Dennis, Fiona Ramsay, and Fezile Mpela, and directed by Greg Homann.

[44] Peter Brook wrote several books detailing his thoughts on acting, including *The Empty Space* (1996) and *The Open Door* (2005).

2.5 Locating your method

Territorial claims to spaces, whether liminal or not, to content and narrative, or to motif and manner that occur in rehearsals can exist and co-exist in this in-between place to be creatively examined and explored. We may seek or actively find liminal spaces where cultural territory and ownership could be unpacked and addressed.

Can an actor use training methods from separate practitioners and embrace the psychological and sociological modes together in performance? From the point of view of cognitive science, there is no reason these methods cannot be fused. Humans can choose from various identity concepts when integrating actors and characters for dramatic representation. Even though our history and culture will edge us toward one choice or another, we have the natural capacity to understand ourselves as emotional containers, social types, and physical objects. When contemporary actors perform traditional plays, the kinds of characters they are playing will likely involve them in choosing identity concepts that are out of their comfort zone.

In Chapter 3, I discuss cultural appropriation and its implications for acting pedagogy. I discuss how the methodologies discussed in Chapter 2 contribute to or appease the notion and possibly pave a path toward negotiating the territory to facilitate awareness of and sensitivity to characters outside one's immediate cultural frame.

CHAPTER 3: Cultural territory and appropriation

This chapter explores the concepts of cultural territory and appropriation and how these influence current paradigms of thought and critical theory regarding performance. Based on critical race theory, I interrogate the political context and landscape in which my archive was created, which may inform work performed outside its period of relevance.

A central question in the thesis is how, as an actor, I can access and engage characters from different cultural frames and territories. I use the word territory loosely, not to denote land, but to signify the cultural area to which individuals and communities lay claim and because the notion of territory is fiercely embedded in our history. It is in a cultural territory that people can share similar traits, customs, language, and heritage. Claiming an object as one's territory or possession impacts the possible knowledge sharing with territoriality.

3.1 Originality and appropriation

The emphasis on personal genius and originality in the art of the 1900s developed to include the collective consciousness where the appropriation of ideas was accepted and often welcomed.

I am not arguing against the legal rights of ownership, but legal claims do not guarantee that people will share ideas about which they feel territorial. Territoriality appears innate, possibly universal, and dependent on trust and societal relationships. Social psychologist Geert Hofstede (1980a) posits a cross-cultural communication and interaction framework. His theory was based on relationships between individuals and collectivity in a given society. Hofstede (1980b:45) defines this as:

> *Individualism implies a loosely knit social framework in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only, while collectivism is characterised by a tight social framework in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups; they expect their in-*

group to look after them, and in exchange for that they feel they owe absolute loyalty to it.

Yet, it appears more prevalent in individualist cultures where ownership of ideas and feelings of possessiveness over an innovative object or creation are culturally more accepted than in collectivist cultures. People behave according to self-interest and personal preferences and consider independence and self-sufficiency important in individualist communities. In contrast, groups are essential, and individuals are secondary in collectivist populations. However, creative production and pursuit always acknowledge the influence and exchange of ideas of other artists or those that have gone before.

South Africa contains both collectivist and individualist groups within society (Hofstede, 1980b), and therefore, like cultural appropriation, it is difficult to define the boundaries of territorial knowledge. People who have created something might feel entitled to determine how or what happens to their creation.

American lawyer Hannah Buxbaum (2014)[45] writes about conflicts in global economies and suggests that people who see an association between their identity and an idea are more likely to feel a claim to that idea, and the more involved they are in creating the idea, the stronger the claim. Therefore, legal ownership becomes problematic because it fails to ensure people will share the knowledge, they feel territorial over. Ownership is particularly significant regarding who can culturally claim knowledge and creative work, but legislating is challenging.

Opinion on how to negotiate cultural appropriation or territory is twofold. One argument is that all great art may involve the creative expropriation of the work of others, emphasising that any restrictions on borrowing might stifle and limit artistic expression (Steven Mintz, 2023). Historically, the fusion of expropriated work with newly created work has played a significant role in cultural transformation. Transformation is further reinforced in current multicultural

[45] Hannah Buxbaum is the vice president for International Affairs at Indiana University and writes on international property and ownership rights.

societies where interrogating territories beyond our provincialities contributes to a body of knowledge and understanding of the world.

An important counterargument maintains that unacknowledged borrowing amounts to theft, with aboriginal activist Henrietta Marrie (2008) claiming that adopting elements of culture as part of the identity of members of another culture is blatant stealing. Arguably, cultural appropriation is more than using an already developed idea or custom and is often manifest in the profiteering from the hard work, talent, and ideas of black creators by white artists. However, Marrie does not discuss appropriation generally and does not include white artists appropriating the work of historical figures or other white artists.

3.2 Culture and Identity

The claim that "good artists copy, great artists steal" is anecdotally attributed to the celebrated visual artist Pablo Picasso,[46] inferring an acknowledgement that his work reflects and uses influences from many cultures. Artists from the Dadaist Movement (1916–1930), one being Marcel Duchamp, create multimedia paintings or collages from art or existing objects. Duchamp regards the appropriation process as minor and believes that arts practitioners incorporate borrowed imagery into their work to reinterpret an aesthetic (David Hopkins, 2004).

In the previous chapter, the appropriation of ideas of theatre methodologists was traced to illustrate that a conception of art and product is usually an amalgamation or fusion of ideas that have gone before, that are revisited, adapted and reimagined for a new context. Artistic work generally may be an appropriation of some form. Shakespeare was not Italian, yet he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, and many of his plays were set in Italy. African American designer Ann Lowe (1953) designed Jacqueline Bouvier's wedding dress inspired by Parisian couture, and artist Andy Warhol (1962) used famous advertising images

[46] Pablo Picasso was quoted in an article on appropriation by the Arts Centre of the Bluegrass (2022).

from consumer publicity. The richness of global culture has been and continues to be the product of cultural intermixture.

Because appropriation in arts and culture occurred previously, it should not continue to be sanctioned and accepted but must be included in artistic debate and enquiry. For artists like Barbara Kruger (1985)[47] and Sherrie Levine (1981),[48] appropriative art has guided artists to consider the potentialities of art and how it can communicate, evolve, and respond to the current conditions of society, culture and the world. They suggest that by appropriating images and using them in their work, they reclaim imagery that expresses feminist positions and dialogue. Toronto-based visual artist Elizabeth Zvonar (2016) based her *French Fantasy* on Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *The Grand Odalisque*, resulting in a contemporary humorous twist on an old classic. Classical painting motifs are used as the basis for the destabilising pieces, which explore the complications of making inherent feminist interventions to an existing visual archive.

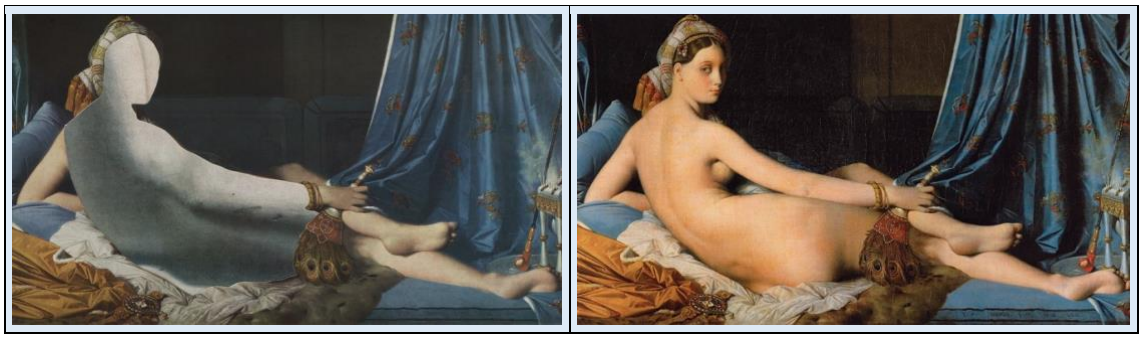


Figure 3: Left – Elizabeth Zvonar, *French Fantasy*, 2016; Right – Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *The Grand Odalisque*, 1814

We may have become dependent on premade images, production, and thought, only being able to function with the aid of a cultural crutch. Although art is not created in a vacuum, art creates and precipitates art, with appropriation having a significant purpose in the practice of the arts obscured by a complex moral

[47] United States artist Barbara Kruger employs pithy graphic design strategies of text and imagery common in advertisements to direct attention to pernicious systems of power. She combines photograph-based images with slogans or aphorisms, deconstructing them visually and verbally. She uses images and motifs of other artists and advertising slogans and images.

[48] United States artist Sherrie Levine creates almost indistinguishable copies of others' work and emphasises that authorship is defined by use rather than individual creation and that nothing is inherently unique.

history. Any crossing cultural territories can be used to contemplate history, reframe ideas, and generate discussion, producing new ways of thinking and exploring and should be encouraged.

British anthropologist Edward B. Taylor (2010:4) writes, “Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man”. This definition has shifted in the last decade. Still, it is commonly recognised that it refers to a cumulative deposit of knowledge and experience, often universal, which can be shared to include values and beliefs, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, concepts of the universe and material objects and possessions acquired by a people in the course of generations through individual and group exchange.

When territories shift and open, group exchange occurs, proving that culture, territory, and knowledge are not fixed but fluid. Territoriality may affect understanding in ways that cause resistance to sharing and accepting ideas. In my methodology, the actor attempts to understand the *‘self’*, then enters a neutral space or territory to facilitate a shift to a ‘*neutral self’* and shares ideas to create a ‘*transformed self*’. It may be contested that a space can never be neutral as tensions and conflict will undoubtedly be present. Still, it encourages challenging assumptions and biases, fosters critical thinking and curiosity, and stimulates divergent and convergent thinking to generate alternative and innovative options. The notion of the neutral here is for the space to focus on issues, emotions, and thoughts around themes, content, and the core of the creative work, as well as to interrogate the extraneous hostilities or anxieties that might assist creativity and the product.

Critics insist the very idea of neutrality is based on white identity and white supremacy, resulting in young black actors who don’t identify often being forced underground as an act of survival. The degree of self-erasure young actors endure can be profound. And to live with the cognitive dissonance of being told by primarily white teachers to bring your whole self into the room, knowing that to do so would probably expose you to actual harm, would make any young actor of colour question their place or their value in this field (Ginther, 2023).

One grows up within a culture, learns, and adopts its customs, which are prescribed and aim to assist one in surviving within that cultural territory. Aspects and fundamental principles of this culture may be repressive and inequitable, and one may want to reject and disassociate oneself from these. One may also try to shift one's cultural context if it is oppressive, curbs freedoms, and enslaves.

The results of appropriation in its crudest form are recounted in wars fought between nations and cultures, with dominant conquerors imposing cultural frameworks, customs, language, ritual, and religion on the conquered. Through many wars, annexations, colonisations and destabilisations of territories, victors looted and stole cultural artefacts while forcing their particular cultural practices on the overpowered. Two examples of this are demonstrated by American Western art dealers who went to extremes to collect Native American treasures and bronzes by excavating thousands of now-unknown graves (Tina Charisma, 2021). In the 1900s, carved tusks were sold in European markets after being stolen from Benin. The Asante gold weights are available at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, having been looted from Ghana (Dan Hicks, 2020).

3.3 Critical race theory

A core academic concept that race is a social and systemic construct is introduced first in *The Souls of Black Folk* by American W.E.B. Du Bois (1903, 2014:45). Critical race theory developed from civil rights initiatives and was taken forward by a law professor and spiritual godfather of the theory, Derrick Bell (Jelani Cobb, 2021). This theory explains how racism has shaped public and cultural policy. I disagree with an emergent right-wing dogma that suggests it is a divisive discourse that pits people of colour against white people to achieve equity. Aiming these accusations at theorists who support policies that explicitly study race theory can lead to negative dynamics, focusing on group identity over the universal, continuing an outdated division between people into oppressed and oppressor groups, and encouraging intolerance.

Developed to consolidate awareness of human rights in contemporary culture, the theory constantly challenges conservative ideology. Strategies were implemented in education, the health sector, and the arts, striving for inclusivity,

and remain a priority until resolved. The theatre remains an ideal and essential platform to speak out against inequalities, share resources, amplify the voices of those previously not heard, support initiatives that seek to redress power inequities and promote critical race thinking.

If the cultural exchange serves both black and white interests, where a white culture is viewed and portrayed by black culture and black culture is considered and performed by white culture, interest convergence might occur. This convergence occurs in Nuttall's intertwined entanglements and is evident in postcolonial South Africa. However, the recent US Supreme Court ruling that race-conscious admissions practices at some universities and colleges are unconstitutional destroyed decades of legal precedent and overturned the recruitment and enrolment practice.[49] The race-conscious admissions, coupled with the introduction of bills to restrict the teaching of and limit how teachers discuss racism and sexism in classrooms, have arrested affirmative action and developments in education to advance diversity. Not allowing historical facts to be aired is censorship and perpetuates a fabricated historical perspective to eliminate specific facts. The liminal space I suggest is precisely for these discussions and engagements.

Kenyan cultural activist and author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (2011) devised an innovative form of theatre to liberate the theatrical process from a bourgeois education system, demystify it, and avoid alienation through audience participation. Forms of theatre divided by audience and spectator boundaries produce active stars among grateful admirers, encouraging passivity and disengagement and not exchanging ideas (Thiong'o, 2011). Interestingly, in most definitions of culture, artistic achievements are singled out as valuable features and include behaviour systems.

Bertens's (2014) writing focuses on an individual or people's wrongs and suggests encouraging white people to feel guilty, illustrating how systems perpetuate racial disparity. Law professor Kendall Thomas (1995) concurs that

[49] In a historic decision, the US Supreme Court effectively ended race-conscious admission programs at colleges and universities nationwide on 29 June 2023.

racism need not necessarily define cultures but that there ought to be a strong will to raise awareness for it to be considered and eradicated. Political dilemmas surrounding race theory seem symptomatic of this historical moment, including civil rights ethos, affirmative action campaigns, increased racial integration and cross-identification, and shifts in immigration and demographics. The possibility of artists' cross-identity (and cross-gender) performances seems to offer a way to rethink enduring political inequalities and provide opportunities for political alliance and social justice. We require a new critical vocabulary that allows us to imagine race, identity, and power differently. However, this looks less and less likely as affirmative action laws are repeatedly repealed, discouraging critical race theory discourse.

Perhaps less objectionable appropriation begins with genuine appreciation and understanding of a cultural product's value, significance, and knowledge of sacred rituals and motifs; one would be less likely to use it offensively. However, deferring to cultural experts is essential to establish if these are acceptable and whether permissions are needed; these have yet to be identified and agreed upon. Sharing and being part of each other's cultures might provide a healthy way for society to coexist and learn about each other. However, navigating what appropriation means for individual cultures must be thoroughly interrogated before embarking on work. Taking part in another culture without understanding its significance or meaning can be destructive and hurtful to those whose culture you use and those with whom you share it.

The murder of George Floyd,[50] triggered protests around the world. A stark reminder of the deep systemic inequities underlying black lives that insists a re-evaluation of teaching initiatives to address systemic racism and ensure places of learning include experiences of marginalised groups. Curatorial arts consultant and author Simelia Hodge-Dallaway remarked that Floyd's brutal murder "catapulted change and a more urgent worldwide evaluation of the theatre industry", forcing positionality in attitude. "We started to see a lot of institutions

[50] The killing of George Floyd, 46, who repeatedly told Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin he couldn't breathe as the officer knelt on his neck on 25 May 2020, sparked days of unrest and mass protests across the globe over the treatment of black people by police.

displaying written statements of solidarity on their websites and social media platforms" (Hodge-Dallaway, Kwei-Kwame & Poglio-Nwabali, 2024: 37). The event ignited and increased the Black Lives Matter movement, which urged the white world to acknowledge that institutional change was needed and encouraged them to join that journey. It was a pivotal moment in the global re-evaluation of histories of racial tension to demand more from institutions and to acknowledge oppressive forces that had been wreaking havoc on humankind for centuries and continue to do so.

American cultural race theory continues to be forced to engage with the violent killings and assassination of the black community by police. This awareness is felt worldwide no more keenly than in Africa, where critical race theory must be visible in both practice and theory as curricula shift to focus on principles of decolonisation.

3.4 Language, power, and appropriation

Power relations of language materialise when the transfer of knowledge constitutes power and access to truth: "If race is a social construct, so too is gender, and both encourage behaviour and particular use of language" (Foucault, 1966:15). I acknowledge the absences in Foucault's work around colonialism and race and use this reference about language and culture in critical race theory. The word culture was used in a structuralist context to refer to a form of high art or pursuits of an elite that encouraged criticism but has shifted to a more comprehensive concept of culture. It has become more complex as the collision and entanglement of alternative cultures are complicated and messy.

Words are never fixed or stable in time; assigning meaning creates a process that shifts and never ends. As soon as an authentic truth is uttered and becomes present, it destabilises and becomes inauthentic (Roland Barthes, 1986:141-148). The construction depends on the signifier's and the signified's associated contrast, similarity and connective principles. The signifier is stable, but what is signified is open to interpretation and often requires clarification. Whether a story from one's culture can be expressed in certain words or whether these words belong only to one's culture forms part of cultural debate.

To advance principles of critical race theory in literature and the arts, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe (1995) claimed art in any language or form should transcend place and time but would reach a much more expansive community when African writers consciously wrote in English. It is impossible to answer whether a description of grief in isiXhosa is more authentic than a description of sorrow in English. Language and culture may be construed differently, depending on a researcher's and audience's cultural context, professional affiliation, personal preferences, current predominant fashion and other social factors.

In terms of appropriation of language, I found the Russian formalists Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky's model that provides *fabula* and *zyuzhet* helpful, where the *fabula* describes the raw material of a story and documents reality (Victor Erlich, 1981). This theory goes some way to advance the argument of how a narrative can be re-interpreted in a different form while not constituting appropriation because a transformation of the form or medium has occurred. This information is organised into the *zyuzhet* and the different and myriad styles in which the story can be told.[51] Allowing for a margin of freedom in cultural boundaries encourages human agency and subjectivity. This may validate the use of stories or motifs of another culture based on this transformation as being represented differently. The actual language is the same; merely the form of the telling is different.

The *zyuzhet*, therefore, is the finished arrangement of narrated events rather than the unfolding of a chronological sequence of events and represents a vision, interpretation, or 'take' on the original story. The film Citizen Kane proves a good example where the *fabula* is the story of Kane's life from birth to death. In contrast, the *zyuzhet* begins with his death and traces the story of the journalist interrogating his life using the retrospective technique of flashbacks. The story or *fabula* may be appropriated in terms of cultural appropriation. Still, the manner, style, and form in which the story is related is not, as the narrative is revealed in a modified and transformed style.

[51] Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky introduced the terms *fabula* and *zyuzhet* into the Russian Formalism movement in the 20th century.

Plays, productions, and performances are works of art that present a plurality of voices and embrace languages, social dialects, characteristics, generic languages, and languages of generations. Where only one language is used in telling a story, characters speak in different voices, including dialects or languages of former generations (possibly immigrating from a different culture), which increases the fluidity and mobility of culture, territory and language.

Would one be qualified to represent the cultural frame of an ancestor or antecedent born in a foreign country embracing many aspects distinctive to that culture? Can I play my Scottish grandmother? I have lived with her, known and observed her, and been influenced by her traditions and culture, but I am not Scottish. Or am I close enough to the culture to qualify?

Bertens (2014:23) posits that literature and art are not bound by time and place but transcend the limitations of the area of origin and address the complexities of an essentially changing human condition. Literature and art are not simply by-products of history but actively contribute to it, forming a historical matrix that reflects events of the time, becoming a fusion of histories and collective memory.

Whatever the definition, culture reflects the context, time, and place of origin of art, and acts of cultural appropriation are more difficult to identify. According to Italo-British architect and theorist Richard A. Rogers (2006), four types of cultural appropriation occur: exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transcultural engagement. Transcultural engagement interests me, suggesting that a greater understanding of world cultures could be reached. However, this may only be feasible once the terms of cultural exchange have been agreed upon and the occurrence of dominance and exploitation has been eradicated. Reciprocal cultural exchange could be valuable to both, where sharing underpins the act and each culture has equal input.

3.5 Artefacts of territory

Using pre-existing objects and images that exhibit little or no transformation would be appropriation, but using these in a new way and applying them to a new context might not. Therefore, where renovation or re-contextualisation of an

object, image, or motif has occurred, and transformation has occurred, it might cease to be viewed as appropriation. I raise this as transformative consideration became the basis of the legal, fair use test. American judge Pierre N. Leval (1990:1106) cites transformation to occur when the secondary use of a work or artefact is used to determine the purpose and character and evaluated in terms of its critical, educational, and non-profit usage over commercial use. However, one must note that 'transformative' cannot be taken too literally to understand elements of fair use, and it seems Level (1990) implied a complex thought. Still, it does not mean that any or all changes made to an author's original text will necessarily support a finding of fair use. There have been similar cases, and recent opinion holds that courts should reorient themselves and allow the public to indicate the transformative nature of work and return the power to determine what is in the public interest to the public (Jonathan Francis, 2015).

There are many examples of blatant appropriation when adapting a work. English director Peter Brook's nine-hour production of *Mahabharata,* first performed in a Quarry in Avignon, France, in 1986, was an adaptation of a Sanskrit epic poem, the Great Tale of the Bharata Dynasty. Canadian director Robert Lepage's and Ariane Mnouchkine's production of *Kanata*, which means village in the Irochi language of the First Nations Scholar in North America. New Delhi professor Rustom Barucha wrote a detailed analysis of the production, criticising Brook's colonialist approach to the text and pointing out his failure to understand or respect Indian culture (Barucha, 1988). Indigenous activists and artists accused Lepage of producing a culturally insensitive play with little input from the communities portrayed. Issues raised by Lepage's production are the representation of other people and other cultures and the right to speak for and represent others in a dominant-sub-altern dynamic (Ashifa Kassam, 2018).

Therefore, more than simple adaptation is needed to render a work culturally appropriate. Often, the reworking may stray too far from the original and distort the intention of the work and, by implication, its integrity. There is a responsibility when adapting pre-existing work to conduct sufficient research and consult with cultural interpreters to ensure its integrity and that the voice presented remains faithful to the original. Histories of cultural dominance, colonisation and

appropriation must be carefully investigated before adapting. However, forms of adaptation can be valuable and offer insights into other cultures. But only if reciprocity between cultures is evident, which involves extensive and sensitive research, accreditation is provided, a fee or royalty is negotiated, consultation with originators is ensured and audiences comprise originating cultures.

Theatre skills are founded on repetition, rehearsing existing texts and interpreting in new ways, or revisiting iterations of productions and performances that have preceded them. Reinterpretations and reimagining of text form part of theatre arts knowledge, and a director's and performer's new approach or vision contributes to theatrical knowledge. An interpretation of an original represents a transformation. Several productions of the same play are often performed in one city simultaneously, each with a different interpretation and in acts illuminating the past and the present, history can illuminate the future (Cardozo, 2012:180).

Invasion of cultural territories occurs in many fields of art. In haute couture, the Louis Vuitton Basotho blanket motif[52] was viewed as appropriation using designs from the Lesotho culture (Corrigall, 2017). The South African Mint commissioned the original creation of the Legacy Cape or 'blanket coat' to mark 50 years of the Krugerrand's existence, designed by South African designer Thabo Makhetha and was not considered appropriation. The origin of the blanket designs has been documented as a gift. It most reliably can be traced back to 1897 when Queen Victoria visited the then-Basutoland during her Jubilee year and gave King Lerotholi Letsie a blanket named Victoria England[53]. The Victoria England is the oldest design, and there are six in total in the Victoria Collection. The blankets are significant cultural items of clothing worn by the Basotho.

[52] Louis Vuitton Fall Collection (2017). Whilst some may say this is an appreciation of culture, others deem this as cultural appropriation. Local Basotho designers need to be more impressed as little attention is given to their designs and are not involved in the process. https://www.wantedonline.co.za/fashion-and-grooming/2017-07-20-fab-or-cultural-faux-pas-louis-vuittons-basotho-blanket-inspired-collection/

[53] The Victoria England is the oldest design, and there are six in total in the Victoria Collection Pelo-Ea-Morena (Heart of the King); Crown; Badges of the Brave; Lehlako (Crest); Skin; Malakabe (Flame) (Pietila, 2023).



Figure 4: Left – Louis Vuitton's Basotho Blanket Collection 2017; Right – Basotho blanket coat by Thabo Makhetha to celebrate 50 years of Krugerrands

This case could be regarded as claiming ownership over cultural or historical objects belonging to a particular community.

Artist Dana Schutz (2016) strode into controversial territory when she portrayed the African American teenager lynched to death by bigots in 1955 in her abstract *Open Casket* painting.

The title reflects the decision of Emmet Till's mother to leave the casket open, insisting people must see what she saw, which was the result of a brutal racially motivated mutilation. It caused public protest and debate as unacceptable for white people to use black suffering for profit or gain.



Figure 5: Dana Schutz, *Open Casket* (2016). Oil on canvas (Collection of the artist; Courtesy Petzel Gallery, New York) [54]

In her defence, Schutz (2016) asserts that artists work to conjure debate and question the status quo of society but agrees that it does not mean one has the inherent right to speak for another's culture, history, or marginalisation. She admits that although she does not know or experience what it is like to be black, she does know what it is like to be a mother, having experienced motherhood, which compelled her to create the work. The depiction of a young black person's brutal death occurs outside the artist's cultural territory but within her experience of maternal grief.

3.6 Blackfishing or blackface

The term 'blackfishing' became prominent in 2019, first used by journalist Wanna Thompson on Twitter.[55] It is a form of contemporary blackface. White celebrity Kim Kardashian[56] and her family created an empire by undergoing plastic surgery

[54] *Open Casket* by artist Dana Schultz. Whitney Biennial (2016) initiated vigorous debate and removed the painting. Schultz was emphatic that she never intended to sell or profit from the work, nor did she paint it for fun. However, it was immaterial to the protest.

[55] Wanna Thompson's Twitter post: Can we start a thread and post the white girls cosplaying as black women on Instagram? Let's air them out because this is ALARMING (7 Nov 2018).

[56] In 2022, Kim Kardashian held a glass of champagne with her posterior (recreating that of the oppressed Saartjie Baartman), which she claims was part of a media campaign highlighting South African music. The photograph appeared in *Paper Magazine* (2014). Story: Amanda Fortini/ Photography: French graphic designer Jean-Paul Goude.

enhancements to have the naturally curvy shapes and facial features of black women. Blackfishing is any appropriation by white people of black culture, illustrated by a photograph of Kardashian balancing a glass of champagne on her remodelled bottom. I raise the issue of black fishing concerning my portraying the role of the black character Mama Nadi in my creative project analysed in Chapter 6.

In contrast, 'white negroes' is a term cultural commentator Norman Mailer (1957)[57] coins in his essay of the same title. The essay was a call to abandon a numbing culture of conformity and psychoanalysis in favour of rebelliousness and emancipating sexuality associated with marginalised black culture. Black sounds came out of white artists, and whites adopted black style. He was strongly criticised for this, particularly by writer and playwright James Baldwin, who accused Mailer of writing about white men's imagining of the racial other, which perpetuated the myth of the sexuality of negroes (Baldwin, 1961). Baldwin believes the psychoanalytic exploration of racial dynamics remains inadequately developed within critical race theory. He exposes a new generation of whiteness thriving on the borrowed ingenuity of black people and explores how this contributes to and intensifies racial inequality and would qualify as appropriative.

Appropriation seems inevitable everywhere; as long as people interact with other people, whether by choice or force, cultures will intersect, mingle, and graft onto each other. Attraction to or appreciation of foreign people, manners, customs, or cultures is known as xenophilia. Appropriation may offer a means of social and political repair, but it is the form it takes that needs examining. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was chaired by former Archbishop Desmond Tutu and was appointed in December 1995. The central purpose of the Commission was to promote reconciliation and forgiveness among perpetrators and victims of apartheid. The commission aimed to discover the causes and nature of human rights violations in South Africa between 1960 and 1994 and to allow amnesty to those who fully disclosed their involvement in politically motivated human rights violations. However, the commission only recorded the

[57] Norman Mailer's (1957) 'White negroes' remains most famous and most reprinted essays and established his reputation as a philosopher of hip.

testimony of 21,000 victims, and only 2,000 of these appeared in public hearings. This is not significant regarding the amount of people affected by violence and human rights violations, with the resulting trauma still evident.

Many criticised the process and outcomes of the TRC. Playwright Jane Taylor (2021), who wrote the acclaimed Ubu and the Truth Commission*,* found fault with the commission's lopsided influence and claimed, “The TRC is unquestionably a monumental process, the consequences of which will take years to unravel. For all its pervasive weight, however, it infiltrates our culture asymmetrically, unevenly across multiple sectors”. The hearings often took place in local churches or community halls in rural areas, and significant engagement was had with those communities. However, the hearings in urban centres were isolated and marginalised by other social events. My thesis aims to continue the work of reparation in proposed liminal spaces that allow for engagement around entanglements and trauma.

Not all acts of appropriation are equal, and their implications are not always determined by the intent or mindfulness of the act but may be shaped by the contexts in which these occur (Rogers, 2016:476). Cultural practices and appropriation should be reconceptualised and understood as relational, dialogic, and not limited to a particular culture. Acts of communication and cultural appropriation can reflect the individual and group identities and their positions toward each other. Indeed, cross-cultural examination and collaboration might assist in assuaging the sharp divisions amongst communities based on cultural differences and encourage an increased awareness and knowledge to synthesise traditional and postmodern practices.

3.7 Cultural territories in South Africa

If one accepts that culture is a social construct, it is often accompanied by resistance or opposition to a dominant culture and an identity formation where culture is the subject. Art can advance active participation in constructing discourses and ideologies and should be encouraged in practice and performance. Encountering unfamiliar responses illustrates the complexity and

overlap of these identifying terms where meanings adapt, change and are diluted.

In South Africa, the apartheid regime advanced forced segregation and imposed stringent laws of separate development through the classification of white, black, and brown citizens. Further division was ensured through imposed language using Afrikaans, English, or foreign languages within the black community. The socio-lingual concept of code-switching applies to monolingual and bilingual speakers, with the distinctions between the languages losing definition and tracking which language belongs to which group becoming complicated. A small percentage of the population speaks all official languages, but many speak a smattering of two or more of these, resulting in code-switching mid-sentence.

South Africa's first democratic election was held in 1994 amid an atmosphere promoting shared cultural experience and a Rainbow Nation.[58] This ideal was short-lived and faded with increased debt, widespread unemployment, stagnant gross domestic product, increased crime, and poor energy and water infrastructure. These realities and a lack of hope for the future have shattered the rainbow nation idea.

What cultural items can be owned commonly in intersecting and shared cultures, and can this be regulated? Property ownership is lawfully restricted to individuals or a group of people and possibly not to a particular culture. Copyright and intellectual property rights are significant in an expansive law field that grapples with appropriation notions. This raises the issue of intellectual property rights of creations of the mind or inventions.

Signification is essential in cultural appropriation processes, where the study of the art of any period reflects the dominant values of the society in which it emerges. Material cultures, such as the novel, the play, the painting, and the

[58] 'Rainbow nation' is a term coined following the first democratic election in South Africa in 1994 by archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe the country after the end of apartheid rule.

architecture of a city, are positioned to narrate and detail the political struggles of society and cultural governance systems.

Indian physicist and postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha (1994) identifies the liminal and hybrid in cultural interaction to describe ways the colonised resisted the power and dominance of the coloniser. Based on the existence of such spaces, cultural borders open up, creating new hybrid cultures that combine their particular features that often atone for differences. He suggests this as a way to deal with genuine ‘otherness’ as we live on the borderline of the present. Similar to the idea of overlapping territories, "homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons… Exiles cross borders and break barriers of thought and experience” (Said, 2002:185).

The hybrid and the liminal principles interest me and suggest a compelling fusion of cultural forms to create an in-between position halfway between cultures with equal power (Bhabha, 1994). He notes that multiculturalism is prevented in practice despite consistently being recognised in theory. I propose entering the liminal space to offer an entry point for forming shared hybrid cultures where no one culture is dominant and to address this imbalance. Postcolonial theory poses that authenticity would be eroded and might disappear within hybrid cultures, contaminating the culture’s essence and authenticity. Should these develop, will the many common cultures in different hybrid forms emerge from these engagements, and interactions become siloed and isolated from another common culture that has developed?

Arriving at a definition of cultural rights is challenging as these intersect with the idea of cultural territory. One must distinguish the rights that are considered artistic and define the content of such rights in the same way civil, political, economic, and social rights exist.

In South Africa, the Indigenous Cultural Communities Act (1997) was introduced, and a National Commission on Indigenous Peoples to recognise, protect, and promote the rights of Indigenous communities. The Act proposed establishing a national record system of Indigenous knowledge systems. Because the work

would have to be registered before a penalty for appropriating without consent be handed down to a transgressor, how would one claim? The Act proposed a sentence of no longer than three years of imprisonment or a fine of R30,000, but where would this be paid, and who holds the purse strings of cultural property? Minister of Science and Technology in 2016, Naledi Pandor, addressed parliament on the adoption of the Protection, promotion, development and Management of Indigenous Knowledge Systems Bill,[59] outlining its purpose:

> *To establish and implement mechanisms and access to knowledge of Indigenous and local communities to provide for the registration, accreditation and certification of Indigenous knowledge practitioners. of appropriating funds and other purposes (Indigenous Peoples Rights Act 1997, Republic Act No. 8371 of 1997).*[60]

Although the Bill was adopted, it has been enforced only in clear-cut and apparent issues, but where there is contestation and a need for clarity on origin and rightful ownership. Traditional knowledge was slotted into existing legislation to protect intellectual property rights but was criticised, as these cannot be legislated under one umbrella. Face-to-face teaching, academic review and news, and reporting of current events require no prior consent. As an academic teacher and practitioner, all my work comprises theoretical praxis to further education. At the nub of contestation is the issue of financial gain.

Transculturation is evident in many emerging democracies that comprise migrant populations. This can be seen in the loss or acquisition of cultural material from a culture or the creation of new cultural material that combines different cultural elements. Colonialism and its legacy are examples, followed by attempts to return artefacts of culture to the owners. Cultures are built over long periods and shared, but sharing one's culture, or borrowing from another, infers identifying with the culture and understanding the history and impact of the item one is

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[60] Raised in the National Assembly (proposed section 76); explanatory summary of Bill published in the *Government Gazette* No. 39910 of 8 April 2016).

borrowing. In examining cultural capture, Louis Rockwell (2019) offers practical advice to explore what is being captured and aims to do so without offending anyone by carefully researching origins.

3.8 Appropriation and plagiarism

Being part of and sharing cultures is a healthy way for society to learn about each other and is vital to co-existing. Marginalised groups continue to offer cultural contributions, but without respect for these contributions, acts of appreciation can become appropriation. But can one adopt a culture other than one's own to alleviate or escape personal persecution, for example? Pakistani sociologist and feminist rights activist Farida Shaheed (2014)[61] makes a case when she notes that for many women, the right to access begins with the fundamental right of freedom of movement. The right to information follows, which includes engaging freely with people, ideas and events beyond a particular community. But surely, a right to participate in a cultural life must also include the right not to participate in specific traditions and customs if these infringe on human dignity and individual rights. Repressive societies that prescribe a code of dress and conduct and regimes that systematically discriminate against women (treating them as second-class citizens) enable violence against women and sexual exploitation of girls. In such societies, women are harassed, jailed, fined, and whipped for crimes such as appearing in public without covering their hair and bodies or being an activist for women's rights. Women must be segregated from men, are denied political and economic opportunities and family and inheritance laws favour men over women.

One may seek the freedom of a more equitable and attractive culture if born into a repressive, rigid and imposing culture which controls rather than liberates. A feminist living within a male-dominated patriarchal culture would not be permitted to pursue feminist principles and ideals. Would the feminist be entitled to

[61] Farida Shaheed covered cultural rights as a special rapporteur at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

appropriate a culture that allowed more involvement in governance issues and free expression?

Freedom of expression increases social value, and appropriating sacred designs and subjects is part of realising free artistic expression. There should be a balance between the interests and values of those existing on a continuum of culture. Here, people closer to either endpoint on the continuum belong to a group based on characteristics such as ethnicity, sexual identity, and gender, and a form of freedom of expression may exist independently for each group.

This promotes binary theory, which underpins polarisation and dominance, keeping each group separate as either or does not help discuss entanglements in liminal spaces. A more complex theory is vital to accommodating marginalised and smaller groups along the continuum. An intersectional approach to understanding identity gives us a more complex understanding of social reality. The social world is complex, and rather than reducing human differences to simple binaries, the liminal space allows acknowledgement and embracing of this complexity.

To return to the words of Hamilton's creator, Miranda suggests that works of art are the only silver bullet against racism, sexism, and hatred and that they engender empathy in a way that politics cannot (De Marco-Jacobson, 2022). Simply because many creators of work are not women, minorities, or members of the LGBTQi community does not imply they cannot tell those stories authentically and loudly. Art can change people's hearts (De Marco-Jacobson, 2022).

I am unaware of any legal claims against a theatre maker on the grounds of appropriation. However, a recent revival in the West End of the musical production The March of the Falsettos (2016) 59 prompted Jewish playwrights and actors to protest in a critique describing it as an “undeniably Jewish show” and reprimanding the production for not being acted or directed by Jewish practitioners.

Criticism of intercultural theatre in general and Peter Brook's production of the (1985)[62] was spearheaded by writer Rustom Bharucha (1993), who strongly criticised the production as a Eurocentric appropriation of non-Western cultures. Bharucha labelled it a blatant appropriation of Indian culture because it misappropriates non-Western material within an Orientalist framework and advises that the fight against systems of power that endorse these practices must be vigilantly waged.

Visual artist Jeff Koons[63] was sued for appropriating the work of others. His work was cited as plagiarism. Koons suggests his work is 'transformative' appropriation, not theft, and should not be considered offensive. The charge of appropriation is void because the work transforms the appropriated object.

Using previous or current images is a form of communication today often used in memes and gifs. The internet became a cultural mecca for learning, creation, communication, and accessing vast content, and damaging forms of cultural appropriation have appeared on social media platforms, particularly TikTok. The application was intended to allow content creation in a minute, where one could upload one's voice, image, music, and more, making it available to any other TikTok user.

[62] First performed in 1985 in Avignon, France. A central theme in the *Mahabharata* is the idea of sacred duty, where each character is born into a particular social caste and must follow the duty prescribed to it by the holy law. There is no copyright for the ancient Indian text, so it is open to appropriation.

[63] Jeff Koons is an American artist and advocate of popular culture, but critics are divided in their views of Koons. Some declare his work superficial and derivative, and others as pioneering and of paramount art-historical importance.



Figure 6: Left – 'Fait d'hiver' Naf Naf clothing advertising campaign (1985); 'Fait d'hiver' (1988) sculpture by Jeff Koons at Venice Biennale 2011 (Left – Photo: Franck Davidovici; Right – Photo: Ruth Fremson)

In the honesty of the exchange between performer and audience on stage, identification occurs, and people constantly relate to other individuals and groups à propos similarities and differences. The benefits of cultural appreciation and appropriation are that these inspire creativity and an increased understanding of another way of doing things. A view of me by another gives a new perspective on my values, and implicitly, the idea of them by me or us can ultimately educate, highlight, and value differences and uniqueness.

History always informs the present, and therefore, when one devises or writes a play that touches on the origins or history of South Africa, the play will be relevant as the conflicts in our history persist and are the conflicts we still address. In my work, I aim to gain and provide permission to amplify many voices and characters that may alter perspectives and knowledge. I introduce this mantra to acting students to encourage pushing boundaries, investigating further, and questioning limitations. These affirmations resemble Miranda's belief: "I am the one thing in life I can control; I am inimitable, an original and can play anything" (National Public Radio, 2020).

I was born and raised in South Africa and know that I am regarded as a member of a settler society that dispossesses Indigenous peoples to retain and reinforce power inequality. Whether one was against or in favour of the apartheid regime, whites were complicit in the benefits of it, and it is this sense of responsibility to engage with cultural entanglement that recurs in my work. I strive for a counter-

colonialist voice. I do not want to speak in another's name, but I would like to broaden my understanding of what may be outside my immediate cultural frame. If this is not facilitated in future, white scholars will or may never discuss Indigenous or First Nations communities, straight scholars may never interrogate the LGBTQi community; settlers may not write about immigrants, and dispossession and boundaries of cultural territory would only be addressed by the dispossessed.

I portray characters outside my cultural frame and analyse how to transform into them. Representation can have multiple meanings and interpretations and is defined as looking like or resembling, standing for someone or something, or presenting a second time.

In the following chapter, I discuss further the concept of liminality in the acting process and how liminal nodes may afford spaces of liberty to examine and collide with other cultures and share this knowledge.

CHAPTER 4: The value of liminal nodes and liberties

Liminal spaces or nodes are necessary to the process of becoming that which one is not, and accessing these is used by an actor exploring modes of transformation.

In Chapter 2, I discussed methodologies and approaches to acting. Despite many varied systems, accessing liminal spaces in the rehearsal allows actors to inhabit the interstices between the established and undetermined. These spaces assist a mode of study that locates its interest on margins, borders, and transitions referred to in this thesis as the liminal.

4.1 Identifying spaces and nodes

The term 'liminal' first appeared in French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep's (1908) book Rites de Passage,[64] which was developed by British anthropologist Victor Turner (1964) in his publication *The Forest of Symbols,* in which he examines rituals within African communities in the 1960s. He describes the core of certain rituals that signify the transition from one social identity to another, such as from child to adult or from a living body to a corpse and posits a three-stage pattern in these rituals. These are the 'rites of separation', 'transitional rites' and 'rites of incorporation'.

An actor spends much of a creative life in liminal spaces or at liminal nodes, being on the threshold or interim place of discovery. This liminal space shifts to become stable as the unknown becomes known, and the actor finds themself in a new zone of the unknown (another liminal space). It is a continual and often perpetual journey through these spaces, constantly navigating and negotiating the known and unknown and a significant factor in creative activity. At the centre of liminal space is the node where entanglements occur and questions and complications emerge. Pursuing elusive completion is at the heart of creating and making, leaving unresolved issues.

[64] Charles-Arnold Kurr van Gennep, German French ethnographer and folklorist, held the Chair of Ethnography at the University of Neuchatel, Switzerland (1912–1915).

A ‘pre-liminal’ space exists just before entering the ‘liminal’ space, and one enters a ‘post-liminal’ space as one exits the ‘liminal’ space. These are liminoid spaces professor and performance theorist Richard Schechner suggests spaces of suspension from standard social rules that become sites of playful creativity.[65] These spaces are fluid and support experimentation, exploration, and discovery, allowing connections and transitions to form. However, as a space stabilises and the experience becomes known and understood, a new space propels the actor into further liminal spaces of discovery. Because of this experience, an actor can perform the same role over many months or years and continue to make discoveries as the performance process affords new liminoid spaces of discovery for each performance.

The rehearsal process regulates where these liminal spaces occur or exist and is often guided by a director, producer, and the cast. Theatres have rehearsal rooms or spaces for this purpose, but directors frequently favour site-specific areas to support a conceptual vision of the work. I have rehearsed for a single work in an abattoir, a psychology ward, and a building rooftop.[66] Interestingly, the longer one rehearses in a particular venue, the more familiar it becomes, but no less terrifying as a place of discovery.

4.2. Embracing liminal spaces as zones of discovery

The rehearsal room is a transitory and precarious phase between stable states of ordinary life and performing, bordered by conceptual, spatial, and temporal barriers. Within this liminal zone, individuals, groups, and objects are set apart from the everyday. This liminal zone aims to provide safer and more equitable performing spaces for students, spaces to play, explore, examine, and reflect on many aspects of the work. What is discovered or uncovered in this zone is bound to connect to a culture or cultures, and it is here that the entanglements of shared histories can be aired. It may be a safe space, but it does not imply all that

[65] Professor emerit Richard Schechner at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, editor of *The Drama Review.*

[66] Don Juan DeMarco, Gate Theatre, Notting Hill Gate, London (1986). I did not remain in the production as, during rehearsals, I was cast in British playwright Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia* for the Royal National Theatre.

happens within these is safe. Personal, political, or structural disputes may arise, and disagreements may occur between individuals or a group where boundaries need to be drawn. In extreme cases, professional support might be required. Cultural conflicts, personal discord, social tensions, and contradictions may emerge, and interrogating these contributes to richer and more mindful work.

In my experience, power differences occur with dynamics of privilege and oppression, and the presence of ideas and cultural differences indicates that some might be opposed to others. I am inspired by the healing nature of liminal spaces described by writer adrienne maree brown (2020), who suggests this sort of interaction and conflict can assist collective growth with detailed engagement with writing, creation, and actions.

Liminal spaces can be identified in the minute gaps the actor moves through, making discoveries and reflecting on, gaining experience and knowledge, and exiting and re-entering a space of praxis or vacuum of the unknown. In liminality, participants lose their prior symbolic status but have yet to attain a new significance in an imagined world. Liminality, then, is an in-between of potent but dangerous formlessness. It denotes a social non-space in which transformation is experienced and achieved, where conversations must be fostered to allow all the identities in a rehearsal room to be present. A liminal space can invite people to enter with their truths and allow these to co-exist. The space enables identity's messiness, chaos, and complexity to unfold. With new work, the creative team collaborates, where identity can impact project development (Jadhwani, 2021).

The shift for the performer from the self, through a neutral self into a transformed self or character, suggests an identity floating indeterminately between the actor and the character one plays. In *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology,* Franco Ruffini indicates that “the actor and character are the two poles of a duality” and “have been the subject of considerable historical and theoretical investigation” (Barba, E. & Savarese, N., 2005). This implies that the actor enters the character, and the character enters the actor. Therefore, the actor and the character meet at a point. Ruffini’s version of what occurs in this process discredits my theory of total immersion in a role and the notion of a transformed self. However, I argue

that the point where the actor and character meet is a form of transformation, as the actor relinquishes some part of the self in the process.

Scholars such as Arpad Szakolczai (2009)[67] have begun to use the tripartite structure of the liminal as a model for describing all experiences that cannot be fully accounted for within our existing intellectual and social paradigms. He suggests that research based on the fundamental issue of being human is perplexing in light of the current political, economic, social, and cultural crises. Suppose one accepts that liminality can help make sense of the shape of performative experience; it would infer a relationship between social, aesthetic, temporal, or conceptual forms. Liminality allows us to see how affective experiences are malleable, both taking and giving form.

The rehearsal room can exist during the mid-phase of a performance process to enable transitional rites to occur in isolation from general society. Here, the unpredictable and imperceptible are experienced in a cycle of discovery to ensure a freshly minted performance. Thus, the performance event is also unrepeatable, as every performance will be unique.

I am reminded of poet and artist Katsushika Hokusai's haiku, which uses metaphor to depict how his process works and evokes what may occur in a liminal node is *A Poppy Blooms*,

> *I write, erase, rewrite*
> *Erase again, and then*
> *A poppy blooms*
>
> *The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down*
>
> *(*Haemin Sunim, 2012)

Here, Hokusai's erasing and writing again are like the working and revisiting that takes place in transformative performance. Theatre studies and language professor Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) writes extensively on the transformative power of performance and the politics of performance cultures that extend

[67] Sociologist and political anthropologist Arpad Szakolczai is the author of several books and articles and professor emerit of Sociology at the University of Cork College, Ireland.

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Turner's liminal theory.[68] Fischer-Lichte identifies the liminal spaces between performer and spectator, where a liminal experience emerges in the body in response to an impulse, causing a change to the physiological, energetic, affective, and motoric state. This level of the spectator's experience is connected to the actor's presence, which is a transient, intense and extraordinary experience. The liminal space exists between audience and performer, and the discoveries that both make often grapple with shared but different histories. One may witness the same event but experience it differently. Performance offers moments of liminal clarity, communion, and brief transcendent bits of profound human feeling and connection, thought American scholar Jill Dolan 66 (2005:168). However, these moments are not individual experiences but inescapably collective and shared by the audience. The experiences in liminoid spaces may offer a way to engage with one another's differences and our mutual humanness.

The selves the actor grapples with, mentioned earlier as the self, the neutral self, and the transformed self, exist together in a liminal space. The liminal space compels only the neutral self to be present for exploration, and as soon as the transformed self emerges, the space ceases to be liminal. Although, as a performer, I experience the sense of a complete metamorphosis into a character, this has been proved possible if only when one enters an altered mental state such as a trance. Therefore, I do not lose control of any faculties and am not in a trance. I must be aware of what is happening on stage with a colleague and the audience and keep track of the narrative and words. The embodiment of a fictional character is the creation of a temporary self. Still, creating authenticity by complete identification with the character is unlikely. Controversial Israeli professor of history and author Yuval Noah Harari (2016) raises provoking thoughts on the self or selves in human behaviour and questions the difference between a remembering-self and an experiencing-self and how these selves interact.[69] The remembering-self reflects on what we have experienced. Fellow

[68] Writer and professor Erika Fischer-Lichte is also the director of the International Research Centre on 'Interweaving Performance Cultures' (since 2008) at Freie Universität Berlin.

[69] Yuval Noah Harari is a history professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He writes about the cognitive revolution of the 21st century, how homo sapiens might cease to be what we

Israeli psychologist Daniel Kahneman (2011) distinguishes these to describe two modes of self he identified, where the experiencing-self existed only in the present moment. In contrast, the remembering-self exists only in the past moment or retrospect. However, both interact to create perspective and inform decision-making. The notion of two aspects of the self and how they engage in making sense of the world is an exciting theory that unpacks an actor's process in creating and crafting a character.

I understand that a dichotomy exists between these selves, where the experiencing-self feels that which is ‘in the moment’, whereas the remembering-self analyses and contextualises the moment in the broader arc of who you are and what you do. As an actor, I save and store the duality of these moments and, therefore, pull back to observe those two selves. In a liminal space, these elements merge into creating a character in a fictional representation, emerging as the narrative self. Both ‘selves’ interact to generate perspective and inform my decision-making. My experiencing-self can support or derail plans made by my remembering-self. An example is one where the remembering-self knows they are overweight and should go on a diet and decides to do so. However, the experiencing-self intervenes ‘in the moment’ of experience that does not feel like dieting – one cannot remember the feelings of being overweight, which derails plans to lose weight.

This theory of independent selves relates to my theory of the self, the neutral self, and the transformed self. The experiencing-self is associated with instinct; the remembering-self (or narrative) tries to rationalise past behaviours and justify future decisions.

Art and spirituality are thought to be complementary. In performance practice, liminality and accessing liminal nodes can be valuable in ritual and theatricality

know to emerge as just ‘bad algorithms’ soon to be redundant and replaced because machines could do it better.

to stage the creative and spiritual. Liminality may extend performance outwards from a microcosm to the greater macrocosm of the human community.

Traditional anthropological liminality was a model for transforming one solid social institution into another. It is a challenge to understand how one fluid convention can be converted into another equally fluid one. Therefore, updating Turner's ideas and developing models of experiential, transformative events that speak to contemporary life indicates that artists should conceptualise these liminal events (Liedgen, Desmet & Gaggioli, 2023). Theatre and performance offer an essential testing ground and experimental laboratory for the human experience. In developing new liminal-like events, we may find new ways of experiencing and understanding contemporary spirituality.

Traditional theatres and performance spaces have a proscenium arch marking the exact line between the narrative space of a play, cutting the audience off from the actors. The stage represents the sacred space where a ritual occurs, which is a form of the altar in a spiritual ritual, but a liminal space can extend beyond the boundaries of the stage and audience in a ritual. A performance is organically generated as an interactive form of art where performers and spectators interact in a two-way communication system that develops into co-performance.

Breaking the fourth wall, where the performer addresses the audience directly, refers directly to the boundary created by the proscenium, and breaking it causes these boundaries to merge. Breaking out of character or for a character to acknowledge the audience's existence breaks this illusion of separation between the mundane space of the audience and the sacred space of the narrative and invites a unique form of audience interaction. This interaction can pull the audience into the liminal space, elevating them to a sacred status, and is experienced in many theatre genres. The soliloquies of Shakespeare in monologic form, where the performer directly addresses the audience, are examples and similar to traditions in African theatre, which focus on direct audience engagement.

Interestingly, Stanislavski encourages a focused and intense atmosphere in the rehearsal room, and his work emphasises experimentation and improvisation for

self-discovery (Whyman, 2013). Grotowski enjoys working in unconventional spaces, believing that strange and less traditional spaces allow greater liberty for the actor (Wangh, 2000). Spolin creates spaces conducive to playing improvisation games and specifies that they must be airy, light, and clear (Spolin, 1999). Meisner believes supreme acting comprises spontaneous responses to the actor's immediate surroundings and encourages awareness of these in rehearsal (Silverberg, 2020). So crucial is this to his technique that Strasberg devotes the first two hours of his four-hour classes to relaxation and sense memory exercises in a quiet space before rehearsing (Cohen, 2010).

I suggest these functioned as a liminal space but were not then identified as such. Theatre systems use terms such as exploratory space, the laboratory, or safe spaces where actors are encouraged to create. These function much like the peaceful space in the city of Belfast's centre in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, where several vital sites reflected how the creation of peaceful spaces generated a distinctive inside zone where conflict is discouraged and an outside zone where conflict is acknowledged. This peaceful space may not be peaceful, but instead encourages engagement between oppositional frames, illustrating how a liminal space can also develop a shared understanding.

The liminal space in theatre exists for exploration, to prepare, or to get ready, and where these can be identified, the inhabitants are changed by their experience. This existential space, neither here nor there, is where the participants forge, practice, and share culture. It is a space where things can flip from power to comedy to tragedy. This study presents a collection of research methods that are valuable tools in analysing the largely invisible influence of cultural territory on performance and creativity. By exploring liminality and how it fits my practice, I discovered multiple ways actors, designers, and directors inhabit it together.

The more I looked, the more liminal spaces I identified.

I am reminded of T.S. Eliot's poem *The Wasteland* (1919):

> *We shall not cease from exploration.*
> *And the end of all our exploring.*

We will arrive where we started.
And know the place for the first time.

In an attempt to draw researchers' attention to the different practices of what he called ‘evocative or emotional autoethnography', Anderson (2006) distinguishes between these by introducing a more analytical form in which the researcher is a full member of the research, visible as a member in published texts, and committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena (2006, p. 373). In my research, both emotional and analytical ethnography are present where an evocative autoethnographic method occurs in the compiling of the creative component and the performance and analytical autoethnography is engaged in gathering and analysing the data. However, I suggest that these are closely entangled and often symbiotic, particularly in the liminal spaces I have identified.

Some actors cannot shift between liminal states, remaining trapped in a fixed state of liminality. In contrast, others exist in permanent liminal zones, suspended between states and inhabiting what Turner (1994:6) calls the ‘liminal persona’. Those who struggle to shift from a liminal space often frequently exist in the in-between and are not integrated into a cast or community. Exploring liminality, one might risk encountering unearthed altered states and confront mental health issues.

Referring to liminal spaces, Peter Kuo warns that one can diversify the spaces and include many different voices and perspectives in these spaces as well as individuals from various demographics, but if they don’t feel welcome in the space, they can never be fully themselves (Pierce & Kuo, 2021). The space must not be in-between but can serve as a safe space. This process may feel safe for some but not others, and engagement and discussion around this issue is part of acknowledging the reasons or causes of these entanglements.

Through my research, I have gained a broad knowledge of in-between spaces and learned how to articulate more precisely what is happening within these with cast members and directors and to me as an actor. I feel better equipped to talk about the need to inhabit liminal spaces to deepen exploration and use this

knowledge when directing. In a production in Salzburg,[70] I used this method to guide the actor through investigative liminal spaces to deepen her connection to the narrative and emotional arcs of the character. Solo performance texts demand introspection and reflection in the liminal spaces, whereas multicast texts require engagement and conflict, discord, and dissent often emerge. When working with a cast, hearing identities spoken into the space is healing because naming identities valued and devalued in the liminal space can offer us choices about how we relate them to one another.

Reflecting on my process and archive, I describe how I have previously unconsciously used this theory of liminal space in my work but did not recognise nor articulate it at the time.

Thus, autoethnography allows researchers to draw on their experiences to understand a particular phenomenon or culture. Theatre is a cultural element that best exemplifies Africa, at the intersection of the sacred and the profane, of inner roots, external orality, and the written word. The functioning of African society most directly dictates artistic expression, whose theatre is rooted in myths, rites and folk celebrations, which externalise beliefs, passions and concepts that preoccupy any given group. It is prodigiously rich in rituals of all kinds; some are lighter and give rise to comic expression, but most have their origins in religious expression and magic. Rituals serve as a proposed discourse with supernatural forces to channel, control, appease, or honour them to ensure the survival and stability of the community. Rituals occur in liminal spaces outside the everyday experience. Moving through and working in liminal spaces, actors remark they experience an overwhelming sense of an unknown, often liken it to a spiritual event, and echo experiences performing in Greek theatre.

4.4 Liminality and spirituality

Liminal space can be a literal or physical space, easily identifiable; some are stairwells and elevators, hallways, parking lots, abandoned buildings and airport

[70] I directed a production of Willy Russell's *Shirley Valentine* in 2022 with Janna Ramos-Violante as the debut production for the International Theatre Salzburg, Landestheater, Salzburg.

terminal lobbies. There are also non-physical spaces of liminality, human mental states engaged in creativity and creating. Can one create a liminal space in a rehearsal room that is physical, psychological and spiritual? A place for experimentation that functions as the space between the outside and every day and the space preparing for the stage or performance area.

Liminal spaces should ideally be spaces apart or en route to another space, and it is in that period that transitional and transformational moments afford a different or new identity. In *The Power of Myth,* sociologist and writer Joseph Campbell (1991:63, 102) holds that the world comprises sacred and profane space.[71] We must frequent profane spaces because we live in a modern society, including banks, post offices, and offices. But sacred spaces are those where transformation occurs to enable a more profound, better understanding of ourselves and a world bigger than us. Therefore, a sacred space is one's private sanctuary or, if you live with other practitioners, a communal room devoted to spiritual practice. I view liminal spaces in the creative process as sacred.

Artists enter a liminal state when creating, which can induce liminal dreaming,[72] a state where one is not asleep, but one's mind experiences vivid images or sounds en route to sleep, as dream scholar Jennifer Dumpert (2019:9) details. In the zone of liminal dreaming, one's mind is in an imaginal place where one can channel creativity and problem-solving as a form of metacognition to explore thought processes and experiment for consciousness exploration.

I suggest this state occurs post-rehearsal daily, processing the discoveries of the liminal space of the rehearsal room. Reflexivity is the constant movement between being in the phenomenon and stepping outside it, and participant reflexivity suggests this occurring within the encounter. There are three applications of reflexivity, the researcher, the participant, and the encounter or work, for

[71] Written by John Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (1988) is based on interviews between these authors, which were the basis for an acclaimed television series that discussed the evolution and universality of myths in history and their place in modern society.

[72] The mental state between waking and sleeping, where a form of dreaming and cognitive connections is made.

exploring an interview process as a dialogic liminal space of mutual reflection between researcher and participant about the encounter. In this study, all three are experienced by me but would be experienced by members of the creative team, actors, designers, directors, and the audience in a work that is not a one-person performance.

In the liminal space, the actor knows that what they experience is not occurring in their existing world, yet they experience immediate feelings of something authentic. This experience, an undefined and often contradictory in-between state, accesses new ways of being and transforming. Entering an undefined space without purpose may feel meaningless, chaotic, and terrifying, and only when a purpose is offered does it become less so. But, if one remains in a familiar and finite space that does not find discomfort and experimentation, one may be unable to adapt or transform. Gender liminality or fluidity is not relevant because, although I have played cross-gendered roles, they are beyond the scope of this research.

In the following chapter, I discuss the voice as a primary signifier regarding identity transformation but acknowledge that this is just one aspect of metamorphosis. In Chapter 6, I note where I inhabited and used liminal spaces in the creative project to effect change and create a character.

CHAPTER 5: The voice as a sonic signifier

Chapter 5 discusses the vitality of vocal sonic quality, embracing shifts made in sites of articulation to realise a transformation into character. The chapter examines dialects and accents (or languages) and how these develop, influenced by global migration, where cultural exchange and assimilation produce hybrid forms of culture, language, and accent.

The previous chapter discussed liminal spaces, which afford the liberty to investigate and experiment. This is valuable in my research as the voice is particular and pertinent to my practice. An excerpt from a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow aptly captures and illustrates the essence of the liminal and the voice:

> *Ships that pass in the night and speak to each other in passing,*
> *only a signal is shown, and a distant voice in the darkness;*
> *So, on the ocean of life, we pass and speak to one another,*
> *only a look and a voice, then darkness again and silence*
>
> 'The Theologians Tale', *Tales of the Wayside* (1863)[73]

The liminal space is the ocean, where ships travel from one place en route to another, traversing a no-man's-land of the uncertain. It is a metaphor for life and the many journeys made. The only signifiers present are a signal, a look, a voice, and darkness. This conjures images of how the voice sounds across the waters, what the signals are and sound like, the fleeting look as they pass and the unfamiliar familiarity of darkness. It describes an experience not unlike an actor's feelings in liminoid rehearsals.

To fully embrace vocal possibilities, the actor must be aware of vocal mechanisms and how these operate when speaking. The speech apparatus used in language articulation is the same for all people. This consists of the larynx

[73] 'The Theologian's Tale' forms part of *Tales of a Wayside Inn*, a collection of poems narrated in the voices of a group of people in the tavern of the Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Massachusetts by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

(or voice box) that houses the delicate and adjustable vocal folds or cords, glottis, tongue, teeth, lips, and hard and soft palates. While one may feel that the impulse that causes speech originates in the larynx, phonetic articulations are primarily due to the muscular activity of the tongue.

Speech and language are characteristic of every known group, as no nation is without language. Writing on the psychology of culture, American linguist Edward Sapir (2002) believes language was the first highly developed form of culture.[74] The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis refers to the proposition that the language one speaks influences how one thinks about reality. This controversial theory seems to deny the possibility of a universal foundation for human cognition. Language is instead an expression of culture, and it is a culture that determines and influences thought processes. Languages have definite phonemic systems,[75] and the analogy with musical theory seems fair, where a symphony is built from tangibly distinct musical notes.

The voice is a sonic signifier that reveals a leak of information about our biological, psychological, and social status from the moment we open our mouths. The sonics are the sound wave, the resonance, and the energy of the voice with its unique pulse, which causes a vibration, a melody, and cadence. Voice is integral to portraying a character, but it is a component that audiences still need to separate from the character in the entire depiction (Churcher, 2003).[76] I become aware of the separation of my voice from my 'self' as it shifts through an unformed vocal quality of the 'neutral self, edging toward the character I play and merging with the 'transformed self' to complete the portrayal. This sense of several selves separating and interacting in this process seems to be one of the functions of art.

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[74] Edward Sapir is widely considered one of the most influential figures in the development of linguistics. In 1929, with Benjamin Lee Whorf, Sapir wrote about linguistic relativity, known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

[75] Phonemes are the perceptually distinct units of sound in a language that distinguish one word from another.

[76] Mel Churcher is a vocal coach who worked primarily in film.

Autoethnography was the first instrument I used to assist in locating myself and in learning to strip myself as much as possible of this self to embrace a neutral version of myself. The character's ethnography provided information and detail to assist with the process of metamorphosis into a transformed self. I also used autoethnography to learn an accent or foreign language. Investigating personal stories assisted in reflecting on my vocal qualities and language learning history and honed my ability to empathise with people. This tool is valuable in understanding students in the classroom as it contributes to empathetic relationships.

A vocal quality arrived at during a rehearsal must be achieved while the actor is projecting their voice to be sustainable in performance. The nature of film performance, where one films short segments of the film in one day, allows for vocal experimentation but demands consistency throughout the shoot. When a vocal quality may damage the voice, film actors are afforded recovery time. Theatre actors must sustain their vocal quality without impairing the vocal apparatus for extended periods.

Projecting one's voice for theatre work is fundamental to acting. It is achieved by developing a blend of chest and head voices, controlling the outgoing breath, and building the larynx muscle to increase volume and power. This preparation is also the basis for proficient singing. It is part of most voice instructors' teaching praxes, although the distinctive programme and process for improving and enhancing the vocal apparatus may vary. This skill must be achieved before one can begin nuanced or detailed work on diverse vocal qualities or different vocal traits for characters.

Actors vocally encode information about a character's personality into their performances. Interestingly, the word 'personality' etymology is from the Latin *per sona* (resound) and indicates the connection between the voice and the personality (Karpf, 2011).[77] While one may be unaware of the vocal signifiers one

[77] Anne Karpf is a British sociologist and journalist who writes on various issues, including the Holocaust, how to age and the current phenomena of women's voices becoming deeper.

emits, in a broad sense, the subconscious may be more finely tuned to access nuance.

The term ‘voice theatre’ refers to a rhetorical mixture of vocabulary, syntax, and tone that makes phrases, sentences and paragraphs flow in a particular manner. Unlike the Cartesian dualist movement theory (René Descartes, 1993), which states that the mind and body are separate entities and exist independently, the voice links the body, culture, self, and the other. Voice forms part of character creation, implying that mind and body work harmoniously. If we focus on the identity of what makes a person in terms of the physical body, including personality, attitudes, and social roles, we are looking at personal identity. It is this cluster of factors the actor excavates to create the personal identity of a character and is reflected in the voice.

When one talks to a stranger on the phone or listens to a podcast, one’s mind automatically creates an image of the person speaking. One imagines their gender and age, whether the person is delicate and petite or tall and robust, and one can also identify whether they are sad, friendly, interested, nervous, angry, or hostile. Oral communication functions at the phonetic level in the quality of our voice and the distinctive vocal features used. One’s voice indicates one belongs to a particular group but also defines one as a unique individual; this operates like a fingerprint of personal and communal identity. The concept of identity is a mixture of individuality and collectiveness, at the same time a sense of uniqueness and a sense of belonging, or as Mendoza-Denton (Chambers, Trudgill & Schilling-Estes, 2002:474) says, “an individual and collective-level process of semiosis”. To achieve authenticity, the fusion of personal identity markers with collective identity signifiers must be evident in an actor’s character portrayal.

One is confronted daily with the concept of identity: to enter some buildings, a card, a fingerprint, or a voice recognition device will check our identity; purchases often require one to prove one's identity to authenticate a payment, and the recently developed field of forensic linguistics tries to focus on identification through linguistic and paralinguistic evidence. The list of examples is illustrative, but there is a common thread in all these cases that implies that we understand

the concept of identity as that which makes us unique. Identity singles us out from the millions of other inhabitants on this planet so that we are not mistaken for somebody else.

The above examples prove that identity is based on a legal sense of identity: the corroboration between a face and a name. The idea was raised in Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1969:61-62) *Blue and Brown Books*, which suggest one is, as a rule, recognised by the appearance of one's body. One's body and voice change appearance gradually and relatively little; therefore, recognition continues until the body or voice drastically alters so that one is distinguishable. The language one speaks impacts the vocal quality and is a factor in identity.

Although language and voice are vital in acting, I also consider the semiotic possibilities of gesture, image, sound, and visual aspects in a performance. Current evidence suggests that gestural and vocal theories of language evolution may be more accurate when combined with a multimodal theory of evolution, from which human language evolved and continues utilising mutually informative gestures and vocalisations (Nobuo Masataka, 2008). He suggests that voice and speech patterns are uniquely organised during ontogenesis and growth, with a coordinated structure emerging that eventually leads to acquiring language.

5.1 Voice and identity

An early theory developed by the late sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) uses theatrical performance to frame his ideas. His triptych of the individual and social behaviour exhibited is the presentation of self in everyday life, frontstage behaviour when all the world is on stage, and backstage behaviour one engages in when no one is looking. This triptych forms part of the dramaturgical perspective within sociology that uses the theatre metaphor to explain social interaction. These relate to the theory of self I suggested earlier: the self (Goffman's 'everyday self'), the neutral self (his backstage self) and the transformed self (his 'frontstage self') (see Chapter 4: 4.2 Embracing liminal spaces as zones of discovery).

The distinction Goffman makes about the frontstage and backstage selves suggests the backstage area is the space for experimentation, where no one is

allowed to interrupt the discoveries made, is a private and free world away from view. The frontstage self has altered to become a transformed self, embracing the liberty of another self in the sense of a character or the confident self.

In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* English philosopher John Locke (John Locke & Roger Woolhouse, 1998) examines what constitutes identity and notes that a cognisant being possesses the ability to reason and reflect and can consider and conceive of itself in different times and places. This gives the being a sense of identity, with personal identity referring to what a person is (Locke & Woolhouse 1998:138). For Locke, the self (used as a synonym for personal identity) is a consciousness that persists through time, a conscious entity with a coherent collection of experiences, thoughts, feelings, and memories. This is why his identity theory is sometimes called the memory theory, which is conveyed in an actor's voice.

Contemporary actors grapple with tensions between memory and the politics of history about memory in a global context. Milija Gluhovic (2020) discusses the centrality of memory in theatre training and its vital role in transmitting individual and collective memories in contemporary theatre. Crucial to many acting methodologies, memory theory is evident in Stanislavski's (1936) affective memory and Strasberg's (1963) sense memory. Individual memories are present in my research, where the recollections of experiences of people, places, and events gathered for each character form the bedrock for current research.

One cannot dispute the value of memory theories in actor training programmes as the theories have solid connections and intersect with the imagination. Philosopher Thomas Reid (Beanblossom & Lehrer, 1983) argues that memory and perception are extra-mental and that perception is the mind directed to present material objects and properties. Memory is the mind directed towards past events to which one was an agent or witness. Therefore, Reid (Beanblossom & Lehrer, 1983) holds that it is impossible to account for personal identity in terms other than itself, and it is simple and unanalysable. One is not the same person represented in one's memories. Still, a memory of a person allows one to know one's past immediately and directly, which is possibly why theatre practitioners and actors understand the advantage of memory theory in

their practice. Memory recall is visceral and can be felt in the body, the senses, and the imagination. Autobiographical memory and transformative imagination are present in creating a role, and both involve imaginative activity.

Personality develops from the interaction of living human organisms with the environment that frustrates, encourages, and conditions its impulses. This produces a general pattern of daily behaviour, attitudes, tendencies, and preferences, forming distinct individuals. The actor must research these complex aspects to create the character's personality and must be aware of all these patterns and how they are reflected, particularly in vocal qualities that define them as distinct from the actor's character or role.

But how is one's identity reflected through voice? What voice features allow one to transmit this information about who one is? How do ordinary judgements arise about speakers, and are they accurate? Are these language-dependent? How are they reflected in the voice labels used? These are some of the questions that inspired the research. The questions are discussed in Chapter 6 and demonstrated in the creative project.

5.2 The voice in autoethnography

I trace the archive of my work as a road map of choices and navigations that have brought me to where I am now. I use the multimodal research methods of Carey Jewitt (Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran, 2016),[78] which suggests an examination of different modes of communication, linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, and audio, to evaluate how my mode of performing is expressed, shaped, or constrained. I focus on how the linguistic and vocal modes are key in formulating and creating character while acknowledging the integration with other modes of communication.

Stuart Hall's (1980) landmark work in cultural studies on encoding and decoding offers insight into exploring meaning in a text and how this is communicated. His model suggests that senders encode specific meanings into texts that the

[78] Carey Jewitt explores multimodal research, communication, and interaction for learning and multimodal identities research.

receivers or audiences decode. These are multimodally communicated, and I regard the voice as the primary mode. Vocal features also transmit much of who we are, what we are like, and where we come. Using the voice is how one can construct one's identity in everyday conversation, whether one is conscious of the use one makes of it or not. In *Verbal Hygiene,* Deborah Cameron (2012:17) suggests an interesting rhetorical question: If identity pre-exists language, why do language users have to mark it repetitively?

Language or discourse markers express speech functions and help organise what is said while simultaneously signalling the speaker's attitude. These words or phrases allow time to consider what one is saying, such as 'I mean', 'let me think about that for a minute' and 'actually'. Regarding the relationship between speech markers and what they mark, there are invariant speech markers when a specific speech marker is always associated with a particular variable and can be universal or culturally specific. The motivation to use speech markers is intrinsic, governed by evolution, biologically determined, and extrinsic when psychologically or socially defined. These two factors may operate simultaneously, making attributing to a particular influence difficult.

Other markers that can be identified are physical, social, and psychological factors that an actor must consider in creating a character. The size and physique, sex, age and state of physical health are physical markers. Social markers would indicate the regional origin, the social group or class, the profession, and whether dominant or subservient. Moreover, personality traits, attitudes, emotions, and state of mental health are psychological markers. All these markers can be reflected in the choice of vocal quality of the researched character the actor experiments with and then decides to inhabit.

The individuality of each person's voice and distinctive vocal features make it easier for audiences to identify a character, with the sound of the human voice being so specific and essential that it makes hierarchies of everything around it (Michel Chion, 1999:5-6). Details of a speaker are revealed in speech patterns, rate of speaking, tone, inflexion in the voice, accents, and dialects (Mel Churcher, 2003). Researchers have interpreted vocal signals of power differently but agree that males tend to possess deeper voices and often use a higher pitch to signal

dominance in contrast to females, who generally have higher voices and choose a lower pitch to be assertive. Theo van Leeuwen (1999:134) suggests that frequency, intensity, and nasality can be used in isolation to convey dominance or submission.

However, according to Sarah Kozloff (2000:26), speech is not an abstract, neutral communicative code where issues of power, empathy, ethnicity, and gender are automatically engaged when one speaks. The sound of the voice can reveal interesting facts about the speaker, such as education, socio-economic status, level of self-confidence, and state of sexual arousal (Karpf, 2006; Kozloff, 2000; Withers-Wilson, 1993).

5.3. Developing a technique for vocal discovery

An actor uses the voice to build their character with these considerations: pitch, pace, tone, volume, emphasis, intonation, age, dialect, speech pattern, and personality. Biological and psychological statuses also disclose information in the sound of the voice and act as a stethoscope, revealing anatomical abnormalities, illness, fatigue, and even certain types of cancer (Karpf, 2006; Withers-Wilson, 1993). Emotion is communicated by what one says and how one says it. The inflexion, tone of voice, syllabic and word stress, pitch, length, and rate of speech all provide cues about the speaker's emotional state. Listeners usually associate particular patterns of acoustic cues with distinct emotional states (Bachorowski, 1999:55).

The anatomy and physiology of the vocal mechanisms within the body reveal emotion vocally. The place in the body from which the sound of the voice originates, the source, which is the larynx, involves specific muscles that control the flow of air through the breathing apparatus. Muscular tension changes airflow, and many emotions trigger tension that changes breathing patterns and can alter the vocal sound (Bachorowski, 1999; Sonnenschein, 2001). Physical movement and physiology also impact vocal mechanisms, most notably the facial expression of smiling, causing a change in the position of the lips and jaw, which in turn alters the effects of sound and air in the vocal tract above the larynx. Physical adjustments in the body cause distinct differences in the sound of the

voice (Bachorowski, 1999). For example, when you have a cold, the body produces mucous, and the vocal folds, nasal cavities, and throat change shape. Therefore, physiological variations impact breathing, airflow across the vocal folds, and the respiratory system, which transforms the sound of one's voice. These modifications need to be monitored by the actor when creating a character's voice.

Prosody is the central term for stress and intonation patterns in language, which assists the voice in communicating emotion (Karpf, 2006; Kozloff, 2000; Murray & Arnot, 1993). Anne Karpf (2006:33) calls it "the audio version of our personality, our sonic self". Types of prosodic input can convey information intentionally or unintentionally. The input is informative, carrying meaningful new information for the listener. Aspects of vocal quality can be associated with phonation type, nasality, pitch, and intensity. These are not controlled elements of our speech and tend to be spontaneously made, giving information about our identity by inference. Features of vocal dynamics are learnable and employed differently according to the context and what one wants to communicate. Occasionally, it may be apparent to the audience that an aspect of prosody is being accidentally revealed rather than intentionally conveyed. Linguist Tim Wharton (2012) notes that the speaker's faltering tone may betray the fact that one is slightly anxious or frustrated, and this tone may be covertly manipulated to suggest to an audience that the person accidentally disclosed their feelings.

Compare the expressions that follow, comprising the exact words but placing the stress on different words, altering meaning: Bella insulted Blanche, and then she *hugged* her, and Bella insulted Blanche, and then *she* hugged *her* (the italicised words denote where the stress lies). The expression, accompanied by a facial gesture of shock or a laugh, will also alter the meaning.

Therefore, an actor uses the voice to build a character with these considerations. I detail some of these below to gain insight into the many choices available to the actor. Experimenting with the features occurs in rehearsal and primarily in liminal spaces to investigate physicality, gesture, movement, and cultural traits that enhance character inhabitation and portrayal.

- **Breathiness**: when the closing phase of the vibration is not complete, producing simultaneous breath and tone.
- **Creakiness:** produced by holding the entire glottis compressed horizontally yet not tensed, except for a small opening near the anterior, which makes precise audible taps.
- **Intonation:** pitch combined with loudness, tempo and pauses to convey linguistic or paralinguistic meaning.
- **Loudness**: the amplitude of the sound wave produced is measured by its intensity.
- **Nasality:** the perceived effect in speech of a lowered velum, which allows the air to come out through the nose.
- **Pitch**: The rate of vocal fold pulse recurrence is measured by the fundamental frequency of the sound wave it produces.
- **Roughness**: an aperiodic vibration of vocal cords heard as friction.
- **Tempo or rate:** the speech delivery pace, generally measured in syllables per minute (SPM) or words per minute (WPM).
- **Tension or squeeze:** when the throat muscles are either contracted or de-contracted.

The techniques above can convey emotions and the relationships between vocal technique, prosody, meaning, and emotions. Generally, joy correlates with higher frequencies and tone variability; in comparison, sadness is often associated with lower frequencies, lower tone variability, falling intonation patterns, and less articulation. Anger might be expressed with an overall high frequency and amplitude but decreasing frequency as the anger subsides.

When analysing tempo, joy is often associated with a slower speech rate and clearer vocalisation and implies sadness, while a high speech rate with pauses and elisions hints at anger. Breathiness or raspiness may indicate anger, joy, lust, and despair with a creaky, aspirated, breathy voice.

The social environment's impact on our speech perception and production is sometimes called social embodiment. Research conducted by veteran vocal coach Virgil A. Anderson (1977, 2005:14) suggests how sensory, motor, and perceptual environmental cues influence thoughts, affect, and behaviour; these

affect an actor's choices in conceiving a character they are playing. The actor's vocal delivery accurately situates the characters in the proper time and place. Therefore, depending on the era and where the story takes place, actors need to sound like they belong geographically in that time and location. This implies accent or dialect background and a particular period's tone, manner, and vocabulary.

5.4 Accent and dialect shifts

For some actors, accent and dialect allow the facility to 'disappear' inside their character's world and, by mimesis, penetrate a truth not their own to reveal this truth to an audience. To view one's culture as one among many and code-switch and immerse oneself into another culture is immensely difficult but hugely rewarding. Being immersed in a culture differs from belonging to one, as I live in South Africa and work with actors from diverse cultural backgrounds. As a white person, I will never fully know what it means to fear interrogation or arrest based on the colour of my skin.

To interrogate further to discover a character's particular idiolect can be a revelation in performance. The terms accent and dialect are often used interchangeably, but a dialect is a legitimate language variant, revealing a speaker's regional and class origins. A dialect has its own grammar, vocabulary, and distinctive pronunciation. At the same time, an accent is a dialect or language feature primarily concerned with pronunciation. As a result, dialect with subtle idiosyncratic variations is generally consistent and more predictable than accent.

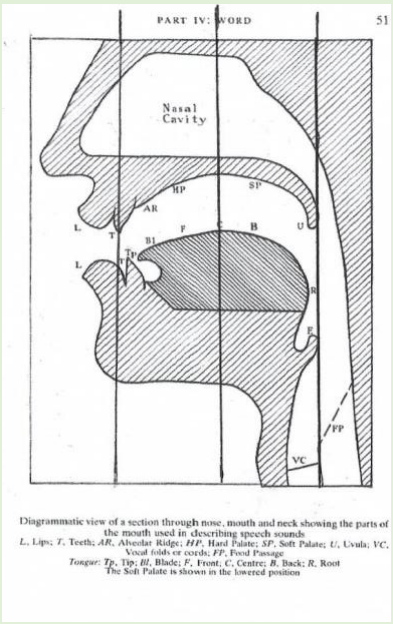
Increasingly fewer actors are taught the International Phonetic Alphabet as it is considered a colonising teaching paradigm. Although familiar with the phonetic symbols, during my experience as a dialect coach, I have devised a system I refer to as Fiona's Faux Phonetics. This helps teach actors with a variety of first languages, as I can locate the sound we wish to produce using a form of spelling informed by their first language sounds. I will not detail further, but it is a system that encourages words within the same lexical set to be pronounced with the same vowel or consonant, encouraging consistency.

The first step in dialect or accent acquisition is locating the point of articulation, where the dialect sits or is placed in the oral cavity. After detecting this, further investigation is required into how particular vowel and consonant sounds are made and what articulators are involved in producing these. A fundamental criterion for a successful dialect is the consistency of similar sounds; for example, the vowels in ‘cat’, ‘mat’, and ‘sat’ need to sound the same, and those in ‘heat’, ‘steer’, and ‘dream’ must be the recognisably the same. By inference, ‘label’, ‘lunar’, and ‘molar’ need to use the same pronunciation for the ‘l’ consonant and ‘sea’, ‘lace’, and ‘books’, the exact version of the ‘s’ sound.

However, the primary way to learn a dialect is to locate the point or place of articulation of the oral cavity (see Figure 7), where I have drawn lines to indicate places of articulation for South African English, Standard British English, and General American. I refer to these points of articulation when analysing my practice.

Points of articulation for

General American South African Standard English



Diagrammatic view of a section through nose, mouth and neck showing the parts of the mouth used in describing speech sounds
L, Lips; *T*, Teeth; *AR*, Alveolar Ridge; *HP*, Hard Palate; *SP*, Soft Palate; *U*, Uvula; *VC*, Vocal folds or cords; *FP*, Food Passage
Tongue: *Tp*, Tip; *Bl*, Blade; *F*, Front; *C*, Centre; *B*, Back; *R*, Root
The Soft Palate is shown in the lowered position

Figure 7: Voice production and speech (Greta Colson, 1982)

Note that the place of articulation for South African English is in the back of the throat and engages the uvula and root of the tongue. It would also serve as the

point of articulation for South African Indigenous languages and Afrikaans. This, in turn, affects how the mouth is held and facial musculature. When sounds are produced and linger in the back of the throat, there is little reason to open the mouth or drop the jaw, making the mouth barely open and smiling.

The line dissecting the vocal cavity running through the space between the soft and hard palates moving through the centre of the tongue is the place of articulation for Standard British English, which requires a significantly dropped jaw and very relaxed upper facial muscles. The line through the lips indicates the point of articulation for General American, where the sounds engage fully with the lower facial muscles and lips as the sound shifts to the front of the mouth. More nuanced placements for dialects within these broad categories can be experimented with during rehearsal to lend a distinctive or idiosyncratic sound or facial position unique to a character.

In conclusion, the voice operates as both a signifier of one's self and a signifier of our transformed self (or the character one is playing). In Chapter 6, I analyse aspects of the creative project in which voice is a significant factor.

CHAPTER 6: Analysis of archive – process and performance

This chapter forms a detailed analysis of the three characters selected from the archive and one never performed before to reflect on, revisit, reinterpret, and restore in performance. I examine the raw data collected at the performance, the filmed version, and the data emerging from the post-performance discussions and my observations.

My research involved a creative project in the form of a lecture performance. The presentation was not conceived in an academic format but comprised a performance in a theatre, fusing aspects of theatre and performance. The lecture introduces and contextualises the research and reflects on the performances of the various characters portrayed. A cross-section of audience members viewed it: students, lecturers, and academics from the Wits School of Arts and the Humanities faculty, audiences familiar with theatre productions and styles, local and international theatre practitioners, stage crew, and administrative staff.

(A filmed version of the presentation accompanies the thesis, and appendices are on the embedded Google Drive link in the text here for easy reference.)

My autoethnographic research is practice-based and could be categorised as performance autoethnography, where a lead actor tells a story partly informed by their own experience in a theatrical performance and brings to life or to the stage/theatre transcribed or text-based lived experience' (Denzin, 2018).

The originality of my study emerges in both the creative outcomes and the academic findings. This thesis describes the significance and context of my examination; however, a full understanding can only be gained concerning the practice outcomes, which comprise both my broader archive and distilled filmed presentation. I am interested in the relationship between an actor's concepts of self and that of a character and how the two interrelate.

The substance of my archive embraces outcomes of writing, devising, creating, and performing work that interrogates fundamental inequalities in the society and

context into which I was born. I raise important but disturbing and troubling issues in my politico-socio-cultural landscape, wanting to encourage comprehensive access to the problems and to highlight matters critical to democratic principles. Central to the enquiry is interrogating liminal spaces, identifying where these occur and interrogating how one can design or generate these to create collaborative intercultural work. For this purpose, these spaces should not hold clear markers of identity or ownership. I exist in a liminal space because although I am African (in that I was born in, live, and work in Africa), I am caught in an in-between space since I am no longer European but not yet African. These echo the words of the South African author J.M. Coetzee (1988:11).[79] I inhabit a further liminal space between being both the practitioner and the researcher of my work. I am trapped between the performance and the reflection. I understand this feeling is common as I straddle these dual identities. It requires balancing the immediate demands of practice with the slower, more deliberate process of reflection. The liminal space becomes a productive terrain for new ideas and approaches and facilitates continuous feedback between doing and thinking.

In this context, I experience a sense of being 'trapped' not necessarily in a negative sense but recognising the constant flux and transition inherent in the roles of performer and researcher. It is a space of potential where the boundaries between action and analysis blur, which leads to innovative and integrative insights. This ongoing negotiation between practice and research can ultimately contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the field.

In the chapter, *Uhambo: pieces of a dream – Waiting in the Ambiguity of Liminality,* Sara Matchett and Awino Okech (Fleishman, 2015) suggest that art practice in Africa often insists on researching the margins or liminal spaces and conducting enquiry and examination in these spaces. The silencing of voices of the marginalised during apartheid influenced my methodology, which is rooted in unearthing breath, voice, and life to characters and unheard souls. Finding or discovering the voice holds meaning in my praxis as it is the fundamental entry point into work to suggest how this practice might be taken up in the future in

[79] J.M. Coetzee is a South African novelist and critic noted for his novels about the effects of colonisation. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

performance discipline. As an actor, I unearth or liberate breath in myself; I liberate the breath and life of the characters I play and assist in locating breath and voice in actors and students as I coach performance and dialect.

6.1 Practice as knowledge

The tension between the roles of practitioner and educator can be challenging and enriching. On one hand, being a practitioner can sometimes make it difficult to maintain the necessary distance for critical analysis. On the other hand, the insights gained from direct involvement can lead to a more nuanced and authentic understanding, which purely theoretical research might miss.

The current trend of typecasting in terms of cultural, racial, physical, and sexual orientation implies considering and casting only performers from these frames. How does this impact the craft of acting if the actor is prohibited from auditioning for and being cast in a role outside their particular frame? Current trends reveal casting should 'fit' regulated boundaries where, for example, only transgender performers may audition or be cast as transgender characters, disabled performers audition or be cast as disabled characters, German or Greek performers audition or be cast as a German or Greek character, and so on.

It is possible and necessary for actors to perform across different cultural frames, as this is how one extends one’s knowledge, gathering information and learning beyond the confines of one’s cultural territory. We can only gain a broader and richer comprehension of the world through exposure to an understanding and appreciation of what we do not know.

The criteria for the success or failure of the representation lie in many factors aside from appropriation in the craft itself. Previous chapters raised aesthetic qualities and virtuoso skills to evaluate whether a work constitutes appropriation. However, the statement “A performer who demonstrates great facility and ability to play outside their cultural frame without offence” does not address an enquiry into appropriation, relating only to one performer with extraordinary talent.

The process of transforming or metamorphosing into characters is complex and challenging to articulate as it happens seamlessly and unbidden, founded on

years of study of theory and technique. A description that conjures my experience, magic and mystery of the process is by Zen master Seo-ong reflecting on meditation,

> *When I gaze upon water, I become water.*
> *When I look at a flower, I become the flower.*
> *The flower riding on the water, yippee!*
>
> *The Things You Can See Only When You Slow Down*
>
> *(*Haemin Sunim, 2012)

6.2 Method of analysis

In formulating my analysis method, I was influenced by Diana Taylor's view that "performances are neither universal nor transparent; their meanings change depending on the time and context and framing of their realisation" (Taylor, 2007:40). I want to contribute to the future of performance, but of course to invoke the future is also to invoke the past.

Before analysing the filmed presentation, when revisiting three works from my archive, I was aware of consciously creating a rehearsal space that operates as a liminal space, ensuring sufficient time and pause for shifts to occur and to detail re-discoveries made during the process. I revisited and re-entered the works without preconceived ideas, save for the embodied knowledge of having played the characters previously. I aimed to eliminate the literal meaning from the text in my process and to focus on discovering or uncovering what might be new or different from my previous inhabitation of the role. As a vocal practitioner, actor, and researcher, integrating autoethnographic research methods into my practice forged the unearthing of what liminal spaces might offer.

All the work was created and borne out of a response to a socio-political context, and characters are stylistically re-presented to re- or de-construct the work in the changed present. To do this, I wrote a framing lecture that intersected with performed excerpts from each play to examine how the works were revisited and the changes made to avoid any poor choices concerning cultural appropriation. I also note contrasts and commonalities.

In revisiting the roles, I re-experienced the identification with the characters in very different ways than when they were first encountered. Actors and the characters they play may transform each other. Sometimes, these relationships are interdependent, co-dependent, abusive, or combined. The relationship I explore is all-consuming and richly rewarding, yet it can be self-destructive as that between the actor and a traumatised, chaotic character.

I am unaware of a distinction between persona acting and transformational acting when I embody a role. A study showed that an actor's identity transformed in the first weeks of rehearsals and several weeks after. Cognitive science was used to investigate and explain changes in neural pathways when we act. Neuro-imaging methods were used to assess the adoption of a third-person perspective, where one speculates how 'he, she, or they' might feel and compares these images to those when the subjects were acting (Brown, 2019) and acting activated the posterior part of the precuneus,[80] resulting in dual consciousness. Interestingly, gestural change to one's accent while maintaining the self-identity led to a qualitative pattern of deactivations similar to acting, suggesting that changes in embodiment can lead to neural changes.

In preparing for a role for performance, I combine my experience with the character's. Echoing Rick Kemp's (2012) ideas, where I could appreciate different concepts while simultaneously maintaining an appreciation of their differences. This explains how I can simultaneously be aware of myself as an actor and aware of the character while performing. As an actor, one must hold both the reality of the actor or 'the self' and that of the character or the 'transformed self'. This is a technique a skilled actor learns, and therefore, I acknowledge that the performance is never a total transformation as the 'self' is invisible but present.

[80] The precuneus is the brain region involved in complex functions, including recollection and memory, integration of information (gestalt) relating to perception of the environment, cue reactivity, mental imagery strategies, episodic memory retrieval, and affective responses to pain.

I coaxed and allowed my imagination to welcome and explore images and visceral emotional memories from memory and experience. Clear mental images began to form, and experienced or felt emotions were expressed in physical and vocal gestures. This expression seemed fully embodied and spontaneous and emanated from the liminal space, from which remembered experiences shifted in the body to become present vocal expressions and reverberations of personal truth. The study applies narrative analysis to the diverse kinds of cultures in the texts, where these are storied from and aims to investigate themes that include ethnicity, gender, class, groups, and individuals. I selected these characters from works in my archive to investigate whether choices made in the historical context in which they were created remain culturally appropriate.

The filmed version of the 2023 performance is accompanied by filmed versions of the pieces when first performed for cross reference. The filmed performances of the works are analysed along with reviews and observations by critics grounded in the criteria set out above. In editing the film, I decided to indicate the journey through the liminal space by slowing the action, allowing the character to leave me and will enable me to return, or allowing the pause for the transformed self to shift through the neutral self to become the self that is me. I chose to have the lecture or theory of the performance desaturate to black and white images to delineate the transformed self as a technicolour creation.

(A filmed version of the presentation accompanies the thesis and appendices on the embedded Google Drive link in the text here for easy reference.)

6.2.1 Mia Steinman

Mia Steinman in *Born in the RSA*



Figure 8: Mia Steinman in *Born in the RSA*, Images: screen grabs from BBC filmed version (1986) and Ruphin Coudyzer for the Market Theatre (1985)

Born in the RSA (1985) was created collaboratively in response to the draconian State of Emergency declared by the apartheid government to detain people while bypassing legal avenues.[81] Many people were arrested and held in undisclosed locations, while others could be killed without the police or other State security apparatuses being held accountable. A further State of Emergency was declared in 1986 when the play was performed internationally in response to the tenth anniversary of the Soweto Uprising in 1976. Children and students were again at the centre of the demonstrations and detentions. Simon's work is fostered by his "religion of humanity and ideological conviction".[82] I do not address his perspective here.

I created the role of human rights lawyer Mia Steinman as one of seven characters in the play, linked by their affiliation to the fight against apartheid

[81] *Born in the RSA* created and rehearsed with Barney Simon, Fiona Ramsay, Terry Norton, Vanessa Cooke, Neil McCarthy, Timmy Kwebulana, Thoko Ntshinga and Gcina Mhlophe and published in Four Workshopped Plays as *Born in the RSA* Simon, B & Cast (2001).

oppression and social injustice. Mia is a fusion or consolidation of research and interviews with lawyers practising in South Africa in 1984 and 1995 and the distillation of their identity into a single white lawyer inhabiting the political landscape of apartheid South Africa.

The monologues were created in isolation from each other as the State of Emergency made it difficult for all actors to meet at the same time. As such, each character is an extended monologue intercut with the monologues of others. The process was informed by what was possible during the State of Emergency.

I only examined the text of Mia's account. Central to the play is the issue of betrayal. Mia's adversary, a campus spy, infiltrated a radical community for the South African government to root out terrorists. The character was loosely based on Craig Williamson,[83] who used and abused students in the intelligence war of apartheid. All characters in the play were fictionalised to protect their identity, as individuals who expressed sentiments contrary to the Nationalist Party line were often targeted by the police force's Special Branch and harassed or assaulted. The Special Branch collected, collated, and disseminated intelligence with security and law and order implications. It usually dealt with public agitation and subversive activities perceived as threatening the State's security. Mia reflects on how he can deceive people closest to her, which weaves through her narrative, culminating in the devastation when she discovers the extent of his infiltration.

The cast researched the private lives and public careers of the characters whose lives are deeply intertwined to write a collective testimony. My research began with interviews with prominent human rights lawyers working in their offices at

[83] Craig Williamson is a former member of the South African Police, exposed as a spy for the Nationalist government in 1980. He was involved in State-sponsored overseas bombings, burglaries, kidnappings, assassinations and propaganda during apartheid rule.

the time, including Kathy Satchwell,[84] Priscilla Jana,[85] and Felicia Kentridge.[86] I could also talk to clients, assist with statements, sit in on meetings, and observe the legal environment.

I listened to many news reports and bulletins and immersed myself in the coverage of nationwide disruptions and arrests. The fatal shooting by the South African police of twenty people at a small funeral gathering near Uitenhage in the Eastern Cape Province was brutal. I spoke with the attorney Charles Nupen, who had travelled to represent the families of the deceased.[87] He was deeply traumatised by the event. The intentions of the crowd and the police had not been simply aggressive but developed into acts of war, shooting before giving ample warning to disperse, and the event replicated the many violent confrontations in South African history.



Figure 9: Left – Kathleen Satchwell (SABC, 1984); Right – Felicia Kentridge (Archive Legal Resource Centre)

I collated notes from interviews and investigations with the three human rights lawyers. I also conducted field research in the legal offices of Priscilla Jana, whose

[84] Kathleen Satchwell is a judge and was a prominent human rights attorney in the 1990s, now retired from the South African High Court.

[85] Priscilla Jana was an African National Congress (ANC) lawmaker from 1994 to 1999; later, she became a diplomat, serving as the South African ambassador to Ireland and the Netherlands before joining the South African Human Rights Commission as its deputy chair in 2017. She died in 2020.

[86] Felicia Kentridge was a South African lawyer and anti-apartheid activist who co-founded the South African Legal Resource Centre and married Lord Sydney Kentridge. She died in 2015.

[87] Charles Nupen was the president of the National Union of Students (NUSAS) in 1973. In 1980, he started working at the Legal Resource Centre (LRC) where he worked as an attorney for seven years. In 1984, he became involved in mediating disputes.

offices were full of laughter and food as she bustled around assisting her clients with care. A high tinkling but warm voice filtered through the office, belying her firm hold on fighting the arrests and incarcerations possible due to the iniquitous 90-day detention without trial law.[88]



Figure 10: Priscilla Jana at the Women's Rally in 1983 and in her office in 1979 (Lilliesleaf Archive)

My research journal contains the interviews, questions, pithy quotes I found helpful, and images of people, children, the police, and the courts that helped to create Mia's world. Below are entries written in the first week of fieldwork research, including photographs and an extract from my journal for Born in the RSA (1985). I have included a typed version for clarity.

13 June 1985: (My birthday – best present ever – working!) Visited the offices of human rights attorney Kathy Satchwell for the first time. Sat in the waiting room – packed with clients, mostly mothers or grandmothers of children who had been arrested or detained by the police during their patrols and protests – or not!! Some were sobbing and needed to be counselled – others were really angry and indignant, shouting powerlessly, and I noticed a few sat calmly, catatonic from trauma and fear. HORRIBLE! Tea was provided and bread to those who could eat. Just horrible! I went into Kathy's office and was struck by how calm she seemed, and that surrounded this formidably and steady woman firmly seated behind a lot of papers and files at her desk. Her voice was measured and controlled – to counter the waiting room's chaos. I sat in the office observing and looking –

[88] The General Law Amendment Act 37 of 1963, commonly known as the 90-Day Detention Law, allowed a South African police officer to detain a person suspected of a politically motivated crime without a warrant for up to 90 days without access to a lawyer, including children.

that composure was unnerving – but reassuring! I wanted to ask her so many questions about her job and human rights and how far that had allowed her to assist her clients. – but these were redundant – my research seemed a privilege among all this calamity and sadness. I tried to make notes but too much was happening – and the phone never stopped ringing – always with the same queries – where is my child – I can't find him!!! Clients came into her office – sometimes there was another person who interpreted – she – Kathy was calm and asked gently to tell her exactly what happened. Gentle but quite firm and direct. I got the impression TIME was vital and always against her. Her cases and day had to move along swiftly. Finally, I was able to ask a few questions, to which she abruptly answered that there was no TIME for her in her life. I felt out of my depth and worried that I was never going to be equipped to create a character. *Barney: Rehearsal Friday at 2 pm*

Pricilla Jana's office: Mon 17 June at 10 am Barney: Rehearsal Wednesday at 2 pm

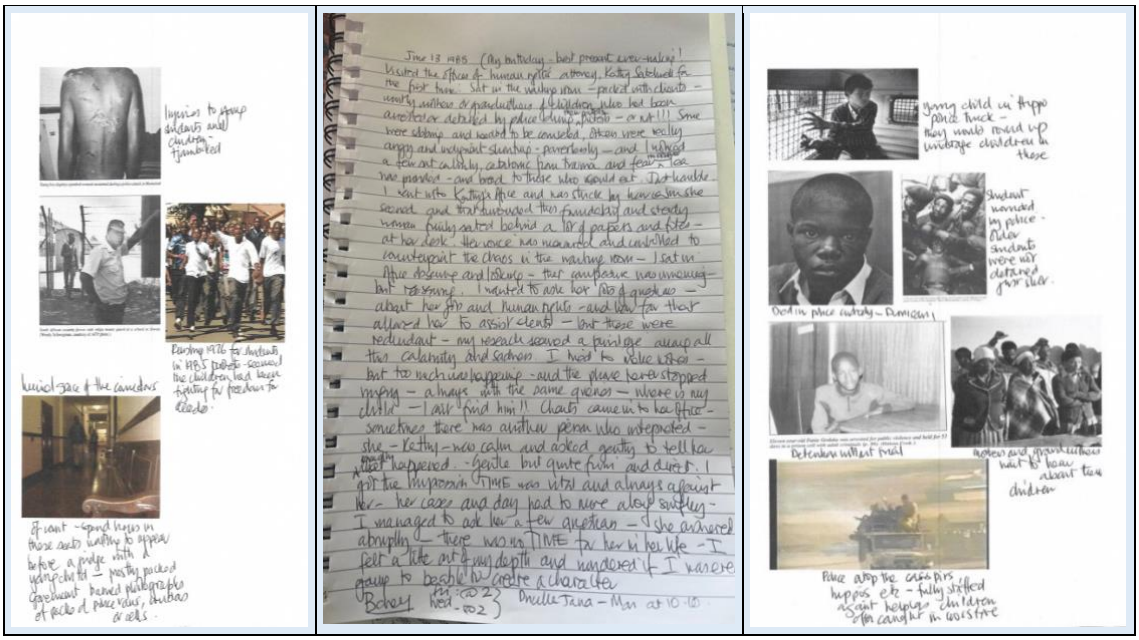


Figure 11: Left – Images from newspapers and notes. Diary entry 13 June 1985; Right – Images from newspapers

This written account was then fictionalised by Simon and me, a synthesis of my research, with the truth eventually transforming into something authentic and plausible. The account was incorporated into the bigger scheme of the play.

I became increasingly frustrated in my discussions with him as we began collating what we had found interesting. He seemed to show little interest in the

research I had accumulated and painstakingly documented for him to distil. He would sit in our rehearsal space or his office and listen to the plethora of neatly written notes, and before I had concluded, he would suggest that a cream bun might be the best idea to have in this moment of discovery. When I showed little interest, he would widen his eyes and try an even tastier treat to lure me.

I would eventually succumb, thinking he needed some sustenance and sweetness, and only realised much later that he was hoping I might grab hold of the bun with two hands, devour, and lick the cream off my fingers afterwards. He believed this was how Mia would have eaten, would have no time for herself or would not pause for meals; she would grab whatever was to hand and demolish it to enable her to keep going with the mounting cases and stress she faced each day.

I did not understand for some time this ploy of Simon's to express the detail and duress of Mia's life in how she ate, smoked, or sat. These discoveries were made in isolation in the rehearsal room before the rest of the cast joined. Then, I became aware of the unique space Simon had created with each individual, which I will call liminal. This space altered slightly when we were in the same room, allowing us to connect as actors and as characters. Simon so finely tuned the detail and clarity of each actor's character that it enabled characters to communicate without language.

(The embedded Google Drive link holds a 1986 filmed version for Channel 4, British television, combined on-stage filmed scenes intercut with monologues shot in appropriate locations.)

In revisiting the work in 2023, the socio-political environment had changed. The slow process of disentangling and dismantling apartheid rule in South Africa country, with Nelson Mandela being released from prison in 1990, with democracy in place since 1994. What changes were needed to perform Mia 38 years after she was conceived and created?

I began this research by locating the lawyers she was based on: Priscilla Jana died in 2020; Felicia Kentridge died in 2015; Charles Nupen received an honorary doctorate for his lifetime commitment to dispute resolution from Wits

University in 2022 and is now the executive chairman of Stratalign; and Kathy Satchwell is a retired judge of the High Court. The number of human rights lawyers has increased dramatically. In the Legal Aid Resource Centre in Johannesburg, fifteen attorneys now specialise in the Statelessness and Refugee and Migrant Rights programmes.



Figure 12: Left – Retired judge Kathy Satchwell (panel discussion Rhodes University 2020); Right – human rights lawyer and law lecturer Jessica Lawrence (2020)

I was older than when I first played Mia, and so were the lawyers I had interviewed. I spoke to Satchwell and read articles and interviews by a younger human rights lawyer, Jessica Lawrence, 91. I was interested in the quality of both their voices to detect if there were any audible signs or residue of the legal battles they had encountered and how this presented.

I used similar research methods when rehearsing each character to assess the value of revisiting and reconstructing the characters.

- Interviews and discussions with people with some knowledge or experience comparable to the character are primary tools in ethnographic and autoethnographic research
- Observation takes the form of fieldwork to witness subjects/objects for your study
- Personal experience of a particular issue, event, or emotion
- Research on a particular issue, event, or emotion

- Improvisation, where actors and directors create or adapt a play through improvisation.

When speaking to lawyers currently practising law, I was aware that the interval time created for both the interviewer and interviewee occurred in the form of liminal space. The detailed experiences confirmed the liminal spaces between experience and language, the known and unknown, and the physical (somatic) and meaning (semantic).

In the liminal space of the rehearsal room, I returned to the Stanislavski-based biography I had created for her. The character of Mia was finite in the published text from 1985, but in the current iteration, I had to detail the context when she was created in some way. I grappled with how to recreate the danger and urgency in 1985 in South Africa without including context and explanations in the monologue or noted in an accompanying programme.

My research for the 2023 iteration of Mia focused on her interior life and her attitudes to her political landscape, with whispers of what she might have imagined in the three decades since and her disappointments that would possibly present differently. A question that nagged me was: How do I utter the names of previous struggle heroes after their release, many now occupying positions in the current government and retaining the promise they offered at the inception of a post-1994 South Africa? Although smoking is no longer as popular as it was then, with it being frowned on and forbidden in most public spaces, the cigarette indicated a time when smoking was permitted in offices and captured Mia's need for relaxation, oral gratification, and intimacy.

I used Uta Hagen's (1991) six principles in preparing for the role. It is important to note that these observations and thoughts flow freely and are not bound by good grammar or writing skills. They represent a stream of consciousness of character and are distilled from the text, supplemented by imagined histories that lead to the narrative that unfolds.

> *<u>Who am I?</u> I am Mia Steinman, 55 years old. I attended Afrikaans medium schools in Pretoria and Johannesburg, studied law at Wits University, and graduated with an LLB two years after my husband, Mike. My relationship*

with my parents shaped much of my life, and still, the strong ethical principles they lived by inform my choices. I was younger with an older brother who became an accountant and left South Africa in the 70s to escape the army. His life was hugely impacted by the nationalist regime, which moulded his introspective, introverted personality. He removed himself from society, and I suspect it was because he couldn't bear to face the reality of what his forefathers had perpetrated. Although he agrees with my father's staunch liberal conviction, he shied away from engaging in any dialogue about the political landscape. In removing himself from society, he became a hermit. This influenced his relationships, and I felt abandoned when he disengaged from life. When he left the country, he never returned. He cut all ties with friends and spoke to my parents only on birthdays or holidays and then only briefly. I always imagined how much he had contained and withheld from the world, and only later in life did I realise the immense impact on young lives the regime had caused. He isolated himself. I am a heavy smoker. The onerous, demanding, and complex workload has left its mark on my physique. I am slightly overweight from snacking, and my shoulders are somewhat slumped from all I carry and support on them. I am cynically optimistic, have a good sense of wry humour, and am vibrant in my atheism. After seeing what I have seen, believing in a benevolent being is impossible. My bold and staccato gestures seem metaphors for my desire to attack an unjust government and society.

<u>What are the given circumstances?</u> My husband Mike was killed in a head-on collision three years ago, leaving me feeling abandoned and empty, as we had no children. I had to identify his body, which, despite the many families and mothers I have helped identify the bodies of relatives, was traumatic and has left complicated and profound emotional damage that I veil. I felt considerable guilt about my inability to manage my reaction, and I chided myself for indulging in the context of the widespread national trauma I witness daily. Rather than seeking counselling, I plunged headlong into taking over Mike's practice and worked at increasing human rights cases and pro bono assistance. Currently, I have an enormous

caseload representing those detained without trial, many children. My world is a chaos of blood, injustice, fear, dedication, and courageous confrontation.

What are my relationships? I am a vital community member with a compact circle of close friends – loyal, solid groups of comrades bound by ideology and the desire to make the world a better place. Susan has been my best friend since our University days, and our commitment to the struggle cemented our friendship. Thenjiwe became a dear friend and ally, and my relationships with Sindiswa and Zach developed from this. I have lovely friends, good relationships with fellow human rights lawyers, and highly fraught and frustrating relationships with prosecutors, judges, police, etc – my adversaries borne out of the apartheid system.

What do I want? I am driven by a desire to change my world and fight for a democratic South Africa, and this consumes my life—my work and my play. The sheer volume of cases I handle daily is exhausting, draining, and often insurmountable, but my need to assist and help people is overwhelming and relentless.

What is my obstacle? My single focus is to overcome the many barriers, obstructions, complications, and difficulties in acquiring justice for my clients. My life is a daily battle which demands incredible resilience, fortitude, and energy to go to war with a monolithic system of oppression. My life is an obstacle course of laws and regulations that need agility to navigate. Many have commented that I seem forever on a treadmill to nowhere – relentless in repetitive behaviour and action. The song We Shall Overcome was an anthem of my youth, and friends have suggested it should be inscribed on my headstone.

What do I do to get what I want? I think this is simple – fight! But involves keen strategy, taking chances to outwit my adversaries and unremitting determination to win a little piece of freedom for all of South Africa.

I added a seventh principle, which is critical to my methodology:

<u>What shapes Mia's voice?</u> Her Afrikaans heritage certainly was present in her voice, which had been dulled first during her time at Wits University when she studied and mainly spoke English and later when her community spoke mostly English or Indigenous languages. I decided she was unapologetic about her history and cultural context but sensitive to those who might instantly fear strongly accented English. Her commitment to the truth in all respects would not have allowed her to betray her roots. She uses Afrikaans' onomatopoeic language and phrasing beautifully, aware of its power and ability to punctuate pointedly.

Point of articulation, Afrikaans dialect

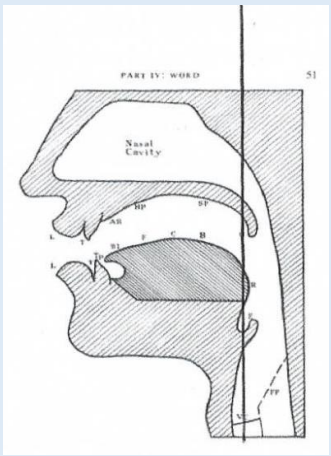


Figure 13: Voice production and speech (Greta Colson, 1982)

Mia's Afrikaans dialect was more robust and considered, possibly influenced by the incipient polarisation that permeates the society at odds with the rainbow nation first imagined at the first democratic election. The idea of multiculturalism is embraced in theory, but cultural identity is held far more tightly in practice, possibly due to a fear of extinction. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, the decision to use the slight but present Afrikaans dialect I had in 1985 meant that I had to shift the point of articulation further back into the throat as the language is placed and originates in the throat. Locating the voice here changes the position of the mouth and alters my facial features slightly; these positions and effects are different to my 'self'. The posterior point of articulation creates considerable tension in the jaw, accompanied by a sense of containing the

sounds in the back of the throat. The sensation is best described by releasing voiced sounds before one opens the mouth, increasing glottal sounds and voiced consonants. However, I am no longer conscious of travelling through a ‘neutral self’ momentarily to the ‘transformed self’ of Mia, but it is briefly there.

I noted that I spoke much more rapidly and impatiently in the second iteration and circled back to the profound sense of privilege I had often experienced during my research in 1985. This sense of advantage intensified in the rehearsal room. I revisited Mia's office space from memory and tried to reconjure the faces of the bereft characters in the play and the sounds on the city streets in the 1980s.

I played a soundtrack from documentary footage in the liminal rehearsal space as auditory stimuli – of playing of sirens, of children chanting, of gunfire, of police shouting, of children running and screaming. I played these as I relearned the text and gradually increased the speed of the sound effects until they were a cacophony against which I had to speak and be heard. This produced a harsher vocal quality, indicating the exhaustion of being a human rights lawyer and the constant fight in which one is engaged. I attempted to use a similar vocal quality to the one I had first used for Mia, but it felt too composed and unengaged against the backdrop of horrific sounds. The escalation of global intolerance and violence, coupled with forced migration to escape authoritarian rule or war-torn territories, has numbed us to the sounds of conflict and terror, and they seem less penetrating or disturbing. This released more profound, darker vocal sounds; my voice had an urgency and attacking quality.

Moreover, physically, I sensed a greater weight on my psyche, on my being, that seemed to pull me down physically. The staging had to be simple but needed to evoke Mia's world. I decided on two filing cabinets to flank her, denoting her being trapped by laws and regulations and imprisoned by her commitment to the law. Smoking was one of Mia's crutches in coping with stress and the horror she dealt with daily. Although unfashionable in 2023 and prohibited in all public places, I decided the action reflected the period the play was written in when more people smoked, coupled with Mia's genuine sense of impotence that was palpable in performing the role. I felt impatient with Mia, a sense of not being good enough to help everyone and the enormity of what still had to be accomplished.

In playing Mia in 2023, her hands seemed more expressive, as though she single-handedly had to take on the might of the nationalist government. The movements are sharp, almost stab the air, are held in tight fists, or cover her face and eyes as images of the horror in her ‘world’ descend. I am acutely aware of the shifts physically and vocally as I shed my 'self' and entered a space of neutrality to discover the new Mia I was about to create and perform. There is a chilling but thrilling moment when Mia possesses me, or I have her. Still, I no longer need to monitor my performance because of all my research and analysis, and it becomes embodied and spontaneous.

I recognise her voice is not mine, as it is more emotional with hints of Afrikaans sounds and timbre. I sense her anger might not only be about her clients' invidious positions but also her cultural identity, closely and ironically equated with the apartheid regime, against which she had fought for years, complex and challenging when you are an ‘insider'. I recognise her body, which is tired and slower than mine from a lifetime of sitting for long hours to work. Her psyche is more complex than mine and contains a history of traumatic events and traumatised people. I cease to be aware of being me, only Mia, which happens often and seems enigmatic. Observers of my performances over the years have noted that despite marked changes in portraying character, Fiona is always present in the transformation, indicating that complete change is impossible.

In performing Mia, I was aware that I ceased to exist consciously as Fiona once I moved from the rehearsal venue onto the stage. Moreover, because there were spaces dedicated to other characters on the same stage, I only felt a sense of transformation when smoking and entering her imaginary office space, particularly in her chair. It is a complex sensation to articulate, but it is as if you have different blood in your veins that pulses at different rates; you breathe at a different pace. I feel it quicken and an overwhelming sense of the horror of my life (as Mia); my voice gives voice to the devastated lives of clients. My body feels the weight of apartheid. I reflected immediately after the performance on whether the character I created or the portrayal crosses a cultural territory inappropriately or whether it offends anyone. During the post-performance discussion and Q&A session, no comments indicated that anyone felt discomfort or was offended by

my Mia. An Afrikaans woman in the audience said she felt proud that the portrayal placed her people in the centre of the struggle against apartheid., which is not often evident in post-apartheid work.

6.2.2 Stella Goldschlag

I move to the presentation's second character, based on a real-life person I have never met but have access to resource material on, the period generally, and on her precisely. This is Stella Goldschlag from *Blonde Poison*, the Jewish Nazi spy.

Stella Goldschlag in *Blonde Poison*



Figure 14: Images by Phillip Kuhn for the Sandton Theatre on the Square

Blonde Poison was written by Gail Louw (2015),[89] who explains she wrote the play in response to “issues that emerge in the story relevant to areas of conflict throughout the world today”. She raises concerns about victimhood, torture, self-preservation ethics, and moral dilemmas. It is based on the life of Stella Goldschlag, the German Jewish *greifer* (catcher) or spy in Nazi Germany, where her gift was to remain successfully undercover, allowing her to shop Jews to the Gestapo. Her character is multifaceted and duplicitous, and she shifts from being a tortured victim to a cruel killer, from loving daughter to betrayer, from gentle

[89] Louw, G (2015). Collected plays UK: Oberon Modern Playwrights starring Fiona Ramsay, Directed and designed by Janna Ramos-Violante, Produced by NAF, Hilton Festival & Daphne Kuhn of Sandton Theatre

and naïve love to depraved promiscuity, causing her to be labelled the Blonde Poison by the Gestapo, who revelled in her wretchedness.[90] The similarities and comparisons to South African society under apartheid rule are apparent and worth noting.

The play examines German Jewish identity through the acts of spying she commits. Superficial attributes of identity, such as hair and physical features, contribute to perceived identity and gestures and dialect corroborate these. Interestingly, audiences at the play's outset believe the blonde-haired, fair-skinned, aloof, arrogant, and cultured Stella is an Aryan, reinforced by a particular Berlin dialect. Audiences walked out of a performance before it was revealed that Stella was a German Jewess whose life was dedicated to saving her parents from certain death, raising the question of whether she betrayed her culture. Q&A sessions post-performance elicited queries on my 'identity' and whether I was qualified to play the role.

After the first iteration, audience members asked why I had decided to play such a horrible character. One asked if I was Jewish, and my response was, "What do *you* think?" Another asked if I was qualified to play Stella, and I responded, "Do you believe I am?" She thought my questions as answers were rhetorical and did not answer but felt that as a Jew, she could and would never play a Jewish person who could betray Jewish people. Should one only play tasteful roles? Stella had committed heinous crimes that continue in society: Should she be hidden in libraries, shrouded in secrecy and not be portrayed? It was a dilemma but having lived through the apartheid era and been aware of the duplicitous nature of people, who could be damaging and cruel, it seemed valuable to depict such people as a warning that it should never happen again. I was reminded of Primo Levi's (1988) statement:

[90] Gail Louw, playwright, in her foreword to the play *Blonde Poison*, describes the character of Stella Goldschlag and the play's themes.

It is neither easy nor agreeable to dredge this abyss of viciousness. Yet, it needs to be done because what could be perpetrated yesterday could be attempted again tomorrow and overwhelm us and our children.

The Drowned and the Saved, Primo Levi (1988)

Serendipitously, I was approached to bring a production to the National Arts Festival, which focused on women and war. The play was performed in London, but I was still determining how it would be received in South Africa. I held a play reading for a small audience, followed by a discussion. The text had to be trimmed to accommodate the hour-long slot for the festival, and I began the research.

I read the many documented accounts of the Holocaust and the only comprehensive narrative *Stella* by Peter Wyden (1999), a peer from Stella's school. The book provided excellent and compelling insight into Stella's character and captivating and fascinating details about those who inhabited her world and the play. Images of Stella are scarce, and Figure 15 shows her on a boat at 18 years old (the image that gave her the nickname of the Marilyn Monroe of Berlin) and from her trial in 1946 for 'crimes against humanity' by a Soviet military court. She was tried in two West German courts in 1957 and 1972 as an accessory to murder.





Figure 15: Top – Stella Goldschlag in 1939 on a boat in Berlin at the beginning of her career as a Nazi spy; Bottom left – 1946 trial in a Soviet military court for crimes against humanity (Photo: Court archive); Bottom middle – 1957 trial in a West German court for accessory to murder (Photo: Court archive); Bottom right – 1992 Stella leaving her flat in Berlin where she died in 1994 (Photo: Anonymous)

What struck me from these images when first creating Stella was the angle of her head; she never averts her eyes downwards but holds her head coquettishly, with her chin angled for effect. She faces people directly, and her demeanour is defiant.

Analysing the complexities of Stella's rationalisation of her wartime actions and the roles played by Holocaust survivors in bringing her to justice shed light on attitudes she encountered but not how aware she was of her wrongdoing. This project sought to contribute original to Holocaust and genocide studies, women's and gender studies, and the history of transitional justice.

Blonde Poison is a one-person play that could be staged as a simple conversation between the protagonist and the audience as she recounts her life as she remembers it. I collaborated with director Janna Ramos-Violante on previous projects and decided to formalise the possibility of creating the liminal space of the rehearsal room.

We consciously and meticulously ensured that our chosen room would only be used for exploration and discovery. Any discussions before or after the rehearsal would be conducted in a separate room. It was an attempt to allow the creation of the character and performance to happen in a safe and sacred space to maximise creativity and imaginative freedom.

A significant part of Stella's life was spent observing, watching, following, and betraying people. She appeared objective and distant in her relationships with the people she informed. A large part of her life was conducted in hiding and darkness, and her survival relied on her being invisible and ghostlike so that she would not be noticed before she had ‘shopped’ her victims.

Throughout the narrative and action of the play, Stella and her parent's modus operandi is to evade capture and deportation to one of the many concentration camps set up in Germany and neighbouring countries. The threat of this overcrowded forced labour, prisoner-of-war transit camps, and killing centres loomed significant and potential horror lingered everywhere. I return to the notion of Nora’s *lieux de memoire* or sited of memory, as I had travelled to Germany in 1990 for a holiday and to explore aspects of the country's history I had only understood through the lens of my mother and maternal grandmother’s collective recall of this period. I visited the *milieux de memoire,* where the first concentration camp had been established in Dachau in 1933. The vivid experience of revisiting the site, now a museum, reading narrative descriptions, surveying tormented images, and walking through the various rooms and chambers was intense and disquieting.

I have a clear memory of the documentary footage of the residents of Munich – the camp was erected on the railway line just outside the city – walking through the site soon after the war ended, handkerchiefs to their noses because of the stench of decomposing bodies of the prisoners still in the air. The residents were muttering, “*Wir haben nicht gewusst*” (we did not know), *“Wieso haben wir das nicht gesehen?”* (how did we not see this?), and *“Mir ist schlecht – das stimmt nicht”* (I feel sick – this is not true).

These sentiments resonated with South Africans I had encountered who professed similarly once the atrocities of apartheid were exposed. My memory of the historical site, my feelings, thoughts, images, smells, and the sensation of gravel crunching underfoot contributed to valuable tacit knowledge to tap for Stella.

The biography of Stella revealed an illuminating moment when Stella jumped out of her apartment window to commit suicide (in the play, she shoots herself in the head). This revelation cemented my thoughts of her constantly observing and constantly being observed. The set was a series of windows denoting different locations marking her life, and Stella was either inside or outside these, looking out or looking in. This decision contributed to the style of performance, which emerged as magical realism,[91] not entirely realistic but embracing alchemy and theatrical illusion.



Figure 16: Publicity photographs for poster 2016 demonstrating the observed being observed by Janna Ramos-Violante

Magical realism uses subtle unreal elements in otherwise ordinary settings and situations, which often have a symbolic nature, to comment on themes such as identity, race, and class to suggest possible realities beyond what we understand or perceive as accurate. These symbols can use objects, colours, and sensory details that facilitate an atmosphere of magic and mystery. In magical, realistic art and literature, a narrative occurs where fantastic, crazy things are told matter-of-factly. It encourages using inspiration from dreams and viewing the world through a metaphoric lens, allowing for beauty and magic in the mundane with a critical underlying socio-political commentary.

To access magical realism techniques, I began each rehearsal with a demanding physical warm-up followed by mime exercises. I needed to counter the harrowing detail of Stella's spoken account with the physical embodiment of character first.

[91] Franz Roh was a German art critic who introduced the term ‘magical realism’ in 1925. He intended it to create an art category that could stray from the strict guidelines of realism.

I revisited Berkovian exercises, which emphasised extreme physical fitness and mimetic control. These provided a focus away from the precise words of the play to enjoy Marceau's 'art of silence'.

The narrative is peppered with notable characters in Stella's life, alternating with the actor taking on the persona of these and effecting slight vocal and physical changes. We chose to enhance the magic of memory by recording a soundtrack of these voices. These seemed to echo in Stella's mind and were always present, gnawing at her tightly guarded conscience.

A sensory soundscape accompanied the performance – evoking the events of her life, Gestapo boots, the breaking glass of Kristallnacht, the factories, prison cells, and the other critical elements of her life. This soundscape was both soothing and unnerving for Stella, and the voice worked together with the soothing sounds, where I used a breathy, smooth voice that was comforting and seductive. When the sounds were disturbing, my voice altered to become more engaged and less breathy, and I had the ability to cut through the sounds using a higher pitched, brittle, and plangent quality.

(The embedded Google Drive link is a filmed 2018 stage version at the Theatre on the Square, Johannesburg.)

In recreating Stella, I found a silent mime technique a compelling entry point for mapping the action purely physically and only adding the text later. I devised this exercise after a workshop with Steven Berkoff called Mirror Emotion. The actor finds a physical expression for each word of the text but does not utter these, using a single finger, a limb, the head, or any isolated body part. The exercise is repeated, extending the movement into the whole body. The exercise is repeated again, adding the words to gestures, and the sounds that emerge are informed by a physical metaphor that contributes to the freeing of the voice.

The narrative of *Blonde Poison* contains such monstrous sentiments, odious actions, and a harrowing experience for the actor, particularly when preparing for the role, both in rehearsal and performance.

One of Strasberg's exercises that was helpful and that I often used during the process is known as the gibberish exercise: in working on a section of Stella's monologue from the play (where she describes how she points out Jews to the Gestapo when in a queue), keeping the intention and circumstances, I speak gibberish and not the actual lines. This opens up possibilities of body language, tone, and facial gestures and helps to break a rhythm that may have developed to keep me 'safe' from the distress of the content.

Strasberg introduced an exercise into his method when working with actor James Dean for the film *Rebel Without a Cause*,[92] where a monkey was a recurring motif in the film. Strasberg suggested that Dean experiment with the physicality of the monkey (Lipton, 2006*).* One notices in Dean's performance his uncomfortable gait, movements where he lunges at his father, and his prized bean field, which is thought to have been inspired by this exercise. Despite this unusual exercise, Strasberg developed an unusually naturalistic performance style. This exercise is often used in acting classes where the actor chooses a particular animal to study, recreates moves, and how the animal interacts with the outside world through its senses. The actor becomes human but retains discovered traits in the characterisation; therefore, the exercise still falls under sense memory exploration.

I chose to work with a feline image for Stella, using this exercise to develop traits associated with cats that were evident in her character: an independent personality with elegance and grace, obsessive-compulsive cleanliness, distinct aloofness, agility to navigate complex spaces, sensuality, and cruelty. Cats have impressive night vision and are excellent hunters with little regard for their prey. The cat Pangur Ban in the anonymously written Irish poem of the same title, translated by Seamus Heaney, aptly describes Stella:

> *With his unsheathed, perfect nails*
> *Pangur springs, exults and kills*

[92] *Rebel Without a Cause* was filmed in 1955 and starred method actor James Dean (directed by Nicholas Ray).

In the liminal space before rehearsals, I began by exploring the stealth and lope of a cat, walking first, circling objects and furniture, settling on furniture, and generally feeling the agility of a cat physically. I noted how the centre of gravity while walking differed from mine and caused me to walk upright, yet with a malleable and flexible spine. I then examined how cats observe and look at objects or people, their fixed gaze and unapologetic stare mirroring what the play's text seemed to convey about Stella.

Her clear and focused intent on how to execute a plan. Her aloofness and ability to regard the world around her with disdain seemed cat-like and matched her talent for disengaging from her victims. The physical discoveries informed her attitude, which assisted in interpreting the text, clarifying how she might utter a phrase and wait before pouncing, affording pauses in how she shared her story with the audience. Reading Emily Dickinson's (1976) musing on her cat poem evoked Stella in action for me:

> *She sights a Bird—she chuckles—*
> *She flattens—then she crawls—*
> *She runs without the look of feet—*
> *Her eyes increase to Balls.*
>
> '507th Poem'*, The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1976)

This led to an exploration of the sounds cats make: meowing, purring, yowling, and hissing. I decided to use a dialect to enhance the authenticity of my depiction. A German dialect from the period may illicit emotive responses, as it is often identifiable to the listener. Her biography informs the choice of dialect.

Stella's voice was interesting as it had to contain elements of her life as a young Jewess as a daughter and infiltrator who lives disguised and incognito and adopts an identity to convince people she is an Aryan woman. She had to transform more fully to successfully infiltrate the Gestapo, to be accepted by them and to be regarded as authentic. Achieving this would have been a manifold task for her, copying and imitating those she aspired to be and indicating her gifts as an actor. Still, it was a more intricate and challenging task for me to try to encompass and master these voices of Stella.

Point of Articulation, Soft German Dialect

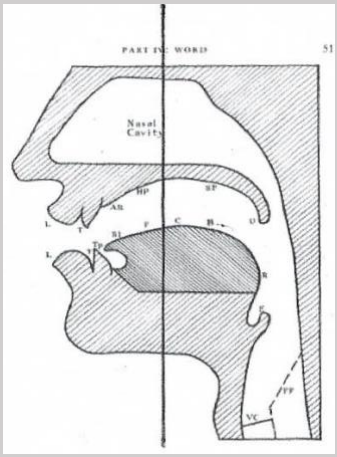


Figure 17: Voice production and Speech (Greta Colson, 1982)

The point of articulation shifts in German, moving easily through the mouth, with some sounds made in the throat while others linger on the mouth and lips. Contrary to what many may believe, the German spoken in Berlin (especially in the early 1900s) was softer and not produced in the back of the throat, but the *ich* sound (meaning I) is placed more centrally and shifts forward. Central articulation encourages relaxation in the jaw and sensual engagement with internal articulators such as the tongue and lips. The sensation is one of the words only being formed or voiced once in the oral cavity and exhibiting less glottality. The mouth is active and opens more widely than in a posterior articulatory point. The physicality supplemented by her voice felt less of an assault on the actor and audience. I reconstructed Stella with more energy and with no vestige of conscience. Possibly, one might detect a flicker, but only when she had to confront her fate of never seeing her daughter again and the prospect of having no contact for the rest of her life. A fundamental principle of acting is not to judge a character you are playing but to aim to be as authentic to the person's essence no matter how detestable that is.

I noted that the voice I had arrived at when I first performed Stella was based on my sister-in-law's mother, Ruth. Moreover, I felt the soft and soothing quality was no longer present in my voice, but a more rooted, guttural, and possibly impatient vocal quality had emerged.

I was influenced by the context of increasing episodes of global atrocities committed in the name of a governing party or faction, which was unnerving and indicated that a similar barbaric genocide could happen again. In the first iteration of playing the character, I noted that the Stella I created was livelier, less cowed by her deeds and optimistically pursued her belief that “she only did it to save her parents”.

Stella's belief in her acts of espionage, as portrayed in 2023, was possibly less matter of fact and more desperate. During rehearsals, I was aware of Stella's hands and their potential to convey some of her vexed life in a constant inner tremor that belied her calm exterior—constantly moving and fluttering, and possibly a remnant of her early obsessive-compulsive disorder. Her hands expressed the fragility of her fear and trauma.

Again, I reflected on the appropriateness of my playing Stella directly after the performance regarding whether the character I created or the portrayal crosses a cultural territory inappropriately. During the post-performance discussion, an audience member commented that my portrayal was brave, illuminating, and possibly more revealing because of my not being Jewish and because I did not fall into a stereotype. An audience member contacted me later that day, saying she felt she was watching her Jewish grandmother. I exhibited the same gestures, dialect and idiosyncrasies, and as a result, she said the performance chilled her as she sympathised with Stella and felt deeply conflicted.

6.2.3 Kleiopatra

In *If We Dig*, I play Callinicos (Kleio), a first-generation Greek, and I acquired the dialect to reflect the natural person. Kleio is a fictionalised version of Luli Callinicos, whose life was dedicated to the struggle against apartheid, to unearthing the country's history, and to making it accessible to all. Her interest in migrant cultures and the effects of displaced societies was at the heart of *If We Dig.*

If We Dig was born by chance from another project in 2016, and during the research period, the work of the social historian Luli Callinicos was used as a primary resource. To fully understand the issues we were tackling, we set up an

interview with Callinicos, and it was during this conversation that Megan Willson and I became aware that “Luli was our play!”. The discourse around identity was triggered by Willson’s passion for the many immigrant populations seeking refuge in other countries at the time and how her perception was informed by her parents being migrants. Attitudes toward immigrants and minorities are another theme in all three works.

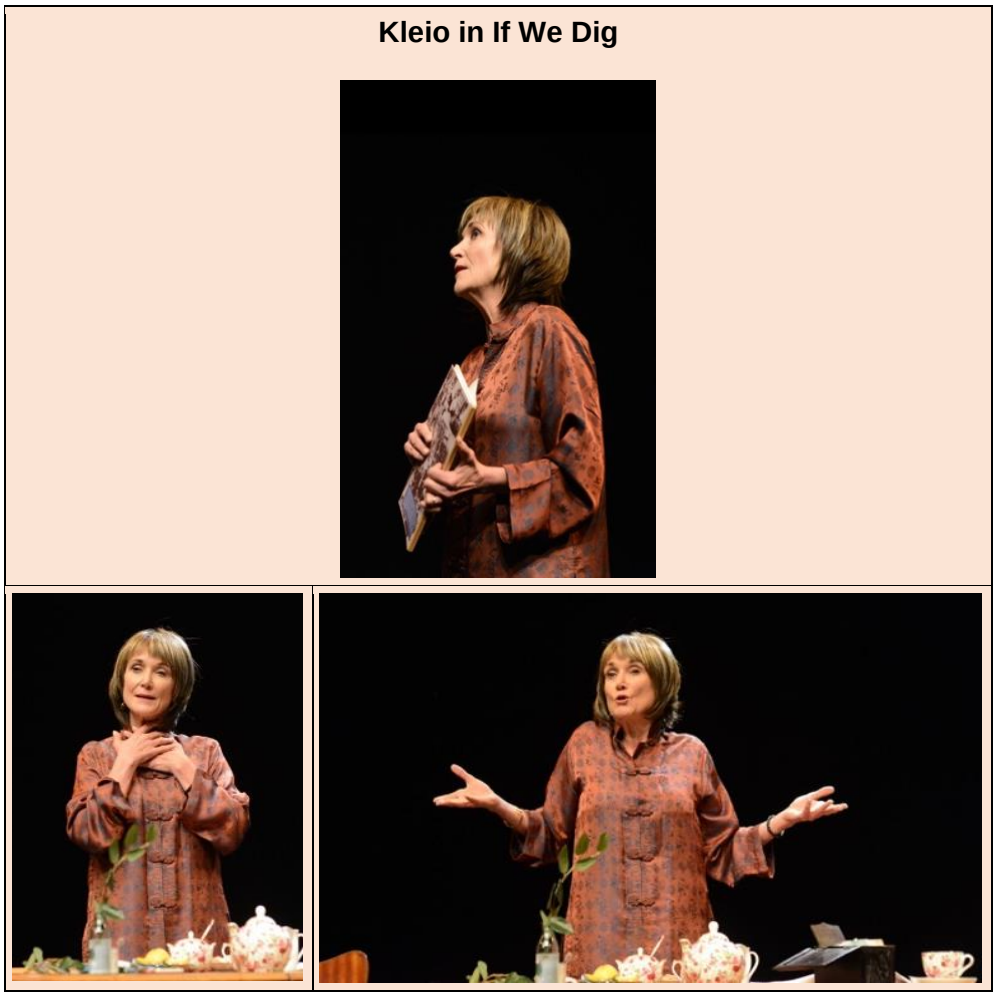


Figure 18: Kleio in *If We Dig*. Images by Suzy Bernstein for the Market Theatre Archive

Callinicos' work traced South Africa's history (particularly Johannesburg) and, at the core, migrant peoples. History is at the heart of *If We Dig*, focusing on how the view of 'home' alters and impacts identity. The play is a dramatic distillation of Callinicos' trilogy of the social history of Johannesburg, drawn from interviews of people and investigations into their lives, living conditions, and opportunities. It was a way to explore history through orality. She was an activist of Greek

heritage, and her study interrogates the significance of migrant and immigrant populations in influencing culture and cultures.

The work, as Callinicos' trilogy had done, aims to give voice to the voiceless, and one reviewer acclaims it as a "tribute to the nub and grit of anti-apartheid energies … a fine celebration of South Africa's minority groups and the generally uncelebrated cogs of the South African system" (Robin Sassen, 2016).[93] Critic Etienne Shardlow (2016) praises its depiction of "real characters from Joburg's past, the people working the mines, mills, and factories on the ground, who despite the bigotry, racism, classism and fear that fed apartheid, they did see each other as equals".[94] Reviewer De Swardt (2016)[95] admitted she had never heard of Callinicos before seeing the play but was awed by the fictional Kleiopatra or Kleio as she is called, "touched by the characters' histories and ultimately gratified to hear important new stories … told with grace, skill and great theatrical intelligence".

Performing the fictionalised Callinicos as Kleio would be challenging to inhabit and embody her as authentically as possible. The writing needed to bristle with authenticity and accurately depict her voice, cadence, and passion. Again, I was playing a living person. Callinicos was very much alive, and the pressure to create a three-dimensional contemporary figure was acutely palpable.

My point of entry into playing Callinicos was observing how she spoke and phrased her thoughts and her mannerisms, attitudes and habits. Initial meetings were crucial, and I cannot precisely pinpoint when I began to explore her voice in mine. I sensed my vocal tract shifting to her vocal placement during these interviews. I investigate and examine her from an actor's perspective until the fictional character of Kleio exists independently of Callinicos.

[93] Robyn Sassen is an arts and culture journalist and scholar.

[94] Ettiene Shardlow is an arts journalist and critic.

[95] Moira De Swardt is an arts critic.



Figure 19: Publicity images of Luli Callinicos (South African History Online, https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/luli-callinicos)

Directly linked to the research process during the interview process, to recreate the role of Kleio, I returned to improvisation exercises devised around the text. One exercise was interviewing myself as Kleio and talking about issues the character raises in the play informally while driving. The car became a liminal space en route to somewhere but with no fixed location other than inside a vehicle, an exercise I have used many times to allow my voice to play around with sounds, prosody, and inflexion, not limited to my speaking of the text.

Aiming to use an authentic voice as close to Callinicos' as I could, I wanted not just to imitate or replicate her habits and cadence but to serve the text we had written based on lifting it out of mundane realism into a place that encouraged magic. It is difficult to suggest that one hopes to access a spiritual aspect of a living person you are playing, as it is invasive and presumptuous. One cannot presuppose a person's transcendent or psychic qualities.

The liminal space supports inventiveness and inspiration to discover facets of otherness, not used in a pejorative sense, but that the character is other than the actor. Does the artistic and aesthetic licence allow for this presumption? Furthermore, is it not an actor's choice to be truly authentic to the craft by imagining what that essence could be?

The more detailed the research and the body of knowledge gained about the character, the more valuable a liminal space will be to the actor for the research to become embodied. I was aware of using sense memory in the recreation of Kleio. The techniques of the method assisted particularly in conjuring growing up

and going to school in Johannesburg to the sense of family. My first discovery was that family members I had assumed thought like my parents or I held different and contrary beliefs. The method technique uses a robust set of exercises to access sensory memories.

Some of the exercises I used were the sounds of ice-cream vans that rumbled through the suburbs, sounding a distinctive tune that conjured ice-cream delights; the smell of dusty winter grass and the prickle of it on your school socks and uniform; the warm, firm hand of my nanny Sally, who was such an essential and integral part of my life, the memory of her skin always fragrant with body lotion, and all the words she used in isiZulu to communicate with me, comprised our secret language; a visit to a church in Soweto as a student and the tingling sensation as the congregation sang the then banned national anthem.

I opted to root my exploration in Strasberg's method to create Kleio because he insisted on all rehearsals beginning with intense relaxation exercises, which felt necessary in tackling the broad narrative sweep of her life. I was aware that using this method would also require sense memory exercises to tap into those qualities stored in the resource of my embodied and tacit knowledge. Strasberg's exercise was developed to assist the actor in identifying unwanted and unnecessary tension in the body's muscles, the neck, and the face, the latter being where mental tension manifests. Added to the physical release, I constantly needed to release tension in my throat and tongue by exhaling a long 'aah' sound to ensure the emotional content of the text would not contribute to tension.

If We Dig's narrative, though wry and self-deprecating, contains harrowing and triggering information when Kleio elaborates on the heinous actions of the South African government. This can result in being moved to tears or laughing hysterically from shock or revulsion. One fundamental principle common to all acting methodologies is never to judge a character or comment on them.

This is where accessing one's neutral self in a liminal space is crucial, encouraging neutrality of attitude and eliminating habitual physical and vocal patterns. This was how I prepared in advance of rehearsals, consciously

abandoning all that is Fiona, locating my neutral self (I have developed a short method to facilitate the process over many years of practice that it often occurs involuntarily) to enable Willson and me to begin the work of honing performance.

The method of sense/sensory memory, finding the inner core of the character, is what I call working from the inside out. Strasberg warns that the technique is not for those with unresolved emotional issues—nor should it be confused with psychotherapy. Its prime aim was to help the actor create real thoughts and emotions under imaginary circumstances.

Actors use sense memory to connect to the given circumstances of a play and character. A particular smell or taste can elicit a memory from your past that aligns with a feeling or reaction to a similar circumstance. You start with single memory recall, but several sense memories can be accessed simultaneously as you become more adept. (This exercise was developed into Barney Simon's A World in an Orange exercise, referred to in Section 2.1.15.)

Adler (1988) works on various exercises to increase the actors' imagination, such as describing objects and trying to relate to them. For example, she might ask an actor to describe precise details of their chosen object. The more the actor notes the exact detail, the more the object becomes alive and the more the audience feels it. Another exercise that aims to make the actor look real and natural in the role is paraphrasing, where Adler (1988) has her students choose a random sentence and try to make up a reason for saying it. First, the actor needs to understand the idea, respond to it, and make it their own until he feels a real need to communicate it.

This technique of sensory recall occurs frequently in everyday life. Still, the actor examines these carefully and searches to unearth deep-seated memories triggered by smell, taste, sound, sight, or touch. I often use this technique when playing a character that spans many years and assigns a 'touch' sensory memory to each era. For example, with Kleio, the early object was a bag of sweets, which I sourced and would hold when talking about her childhood. I used an old paper pad from the 1960s, made from a waste newspaper with a distinct texture and smell. I held a specific China teacup when relating stories from her first marriage,

which was comforting, but I was acutely aware of its fragility. For Kleio's later years, I used an old pashmina that belonged to my grandmother; it had a slight coarseness due to the pilling that the fabric had gathered and held a sense of our mortality.

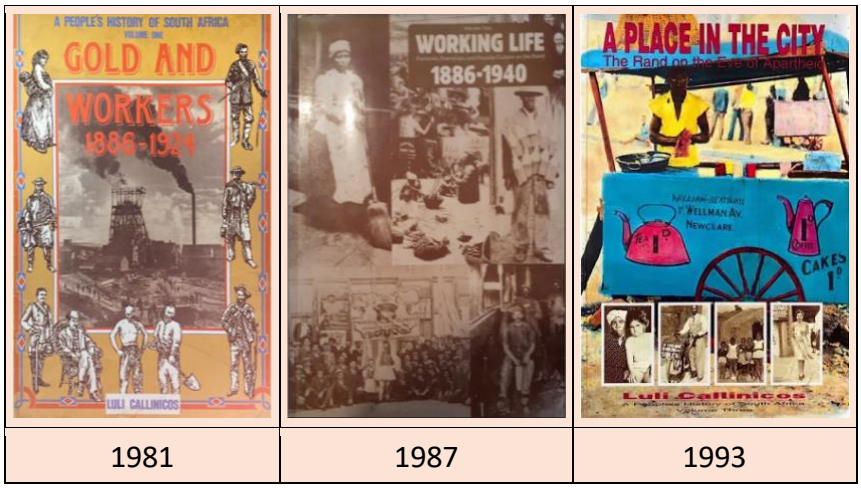


Figure 20: The three publications comprising a historical archive of Johannesburg written by Luli Callinicos

Enriching diversity has become particularly relevant to South African theatre since the 1990s, when there was a rise in what has been termed issue-driven theatre, and playwrights were encouraged to write in 'their voices' rather than emulate expressions and forms of Western theatre.

The central characters of Kleio's narrative are four Witwatersrand women: Maria Wilhelmina Jacoba Le Roux, Maria van Denver, Ama Naidoo, and Susan Gerber. These women were all outside my cultural framework.

I had wanted to include the account and story of the black migrant worker Elizabeth Nkosi, but it was omitted as being culturally inappropriate and possibly offensive. This version of history presented in the play was then at odds with its intention to examine the cultural and racial diversity in the area at the time. The investigation and re-imagination are to test the vocal choices further to embrace the period's black women and use their dialects and language. Is this offensive?

Callinicos' dialect combines being a first-language Greek speaker and a first-generation South African growing up in Benoni.

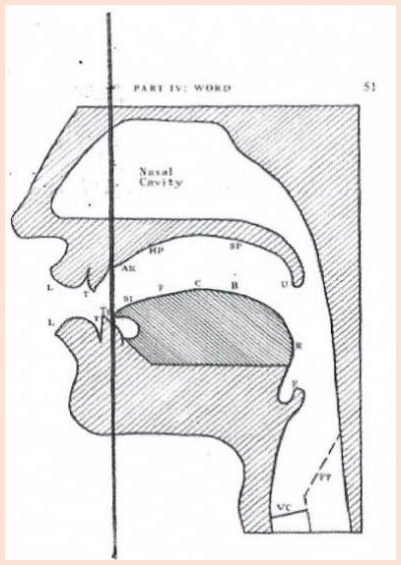
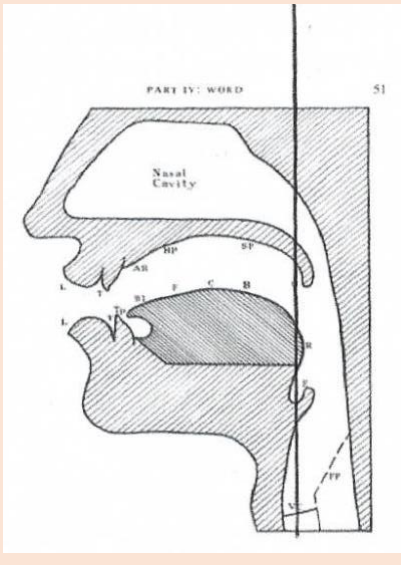
Point of articulation for Greek dialect	Point of articulation for South African dialect
	

Figure 21: Voice production and speech (Greta Colson, 1982)

The points of articulation for Greek and South African English sit far from one another and shift from anterior to posterior positions. This allows for both glottal sonics formed in the throat and the softer sensual sounds engaging the lips, necessitating more pronounced use of the lingual articulator. The jaw is held tightly in anterior articulation but allows for greater relaxation of all facial muscles when engaging an anterior place of articulation.

(The embedded Google Drive link has a filmed version of the 2016 stage production at the Market Theatre. Johannesburg.)

Directly after the performance, I reflected on the appropriateness of my playing Kleio and the implications of portraying a person still living and known in academic circles. I asked whether the character I created crossed cultural territory inappropriately or had caused offence. The notion of offending a person or community has become a necessary concern for artists, which seems at odds with and contrary to artistic expression.

During the post-performance discussion, an audience member commented that the portrayal was unnerving. She knew Callinicos well and found the representation authentic and alarmingly accurate, as though she was watching Callinicos herself. In the original production, I supplemented the performance

with interpretations of the characters from Callinicos' books, and an audience member mentioned that when first seeing the full-length production, she had found my representation illuminating.

However, there was a dissenting voice about my representation of Indian activist Ama Naidoo in the first iteration of *If We Dig*. I had 'read' the words of Ama Naidoo as if I were Kleio proofreading one of my books, but I did add a soft Tamil dialect and an Indian shawl that covered my hair. It was suggested that had I dispensed with the dialect and shawl and read as Kleio, and it would not have been offensive; however, it was felt that personalising a character outside my cultural territory was offensive.

Another audience member introduced herself as bi-racial and of Indian descent and said that she had found the presentation of Ama a fine tribute and acknowledgement of the diversity within South Africa's people.

Accents and dialects become fascinating dramaturgical problems when several dialects are spoken on stage in a single presentation and exist next to one another on stage and in the air.

The playwright must consider not only the audience's response to a particular dialect but also how the nuances inform the audience about the characters' relationships and whether these are integral to the production. This should aid the audience in assimilating information about a character or characters, as well as context and content, and pose a pressing issue in the representation and performance of Mama Nadi from the play *Ruined*.

The character was written in English by the American playwright Lynn Nottage but is written in the French patois of the Democratic Republic of Congo. (I have often raised the issue of using an accent or dialect if a play is written in English – yet clearly represents another language. Should the actor speak accented English or speak in English as if speaking French, for example? I contend that the sounds of English do not allow for shifts and flavours of cadence, and the heart of the language would constitute a form of colonisation or appropriation.)

Examining language as a social and cultural phenomenon, or sociolinguistics, helps solve dramaturgical problems when writing plays and characters from different social, educational, or ethnic backgrounds.

Sociolinguistics looks at the social codes in the speech that provide clues to the speaker's background, class, and attitudes. Performers use these social codes to create a character and make choices about accent/dialect and how this may aid in authentic representation. I investigate the process of making choices and aim for these to be authentic and appropriate.

Many African scholars, such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Nkonko Kamwangamalu, debate the role of language in a postcolonial continent. Thiong'o (2016: 27) declared that "African literature can only be written in African languages" and a different "language policy in Africa, where we have a triple language policy: mother tongue*, lingua franca,* and then French or English or whatever" and concluded that this policy would aid in decolonising Africa.

I must acknowledge here, however, that decolonisation is not an event but a process, and it is not necessarily easy to achieve. As practitioners and artists, we should not focus only on a planned outcome or plan but on how we lived through events that led to the work.

Research for the role of Mama Nadi began when I first saw the play *Ruined* in New York (2009). I was drawn by the dialect work of the coach, Charlotte Fleck, to discuss her approach to Congolese dialect work and any similarities with my method of teaching dialects. The performances were riveting and detailed, and the dialects were subtle and heterogeneous in tone, facilitating uniformity of pronunciation and suggesting an identifiable community.



Figure 22: Mama Nadi in *Ruined*

The character of Mama Nadi is explosive and embodies moral contradictions in her struggle to sustain herself in the war-torn Congo. Like Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage in *Mother Courage and Her Children, first publ*ished in 1949, both made their living from the war. Mama Nadi is a very wise and dynamic business owner who simultaneously exploits and protects young women soldiers sexually exploited in the armed conflict in that region.

She paints a colourful and robust woman against a backdrop of terror and misogyny, as the DRC is believed to be one of the most dangerous countries to be a woman or girl, with widespread gender-based violence and child marriage. Years of political upheaval and war have caused instability and are significant causes of poverty. Youth unemployment ignited conflicts, violent crime, armed robbery, armed home invasion, and assault. The local police lack the resources to respond effectively. American journalist and researcher Lauren Wolfe (2012) remarks that sexualised violence in the DRC is much more than a weapon of war

and reflects the widespread acceptance of patriarchal norms and rape myths that justify and normalise both rape and the everyday subordination of women by a majority of men granting themselves entitlement to women's bodies.

In her play, a theme raised by playwright Lynn Nottage is the notion of land ownership, where traditionally, women in the Congo have no right to inherit land in the family hierarchy or register land in their name. Should one have the courage to fight for her right to own land, she needs money and the authorisation of a man to litigate on her behalf. These acts of dispossession, oppression, and repression are present in much of Africa. It is a silent war, a war against women and children, with one in four girls facing the prospect of being raped before they reach 16 years old.

Both the DRC and South Africa have been dubbed the rape capitals of the world by Interpol at various times over the past twenty years. The play's themes seemed relevant to South Africa, where women daily face palpable danger and violence in cities. I have taught many students who have experienced violence and confided in me, needing to tell their stories without recrimination. I have been the object of harassment and in varying degrees of danger, and I am familiar with the intense feelings of anger, impotence, and fear. I had met many Mama Nadi's growing up in apartheid South Africa and sensed that much of the research was embodied and needed only to be tapped.

(I worked on the film *Hotel Rwanda* (2004)[96] and travelled to the DRC, Rwanda, and Burundi when working on *Africa United* (2010).[97] I studied the dialects and languages of the countries. I speak French, which was helpful when studying the languages of Francophone Africa

[96] *Hotel Rwanda* was directed by Terry George (2004) and is set at the time of the genocide in Rwanda, Africa. It was an account of hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina who sheltered and housed thousands of Tutsi refugees in their struggle against the Hutu militia. I was the dialect coach and studied African dialects and languages extensively before the project.

[97] *Africa United* was directed by Debs Paterson (2010). It is the story of four children who walked 3,000 miles to get to the World Cup. They encounter HIV and child prostitution, among other things. I was the dialogue coach and furthered my studies on African dialects and languages before and during the project.

I kept hearing an echo of Strasberg's advice to actors during rehearsals:

> *The actor's job is to bring non-existent things alive onstage, make them real to herself, and convey that reality to the audience.*
>
> *Acting: A Handbook of the Stanislavski Method,* Lee Strasberg (2014:43)

The inclusion of Mama Nadi in the creative research performance was intended to confront and interrogate the issue of identity in cross-racial casting and to test the value of liminal spaces in rehearsal processes. Throughout this rehearsal process, I researched extensively and consulted with several black and Congolese women. I was sure the character was within my ability; I possessed the technique and skill to embrace both the emotional and narrative arcs required. Mama Nadi is undoubtedly beyond my cultural frame, and she is a black woman while I am white. However, as rehearsals moved on stage, I became more and more acutely aware that my portrayal might be viewed as not only appropriative but painful and infuriating to the community I was representing (and more so as Nottage is an American writer and not from the Congo). I was reminded of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985),[98] who opposes the Western attempt to situate itself as investigating a subject opposed to the investigated non-Western object. In *Can the Subaltern Speak?,* Spivak's (2008) answer to her question is 'no'. Subalterns cannot speak when the Western academic field cannot relate to the other with anything other than its paradigm. I was aware that by attempting to portray Mama Nadi, I was not 'unearthing her voice' but possibly taking it away.

To extend Spivak's concerns, the work of Brett Bailey, such as *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2001), seems to place Africans in a position of humiliation and complete and utter powerlessness. While Bailey's imagery might induce white liberal guilt, it does nothing for black empowerment. Presenting black identity as being attached to concepts of

[98] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a literary theory professor at Columbia University known for her English translation of Jacques Derrida's seminal work *Of Grammatology* (1967) and her philosophical writings on the postcolonial condition that introduced the term 'subaltern' into the philosophical lexicon.

extreme violence may subvert a colonial contemplation but also feeds into a stereotype of a violent and savage black person. This gaze signifies a psychological relationship of power in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze (Jonathan Schroeder, 1998:58).

William Kentridge, one of South Africa's foremost visual artists, is rarely scrutinised in academic circles, as his work has created an art of cultural authority. His discourse on white privilege and the inability to transcend it is present in much of his work. I understand and wrestle with this sentiment concerning my future value in pedagogy and worth in performance. This study highlighted the issue of white privilege in my work, how white privilege influences my teaching methods, and how white privilege functions in the archive.

I was conscious of the exercises I used in rehearsing Mama Nadi and tried to access a voice I had not used before, as I had never attempted to inhabit a black character or role. I used the black acting methods (Luckett & Shaffer, 2016). To access her voice, I listened to Congolese music, extracted the lyrics, and sang along with the soundtrack. I noted the placement of French spoken in the Congo, which is further back in the mouth than in parts of France. The placement is in the throat, which helps access chest resonators; therefore, a more profound and more rooted voice emerged. I added dance to the singing and was instructed in a tribal dance that required movements more grounded and expansive than my body was comfortable with. I was aware of a sense of genuinely sitting in my body and centring the fulcrum of my posture to allow a fuller circumference of movement in all limbs. I interviewed Congolese people, taping their voices and observing their physicality and manner or quirks, and I noted this similar process when interviewing Callinicos for *If We Dig.*

The text in Nottage's crafted words required analysis and interpretative choices to effect the inhabitation and transformation. Nottage has a singular, Brechtian vision of the consequences of war for women as hard and bitter as are present at the beginning of the play. Yet, her narrative answers this with a heterosexual marriage that solves all, but this did not impact how I played the single scene but remained a factor when I considered Mama Nadi's defence and ownership of her girls.

I felt it vital to create and imagine a detailed biography for Mama Nadi, and I returned to Uta Hagen's (1991) six primary principles:

> *Who am I? I have had a challenging life, which has led to my having to be practical to survive the ongoing civil war in the DRC. I have had to develop strength and resilience to stay alive in adverse conditions. My papa was a strong, proud man who tried hard to provide for his family of five daughters. He dreamed of being rich as they married into wealthy families and often said to me he looked forward to the day he would be looked after by his daughters and their rich husbands. He would joke that his life as a child was nomadic as his father had his land taken away from him by white colonisers, and after that, he had no certain job, and he dreamed that as he aged, he would travel to each of his daughters' homes and be feted until he died. My elder sister died from malaria, my baby sister died in an accident, and the three that were left got married very young, but not as my father had hoped to rich, kind men. My mama was beautiful and loved men, all men. She betrayed my father often – he did not get angry just very sad. At first, my husband seemed a good man and provided for me, but I soon learned that he was a drunkard who beat me regularly, and eventually, I ran away. I realised that men believe raping a woman is their right, that it symbolises their power over you. One of my sisters had been murdered by her husband so I felt I had to protect myself. My education was learned on my journey of life. I have learned a lot about different types of men – but they are ultimately all the same. It is hard to believe in love when all around you is violence, horror and men so brutal due to constant war. And I don't take shit from anyone. After my grandfather had his land taken from him, I resolved I would hold onto everything I could get and look after it. My bar is mine and will stay mine.*

> *What are the given circumstances? I live in this crazy fucked up country in the Ituri rainforest at the edge of the mine. I run a business – I am self-made and proud – I have looked after myself, and now I look after young women like my sisters who could not look after themselves. My girls have been raped and abused, but here at Mama Nadi's, they have dignity; they*

have a roof over their heads, clothes, and food, and of course, they must work for that. But they have both physical and spiritual shelter. People say I am cruel and selfish and only interested in money but I look after people – I talk straight to people to help them – no use in sugaring words. I have learnt that it is difficult to have relationships in this country. White people have brought devils to us – war has turned us all crazy, angry, and desperate. Rape has become a weapon of war far stronger than a gun. And marriage, as I say in the play, was not just a tool to humiliate us. It was a way to strip us of our wombs. All my girls have suffered rape-related injury and psychological trauma – we are all ruined.

What are my relationships? I protect my girls, but they are out if they don't pull their way and work hard. The men who come to my bar must show respect. I say to men, 'My place is nice for a drink, but I don't abide by bush laws. If you want to drink like a man, you drink like a man; You want to behave like a gorilla, then go back to the bush'. Don't come into my place, my bar and bring the war from outside here. No, we don't need this macho behaviour here. Here, we are all equal. I know the men that come in here like me – some like me for my money, some like me because I am strong – I am like a man. Some may really love me – but I have had enough of that nonsense. I am a businesswoman who will survive this war intact. You must not be too soft – you must not be too gullible – you must not be flattered – you must fight silently to keep your dignity and space. I don't get close to anyone anymore.

What do I want? I want to keep a sane sanctuary inside this bar of mine. I am like the parrot I keep in that cage – colourful, beautiful, full of chatter and rude when I need to be. I symbolise good luck to the girls I look after – like the parrot. I bring joy and encourage people to talk, and here, we are a community – I do not allow fighting here – fighting is for outside. In this challenging time, you can find support in this little community in Mama Nadi's. I would like to get a piece of land and cultivate it. I want the war to end, I wish for peace and in my heart, I believe it can happen – but then I go outside, and a wall of terror engulfs me – the destruction, the damage

and the futility are too much to bear. I want a better life. My better life is contained in the caramels I enjoy – they represent all that is good. I am a brittle, brown, sweet, nutty, buttery and bitter caramel. I am a person full of love, but I am misunderstood. I give joy to the world. I like to laugh, but how do you laugh when we are surrounded by violence, viciousness and inhumanity?

What is my obstacle? War, men, chaos, brutality, inequality.

What do I do to get what I want? I profit from the men's loneliness and their unbridled desire. We dance, tease, coax, and tempt them for cash to keep us alive. We have to make a living, and what better way in a war than making men pay for what they take as a spoil of war? We are all good actors in Mama Nadi's place.

Again, I added a seventh principle, which is crucial to my methodology:

What shapes Mama Nadi's voice? The placement of Congolese French is in the back of the throat and produces more guttural 'r' sounds than occurs in some regions of France. This point of articulation when speaking French is influenced by the Indigenous sounds of the four official languages Kituba (Kikongo), Lingala, Swahili and Tshiluba. In a French dialect originating in France, the 'r' sound in a word like 'caramel' would be pronounced with a uvular trill, where the root of the tongue articulates with the uvula. In a French dialect originating in the DRC, the 'r' in 'caramel' would be pronounced with an alveolar trill, where the tongue articulates with the alveolar ridge. This is because the 'r' sounds in the Indigenous languages are alveolar trills. The strength of Mama Nadi's character, the hard life she has lived and her ability to stand up to male violence, disrespect and threats indicate a large voice that can carry across a rowdy bar, so she has a good facility to project her voice, engages deeply into the diaphragm and uses deep-seated chest resonance to lend authority to her vocal tone. The 'r' sounds become even more pronounced when she raises her, and these, coupled with deep-throated 'g' and 'c' sounds, operate like vocal bodyguards.

As one often does, I looked at previous production material. I read reviews to avoid stereotypical portrayals and the accounts and images that Nottage had used in her research to write her play. This forms a bedrock of knowledge on which to build and explore. I was keen to see how much of the character I could embody and how much of her life I could evoke.

I had no sense that my preparation and process in accessing Mama Nadi differed from how I inhabit and rehearse character. For obvious reasons, I had not changed my skin tone nor made any nod to blackface. Rather, I wanted to lean into the universal feminist issues the character faces.

Education professor Philip Howard asks whether blackface could be racist if a black person were involved and suggests it was possible to use it to make an antiracist statement (Howard, 2018). The Zulu use it as part of a historical tradition and culture, but the growing sensitivity to blackface would make a rule that applies to every situation.

It is only possible to understand whether it is acceptable if we know its history and performance tradition. The debate over blackface goes right to what is the individual's intent. We start with the past and the impact on targeted people.

The playing of characters outside one's own cultural frame occurs in the South African play *Woza Albert!* (Ngema, Mtwa & Simon, 1981) and in *Bopha* (Mtwa, 1985), to name only two. Black actors take on the roles of white authority figures by adding a red or pink nose reminiscent of clowning.

These satirical portrayals highlighted their brutality, intransigence, and inability to see beyond their small, regulated worlds. When asked if a white actor could portray a black character by adding a nose of a different colour, a fourth-year performance student was adamant that this would be unacceptable and insulting despite the motif used in many protest plays of the 1980s, such as *Woza Albert* (1981); *Asimamali* (1983); *The Native Who Caused all the Trouble* (1983); *Bopha* (1985); *Saturday Night at the Palace (1985); Sophiatown* (1986); *Sarafina* (1987).

Following a protracted discussion, the class conceded that it was possible, but only in a satirical style where suspension of belief was not required. However, students welcomed interpretations by peers of white characters, endorsing the power politics inherent in the act.

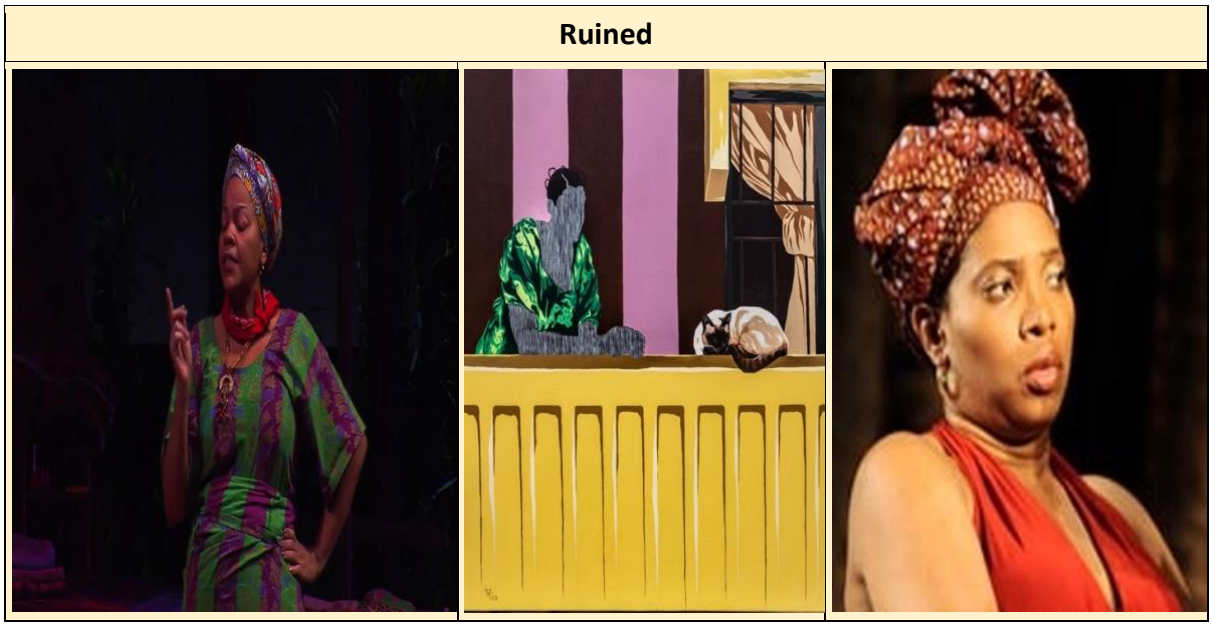


Figure 23: Left – Tonye Patano as Mama Nadi in *Ruined* (Photo: Kevin Berne, 2010); Middle – Derek McLane's sketch for the set (Manhattan Theatre Club, 2009); Right – Saidah Arrika Ekulona as Mama Nadi (Photo: Joan Marcus, 2009)

In the post-performance discussion, many audience members expressed discomfort at my portrayal. They noted that they felt insulted by the depiction and that vital elements of blackness were absent. When pressed for these, the audience suggested that this is difficult to articulate as it is 'blackness' and a lack of understanding that was missing from the interpretation. While some praised the technical aspects of the performance, it was clear this was insufficient to justify it.

A visiting academic from Ghana (who chose to remain anonymous for this commentary) suggests he was pleasantly affected by my Mama Nadi because it had resisted stereotypes. He had seen the play before and acknowledged the unpopularity of his opinion but supported his condonation of the portrayal with a detailed reference to the 'caramels' Mama Nadi is given as a gift and savours in the scene. He notes that in all previous incarnations of Mama Nadi, the sweets had merely been a way into the scene: a customer had brought them as a present

to get his favourite ‘girl’ for the night. The sweets remained a focus and a symbol of the lack of good, nice, sweetness, and softness in women’s lives in the Congo. They contrasted sharply with the words describing the harshness and horror of their lives, and the tension was palpable and present.

On reflection, it became clear that I could continue to explore other cultures through collaboration and intercultural experiences only if the character was white. It is insensitive for white actors to portray black characters. One should not ask whether one can embody the other but under which conditions one can do so. I interrogate whether the work is valuable in supporting or not helpful as it hinders the community and individuals I attempt to represent. And I acknowledge that my speaking for others might still be very painful for some communities. Although an exciting and challenging aspect of the research, I recognise it is inappropriate for me to inhabit the role of Mama Nadi.

Point of articulation, French Congolese dialect

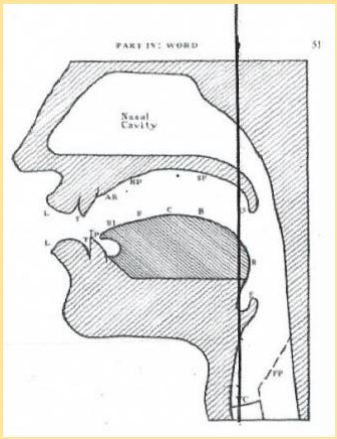


Figure 24: Voice production and speech (Greta Colson, 1982)

The research process of recreating work from another time and context has made it difficult to revisit uncomfortable, painful, and often harrowing memories. Re-entering places of discovery as a researcher investigating and collecting emotional and practical performance data, running concurrently with rehearsing and performing, divided focus. I acknowledge that the data analysis could have been more rigorously detailed and recognise Charleson’s (2019: 16) view that

“autoethnography allows the researcher’s battles, failures, and feelings to be integrated as part of the research write-up – it is a total journey”.

In reviewing the process of performing the characters, it emerged that the liminal space of discovery is never exhausted, the project still needs to be finished, more options exist, and the product and process are never perfected, final or restored and definitive. Whether we continue to work on the specific project directly or not, the object will mutate and produce other meanings and significances; it will generate more questions and extend the practice while always remaining unfinished and incomplete. And I am reminded of the Sukuma proverb from Tanzania that is also common in Swahili:

> *Kuhuba nzila hu gumana nzila* - Sukuma
>
> *(To lose the way is to find the way)*
>
> *Kupotea njia ndio kujua njia* – Swahili
>
> *(To get lost is to learn the way)*
>
> Translated by Albert Scheven in Swahili Proverbs Collection (2010)

This kind of research is close to what we engage in when performance practice becomes research practice. Productions emerge from such processes in the professional theatre context and become archival objects or traces in a company’s historical record. As research objects, they remain unfinished parts of a continually unfolding thinking process that expands in time and across space, intersecting with other unfinished objects and their thought processes along the way. I enjoy the sentiment that art is never finished, only abandoned, anecdotally attributed to Renaissance artist Leonardo Da Vinci.

My research addressed the voice as a signifier and revealed how a rehearsal process that uses tacit knowledge to examine the self could lead to free vocal expression. Vocal freedom is defined here as the ability of the performer to let go of awareness of the mechanical elements of the vocal instrument in performance.

This freedom is found in a balance between technical aspects of vocal expression and the ability to let go to achieve an expanded capacity to

somatically experience and connect emotionally to the text, material, or content to elicit a deeper connection. These investigations that occur in the liminal space intertwine with an autobiographical narrative.

My methodology is based on unearthing breath, voice, and life to souls, where discovering or finding a voice holds its own meaning and provides practice. I also examine how this discipline might take up this practice in the future. Practice in Africa is a way of doing research that exists in the margins or liminal spaces, and when practice speaks, it does so with language but beyond it. Language finds expression through the body, which might threaten translation capacity and limit the ability to transform. As a voice teacher and coach, I am interested in the role of the voice and the literary tools of language, idiom, and dialect used to create the characters' identities. The exploration and detail of vocal identity were helpful in the construction and development of the plot, the choice of setting and the delineation and grouping of characters in their landscapes and lives that were represented.

As a practitioner, I am deeply immersed in the process, experiencing and influencing the work firsthand. This hands-on engagement gives me a practical perspective and an intuitive grasp of the work and characters I play. As a researcher, I step back, critically analyse, and theorise the implications and outcomes of the practice. This reflective stance requires a more detached, objective viewpoint, which can sometimes feel at odds with the immersive nature of practice.

CHAPTER 7: Pedagogic shifts

The final chapter explores and details the implications emerging from the analysis of performance on future teaching of the craft of acting.

Acting pedagogy emerged in the early 20th century and has developed separately from drama education, where a drama teacher typically teaches method, theory, and performance practice alone. As we move into the 21st century, actor training must be intraculturally based, where theatre pedagogy integrates art and education to develop language and strengthen social awareness rooted in stagecraft and drama.

Pedagogy aims to build on the student's previous learning and works on developing students' skills and attitudes. I use five primary elements in my approach, which are crucial in my teaching praxis: constructivist, inquiry-based, integrative, collaborative, and reflective. These five pillars are contained within each course I teach. Resource and reading material are discussed initially, encouraging queries and questions that may arise regarding content requiring explanation and content that needs to be engaged with and experienced. Peer review and group collaboration form part of the course, and the summation is devoted to evaluation and reflection.

Embodied learning is the reservoir for the actor, and awareness of this is essential. Helpful knowledge and learning models should be present in the pedagogy. Acting training generates and cultivates cognitive skills such as language and communication, problem-solving and critical skills, decision-making awareness and capacity, creativity and imagination stimulation, and collaboration skills.

Walter Mignolo's (2017:43) theory of delinking underpins the dissolving of ties between coloniality and modernity. Decolonial thinking exists on the borders of principles of Western epistemology and knowledge-making, which fears losing the status of rational thought and elevating emotions over reason (Mignolo, 2017:38, 45). Philosopher and scholar Olùfémi O. Táíwò argues that modernity is not a product of colonialism and should not be confused with it Because

modernity is conflated with Westernism and with ‘whiteness’, and all three with colonialism, the negation of decolonisation is used as a blanket phrase to wrestle with many issues which often have only minor links to the West (Táíwò, 2017:14). He believes this is not only problematic theoretically and historically but is also incorrect, and states that where a commodity cannot be verified to have colonial origins, it does not qualify to be decolonised (Táíwò, 2017).

Contemporary theatre and performance is a hybrid body of work that incorporates art, dance, music compositions, and theatre to create a piece of art. I was drawn to the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s (1968)[99] theories because his view of teaching was a people-oriented and people-guided approach to education. Growing up under apartheid rule in South Africa, I was conscious of my privilege and access to literacy, and Freire’s (1968) goal to eradicate illiteracy among people from previously colonised countries and continents provided a possible escape from inequality. Freire (1968) believes unequal social relations create a culture of silence that instils the oppressed with a negative, passive, and suppressed self-image.

Students must be encouraged and guided to develop a critical consciousness to recognise that this culture of silence is created to oppress. Living during the oppressive apartheid regime with the stranglehold on access to knowledge and information and a rigidly nationalist education model, Freire's (1968) quest to redress the imbalances from oppression seemed logical and necessary to my context. I had grown up in a culture of silence for many and actively pursued engagement in class with peers and students from other institutions. I sensed that at an early age, the broader your knowledge base and understanding of beliefs, not your own, is useful in resolving differences. With life experience at the core of learning, the dignity of all participants can be affirmed to recognise that everyone in the room is both a teacher and a learner if all participate.

Liberating the education system allows students to develop ideas and realise abilities as active subjects to change and influence the world around them. Freire

[99] Paul Freire is a Brazilian educator, philosopher, and advocate of critical pedagogy. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) is considered a foundational text of this movement.

(1968) fosters the possibility of joining freedom with the responsibility to seek a balanced approach and addresses the education system through the proposed methodology called ‘dialogical problem-posing’ (Freire, 1993). This methodology is a participatory teaching model that enables teachers and students to develop their critical attitudes and stimulates students’ creativity, simultaneously triggering their curiosity by encouraging questions. Theatre practitioner Augusto Boal (1973) formed a theatre company in Brazil and extended Freire’s ideas to include Newspaper Theatre, Image Theatre, and Invisible Theatre, and its central technique, Forum Theatre.

Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1993) informed much of my student life spent observing demonstrations on campuses and schools, culminating in the student protests of 1976 (my first year at university).[100] Boal’s (1993) philosophy highlights the importance of the awareness of iniquities and inequities in society and education. The widespread protest in South Africa resulted in the shooting and detention of children, which provided the backdrop to much of my research during those formative years. During this time, the curriculum and teaching approach I experienced was predicated on a solid liberal Western tradition; lecturers encouraged critical engagement with curriculum tenets and highlighted how these intersected with contemporary urban life. Newspapers were the prime source of information dissemination, where one obtained news from investigative journalists.

During periods of States of Emergency where material and information were banned and freedom of expression was compromised, the theatre provided valuable platforms for protest and debate. Theatre became a primary weapon of the 'struggle' against the oppressive and violent apartheid regime. South African Protest Theatre emerged and continued well into the 1990s. It was a form of provocative theatre with a specific agenda as a tool for social change and the injustices and conditions of apartheid.

[100] University of Cape Town was where I studied for my undergraduate degree and graduated with a BA Hons in 1979.

Segregation prohibited white students from accessing work produced and made by black students and further siloed education with fearful students not joining protests or liberation movements. In contrast, curious and driven by a need to voice their disapproval of the political system, a cluster of students spurred by feelings of empowerment and anarchy and militant at this injustice protested, devised, and created work that challenged the status quo.

Social incongruities fuelled the choice of work and content students researched, where work was evaluated on artistic merit, relevance, and contribution to protest against separatist legislation. Many audiences were not keen to attend work that did not project values endorsing the existing government, and it was incumbent on artists to interrogate what society did not want to acknowledge. Working with people from other cultures was illegal and fuelled a significant gap in education, rendering multicultural engagement minimal, if at all.[101]

Much of my work at this time echoed Schechner's (1995) ideology that theatre is the art of actualising alternatives on a continuum of methodologies. While at university, I formed a company called Troupe Theatre Company to create and devise theatre that strove to offer knowledge and experience to demonstrate how things should or could be and provoke audiences into action or realisation. This work was aimed at making mostly white audiences address and confront issues of inequity and human rights violations, as the institution was still not open to black students. Soon after leaving university, I travelled to Johannesburg to work at the Market Theatre, which was set up in opposition to the government as a multiracial institution. I was also involved in projects that created theatre work that was relevant to all. This often took the form of Protest Theatre. Protest Theatre was the term most widely used to discuss the practice of provocative theatre. It served as an umbrella term for many new forms that emerged during the struggle against the apartheid regime.

It is crucial to make pedagogical changes in actor training based on more specific questions around collective relationships to the land we occupy as colonial

[101] There were pockets of multiracial practitioners working on projects at Dorkay House, Arena Theatre, Space Theatre, Market Theatre, and fringe venues, but these were not legal and productions were frequently banned.

settlers and our specific institutions or programs' legacies with this land and its original guardians (Ginther, 2023).

These influences shaped my practice and pedagogy, and as an educator, my teaching beliefs and concerns focused on the interplay between culture and various ways to learn. I engaged with languages spoken in South Africa but not yet deemed official languages – which only occurred in 1994. Bilingualism was promoted in education, using both English and Afrikaans as compulsory languages of instruction, where teachers and students switched between these codes. Welshman Cen Williams (1983) coined the phrase translanguaging when advocating the use of both Welsh and English in teaching practice.[102] This was developed to include many languages in classrooms that are used simultaneously, which is particularly relevant to South African pedagogy. Translanguaging uses a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages. Still, translanguaging depends on people's willingness to get on with each other despite apparent differences. There are successful exchanges between people who do not share a language but accept differences, often appropriating that difference as a communicative resource where increased diversity becomes an asset rather than a deficiency.

Communicative practice in multilingual countries involves translanguaging and translation, where the latter encourages communication between and across languages in the arts and everyday practice. This can be creative and transformative, but more attention should focus on accurate and authentic representation, interpretation, and democratisation of communicative practices. Ethnographic drama emerged as a vital form of workshop, protest, and living theatre in which people made work using several languages.

My interest in teaching sprung from my exposure to ethnography in performance, which I experienced as collaborative, multisensorial, and transdisciplinary modalities at all levels of the ethnographic process. Here, the disciplines of

[102] Cen Williams posits this theory in his unpublished thesis *An Evaluation of Teaching and Learning Methods in the Context of Bilingual Secondary Education*.

humanistic anthropology and theatre studies intersect. Simon[103] initiated conversations on how ethnographic performance-creation could assist in reconceptualising public engagement, activism, collaboration, reflexivity, and representation in the South African context. As a recent performance graduate, I used ethnography as a form of research to collect data through participant observation, field notes, and in-depth interviews to create a collaborative artistic production accessible to audiences outside the academy.

My pedagogy develops Harold Garfinkel's idea of ethnomethodology, which investigates "radical properties of expressions and practical actions as contingent accomplishments of organised artful practices of everyday life" (Garfinkel, 1967:11). This is where reflective analysis and self-observation counter a directed research plan and examination of both creative artefacts, outcomes and the notes and drafts that constitute and contribute to their making. The resulting creative work and critical interpretation or examination are inextricably bound together, informing one another in an exchange of knowledge.

I know that Bourdieu (1999) questioned the ethnographic voice's single, central, and dominant point of view, arguing that working with multiple perspectives corresponds to a multiplicity of co-existing. He believes the now-traditional ethnographic monograph limits the power of the academic voice but conceded that ethnographic drama could foreground the more interesting voices of research participants and the background of the academic ethnographer. Ethnographic representation carries the potential for conflict between ethical and aesthetic responsibilities. For the ethnographic dramatist, this arises in the moral obligation to recreate an authentic representation of research while producing an aesthetic interpretation.

I use ethnography in my teaching theory, which embraces fieldwork and focuses on practice first, with findings endorsed by theory and reflection on the interplay between them. One's function as a participant in creating a character is to make

[103] Barney Simon (with Mannie Manim and members of The Company) began a unique form of ethnographic theatre which was developed into a form and ethos synonymous with the Market Theatre in Johannesburg.

adaptations in terms of content and theatricality. Dialogue in ethnographic drama can often be a direct reconstruction of research data, or characters may approximate versions of research participants. It can create validity, authenticity, and integrity beyond the academic report and may be achievable through rigorous attention to a chosen aesthetic. So, for example, when empirical data does not provide helpful dialogue for a production, the author's imagination provides the discourse.

Knowledge is constantly moving, evolving, changing, destroying, interacting, and engaging with other ideas. These flashes of knowledge occur in liminal spaces where student actors engage not to follow their teacher but to unfold, rearrange, separate, and decide instantly. These encourage a total change of individual perception and imply the dysfunction of the logic we have been brought up with, leading to a complete re-set of the mind. The deconstruction and decolonisation of curricula in classrooms might find quantum pedagogy helpful, as it is where liminal space intersects with knowledge.

This is where my study of ethnographic drama offers the opportunity for inclusion into my teaching practice, where students, researchers, artists, and audiences can examine others' life experiences and shape those moments into new aesthetic forms.

At the turn of the last century, German quantum physicist Max Planck proposed a theory that the world is a flash of energy or quantum.[104] Quantum pedagogy is built on the relativity of knowledge and belief and affects artistic communication and creation. This was known as ‘liquid knowledge’ and developed pedagogy as a striving for knowledge of knowledge, with lessons living in many flashes, connections, and unions with other knowledge and structures. He believes knowledge flashes similarly to how pedagogy is built. In the context of teaching, theatre is not concerned with forming a good performer but a creator.

[104] Quantum physicist Max Planck’s theories were applied to education based on the idea that our world is a flash of energy or quantum.

Acting training comprises several modules focusing on the voice, the body, the mind, and the psyche. I teach all these modules, but the nucleus and core of my methodology, as previously detailed, is applied most rigorously to the voice. Previously, voice training formed a mirror of the world, focusing on the physiological, objective realities of vocal anatomy, acoustics, and technical skills. Using principles of ethnographic investigation, I developed voice training that facilitates the individual's perceptions of self in the world. A holistic approach is optimum, where empirical and arts-based praxis collide.

I resonate with the American arts educator and dialogue coach Tre Cotton's (2022) suggestion that teaching should be a conversation, not a lecture. In conversation, we genuinely see and possibly understand another person's perspective. Knowledge and stories are passed down generationally and often orally; through these, we can learn. I foster discussions and open dialogue in the classroom on course content before a module and ongoing discursive engagement and reflection as the learning process unfolds. I have noticed considerably more retention of principles and concepts and an understanding of how these underpin practice.

Theatre is a living, breathing, and palpable piece of art that should be seen in its created context. This does not imply it cannot be viewed in another context and time to raise the issues and resonate in a different time in history as a response to the realities and demands of a current moment through revisiting and re-imagining.

Pedagogical development has focused on decolonisation and decolonising strategies in education, but an anti-colonial critique is not the same as a decolonising framework; anti-colonial critique often celebrates empowered postcolonial subjects who grasp denied privileges from the parent state of the colony. This anti-post-colonial project does not aim to undo colonialism but to remake and subvert it (Tuck & Yang, 2012). As an educator, I must give each storyteller the tools in the invisible classroom space before they enter the rehearsal's liminal space where the story's words are subtext and assist in finding humanity in texts to create valid, valuable and helpful work.

Poka Laenui (Tuck & Yang, 2012) cited five phases in the process of decolonisation: recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action. These stages seem clear, with the first embracing a process where colonised peoples recover and reclaim their history, culture, language, and identity and rediscover these in this process. Mourning is evident in the acknowledgement of the continued assault on the world's colonised peoples, on their identities and social realities. Dreaming about possibilities and bringing these into the classroom will formulate strategies and commitments that lead to actioning a process of decolonisation.

Pedagogy must embrace initiatives to decolonise curricula that include critical race theory, focusing on a more expansive and inclusive view of history, including issues of diversity and multiculturalism. This must begin at the student's entry-level in South African theatre, with discourse and practice in African theatre forms and styles. Ethnographic investigations are encouraged to identify connections of these forms in one's own life. Physicist Albert Einstein's observation is helpful here: We cannot solve problems by using the same thinking we used when we created them; we have to find new ways of solving problems. Thus, as contexts and territories shift, thinking needs to find new ways of solving issues.

Ted Aoki's model is that a curriculum should not focus on a method of 'curriculum-as-planned' but include 'curriculum-as-lived' and investigate how students and teachers live this (Aoki, 1999).

Alternative theatrical pedagogy based on African theatre aesthetics must be included, where some elements of African theatre are tapped for their pedagogical value to provide an invaluable model for drama or theatre educators. Artistic creativity cannot be separated from ritual activity, thought African scholar Kennedy C. Chinyowa (1998). The organic integration of the two phenomena manifests in the life-giving force as an integral and active part of the African reality. Therefore, contrary to the adage, art is art for art's sake, historically coined by Victor Cousins (1832), it must instead be art for life's sake.

The Spectator Theatre of Boal (1973) does not clearly distinguish between actor and audience, which allows for collective audience participation like that found in

African theatre and can be transferred to the modern learning process or experiential learning.

Role-playing goes beyond the craft of acting in African theatre and the entry of another being into the body of a chosen human medium. The entry into the body of another is based on the belief that the invisible world can only be understood through knowable phenomena in human experience with spiritual power conceived in more concrete than abstract terms (DA Masolo, 1994:106). Here, the liminal space is accessed both in contemporary forms of theatre and African theatre to allow the pause for the entry of another being into the body in the latter and the actor's entry into another being in the former. Acting would be more convincing if it could reach that point of liminality where the characters cease to be themselves but as somebody or something else. The liminal state intersects human creative perception and the spiritual realm (Turner, 1969:202). Like Thomas Merton's (1999:239-240) 'transcendental consciousness', a change in consciousness enables participants to access new knowledge. Turner (1979) further points out that the ritual thrives on the 'not-yetness' or 'unfinishedness' of human experience.

Concepts advanced by people of various cultures are often based on differences in basic assumptions and theories about reality. Contemporary research of art and beauty reveals that aesthetic mindsets and perspectives differ based on various factors, including cultural, historical, religious, ideological, and educational contents of the appreciating mind. It follows then that African cultural preconceptions influence the aesthetic perceptions of the African people (Njiofor, 2021).

Exploration and examination occur in a liminal space, and you have the sensation of losing the 'self' to work as the neutral self and transform into another self. A colleague I have worked with who wishes to remain anonymous termed it the perception of being 'possessed' by the spirit of another or the sensation that they are inhabiting another being or person. This is extremely difficult to describe as a performer, but I do not feel I am myself in every character I play, as if another has suffused me. My perception is that a transformation is complete.

Crossing cultural territory is possible in the liminal node to inhabit a person from a different cultural context from your own. I note that in her writing on teaching and education as the practice of freedom, bell hooks (1994) cautions teaching from old traditions and attempts to reclaim these by integrating them into a revisited curriculum to form a hybrid methodology, as these all had roots in domination. One must embrace tenets of culturally responsive practice, cultural humility, self-awareness, knowledge, a willingness to listen and consider someone else, and an ability to recognise values and perspectives beyond one's own. Cultural awareness can significantly improve teaching practice (Epskamp, 2006), and exposure to varied cultures can positively influence each other.

When discussing theatre pedagogy, one needs to define the demands of contemporary acting and a way forward to implement decolonising strategies into an established curriculum. As contemporary actors are also theatre makers, curricula must include the co-existing strand of training, which is theatre-making. It gives actors a sense of authorship and agency, as they are no longer always waiting to be directed.

Teachers must develop a practice of critical reflection to ensure they do not remain trapped in unexamined judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations (Larrivee, 2000:293).[105] A fundamental concept of reflective practice involves both personal reflection and social critique: reflecting critically on the impact of one's background and assumptions and taking note of the broader organisational, discursive, ideological, and political context.

The philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) developed the idea of 'radical reflection', arguing that self-comprehension consists, paradoxically, of recovering our unreflective experience and that reflection and action co-occur. He cautions that practitioners should be aware they are treading contested territory. As Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1968) suggests, reflective practice is not without its 'dark side'. Cultural and personal risks are involved, and not everyone feels empowered (Brookfield, 1994, 1995). Brookfield (1994, 1995) suggests that

[105] Barbara Larrivee writes on how to become a critically reflective teacher.

assumptions can be challenging and potentially cause psychological turmoil. Our understanding of the world can be shattered when these assumptions are challenged. Therefore, educators who promote transformative learning can be considered experts in deconstructing psychological and cultural barriers.

However, with mutual collaboration, a participatory, dialogical approach to reflective practice is sought in what Ghaye (2000) calls a reflective conversation. I hold a dialogue with myself. I often interview myself and record as I explain what I have experienced. It may seem obvious and a poor scientific way to collect data, but because the interview occurs in a liminal space (in a car driving, in a corridor while waiting for a class or rehearsal). In practice, I find introspection a dominant mode of reflective practice. The researching self (subjective-research-self) knows the set of questions that need to be answered – but often, the answers the practising self (objective-research-self) discovers are aspects in the telling that have not been considered or known before.

My teaching praxis will hold the liminal or in-between space of ongoing identity examination and work. A liminal space serves science and art, theory and practice, and is vital to creating Indigenous pedagogies for acting, performance, dialect, and voice training. It also offers opportunities to reevaluate current systems and facilitate a process of modification or change.

I reiterate Ghaye's (2000:7) suggestion that reflective practice will fulfil its potential to help us make sense of the uncertainty in our workplaces and offer us the courage to work competently and ethically at the edge of order and chaos. My job as an educator is to create conditions and spaces where students can experience their full dignity and enjoy a sense of worth.

CONCLUSION

As a performer, I am conflicted between acting in productions that reinforce traditional forms of theatre and experimenting with and forging new forms, embracing the context and country in which I live. I am positioned on a continuum of methodology, identity, and practice, and I am moving through a gradual transition without abrupt change. This change in reviewing my practice has developed over time without being interrupted. This continuum best describes the reach of my practice and pedagogy.

The thesis was borne from the socio-political context I grew up in, shaping my life and practice. Growing up in South Africa, I experienced the brutal autocracy of the apartheid regime, followed by a phase of governance by an Interim Constitution (which introduced a new system of government and new institutions) and the constitutional democracy that followed. My practice was formed and developed in response to the shifting political landscape, and a methodology emerged that seems uniquely rooted in South African heritage. Locating a value in liminal space occurred during a transitional political period when contemporary criticism of cultural issues formed relationships with theories of identity.

As a teacher, I am conflicted between training students to equip them for the realities of the present moment and a desire to train them for an imagined future that I hope they will inherit. My pedagogy aims to honour the past and to continue contributing to and moving towards a more equitable future. It is vital to examine history to shift the gaze, not abandoning previous knowledge and technique but ensuring access and relevance to all. I am torn between this and teaching modules focusing only on my specific area of expertise. Still, the contribution of my practice to my classroom is that teachers and students must engage and be educated in this process. The research made sense of the uncertainty in our working spaces and has given me further courage to work ethically at the edge of order and chaos. This solitary introspective self-dialogue investigates a personal process, focusing on the relational context and practice.

The liminal space became vital to my creative process and echoed Nuttall's (2009) entanglements with issues, other practitioners, and audiences, as well as

being twisted together and involved. While devising the creative project, I became increasingly aware of the safety of liminal space – not necessarily pleasant or comfortable – as concerns and disputes form crucial components of working in decolonised spaces.

As a person, I am torn between two desires. First, my desire to continue teaching when a part of the methodologies and histories in which my pedagogy is rooted might no longer be relevant to the emerging theatre and art forms and ideologies in Africa. I desire to write about my experiences and ideas to feed into the archive of theatre pedagogy. Second, I aspire to teach by example and continue performing to allow my praxis to be viewed and contribute to the process.

Revisiting an archive comprising significant politically driven content and discussion is invaluable in reconsidering historical contexts, mores, and attitudes and sheds light on current matters. The interwoven nature of shared and separate histories endorses Nuttall's view of how we are linked, connected, or intertwined in South Africa.

Barney Simon was a catalyst in creating the South African method or auto-ethnographic method. Simon was an aggressive advocate of the need for artists to risk and experiment, secure in the knowledge of the 'right to fail'. Such was his standing and influence that this principle of tolerance accommodated and affirmed the rights of aspiring writers/directors. He construed failure not so much as a disgrace but as an integral component of the learning experience and crucial to the development process.

Troupe Theatre Company is an independent South African theatre company founded in 1978 during the years of apartheid. During this period, the idea of protest intervention using theatre became a way of thinking that has informed my work and career until now. The work the company has produced over the past four decades is committed to proposing projects that shift ontological and epistemological nature and form while dependent on the context in which they are created or made. I am inspired by Taylor's claim that "the power of performance enables individuals and collectives to reimagine and restage the social rules, codes, and conventions that prove most oppressive and damaging"

(Taylor, 2007:xiv). I hope my practice continues to probe and challenge defining lines of the arts and to develop the function of the liminal spaces and nodes.

Theatre-making and creating work is not done in isolation but is a synthesis of inputs by a creative team comprising actors, directors, designers, stage managers, and any number of specialist creatives. Although I focused on solo performance in the creative research in this study, these were the products of collaborative engagements with directors, designers, writers, stage managers, and technicians. Their contributions in rehearsals and during performances of the works are invaluable and significant, and I acknowledge this input with gratitude. The recreations of the roles from the archive were not facilitated or directed, and I relied on my memory and recollections of the first creative processes. The core of my investigation lay in the performer's private process and how my embodied and acquired knowledge since first performing the roles influenced and added to revisiting the characters.

The liminal spaces I inhabited would have been populated with collaborative creative teams, and they formed part of my investigation when I directed the production of *Shirley Valentine* at the Landesteater in Salzburg in 2022 and again in 2024 when I was redirected in the role of Stella Goldschlag in *Blonde Poison* for the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. The director, actors, and designer were made aware of my theory of how liminal spaces can deepen investigation, sharpen engagement and open channels for sincere communication. The archive of my work is a resource for productions in which I appeared and is also an archive of broader social engagement. The archive documents a part of theatre history in South Africa. I have chosen to limit information about participants in my autoethnographic research and focus on my observations, reflections, and experiences.

As a practitioner and performer, I grapple with my contribution to decolonial performance theory, particularly in the notions of representations and identities. I strive to develop a theatre aesthetic that subverts the colonial gaze but resists feeding into a colonial fascination with African exoticism. Social preoccupation with diversity seems to encourage white individuals to engage in racial capitalism by deriving value from black identity. I reject this and strive not to engage in

processes or practices that do not serve equal value for each member of a creative project.

This study reveals that liminal nodes provide chaotic spaces of conflict and colliding ideologies and cultures, which are not necessarily resolved in or by my work. Effecting change involves engaging in conflict, and managing it is an essential skill that affords an emotional state that adapts to these challenges and conflicts.

What occurs in the liminal node may evoke academic and author Isabel Hofmeyr's (2004:17) "intellectual convergences", a place of interlacing, connection, and intertwined histories. And just as these may be rejected or "become meaningless and unintelligible" (Hofmeyr, 2004:15), that which is unearthed and discovered in the liminal space may be unresolved or short-lived. Perhaps the view of creative work should be that it is never finished or complete. My work as a performer and teacher, with its emergent complications, interaction, and complexity of engagements in liminal nodes, remains incomplete and unresolved but will be revisited and possibly reformed in performance.

Integrating knowledge sources in a liminal space to investigate a shared multiplicity in acting training will contribute to contemporary training methodologies in South Africa. Devising curricula that embrace decolonial frames while not eschewing colonial or current inputs will create a fusion of pre- and post-colonial contributions.

The study reveals how shifts in educational strategy and methods develop from examining an archive to facilitate embracing a decolonised academic project borne out of discourse and experience in liminal spaces. These collisions point to using history or archives to deconstruct pedagogic practice while recognising the value of embodied knowledge and not eliminating it.

I aim to continue the archive of work in South Africa that reflects the entangled lives of its people and promotes intergenerational, interracial and intercultural conversations to advance theatre-making processes and ways of communicating in theatre spaces and celebrating contributions to a decolonised practice.

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Film

Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom (2013) Director: Justin Chadwick, Actors: Idris Elba, Naomi Harris, Writer: William Nicholson, Producer: Anant Singh (Videovision).

Act of Defiance (2017) Director: Jean Van der Velde, Actors: Peter Paul Muller & Antoinette Louw, Writer: Dominic Morgan & Matt Harvey, Producer: Spier Films.

Sophies Choice (1982) Dir: Alan J Pakula, Actors: Meryl Streep & Kevin Kline; Writer: William Styron, Producer: Universal.

Ghost in the Shell (2017) Director: Rupert Sanders, Actors: Scarlett Johannson & Takeshi Kitano, Writer: Jamie Moss, William Wheeler & Ehren Kruger, Producer: Paramount Pictures.

Appendices

Creative component

Script 1

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1pLRe0_KWn-Nz8gsVUG_wiSk9AnbRYS1i/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=100157808026726406252&rtpof=true&sd=true

Script 2

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wUNhk_ouzrEqK0OVn32lc40Jj5KG4SBJ/edit?usp=drive_link&ouid=100157808026726406252&rtpof=true&sd=true

Archive spreadsheet

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1a0hFB9kJ5g-KiZm0a2Xq5Yfm6bqFe5Ak?usp=drive_link

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1JexwmfdQXCc7R_-OdgXZJ4S0VdI2obxr/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=100157808026726406252&rtpof=true&sd=true