

Revolt as a strategy of de-reification in contemporary performance practice

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Abstract:

This thesis investigates the concepts of revolt and de-reification and how these can be perceived and implemented within the context of performance. The argument focuses on the ability of revolt to question and unsettle processes of reification which in turn manifest a strategy of de-reification. I investigate the potential in contemporary performance practice to challenge prevailing modes of perception and restore the production of desire to the spectator through strategies of de-reification. This research is approached through a qualitative process which entails a reading and application of critical texts to the analysis. This reading/application is engaged in a dialogue with the interpretative and experiential aspects of the two works selected for analysis.

Chapter One functions as an introduction to the concept of reification and the necessity of a process geared towards de-reification through revolt. I argue that revolt is already embedded in avant-garde artistic practices through an experimental and questioning approach to artistic practice and the production of meaning. Chapter Two is an analysis of Vera Mantero's solo work, *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings** (1996). This is structured around two identifiable elements, one being the resistance to signification (de-signification), which is argued as a strategy of revolt within the piece. The second is the notion of abjection, which works doubly to aid the resistance to signification as well as working as a strategy of revolt by its implication in the work. Chapter Three analyses Jaco Bouwer's *Untitled* (2008), specifically dealing with the notion of absence as a strategy of revolt and de-reification. The discussion is focused on the potential complication of desire through absence as enacting a larger project of revolt. As in

Chapter Two, this is similarly related to the fragmentation of signs through de-signification which emphasises the strategy of absence.

This thesis concludes with the idea that meaning-making in performance can be considered a process. Instead, the lack or failure of meaning within these selected performance practices enables a return to the individual (performer and spectator) as the agent of desire.

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Introduction and Methodology

This thesis is written from within the discipline of Performance Studies, a field of study, which embraces an inter-disciplinary approach to research. According to Richard Schechner, “Accepting ‘inter’ means opposing the establishment of any single system of knowledge, values, or subject matter.”¹ This inclusively orientated approach destabilizes the idea of one form of knowledge as superior to another. It is within this perspective of an inclusive approach to research that I have drawn from other fields such as philosophy, psychoanalysis and art criticism. Performance studies supports alternative ways of knowing that are based on the experiential. This is in relation to the more practical aspect of reading/engaging with performance as an event or situation and not only as a concept. The experiential aspect of performance is significant for my argument, which entails an investigation of the visual, aural and kinetic elements within the two performances selected. These elements are analysed as signs transmitted through the experiential act/s of performance. My interpretations are also informed by a qualitative engagement with theory, subjective and speculative. This stance is considered in relation to the selective quality of interpretation, as Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson state, “What we take to be positive knowledge is the result of interpretative choices.”²

To address reification and desire is an uneasy, anxious task. It is a process complicated by the already inherent contradictions in writing a response that does not itself enact or perform a process of reification. Timothy Bewes in *Reification, or The Anxiety of late Capitalism*, implies that anxiety accompanies any consciousness of reification.³ Citing Jean-Paul Sartre, Bewes perceives anxiety as distinct from fear. Sartre states, “A situation provokes fear if there is any possibility of my being changed from without; my being provokes anxiety to the extent that I distrust myself and my own

¹ Schechner, R. 2002. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 19

² Bal, M, and Bryson, N. Semiotics and Art History. *The Art Bulletin*. A Quarterly published by The College Art Association. Volume Lxxiii Number 2. June 1991. p. 175

³ Bewes, T. 2002. *Reification, or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism*. London and New York: Verso p. 173

reactions in that situation”.⁴ Anxiety is perceived in Sartre’s view, as a positive aspect within the subject and is related to a freedom from reification. Bewes notes,

Anxiety signifies a superfluity, an excess of individuality, in which the subjective response is far from predetermined by external circumstance; it is thus akin to what Derrida sometimes calls a situation of undecidability – yet the very existence of anxiety is also a testament to the non-deconstructibility of consciousness itself.⁵

This thesis is also an enquiry subject to the anxieties related to reification. That perhaps my choice to focus on reification betrays a nostalgic and idealistic notion of a time before the onset of the consciousness of reification. Yet this anxiety creates a space from which I am able and allowed to interpret. My aim is not to define performance in relation to media society, but to investigate the possibilities for performance to revolt against a process of reification. My interpretative choices are informed by an anxiety with regard to the oppression of desire within spectatorship. This is not an attempt to define desire but to investigate what possibly liberates desire in performance practices restoring it to the spectator. This oppression of desire is considered in terms of a reification of desire.

The focus of Chapter One is to contextualise a frame for the analysis of the two performances. *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, was first performed in 1996, and has been performed as recently as 2010 by the Portuguese choreographer/performer, Vera Mantero. This solo work was commissioned as a tribute to the late Josephine Baker. *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, explores an alternative to predictable forms of representation in the field of choreography. *Untitled*, by South African director Jaco Bouwer was created and performed in 2008 by a cast of eight performers. This performance also suggests a different perspective on the production of meaning within performance. It will be useful for readers of this thesis to view the DVD recording of Mantero’s, *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, and read the script of Bouwer’s, *Untitled*, added as an appendix. This will aid an understanding of the introduction and analysis in relation to the theories of revolt and de-reification, and the multiplicity of

⁴ Bewes, T. 2002. p. 190.

⁵ Bewes, T. 2002. p. 190

concepts that surface throughout the investigation. Since reification is itself a complex topic, this introduction provides an understanding of the concept in relation to philosophies of performance.

Chapter One

Towards an understanding of Revolt and De-reification in the context of Performance

It is a fundamental fact of today's Western societies that all human experiences (life, eroticism, happiness, recognition) are tied to *commodities* or more precisely their consumption and possession (and not a discourse). This corresponds exactly to the civilization of images that can only ever refer to the next image and call up other images. The totality of the spectacle is the 'theatricalization' of all areas of social life.⁶

Revolt is not simply about rejection and destruction; it is also about starting over. Unlike the word violence, revolt foregrounds an element of renewal and regeneration."⁷

The problematic aspect of a "theatricalized" society is the threat to the agency of the performer and spectator, giving little space for the subtlety of individual desire. Throughout this thesis, I argue that revolt through constant enquiry is an alternative to the commodity driven and "theatricalized" experience. I investigate the processes of de-signification in *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, by Vera Mantero and *Untitled*, by Jaco Bouwer. De-signification is here understood as a process by which the meaning/s of particular signs are deconstructed and fragmented in the course of performance. Within the process of de-signification I have highlighted abjection and absence respectively, as strategies which complicate spectator desire and thus enact a project of de-reification through revolt as theorised by Julia Kristeva.

Historically, Georg Lukács used the concept of reification as a socialist critique with regard to the capitalist effect on the object in assembly line production.⁸ It was described as a negative effect of capitalism on human relations. Lukács argued that the worker in capitalist societies was becoming increasingly alienated from the products of

⁶ Lehmann, H. 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre*. (USA and Canada: Routledge.) p. 183

⁷ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Revolt, She said*. (New York: Columbia University Semiotext(e)). p. 123

⁸ Foster, H.1996. *The Return of the Real*. (Cambridge Massachusetts & LondonEngland: Rebel Press.) p. 72

his labour, which in turn caused a rift between man and the rest of society.⁹ In later analyses of advanced capitalism (Theodor Adorno, Hal Foster and Timothy Bewes), reification is connected to a disintegration of communication which can be related to the breakdown and fragmentation of the sign in media saturated contexts. Reification can be described as a practice whereby abstract concepts are thought of as concrete, tangible entities that exist independently of those who actually frame them. Reification refers to the process in which human assets are transformed into things. It is taking an idea for granted and treating it as a given – as a thing. In this thesis I consider reification more specifically in relation to the production of the sign. This is in concurrence with Hal Foster in *The Return of the Real*, in which he notes “Today, in the midst of an advanced capitalism based on serial consumption, we are witness to a further reification and fragmentation - of *the sign*”.¹⁰

Foster, interpreting Ronald Barthes identifies a historical transformation of the sign in relation to the conversion from feudal society to bourgeois society, associating the latter with the sign and the former with the index.¹¹ Whereas the index has a reference and origin, the sign does not; the sign is unlimited in its references, and can be bought and sold.¹² The sign is penetrated by capital and no longer represents its reference in reality, but rather refers to other signs. Much of the experience of contemporary Western societies is to some extent characterised by this saturation of the sign. A sign, can for instance, signify the attainment of happiness through the advertising of a pair of shoes. Not only should we desire the shoes but we should also desire to attain the happiness that may come from possessing these shoes. This example might seem reductive, but it illustrates the reification of desire in a simple manner.

Hans-Thies Lehmann in *Postdramatic Theatre* observes that although used as a medium of communication, the habitual and repetitive use of the sign ironically causes a breakdown in communication. Lehmann states,

⁹ Lukács cited in Pitkin, H. Rethinking Reification. *Theory and Society*. Vol. 16, No. 2 (March, 1987) p. 265

¹⁰ Foster, H.1996. p. 72

¹¹ Barthes, R cited Foster, H.1996. p. 74

¹² Barthes, R. cited Foster, H. 1996. p.74

The basic structure of perception mediated by media is such that there is no experience of a connection among the individual images received but above all no connection between the receiving and sending of signs; there is no experience of a relation between address and answer.¹³

It is through the distance between address and answer that a process of reification can be observed. Although performance in the context of theatre occupies a more or less marginal space within a media saturated world, it is important to consider the position of performance within these structures. The sign used as a means to capital rather than as a means of communication in which individual desires are taken for granted, enables a system of reification. According to Herbert Blau, with the dissolution of any sense of community or unity among individuals, the position and desire of the contemporary spectator is defined by “odd, anonymous needs”¹⁴ Yet, through the gap between sender and receiver, these “odd” and “anonymous” desires and individual differences are often objectified. This is in the process of endorsing an unrealistic ideal of a stable and objective world which cannot be recognised in reality. This passive engagement is two sided and results in predictable forms of representation which take for granted the ambiguity and complexity of individual desire.

In the *Society of the Spectacle* (first published in 1967) Guy Debord observes that society’s relation to self and environment is mediated through the power of the image.¹⁵ Debord refers to the reification of desire, stating; “Spectators do not find what they desire, they desire what they find”.¹⁶ Debord’s quotation implies that spectators are passive recipients and victims of desires that are not their own. It also implies that desire can be pre-determined and regulated. In Debord’s conception of *The Society of the Spectacle*, consumers are educated to live in a world fabricated by others instead of establishing their own version of the world. According to Debord, “The world at once present and absent which the spectacle lets us see is the world of the commodity

¹³ Lehmann, H. 2006. p. 187

¹⁴ Blau, H, in Auslander, P. 2003. “Odd, Anonymous Needs: The audience in a dramatized society”. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 2. p. 275-277

¹⁵ Debord, G. 1992. *The Society of the Spectacle and other films*. (London: Rebel Press.) p. 76

¹⁶ Debord, G. 1992. p.121

dominating everything that is lived.”¹⁷ In *Revolt, She Said*, Kristeva notes for example, how in certain documents of the European Union, people are referred to as patrimonial persons, as owners not only of material things but even of their organs.¹⁸ Not even the body escapes this ‘becoming’ commodity.

In the passage below, Baudrillard observes how representation, in its many forms, has become a substitute for reality in contemporary culture.

It ‘gives you more’. This is already true of colour in film or television: the colour, the sharp resolution, the sex in high fidelity, with bass and treble (true to life) - it gives you so much that you have nothing more to add, which is to say give in exchange. It is totally oppressive: by giving you *a little too much*, everything is taken away from you. Beware of that which is so well ‘rendered’ to you without you having ever given it!¹⁹

The precision and lucidity afforded by the technological advancements in the media place a limitation on individual interpretation by “giving you *a little too much*.”²⁰ Baudrillard highlights the lack of subtlety inherent in this kind of representation. This lack of subtlety can be interpreted as a symptom of reification, for if nothing is hidden or covered up, we are given no opportunity to invest our own interpretation into what we see. Baudrillard describes his theory of ‘simulation’ as the “liquidation of all referentials”²¹. This indicates an absence of reality external to representation which is replaced by the “hyperreal”, described by Baudrillard as a strategy of simulation.²² As audiences of a Disney movie, for example, we (most likely) know or can guess as to what the conclusion will be; an endorsement of the ideal as reality, if not, compensation for the lack of the ideal in reality. Baudrillard argues that hyperreal spaces, like Disney and Monte Casino, compensate for a lack of reality.²³ These signs become substitutes for a reality that has become “hyperreal”.

¹⁷ Debord, G. 1992. p. 73

¹⁸ Kristeva, J. 2002 *Revolt, She Said*. p. 84

¹⁹ Baurillard, J. 1990. *Revenge of the Crystal: Selected writings on the modern object and its destiny, 1968-1983*. (London: Pluto Press.) p.147.

²⁰ Baudrillard, J. 1990. p.147.

²¹ Baudrillard, J. 2001. “Simulacra and Simulations”. *Selected Writings*. (Oxford: Blackwell) p. 170.

²² Baudrillard, J. 2001. p.174.

²³ Baudrillard, J. 2001. p. 174

Both Debord and Baudrillard emphasise the alienated means by which the spectator is placed in a passive position. The preoccupation with the media's power to render the spectator passive, can be related to an anxiety with regards to reification. Debord considers the 'spectacle' as sustaining the growing alienation between man and his products²⁴ and Baudrillard views the effects of the 'hyperreal' as "totally oppressive".²⁵ These theories are significant for my argument which is concerned with the oppression of desire in the context of performance. This reification of desire places a limitation on individual interpretation as one's decisions and even desires are determined by the omnipotence of the sign. This is the focus of this argument.

A connection can be drawn between Julia Kristeva's notion of revolt and the anxiety that characterises reification. In *Revolt, She Said*, Kristeva states,

The events of the twentieth century, however have shown us that political 'revolts' - Revolutions - ultimately betrayed revolt, especially the psychic sense of the term. Why? Because revolt as I understand it - psychic revolt, analytic revolt, artistic revolt - refers to a state of permanent questioning of transformation, change, an endless probing of appearances. The history of political revolts shows that the process of questioning has ceased.²⁶

Kristeva reformulates revolt as a consistent questioning resulting from anxiety. "I work from its etymology, meaning return, returning, discovering, uncovering and renovating".²⁷ Kristeva notes that revolution often ends with the cessation of questioning; she states, "...people find stability in their new values instead of also questioning it."²⁸ Here, much like Sartre has inferred, anxiety is interpreted as a positive reaction within the subject. In Kristeva's discussion on anxiety as essential to revolt she states; "It's a kind of language that accompanies this state of anxiety and that allows the individual to remain both anxious and at the same time harmonized, a language which does not reject or

²⁴ Debord, G. 1992. p. 67.

²⁵ Baudrillard, J. 1990. p. 147

²⁶ Kristeva, J. 2002 *Revolt, She Said*. p. 120

²⁷ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Revolt, She Said*. p. 85

²⁸ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Revolt, She Said*. p. 6

exclude him or her”.²⁹ According to Kristeva the ability to question, discover and rediscover are aspects that are undervalued and undermined by the consumption of the image in contemporary culture. The contemporary consumer is subject to an excess of information, but accumulating information is different to assimilating what one stores. A machine can store huge amounts of information, but what separates the individual from a computer per se is the ability to question the information it receives.³⁰ This questioning itself is what makes revolt a continuous process. Kristeva argues that contemporary culture is experiencing a crisis in the symbolic order.³¹ As a student of Jacques Lacan, Kristeva’s understanding of the term symbolic order, is in relation to language as the system by which society and culture is organised.³² She states “What’s more, television is abolishing this consciousness of nihilation: the mass media imaginary is well on its way to becoming not only the reality of consciousness but the Only Objective Reality”.³³ Kristeva proposes revolt as a way of escaping the numbing power of the image.

Kristeva proposes an intimate revolt.³⁴ She suggests that the only successful attempts at (deep) questioning happen at a personal level, starting with the individual. This intimacy described by Kristeva is made up of the inner representations necessitated by the drives and sensations of the individual, as well as the thinking ego.³⁵ According to Kristeva “The intimate is where we end up when we question apparent meanings and values”.³⁶ Revolt through intimacy enables the individual to sustain an ‘internal vision’.³⁷ Since this process is ongoing, the subject is in a permanent state of self-interrogation. One area in which Kristeva observes the potential for revolt is in the area of artistic practice, which she deems as a far more subtle response than the aggression inherent in political revolution. According to Kristeva, art and literature are the “allies” of psychoanalysis, as they prepare the ground for psychoanalytical interpretation.³⁸ Kristeva

²⁹ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. (New York: Columbia University Press.) p. 6

³⁰ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Revolt, She Said*. p. 101

³¹ Kristeva cited in McAfee, N. *Julia Kristeva*. (UK, USA and Canada: Routledge.) p. 87

³² Grosz, E. 1989. *Sexual Subversions: three French Feminists*. (Australia: Allen and Unwin) p. xxiii

³³ Kristeva, J. 2002 *Intimate Revolt*. p. 173

³⁴ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 125

³⁵ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 43

³⁶ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt* p. 43

³⁷ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 46.

³⁸ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 68

conceives of artists as being able to perform an “experimental psychoses” or “experimental autism” which pushes viewers beyond the limits of their subjectivity.³⁹ She states, “Why is this profitable? Because we have a representation of these states of malaise which we experience individually and that can render us extremely morbid. Through contemporary art we feel recognition...”.⁴⁰ Kristeva considers avant-garde art and literature as an example of this recognition, citing artists such as Jackson Pollock and Pablo Picasso.

If revolt can lead to the intimate (as described by Kristeva) it can challenge the reification of desire and passivity rendered to the spectator. In Kristeva’s conception, the subtle act of questioning leads the individual to an intimate space.⁴¹ She states, “We can posit that the intimate is what is most profound and most singular in the human experience. We can say that the intimate is similar to the life of the mind, that is, the activity of the thinking...”.⁴² Revolt is therefore a constant questioning which initiates a return to the self as the author of desire. As an artistic practice, performance is well suited to a project of revolt. It is through revolt that a process of de-reification becomes possible through its constant questioning of dominant discourses. In this thesis, revolt is specifically related to the transgression of taboos within performance practices. To transgress taboos in performance is a practice of questioning and not merely an attempt to annihilate what is forbidden in the eyes of society. The transgression of taboos reveals the vulnerability of the laws that formulate taboos. Lehmann observes, “Theatre as aesthetic behaviour is unthinkable without the infringement of prescriptions, without transgression.”⁴³ According to Lehmann, through apolitical representations of disconsolatory images that are otherwise rejected as taboo, particular performance practices reflect a political dimension.⁴⁴ This political dimension is revealed precisely by a negation of the classifications of the political through transgression.⁴⁵ The action of negating the political becomes a political move in itself. In this way, revolt in

³⁹ Kristeva, K. 2002. *Revolt, She Said*. p. 115

⁴⁰ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Revolt, She Said*. p. 115

⁴¹ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 46.

⁴² Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 44

⁴³ Lehmann, H. 2006. p. 178

⁴⁴ Lehmann, H. 2006. p. 179 and 186

⁴⁵ Lehmann, H. 2006. p. 179

performance can be a challenge to the reification of desire by instituting a sense of intimacy which is derived from consistent questioning.

Instead of the deceptively comforting duality of here and there, inside and outside, it can move the mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the centre and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception.⁴⁶

Performance responds to the simulated and spectacle orientated character of the media through what Lehmann's identifies as a *politics of perception*.⁴⁷ Lehmann suggests that some performance practices can reveal the constructed-ness of perception and can destabilise and fragment the sign through a transgression of taboos. As is later explored in Bouwer's *Untitled*, this transgression can be applied to a self-reflexive engagement which works to question the logic of theatrical conventions from within. It can also be applied to the disruption of the sign-making process by the presence of abjection which can be seen in Mantero's *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**. Lehmann refers to this *politics of perception* as an *aesthetic of responsibility*.⁴⁸ This perspective applies to the two works that have been chosen for analysis as both these works reveal a sense of aesthetic responsibility towards the production of signs in performance. Revolt becomes significant in relation to the post-colonial contexts of the two works selected for analysis as both Mantero and Bouwer deal quite provocatively with post colonial subjectivity in their work. Mantero's homeland, Portugal was Europe's last colonial empire which only ended in 1974. Bouwer is situated in South Africa, which only recently became a democratic country in 1994, after the Apartheid rule. Both countries are thus still in a process of transformation and development with regard to their colonial histories. These two performances through their respective strategies, offer alternative perspectives on the post-colonial subject in the context of a "theatricalized" society. Both *one mysterious Thing** and *Untitled* are investigated in terms of de-signification or a "resistance to semiotisation" as observed by Isabel Ginot.⁴⁹ This move towards a *politics of perception*

⁴⁶ Lehmann, H. 2006. p 186

⁴⁷ Lehmann, H. 2006. p.185

⁴⁸ Lehmann, H. 2006. p. 185-186

⁴⁹ Ginot, I. "Dis-Identifying: Dancing Bodies and analysing eyes at work: A discussion of Vera Mantero's, *a mysterious thing said e.e Cummings**". *Discourses in Dance*. 2003. Vol. 2. No.1. p.

in performance is concerned with the position of the spectator as an active rather than passive agent. In *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings** the process of de-signification is heightened by the element of feminine abjection. In *Untitled*, this process is made possible through the play of absence within the performance. These processes will be discussed in detail in Chapters Two and Three.

In performance, revolt can be considered in the context of avant-garde artistic practices. Although the avant-garde cannot be reduced to the idea of merely being a movement in art history with a defined approach, its emergence in the early 1900's is connected to an experimental and anti-institutional approach to artistic production. One of the key features of the avant-garde, according to Günter Berghaus, is a reaction to the notion of the artwork as independent from its social context. To sever the gap between art and life.⁵⁰ Foster notes how the historical avant-garde has subsequently been negatively critiqued for its naïve desire to reunite art and life. Foster observes though that for the most discriminating avant-gardist, "The work is to sustain a tension between art and life, not somehow to reconnect the two."⁵¹ The impossibility of art representing or standing in for life is similarly emphasised in the works selected for analysis. This is through a self-reflexive engagement and transgression of conventions within performance practices. In *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings** which was commissioned as a homage to Josephine Baker, this tension can be observed in the play of de-signification in which no clear representation of Baker ever surfaces. In *Untitled* this tension comes across in the set design which conceptually highlights the play of illusions and appearances that are presented in the performance.

Foster also argues that if such a reconnection between art and life has occurred, it has manifest through the culture industry rather than the avant-garde.⁵² The early avant-gardes, who emphasised a resistance towards the art establishment, are now accepted as part of the canon of art history. As Berghaus, referring to Modernism and other early

⁵⁰ Berghaus, G. *Theatre, Performance, And The Historical Avant-Garde*. (New York and Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.) p. 44

⁵¹ Foster, H. 1996. p. 16

⁵² Foster, H. 1996. p. 21

avant-garde movements notes, “Both countercultures succumbed to the institutional embrace and ended up being yoked to the very system they tried to overcome.”⁵³ So, in some ways it may seem as if the avant-garde fails at its attempt to undo institutional notions of art. Yet the avant-garde movements of the 1900’s were aware of the threat of re-instilling instead of opposing the elitism of the academy. Berghaus observes how the early avant-garde movements were aware of the threat of being subsumed within the established order.⁵⁴ For some strains of avant-garde art, for instance Dada, performance was a way to avoid objectifying art and its commodification.⁵⁵ By using the medium of performance, no one could claim ownership of the artwork as it had no material life beyond the performance. Awareness of the eventual reification of their art is reflected in Marinetti’s statement, that Futurism, is a “short-lived affair” which he deemed would be outdone by “younger and stronger men, who will probably throw us into the waste paper bin like useless manuscripts — we want it to happen.”⁵⁶ Berghaus observes similar statements from Alfred Jarry and the Dadaists.⁵⁷

According to Foster, the re-workings of the avant-garde and the assimilation of the avant-garde into the academy have promoted new ways of engaging critically with artistic production and its reception.⁵⁸ Contemporary avant-garde approaches still question and subvert the academy, not to destroy it utterly, as in the attempts of the historical avant-garde, but to reveal and question the conventions and hierarchies upon which the academy or canon is founded. Considered from this position the idea of the avant-garde can be seen as a process which is constantly re-developing and critiquing its discourses. The analyses of *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings** and *Untitled* are framed within contemporary avant-garde approaches. This is in relation to their ambiguous sign making processes and their consistent questioning of orders of perception as an artistic revolt.

⁵³ Berghaus, G. 2005. p. 42

⁵⁴ Berghaus, G. 2005. p. 43

⁵⁵ Berghaus, G. 2005. p. 44

⁵⁶ Berghaus, G. 2005. p. 43

⁵⁷ Berghaus, G. 2005. pp. 43-44

⁵⁸ Foster, H. 1996. p. 21

A significant idea for this argument is Kristeva's notion of the semiotic.¹ In relation to the concept of revolt, the semiotic becomes significant as an aspect which questions hierarchical modes of perception. Kristeva's formulation of the semiotic is understood in relation to Lacan's notion of the symbolic order, which is as Elisabeth Grosz notes, "the law abiding operations of socio-linguistic systems".⁵⁹ It is the paternal function associated with language and the laws constructed by language.⁶⁰ If the symbolic can be described as the 'law of the father', the semiotic could be interpreted as standing outside of this law. Kristeva assigns the work of the semiotic to a space she (appropriating the term from Plato) refers to as the *chora*. "The *chora* is a semiotic, non geometrical space where drive activity is 'primarily' located."⁶¹ The *chora* is representative of the time before the infant has differentiated itself from the maternal, before the child has acquired the use of language; in fact a kind of non-place. The semiotic is pre-symbolic; as Elisabeth Grosz notes, "The semiotic thus precedes all unities, binary oppositional structures and hierarchical forms of organisation".⁶²

Kristeva in agreement with Debord's theories, references the *Society of the Spectacle*. This in relation to Debord's idea that human life is predominantly shaped by fantasy and spectacle.⁶³ She states;

For this is indeed what happens in the society so well described by Guy Debord as a "society of the spectacle". By exhausting representations, being bored in representations, suffocating from its falseness in the ballet of those who govern us (and who trade planes for human rights, for example), by letting himself be invaded by representation, though he knows its strings, modern man comes up against the logic of fantasy.⁶⁴

Kristeva conceives of this as a crisis in the symbolic order. Kristeva attributes this crisis in the symbolic order to the result of an absence or deficiency in relation to the semiotic. Kristeva argues that the semiotic and symbolic work together in the subject, and

⁵⁹ Grosz, E. 1989. *Sexual Subversions: three French Feminists*. (Australia: Allen and Unwin.) p. 42

⁶⁰ Kristeva, J. 1941. *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press.) p. 3.

⁶¹ Kristeva cited in Lechte, J. 1990. *Julia Kristeva*. (London and New York: Routledge)p. 129.

⁶² Grosz, E. 1989. p. 43

⁶³ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 75

⁶⁴ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 75

that a balanced relationship between the two is necessary for the formation of a healthy psyche.⁶⁵ The usurpation of semiotic drives by the “spectacle” leads to the repression of the primal fantasies and drives of the subject. According to Kristeva this results in “phantasmatic poverty”.⁶⁶ This is in relation to the power the infiltration of images exerts on the individual. Working in a prescriptive manner signs become substitutes for desire. It is within this context that Kristeva endorses revolt as the means by which resistance is achieved.

The semiotic can be observed in artistic practices, for instance Kristeva notes that the semiotic can be traced in poetry through hyperbole, as well as in art. She cites Jackson Pollock’s rejection of the symbolic order in his paintings as an example of the semiotic.⁶⁷ In Pollock’s *Blue Poles*, rhythm is emphasised in the painting through its lack of form. Lehmann comments that there is an emergent response in contemporary theatrical practice which is geared towards a “*restitution of chora*”.⁶⁸ This surfacing of a need for *chora* or the semiotic, is not a desire to abolish the symbolic order but rather as Lehmann observes, an attempt to deconstruct the “logos” of the theatrical.⁶⁹ Lehmann suggests, “In this sense, we can say theatre is turned into *chora-graphy*: the deconstruction of a discourse oriented towards meaning and the invention of a space that eludes the laws of telos and unity.”⁷⁰

This desire for a turn to semiotic drives and impulses can be observed in the writings of Antonin Artaud, the French performance theorist who sought a rejection of psychological, literary and didactic theatre. Artaud’s theory for a metaphysical theatre represents in its own way a semiotic desire. Artaud’s criticism of the primacy of the literary text in Western Theatre was not a wish to abolish the text, but the desire for spoken language on stage to transcend language. Artaud asks in the *Theater and Its Double*;

⁶⁵ Kristeva cited in McAfee. N. 2004. *Julia Kristeva*. (UK, USA and Canada: Routledge.)p. 85.

⁶⁶ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 68

⁶⁷ Kristeva cited in Lechte, p. 129

⁶⁸ Lehmann, p. 145

⁶⁹ Lehmann, p. 146

⁷⁰ Lehmann, p. 146

Why is it that in the theatre, at least in the theatre as we know it in Europe, or rather in the West, why is it that everything specifically theatrical, that is, everything that defies expression in speech, in words, or, if you will, everything that is not contained in dialogue (...), is relegated to the background?⁷¹

For Artaud, a metaphysical theatre was only possible if all elements that make up a performance were considered in the creation of a performance. Artaud saw all stage elements as equally important; stage design, lighting, choreography and the position of the spectators in relation to the event being staged. What happened on stage had to affect the spectators on a sensory more than an intellectual level. This emphasis on the sensory experience of the audience is a desire for more semiotic drives and impulses; Artaud states, "...that there is a poetry of the senses as there is poetry of language, and that this physical and concrete language to which I allude is truly theatrical only insofar as the thoughts it expresses transcend spoken language."⁷² The semiotic becomes apparent in Artaud's theory, in the manner in which he uses language to subvert the symbolic order. Kristeva considers Artaud's writing as liberation of desire (*jouissance*)ⁱⁱ within the symbolic order.

I would like to relate the semiotic to the physicality of the performing body, to consider the semiotic in terms of corporeality. Grosz notes how the Western idea of corporeality is considered as a binary to the mind. While the mind is associated with "reason, subject, consciousness, interiority, activity and masculinity, the body is implicitly associated with the opposites of these terms, passion, object, non-conscious, exteriority, passivity and femininity."⁷³ Grosz notes how Kristeva (amongst other feminist writers, like Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous) seeks to recover the notion of the body without these binaries.⁷⁴ According to Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Anna-Sanchez-Coleberg; "Corporeality sees the human body as a body that is personal, social, emotional, animal, mineral, vegetable, sexual, biological and psychological, as well as

⁷¹ Artaud, in Sontag, S (eds). 1976. *The Theater and its Double. Antonin Artaud Selected Writings.* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.) p. 231

⁷² Artaud, in Sontag, S (eds). 1976. p. 231

⁷³ Grosz, E. p. xiv

⁷⁴ Grosz, p. xv

agent of motion...”⁷⁵ Corporeality takes into account the many facets that make up the performer’s being on stage. The semiotic becomes relevant to corporeality as it highlights the physical intelligence of the body without the organisation of language. It emphasises desires that are not informed by the advent of the symbolic order.⁷⁶

In performance which uses the physical intelligence of the performer to make art, corporeality is emphasised by the body. In the experiential activity of performance, a different kind of knowledge surfaces, a kind of knowing that cannot be clearly transmitted through analysis or description. This is the intelligence of the body without the rules of language, an idea which is emphasised in both works chosen for analysis. The semiotic can be alluded to through the poetic use of language as in the case of Artaud, as well as through the body. The idea of corporeality is similar to the semiotic as a kind of knowing that exists outside the domain of rational discourses. In this way the semiotic can be seen as a means for revolt.

An example which aids an understanding of semiotic impulses as revolt is the Japanese avant-garde dance form Butoh. Ankoku Butoh which was instigated by Tatsumi Hijikata, is referred to as the “dance of darkness”.ⁱⁱⁱ In his thesis Vincent Truter discusses how in Ankoku Butoh, Hijikata endeavoured to evoke the immediacy of the body. The body is not used to communicate aesthetically or through meaning, but as “a defiant entity that owns its own abilities to generate meaning”.⁷⁷ Ankoku Butoh revolts against codification of the body in technique, as can be seen in *Kinjiki*.^{iv} In *Kinjiki*, the minimal movements and the condensed energy with which they were performed, together with the homosexual subject matter were a resistance to any previous conventional ways of dealing with the moving body.⁷⁸ According to Truter, “*Kinjiki* broke all established dance conventions in order to create a dance in which the subject does not express himself – or

⁷⁵ Preston-Dunlop, V, and Sanchez-Coleberg. 2002. *Dance and the Performative*. (London: Verve Publishing.) p. 9

⁷⁶ Grosz, E. 1989. p 43

⁷⁷ Truter O, V. *The originating impulses of Ankoku Butoh: Towards an understanding of the trans-cultural embodiment of Tatsumi Hijikata’s dance of darkness*. Half thesis: Rhodes University, Grahamstown. December 2007. p. 34

⁷⁸ Truter, O.V. p. 36

herself through the body, but where the body itself is the expression.”⁷⁹ I would like to argue that the silencing of the social being in Butoh and the “return to an originating impulse”⁸⁰ embodies a resistance to representation. Although the rejection of technique eventually assumes its own techniques such as the silencing of the body, the point of interest is the desire for *chora*. The body of the Butoh dancer/performer becomes an expression of the semiotic, in which the social body of the performer with its inhibitions and reliance on language is silenced. The body becomes a body in revolt; Truter states, “The Ankoku Butoh body is sentient and stubborn in its defiance of codification and as such can only be left to its own devices, outside of rational thought.”⁸¹

It is significant to note that any presentation of the semiotic in art will go through some regulation of the symbolic order, as this is primarily the function of the symbolic.⁸² For instance, although Artaud sought to challenge the primacy of the text in theatre, he does this through language, but a language which invokes the semiotic. What is produced in art, cannot be the semiotic, but it can reflect the workings of the semiotic. In Chapter Two, Vera Mantero’s *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings* is cited as a work enacting a process that reflects the workings of the semiotic, through its rejection of representation and a logic of questioning the symbolic order. The analysis of *Untitled* which is mainly focused on the failure of symbolic systems to articulate subjectivity arouses those spaces which elude representation: the semiotic.

Through a discussion of the avant-garde and the interface between the notions of the semiotic and corporeality, I have outlined how the semiotic can be conceptually useful for performance analysis, specifically performance that is inclined towards an avant-garde approach. *Untitled* and *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, both reveal avant-garde tendencies in the way they have been presented. Both question processes which constitute the production of meaning and the representation of signs on stage. *Untitled*, is analysed as enacting a strategy of absence, which is made possible by

⁷⁹ Truter, O.V. p. 37

⁸⁰ Truter, O.V. p. 101

⁸¹ Truter, O, V. p. 101

⁸² Kristeva cited in Lechte, J. 1990. p.129

the lack of narrative coherence in the structure of the performance. *One mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, is analysed as a performance which enacts a strategy of abjection, specifically related to feminine abjection within the symbolic order.

In this chapter I have outlined some frameworks for the analysis of these two works. With an anxious and critical stance towards reification, I have focused on the possibilities of revolt in performance to enact a strategy of de-reification. The main point of interest is the attempt made in the selected works to release the viewer from a passive position of spectatorship, yet at the same time to suggest alternative 'readings' of performance, through the analysis which is geared towards a strategy of revolt. Therefore a questioning stance towards representation in performance is significant in terms of the framing of the two selected performances. The kind of revolt that takes place in these two performances is an aesthetic revolt which can possibly institute a reciprocal proposition within its spectators. As Lehmann states, "Such an experience would be not only aesthetic but therein at the same time ethico-political."⁸³

⁸³ Lehmann, p. 186

Chapter Two

Revolt and Abjection in Vera Mantero's *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**

The telling moment in an individual's psychic life, as in the life of societies at large, is when you call into question laws, norms and values. Because its precisely by putting things into question that 'values' stop being frozen dividends and acquire a sense of mobility, polyvalence and life.⁸⁴

Chapter Two investigates the possibilities of de-reification and revolt through the implementation of the abject in Vera Mantero's *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings** (1996), which I will refer to as *omT**. The analysis focuses on the process of de-signification as played out in the performance which is made possible through the force of abjection, specifically the presentation of feminine abjection within the symbolic order. According to Ginot, *omT**, "although apparently invaded or covered by signifiers, resists signification, ...".⁸⁵ In this way, Mantero's piece invites as well as resists analysis as she constructs an ambiguous relationship with the play of signification. In the opening quotation Kristeva highlights the ability to question as a significant process, a kind of continuous enquiry, which is never quite resolved. Revolt, in this sense, is the need to question insistently and continuously. Instead of instituting a sense of closure or finality in relation to the analysis, I would like to consider *omT** as a performance which highlights a process of insistent questioning. In this way I hope to place more emphasis on the idea of meaning-making as a process. Mantero proposes that human existence;

...needs to read the world. It needs to read the world continuously. Probably not to understand, to explain something, to close a topic definitely, but simply to situate itself at a certain point, (...) to have a point where it can be, among the millions of points possible. Art is thinking, it is reading the world.⁸⁶

According to Isabelle Ginot in her discussion of *omT**, Mantero's play on signification serves to destabilize the power operations involved in assigning meaning to

⁸⁴ Kristeva, J. 2002 *Revolt, She Said*. p.12

⁸⁵ Ginot, I. Dis-Identifying: Dancing Bodies and analyzing eyes at work: A discussion of Vera Mantero's *a mysterious Thing said e.e cummings*.(*Discourses in Dance*. 2003. Vol.2. No.1.pp. 23-34.) p. 29

⁸⁶ Ploebst, H. 2001. *No Wind No Word*. (Munchen: Kieser). pp. 49 and 52

dance works.⁸⁷ Mantero highlights the moments of arrest, moments where meaning struggles and fails. In the previous chapter, the notion of revolt is discussed as a possible process in performance which is oriented towards a more avant-garde approach. In relation to *omT** this is investigated as a process engaged with the questioning of dominant ideologies, both within the discipline of choreography and performance as well as its position within the broader implication of postcolonial subjectivity. I would like to suggest that this questioning attitude adopted by Mantero in *omT**, enacts this revolt as proposed by Kristeva. Here revolt is understood as a continuous process of enquiry, interrogation and re-interrogation. As Kristeva states; “Because revolt as I understand it - psychic revolt, analytic revolt, artistic revolt - refers to a state of permanent questioning of transformation, change, an endless probing of appearances.”⁸⁸ I have analysed *omT**, in relation to its questioning stance towards representation and interpreted this revolt as provoking a process of de-reification.

The solo work, *omT**, was commissioned for the Theatre Culturgest in Lisbon as a homage to Josephine Baker. My interpretation of Mantero’s solo work has been informed by a qualitative engagement with articles written on the performance, programme notes to the performance and a DVD copy of the performance. The description, which follows, has been derived from the DVD footage of *omT**.

A spotlight slowly reveals the body of the performer in a twenty-minute fade in. Her white face is covered by make-up typically worn by performers in vaudeville acts. From the neck down her body is painted in a brown/black iridescent paint up to her hands which, like her face, have been left white. As the light builds Mantero starts the murmur that will become more discernable as she continues; a string of words focused on repetition and emptiness; “A sorrow, an impossibility, Atrocious, Atrocious... .”⁸⁹ Mantero remains in this spotlight for the entire piece, swaggering and swaying on top of what will eventually be revealed as a pair of clogs shaped like goat hooves. She simultaneously performs a gestural sequence with her arms and hands. The effort of her

⁸⁷ Ginot, I. 2003. p. 31.

⁸⁸ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Revolt, She said*. p. 120

⁸⁹ Programme notes by Vera Mantero for *a mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**. (Appendix A)

performance becomes apparent in the sweat that reveals her white skin as she strains to balance on the goat hooves and remain upright. The strain caused by the balancing act, together with her poetic chant and the movement of the arms results in a growing tension, which eventually ends the piece as unceremoniously as it started.

Mantero is a classically trained dancer who choreographed and performed at the Ballet Gulbenkian, a modern dance company in Lisbon, for five years. She furthered her training in New York with release techniques such as contact improvisation, composition and vocal training.⁹⁰ This experience widened her approach to performance. Mantero sees more benefit in a trained total performer than a specialised artist (a dancer, singer or actor). She writes; “I’m not a dancer, I want to do whatever I feel like doing, I want to do whatever is necessary to do. It’s not obvious to make dances in terms of theatrical, composed dance”.⁹¹ Her approach to choreography can be seen in the context of the contemporary European dance scene within the broader context of society and art.⁹² André Lepecki refers to this shift in the European dance scene as the, “...move of dance from a theatrical paradigm to a performance paradigm...”⁹³ According to Lepecki within this development, importance is given to the experimental tradition of performance art from the 1960’s and 1970’s, as well as the fields of Minimalism and Conceptual art.⁹⁴ The effect of these influences on European choreography has shaped a “trans-disciplinary”⁹⁵ approach to dance making.

Central to the European dance scene is the instability of the term “dance” and its position within society. Lepecki defines the traits of this “trans-disciplinary” approach in the European dance scene as: a suspicion of representation and virtuosity, a reduction of unnecessary elements within performance, an insistence on the presence of the performer, and engagement in a discourse with the visual arts and performance theory.⁹⁶ As Lepecki

⁹⁰ Werner, F. *Unruly Bodies. Dance Theatre Journal*. Vol 14. No. 3.(1998). p.21

⁹¹ Ploebst, H. 2001. p. 54

⁹² Lepecki, A, in Carter, A. 2004. *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader. Concept and Presence: The Contemporary European Dance Scene*. Routledge. p. 171

⁹³ Lepecki, A in Carter, A. 2004. p. 172

⁹⁴ Lepecki in Carter, A. 2004. p. 171

⁹⁵ Lepecki in Carter, A 2004. p. 172

⁹⁶ Lepecki in Carter. A. 2004. p. 173

notes; “The most important element behind all these aspects would be an absolute lack of interest in defining whether the work falls within the ontological, formal or ideological parameters of something called, or recognized as, ‘dance’.”⁹⁷ These ideas, highlighted by Lepecki, reveal the questioning attitude that is prevalent within the European dance scene and which is also relevant to Mantero’s work.

Traditionally, dance enters economy by escaping its ephemerality through an investment and reliance on precise techniques defined also as signature of a choreographer’s personal style. This practice generates both a system of recognition (...) and of reproduction (...).⁹⁸

By denying elements such as technique and questioning the authorial presence of the choreographer, these works also challenge the saleability of the dance object (the performance). A trait of Mantero’s is the resistance to a spectacular treatment of the body, which is coupled with a denial of the virtuosic display of the body in dance. Her unspectacular display of the body also underscores a broader concern of this chapter with the status of the performance object (the performance itself) within the network of a “spectacle” orientated society. Since there can be no consensus as to what Mantero is trying to tell us through the piece, it cannot sell us a fixed idea. Therefore the performance can potentially relocate the desire of the subject instead of reifying it. The work is released from the commodity form as a consumable product by its ambiguous relationship with signification. The fragmentation of signs in the performance creates a more viable space in which desire can be complicated and disturbed.

Lepecki formulates choreography as an apparatus of capture that subjects dance’s relationship to perception and signification.⁹⁹ Dance is thus organized around the apparatus of choreography, and is understood through this mechanism.¹⁰⁰ Mantero’s trans-disciplinary approach to choreography and her resistance to clear signification can be interpreted as a revolt against the authoritarian power of choreographic apparatus. This

⁹⁷ Lepecki in Carter, A. 2004. p. 173

⁹⁸ Lepecki in Carter, A. 2004. p. 177

⁹⁹ Lepecki, A. Choreography as Apparatus of Capture. *The Drama Review*. Vol. 52. No. 2. (Summer, 2007) p. 120.

¹⁰⁰ Lepecki, A. 2007. p.120

kind of revolt is not characterised by an attempt to destroy the choreographic, but rather a subtle interaction with what Lehmann has referred to as the “politics of perception”.¹⁰¹ This subtlety can be understood in relation to what Lepecki refers to as a “reduction of the unessential”, in contemporary European dance performance. By doing what seems to be very little on stage, she reveals a lot: about the unstable status of the contemporary dance object, as well as the subjectivity of the post colonial subject with reference to its colonial past. Mantero enacts many subtle revolts as she performs the piece. This can be seen in her rejection of the spectacular in her homage to Baker, the consideration of the ethical implications of representing the distant and colonial other as well as the presence of feminine abjection.

Josephine Baker was a “not-so-black” singer, actress and dancer in the early nineteenth hundreds. She was originally from America, but was more successful as a performer in a European context especially in Paris. In 1920’s Paris, a phenomenon known as negrophilia, which is the process of fetishizing and exoticising black individuals, emerged.¹⁰² Baker is said to have captured the sexual imagination of Parisians in a way few others did. Dalton and Gates describe her dancing in the *danse sauvage* saying, “She appeared to be part animal (...) and part human. Her movements are just as astonishing: shaking, shimmying, writhing like a snake, contorting her torso, all the while emitting high-pitched noises”.¹⁰³ This was a platform of subversion for Baker, for although Baker played the role of simple savage on stage, in her personal life she revealed a very different side to her onstage characters. Baker was a human rights activist, she was part of the French resistance to the war, and was the first woman in France to be buried with military honours.¹⁰⁴ It could be said that Baker played the African “savage” in an opportunistic manner. The irony becomes apparent when her insistence on equality is juxtaposed with her performances in which she embodies the other and reveals the racist constructions that are inherent in negrophiliac views.

¹⁰¹ Lehmann, H. 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Trans: USA and Canada: Routledge. p. 185

¹⁰² Dalton, K and Gates, H. “Josephine Baker and Paul Colin: African American Dance Seen through Parisian eyes”. *Critical Enquiry*. Vol.42. No. 4. (Summer, 1998). p. 903.

¹⁰³ Dalton, K and Gates, H. p.914

¹⁰⁴ Dudziak, M. “Josephine Baker, Racial Protest and the Cold War.” *The Journal of American History*. Vol. 81. No. 2, (Sep.,1994) p. 548.

Baker's political stance and her insistence on equality eventually led her to being blacklisted from the international entertainment circuit as well as making her a political exile. As M. Dudziak notes; "Excluding her voice would make it easier to maintain a carefully crafted image of American democracy."¹⁰⁵ In this way Baker's voice as a human rights activist who sought equality was disempowered and silenced. Baker is ironically celebrated as an object of desire for her difference in France and is exiled and considered a political threat for it in America. Both views perpetuate a stereotypical perception of the colonial subject, in this instance, the othering of Josephine Baker. Lepecki observes that in her films Baker plays an African, not an African-American.¹⁰⁶ In *omT** Mantero's refusal to represent Baker sets off a process of de-reification in which the memory of Baker is not objectified, is not made into a mere thing. Mantero eludes reification in two ways; one is achieved through a political sensitivity to the implications of colonialism and the other is through a corporeal investment in the body.

In *Reification or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism* Timothy Bewes observes that the idea of reification can be linked to the colonialist project of objectifying the colonial other.¹⁰⁷ In Baker's case this is significant as the performer probably exemplified the idea of the *primitif* in the eyes of Western audiences she performed to in Paris in the 1920's and 30's. According to Brett Berliner as cited in Lepecki, in the French vernacular a distinction was made between the way *sauvage* and *primitif* were used. The term *sauvage* referred to black Africans while *primitif* referred to African Americans. *Primitif* people were regarded as having a capacity for civilisation, and were celebrated more so than their African counterparts.¹⁰⁸ Baker would have been perceived as *primitif* and this is part of the reason that she was so popular amongst French audiences. According to Dalton and Gates, after Baker's performance of the *danse sauvage* in the *Le Revue Nègre*, "words like *lubricity, instinct, primitive life-force, savage, exotic, bestiality*, and that

¹⁰⁵ Dudziak, M. 1994. p. 570

¹⁰⁶ Lepecki, A. 2006. *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. (New York: Routledge.) p. 121

¹⁰⁷ Timothy Bewes. 2002. *Reification, or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism*. London and New York: Verso. p.15

¹⁰⁸ Berliner cited in Lepecki, A. 2006. 112

particularly loaded word *degenerate*, raced through the capital.”¹⁰⁹ It is possible that Baker’s performances were appreciated mainly by the idea of her as a sexualised and exoticised representation as the body of the ‘other’. In the context of Paris in the early 1900’s the image of Baker’s body was in many ways treated as a ‘Thing’, which created a reified notion of her body as a representative for the ‘other’.

Mantero researched Baker extensively and formed *omT** as a response to the rather problematic project of representing this historical “other”. André Lepecki observes the inherent ethical problematics of a white European woman representing an African-American woman.¹¹⁰ This ethical question is complicated by Mantero’s own history; her homeland, Portugal, was Europe’s last colonial Empire ending only in 1974. Mantero is thus a product of post-colonial Portugal, and at odds with a consumerist society, which is apathetic in relation to its colonial and fascist history.¹¹¹ Mantero, through an anti-theatrical approach, does not attempt to capture Baker. Instead, the signs that do allude to the late Baker are deconstructed as they are performed. In this way, she avoids the ethical trap of subjecting Baker (her memory) one more time, to a mostly white, European gaze.

Lepecki argues that Mantero avoids sparking a ‘*postcolonialist melancholia*’, borrowing and extending the term derived from Brett Berliner’s ‘twentieth century colonialist melancholia’.¹¹² Drawing from Freudian theory, melancholia is, simply stated, the grief and trauma that accompanies loss. This loss can be in the form of a loved one or “the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of (a loved person), such as a fatherland, liberty, an ideal, and so on.”¹¹³ *Postcolonialist melancholia* is a process by which the grievance or protest of the colonised is mistakenly interpreted as a representation of the colonisers’ own loss.¹¹⁴ As Lepecki explains;

¹⁰⁹Dalton, K and Gates, H. “Josephine Baker and Paul Colin: African American Dance Seen through Parisian eyes.” *Critical Enquiry*. Vol.42. No. 4. (Summer, 1998). p. 915

¹¹⁰ Lepecki, A. 2006. p. 111.

¹¹¹ Werner, F. “Unruly bodies.” *Dance Theatre Journal*. Vol. 14. No. 3 1998. p. 21.

¹¹² Lepecki, A. 2006. p. 107

¹¹³ Lepecki, A. 2006.p. 110

¹¹⁴ Lepecki, A. 2006. p. 126

The European's incapacity to overcome colonial loss creates a psychic topography that turns Europe into a space where specific kinds of (non)encountering take place. The lament of the colonized singing, dancing, or performing the loss of her homeland finds an odd, affective, unexpected reverberation in the colonizer's own (antithetical, racist, angry) sense of loss.¹¹⁵

In this way *Postcolonialist melancholia* can be described as a phenomenon whereby the coloniser mourns the loss of power once held over the colonised. It is thus a complicit and amnesiac response to colonialism in which the viewer is guarded from interrogating his/her own collusion within systems of colonialism. In *omT**, Mantero is able to challenge this melancholia and forgetfulness assumed towards the colonial 'other'. In the process of investigating Josephine Baker, she also investigates herself and her society. In the process of creating the performance, she does not take for granted her own country's quite recent historical involvement in the process of colonisation, and treats this as an ethical responsibility. Through this investigation she enacts a revolt, which is not self-indulgent or overly sentimental with regard to colonialism.

In *omT**, Mantero is able to pay homage to the corporeality of the late Baker as well as acknowledging her own. Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Anna Sanchez-Coleberg describe corporeality in contrast to the reified body.¹¹⁶ The notion of the body as reified could be described as the denial of the subjectivity of the performer. Sanchez-Coleberg and Preston-Dunlop use the example of the ballerina, who may possibly be constrained to hierarchical social structures, in that she learns her steps and performs them without questioning her own subjectivity in the creative process.¹¹⁷ She may be denied any creative response to her movements. Baker's corporeality is emphasized by its absence within the piece. There is no overt representation of Baker, and those signs that do point to the late celebrity are destroyed through the process of de-signification as the piece continues. Mantero's subjectivity is emphasized, by her whiteness, indeed her otherness to Josephine Baker. She makes this obvious with the iridescent brown paint, which melts

¹¹⁵ Lepecki, A. 2006. p. 112

¹¹⁶ Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Anna Sanchez-Coleberg. 2002. *Dance and the Performative*. London: Verve Publishing p. 10.

¹¹⁷ Preston-Dunlop, V and Sanchez-Coleberg, A. 2002. p. 10.

as she performs revealing her whiteness beneath the paint. In this way, by not attempting to represent Baker, Mantero emphasises both her own subjectivity and Baker's.

In the title, the word *Thing* receives the most attention as the only word printed in capital among the other smaller words. Reification is a process, which transforms abstract concepts and even whole nations into “things”. The notion of Baker as a ‘Thing’ and the idea that she can be represented is counteracted by Mantero’s refusal to represent her. Interestingly, in her programme notes to *omT**, Mantero writes; “It is one thing that I would like to find or create: a vast territory in which richness of spirit prevails.”¹¹⁸ (It is significant to note that there is no mention of Baker in the programme notes except for a small part explaining the origins of the quote.) The title references a quotation made by the poet E.E Cummings concerning Josephine Baker, in which he evokes Baker as; “...a mysterious unkillable Something, equally non primitive and uncivilized or beyond time in the sense that emotion is beyond arithmetic”.¹¹⁹ Through the programme notes, the idea of Baker is signified both as ‘spirit’ as well as a ‘thing’. Working in an ironic way the title’s acknowledgement of Baker as a ‘Thing’ is also able to break down this idea. The title of the piece does not even contain an exact quote, but rather an ironic and elliptical allusion to two words, one of which is altered, from a description of Baker by the poet E.E. Cummings. What is significant is the reference to spirit in association with Josephine Baker, as well as the notion of her as a “Thing”. Her construction in the title as a “Thing” is broken down and reveals the lack or failure inherent in representation to express the spirit of this particular ‘other’. From the start, the process of de-reification starts to assume itself through the deconstructive tool of de-signification. Whoever the late Baker was in life cannot be found in the programme notes, the title or the performance. The subjectivity of Baker as an individual, rather than a thing, is made possible by not representing her in any clear way.

¹¹⁸ Programme notes for *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings*.

¹¹⁹ Cummings cited in Dalton and Gates. p. 917.

Mantero is able to achieve de-signification, or a 'resistance to semiotisation',¹²⁰ through her staging of the piece; in her use of space, light, design, costume, sound and movement. The ambiguity in the title mobilises the process of de-signification; even though E.E Cummings is referenced, he is not the subject of her performance. It is important to note that E.E. Cummings was a modernist poet who explored syntax in an unconventional way, often fusing individual words to create sentences. His work often disregards punctuation and typographical conventions.¹²¹ The structural aspects of his poetry can be considered as an attack on conventional forms of poetry, which make the reference to him quite significant, as his poetry is a questioning of language through deconstruction and fragmentation. In the alteration of his words in the reference to his description of her, Mantero perhaps implies that his revolt did not go far enough.

The performance avoids sustaining any narrative structures that are set up during the performance, such as the narratives of and around Baker, or that of E.E Cummings. The elements are not set up as in the well-made play, with a beginning, middle or grand finale. Her approach is anti-theatrical as there is no cathartic moment in which the audience is encouraged to empathise with the performer. Mantero, instead, makes it difficult to identify with her; she is darkly lit, she stays in one place, her movements block space instead of opening out into it. The vocal score is not a narrative device in the piece, and those elements which do set up a narrative are broken down again by the process of de-signification. Féral observes that the absence of narrative is also a way to highlight the limits of representation. Féral notes

The absence of narrativity (continuous narrativity, that is) is one of the dominant characteristics of performance ... This absence leads to a certain frustration on the part of the spectator, when he is confronted with performance which takes him away from the experience of theatricality. For there is nothing to say about performance, nothing to tell yourself, nothing to grasp, project, introject, except for flows, networks, and systems. Everything appears and disappears like a galaxy of 'transitional objects' representing only the failures of representation.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ginot, I. 2003. p. 27

¹²¹ Ray, D. The Irony of E.E Cummings. *College English*. Vol. 23. No. 4. (Jan, 1962). p. 290

¹²² Féral, J, in Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. p. 215

Mantero's use of her own voice as sound score is a vital element within the network of de-signification. As Ginot observes, the words Mantero recites lack syntax,¹²³ yet there is an order in the rhythmic structure of the words arranged around the repetition of phrases; "Atrocious, atrocious", and "a sadness, an unwillingness".¹²⁴ The unemotional tone in which Mantero recites the text can be seen as another way she avoids sparking a "post colonial melancholia". By not personally involving herself in an emotional evocation of Baker, she defers the focus of herself as victim back to Baker, as a victim of colonialism. In *omT** the dancer's voice emerges where it is usually silenced in the classical tradition Mantero was trained in. This recitation can be seen as an accumulation of movement via the voice. Lepecki suggests that Mantero's use of text as a device in her work can be seen as a "re-organization of the sensorial: one can only see her dance once one decides to listen to it".¹²⁵ The voice, as an instrument for movement, can be seen as a way to challenge the conventional way in which an audience perceives dance and choreography as an art form. In a conventional way, choreography privileges the eye; dance is mainly appreciated by seeing it. In *omT** the eye is less privileged. This is made possible through the use of poetry as movement, but also through Mantero's approach to space.

Mantero's use of space is restricted to one area on stage; the centre, which is delineated by a spotlight while the rest of the stage space is imperceptible to the viewer. In this way, light destroys sculptural qualities and perspective on stage. Light also splits the body of the performer; at first revealing only the face of the performer, and eventually the whole body. The minimal use of light both emphasizes her presence on stage and also dwarfs her. The darkened stage also makes it difficult to correctly read the visual clues on stage. As Ginot states, "The actuality of what can be seen, let alone how it could be interpreted, is uncertain."¹²⁶ The absence of perspective in the design, aided by the use of one spotlight, creates a space which is ambiguous. The use of perspective can be seen as a way to frame the world around us in a mathematical and technical way. In an image

¹²³ Ginot, I. 2003. p. 28.

¹²⁴ Programme notes by Vera Mantero for *one mysterious Thing said e.e Cummings**. (1996.)

¹²⁵ Lepecki, A. "The Dancing Book." A Portrait of the Portuguese choreographer Vera Mantero. First Published in *Ballet-Tanz*. (March 1999.) p. 2.

¹²⁶ Ginot, I. 2003. p. 28

perspective is created when all points eventually converge in accordance with their points of origin. An image which obeys the technical laws of perspective can therefore be seen as a more or less adequate rendering of reality. The absence of perspective and the lighting design are not an attempt to create a fictional world for the character of Baker, but rather reveal the constructed-ness of representation.

This is also extended into the physical use of space by the performer. The only choreographed movement is performed with the arms, which are mostly focused within the kinesphere. When the arms do extend, the movement ends abruptly through the rhythmic dynamic of impact. These two factors confine the space instead of opening out into it.¹²⁷ The movement is directed toward the self, and destroys its efficacy in communicating meaning to the audience. This is emphasized through the staggering effect of balancing on the goat-clogs. Every time the dancer attempts to extend movements the strain of balancing becomes harder. As Ginot observes, Mantero's focus also disturbs the visual field by a peripheral use of eye contact.¹²⁸ As her eyes move from the audience to other areas in the space, they serve as another approach to dissolve the space. Her use of space on a micro and macro level is a formal rejection of space.^v The rejection of space on stage, enabled by the minimal lighting design and reductive use of space, could be read as a questioning of the (reified) conventional expectations of the dancer's body and the role of dance in the broader context of artistic production. Mantero's minimal and reductive use of space on stage challenges the expectations of dance as something that interacts with and moves in space. Any sculptural effects are denied by her full-frontal position throughout the performance.

Mantero creates a space that resists merely entertaining her audience in the traditional sense, as we are not really given the opportunity to engage with her body as we normally would with a dancer's body. Professor Ashraf Jamal referred to Kurt Cobain's lyrics, "Here we are now, entertain us"¹²⁹ as a metaphor for what is happening

¹²⁷ Ginot, I. p. 28.

¹²⁸ Ginot, I. p. 28-29.

¹²⁹ Cobain, K. Lyrics to Smells like Teen Spirit. 1991

in Mantero's performance.¹³⁰ Mantero frustrates the expectations of her spectators by her decision to remain in one space. Her performance is unusual in a contemporary context, in which the distractions afforded us by the media are a part of daily life. As Hans Lehmann notes in *Postdramatic Theatre*, "The totality of the spectacle is the 'theatricalization' of all areas of social life."¹³¹ As much as we may want something to happen on stage, to be distracted and entertained by the moving body, Mantero resists this amnesiac response to her subject matter. Her anti-theatrical approach to the commission forces the spectator to engage with the work in a different way. Lehmann notes that Postdramatic theatre opposes the spectacle of the theatrical,

It becomes 'calm' and 'static', offering images without reference and handing over the domain of the dramatic to the images of violence and conflict in the media, unless it incorporates these in order to parody them.¹³²

Mantero's decision to remain in one space is made problematic by the goat clogs she wears (they keep her on *demi-pointe*). The goat clogs keep her in a constant process of maintaining her balance. This also affects the quality of her gestures and stance. Mantero's pelvis is pushed forward, while her torso is pulled backward. There is a definite split in the body between the upper and lower halves:¹³³ the former in the process of performing a language, and the latter as part of the function that helps break that semblance of meaning in the piece. Viewers are not given a virtuosic display of the body, yet the balancing act which is sustained for twenty-minutes reveals the strength of the classically trained dancer. Through the non-dance emerges another kind of 'dance', which can be seen between the seesaw effect of her shifting centre in order to remain standing, the words she utters, and the phrase she performs with her arms.

Mantero's movement is in dialogue with notions of the semiotic as theorised by Kristeva. In Chapter 1, I argue that the semiotic space is an aspect of avant-garde tendencies in order to question the symbolic order. As Auslander notes, with regard to the

¹³⁰ Jamal, A. At the Sewsa Conference. Feedback on the essay: *Revolt and Abjection in one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings** Grahamstown, July. 2009

¹³¹ Lehmann, H. 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre*. Trans: USA and Canada: Routledge. p. 183

¹³² Lehmann, H. p. 184

¹³³ Ginot, I. 2003. p. 29.

semiotic; “The infiltration of the semiotic within language is the return of the linguistically repressed.”¹³⁴ The semiotic infiltrates the movement of the performer in *omT**. The semiotic, existing outside the symbolic domain of speech and thought also applies to the experiential knowledge that is manifest through the physicality of the performer. This knowledge, which cannot be accurately described in a logical fashion, denotes the workings of the semiotic. To speak of the semiotic is an illogical exercise, since theorizing it is to place it within the realm of the symbolic, however as has been pointed out, the semiotic works with the symbolic order. The image of Mantero swaggering on top of the goat hooves reveals the dependence of the symbolic order on the pre-discursive workings of the semiotic and *vice versa*. The gestures performed with the arms and hands seem to signify a desire to communicate or signify that is constantly undermined by the balancing act.

During the performance, Mantero draws attention to an area in the centre of her body by placing three fingers in a loosely triangular shape. Ginot has described this as a non-space in the body, “... a place surrounded by signification and left out of signification right in the centre of the body”.¹³⁵ The centre operates as the point of gravity within the body, which aids Mantero in performing the balancing act with the clogs. Although equilibrium is maintained through the motor functions of the brain, it is not a voluntary gesture; it is not usually a conscious process on behalf of the individual. The balancing act thus implies the physical intelligence of the body without the dominance of language. In *omT** the symbolic is dominated by the semiotic, and the ‘non-place’ Mantero points to in the piece is an indication of this.

Another aspect which is also related to the semiotic is the rhythm which arises organically from the effort to defy gravity and remain upright in the goat-clogs. The rhythm centred in the lower half of Mantero’s body could be called a semiotic rhythm. To make an illustrative comparison, Kristeva regards the non-symbolic space and rhythmical

¹³⁴ Auslander, P. 2008. *Theory for Performance Studies: A Student’s guide*. (London and New York: Routledge) p. 113.

¹³⁵ Ginot, I. p. 29.

elements of Pollock's paintings as 'semiotic'.¹³⁶ In the painting, *Blue Poles*, for instance, the artist has rejected a geometrical composition in favour of the rhythmical elements introduced by colour. This gives the painting its sense of movement. The lack of form in the painting can be interpreted as Pollock's attack on the symbolic order through his rejection of the representational mode. Mantero rejects representation by her decision to stand in the goat-clogs in the same spot leaving it to her sense of balance and effort to create the rhythm of the piece. In this way rhythm is choreographed in an organic way, by the effort to stay balanced. This also destabilises the gestural phrases performed with the arms and hands.

Discussing the absence of signification becomes a paradoxical exercise, since as part of the realm of language, one cannot help but signify. *omT** is an interrogation of the realm of language and images. Mantero desublimates^{vi} her representation of Baker in a way that Baker is no longer discernable in the piece. Yet Mantero herself is also not the focus of the piece. Neither figure can be contained or represented in the performance due to the breakdown of signification enabled by the semiotic processes. Although many ideas are raised through the process of de-signification, none are highlighted as a main theme. Except, perhaps the questioning of the symbolic order as an avant-garde process, which can be interpreted as recurring throughout the piece. The semiotic becomes the driving rhythmical force in this piece; an element that helps complicate the process of assimilation. This is not to say that Mantero represents the semiotic, because it cannot be represented. Instead the semiotic stands as a marker of the absence or failure of the symbolic to act as a satisfactory representation of Baker. The reference back to the centre of the body highlights the work of the semiotic in the process of this performance.

Abjection in one mysterious Thing said e.e cumming*

The next part of this analysis is devoted to the notion of abjection which pervades the performance. According to Kristeva, abjection can be interpreted as the state of literally

¹³⁶ Kristeva cited in Lechte. 1990. *Julia Kristeva*. (London and New York: Routledge). p.127

being cast off.¹³⁷ What we cast off as human beings, for example hair, urine, sweat, are parts of ourselves which need to be shed in order for us to live.¹³⁸ To be confronted with the abject, is to witness a part of oneself which seems repulsive and alien.¹³⁹ This process is continuous; the abject cannot be assimilated, and performs its operations despite the symbolic order. Kristeva's explanation of abjection is also specifically related to the corporeal knowledge that precedes the symbolic. Kristeva's theory of abjection is extremely helpful for the analysis of contemporary artistic practice which deals with those aspects of existence which society would rather keep hidden than revealed. The incorporation of the abject is one way of transgressing taboos in performance, because the presence of the abject is a taboo in itself. Abjection in art is usually not an attempt at a consolatory representation of reality, but rather emphasises that which is rejected as impure and unwholesome. The transgression of taboos within performance, its ability to expose the unacceptable within representation and reject those forms favoured by the limit that taboos assume, is at the heart of the "politics of perception".¹⁴⁰ Abjection can be considered the most significant aspect of revolt and de-reification in *omT**. This is because abjection aids in breaking down the process of signification which is evident in the piece, but also by its implication, serves to highlight the symbolic order in crisis.

Kristeva distinguishes between the "condition" of abjection and the "operation" of abjection.¹⁴¹ The operation of abjection is a regulatory function which is performed to ward off those non-objects which threaten our stability as individuals within the symbolic order. "Abjection is what the symbolic must reject, cover over or contain."¹⁴² We separate from these unwanted parts in order to assimilate a sense of self. This waste being a reminder of our mortality threatens our stability. Kristeva states;

...refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from

¹³⁷Kristeva, J. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press.)p.3.

¹³⁸ Kristeva, J. 1982. p. 3

¹³⁹ Kristeva, J. 1982. *Powers of Horror*. p.2

¹⁴⁰ Lehmann, H. p. 187

¹⁴¹ Kristeva, J. 1982. pp. 2 and 8

¹⁴² Grosz, E. p.73

that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit - *cadere*, cadaver.¹⁴³

Abjection reveals the instability of the individual's sense of identity, as it underlines the potential of the subject to be drawn back into the "chaos which formed it."¹⁴⁴ The condition of abjection subverts the order of the symbolic by highlighting its fragility. The abject works in these two ways, in one instance it assists in upholding the symbolic order: its operation. And in the other, is a constant reminder of the instability on which language or symbolic functions are founded: its condition.

The inclusion of abjection within art is a contested subject. Hal Foster, for instance, highlights the problematic issues that surround the notion of abjection as artistic strategy. According to Foster, contemporary approaches to the abject can be interpreted as regulatory impulses; by revealing the condition of abjection, the works evoke the operation of abjection.¹⁴⁵ The attempt to reveal the instability of representation in the symbolic order, re-endorses the regulatory functions of abjection to restore the stability of the symbolic.

Foster uses the example of the Surrealists to explain the dilemma that arises in contemporary responses to abjection in art. The division between George Bataille and André Breton (who headed the two factions in Surrealism) is curiously related to Bataille's insistence on the inclusion of the baser elements of abjection into art and literature. Breton criticised Bataille's inability to raise the low to the high, for being unable to transform the abject into what Breton conceptualised as art. Breton favoured sublimation; the conversion of primal drives into more acceptable representations. In Bataille's opinion the "power of perversions" was a lot more potent than Breton's idea of sublimating. As Bataille states, "I defy any amateur of painting to love a picture as much as a fetishist loves a shoe."¹⁴⁶ Foster argues that these two perspectives still influence the reception of abjection in artistic practices;

¹⁴³ Kristeva, J. 1982. p. 3

¹⁴⁴ Grosz, E. p. 74

¹⁴⁵ Foster, H. "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic." *October*. Vol. 78. (Autumn, 1996). p. 116

¹⁴⁶ Bataille cited in Foster, H. 1996. p. 117

Is this then, the option that abject art offers us - Oedipal naughtiness or infantile perversion? To act dirty with the secret wish to be spanked, or to wallow in shit with the secret faith that the most defiled might reverse into the most sacred, the most perverse into the most potent?¹⁴⁷

Is the abject a call for order in the symbolic crisis, a regulatory impulse? Is it an excuse to shock one's audiences? The response of these Surrealists to the abject is incidentally the two most common reactions to abjection according to Kristeva, that of attraction and repulsion. She states, "It lies there. Quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects."¹⁴⁸ There is thus a tension created between the demand for attention created by the inclusion of the abject in art, and the simultaneous repulsion experienced by the viewer. The abject both attracts and repels creating a position that is not limited by binary connections. In this ambiguity resides the strength of the abject as an artistic strategy. The abject can thus be an agent in the complication or disturbance of desire by both attracting and repelling the viewer. Through its ambiguity abjection speaks to the crisis in the symbolic order. As Kristeva observes, "We may call it a border, abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger."¹⁴⁹

Kristeva also observes that the feminine body is especially abject because of its maternal functions; this body betrays its debt to nature. Excrements, waste, disease, the dead body etc endanger identity from the outside, while menstrual blood threatens identity from within.¹⁵⁰ In Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine* she discusses the representation of the female monster in the horror film. Creed elaborates on the myth of the *vagina dentata*, the idea that women are frightening because they have teeth in their vaginas, which must somehow be removed before the male can have sexual intercourse

¹⁴⁷ Foster, H. 1996. p. 118

¹⁴⁸ Kristeva, J. 1982. p.1

¹⁴⁹ Kristeva, J. 1982. p. 9

¹⁵⁰ Kristeva, J. 1982. p. 71

with her.¹⁵¹ This myth, which identifies female sexuality as a devouring and evil force to be controlled or restrained, is related to the oppression of the feminine in representation. The fear and horror created through the feminine body according to Kristeva is an “undifferentiated power and threat, a defilement to be cut off.”¹⁵²

Lepecki argues that Mantero in *omT** becomes perceptible as a marker of feminine abjection within the symbolic order.¹⁵³ She threatens the symbolic through the presence of her feminine body. In the unfolding of the performance, her hybrid character made evident by the goat clogs, and aided by the grotesque make-up and iridescent skin paint reveal an image of abjection. As Ginot observes;

The body appears at first glance because of its visual aspects: between human and animal (due to the clogs) but also between sophistication (the hyper-made-up face) and roughness (the clogs), and ambiguously between whiteness and blackness.¹⁵⁴

Hybridity is an indication of mixed blood which also carries overtones of the abject. If the abject is something we cast off in order to keep us entirely assimilated as members of the symbolic order, then the hybrid character created by the goat clogs is a definite inversion of these laws. The goat clogs work in opposition to the symbolic; they work against the idea of a ‘clean and proper’ self. “The body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic”.¹⁵⁵ More than any other element, the goat’s clogs/hooves force us to encounter the abject and in this way emphasise the fragility of the symbolic order. The idea of Mantero’s body as a monster is made implicit by her association with the goat (via the goat hooves) and as a hybrid, so also a monster. Lepecki observes, “The dancer is naked in front of us: she is a whore, she is enchantress, she is an accuser, she is pain, she is a monster, she is beautiful.”¹⁵⁶ The broken form of the gestural sequences by the act of balancing on the

¹⁵¹ Creed, B. 1993. *Horror and Monstrous-Feminine: Film, feminism, psychoanalysis*. (London and New York: Routledge.) p. 2.

¹⁵² Kristeva, J. 1982. p. 106

¹⁵³ Lepecki, A. Skin, Body, and Presence in Contemporary Choreography. *The Drama Review*. Vol. 43. No. 4. (Winter, 1999). p. 137.

¹⁵⁴ Ginot, I. p 26

¹⁵⁵ Kristeva, J. 1982. p 102

¹⁵⁶ Lepecki, A. 1999. p. 138

goat hooves creates an ungainly look in the performer which contributes to the monstrosity suggested by her hybridity. The denial of space, the minimal use of light, the sweat issuing from the body of the performer all contribute to create a space where form can be interpreted as broken, clumsy and ugly.

The notion of abjection in relation to colonised subjects is also significant. The idea of colonisation has been linked earlier in this chapter to the notion of reification. The distinction between African Americans as *primitif*, having a capacity for civilisation and the African as savage is important when considering abjection in *one mysterious Thing*. The colonised subject can be considered a condition of abjection. According to Lepecki, “Baker’s African American body stands in for those other colored bodies that seem to cause so much discomfort to the European proper, neat, regulated, colonialist home”.¹⁵⁷ If Baker’s performances were a substitute for the colonial ‘savage’, as embodiment of the ‘savage’ she was also a symbol of abjection. Baker’s performances can therefore be interpreted as alluding to the abjection of the colonised subject in colonialist practices.

The goat clogs are comparable to ballet shoes, they are also utilized in the same way a classic dancer would use ballet shoes. Lepecki has referred to them as “grotesque pointes”.¹⁵⁸ It could be argued that the clogs operate to invert the figure of the reified body, for here the ability to stand on one’s toes is not symbolic of grace and ease, but of labour and pain. “In particular a ballerina denies her body’s weight, her perspiration, her effort, even her breasts, ...”.¹⁵⁹ Mantero does not deny the pain caused by her effort to remain in one position. This becomes apparent through her sweat and the tremor in her body. The pain caused by the effort of remaining in one position is also a significant element. Pain implies a certain risk on the part of the performer, an indication of investment. Pain could be interpreted as an element of revolt, as it implies a certain desire for feeling which is opposed to the numbing quality caused by the spectacle. It also

¹⁵⁷ Lepecki, A. 2006. p. 121

¹⁵⁸ Lepecki, A. 2006. p. 137

¹⁵⁹ Preston-Dunlop, V, and Sanchez-Coleberg. 2002. *Dance and the Performative*. (London: Verve Publishing.) p. 10

highlights that the trained body of the dancer is not free from pain - that the ephemeral qualities that are suggested by the ballerina on *pointe*, arise from a considerable amount of effort on behalf of the dancer.

Sweat can also operate to subvert the dancer's reified body. Sweat is not to be considered abject in itself, but on stage it may be interpreted as an abjection; being a bodily fluid and unclean, it cannot be properly demarcated from the self. It is something society attempts to sanitize as it is not associated with cleanliness; one dances and sweats but this is usually hidden from the audience. In this context, however, sweat serves the conceptual assemblage of the piece by betraying the effort of the performer. As Lepecki notes "Sweat signifies Mantero's labour when apparently there is none (she seems not to be giving her audience its money's worth)."¹⁶⁰ Mantero challenges her audience by performing 'apparently' very little movement, as she 'stays put' in one place on stage. The sweat serves to break down habitual modes of interpreting dance and the role of the dancer in contemporary society by being in a place it does not belong, by being an abject element within the piece and by being a signifier of the effort involved in the piece, despite appearances.

The goat is an important cipher of abjection in *omT**. Although the goat is connected with lust and carnality, it has more positive connotations as a symbol. In Classical Greek mythology, she-goats are related with the wet-nurse and initiator (those members in non-western ethnicities responsible for initiation rituals).¹⁶¹ The male goat is associated with witchcraft, a symbol of the devil. The goat is an ambiguous symbol, as it can operate as both a negative and a positive reference to sexuality. This association with the animal can be read in context of the representation of the exotic other, as aligned with an unfettered sexuality. The image of Mantero as hybrid/dancer staggering on top of goat clogs/hooves becomes an ecstatic metaphor for the frailty of systems of signification. The image reveals the fragile basis on which desires are constructed. According to Kristeva

¹⁶⁰ Lepecki, A. 2006. p. 121

¹⁶¹ Chevalier, J and Gheerbrant. 1996. *Symbols*. (London: Penguin). p. 437

“...all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded.”¹⁶²

Lepecki observes that in a Portuguese context the female goat is synonymous with a prostitute.¹⁶³ Thus, this bestial, hybrid element becomes a metaphor for the way Baker is remembered as dancer. Yet, the figure of the prostitute also has an abject connotation. This aspect of abjection in the image of the prostitute may act as metaphor for the frailty of the symbolic order. Kristeva notes that “Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject”.¹⁶⁴ Although prostitution is tolerated in society, it is not endorsed by society. Prostitution is not an image of luxury and happiness sold by the society of the spectacle. The act of prostitution is a taboo and is therefore subject to the law, as well as a transgression of the law.

The idea and reference to the “dancer as whore” as an object of desire for the spectator is manipulated in *omT**. Mantero at once, seduces with her make-up and gestural sequence and simultaneously suspends this seduction through the presence of the goat hooves. In this way, she challenges the idea of the dancer as a voyeuristic object for the eyes of the spectator. This is also significant in relation to Baker who was the subject of the voyeuristic Parisians in the early 1900’s. It emphasises the power of abjection to both attract and repel desire and thereby disturb the binaries and hierarchies that shape the symbolic order. It is also important to note that some of the above interpretations are not entirely constructed by the physical presence of the goat-hooves on stage but by their suggestiveness as ciphers. The physical and material presence of the abject is not always as important as what it suggests to the audience.

This continuous threat posed by abjection can be perceived as a positive one. “To be sure, if I am affected by what does not yet appear to me as thing, it is because laws,

¹⁶² Kristeva, J.1982. p. 5

¹⁶³ Lepecki, A. Skin, Body, and Presence in Contemporary Choreography. *The Drama Review*. Vol. 43. No. 4. (Winter, 1999). p. 137

¹⁶⁴ Kristeva, J. 1982. p. 4.

connections, and even structures of meaning govern and condition me.”¹⁶⁵ The abject can be interpreted as an element of revolt in the way that it threatens the symbolic order and is also a transgression of taboos. The ambiguity of the abject undermines notions of class, race and identity in *omT**. Society does not necessarily want to be confronted with the abject; it is like Narcissus looking into a pool of mud instead of the clear waters of stable identity.¹⁶⁶ It is similar to seeing a reflection of oneself that is alien and improper. The abject remains to reveal to us what we cast off in order to stay clean and proper. Confronting this aspect in ourselves and the world is an opportunity to identify the self as in a constant process of assimilation. This is important for the production of art which has a social task. As Kristeva states;

In a world where the Other has collapsed, the aesthetic task - a descent into the formations of the symbolic construct - amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless ‘primacy’ constituted by primal repression. Through that experience, which is nevertheless managed by the Other, “subject” and “object” push each other away, confront each other, collapse, and start again - inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable: abject.¹⁶⁷

The abject, as a process, constantly reveals the instability of the individual and highlights the limits of being. Faced with an inevitable mortality, the subject is confronted with a threat that is always looming, always a possibility. Yet, the presentation of the abject is not without its own concerns in relation to representation.

Foster asks, “Can abject art escape an instrumental, indeed, moralistic use of the abject?”¹⁶⁸ This can be observed in *omT**, which despite its ethical objection to colonialism, is neither prescriptive nor didactic. Mantero’s abjection is carried out in a subtle manner. The goat clogs are not used to simply shock her audience, but are representative of what the piece is built on: instability. The minimal use of light also under-emphasise the visual impact of the clogs. The ‘*mysterious thing*’, instead of representing Baker, reveals the failure of the symbolic order to reveal the individual as

¹⁶⁵ Kristeva, J. 1982. p. 10

¹⁶⁶ Kristeva, J. 1982 p.14

¹⁶⁷ Kristeva, J. 1982. p. 72

¹⁶⁸ Foster, H. 1996. p. 123.

stable and identified. The solo offers no easy solution to questions on identity; rather the piece opens itself to more questions concerning the production of signification. In this way, the dance is not reduced to a totalizing truth or meaning, but rather offers questions instead of answers. These aspects situate *omT** outside of a moralistic interpretation of its abject components.

In *omT**, Mantero does not assume the right to determine the desires of her audiences. The ethical dilemma of representing the colonial other and the use of abjection as an aesthetic strategy are issues that are not taken for granted in the performance of *omT**. If reification is a process of forgetting as Adorno and Horkheimer¹⁶⁹ suggest, then Mantero's solo recalls the fragility of desire in the context of performance.

*omT** is involved in a process of creating a different form through its interaction with the semiotic, its rejection of conventional modes of representation, and its resistance to signification. Mantero's rejection creates something else which can be seen as an alternative to predictable forms of representation in the realm of the choreographic. In this way *omT** can be interpreted as a piece which is involved with the process of revolt on a social, personal and political level. The piece encourages analyses as it cannot easily be interpreted and assimilated. Through a process of de-signification made even more powerful by the use of abjection, a process of de-reification is enacted in *omT**. As Baker challenged stereotypes of beauty, race and representation in the early twentieth century, Mantero challenges our conceptions of beauty, dance, representation and identity in a contemporary context.

¹⁶⁹ Adorno, T and Horkheimer, M cited in Honneth, A. 2008. *Reification A New Look at an Old Idea*. (New York: Oxford University Press.) p. 3

Chapter 3

Absence as strategy of revolt and de-reification in Jaco Bouwer's *Untitled*

Performance is the absence of meaning. ... And yet, if any experience is meaningful, without a doubt it is that of performance. Performance does not aim at a meaning, but rather *makes* meaning insofar as it works right in those extremely blurred junctures out of which the subject eventually emerges.¹⁷⁰

What is a sign, if not what replaces an object for someone under certain circumstances? Surrogate sign, a presence which stands for an absence: the sign for a god, the spool of thread for the mother, the stage for an absent "reality." Theatre as sign of a gap-being-filled. It would not be going too far to say that the act of filling the gap is the very source of theatrical pleasure.¹⁷¹

Chapter Three is an analysis of *Untitled* (2008) directed by Jaco Bouwer as a performance which resists clear signification through a strategy of absence. The discussion is focused on the potential complication of desire through absence as enacting a larger project of revolt. Unlike, *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, which has been analysed extensively by André Lepecki and Isabel Ginot, *Untitled* has not been the subject of extensive study by other writers. For this reason the analysis is more specifically "the product of interpretive choices".¹⁷² My interpretations have been framed by theories related to performance, specifically those theories that deal with the notions of presence, absence and desire and its reification. I start the chapter by surveying the relevant literature and discussing these key concepts, and then apply these in my analysis of *Untitled*. As with the analysis of *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, the discussion focuses on the fragmentation of the sign which I refer to as a process of de-signification. This is investigated through the staging of the performance; the visual images, gestures and movements as well as the spoken text and sound scores. Through

¹⁷⁰ Féral, J, "Performance and Theatricality: The subject demystified." In Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 4. p. 209

¹⁷¹ Ubersfeld, A. "The Pleasure of the Spectator." In Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 1. p. 240.

¹⁷² Bal, M, and Bryson, N. "Semiotics and Art History." *The Art Bulletin*. A Quarterly published by The College Art Association. Volume Lxxiii Number 2. June 1991. p. 175

these elements *Untitled* enacts a process which manipulates and resists meaning, and in this way restores the construction of meaning to the spectator.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of absence as a performance strategy lies in the meaning of the clichéd expression, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”. Sigmund Freud analysed the psychic process of trauma through the example of the *Fort Da* game. Freud observed his grandson repeatedly throwing a wooden spool attached to a piece of string, which would disappear behind a curtain, when pulled back the child would greet its reappearance with *Da* (there).¹⁷³ According to Freud, this game is a repetitive staging of the infant’s trauma related to the separation from its mother’s gaze.¹⁷⁴ Freud interpreted this as a mechanism of control that the subject engages in to master the trauma faced by the loss of its mother.¹⁷⁵ By controlling the spool the infant gains mastery over this trauma; it also enables the infant to deal with the loss of the maternal relationship as he/she grows up.¹⁷⁶ Slavoj Žižek considers the *Fort Da* game as the staging of desire. In *The Puppet and the Dwarf* (2003), Žižek interprets the desire played out in the *Fort-Da* game, not as the mother’s desire but rather the desire of the subject. Not the desire for the mother but for the other, for the *object a*.¹⁷⁷ The *object a* is not the other him/her/itself but rather that which is in the other, and more than the other.¹⁷⁸ This staging of desire through absence is deemed necessary, as it enables the subject to negotiate desire.

Gerald Siegmund notes that although it is assumed that the return of the object is the most pleasurable aspect of the game for the infant, Freud observed that the part where the spool is thrown away is enacted more often than the return.¹⁷⁹ The pleasure is derived from the absence of the object and the infant’s independence from that object, as well as

¹⁷³ Siegmund, G. “Performance in a Space where I am not: Staging Absence in Contemporary Dance.” *Discourses in Dance*. Vol. 4. Issue. 1. (2007) p. 78

¹⁷⁴ Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 78

¹⁷⁵ Freud cited in Žižek, S. 2003. *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. (Cambridge Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT.) p.59

¹⁷⁶ Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 79

¹⁷⁷ Žižek, S. 2003. p. 59

¹⁷⁸ Žižek, S. 2003. p. 59

¹⁷⁹ Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 78

its ability to return the object of desire at will.¹⁸⁰ Siegmund states, “There is thus an inherent danger in the unmitigated presence of the desired object.”¹⁸¹ Desire can thus be extinguished if the object of desire is always in sight. Desire/expectation must therefore always be negotiated/manipulated as, if the desired object is always within sight, it will eventually become, through its overwhelming presence, undesirable.

Siegmund argues that, “Without separation, loss and absence there would be no subject, because subjects need distance to become agents of their own desire.”¹⁸² It is in the absence of the desired object that agency may possibly be retrieved. Staging absence in performance can be argued as a strategy which resists reification through a complication of desire. It opens up interpretation as a process rather than a predetermined thing. It gives the viewers the opportunity to create their own version of events. As Siegmund states, “Absence allows for a space for the subject to be and to desire.”¹⁸³ It is within the absence of presented desire that desire can be returned to the subject. *Untitled* is analysed as a performance which enacts a strategy of absence and in this way complicates the negotiation of desire. This is discussed mainly through the absence of a coherent plot, characters and stage space in the performance of *Untitled*.

Absence, as a strategy, although it suggests a “lack of” or rejection of presence, should not be considered in a binary opposition to presence, but rather as a force already implicated in the conception and enactment of performance.¹⁸⁴ As Siegmund states, “Absence as the term implies, already presupposes a given, that is, a presence.”¹⁸⁵ Thus, absence is implicated in all performance, as what we witness in performance occurs for the present only and we absorb its temporal value through its disappearance. As Heidi Gilpin observes, “Performance through its embodiment of absence, in its enactment of disappearance, can only leave traces for us to search between, among, beyond.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁰ Siegmund, G. 2007.p. 78

¹⁸¹ Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 79

¹⁸² Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 79

¹⁸³ Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 78

¹⁸⁴ Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 84.

¹⁸⁵ Siegmund, G. 2007. p.87.

¹⁸⁶ Gilpin, H. Cited in Foster, S L. 1996. *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*. (London and New York: Routledge.) p.106

Absence, instead of functioning in a dichotomous relationship with presence, can blur the boundaries of meaning making in performance.

Performance is often distinguished from other forms of entertainment through the notion of presence. As a subject of interest it has become an important element in philosophies on performance. In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) Peggy Phelan observes that when a performance is documented, analysed or reproduced in a medium, it is no longer performance, but something else. She states, “Performance’s only life is in the present.”¹⁸⁷ Presence could then be described as the object of performance. This implies something beyond mere appearances, something which can only be fathomed and never captured. For Phelan, presence is what separates live performance from the media.¹⁸⁸ In many ways, presence engendered through performance, the interaction between performers and spectators at a live performance is what defines performance and gives it its aura (so to say) of authenticity.^{vii}

According to Victor Burgin in the *End of Art Theory* (1986), presence is linked to the humanist idea of a true and essential self.¹⁸⁹ However, as Burgin notes, “...the belief that meaning can be ever present, preconstructed in its full integrity, ‘behind’ a unit of language, or any other representational form, is an *illusion* of language.”¹⁹⁰ Gerald Siegmund argues that “presence established in the present with its strategies of the avant-garde theatre have long since been integrated into the spectacle”.¹⁹¹ The insistence on presence can thus be seen as a nostalgic yearning for a whole or totality that was established by the “illusion of language”.

Presence is also linked to the notion of capturing the real.¹⁹² Andrew Quick notes that some descriptions of performance indicate the possibility of being “real”, “of a real

¹⁸⁷ Phelan, P. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. (London: Routledge.) p.146.

¹⁸⁸ Phelan, P. 1993. p. 146

¹⁸⁹ Burgin, V. 1986. *The End of Art Theory: Criticism and Post Modernity*. (London: Macmillan.) p. 33

¹⁹⁰ Burgin, V. 1986. p.33.

¹⁹¹ Siegmund, G. 2007. p.83

¹⁹² Quick, A. “Approaching the Real: Reality Effects and the Play of Fiction.” *Performance Research*. Vol. 1. No. 3, Autumn 1996. p.13

that might evade the operation of the frame”.¹⁹³ Quick observes that since there is always a frame (context) within which performance takes place, performance can never escape the implication of being a work of art, a representation which takes place in a situation between spectator and performer.¹⁹⁴ As Quick notes, “It is not as if the audience can ever forget the material context of their participation of being spectators (with)in the theatre and its concomitant representational apparatus”.¹⁹⁵ In considering this material context, one could say that performance is always in a process of representing and never quite the real thing. Presence is a very significant element of performance, but through its constant disappearance it cannot be clearly defined as the object of performance. The notion of presence is undecided and ambiguous.

As Auslander observes, it is perhaps less useful to look at performance as opposed to mass entertainment forms or to assume that presence in performance is a given because it happens in the present or because it is performed in a live situation.¹⁹⁶ Since the idea of presence can itself become reified, what is the difference between the situational presence created in a mall, and the presence engendered in theatre performance? Presence in performance is an elusive concept that is easily lost when we attempt to define it, and, in many situations, it can be more useful to look at presence through absence. Frequently, staging disappearance results in the opposite, it is often in absence that we most recognise presence in performance.

This is something that Phelan observes in her analysis of *Ghosts*, by Sophie Calle.¹⁹⁷ In this work, Calle asked the employees of the Museum of Modern Art in New York to write descriptions and recollections of the permanent collection which were on loan at the time of Calle’s contribution. These descriptions of the paintings replace the absent paintings. In this way the spectators of *Ghosts* are provided empty spaces which set off a mental or imaginative process within the spectator. Presence is invoked in the present-ness of the spectator attempting to recall and imagine these paintings. In this

¹⁹³ Quick, A. 1996. p.14

¹⁹⁴ Quick, A. 1996. p. 14

¹⁹⁵ Quick, A. 1996. p. 17

¹⁹⁶ Auslander, A. p. 55

¹⁹⁷ Phelan, P. 1993. p. 147

work Calle emphasises the powerful force of absence as a generator of meaning and even presence. Phelan notes,

The description itself does not reproduce the object, it rather helps us restage and restate the effort to remember what is lost. The descriptions remind us how loss acquires meaning and generates recovery – not only of and for the object, but for the one who remembers.¹⁹⁸

Absence in performance could also be interpreted as the “reversal of seduction”.¹⁹⁹ Emilyn Claid relates the reversal of seduction in what she notes is the “signal” Post modern dance, *Trio A*, created by Yvonne Rainer.²⁰⁰ In *Trio A* which has been performed many times since its creation in 1966, there is denial of both the expressive qualities of modern dance as well as the technical virtuosity of ballet.²⁰¹ The language is not trying to tell a story or reveal a specific meaning for the audience to relate to, but is more focused on a pedestrian, anti-theatrical and task-like movement vocabulary. A reversal of seduction is achieved through a complication of its conventional operation, in which the spectator is required to buy into the illusion of the performance. “The real/illusion strategy for seduction is turned inside out.”²⁰² Claid argues that in Derrida’s idea of *differance*, the open-ended play of meanings in language, presence is transformed into an aim since truth, as an aim, is forever suspended.²⁰³ “The performer’s denial of illusion becomes the seductive strategy in reverse for the spectator. No longer searching for the real body through the illusion, the spectator searches for illusions (meanings/images) through the real body.”²⁰⁴ Through the absence of presence the spectator is encouraged to engage in an alternative approach to the production of meaning or narrative in the performance. In this way, the question of what is desired or encouraged to be desired is questioned.

¹⁹⁸ Phelan, P. 1993. p. 147

¹⁹⁹ Claid, E. 2006. *Yes? No! Maybe... Seductive Ambiguity in Dance*. (USA & Canada: Routledge) p. 94

²⁰⁰ Claid, E. 2006. p. 92

²⁰¹ Claid, E. 2006. p. 92

²⁰² Claid, A. 2006. p. 94

²⁰³ Claid, A. 2006. p. 97

²⁰⁴ Claid, A. 2006. p. 99

Absence highlights how presence can be the result of, as Elinor Fuchs observes; “still carrying out the Renaissance humanist program of Cartesian self-centred signification.”²⁰⁵ Absence challenges this outdated notion of presence as instituting a sense of wholeness and closure. Presence in performance is not the problem; it is rather how presence has been theoretically and/or theatrically reified as representing essences or truths. According to Fuchs “A theatre of Absence, by contrast, disperses the center, displaces the Subject, destabilises meaning.”²⁰⁶ Like abjection, absence is related to desire. By subverting the Cartesian idea of meaning as an end, as something which can be established indefinitely, absence deals with the displacement of meaning and therefore also displaces desire. This challenge to the dominant and rational as an end-product of meaning is the revolt that takes place in *Untitled*.

Untitled premiered on the main National Arts Festival programme and is directed by Jaco Bouwer the 2008 winner of the Standard Bank Young Artists Award for Directing. The following description of the performance is derived from my reconstructed memory as a spectator of *Untitled* on the 5th July in the Rhodes Main Theatre at 14:00.

The curtains of the proscenium stage are closed as we enter the auditorium. The director enters from the wings and introduces the piece in quite an off-hand, awkward and un-theatrical manner. The curtains are raised revealing eight performers seated on chairs with their backs to the audience, staring at another stage within the recess of the proscenium. This image depicts and mirrors the actions and gestures of restless audience members awaiting a show. The stage wings are exposed, revealing the lighting and sound apparatus. On the stage floor another floor has been placed; a floorboard design which juts out into the apron of the Proscenium. This demarcates the performance space, as the stage within is barely used by the performers. Bouwer is seated on the periphery of the

²⁰⁵ Fuchs, E. In Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 2. p. 111

²⁰⁶ Fuchs, E. 2003. p. 111

performance space, and during the course of the performance, hands microphones and props to the performers. The performance is marked by a series of disparate vignettes (or episodes) which characterise the plot-less-ness of the performance. Themes of trauma, violence, loss and silence surface despite the incoherence or lack of a narrative structure and serve as a fragmented through-line for the performance. This is made discernable through the constant references to death and loss by the performers in the monologues and dialogues. These scenes can be described as attempts made by performers to give a language to and cope with emotions connected to fear and its effects on the body. Scenes are divided and fragmented through the movement and sound score which feature the sound of percussive instruments and are referred to as overtures in the script. Ntobeko's operatic sound score provides the leitmotif of the piece with the repetition of the phrase, "I can't say it". Movement is performed by two female performers, Anneke and Chuma. These choreographed phrases are based in a repetitive gestural movement vocabulary. The abruptness of the performances, at times makes it feel like you are watching a rehearsal and not a play, since there is no linear progression in terms of plot or character development, scenes end unexpectedly, resurface and dwindle in the performance.

Untitled is engaged with the insufficiency of our symbolic systems to make sense of, and articulate, the world around us. The title of the piece is significant; how can one put a name to something unknowable and unspeakable? As Johan Myburgh states, "how do you give a descriptive title to something that you cannot bring under words as a form of control".²⁰⁷ By naming the piece *Untitled*, relieving it of any descriptive value, the audience is given little access into the piece and what it will be about. This title opens a space for interpretation, and simultaneously reveals the impossibility of naming the ineffable. It deals with lack. This can be described as a lack on behalf of the symbolic order which is in turn impelled by a need to put a name to everything, to bring everything

²⁰⁷ Myburgh, J. "Untitled Silences" <http://cue.ru.ac.za>. Print Edition: Cue edition 9. 2008. Last Accessed: 19 November 2008.

under the control of language. As Baudrillard puts it, "...the frenzy to explain everything, attribute everything, footnote everything."²⁰⁸ *Untitled* deals with the inability to control everything that we know and feel through language. In a short monologue Neels speaks of the absence of any word to describe what you call a parent who has lost a child;

Dat ek 'n kind van my moes begrawe, dat ek my kind oorleef... as 'n man sy vrou verloor is hy 'n wewenaar, en as 'n vrou haar man verloor is sy 'n weduwee. En 'n kind sonder ouers, is wees. Maar daar is nie 'n woord vir 'n ouer wat n kind begrawe nie.²⁰⁹

This is followed by Albert's comforting but rather clichéd remark to Neels, "Oom moet maar net sê as daar iets is."²¹⁰ Although, this remark is specifically related to the short narrative of the loss of child by a father, it also manifests the inadequacy in language to satisfactorily describe or suffice for the experience of loss. This alludes to what words cannot do. In this way it reinforces an idea of the absence in language to substitute for emotion. This is also referred to earlier in the performance by Anneke; "Die onherbergsaamheid van verlies."²¹¹ These words also evoke a sense of the limitations of communication between the subjects. In an interview on *Untitled*, the scriptwriter, Saartjie Botha refers to South Africa as a country with eleven official languages and how despite this people are still unable to communicate.²¹² In fact, these many languages instead of helping to institute any sense of unity, seems to alienate. Instead of creating a space for communication, language aids in distortion and confusion.

In *Untitled*, performers are unable to give words to their feelings; they have lost control over language. This is expressed quite literally with the words "I can't say it", a leitmotif within the piece. This inability to articulate reveals the incoherence and fragmentation of the subject and also manifests as the absence of an objective on stage.

²⁰⁸ Baudrillard, J. 1990. p. 12

²⁰⁹ *Untitled* Script. 2008. p. 94 (Appendix B). Trans: That I had to bury a child of mine, that I survived my child...when a man loses his wife he's a widower, and when a woman loses her husband she's a widow. And a child without parents is an orphan. But there is no word for a parent that has to bury their child.

²¹⁰ *Untitled* Script. 2008. p. 94. Trans: If there is anything I can do for you, just say the word.

²¹¹ *Untitled* Script. 2008. p. 87. Trans: The impossibility of living with loss.

²¹² Saartjie Botha cited in Interview with Paula Gilbert with Jaco Bouwer and Saartjie Botha. <http://cue.ru.ac.za/podcasts/jaco-bouwer-paula-gilbert>. Last Accessed: 10 November 2009

This absence and incoherence in the subject is revealed in the first monologue of the performance, where Eben iterates;

Dit is nie dat ek nie weet nie, of nie woorde het of bang is of... as ek aan iets dink, en daar is baie gedagtes en van dit is valid, of ek dink dit is, en dis in volsinne, dit maak sin. Asof, as ek dit sou se, dit miskien vir iemand, iets kan beteken.²¹³

Eben's text is recited in an absurd style which emphasises his struggle to speak about speaking. It is as if he is speaking aloud his own inner monologue. With this fragmented monologue, the performer questions the validity of his construction of language. This questioning of the legitimacy of language to describe the human condition is pursued throughout the performance.

In Boucher's introduction, he states, "I'm trying to explore a new thing of its okay not to be in control" which he describes as creating "a slight release... It might open up something that's in there, that's never been allowed to come out".²¹⁴ This could be interpreted as the mission statement and context of the performance. Boucher makes a point of releasing his authorial grip on the piece as the director, into the hands of the audience. With this introduction, Boucher initiates a dialogue with the audience which sets up a different expectation. We are not going to be given the traditional well-made play. The directorial act of releasing control reflects some of the conceptual concerns of the piece. *Untitled* although marketed under Boucher's name, is a collaborative piece; the performers are co-authors and co-creators. The role of author is divided; Boucher functions as director but is also implicated as a facilitator to the performance situation as he watches on the sideline, every now and then handing props to the performers. The conventional hierarchical organisation of director/performer is dismantled in *Untitled* as the cast are simultaneously performers/creators/authors/singers/dancers. Boucher's collaborative approach to *Untitled*, challenges and subverts the conventional hierarchical perception of the director as authorial voice of a performance. Boucher's awkward

²¹³ Trans: "Its not that I don't know, or don't have words or that I am scared or...when I think of something and there are many thoughts and some of them are valid, or at least I think it is, and its in full sentences. It makes sense. As if, if I said it, that it could mean something for someone." *Untitled* script. 2008. p.81.

²¹⁴ Boucher cited in programme notes in *Untitled*. (2008) p. 97 of Appendix B.

manner in his introduction could be said to signify his own anxiety in relation to control. From the very beginning of the performance, the perceptions of the audience are challenged. The creative input of those involved in the performance situation, is not taken for granted.

Untitled is contextualised within a kind of contemporary setting; the performers seem to be of the “here and now”. They are dressed in pedestrian every day clothing which does not signify costumes and their everyday attire gives them a kind of anonymity as they are not marked as characters in any conventional sense. The programme note for *Untitled* reads, “The person is white, black, one of many.”²¹⁵ The performers also use their own names instead of constructing imaginary character names. They are not representative of characters in the classical sense as they are not interpreting roles, but function rather as “subjects in process”.²¹⁶ Josette Féral in *Performance and Theatricality: The Subject demystified*, (2003) interprets contemporary performers as, “Subjects in process: the subject constructed on stage projects himself into objects (characters in classical theatre, part-objects in performance) which he can invent, multiply, and eliminate if need be.”²¹⁷ The lack of any linear sequence of events further destabilises any character development on behalf of the performers. This underscores the incoherence and fragmentation of the subject in performance.

Untitled can be described as an entanglement of illusion and appearance. In an interview with Paula Gilbert, Bouwer states; “In movies its so perfect in terms of the story and structure and plot of the thing. But for me real life doesn’t work that way. It’s so fragmented.”²¹⁸ In *Untitled* the play with illusion and appearance reveals the absence of a stable perspective on reality. In Jean Baudrillard’s theory of ‘simulation’, which he describes as the “liquidation of all referentials”, the absence of any reality external to the

²¹⁵ Programme notes for *Untitled*. 2008. (Sourced from the National Arts Festival Booking Kit.) p.8

²¹⁶ Féral, J, cited in Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. p.213.

²¹⁷ Féral, J, cited in Auslander, P. 2003. p.213.

²¹⁸ Jaco Bouwer cited in Interview with Paula Gilbert with Jaco Bouwer and Saartjie Botha. <http://cue.ru.ac.za/podcasts/jaco-bouwer-paula-gilbert>. Last Accessed: 10 November 2009

realm of representations is relevant to this discussion.²¹⁹ As cited in Chapter One, this absence of reality is replaced by the “hyperreal”, described by Baudrillard as a strategy of simulation. Signs do not refer to their referents in physical form; rather they determine what reality is constructed upon. Through this infinite process of signification, signs maintain the principle of reality. Baudrillard refers to Disneyland as a simulacrum, which aids in convincing subjects that there is a real world outside of the fantasy space created by Disney. In *Untitled* the simulated nature of signs is interrogated through an ambiguity between signs and their referents. *Untitled* is self-reflexive about its simulated nature as a performance and in this way delivers commentary on the simulated-ness of what lies beyond the performance.

The strategy of absence that is enacted in *Untitled* can be related to Baudrillard’s idea of seduction.²²⁰ Baudrillard states; “Seduction is always opposed to production. Seduction withdraws something from the visible order and so runs counter to production, whose project is to set everything up in clear view, whether it be an object, a number, or a concept.”²²¹ In *Untitled* things are not set up in “clear view”. This is noticeable in the absence of character development, and of linear narrative structures as well as through the use of silence and in the design. In *Untitled* the illusion that the drawn curtains establishes, is broken by the absence of stage wings and the presence of the director/facilitator, (once they are opened). This undermines the convention that is set up by the drawn curtains. The image of the performers representing audience members (mirror awaiting audience) aids in a further fragmentation of signs on stage. This image reveals the classical requisite of performance to enact mimesis, to copy from life, as well as highlights the illusion that can be created, by reflecting and acknowledging the audience. The audience is not encouraged to be seduced by the illusionary nature of performance (or even the absence of illusion in the way of the traditional well-made play). The relationship between illusion and appearance is manipulated in *Untitled*. Baudrillard states that, “Illusion is not false, for it doesn’t use false signs; it uses

²¹⁹ Baudrillard, J. 2001. p. 170.

²²⁰ Baudrillard, J. 2001. pp. 152-168

²²¹ Baudrillard in Korrocks, C & Jevtic, Z. 1999. *Introducing Baudrillard*. (Cambridge: Icon)p. 94

senseless signs, signs that point nowhere. This is why it deceives and disappoints our demand for meaning, but it does so enchantingly.”²²² The absence of coherence in *Untitled* potentially generates an atmosphere of uncertainty for the spectators. The process of making sense of the performance is constantly undermined by the play between illusion and appearance. This absence of meaning potentially stimulates the desire of the audience member to construct a perspective of their own.

In an article entitled *The Pleasure of the Spectator*, Anne Ubersfeld notes;

...many stage signs are opaque, and these are by no means the signs which give the spectator the least pleasure. When he is faced with signs which he does not understand, to which he cannot give a name (objects, gestures, discourse), which do not refer to anything in his experience, or, more simply, which pose a problem for him, the spectator's own inventiveness is stimulated: it is up to him to manufacture the relationship between the signs and its intelligibility, or its relationship to the world, even to the point where the spectator has too many demands made on him and withdraws his participation.²²³

In this passage, Ubersfeld observes that obscure signs in performances can stimulate the audience. Thus, for instance, the absence that is established by seduction challenges the spectator in a performance situation. Ubersfeld notes that experience of engaging with ideas/objects/ that are difficult to recognise or understand is one of the many pleasures of being a spectator.²²⁴ The disruption of the signs onstage creates a kind of seduction that potentially produces its own kind of pleasure within the spectator. In *Untitled* the spectator is not seduced by details and catharsis, but by the uncertainties that are created by the fragmentation and incoherence of the narrative forms. The visual presence of the stage-within-a-stage also constantly reminds the viewer of the simulated falseness of the objects onstage. Baudrillard notes that, “Seduction is also falsier than false, since it uses signs, which are already semblances, to make them lose their meaning

²²² Baudrillard, J. 1990. *Fatal Strategies*. (Great Britain: Pluto Press.) p. 44

²²³ Ubersfeld, A. The Pleasure of Spectator. Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. p. 242.

²²⁴ Ubersfeld, A. p. 237.

– it abuses signs and subjects.”²²⁵ This abuse of signs results in a displacement of meaning which is challenging for spectators. The desire to understand the sign and the failure to do so impedes any attempt to construct a secure notion of wholeness and stability. In this way, the inability to recognise signs gives the audience member the ability to create his own narrative. In relation to Julia Kristeva’s notion of revolt, the seduction in *Untitled*, strategically invites questioning on behalf of the spectator.

Within the many narratives in *Untitled*, the theme of violence and murder are repeatedly referred to. The experience of violence is referenced both from the victim and the perpetrator. These references to murder in the text are ambiguous, as there is no information offered as to who was murdered. The closest reference to information in the text are Andile’s words, “I’m not happy mos man, ...you see. I’m not happy at all. Why? Because I’m the one who shot you...”²²⁶ In some scenes, Andile takes on the role as the dangerous black man with criminal intentions but repeatedly ruptures this perception by playing other persona’s, for instance, the caring friend, “Chuma is not smiling its not because she has a tooth ache its because she has a heart ache.”²²⁷ Andile’s performance is based on a distortion of character/s. This can be linked to a process of de-signification, in which the various persona’s which emerge are manipulated to suit the scene he is playing. In the context of the stigma associated with black South African men as potentially dangerous (*tsotsi’s*), *Untitled* provokes the perceptions and assumptions of the audience member.

The act of murder is also reminiscent of the murder mystery or the detective novel in which clues are provided to the reader. These clues function as small rewards for the reader, who in an association with the protagonist, puts these clues together. The investigation in the detective novel eventually leads to a point of closure in which the antagonist is discovered and justice is delivered. In *Untitled*, the closure point found in the detective novel is abjured as the spectators never come to know the complete story.

²²⁵ Baudrillard, J. 1990. *Fatal Strategies*. p 44

²²⁶ *Untitled Script*. 2008. p. 89

²²⁷ *Untitled Script*. 2008. p. 86

The desire for a point of closure is mirrored in Eben's words: "Who was it? How many? I wanted to know. Details. The why and the how. I wanted to know what happened. I wanted a story. A well made play."²²⁸ Eben's words reflect the conditioning of audience members, the desire to attach meaning to what is perceived, to pass judgment on the antagonist and sympathise with the protagonist/victim. Through the absence of a clearly defined narrative, *Untitled* moves beyond binary conclusions, which in turn, does not satisfy or reward the spectators.

The staging of the themes of violence, death and trauma, is significant as it points to the reality of contemporary South Africa, where violence is a characteristic aspect of daily life. Violence also permeates the media and repetitive images can render spectators numb to representations of violence and terror. This relates to the broken connection between images and those who receive them. As Hans Lehmann observes,

Thus the continual presentation of bodies that are abused, injured, killed through isolated (real or fictive) catastrophes creates a radical distance for passive viewing: the bond between perception and action, receiving message and 'answerability', is dissolved. We find ourselves *in* a spectacle in which we can only *look on* – bad traditional theatre.²²⁹

Through the saturation of simulacra we cannot distinguish between signs and their referents, and this causes an apathetic relation to the presentation of violence. In *Intimate Revolt* (2002) Kristeva notes, "On the one hand, we ask the image to represent a desire for happiness, but, on the other, above all, we want it to represent its sadomasochistic flip side. Exhausted in the evenings we watch police dramas on television and the crimes that we see appease us."²³⁰ Boucher remarks on this violence, in particular the fear it creates in individual consciousness. He states "We are so used to living with it that we've got this element of fear that makes up who we are."²³¹ In *Untitled*, violence to the body is only an

²²⁸ *Untitled* Script. 2008. p.92.

²²⁹ Lehmann, H. 2006. p. 184

²³⁰ Kristeva, J. 2002. *Intimate Revolt*. p. 75.

²³¹ Boucher cited in Gxolo, N. (whatsonSA) "Boucher: Untitled and Uncategorised" <http://cue.ru.ac.za/theatre/drama/2008/boucher-untitled-and-uncategorised> Last Accessed: 19 November 2008.

imagined violence; we are never presented with a violent scene on stage. In this way the traumatic act is never trivialised, since there are no physical signifiers of violence on stage. Instead what we are presented with is the attempt of the performers to define their own experience of trauma and loss.

Absence is made explicit through the use of stillness in *Untitled*. The piece begins in silence after the curtain has risen; as the performers mirror audience members awaiting a performance. Silence is an important strategy as it implies the absence or failure of the symbolic system. To be rendered mute is the obvious result of the failure to communicate meaning. Silence becomes a repetitive gesture and leitmotif of the inarticulate, since silence is the end result of the inability to articulate. The performers make reference to this silence. “Ek hoor stilte”, Ek hoor niks” and “Dit behels meer as die afwesigheid van geluid”.²³² An image which successfully evokes this absence of sound is Anneke’s silent scream. In this scene, Anneke, seated in a chair weeps wildly and without restraint. She eventually comes forward in an emotional outburst that is accompanied with the gesture of a cry that is not heard. That is, the movement of her mouth signals a scream, but there is no sound to accompany the gesture. This scene seems to come out of nowhere, as there is no development towards it. The scene has a staged quality to it, highlighted by the way the chair is set in place by Bouwer. A tension is created between the staged quality of the scene and the method-acting, realistic style of the performance. This is further complicated and enhanced by the anticlimactic denial of the scream which ironically has more impact than a real scream.

Anneke’s silent scream can be interpreted as a comment on the incapability of representing reality, in this case, the inability to represent the inner, subjective experience of the individual. It signifies the failure of representation. As Lehmann notes, “Representability, the inner logic of theatrical reality, thus by no means contradicts the insight that human reality can only be dealt with under the premise that it remains

²³² *Untitled* Script. 2008. p. 95. Trans “I hear silence” “I hear nothing” and “It contains more than just the absence of sound”

unrepresentable.”²³³ Anneke’s silent scream echoes the well-known Expressionist painting *The Cry* by Edvard Munch. The painting shows a man alone on a bridge, his mouth a gaping hole, which is reflected by the circular forms that stretch out over the sky of the painting. The unrealistic rendering of the man and the colours of red, which are contrasted with the darkness of the figure, create the symbol of man isolated. The strength of emotion in the painting is conveyed through the circular forms that almost stretch from his mouth into the sky. *The Cry* is a representation, an expression of human alienation, but it can only represent this alienation in a symbolic manner. Anneke’s silent scream scene is also an expression, which perhaps explains in another way, why the actual sound of her scream is denied. The audience knows what her actions signify but can only guess as to why. Here a process of de-signification is enacted through the absence of meaning attached to the Anneke’s scream. This is enhanced by her sudden change of manner; in the scene which follows where Anneke is seen smiling and seemingly quite happy performing a very different persona to the one which surfaces in the scream episode.

The abrupt silences of the performers creates an unsettling and tense atmosphere for the spectators. This overall silence that arises can be interpreted as a commentary on the silence that characterizes the role of spectators. This could be described as the void of silence that lies between the receiver of signs and those who send them. Eben’s monologue can be considered in relation to this empty space;

Partykeer verloor die woorde hulle klank en dan is dit net letters, soos teen ’n graad 1 muur en ’n juffrou en ’n stok, erens het ek verloor om my mond oop te maak, kom daar lanklank nie meer klanke uit my keel nie. Swaarmoedig, en gefruustreed en lonely. Sad man met halwe sinne en niemand om dit voor te sê nie.²³⁴

²³³ Lehmann, H. p. 173

²³⁴ *Untitled Script*. p. 81. Trans: Sometimes the words lose their sound and then its just letters, like against a grade 1 wall and a teacher and a stick, somewhere I unlearned opening my mouth, Heavy-hearted, and frustrated and lonely. A sad man with half-sentences and no one to tell them to.

Eben has no audience, no receiver, and therefore loses the desire to communicate. In Baudrillard's opinion there is no possibility for reciprocal exchange between the sender of messages and the receiver, resulting in silence.²³⁵ Of course, Eben's monologue could be read in alternative ways, but since *Untitled* interacts self-reflexively with the stage as a frame and comments on its illusory operation, I have interpreted these in relation to the silence that we endure or enjoy as audience members.

The enigmatic quality created through silence is paralleled in the design of *Untitled*. In an interview Bouwer states "My strength lies more in conceptualisation. Conceptualising a visual landscape for the performers to interact with."²³⁶ The design elements reveal an awareness of the realm of illusion. This reading is reinforced by the use of space within the performance. Positioned upstage in the recess is another stage. This image of the stage within a stage produces a play on perspective. Depth is emphasized by the frame provided by the proscenium and the clear distinction between upstage and downstage. This use of perspective indicates different planes of reality. Perspective as a technique within painting was theoretically investigated and celebrated in the Renaissance.²³⁷ The depth supplied by perspective creates a *trompe-l'oeil*, suggesting a convincing illusion of reality; something which tricks and tames the gaze. Depth also suggests something more than what appears on the surface. Baudrillard regards the contemporary use of *trompe-l'oeil* as a simulation; instead of tricking the eye it reveals its illusionary operation.²³⁸

The *trompe-l'oeil* does not attempt to confuse itself with the real. Fully aware of play and artifice, it produces a simulacrum by mimicking the third dimension, questioning the reality of the third dimension, and by mimicking and surpassing the effect of the real, radically questioning the principle of reality.²³⁹

²³⁵ Baudrillard, J. 1990. p. 10

²³⁶ Bouwer, J cited in Krueger, A. 2008. When You are able to define what you do, then you've stopped searching: Anton Krueger in conversation with Jaco Bouwer. <http://www.litnet.co.za>. Last Accessed: 28 July. p.2.

²³⁷ Baudrillard, J. 2001. p.158

²³⁸ Baudrillard, J. 2001. p.157

²³⁹ Baudrillard, J. 2001. p.159

This idea of depth is toyed with in *Untitled*. The symmetry of the perspective created by the vastness of the stage, from the recess to the apron, is constantly broken by the movement of the performers. The stage on stage in *Untitled* questions the idea of an objective reality external to it by mimicking a stage and thereby producing a simulation.²⁴⁰ In this way it reveals the absence of the real outside the performance. As Baudrillard notes, “Simulation threatens the difference between “true” and “false”, between “real” and “imaginary”.”²⁴¹ In contrast to the use of perspective in the Renaissance, the *tromp-l’oeil*, in *Untitled*, emphasizes the idea that external reality like itself has been constructed through a set of principles. The design elements of *Untitled* could be seen as engaging with the self-conscious awareness of the illusory nature of performance. In this way the design elements can be interpreted as an element in the strategy of absence within the piece.

Besides questioning the idea of reality which is emphasized by the extra stage in the recess, a commentary is also delivered on the history of the proscenium stage as a frame for performance. In *Untitled* the stage-within-a-stage is not used by the performers; they inhabit a space which suggests the auditorium. The space does not allude to a world outside the stage space; it operates according to what it is: a stage. In William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the sub-play in the text, Hamlet stages *The Murder at Gonzago*, in order to expose the guilt of his mother and Uncle.²⁴² The play within the play functions as a revelation for the guilty characters in *Hamlet*. In *Untitled*, the stage-within-a-stage is no eye-opener, it serves almost no purpose for the performers as they hardly interact with it. Here *Untitled* manipulates the convention of the sub-play as a mechanism for disclosure, and rather highlights the fragmentary nature of reality instead of instilling a sense of closure and stability.

The downstage area also aids in breaking down the illusion set up by the pre-existing proscenium stage. The reference to the space suggesting a “hall” is in relation to

²⁴⁰ Baudrillard, J. 2001. p.170.

²⁴¹ Baudrillard, J. 2001. p.170.

²⁴² Shakespeare, W. 1968. *The Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark*. (New York: Masterpiece Library.) pp. 159-164

the curious wooden floorboard design, which comes to a jagged end at the apron. The idea that make-believe and fantasy ends with the fourth wall and that the realm of reality is that of the auditorium is broken by the jagged end of the floorboard stage. The floorboard design divides the space into three realities; the performance space, the actual stage beneath it and the space of the spectator. The jagged end of the floorboard suggests the limit of the performers' world and emphasizes its distinction from the actual stage on which it is constructed. Here once again the simulated character of the space is emphasised. The stage is a fantasy space, one that cannot contain all the desires of the audience. The space is thus designed to operate as another agent rather than merely being a setting for a piece. Féral argues that in performance, unlike classical theatre, the space starts to operate as part of the performance itself, instead of merely as a background and support for the actor. She notes that, "...like the body (the space) becomes part of the performance to such an extent that it cannot be distinguished from it. It is the performance".²⁴³

There are moments within *Untitled* where the spatial organisation of the performers is in complete contrast to what is being said. One example of this is when two performers, Anneke and Eben, discuss the end of a relationship while at a distance from each other. The two performers are also positioned facing the spectators, which emphasises the dramatic inconsistency within the scene. At this point Eben says, "Kan ek so lè met my kop op jou skouer."²⁴⁴ The words spoken suggest a closeness which is not mirrored in the spatial organisation of the performers. This counterpoint between the proxemics of the performers and their intimate dialogue is more representative of a rehearsal exercise than an illusion brought to the stage. The illusionary quality of the scene is highlighted by the "staged" quality of the interaction between the performers.

The incongruity between what is physically enacted and what is said evokes the performers' inability to articulate what is happening internally. The body reveals the

²⁴³ Féral, J. "The Subject Demystified." Sourced from Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Concepts*. Vol. 2. p. 209.

²⁴⁴ *Untitled* Script. 2008 p.88

effects of our silences where words cannot. In one scene the performers refer to the affects of the body under stress;

Andile: Talking helps you know...

Albert: Om te praat.

Ntobeko: It really does

Chuma: Hurts

Anneke: It really does

Ntobeko: Talking about hurting

Chuma: Hurts. That's the worst thing like this part of your body hurts so much for me it becomes so physical that you collapse just collapse I cant stand tall.²⁴⁵

In another example, Eben refers to what the silences between the spoken words tell him; "...And that thing when you hear someone? You can hear it, something about the way they speak, in their voice, I just assumed: my father or my brother or something. I could hear it in her voice, her stuck breath, staccato, the static air in the silences."²⁴⁶

Untitled can be related to the semiotic as theorised by Kristeva, by dealing with those spaces in between signs and their meanings, spaces that cannot be quantified or contained by language. It deals with the limits of language and representation. In the semiotic, meaning is never established because it is more involved with becoming, developing meaning. As Lehmann observes, the semiotic captures, "...the paradox of having to think of being also as becoming."²⁴⁷ In this way *Untitled* conceives of the subject as a process and does not attempt to define identity, or perform a character.

In *Untitled*, the movement of the body within space is very significant. Since the performed text does not supply much information for the audience, the body's relation to space is emphasised in order to locate a locus for constructing layers of meaning. This can be noted in the example of the physical relationship between Anneke and Eben. At one point Stacy Hardy comes forward and speaks the line "The body never lies".²⁴⁸ Yet, the body on stage is performing and creating an imaginary situation. According to Siegmund the performing body can be understood as a triple body; a symbolic body, an

²⁴⁵ *Untitled* Script. 2008 p. 86

²⁴⁶ *Untitled* Script, 2008. p. 93

²⁴⁷ Lehmann, H. 2006. p. 145

²⁴⁸ *Untitled* Script. 2008. p 84

imaginary body, and a real body. The symbolic body of the performer is that body which is being subjected to the performance situation, a body so to say, disciplined by the requirements of the performance.²⁴⁹ The imaginary body is the one created on stage through the performance, the desired body. Behind the imaginary body made by the performer lies the real body.²⁵⁰ In *Untitled* the imaginary body is questioned, which in turn points to the absent body of the performer. Siegmund states, “The real body escapes representation as it lingers around the margins of the performance situation threatening to destroy its symbolic and imaginary structure.”²⁵¹ In *Untitled* this absence of the real body is constantly brought to our attention:

Eben: If there could have been more moments like that.

Anneke: Like this - This...is real.

Eben: Really real. You know. Real. Look. Real. Hands, her wrists, the tiny bones of her fingers.²⁵²

In many ways, these lines become ironic if we take Siegmund’s notion of the triple body of the performer into consideration. In this short episode, Anneke is at once absent, in the sense that her “real” body only appears on the margins of the performance. Yet, she is considered “real”, by her physical presence on stage. This physical presence however, is only an “imaginary” physicality, as she is performing a role, even if she is playing herself. Taking it further this role is constructed by the “symbolic”. This mirrors a lack of distinction between the staged reality of the performance and the assumed reality outside the piece. The spoken text could be considered a product of the imagination, and has most likely been rehearsed by the performer which destabilizes the authenticity of a statement like “...this is... real.” The ellipses indicating a pause between the words suggest a hesitance on the part of the performer in assuming the ‘reality’ of this moment on stage. Yet, at the same time read in another way, what makes them any less real? If the words are spoken in the present and apply specifically to the presence of the performer on stage, are they not real? Reality is again split into separate trajectories,

²⁴⁹ Siegmund, G. 2007. p.80

²⁵⁰ Siegmund, G. 2007. p.80

²⁵¹ Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 80

²⁵² *Untitled Script*. 2008. p.83.

highlighting the fragmentation, instability and the absence of any assumed reality. These fragmented signs highlight the idea of presence as elusive and ambiguous.

This notion of the body of the performer being absent from the performance space is emphasized by the choreographed elements in *Untitled*. The movement of bodies becomes a powerful element because it is able to signify the disappearance of the body in space. The movement vocabulary is based in repetition and mostly in the form of gesture, some of which closely resemble sign language. These gestural movements are performed with impact rhythm (sharp movements that end abruptly in time) which build up in speed and end in released drops to the floor. These are repeated cyclically deeper into the downstage area, while facing the spectator. Through the abrupt effect caused by the impact of rhythm, the reference to sign language and the sudden drop to the floor, the movement starts to look like a sentence cut short. Again, highlighting the inability or failure to construct/articulate meaning.

The repetitive nature of the gesturally based phrases is significant as they become physically tiring for the performers and taxing for the audience member to witness. Heidi Gilpin argues that repetition of movement in performance relates to a particular need to bring attention to a certain aspect, or to comment on it.²⁵³ “Movement performance looks at the longing to control experience and reinscribes over and over the failure to achieve it”.²⁵⁴ The repetition of the movement phrases in *Untitled* could be interpreted as a display of the continuous displacement of meaning. As is discussed earlier, Freud interprets the staging of desire in the example of the *Fort Da* game.²⁵⁵ Desire is set up as a game which the subject plays.

Žižek’s interpretation of the *Fort-Da* game is that it is about the desire of the subject him/herself. Which is the desire for the other, the *object a*, which can never be

²⁵³ Gilpin H. cited in Foster, SL. 1996. *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*. (London and New York: Routledge.) p. 111

²⁵⁴ Gilpin, H. cited in Foster, SL. 1996. p. 110.

²⁵⁵ Freud, S cited in Siegmund, 2007. p.78

attained.²⁵⁶ Movement in *Untitled*, sets up a process of displacement, which feeds the idea of desire since desire concludes when it has been obtained.²⁵⁷ Desire is enlivened and accelerated by absence. As Ubersfeld notes; “The relationship between the spectator’s desire and the stage is one of endless wandering but also one of permanent frustration. And it is not desire alone that is frustrated; the totality of the stage space is the object of demands that cannot be met.”²⁵⁸ *Untitled* complicates desire through its self-reflexive engagement with its own illusionary operation and through this internal conflict is able to perform a kind of revolt and de-reification.

To summarise, the constant presence of the object of desire threatens the potential for a continuation of desire. When performance ‘gives’ too much and ‘asks’ too little it can become a reified practice. This happens because reification enacts a process by which the abstract is made concrete, a given, something to be taken for granted. By reducing meaning to a fixed point we risk excluding other modes of perception. Reification could be described as a menace to agency in the process of constructing meaning/s. Presence although being the distinguishing factor between live and mediatised performance, is easily absorbed into the dense accumulation of images in late-capitalist society. This overwhelming presence of the performance is made absent in *Untitled*, and in this way it reveals a sense of awareness of its position in the “hyperreality”²⁵⁹ that Baudrillard discusses. This performance does not ask you to be seduced by the narratives, or to experience a vicarious catharsis with the protagonist/s.

In the analysis of this work I have discussed the performance as a process of de-signification through the absence of clear signification. This is through a self-reflexive engagement and questioning of the dominant conventions that frame theatre making and meaning making. Through this questioning *Untitled* reveals the impossibility of classifying the desires and fears of the performers and spectators. The design aids in enhancing the simulated realm of appearance. The revolt that takes place in *Untitled* is

²⁵⁶ Žižek, S. 2003. p. 59

²⁵⁷ Siegmund, G. 2007. p. 79

²⁵⁸ Ubersfeld, A. The Pleasure of Spectator. Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. p. 247

²⁵⁹ Baudrillard, J. 2001. p.174

through this questioning of appearances within the frame of theatre making. The movement language assists in the de-reification of signs on stage. By engaging with a strategy of absence *Untitled* highlights the vulnerable position of desire and the inability to control or name desire. In *Untitled* the spectator is given the opportunity to seek out their own desires, instead of having their desires defined. *Untitled* resists the notion of a referent in reality which can institute a sense of wholeness. This refusal to voice the ineffable, questions a logic that wishes to define everything.

In *The Critique of Judgement* Immanuel Kant states, “In a literal sense, and according to their logical import, ideas cannot be presented”.²⁶⁰ Kant argued that artists can only attempt to represent ideas through “negative presentation” or “non-presentation.”²⁶¹ This is a safeguard against assuming a preconceived idea of an absolute and total vision of the external world. In *Untitled* Andile states: “Once you write your report, your name on the signature, once it’s put down in words it turns into fiction, bullshit.”²⁶² Performance that attempts to represent ideas as concrete substance could be considered guilty of breaking the Kantian safeguard, because this task is doomed by the very impossibility of representation to fulfil this kind of demand. *Untitled*, as a performance, engages with the underlying impossibilities that language represents and instead enacts a process which reveals the absences inherent in representation. *Untitled* does not cynically disregard meaning, but rather questions the processes which constitute the construction of meaning, and the failure of those structures. Gerald Siegmund argues that; “Without separation, loss, absence there would be no subject because subjects need distance to become agents of their own desire.”²⁶³ *Untitled* provides the spectator with enough distance to ensure the agency of the individual. This agency affords the spectator the prospect of formulating their own process in the construction of meaning. This at least relieves instead of reifies the position of the spectator.

²⁶⁰ Kant, I. 1952. *The Critique of Judgement*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press.) p. 119.

²⁶¹ Kant, I, p. 151.

²⁶² *Untitled* script. 2008. p. 12

²⁶³ Siegmund, G. 2007. p.79

Conclusion:

This thesis explores the idea that performance has the ability to question and challenge prevailing modes of perception which threaten the agency of the subject. It proposes that some performance practices are engaged in a process of revolt which challenges dominant modes of perception that limit agency and reifies desire. It is in this consistent enactment of revolt that a process of de-reification occurs. This kind of revolt is made possible through a process of incessant questioning that is reflected in the processes of de-signification at work in the two performances. Revolt as a return to intimacy is established through this challenge brought on by questioning. As Kristeva suggests, “An ‘internal vision’, then, finds a place between perception and the deliberate recollection of the judging, discursive mind.”²⁶⁴ In this unstable, liminal state, perception is experienced as fluid and de-reified.

In *Untitled* the subjectivity of the performer’s fears and desires cannot be defined according to rational discourse and the textual dominance of language. In *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**, Vera Mantero’s unspectacular homage to Josephine Baker reveals the inability to represent identity in any stable form. Abjection and absence as respective strategies invest the two performances within a process of revolt. This practice of questioning the status quo (spectacle-oriented society), demarcates an anxious yet ethical space in which to engage with these performances. The surfacing of a fluid and unfixed sense of identity enables the agency of the spectator and performer. As Alice Rayner observes, “The dissolution of the unitary subject does not eliminate ethical obligations: it puts them in the foreground.”²⁶⁵ In this way, the subject, viewer and performer are not taken for granted. A process of de-reification is therefore also a process of recognition, in which the abstract concepts brought to life in performance are not defined as truths or totalities.

²⁶⁴ Kristeva, J. *Intimate Revolt*. p 46

²⁶⁵ Rayner, A. The Audience: Subjectivity, community and the ethics of listening. In Auslander, P. 2003. *Performance: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Vol. 1. p. 252

This research is by no means exhaustive, while some aspects have received much attention; other aspects have been left out of the study. As Philip Auslander notes; “Every theory frames and focuses our attention on some things while leaving other things outside the frame of focus.”²⁶⁶ Instead, the focus has been on the effects of a media saturated and a “theatricalised”²⁶⁷ society, and the passive effects of reification caused by this over-saturation.

one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings and *Untitled* have been resistant towards explanation in the form of analysis. They are not against interpretation but are invested in a process of questioning (revolt). Performance of this nature reflects a different kind of knowledge that cannot be subjected to the dominance assumed by textual modes of knowledge, and it is also in the act, the situation, of the performance that the processes of revolt and de-reification are most emphasised. This signals a singular kind of experience which is generated in performance and which cannot be clearly defined in words. As Valerie Preston-Dunlop and Anna Sanchez-Coleberg note;

A theatre sets up expectations that meaning will be present somewhere since the theatre operates in a situation conducive to message sending; namely, one set of people watching and listening to another set of people who are doing something knowing that they are being observed and listened to. Both parties are aware of this situation and one party, the performers, spend a great deal of effort getting the performance right, that is, in state to be watched. The question is, is it created and rehearsed in order that the watching generates understanding (...)or, is it created to achieve something else, something that is particular to art works, and more particularly, the works of corporeal theatre art?²⁶⁸

In this sense, meaning is considered a process or even a practice. The attempt to make meaning is more significant than arriving at a point of complete understanding. In this way, both *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings* and *Untitled* engage with revolt and through this strategy enact a process of de-reification.

²⁶⁶ Auslander, P.2008. *Theory for performance Studies. a student's guide*. London and New York: Routledge.p.1

²⁶⁷ Lehmann, H. p. 183

²⁶⁸ Preston-Dunlop, V and Sanchez-Coleberg, A. p. 260

Endnotes:

- i. Kristeva's use of the word semiotic should not be confused with the customary use of the word, which refers more strictly to the study of signs and their referents in the physical world. Kristeva is referring instead to the pre-linguistic drives and psychic energy of the subject. Kristeva, J cited in Lechte, J. 1990. *Julia Kristeva*. London and New York: Routledge p. 129.
- ii. According to Elizabeth Grosz, *Jouissance*, is not usually translated into English because of its ambiguity. The term refers to pleasure and joy, but as a transgression of the law.
- iii. Ankoku Butoh is known as the "Dance of Utter Darkness". Hijikata states, "I prefer the dark to the dazzling light. Darkness is the best symbol for light. There is no way that one can understand the nature of light if one never observes deeply the darkness". Hijikata cited in Viala, J and Masson-Sekine, N. 1988. *Butoh: Shades of Darkness*. Japan: Shufunotomo Co., Ltd. p. 188
- iv. *Kinjiki* was performed in 1959. The dance comprised two acts and was performed by Hijikata and Yoshita Ohno. The first act involves the squeezing of a chicken between the thighs of the young boy (Ohno) resulting in the death of the chicken. The second act which was performed in silence was a sensory experience which included the sounds of a sexual encounter between the young boy and older man (Hijikata).
- v. Choreutics is a term coined by Laban to signify the study of spatial forms in movement. Micro-choreutics investigates the spatial form within the kinesphere of a dancer. Macro-choreutics researches the spatial aspect of a work as a whole and includes any spatial content. Preston-Dunlop, V. and Sanchez-Coleberg. (eds) 2006. *Dance and the Performative*. (London: Verve Publishing)
- vi. According to Richard Murphy, desublimation can be understood as a strategy of de-aestheticization, instead of representing the ideal some artists reveal the unpolished reality hidden by traditional representation. In this way desublimation could be simplified as the opposite of sublimation. Sublimation in the Freudian sense, is the refining of libidinal drives into more noble and acceptable forms such as art and philosophy. Richard Murphy states that desublimation acts to, "...counter the idealizing and consolatory effects of sublimation". Murphy, R *Theorizing the Avant-garde*. (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.) pp. 287.
- vii. Phelan's ontological claims regarding presence have been contested by Phillip Auslander. In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, Auslander argues that the very notion of presence is made possible by the existence of the media. Auslander, P. 2008. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. Second Edition. (London and New York: Routledge) p. 44

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DVD Source:

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Programme/Director’s notes:

Programme notes by Vera Mantero for *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings**. (1996.)

Scripts:

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Performances:

Untitled. 5 July 2008. 14:00. Rhodes University Theatre

Appendix A:**Programme notes for *one mysterious Thing said e.e cummings****

Supplied by Vera Mantero

one mysterious Thing,

said e.e.cummings*

by Vera Mantero

Photo by Jorge Gonçalves

What Josephine, on her return, thought in the middle of August 1995:

“After listening to a speech on the radio by the Portuguese President Mario Soares, (I don’t remember if it was during 10th June or 25th April), in which he spoke about the world at that time, with something one might call an elevation of the spirit (something that unfortunately is surprising in a politician these days, so you listen with great pleasure), I connected that speech to Glenn Gould and to his Goldberg Variations (the ones of maturity), to Kazuo Ohno and also to an expression that came into my mind: “greatness of soul”. My big wish of a victory of the spirit, is what I think this association reveals.

It is one thing that I would like to find or create: a vast territory in which richness of spirit prevails. (Is massification of education the answer?) This spirit I’m talking about has no wish to abolish the body, has no shame of its desire and of its Sex, what this spirit wishes is to eradicate coarseness, the frightful foolishness, the deep ignorance, the poverty of horizons, the materialism, etc., etc. (Unfortunately, this seems to be a long list...)

It would be a new dichotomy, not the overtired “body-spirit” (empty of meaning, frankly!), but the unhappily

modern “stupidity-spirit” (or maybe “ignorance-spirit”). Or all possible variants. (It would be nice to make up my mind for one...)”

* What he really said about Josephine:

“one mysterious Thing, neither primitive or civilised, or beyond time, in the sense that emotion is beyond arithmetic”

one mysterious Thing, said e.e. cummings*

Vera Mantero

Concept and performance

Vera Mantero

Props

Teresa Montalvão

Characterisation

Carlota Lagido / Ana Araújo

Original Light Design

João Paulo Xavier

Light adaptation and operation

Bruno Gaspar

Executive Production

Forum Dança

Supports

Casa da Juventude de Almada
Re.Al / Amascultura

Production

Culturgest, Lisbon, 1996

Homage to Josephine Baker

Duration of the performance

20 minutes

Albert

- Andile: Why is everybody looking at me?
- Stacy: Stage fright.
- Eben: Like chocking. My father...
- Neels: Ek dink baie aan my pa deesdae...
- Ntobeko: Mama, mma uphi?
- Chuma: He used to bite off his hair, bite of his hair. My father. His father. Bite. Then throw him up to the roof, then let him land... And he'd take him and hold him again, and bite of his hair... Yes, that is how he was, how he was... My father's father.
- Andile: That's my first memory... Yes, and a shirt, ja, and a... trouser. Formal trouser and formal shoe. Ja... He gave me a kiss... He gave me a kiss and a hug. Ja (laugh) on the mouth, Mfethu, on the mouth.
- Albert: Seker omdat ek hom in myself herken, of nee dis eerder dat ek agter kom ek raak al hoe meer soos hy. Dieselfde gebare, sy hande.
- Anneke: My father does this thing... When he gets really angry, in Afrikaans it's 'kners'. Showing his teeth?
- Neels: They say... I don't know, was it dogs or something... was it dogs? Or some thing where you shouldn't laugh, maybe it's monkeys because if you laugh in their presence, because if you're laughing you're showing your teeth. You shouldn't be laughing in their presence. Because they see it as a sign of, of, of. A threatening sign.
- *
- Andile: Ngoba ndandicinga ukuba uya kwi rehearsals ngobabusuku –
Because I thought you were going to rehearsals that night.
- Chuma: Wena wandixdelela ukuba uya emsebenzini.
And you had told me that you were working
- Andile: Yiyo lento sayifumanisa ihlekisa into yokuba sidibane esitalatweni
That's why we thought it was so funny meeting on the street.
- Chuma: Wawunxibe ijezi yakho e greyi, umile uyita icuba.

You were wearing your grey jersey and you had stopped to light a cigarette.

Andile: Kwakushushu
It was hot

Chuma: Saajongana
Looking at each other

Andile: Deizandla zethu zaqala incoko -
Until our hands began to chat

Albert: Is dit my oe? Nee dis my hande. Ek begin baie speel met my vingers.

Chuma: Kwakuluyolo, siphuthaphuthana, sindayekanga ukujongana sasuka sancumelana.
It was so sweet, stroking hands while we looked at each other and smiled.

Eben: If there could have been more moments like that.

Anneke: Like this - This...is real.

Eben: Really real. You know. Real. Look. Real. Hands, her wrists, the tiny bones of her fingers.

Andile: Safudumezana sibambana angamehlo.
We rubbed each other with our eyes.

Chuma: Kwathi xa kufika ixesha lokuba sohlukane safana neentsana zihlobene esiolweni zingafuni kuyekana kokozidlala zijongene .Abazali bexakene nento uzama ukubohlula –
When we said goodbye we were like two children who've suddenly become friend at a birthday party and keep looking at one another while their parents take them by the hand and lead them off, and you can see it in their eyes -

Andile: Ngethemba lokuba –
The hope that -

Chuma: Ngobabusuku wathi -
That night you said –

Andile: Sukuyenza loo nto. –
Don't do this

Anneke: Yes no yes

Chuma: Uthsintshile uyazi

He's changed you know

- Andile: Ukusukela nini
Since when
- Ntobeko: Since then
- Neels: Is hier nie 'n stoel nie?
- Albert: Van toe af
- Ntobeko: Since the
- Anneke: Incident – that's what we called it. Like everyone was scared to say...
- Stacy: The incident
- Anneke: Go on just say, everyone knows what you mean, just say it...
- Ntobeko: Nothing to say...
- Eben: Niks om te se nie...

**

- Eben: In my old room with my brother. We all stayed. Because the fencing wasn't round yet. Also burglar bars. On the top it's much better. When they don't sleep its fine. Downstairs there's, ja— A hole in the door, for weeks there was this bullet hole in the front door, until it was replaced. I'm quiet scared when I'm there. A bit paranoid. I think it's to do with violence. More so than dying, that moment before dying. The confrontation. Sometimes I have this thing. It's just a physical thing but I have this image. This thing of my legs. Just my legs bending this way.
- Stacy: The body never lies...
- Albert: Is dit my oë? Nee ek dink dis my hande. Ek begin baie speel met my vingers.
- Andile: On the mouth, Mfethu, on the mouth.
- Ntobeko: *I can't say it*
- Eben: My father –

- Chuma: My fathers father
- Albert: Ek is altyd honger, my maag skree.
- Eben: Like a dog.
- Chuma: Bite off his hair...
- Neels: Ek het mos 'n hond. Die hond verstaan net Engels. As ek sê sit, dan sit hy. As ek sê lê dan doen hy niks.
- Albert: Smag daarvoor, smeeek daarvoor, blaf daarvoor
- Stacy: Don't show your teeth. It's a sign or something. It says you're afraid.
- Anneke: Ja en nee, ek is bang.
- Eben: Ek wou nie die bok skiet nie. Ek het die sneller getrek sonder om te kyk. Die bok was gekwes, die bok het hoë skril bulkgeluide gemaak, paar tree gestrompel en op die grond neergeval. Al sagter het die bok gebulk. Ek het begin huil. My pa het sy kop geskud en nog 'n skoot geskiet. Toe was die bok stil. Ek het nader gegaan, tot ek die bloed geruik het, ek het 'n paar tree van die bok gaan staan. Die bloed het na my toe gevloei, in 'n klein kronkelende rooi riviërtjie, tot by my skoene. Daar was brommers en vlieë om die bok, en langs die bloedrivier. Ek het gekots.
- Ntobeko: *I can't say it*
- **
- Andile: Talking helps you know...
- Albert: Om te praat.
- Ntobeko: It really does
- Chuma: Hurts
- Anneke: It really does
- Ntobeko: Talking about hurting

Chuma: Hurts. That's the worst thing like this part of your body hurts so much for me i becomes so physical that you collapse just collapse i can't stand tall. lara says to me that when because i in rehearsals i had tooth infection my jaw was sore with that infection and she said to me what's wrong and i told her and she goes on smiling and i told her i had a tooth ache and she says i must go to the doctor i didn't go to the doctor but i made up with my boyfriend and (laugh) the next day she asks me chuma did you go to the dentist and like no she's like but did you sort things out with your boyfriend which i didn't tell her yet that i was hurting and she says to everyone chuma is not smiling its not because she has a tooth ache its because she has a heart ache and that's just how i am...

Anneke: So much unsaid.

Stacy: Fractured seconds.

Anneke: A smile at the corners of his eyes.

Stacy: His mouth.

Andile: Chuma is not smiling its not because she has a tooth ache its because she has a heart ache

Neels: Ek staan voor die spieël, ek steek my swart tong uit. My tande is bruin gerook. My tong, swart van miere, hulle dra my woorde weg. Die miere dra my woorde weg in klein wit balletjies bo hulle koppe.

Albert: Ek sê bloederige woorde wat kom van 'n bloederige plek af. My kop is taai en bloederig, my tong is bloederig, my hart se kamers - alles vol bloed. Die are is leeg en platgeval, ek is inwendig oorstroom deur my eie rooi ellende. Ek weet nie hoe om dit te sê nie. Ek sê woorde wat nie myne is nie, woorde wat nie pas in my mond nie. Ek maak my mond min oop, my tande is skeef en gevlek, as ek sou asemhaal met 'n oop mond, gaan daar 'n rooi bubble soos 'n chappie borrel by my mond uit groei. My mond is toe, ek kan niks sê nie, Ek loop leeg dieselfde uur as die see. My banke is laag. Dis wat ek probeer sê. Dat ek leeg loop. Met niemand om te soen nie. Iemand wat kan, moet my red.

Neels: Ek wil 'n berg hê en baie miere met wit balletjies bo hulle koppe. Ek wil myself teen berge uitskryf. Dit is my naam. Hier is ek. Ek sê so. In glansende wit klippe. Om van ver te sien, as jy dit dan nie wil hoor nie

Andile: I don't want to – And I can't stop myself –

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Andile: How do I stop?

Chuma: I don't know.

Stacy: You know I've never see you crying. Can't picture it.

Albert: Ek het gehuil toe ek klein was.

**

Anneke: You don't know how to cry, it's one of those things you don't know how to do, crying and laughing.

Eben: There are pictures of me laughing. Like this always laughing. But somehow it disappeared. I do laugh. I could laugh. I can. But I somehow forgot how to-

Anneke: We used to laugh. Do you remember. That day-

Eben: As jy,

Anneke: Die onherbergsaamheid van verlies.

Eben: By my gebly het, ek sou oor jou gaan lê het en jou beskerm het.

Anneke: Die slakke in die tuin trap ek stukkend. Voel 'n seer hart so?

Eben: 'n Skaam slakkie in my hand. Jy was.

Anneke: Moenie. Ek was 'n kind.

Eben: Jy is groot en gemeen. Jy was 'n kind

Anneke: Ek is nie meer 'n kind nie.

Eben: Wil so graag weer net vir 'n slag, net vir 'n minuut selfs, bly wees. As jy by my bly...

Anneke: Jy sanik oor slakke en seer harte.

Eben: Die briewe wat ek geskryf het, is almal verbrand. Jy sal dit nooit hoef te lees nie. As ek net vir jou gesê kan kry, dat ek jou liefhet, so, dat jy dit

verstaan.

Anneke: Van liefde verstaan jy niks.

Eben: Jy is mooier vandat jy my gelos het.

Anneke: Jy is so verswelg deur jou behoefteigheid

Eben: Ek mis jou.

Anneke: Jy het my vir altyd verloor.

Eben: As jy eendag terugkom, sal ek bly wees en jou omhels en woorde in jou ore fluister, my liefing, allerliefste. Kyk ek het vir jou gewag, met 'n bossie verlepte blomme en 'n woordelose brief, gewag vir dag wat jy terugkom.

Anneke: Ek is nie op reis nie. Ek het vertrek.

Eben: Ek het my woorde in jou ore geplant, en dit sal jou haant en hou vir die res van jou lewe. As jy nie terugkom nie.

Anneke: Ek het vry van jou weggestap.

Eben: Wat het geword van woorde, en sinne, het niemand dan meer iets te sê nie?

Anneke: Ek het afgeleer om te luister

Eben: Kan ek so lê, met my kop op jou skouer?

Anneke: Ek hoor niks, want jy sê niks

Eben: Luister dan na my stilte.

**

Neels: Sê dit weer.

Albert: Wat?

Neels: Wat jy gesê het

Albert: Ek het niks gesê nie.

Neels: Sê dit dan weer

Albert:

Neels: Ek hoor stilte.

Albert: Ek hoor niks.

Neels: Dit behels meer as die afwesigheid van geluid.

Hardloop

Andile: The number of the people that are dying, it's huge... you see, Mfethu? Everyday, everything has gone, now I ask man, Mfethu... You see, we have rights, More than our parents. You see? Your parent took for you from childhood, now you are eighteen years old, you are telling them like you want to... like you tell them you want to... like... You want to be... you want to do, what you... you see, Mfethu?... ... I wish I could turn back the hands of time, you see? To those early eighties, when we were all by our parents, when we knew we were part of that... Cause nou, Mfethu,... I can like.. go in... and like, like next door, steal a thing from next door... It means nothing to me mos. Mfethu. I don't... It's just easy to do. I don't have food I don't have shoes, you don't have clothes... you see, Mfethu? I mean maybe I go to... I'm armed... (Xhosa expression, popping sounds, like gunshot) And if I could go to Jaco now, you know, Jaco,.. he hasn't closed his shop yet, you see... , then I take... then I take my girlfriend, I take her out and buy... when you buy, you are closer to the counter mos... you see Mfethu? No, Mfethu, I see you, you smile. When you smile I think I'm making a joke, now, Mfethu... But even when I'm in that situation, Mfethu... God comes, don't do this. That's when you have doubts, you see? You see Mfethu, while they hold you, you scream: I am here for the money, Mfethu... you see, then they put a bullet... When I come back from there, maybe they happy I'm not happy mos man, ...you see. I'm not happy at all. Why? Because I'm the one who shot you... Like, Mfethu... I...

Eben: You wouldn't do that.

Andile: No?

Eben: You'd never kill.

Andile: Ne?

Eben: No, I don't believe it.

Shot

Eben: Albert....?

**

S

**

Eben: He wanted to make this little speech. He stood up. But he couldn't talk — he could talk, he could make sounds with his vocal cords but what he wanted to say, tried to say, the things he was thinking were not the sounds coming out. It was like he was choking on something. It was like gagging. He couldn't speak. He was kind of crying. He couldn't utter. Ah. It wouldn't. Like having a stroke.

Anneke: What's wrong with Oupa?

Andile: Are you alright?

Albert: Noustrop strot, ek kan nie asem kry nie.

Chuma: One cigarette One cigarette

Eben: Eventually he sat down. We all kind of knew but he couldn't like say it.

Anneke: What's wrong with oupa?

Neels: Ek het 'n droom gehad dat ek stap in 'n straat en daar is mure weerskante met hekkies, sulke hout hekkies. Die mure is hoog, ek kan nie oor dit sien nie. Dan spring ek so, maar net-net nie hoog genoeg dat ek kan sien nie, en ek kan nie die hekkies oopkry nie, ek ruk so aan hulle, en ek wil ingaan. Dan maak my pa vir my 'n hekkie oop, van die binnekant af. Ek stap deur die hekkie en dan is daar hierdie tuin, so oneindige tuin, terasse en dis groen en dis mooi en ek weet ek ken die tuin. Dis my tuin, maar ek weet nie waar het ek die tuin gekry nie, wie het dit vir my gegee nie. En ek weet ook aan die einde van die tuin, aan die kante, grens dit aan nog 'n tuin, wat ook myne is, maar ek kan nie van die een tuin oorgaan in die volgende tuin nie, asof die taal van die tuine verskillend is. Elke tuin het sy eie hekkie. Die hekkies is naby mekaar, feitlik langs mekaar, van die straat se kant af, maar as jy deur die hekkie stap is dit asof jy deur 'n tregter gaan in ewigheid in. En die konstante bewustheid dat ek alles van die tuin ken, maar dit nie geweet het toe ek in die straat gestap het nie. En ek is sad, verskriklik sad, oor hierdie beautiful plekke wat ek nie toegang tot het nie. Wat myne is. Dit was 'n

vreemde droom

**

Anneke: Everything! Alles. I'm scared of everything. I'm scared of getting raped. Eks tot in my siel in bang. It's always on my mind. Ek is verklik bang om verkrag te word. Ek is bang om alleen te wees ek is bang dat ek niks daar kan doen nie, net daar gaan sit en nie sal krag he om iets daaraan te doen nie maar ek het ook daaraan gedink senou daar breek 4 mans in en daar is 2 mense in die huis iemand wat ek ken dan sal ek weet net ek sal soos krag erens vandaan kry so eks net rerig rerig bang om alleen te wees. ek baie baie bang vir wat gaan gebeur na ek dood is want ek weet nie ek glo nie daars n hemel nie eks baie jammer vir mense maar ek glo nie jy kan vir die res van jou lewe lewe nie jy kannie lewe vir altyd nie eks so bang ek gaan dood en dans dit net pikswart om my vir die res die res van my dit gaan nooit ophou nie i'm scared to death of isolation en soos weet nie van wat na die dood gaan gebeur en dis basically my basic fears eks bang vir mans mans wat ek nie ken nie eks baie baie bang ja.

Eben: I got a phone call. Overnight.. An unknown number. The next day my mother phoned. I can remember where I was. I can remember what I did. I went to sit, like this, on my haunches - not my haunches, my knees, like this, talking on the phone. And that thing when you hear someone? You can hear it, something about the way they speak, in their voice, I just assumed: my father or my brother or something. I could hear it in her voice, her stuck breath, staccato, the static air in the silences.

Andile: You think you know what happened ne? You come with your details. Your facts, reports. You come with your evidence. Forensic shit – isn't that what you call it? Your *yabaas* witness. Pre-paid, ne? Let me tell you Mfethu, you know fokall. You know what? What do you know about what happened that night? Do you know fear Mfethu? Do you know how it tastes? How it smells? You check. Sweat, Mfethu. A stink. Like burning metal. I could see it in her eyes. That night. Fear Mfethu.

Stacy: I can't help but picture it.

Ntobeko: *I can't say it...*

Andile: If you listened. If you really listened. If you listened past the scared sound of her heart beating.. She turned and saw me, bumped against a chair or

something, ran into the back room. I remember. Her bare feet, how she tried to grab for the phone, small hands, pretty ne Mfethu? Then she dropped it - like it was too heavy, dead weight

Albert: Moennie kyk nie, moennie

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Andile: Like she knew. Mfethu, like she'd been waiting. She turned and faced me. Her face, eyelids...

Eben: Who was it? How many? I wanted to know. Details. The why and the how. I wanted to know what happened. I wanted a story. A well made play.

Andile: But it's all bullshit, right? It's all performance. We have our roles. She's the victim, virgin, snow fucking white. Me? I'm the tsotsi.

Chuma: One cigarette One cigarette one cigarette ...

Andile: You see? You have your details, your facts, your pieces of evidence. You put them together. You think you're so cleva. To make a whole, each part, the fear, the jack-knife breathe, the shaking, limpness, not breathing, when they're all combined, amount to what? The crime scene? Murder? Death? But you check, even if it did really happened, even if that's how it was, even if it's the truth Mfethu,

Eben: There was blood and a carpet.

Andile: Once you write your report, your name on the signature, once it's put down in words it turns into fiction, bullshit.

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Eben: Like a dog.

Albert: Fokken hond

Neels: Die hond verstaan net Engels. As ek sê sit, dan sit hy. As ek sê lê dan doen hy niks, hy luister nie, hy verstaan nie.. As ek sê down, dan lê hy. Slim hond wat so die Engels verstaan. Hy is so gebore as 'n Engelse hond. Iemand soos my pa sou nooit 'n Engelse hond kon gehad het nie, sy Engels was te sleg. Ek dink aan my pa, baie deesdae.

Chuma: Once my father asked me to go and buy cigarettes. One cigarette. And because I used to forget stuff, when I was sent to buy things. So I used to sing them. And I'd go like "One cigarette, one cigarette, one cigarette..."

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Chuma: And instead of buying the cigarette, I bought matches, but then they gave me too much change.. And I was *so* excited and I was going to tell my father that "I bought your matches, but I brought more money back... You, know, you didn't have to pay for the matches because they made a mistake" He was standing outside of our house. And I saw him and as I came I saw there was this group of guys who, who, from another section of, of, of, of the township. And one of them fancied me. But I was still young, I was still in primary school.

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Chuma: And my father was standing outside and, as I gave him the match he, and I was about to tell him that, you know, "This is what happened..." He just, gave me a klap. And I, and I fell on the ground and as he was coming I stood up and just like, you know, "I didn't sent you for a matches, I sent you for a cigarette" And I rrran so, I like, I just *ran* to the shop and I just bought it and I was crying... And, what, I don't know whether what hurt me the most was the fact that that guy was just...

Eben: There's also this thing of the dogs. You know where were the dogs. Why didn't the dogs do anything?

Albert: Fokken hond.

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Eben: So maybe, there's this possibility that she knew him - her attacker - that it wasn't a stranger.

Albert: *Blaf*

Eben: You have a gun. She's not a threat at all. Why would you? But you can't think that way. Things don't make sense. People get shot for absolutely fuck all.

Chuma: Bang to the floor.

Anneke: Three bullets a whole in her head.

Eben: A hole in the door. It stayed like that for weeks. I couldn't understand why no one fixed it.

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Neels: Dat ek 'n kind van my moes begrawe, dat ek my kind oorleef...as 'n man sy vrou verloor is hy 'n wewenaar, en as 'n vrou haar man verloor is sy 'n weduwee. En 'n kind sonder ouers, is wees. Maar daar is nie 'n woord vir 'n ouer wat 'n kind begrawe nie.

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Albert: Oom moet maar sê as daar iets is.

Ntobeko: *I can't say it*

Neels: Ek dra die kis van my kind op my skouers.

Albert: Sy is weg oom.

Neels: Is hier nie 'n stoel nie?

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Chuma: A cry baby, that's what they called me. Not only him, also my sister and my brothers But I just- Yeah, that's how I was. Quiet. Quite. Into myself, not talking too much, not...But I was one thing: I also made everyone laugh. So even though I was quiet, doing my own things and everything, I was the kinda like, the pain killer, or the Panado, or the whatever, after all the violence in the house and I would come in and I would imitate people and - funny. I was thinking of wearing his shoes. Shiny black shoes. Whenever I see those shoes in the shop, I always think of him. His shiny black shoes and his navy jersey, blue shirt, clip on tie and long navy pants with a so sharp it could kill a fly.

Neels: Sê dit weer.

Albert: Wat?

Neels: Wat jy gesê het

Albert: Ek het niks gesê nie.

Neels: Sê dit dan weer

Albert:

Chuma: And he would come home and he'd take off his shoes and he'd have to put them in the room and then he- His socks, he always wore nice socks, but

always the socks they would have a hole in this, the big toe, because he had *big* toes. I was thinking of feeling the hot leather insides. Sometimes I used to wear them. Dance around. Imitating him. The black ones. I remember. I could fit both feet inside one if I wanted. (*sing*)

Neels: Sê dit weer

Albert: Wat?

Neels: Wat jy gesê het.

Albert: Ek het niks gesê nie.

Neels: Sê dit dan weer.

Albert:

Chuma/Albert

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Andile: Where are you going?

Chuma: Can't be with. Can't be without.

Stacy: No not a tightrope - a walk between, a walk way, a –

Ntobeko: ...way. Away.

Aneke: Away. I have to go -

Eben: Please stay

Chuma: I can't don't want to.

Neels: Ek hoor stilte.

Albert: Ek hoor niks.

Neels: Dit behels meer as die afwesigheid van geluid.

Director's notes:

I try to think, I mean you know, sometimes, also, with stuff one's not aware how one responds to stuff. If I think back now I can't really think. There's also this thing of control. I mean I always wanted to be in control. And now lately – but I don't know if that's because of that. I'm trying to explore like a new thing of its okay not to be in control and with that a slight release. I feel it. I feel its there. It might open up something that's in there that's never being allowed to come out.

It doesn't have a name. I mean one would say with the death. But I haven't really spoken it. In a way you don't really ever say it. You talk around it. I mean the story. There's the story. But it's not said, just insinuated. I just assume you know what I mean.

I got a phone call. Overnight. There was a call but I only got it the next day. An unknown number. The next day my mother phoned. I can remember where I was. I can remember what I did. I went to sit, like this, on my haunches - not my haunches, my knees, like this, talking on the phone. And immediately that thing when you hear someone? You can hear it, something about the way they speak, in their voice, I just assumed: my father or my brother or something. She didn't have to tell me. I could hear it in her voice, her stuck breath, staccato, the static air in the silences.

I don't have a very clear memory of stuff. I don't really know much. I can't remember much if other people say then oh ja. But I don't really remember. It's like I only have a handful of stories and I think I've told them all. Some of the stories aren't even true. Oh they happened. But I have no direct memory of the actual events. Rather I remember the last time I told the story and take it from there. I build on what I've said before. Sometimes I still have these glimpses of the originals but it's getting harder to tell what's real or reconstructed. How much of you did I make up from the start? How much did I not see you at all? How much of what I "remember" was only made up in my head?

In my old room with my brother. We all stayed. Because the fencing wasn't round yet. Also burglar bars. On the top it's much better. When they don't sleep its fine. Downstairs there's, ja— A hole in the door, for weeks there was this bullet hole in the front door, until it was replaced. I'm quiet scared when I'm there. A bit paranoid. I think it's to do with violence. More so than dying, that moment before dying. The confrontation. Sometimes I have this thing. It's just a physical thing but I have this image. This thing of my legs. Just my legs bending this way. I think it came from a rugby accident when I was younger. I tore these ligaments. It twisted back. Now I always have this thing of. Legs bending back. And people. I'm scared of people. All sorts and forms. When I'm home I see, I think I see, four black men coming around a corner. Like the fear plays itself out. I hear sounds, hear something, think I hear then I create my own scenario. Also seeing stuff. Like how a shadow becomes a man. There was this one time, in my parent's kitchen, you can see the windows, the 3 children's bedrooms, and once, for a moment I saw, I think I saw, a curtain railing cutting the scene, a leg hanging.

Yes and no somehow. I guess in a way my mother. But with our relationship over the years. Our history. I tend to be more evasive with her. She always wants to know. And I don't want to reveal. Scared. Scared of. It's hard to say. I'm a lot different somehow from them. My way of seeing the world. I always had a sense I don't belong. I don't fit. I like them all. And I hate a lot of them sometimes. Hate's a strong word. Being set in their ways, thinking their way is the norm. I don't know. Maybe. I don't know.

Before the event happened. I was home before. My brother and my father. They had been having these fights, about business. I heard that maybe he lost it a bit. Think there was his thing because I was there and I think he wanted to make this little speech, in a way maybe kind of apologise to my brother. He stood up. But he couldn't talk. It was like he was choking on something. It was like gagging. He couldn't speak. He was kind of crying. He couldn't utter. Ah. It wouldn't. Like having a stroke. Someone said what's wrong with Oupa. Eventually he sat down. Crumpled a little as if he had been slapped on the back, lowered his head for a moment then sat. We all kind of knew but he couldn't like say it.

With me it's different. My voice, kind of, in front of people my voice kind of gets stuck. Not so physical, more, it's more a thing where I create, I mess up the thought process so its there but before it can happen it, before someone can criticise it, I mess it up, chop it off, cut it down, kill the words. Sometimes I feel that I've forgotten how to read. Like I stare at the words and I know I can decode them but they're just a crowd of individual words, even if in lines and sentences and whatever. Like there's no current, no movement, in them or in me. I don't know how to go from one to the other. I can't hold things. Something else comes in, various things.

I wanted to do something small but it became so big. I wanted to do something honest but it ended up being a lie. I wanted to say something but didn't know how.